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British liberalism and the Balkans, c. 1875-1925

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

June 2014

I confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

James Perkins

## **Abstract**

This is a study of the place of the Balkans in British liberal politics from the late-Victorian era to the aftermath of the First World War. It argues that engagement with the region was part of a wider reformist dynamic in British politics and society in this period. The late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries saw the final collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and the emergence of independent successor states in the Balkans against a background of nationalist tension, political violence, and humanitarian suffering. This raised questions and concerns that resonated particularly strongly within British liberal political culture, as revealed through analysis of correspondence and memoir, journalism, public and parliamentary debate, humanitarian initiatives, political activism, and diplomacy. In particular, the thesis considers: the political agitation in response to atrocities in Ottoman Bulgaria in 1876 (chapter 1); the wider impact of this agitation on late-Victorian politics (chapter 2); the renewed activism in response to Ottoman misrule in early-twentieth century Macedonia (chapter 3); the dilemmas and debates generated by the Balkan Wars and the First World War between 1912 and 1918 (chapter 4); and the impact of this on the new internationalist agendas of the 1920s (chapter 5). Liberal engagement with the Balkans is shown to have intersected closely with domestic reformist political agendas, as well as with other international causes, both European and imperial. By exploring these intersections, the thesis re-examines aspects of change, continuity and conflict in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century British politics and society, and reconsiders the multifaceted relationships that linked that society to the rest of the world.

## **Acknowledgements**

This thesis could not have been written without the help and support of many people. Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, David Feldman, for his invaluable guidance over the course of my research. I am also grateful to Lucy Riall for her teaching and supervision on the MA in Historical Research that I completed at Birkbeck prior to starting the PhD, and for her help since.

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This thesis marks the culmination of a number of years combining work and study. I would like to thank my family for encouraging me in this endeavour, my colleagues for providing a supportive working environment, and my friends for providing welcome diversions from books, documents and archives along the way. Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Martina. Her patience, consideration, encouragement and enthusiasm have been a constant source of support throughout my postgraduate study, and I am extremely grateful.

# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction: British liberalism and the Balkans</b> .....	<b>8</b>
‘Some slight friction threatening in the Balkans’ .....	9
‘Trouble-Makers’ and ‘Mugwumps’ .....	14
‘Balkanism’ and the ‘East End of Europe’ .....	17
The Balkans in the Age of Empire .....	26
Outline of Chapters.....	29
<b>The Balkans as a moral crusade – the Bulgarian agitation and the Eastern Crisis</b> .....	<b>34</b>
Liberals and the Eastern Question .....	36
Liberals and the Balkans.....	41
Against Tory and Turk .....	46
Radicalism, religion, and the ‘Semitic adventurer’ .....	53
The Balkans after Berlin: ‘Progress’ and ‘Civilisation’? .....	58
Conclusion .....	68
<b>Balkan Legacies: the political memory of the Bulgarian agitation in late-Victorian Britain</b> .....	<b>71</b>
The ‘East End of Europe’ and the East End of London .....	71
Imperial analogies? The Irish Home Rule crisis.....	78
The ‘Bulgarian Horrors’ Revisited? .....	88
Conclusion .....	99
<b>‘Europe Unredeemed’: the Macedonian question</b> .....	<b>102</b>
The Balkan Committee .....	105
Why Macedonia mattered.....	113
The Balkan dilemmas of British liberal internationalism.....	120
Balkan peasants and the ‘Condition of England’ .....	132
Organising dissent over foreign policy.....	143
‘Futile pinpricks’? A case study in humanitarian politics .....	152
Conclusion .....	161

<b>“What then is the duty of the civilised world in the Balkans?” Liberalism, nationalism and war, 1912-1918.....</b>	<b>164</b>
From ‘Autonomy’ to ‘Anatomy’: the Balkan Wars .....	166
‘Heroic Serbia’, Ivan Meštrović and the imaginative geography of the Balkans at war .....	178
Clash of the Experts: the Balkans and the <i>New Europe</i> .....	191
Citizenship, self-determination and empire.....	199
Conclusion .....	211
<b>After the Eastern Question: the Balkans and British liberal internationalism .....</b>	<b>216</b>
The ‘Balkanisation of Europe’ and Minorities Protection.....	218
From the Macedonian question to the Mandates system.....	225
The Balkans and empire: Noel and Charles Buxton and Africa.....	231
Conclusion .....	239
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>242</b>
British liberalism and the Balkans: domestic and international contexts .....	242
Re-imagining the Balkans .....	247
‘Sentimentalism’ and expertise .....	254
The ‘civilisational perspective’ .....	259
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>267</b>

## Illustrations

Fig. 1: Map of the Balkans in 1878 .....	7
Fig. 2: Map of the Balkans in 1913 .....	7
Fig. 3: Poster advertising the Meštrović exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum, 1915 .....	183
Fig. 4: Meštrović sculptures displayed at the Victoria & Albert Museum, 1915 .....	184

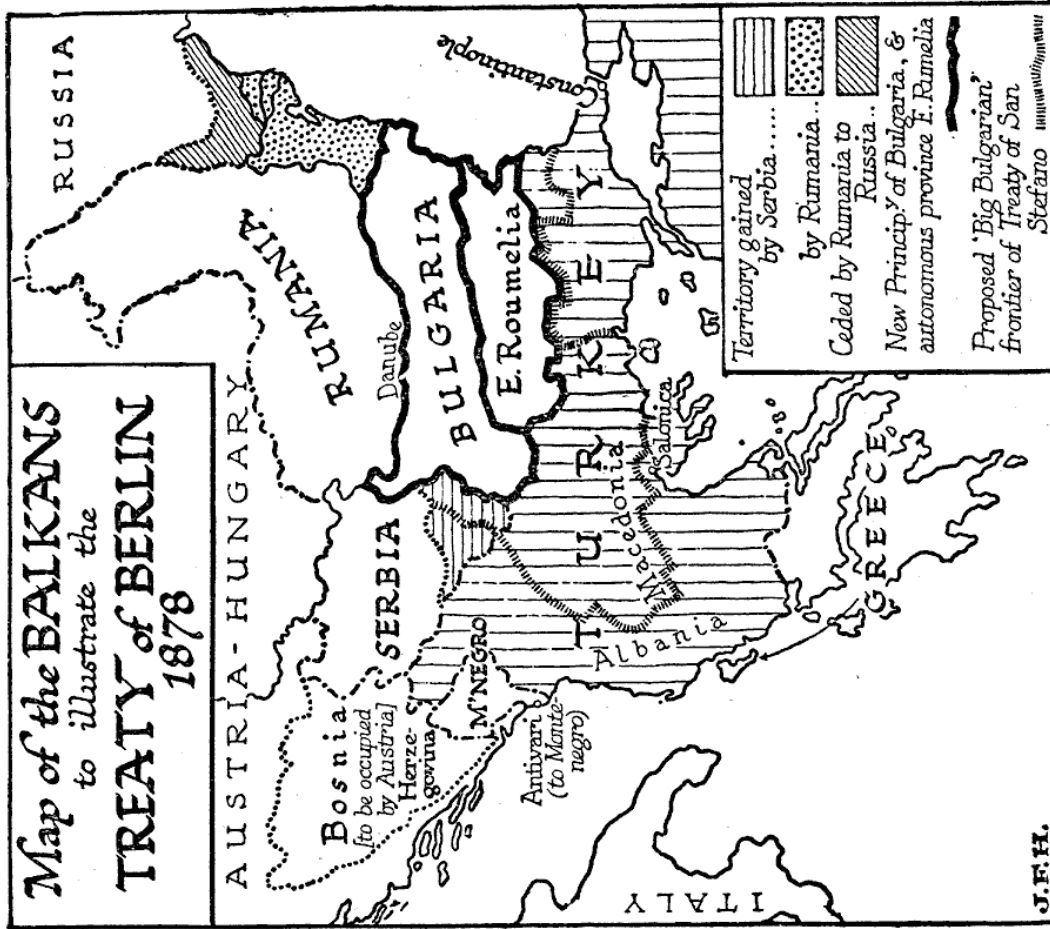


Figure 1: Map of the Balkans to illustrate the Treaty of Berlin in 1878.

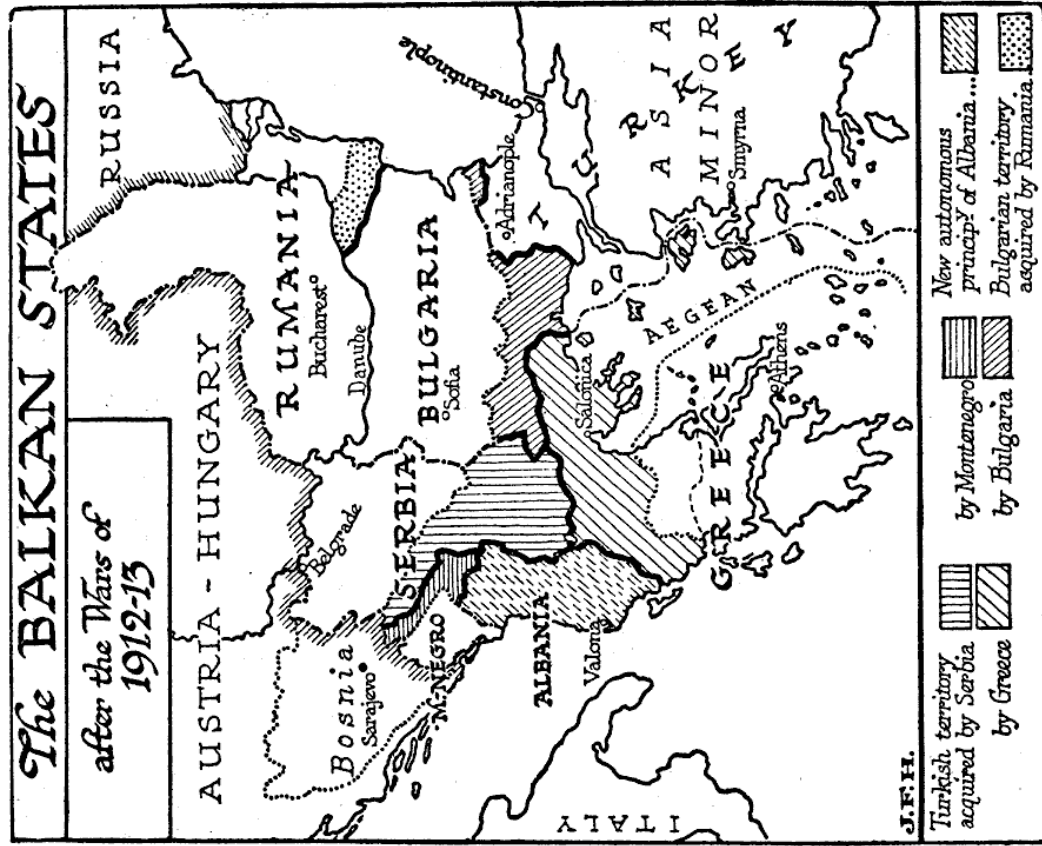


Figure 2: The Balkan States after the Wars of 1912-13.

Both maps taken from Wells, H.G., *The Outline of History* (New York, 1921) and accessed at: <http://etc.usf.edu/maps/> (last accessed 10th April 2014).



# Introduction: British liberalism and the Balkans<sup>1</sup>

No other cause espoused by Liberals so completely swept them off their feet by its own violence. The problems of India and Africa never produced anything like the jungle of savage pamphlets that sprang up in the footsteps of the Liberals who visited Turkey-in-Europe under the inspiration of Gladstone – *Rebecca West*.<sup>2</sup>

When Rebecca West travelled to Yugoslavia in the 1930s she knew she was following paths trod by a slightly earlier generation of British visitors to the Balkan Peninsula. West somewhat cynically described the typical late Victorian or Edwardian with an interest in the Balkans as being ‘of humanitarian or reformist disposition ... the sort of person, devoted to good works and austerities, who is traditionally supposed to keep a cat and a parrot’.<sup>3</sup> It is not clear if this assumption about the British Balkan enthusiast’s choice in domestic pets can be substantiated, but West’s association of the Balkans with British liberalism is certainly understandable. In 1876, in response to reports of atrocities committed against Christians in the Ottoman province of Bulgaria, Gladstone came out of political retirement to condemn the rule of the ‘Unspeakable Turk’ in the Balkans, a campaign that helped to give such matters a lasting presence in the British liberal conscience. This went beyond well-to-do sympathy for the victims of oppression, however. As the Chairman of the Balkan Committee (an early-twentieth century liberal pressure group) recalled in 1935, events in the Balkans during the previous half-century had ‘furnished some of the most famous struggles in English political history’.<sup>4</sup> This thesis explores these struggles. It examines the place of the Balkans in British liberal politics from the 1870s through to the 1920s. It argues that an appreciation of why Balkan questions mattered, and of how they intersected with other political causes – both

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<sup>1</sup> Except when used in quotations, in this thesis the words ‘liberal’/‘liberalism’ (with a small ‘l’) are used to refer to the broad brand of reformist politics primarily associated in this period with the Liberal party or with a general sympathy for that party’s outlook and policies. By the time of the First World War many of the more radical one-time Liberal party members or supporters had transferred their allegiance to the Labour party, yet they arguably did so whilst remaining consistently ‘liberal’ in their political outlook. When ‘Liberal’/‘Liberalism’ (with a capital ‘L’) are used, this refers to the Liberal party specifically.

<sup>2</sup> West, R., *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon. A Journey Through Yugoslavia* (Canongate Classics Edition: Edinburgh, 1993 [1942]), p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> West, *Black Lamb*, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Buxton, N., ‘The End of the Turkish Invasion’, *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 147 (January/June, 1935), p. 400.

domestic and international – can yield fresh insights into British liberalism and into British political culture more generally.

Sympathy for the Balkan peoples tended not to extend into Tory circles, where the future of the region was largely discussed as a matter of geopolitics, and within the framework of an imperial strategy that welcomed the continued presence of an Ottoman buffer state.<sup>5</sup> Nor, on the other hand, did it much occupy the attention of British socialists, amongst whom interest in such foreign causes was likely to be dismissed as a distraction from – rather than as a complement to – the pursuit of domestic goals.<sup>6</sup> British liberal politics, however, regularly kept its eyes open for news from the region. What were these Balkan questions and how did they arise?

### **‘Some slight friction threatening in the Balkans’**

In the 1870s most British commentators would have referred to the region not as the Balkans at all but as ‘Turkey-in-Europe’.<sup>7</sup> However, the political geography of the peninsula was changing. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the part of the Balkans under Ottoman rule was gradually reduced as successor states gained autonomy and independence. This did not follow a uniform pattern – over seventy years separated the start of the first Serbian Uprising (1804-1813) from the final confirmation of Serbian independence at the Congress of Berlin (1878), although there was an autonomous Serbian state from 1829. An independent Greek state was established in 1830s, but its 800,000 inhabitants were dwarfed by the nearly two millions-strong Greek population that remained under Ottoman rule. The Congress of Berlin also saw formal recognition of the independence of Montenegro and Romania, as well as the creation of a small autonomous Bulgarian principality – this latter move was much to the despair of Bulgarian nationalists, who saw their dream of a great independent state

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<sup>5</sup> Janković, B., *The Balkans in International Relations* (Basingstoke, 1988).

<sup>6</sup> As noted by A.J.P. Taylor, ‘even Keir Hardie never voted in any division on foreign affairs during the parliament of 1892-5, so as not to squander I.L.P. energies in any field not directly related to social reform’: Taylor, A.J.P., *The Trouble Makers Dissent Over Foreign Policy 1792-1939* (Harmondsworth, 1985 [1957]), p. 92.

<sup>7</sup> Mazower, M., *The Balkans. From the End of Byzantium to the Present Day* (London, 2001), pp. 3-4.

incorporating much of Macedonia destroyed by Great Power diplomacy. The union of Bulgaria with neighbouring Eastern Roumelia in 1885, and the recognition of this state's full independence in 1908, did little to mollify the bitter memory of what might have been.

If we imagine this as the inevitable passage of the Balkans from Ottoman imperial rule to national independence, we are guilty of reading history backwards. There was certainly never any assumption on the part of the Great Powers that autonomy or independence for one state would lead to autonomy or independence for the next, despite the efforts of late-nineteenth century activists to construct a false teleological narrative of western 'humanitarian' intervention in support of Ottoman Christian populations.<sup>8</sup> Thrace, Macedonia and Albania remained under Ottoman rule in the first decade of the twentieth century. Furthermore, much of the rest of the peninsula was part of another multi-national empire, one that most observers assumed at the time had a far cleaner bill of health than the ill-famed Ottoman 'Sick Man of Europe' – Austria-Hungary. Most of the Balkan subjects of the Habsburgs (including, after 1878, the peoples of Bosnia-Herzegovina) had co-nationals in the Ottoman successor states to their south and east. Nevertheless, nobody seriously suggested the reconstruction of the Balkans according to the 'principle of nationality', at least not until the First World War seemed to make the dismemberment of Austria-Hungary feasible, if not to all commentators entirely desirable.

Even in the Ottoman Balkans, revolts and uprisings against the Porte were not necessarily viewed in Britain as nationalist campaigns. The traveller and archaeologist Arthur Evans described the initial revolt in Herzegovina that led to the Eastern Crisis of 1875-8, and war between Russia and Turkey, as 'largely an affair of tenant-right'.<sup>9</sup> In Macedonia, the radical journalist Henry Brailsford believed the nationalist movement IMRO ('Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation') was 'as much a protest against economic misery as

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<sup>8</sup> Rodogno, D., *Against Massacre. Humanitarian Intervention in the Ottoman Empire, 1815-1914. The Emergence of a European concept and International Practice* (Princeton, 2012), p. 159.

<sup>9</sup> Evans, A., *Through Bosnia and the Herzegovina on Foot during the Insurrection, August and September 1875* (Second Edition, 1877: Reprinted by Arno Press, New York, 1971), p. 336.

it is a national propaganda'.<sup>10</sup> As Davide Rodogno has noted more generally of British (and French) humanitarian campaigns against Ottoman rule over Christian communities in this period, anti-Ottoman moral outrage was as much a protest 'against massacre' as it was a protest 'for freedom'. When the cause of 'freedom' was invoked, this should be interpreted as implying support not for a specifically nationalist agenda but for 'the right of Christians to be ruled fairly by a government respectful of their lives, their religion, and their equality before the law'.<sup>11</sup>

As this thesis will explore, British liberals tended to see events in the Balkans primarily as a question of civilisation. Ottoman rule and, in some quarters during the First World War, even Habsburg rule, were seen as impediments to the material, cultural and social progress of the Balkan peoples. As Mark Mazower notes, 'throughout the nineteenth century the chief justification of the other powers for supporting first autonomy and then independence for the new Christian Balkan states was that removing them from Ottoman rule was the best means of civilising them'.<sup>12</sup> The solution to this problem did not necessarily need to be national self-determination. There were various forms of autonomy or 'Home Rule' open to consideration, expedients with which British liberals were of course already familiar due to the ongoing political debate around their own national question in Ireland. Even autonomy might be unnecessary if the ruling empires were willing and able to undertake internal reforms and put their systems of government onto more liberal and 'progressive' paths. Such reforms were perhaps only really realistic as far as the Habsburg Empire was concerned. Yet there was also a brief moment of hope for British liberals following the 1908 Young Turk revolution, as a result of which the Ottoman Constitution was restored (having been initially promulgated in 1876) and an apparently modernising and secular government put in place.

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<sup>10</sup> Brailsford, H.N. ('Our Special Correspondent'), 'The Macedonian Peasantry: The Economics of Revolt', *Manchester Guardian*, 15<sup>th</sup> May 1903, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Rodogno, D., *Against Massacre*, p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> Mazower, M., 'An International civilisation? Empire, Internationalism and the Crisis of the Mid-Twentieth Century', *International Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 3 (2006), p. 556.

Peter Mandler has underlined the persistence in Victorian political thought of a social-evolutionary, as opposed to a nationalist or racialist, approach to the development of civilisation: ‘At a time when intellectuals in most continental countries, especially liberals but also some conservatives, were developing an exceptionally powerful understanding of national difference, most of their English contemporaries remained indifferent or actively hostile, relying instead on the civilisational perspective for the defence of hierarchy and for their understanding of England’s place in the world.’<sup>13</sup> This approach assumed that, whilst the English may have reached a higher stage of civilisation and progress than most other peoples, this was not due to any intrinsic racial or national qualities. Rather, it was a result of their social and moral achievements, and of the institutions that had guaranteed liberty and prosperity and thus made such achievements possible. English rule over ‘less civilised’ societies and peoples – both in the Empire (over black or oriental ‘races’) and in Britain itself (over the ‘Celtic fringe’) – was justified and necessary; however, as Mandler puts it, ‘the ladder of civilisation, rather than the branching tree of peoples and nations, remained the dominant metaphor’.<sup>14</sup> Civilisation was a universal human potential and was not restricted to certain nations or ‘races’ over others.

As far as foreign affairs were concerned, this meant that British liberals tended to be ambivalent towards European national movements (including the troubling Irish example). Such movements were supported, if at all, as struggles for libertarian rather than national ends. British liberals could sympathise far more readily with the demand for institutional freedom, civil rights and local self-government than they could with the demand for a nation-state. As the following chapters of this thesis will elucidate, this ‘civilisational perspective’ is perfectly reflected in the approach of prominent British liberal commentators to Balkan questions. James Bryce, the first President of the Balkan Committee, believed confidently in ‘the contraction of the world, the overflow of the more advanced races and the consequent

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<sup>13</sup> Mandler, P., “‘Race’ and ‘Nation’ in mid-Victorian thought”, in Collini, S., Whatmore, R. and Young, B. (eds.), *History, Religion, Culture: British Intellectual History 1750-1950* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 228.

<sup>14</sup> Mandler, “‘Race’ and ‘Nation’”, p. 233.

diffusion all over the world of what is considered civilisation'; the historian and wartime Balkan expert R.W. Seton-Watson has been aptly described as conveying 'the image of the traditional moralising Briton who wished to radiate civilisation among those less fortunate'.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, British liberals could not ignore the impact of nationalism in the Balkans. Indeed, the Young Turk revolution turned out to be a false dawn at least in part because its leaders were unable to reconcile their vision of a shared imperial political culture of 'Ottomanism' with the realities of national feeling in the region. As 'Turkey-in-Europe' became 'the Balkans' the region acquired its image as a 'melting pot' of rival nationalisms and a 'powder keg' that threatened to drag the Great Powers into a major conflict. Imperial rivalry between Austria-Hungary and Russia, the two states with the most direct strategic interest in the Balkans, added a further complication to this fraught international problem. To some, the management of this dangerous mix of (apparent) Ottoman decline, Great Power sabre-rattling and nationalist tension may have seemed remote from the interests and preoccupations of the British Empire. Yet, as a European power and an integral part of the continent's alliance system from the early-twentieth century, Britain could not sit comfortably whilst this so-called 'Eastern Question' remained unresolved. Foreign correspondents, travellers, diplomats, foreign affairs experts, religious leaders and other public figures were drawn into debate on the region. Even the idyllic world of P.G. Wodehouse's Bertie Wooster was touched by news from the region (not that this would have troubled him overmuch):

'How's the weather, Jeeves?'

'Exceptionally clement, sir.'

'Anything in the papers?'

'Some slight friction threatening in the Balkans, sir. Otherwise, nothing.'<sup>16</sup>

Reports of 'atrocities' became a recurrent feature of Balkan news, most famously the 'Bulgarian Horrors' of 1876 that inspired Gladstone to return to the political fray. The victims of such crimes included both Christian and Muslim communities, although the sufferings of

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<sup>15</sup> Fisher, H.A.L., *James Bryce* (Vol. 1, London, 1927), p. 330, cited by Weinroth, H., 'Radicalism and Nationalism', in Morris, A.J.A., *Edwardian Radicalism, 1900-1914: some aspects of British radicalism* (London, 1974), p. 220; Miller, N.J., 'R.W. Seton-Watson and Serbia During the Reemergence of Yugoslavism, 1903-1914', *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, Vol. 15, Nos. 1-2 (1988), p. 59.

<sup>16</sup> Wodehouse, P.G., *The Inimitable Jeeves* (London, 2008 [1923]), p. 9.

the latter were invariably overlooked. Furthermore, the Balkan states themselves seemed increasingly prone to act independently, if not in outright defiance, of those whose diplomatic pawns they were supposed to be. Bulgarian unification in 1885 was achieved despite the opposition of her Russian master; the Serbian royal family was overthrown by a 1903 coup to install a regime that would be less easily controlled by Austria-Hungary. Perhaps most unnerving of all to the Great Powers, in 1912 the Balkan states formed a military alliance to ‘liberate’ the rest of the region from the rule of the Porte, in which endeavour they were, against all expectation, almost entirely successful. There was to be no Balkan Federation, however, only a ‘fratricidal’ Second Balkan War between the former allies over the share of the spoils. Thus, as Mazower notes, ‘if 1878 was the high point of Great Power control over the Balkans, the next thirty years marked the breakdown’. With the infamous assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo in 1914 – as a result of which a ‘Third Balkan War’ became a First World War – ‘not for the last time in Balkan relations with the Powers, the tail ended up wagging the dog’.<sup>17</sup>

### **‘Trouble-Makers’ and ‘Mugwumps’**

As noted, British liberals felt particularly compelled to engage with this changing and challenging Balkan situation. If we are to understand why this was so, the political culture that inspired and encouraged such engagement and interaction requires further introduction. Plenty of other international campaigns, crises and conflicts occupied the minds and pens of British liberal activists in this period, both within and outside the sphere of the British Empire. There was also the long-running domestic national question presented by Ireland. This was something of a heyday for dissent over foreign policy, as evoked most notably in A.J.P. Taylor’s classic study *The Trouble Makers*.<sup>18</sup> George Bernard Shaw wryly remarked that ‘a Liberal is a man who has three duties: a duty to Ireland, a duty to Finland, and a duty

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<sup>17</sup> Mazower, *The Balkans*, p. 103, p. 111.

<sup>18</sup> Taylor, *Trouble Makers*, especially chapters 3, 4 and 5.

to Macedonia'.<sup>19</sup> Leonard Woolf, who worked closely with a number of old Balkan experts after the First World War for the Labour party's Advisory Committee on International Questions, was later equally cynical about what he described as the British habit of developing 'a not altogether rational attachment to some foreign nation', whether it was the Boers, the Armenians, the Bulgarians, or even the Turks.<sup>20</sup>

This is how British liberal interest in the Balkans has tended to be seen – as part of a general sympathy for 'oppressed nationalities' that, whilst well meaning, was perhaps a little naïve or, to use a common critique at the time, 'sentimental'. Woolf, like Rebecca West, was content to rather patronisingly dismiss such engagement with overseas national movements as a 'curious trait' of the 'nineteenth-century Liberal', one that he clearly saw as outdated in the post-1918 era. This thesis argues that to adopt such a dismissive tone is to overlook the real significance of these international campaigns to British politics. This was, after all, a time in which moralistic ideals occupied 'the very heart of the hegemonic assumptions of the age'.<sup>21</sup> Understanding British interest in the Balkans can help us to better understand these assumptions, and to appreciate how they affected British politics and culture in often subtle but important ways.

This requires a focus on both international and domestic politics. A brief pause to consider the activities and interests of one prominent British liberal who engaged with Balkan questions – the politician, historian and Balkan Committee member G.P. Gooch – illustrates this point. Gooch was a member of the Social and Political Education League and the Cambridge University extension movement; he was involved in the university settlement work of Mansfield House and Toynbee Hall; he carried out work for the Charity Organisation Society (although he was critical of their 'austere' casework methodology); he was a member of the Trinity College Mission and the Church Army, and a trustee of a branch of the London

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<sup>19</sup> Shaw cited by Zimmern, A., 'True and False Nationalism' (1915) in *Nationality and Government with Other Wartime Essays* (London, 1918), p. 63.

<sup>20</sup> Woolf, L., *Downhill All The Way: An Autobiography of the Years 1919-1939* (London, 1967), pp. 245-46.

<sup>21</sup> Collini, S., *Liberalism and Sociology. L.T. Hobhouse and Political Argument in England 1880-1914* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 50.



City Mission; he supported temperance reform; and he was a member of the Sociological Society. Alongside these domestic activities, Gooch campaigned on behalf of victims of oppression in South Africa and India, in Asia Minor and Russia and, as noted, in the Balkans.<sup>22</sup> He was, in short, a ‘Mugwump’, in G.T. Garratt’s phrase. His political conscience embraced both domestic and international ‘good causes’ and reform-minded concerns. It is within this social, cultural and political milieu that this thesis argues British liberal engagement with the Balkans must be understood. Indeed, the Balkan Committee co-founder Charles Roden Buxton is cited by Garratt as ‘the very highest type which Mugwumpism can produce’.<sup>23</sup>

With such an array of opportunities for foreign and domestic liberal political activism in the late-Victorian and Edwardian period, one might ask what it was about the Balkans in particular that attracted so much interest and concern. The future of the region was of only indirect significance to British strategic or imperial objectives. Commercial links to the peninsula were minimal. Moreover, as Henry Brailsford wrote, ‘the Slav peasant has no passwords to the foreigner’s heart’ such as the Greeks and Italians had been able to provide through their Classical heritage earlier in the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup> The pacifist journal *War and Peace* pondered this point during the First World War, remarking somewhat wryly:

There is probably no corner of the world about which so many illusions have centred and so many lies told as the Balkan Peninsula – among Englishmen at any rate. For some reason or another, the interesting nationalities whose home it is have always exercised a fascination over the mind of the English politician.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, in 1975 the Romanian-born political theorist David Mitrany looked back to the curious period before the First World War when ‘for a number of reasons, political and

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<sup>22</sup> Gooch, G.P., ‘Forward’ to Anderson, M., *Noel Buxton: A Life* (London, 1952); Eyck, F., *G.P. Gooch. A Study in History and Politics* (London, 1982), p. 49, p. 51, p. 57.

<sup>23</sup> Garratt, G.T., *The Mugwumps and the Labour Party* (London, 1932), pp. 76-77.

<sup>24</sup> Brailsford, H.M., ‘The Bulgarians of Macedonia: A Psychological Study’, *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 75, No. 450 (June 1904), p. 1049. On the relatively low levels of British commercial interest in the Balkans, see Suonpaa, M., ‘Financial Speculation, Political Risks, and Legal Complications: British Commercial Diplomacy in the Balkans, c. 1906-1914’, *Historical Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (2012), pp. 97-117, esp. p. 105.

<sup>25</sup> Undated press-cutting of a *War and Peace* review of Noel and Charles Buxton’s *The War and the Balkans* (published 1915): Noel Buxton Papers, McGill University, Montreal, Rare Books and Special Collections (MS 951 c.24/4).

sentimental, devotion to the cause of the Balkan peoples came naturally into play with English opinion' and 'intruded deep into English politics and policy'.<sup>26</sup>

It is thus necessary to explain that 'curious fascination' of British commentators with Balkan questions, those 'political and sentimental' reasons why the affairs of South-East Europe should have aroused such heated debate. What was it about the Balkans that British liberals found so intriguing? In considering this question, one is drawn to the growing body of work produced by historians and literary scholars on attitudes towards and representations of the region.

### **'Balkanism' and the 'East End of Europe'**

Studies of western representations of the Balkan Peninsula have drawn heavily on postcolonial and poststructuralist theories, and in particular on Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Larry Wolff has suggested that 'Eastern Europe' was an 'invention' of the eighteenth century Enlightenment.<sup>27</sup> But by the end of the following century, this invented Eastern Europe's Balkan sub-region had become a distinct and specific blot on the landscape of civilisation – a land where oppression, war, ethnic and religious violence and 'atrocities' seemed to take a particularly virulent and shocking form. Whereas Said saw the Orient as the 'Other' of the West, the Balkans has been seen as the 'other within' – 'wild Europe' or, in the title of an early-twentieth century account of Macedonia, the 'East End of Europe'.<sup>28</sup> The term 'balkanism' serves as shorthand for what is interpreted as an overwhelmingly negative discourse that cast the Balkans as the violent, backward, problematic and hopelessly complicated anti-type to the modern and 'progressive' West.<sup>29</sup> In this analysis, just as

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<sup>26</sup> Mitrany, D., *The Functional Theory of Politics* (London, 1975), pp. 14-15.

<sup>27</sup> Wolff, L., *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, 1994).

<sup>28</sup> Jezernik, B., *Wild Europe. The Balkans in the Gaze of Western Travellers* (London, 2004); Allen Upward, *The East End of Europe. The Report of an Unofficial Mission to the European Provinces of Turkey on the Eve of the Revolution* (London, 1908; Elibron Classics Reprint, 2005).

<sup>29</sup> Said, E., *Orientalism* (London, 1978); Todorova, M. *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford, 1997). Other important studies include: Goldsworthy, V., *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (New Haven, 1998; revised edition: London, 2013); Hammond, A., *The Debated Lands. British and American Representations of the Balkans* (Cardiff, 2007); Norris, D., *In the Wake of the Balkan Myth*.

orientalism was ‘a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient’, balkanism has been presented as an ‘imaginative colonisation’ or a ‘cultural colonialism’. This is seen as having been central to a process that subjugated the Balkans to western European diplomatic, economic and cultural control. It is argued that this process re-emerged with striking force, after a brief Cold War-era hiatus, in responses to the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, and in attitudes towards subsequent EU expansion into the peninsula.<sup>30</sup>

The concept of balkanism suggests that western discourse kept the Balkans in a liminal position. In Europe but not (totally) of it, the Balkans was marked negatively by both its proximity to ‘the East’ and by the impact of five hundred years of rule by a non-Christian empire. As Andrew Hammond summarises, ‘in place of freedom, morality, progress, civil order and the rule of law, in short, were tyranny, chaos, barbarism and, most importantly, the appalling presence of colonial rule’ – and a colonial rule, moreover, which seemed to rest upon slavery and force.<sup>31</sup> It was in fact possible in this vein to view the Balkan Christians in a more sympathetic light, as an oppressed and ‘enslaved’ people. It is surely not coincidental that the Balkan Committee was founded by the brothers Noel and Charles Buxton, great-grandsons of Thomas Fowell Buxton, one of the leading figures in the great abolitionist campaign of the early nineteenth century. Yet, as Richard Huzzey has shown, commitment to anti-slavery politics did not always imply the positive representation of black Africans.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, scholars of balkanism argue that sympathy for the victims of Ottoman misrule did not necessarily imply a more positive representation of the Balkan peoples. Even literature and other writing that romanticised the region as a pastoral idyll is nevertheless seen to have kept it separate from the modern world as a picturesque yet implicitly backward, infantilised

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*Questions of Identity and Modernity* (Basingstoke, 1999); Flemming, K.E., ‘Orientalism, the Balkans, and Balkan Historiography’, *American Historical Review*, Vol. 105, No. 4 (2000), pp. 13-25.

<sup>30</sup> Said, E., *Orientalism*, p. 3, quoted in Hammond, A., ‘Typologies of the East: On Distinguishing Balkanism and Orientalism’, *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, Vol. 29, Nos. 2-3 (June/September 2007), p. 201; Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania*, p. 2; Norris, *Balkan Myth*, p. 28; Hammond, A., ‘Balkanism in Political Context: From the Ottoman Empire to the EU’, *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, Vol. 3, No. 3, pp. 6-26.

<sup>31</sup> Hammond, *Debated Lands*, p. 43.

<sup>32</sup> Huzzey, R., *Freedom Burning. Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (Ithaca, 2012).

and semi-Oriental borderland.<sup>33</sup> As has been noted by Wolff in relation to Eastern Europe, as well as by historians of other regions on Europe's periphery (for example in studies of the Italian South), 'backwardness and the picturesque are two sides of the same coin'.<sup>34</sup>

Whilst acknowledging the strong presence of balkanist tropes in British interaction with the Balkans, this thesis offers a critique of the scholarship outlined above. It argues that positive patterns of representation co-existed with the negative stereotypes summarised above, particularly as far as British liberal attitudes towards the region were concerned. This is partly a question of genre. The concept of balkanism has been developed largely with reference to travel writing and literature. Balkanism was undoubtedly deeply engrained within such writing. Yet a focus on *political* analysis of Balkan questions, particularly that produced by British liberals, suggests that representations of the region were more nuanced than the concept of balkanism implies. This has broader implications for our understanding of 'otherness' and identity in British society at this time, which will be discussed throughout the chapters below.

Considering interaction with the Balkans as an aspect of political culture also enables representations of the region to be put in a specific social and political context, something that has arguably been lacking in previous work on this subject. As Eugene Michail also points out, analysis of British literary representations of the Balkans has rarely given much attention to 'the people, media and processes that have informed the production and circulation of these images'.<sup>35</sup> By contrast, this thesis is concerned not only with how the Balkans was represented, but also with the impact that this interaction with the region had in British politics, both domestic and international. As discussed, the interests and preoccupations of the British liberal Balkan activists were never restricted to Balkan themes and questions alone, but covered instead a range of inter-connected domestic and international issues. The Balkans

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<sup>33</sup> Flemming, 'Orientalism, the Balkans, and Balkan Historiography', p. 12; Norris, *Balkan Myth*, p. 22, p. 27; Hammond, A., 'The Uses of Balkanism: Representation and Power in British Travel Writing, 1850-1914', *Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 82, No. 3 (July 2004), p. 604, p. 611.

<sup>34</sup> Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, p. 331; Moe, N., *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley, 2002), p. 19.

<sup>35</sup> Michail, E., *The British and the Balkans. Framing Images of Foreign Lands, 1900-1950* (London, 2011), p. xi.

was one of many liberal causes, but engagement with the region nevertheless exerted its own specific influence over British liberal politics and culture. This has not been sufficiently recognised or examined.

For example, most historians would agree with the argument that ‘in the end, any analysis of images of others, can always say more about the people who produce the images than about the people who are their subjects’.<sup>36</sup> Following this, it is possible to argue, as Vesna Goldsworthy does, that moments of intense British interest in the Balkans, such as the Bulgarian agitation of 1876, are all the more interesting because they ‘tended to occur when the terms of the debate sparked by Balkan crises happened to coincide with divisions along the key ideological fault lines of British political life’.<sup>37</sup> Yet this seems to grant British-Balkan interaction a rather too passive place in the history of British liberal politics. For rather than seeing episodes like the Bulgarian agitation as a kind of mirror that happened to reflect one or more aspects of British political life, one might fruitfully ask how that political culture was itself influenced and to some extent constituted by such interaction and engagement. How did the Balkans help to give British liberals their political identity? How did events in the region actually shape the broader reformist conscience of late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain? It is only by addressing these questions, this thesis contends, that the real significance of British liberal engagement with the Balkans can be fully appreciated.

This historiographical discussion does not go very far towards explaining British liberal engagement with the Balkans. Indeed, it seems to present new questions. When British liberals addressed Balkan questions through forms of political or humanitarian activism, to what extent were they informed by balkanist stereotypes? Where does balkanism sit within the tradition that inspired Gladstone, in 1876, to come out of retirement and place himself at the forefront of a moral crusade on behalf of the Balkan Christians? Did those who took up the Grand Old Man’s mantle in forming the Balkan Committee in 1903 do so in a spirit of humanitarian benevolence? Or did they act because – as Vesna Goldsworthy argues of their

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<sup>36</sup> Michael, *British and the Balkans*, p. 159.

<sup>37</sup> Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania* (New Edition), p. 227.

left-wing liberal successors in the 1990s – they saw Balkan conflicts as ‘revolting departures from the ideal of cosmopolitanism which could and should – to everyone’s benefit – be solved by mature and responsible powers wielding a big stick and a few small carrots’?<sup>38</sup> The answers to such questions, as this thesis will show, are complex. Yet they are ultimately rewarding for our understanding not just of British liberalism and the Balkans but also of British liberal internationalism more broadly.

Historians of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Britain have remarked that national identity and culture was in a state of ‘flux’ in this period. Imperial rivalry, economic decline, challenges to the primacy of free trade, and social unrest were common causes for concern. The Liberal party in particular was bitterly divided by issues such as Irish Home Rule, the Boer War and women’s suffrage.<sup>39</sup> In considering this, most writing on British attitudes towards the Balkans has implied that representations of the region intersected with domestic debates and discussions in various ways. Maria Todorova suggests that ‘the poor and unpolished, but Christian, upstarts’ who began to stir in revolt against their Ottoman overlords in the nineteenth century ‘have been described in a discourse almost identical to the one used to depict the western lower classes, a virtual parallel between the East End of London and the East End of Europe’.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps those who displayed compassion towards the working-class inhabitants of Britain’s industrial cities were naturally drawn to support the oppressed Balkan peasants in their struggles against Ottoman rule? On the other hand, perhaps humanitarian activity in the Balkan arena was a kind of antidote to the guilt generated by the existence of widespread poverty at home? This interpretation is favoured by Todorova, who borrows the author Cecil Melville’s critique of ‘the capacity of some of us to salve our consciences for neglecting the unpicturesque poor of the East End of London by taking an interest in the picturesque poor of the East End of Europe’.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania* (New Edition), p. xxvii.

<sup>39</sup> Stapleton, J., ‘Political thought and National Identity in Britain, 1850-1950’ in Collini, Whatmore, and Young, *History, Religion, Culture*, pp. 245-270.

<sup>40</sup> Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, p. 18.

<sup>41</sup> Melville, C., *Balkan Racket* (London: Jarrolds, 1941), pp. 98-99, cited in Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, p. 100.

The involvement of well-to-do liberals in Balkan projects can be viewed as a kind of ‘telescopic philanthropy’, in Dickens’ phrase. ‘Like the poor, the Balkans, shall always be with us’, as one commentator (also cited by Todorova) mused in the 1930s.<sup>42</sup> Poverty was not the only problem being debated within British society at this time, however. Analysts of British-Balkan interaction have suggested that a range of other domestic conflicts and concerns were refracted back into the discourse of balkanism. For Todorova, ‘the uneasiness about Ireland was translated into concerns about Macedonia; the vogue about the poor was transformed into a vogue for suppressed nationalities; the feminist movement focussed on life in the harems; the remorse about India or the Boer War was translated at the turn of the century into guilt about Turkish atrocities’. For Andrew Hammond, ‘balkanism is frequently a site of contestation for a wider range of western ideologies’. Vesna Goldsworthy argues that the Balkans ‘has presented a blank canvass upon which Europe’s political unconscious plays out its taboos and hidden anxieties’, and that ‘works allegedly dealing with Balkan themes frequently say more about facts of British political and intellectual history’.<sup>43</sup>

However, none of these studies go much beyond these rather general observations in their analyses of the relationship between representations of the Balkans and British political culture. The rich body of work on the construction and character of the discourse has left much to be done in terms of charting how this related to specific political contexts and questions, as both Patrick Finney and Eugene Michail have noted.<sup>44</sup> The implications for late-Victorian and Edwardian reformist politics of the sustained and active involvement of British liberalism in the unfolding of the Eastern Question over the half-century from the Bulgarian agitation to the construction of the ‘New Europe’ after the First World War, have not been sufficiently considered. In turn, the particular representations of the Balkans that this tradition

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<sup>42</sup> Berkovici, K., *The Incredible Balkans* (New York, 1932), p. 3, cited in Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, p. 184.

<sup>43</sup> Todorova, M., *Imagining the Balkans*, p. 100; Hammond, *Debated Lands*, p. 15; Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania* (New Edition), p. 15, p. 45.

<sup>44</sup> Finney, P., ‘Raising Frankenstein: Great Britain, “Balkanism” and the Search for a Balkan Locarno in the 1920s’, *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (2003), p. 318; Michail, *British and the Balkans*, p. xi.

of political engagement generated, and their significance for our understanding of wider questions of ‘otherness’ and identity, deserve closer attention.

Much of the initial scholarship on British representations of the Balkans was produced against the backdrop of the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, at which time, as one contributor to this body of work noted, ‘Balkanism had permeated the media, military, and academic apparatus of Western democracies’.<sup>45</sup> However, in considering the impact of balkanist discourse on this more recent history of western engagement with the region, and in seeking to elucidate the historical origins of such discourse, it is important not to overlook alternative patterns of perception. It should not be assumed that the media of the 1990s represented the Balkans in the same manner as the media of the 1900s. The recent study by Eugene Michail also makes this point, reminding us that ‘the history of British-Balkan contacts and of Balkan images in Britain in the first half of the twentieth century is much richer than contemporary stereotypes allow for’.<sup>46</sup> This thesis argues, with Michail, that there were significant positive patterns of representation for the Balkans, at least as far as British liberals were concerned.

As the following chapters will explore, this is particularly evident in British representations of the rural, peasant communities of the Balkans. By the late nineteenth century, the interior of the Balkan Peninsula was perhaps one of the few remaining ‘wild places’ of Europe. This aspect certainly attracted the future Balkan Committee Chairman Noel Buxton to the region when he first visited in 1899, as well as countless others in search of ‘valleys undefiled by motor, and mountains unvulgarised by the modern hotel’.<sup>47</sup> As noted, the concept of balkanism suggests that any romanticisation of the ‘pre-industrial’ society of the Balkans carried with it an inherent implication of ‘backwardness’ and inferiority to the West. The Balkan peasant has been described as ‘the clearest symbol of Balkan under-

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<sup>45</sup> Bjelić, D., ‘Introduction: Blowing Up the “Bridge”’, in Bjelić, D. and Savić, O. (eds.), *Balkan as Metaphor. Between Globalisation and Fragmentation* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002), p. 10.

<sup>46</sup> Michail, *British and the Balkans*, p. xvii.

<sup>47</sup> See Anderson, *Noel Buxton*, p. 32; Noel Buxton quoted in ‘The Rhodope Balkans – Discussion’, *Geographical Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (July 1906), p. 29.



modernity', for example.<sup>48</sup> Yet, although the British travelled to and wrote about the Balkans with an undoubted air of superiority as representatives of western European civilisation and culture, they were also prone to present the land and its peoples in surprisingly positive terms. Rather than being a primitive savage, the Balkan peasant was often depicted as an honest 'son of the soil', a 'stout yeoman' doggedly upholding his Christian faith and his rural traditions and culture under an alien and oppressive yoke. At the same time, it must be recognised that this was itself a highly subjective picture of the region, and that the tendency of British liberals to focus overwhelmingly on the plight of the Christian peasantry served to obscure the fact that the region contained significant Jewish and Muslim minorities.<sup>49</sup> Thus, the image of the Balkan peasant seems to encapsulate the ambiguities and contradictions of British attitudes towards the region.

British liberals did not encounter Balkan peasants as passive visitors to some ethnological museum, however. This was a cross-cultural encounter set against the contexts of intense political debate and discussion regarding land reform at home, considerable cultural engagement with the English countryside and rural past, and widespread anxiety over British 'national efficiency' and apparent cultural and physical 'degeneration', particularly in the wake of the Boer War.<sup>50</sup> The Edwardian period saw the optimism of the Victorian age dissipating amid growing uncertainty over the capacity of liberalism, even in its more radical forms, to cope with the domestic and international challenges faced by Britain at the start of the new century. The 'new liberal' politician and writer (and Balkan Committee member)

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<sup>48</sup> Michail, *British and the Balkans*, p. 132.

<sup>49</sup> To take the example of Macedonia, perhaps the Balkan region with the most ethnically mixed population, some indicative population figures are provided by a Foreign Office memorandum on 'The Macedonian Question and Komitaji Activity' (produced in November 1925 but based on figures obtained in 1912), cited in Rossos, A., 'The British Foreign Office and Macedonian National Identity, 1918-1941', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (Summer, 1994), p. 381. The figures given are: 'Macedonian Slavs' 1,150,000; Turks 400,000; Greeks 300,000; Vlachs 200,000; Albanians 120,000; Jews 100,000; Gypsies 10,000. The 'Macedonian Slavs' were claimed by Serbia and Bulgaria to be either Serbs or Bulgarians respectively

<sup>50</sup> Offer, A., *Property and Politics 1870-1914: landownership, law, ideology and urban development in England* (Cambridge, 1981); Marsh, J., *Back to the Land. The Pastoral Impulse in England, from 1880 to 1914* (London, 1982); Packer, I., *Lloyd George, Liberalism and the Land: The Land Issue and Party Politics in England, 1906-1914* (Woodbridge, 2001); Readman, P., *Land and Nation in England Patriotism, National Identity and the Politics of the Land, 1880-1914* (Woodbridge, 2008); Wiener, M., *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980* (Second Edition – Cambridge, 2004).

Charles Masterman despaired that the problem of urban poverty ‘still remains in all its sordid, unimaginable vastness as insoluble as ever’.<sup>51</sup> As an important counterpoint to the image of the Balkans as the ‘East End of Europe’, this thesis therefore considers the ways in which the peninsula was actually set in a more positive contradistinction to an urban Britain (perhaps especially London) of vice and immorality, overcrowding, intemperance, consumerist materialism and jingoism.

Equally, it considers the extent to which engagement with Balkan questions actually stimulated or fed into these debates, helping to inform new conceptions of Englishness and national identity, and helping also to encourage new approaches to public affairs and political debate. Historians of both domestic and international politics have noted the emergence in this period of the purportedly rational and objective ‘expert’, a figure whose approach to political questions stood in stark contrast to the ‘sensational’ or self-consciously emotional brand of public politics associated with the Victorian period.<sup>52</sup> Stefan Collini has charted the decline of the mid-Victorian idea of the ‘public moralist’, a figure whose authority rested on a general intellectual confidence and high social standing. By the close of the nineteenth century, ‘the claim to exclusive or officially licensed possession of a body of theory, which could bring order to the disorientating complexity of intractable social or economic phenomena, was accorded a particular, if sometimes grudging, respect, especially where these phenomena came to seem less transparent, less immediately and concretely knowable, more in need of having hidden forces illuminated’.<sup>53</sup> This thesis develops this point in relation to British liberal approaches to Balkan questions. It considers the changing shape of public debate on the region, from the deliberately and self-consciously ‘sensational’ agitation movement in response to Ottoman atrocities in Bulgaria in 1876, through to the purportedly

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<sup>51</sup> Masterman, C., ‘Realities at Home’ in Masterman, C. (ed.), *The Heart of the Empire. Discussions of Problems of Modern City Life in England, with an Essay on Imperialism* (London, 1902), p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> Perkin, H., *The Rise of Professional Society. England since 1880* (London, 1989), p. 170; Himmelfarb, G., *Poverty and Compassion. The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians* (New York, 1991), pp. 375-78.

<sup>53</sup> Collini, S., *Public Moralists. Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain 1850-1930* (Oxford, 1991), p. 236.

more 'scientific' and expert-driven foreign affairs debates of the First World War and its aftermath.

Integrating analysis of foreign and domestic political culture in this way is a relatively novel approach – all the more so because it draws attention to the impact and importance of a region that lay outside the British Empire at a time when that empire lay in many ways at the heart of British political and cultural life. This is a point that requires some elaboration.

### **The Balkans in the Age of Empire**

Studies that have highlighted the impact of European foreign affairs on British liberalism have tended to focus on the years preceding the period covered by this thesis. Margot Finn's study of the interaction between Continental politics and British radicalism covers the earlier period of 1848-74, for instance.<sup>54</sup> Jonathan Parry ends his study of 'English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe' in 1886, after which point, he argues, 'a much more hard-headed, essentially Tory language of empire ... put Liberalism on the defensive'.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, there is a general historiographical tendency to view the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries as the 'Age of Empire'.<sup>56</sup> The impact and importance of empire in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century British political culture should certainly not be ignored. Yet the important insights generated by the 'new imperial history' of the last decade or so have arguably come at the risk of obscuring the continued impact into the twentieth century of transnational relations and networks linking Britain with regions outside the Empire, including in Europe.<sup>57</sup> The 'imperial turn' should not involve turning away from Europe

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<sup>54</sup> Finn, M., *After Chartism. Class and Nation in English Radical Politics, 1848-1874* (Cambridge, 1993).

<sup>55</sup> Parry, J., *The Politics of Patriotism. English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe 1830-1886* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 26.

<sup>56</sup> Hobsbawm, E.J., *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (London, 1994 [1987]).

<sup>57</sup> As discussed in: Rüger, J., 'Britain, Empire, Europe: Re-reading Eric Hobsbawm', *Journal of Modern European History*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (2013), pp. 420-21; Trentmann, F. and Bevir, M. (eds.), *Critiques of Capital in Modern Britain and America: Transatlantic Exchanges 1800 to the Present Day* (New York, 2002), pp. 9-10; Grant, K., Levine, P. and Trentmann, F. (eds.), *Beyond Sovereignty: Britain, Empire and Transnationalism, c.1880-1950* (Basingstoke, 2007) p. 7; Grant, K., 'The British Empire, International Government, and Human Rights', *History Compass*, Vol. 11, No. 8 (2013), pp. 573-83. On the 'new imperial history' see: Price, R., 'One Big Thing: Britain, its Empire, and their

altogether. There has always been an important body of scholarship premised on the conviction that ‘British imperial policy only made sense within the context of international relations’ and which has approached British imperialism as an aspect of its foreign policy as a European power.<sup>58</sup>

The Balkans and the Ottoman world provide an apposite context for considering the relationship between Europe, empire and internationalism in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century British political culture. In a recent collection of essays, the Ottoman Empire has been bracketed with Russia, China, India and Ireland as somewhere that ‘fell awkwardly between the two poles of the civilised and the barbarian’ in this period.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Mark Mazower has noted that the fate of the Ottoman Empire in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries ‘exemplified the ambivalent process’ through which ‘barbaric’ states might (or might not) be brought into the ‘magic circle’ of civilisation.<sup>60</sup> Mazower argues that Victorian international law divided the world into a ‘civilised’ European sphere, where the main issue was to resolve conflicts between states, and a sphere outside Europe (or the areas of European settlement) where ‘the task was to define terms upon which sovereignty – full or partial – might be bestowed’.<sup>61</sup>

In which of these two spheres was the Ottoman Balkans placed? Whilst often portrayed as a semi-Oriental and liminal borderzone, the Balkan lands have managed to retain their status – culturally, historically and geographically – as an (admittedly troublesome and dangerous) part of Europe. Scholars of representations of the Balkans have consequently grown increasingly mindful of the need to distinguish between balkanism and orientalism.<sup>62</sup> The Balkans is an overwhelmingly white and largely Christian region on the European

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Imperial Culture’, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (2006), pp. 602-27; Feldman, D., ‘The New Imperial History’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2004), pp. 235-40.

<sup>58</sup> Hyam, R., ‘The primacy of geopolitics. The dynamics of British imperial policy, 1763-1963’ (in reference to the work of the historian Wm. Roger Louis), in R. D. King and R. Kitson, eds., *The Statecraft of British Imperialism. Essays in Honour of Wm. Roger Louis* (London, 1999), p. 27.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Liberal Civilisation and Its Discontents’, in Crook, T., Gill, R. and Taithe, B. (eds.), *Evil, Barbarism and Empire. Britain and Abroad, c. 1830-2000* (Basingstoke, 2011), p. 20.

<sup>60</sup> Mazower, ‘An International civilisation?’, p. 555.

<sup>61</sup> Mazower, ‘An International civilisation?’, p. 557.

<sup>62</sup> See in particular Hammond ‘Typologies of the East’ and Flemming, ‘*Orientalism*, the Balkans, and Balkan Historiography’.

continent (albeit its periphery and, as noted, with a significant non-Christian population). The colonial rule under which it spent over five centuries of its history was that of a Muslim power over a native Christian land – the inverse of the rule of the European imperial states and thus, as Goldsworthy notes, ‘the mirror image of the types of colonisation normally studied in the framework of literature’.<sup>63</sup> As Todorova puts it, ‘orientalism is dealing with a difference between (imputed) types, balkanism treats the differences within one type’.<sup>64</sup>

Clearly, we need to remain sensitive to the differing imaginative geographies that British liberals constructed for the Balkans, on the one hand, and for imperial regions, on the other. This thesis argues that the example of British liberalism and the Balkans shows that ‘Europe’ still mattered to Britain in the Age of Empire. Moreover, it uses the Balkan example to contend that British liberal engagement with these two ‘European’ and ‘imperial’ aspects of international affairs was far more integrated than has often been assumed. Jan Rüger has recently written that ‘for too long, historians studying Britain’s external relations have opted for one of two lenses, the first focusing on the Continent as the main source of influence, the second emphasising British history as distinct from that of Europe and best understood in an Atlantic and imperial context’.<sup>65</sup> Analysis of British liberal interaction with the Balkans offers a way drawing these two ‘lenses’ together. The chapters that follow relate British liberal concern with the Balkans to a number of other examples of international humanitarianism and dissent over foreign policy. These include campaigns relating to issues such as forced labour in Africa and the development of the Mandates system, for instance, that are typically covered by historians of empire and imperialism.<sup>66</sup> It is argued that, whilst always an aspect of European foreign policy, British liberal engagement with the Balkans was informed by, and itself helped to constitute, a much broader culture of political campaigning and argument that

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<sup>63</sup> Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania* (New Edition), p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, p. 19.

<sup>65</sup> Rüger, J., ‘Revisiting the Anglo-German Antagonism’, *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 83, No. 3 (2011), p. 583.

<sup>66</sup> One study of British interaction with Balkan questions that also considers intersections with contemporaneous colonial questions is Davide Rodogno’s *Against Massacre*, which notes the similarities ‘as far as the practices and individuals are concerned’ between humanitarian activism with regard to the Ottoman Empire and campaigns against human rights abuses in colonial Africa. (Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, p. 176).

reflected the many different and tangled threads of Britain's relationship with the world, those regions that were painted red on schoolboys' maps included. In this respect, the thesis hopes to contribute to recent calls to integrate more closely the historiographies of British interaction with the imperial and non-imperial worlds.<sup>67</sup>

## Outline of Chapters

This study draws upon the private papers and correspondence of key figures; their multitudinous books, memoirs, pamphlets and newspaper articles; the records and archives of the committees and associations to which they belonged; as well as diplomatic and parliamentary records. It considers the place of the Balkans within the reformist political conscience of the period in roughly chronological fashion, over a period running from the Bulgarian agitation of 1876 to the decade after the First World War. At the start of this period, Gladstone's campaigns on behalf of the Balkan Christians formed a notable part of a political legacy that, it has been suggested, offered a 'unifying point of reference for an increasingly disorientated Liberal party'.<sup>68</sup> The early twentieth century, meanwhile, has been identified by Todorova and others as a crucial time for the formation of British perceptions of the Balkan region.<sup>69</sup> However, by the mid-1920s, with the establishment of the post-war settlement in the Balkans and Near East, the Eastern Question had, in a sense, been resolved (though whether for better or for worse remained a question of some debate, as we shall see). Whereas British literary engagement with the peninsula increased at this time, political and humanitarian engagement declined. In the inter-war decades, the kind of explicitly political concern with Balkan questions associated with figures such as Noel Buxton and H.N. Brailsford was gradually replaced by more 'objective' coverage institutionalised in universities, within the Foreign Office, and at newly created expert organisations such as Chatham House.<sup>70</sup> This

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<sup>67</sup> For example, Weitz, E.D., 'From Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilising Mission', *American Historical Review*, Vol. 133, No. 5 (2008), pp. 1313-43.

<sup>68</sup> Michail, *British and the Balkans*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>69</sup> Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, p. 19.

<sup>70</sup> See Michail, *British and the Balkans*, pp. 46-51.

thesis will argue that this marked the end of the Balkans as an identifiably liberal cause. Nevertheless, the experience of activism in respect of Balkan questions continued to exert influence on debate over British foreign (and imperial) affairs, particularly within Labour party networks.

Chapter One analyses the moment when the Balkan Peninsula first produced in earnest that ‘jungle of savage pamphlets’ referred to by Rebecca West – the Eastern Crisis of 1875-8. The intense engagement of British liberals with the Bulgarian agitation, and the debates and discussions that this engendered, are considered in relation both to the theory of balkanism and to the political culture of the time. This serves to illustrate various facets of, and tensions within, the British reformist conscience and political identity, including the nature of liberal patriotism, the political impact of religious networks, and the engagement of a new generation of radical liberals with ‘the People’. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the impact of the Eastern Crisis on British attitudes towards the Balkans, as conflicting visions of the region’s future started to be more forcefully and divisively articulated amongst those who had rallied to the cause of the Ottoman Empire’s subject nationalities. This anticipates several themes within British-Balkan interaction that recurred in the years ahead, not least the tension between tropes of attraction and repulsion in representations of the region and the tendency to frame Balkan national questions through the prism of the ‘civilisational perspective’ described above.

Chapter Two takes the narrative through to the end of the Victorian period by illustrating the longer-term legacies of the Bulgarian agitation for liberal political culture. Firstly, it examines the metaphorical connection between the ‘East End of Europe’ and the East End of London through analysis of sensationalist journalism and other expressions of moral outrage in the 1880s. This is focused on the journalist and campaigner W.T. Stead, but it raises broader questions about the cultural resonance of Balkan themes in British politics. It also considers the degree to which political activism in respect of the Balkans relied on ‘sensational’ and subjective campaign strategies. Comparisons are then drawn between the

Bulgarian agitation and the Irish Home Rule crisis of 1885-6, and also between the agitation and the ostensibly similar – though arguably far less effective – campaigns against Ottoman oppression of the Armenians in the 1890s. Through such comparisons the specificities of the liberal imaginative geography of the Balkans begin to emerge. It is underlined, however, that different political campaigns drew upon shared references and networks, albeit with varying degrees of impact.

Chapter Three covers the Edwardian period, focusing on the Balkan Committee – ‘a spiritual descendant of the 1876 Bulgarian agitation’, in the words of F.M. Leventhal, but one operating in a changed political culture and context.<sup>71</sup> The approach and activities of the Committee offer a case study in dissent over foreign policy and a window through which to analyse and understand changes in British political culture since the 1870s. The Committee is considered alongside contemporaneous political and humanitarian campaigns, notably those against the use of forced labour in the Congo Free State and Russian imperialism in Persia. This approach highlights the integrated nature of liberal political debate around foreign and imperial affairs. At the same time, taking forward the discussions of the previous chapters, the evolving liberal imaginative geography of the Balkans, and its relevance to British political culture, is explored in detail. Engagement with the Balkans (and in particular the Macedonian question) is shown to have intersected with political conflict at home around land reform, and to have encouraged ongoing liberal promotion of the virtues of local self-government and peasant proprietorship. The Macedonian question also raised difficult questions relating to Balkan nationalism, and the chapter examines the often contradictory and inconsistent responses of British liberals to violence and ‘race conflict’ in the region. This picks up the thread from Chapter One regarding liberal understanding of national self-determination and the role of the international community (the Gladstonian ‘Concert of Europe’) in bringing the post-Ottoman Balkans within the pale of western ‘civilisation’.

Chapter Four continues this theme, covering the period in which Balkan national questions and conflicts were at their most intense: the Balkan Wars of 1912-13 and the First

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<sup>71</sup> Leventhal, F.M., *The Last Dissenter. H.M. Brailsford and his World* (Oxford, 1985), p. 49.



World War. This period witnessed a clear fracturing of the liberal conscience as far as Balkan questions were concerned, just as the states of the Balkans were themselves divided in conflict not always, indeed rarely, of their own making. Images of the Balkans to some extent reflected these fissures, with rival foreign affairs experts loudly condemning each other's perceived partiality for different 'pet nations' in ways that reveal much about the nature of dissent over foreign policy at this time. The chapter examines the continued interplay in liberal political discourse between the negative idea of the 'Barbarous Balkans' and the positive evaluation of certain aspects of Balkan society and culture. Wartime debates in Britain concerning the idea of national self-determination and the place of the Balkans in the post-war settlement are shown to have been critical to the 'shift left' from the Liberal to the Labour party. The Balkan context is also considered in reference to the Irish question, to the articulation of new visions of the British Empire, and to the related liberal-internationalist agendas of the proposed League of Nations. It is highlighted that such debates remained central to continued liberal unease and uncertainty about aspects of British domestic society and citizenship.

Chapter Five brings the narrative into the post-1918 era. It rounds off this study of British engagement with the Balkans by considering its relevance to foreign affairs debates at a time when, as noted, Balkan questions were themselves deemed less pressing in British reformist circles. With a particular focus on Noel and Charles Buxton, it is shown how the earlier experience of activism with regard to the Balkans informed new international questions and campaigns, notably around minority rights, the development of the Mandates system, and the challenge of reconciling liberalism and empire in Africa. This, again, serves to highlight the interconnection between Balkan questions and the imperial aspects of Britain's external relationships, taking forward arguments and themes introduced in previous chapters. Attitudes towards the pre-war Balkans and attitudes towards post-war imperialism were certainly not identical, but it is argued that the earlier history of British liberalism and the Balkans offers important insights into the dilemmas of liberal internationalism in the 1920s. For all the changes in British political culture and society since the period of the

Bulgarian agitation, the chapter serves to focus attention on areas of continuity and correlation. It suggests that there were certain overarching paradigms within British liberal internationalism, particularly concerning issues of self-government and the spread of western ‘civilisation’ and ‘progress’, which remained broadly in place throughout the period.

In summary, this thesis analyses British liberal engagement with the Balkans in order to re-examine the reformist political culture – domestic and international – of late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain. It offers a new approach to aspects of that ‘web of emotional, aesthetic and moral impulses, restraints, reservations, reflexes, reflections and responses’ of which W.C. Lubenow has written British liberalism was comprised. It highlights some intriguing areas of intersection between the Balkans and other liberal causes at home and overseas.<sup>72</sup> Covering the period from roughly 1875 to 1925, the thesis explores areas of change and continuity within British liberal political culture in these years. It also offers insights into historiographical debate around themes such as otherness and identity, liberalism and empire, humanitarianism, and dissent over foreign policy. It has been observed that ‘in the summer of 1876 it was no longer indiscreet to have friends among the “semi-barbarous”, nor eccentric to have a knowledge of the Turkish provinces, the Serbian language’.<sup>73</sup> Charting British attitudes towards, and engagement with, the Balkans over the subsequent half-century means embarking on a journey from this still somewhat unknown and mysterious ‘Turkey-in-Europe’ to the much more widely travelled, debated, attacked and defended nation-states of the post-1918 ‘New Europe’. It is a journey that reveals much about the Balkans, but perhaps rather more still about Britain.

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<sup>72</sup> Lubenow, W.C., ‘Mediating “the Chaos of Incident” and “the Cosmos of Sentiment”’: Liberalism in Britain, 1815-1914’, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (2008), p. 504.

<sup>73</sup> Anderson, D., *Miss Irby and her Friends* (London, 1966), p. 134.

## The Balkans as a moral crusade – the Bulgarian agitation and the Eastern Crisis

On December 8<sup>th</sup> 1876, William Gladstone addressed the National Conference on the Eastern Question at St. James's Hall, London. This marked the climax of a series of protest meetings against the Conservative government's foreign policy towards the Ottoman Empire. The campaign had been provoked in the first instance by the apparent indifference of the Prime Minister, Disraeli, and his Cabinet towards the brutal suppression of a Christian uprising in the Ottoman province of Bulgaria. According to the Foreign Office's own investigation into the matter, this had resulted in massacres of some 12,000 Bulgarian Christians.<sup>1</sup> One of the driving forces behind this agitation movement later described those in Gladstone's audience as 'a tumultuous scene of excited humanity, every hand waving a hat or a handkerchief, and every throat cheering lustily as if it would never tire'.<sup>2</sup> This recollection was typical of the hyperbole and self-promotion of its author, the radical journalist W.T. Stead. Yet there is no doubt that the 'Bulgarian Horrors', as they were famously described by Gladstone in a pamphlet at the time, touched a raw nerve in British society and precipitated an increasingly partisan conflict in British politics.<sup>3</sup> Lord Salisbury felt that no other issue within living memory had 'so deeply excited the English people, moved their passions so thoroughly and produced such profound divisions and such rancorous animosity'.<sup>4</sup> The Bulgarian agitation also placed 'Turkey-in-Europe' at the forefront of liberal dissent over foreign policy, giving the provinces and nationalities of this previously rather unknown and untraveled Mediterranean peninsula a significant place within the British liberal conscience. L.T.

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<sup>1</sup> Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> Stead, W.T. (ed), *The MP for Russia. Reminiscences and Correspondence of Madame Olga Novikoff, Volume One* (London, 1909), p. 289.

<sup>3</sup> Gladstone, W.E., *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East* (London, 1876). Also: Gladstone, W.E., *The Slavonic Provinces of the Ottoman Empire* (Papers of the Eastern Question Association, No. 5: London, 1877).

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Seton-Watson, R.W., *Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question. A Study in Diplomacy and Party Politics* (London, 1935), p. 2 and in Cunningham, H., 'The Language of Patriotism, 1750-1914', *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (1981), p. 22.

Hobhouse would describe support for the struggles of the Eastern Christians against the Turks as ‘the inspiration of Liberalism’.<sup>5</sup>

The Bulgarian agitation brought several public figures into the national political limelight for the first time – perhaps most famously W.T. Stead, but also, for instance, the Liberal politician and future Ambassador to the United States, James Bryce, and the historian J.R. Green.<sup>6</sup> Stead was clear about the importance of these events to his subsequent high-profile journalistic career, claiming: ‘what really made me was the Bulgarian Horrors, in the setting forth of which I took a leading part in the north of England.’<sup>7</sup> Stead, Bryce, Green, Humphry Sandwith, Canon Henry Liddon, Reverend William Denton and Reverend Malcolm MacColl contributed to a network of relief workers, journalists, politicians, churchmen and other public figures determined to champion the liberal cause and rouse public opposition to the government’s foreign policy. The historian E.A. Freeman was particularly prominent, indeed his friend Green felt that it was as if Freeman’s house in the West Country ‘were now a Mecca of the Eastern Question’.<sup>8</sup> This agitation had a striking impact on public life. Supporters included Lord Acton, Robert Browning, Thomas Carlyle, Henry Fawcett, J.A. Froude, William Lecky, Robert Lowe, John Ruskin, William Stubbs, Goldwin Smith, G.O. Trevelyan and Anthony Trollope. The historian Richard Shannon has claimed that the conference in December 1876 ‘assembled the most brilliant array of intellectual figures ever brought together to intervene in a question of politics in England’.<sup>9</sup>

1875-8 was a watershed in British engagement with South-East Europe. Scholars agree that these years ‘finally thrust the Balkans into the British popular consciousness’, with

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<sup>5</sup> Cited in Howard, M., *War and the Liberal Conscience* (London, 2008 [1977]), p. 50.

<sup>6</sup> Brundage, A., *The People’s Historian. John Richard Green and the Writing of History in Victorian England* (Westpoint, Connecticut, 1994), p. 125; Seaman, J.T., *A Citizen of the World. The Life of James Bryce* (London, 2006), p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Robertson Scott, J.W., *The Life and Death of a Newspaper. An Account of the Temperaments, Perturbations and Achievements of John Morley, W.T. Stead, E.T. Cook, Harry Cust, J.L. Garvin and three other Editors of the Pall Mall Gazette* (London, 1952), p. 96.

<sup>8</sup> Green to Freeman, February 1877, cited in Stephen, L. (ed.) *Letters of John Richard Green* (London, 1902), p. 444.

<sup>9</sup> Shannon, R., *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation 1876* (London, 1963), p. 26. A full list of participants in the St. James’s Hall Conference is printed in The Eastern Question Association’s *Report of the Proceedings of the National Conference at St James’s Hall, London, December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1876* (London, 1876).

a striking degree of coverage compared to previous civil wars and rebellions within the Ottoman Empire. This marked the start of a period of intensified cultural and imaginative engagement with the region.<sup>10</sup> This chapter examines the Bulgarian agitation and its aftermath in order to understand how and why a not uncommon case of ‘atrocities’ in the Ottoman Empire had such an impact on British society. It considers the significance of the agitation movement to British liberal politics and culture, and also questions how the representations of the Balkans that were produced during the agitation relate to the concept of balkanism. For one of the results of the newfound British interest in the Balkans at this time is claimed to have been the construction of negative stereotypes and prejudices drawing attention to the alleged inferiority of the region to the West. Vesna Goldsworthy writes that ‘the moment when the newly independent Balkan states are supposed to be joining Europe is ... also the moment when they are symbolically differentiated from it and a new – “Balkan” – Other is created’.<sup>11</sup> If the ‘dominant paradigm’ in British representations of the Balkans was to stress the obfuscation, barbarity, backwardness and instability of the region, why was there so much support for its Christian inhabitants in 1876? Crucially, what do the answers to this question reveal about the wider political culture and identity of British liberalism in this period?

### **Liberals and the Eastern Question**

The Bulgarian agitation was set against the background of the Eastern Question – the apparent decline of the Ottoman Empire and the impact of this on European politics and diplomacy. There was a typically liberal approach to this subject that the political discourse of the agitation movement does much to reveal. To the leaders of the agitation, there was, in fact, nothing in modern European history to compare to the illiberal despotism of the Sultan – not even the rule of that earlier liberal bogeyman, King Ferdinand of Naples. Indeed, ‘Bomba’ was ‘a civilised constitutional ruler compared with the best of Sultans’ and it was stressed that it would be wrong ‘to compare for one moment that government of the Bourbon dynasty in

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<sup>10</sup> Hammond, *Debated Lands*, p. 58.

<sup>11</sup> Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania* (New Edition), p. 12.

Naples with the atrocious system that has been devastating Bulgaria'.<sup>12</sup> If the rule of the Bourbons was, in Gladstone's famous remark, 'the negation of God erected into a system of government', what did that make the Ottoman Empire?<sup>13</sup> The answer was, variously, 'the Eastern Frankenstein' (Stead), a realm of 'barbarians of the seraglio and the degraded beings of the harem' (Denton), an 'étrangère barabare sur le sol de l'Europe' (Liddon), and something approximating the definition of dirt – 'matter in the wrong place' (Freeman).<sup>14</sup> Corruption, oppression, immorality and lack of industry were all intertwined in this liberal distopia, to the extent that Goldwin Smith felt it was 'a mockery to ask whether ['the Turk'] has contributed anything to science, to literature, to art, to manufactures, to the development of commerce, to any department of civilisation'.<sup>15</sup>

It has been suggested that 'the Bulgarian agitation was powered much less by humanitarian sympathy with the Bulgarians than by genuine or politically motivated guilt at the role of previous and present British governments in maintaining Turkish oppression over them'.<sup>16</sup> This may well have been true for Gladstone, who had been part of the British government at the time of the Crimean War, as well as for several of the religious leaders of the agitation, for whom British complicity in the oppression of Christians by a non-Christian power was almost sinful. Canon Liddon expressed his shame that the Porte was able to turn for encouragement and support during the crisis 'not to any of the historical houses of despotism or oppression, not to any other European power, but alas! to England – to free, humane, Christian England'.<sup>17</sup> Similar expressions of guilt and national responsibility, infused

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<sup>12</sup> Stead, W.T., 'The War', *Northern Echo*, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1876, p. 3; Extract from Gladstone's speech to his constituents at Blackheath, 9<sup>th</sup> September 1876, cited in Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question*, p. 81

<sup>13</sup> Gladstone, W.E., *Two Letters to the Earl of Aberdeen, on the State Prosecutions of the Neapolitan Government* (London, 1851), cited in Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, p. 255.

<sup>14</sup> Stead, 'The Policy of Coercion', *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 28, No. 164 (August 1880), p. 262; Denton, Rev. W., *Fallacies of the Eastern Question* (Papers of the Eastern Question, No. 8: London (1877), p. 10; Liddon to Bishop Strossmayer, 24<sup>th</sup> October, 1876, cited in Seton-Watson, 'Canon Liddon and Bishop Strossmayer' in *Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question*, p. 691; Freeman, E.A., *The Ottoman Power in Europe. Its Nature, its Growth, and its Decline* (London, 1877), p. xvii.

<sup>15</sup> Goldwin Smith, 'England's Abandonment of the Protectorate of Turkey', *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 31 (February 1878), p. 610.

<sup>16</sup> Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> From Liddon's sermon in St Pauls on 13<sup>th</sup> August 1876. Quoted in Johnston, J.O., *Life and Letters of Henry Parry Liddon* (London, 1904), p. 206.

by Christian rhetoric, would be a recurrent feature of British liberal engagement with the Balkans until well into the twentieth century, as subsequent chapters will note.

Condemning the alleged barbarity of the Ottoman Empire enabled British liberals to emphasise by contradistinction the humanity and civilisation of their own ideology and political culture. It also, as I explore in more detail below, served to highlight the alleged absence of these values from the Tory government on whose support the Sultan was said to rely. In 1876 the status of the Ottoman Empire as the ‘sick man of Europe’, and its pitiful position at the opposite end of the spectrum of law and order, government and civilisation to Great Britain, were already well established. But such representations were given added potency in the liberal mind by the fact that the Porte appeared nevertheless to enjoy the continued backing of Disraeli’s party. In painting such a negative portrait of Ottoman rule in the Balkans, in seizing upon the reports of atrocities and misgovernment, the agitators could claim that they – unlike the Tory party – represented ‘the great interests of humanity’, the cause of ‘Canning and Wilberforce’, and England’s ‘traditional policy’ of ‘sympathy with suffering and weakness’.<sup>18</sup> It is thus immediately clear that the Eastern Crisis had almost as much to do with British politics as with the Balkans or the Ottoman Empire.

There was, however, a complicating factor in this anti-Ottoman, and anti-Conservative, morality tale: Russia – long the main rival to the Porte in the struggle for power and authority in the Balkans and Near East. ‘The great Tory power’, in Charles Dilke’s terminology, was, after all, a traditional enemy of British liberalism. Russophobia certainly acted as a counterweight in some quarters to humanitarian sympathy for the victims of Ottoman oppression.<sup>19</sup> However, Churchmen like Liddon were happy enough to stress their Christian fellowship with Russia. ‘Christianity alone carries with it the germs of a progressive improvement’, Liddon claimed, ‘whereas Mohammedanism condemns the races which it

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<sup>18</sup> The Duke of Westminster, E.A. Freeman and W.E. Gladstone quoted in The Eastern Question Association, *Report of the Proceedings of the National Conference*, p. 8, p. 78 and p. 119.

<sup>19</sup> Dilke, C. *The Eastern Question* (London, 1878), p. 22.

courses to stagnate in evil'.<sup>20</sup> Even those who entertained more secular visions of progress were prepared to take Russia's side against the 'Unspeakable Turk'. The recent emancipation of the serfs, in particular, suggested to many liberals that Russia had entered an age of reform. In some quarters at least, the 'Tsar Liberator' was seen as having unlocked the progressive potential of his country. This gave Russia an unlikely place on the 'right' side of the liberal reformist conscience. William Morris, the Treasurer of the Eastern Question Association, equated this act of reform with the British abolition of the slave trade – both represented, in his view, equal 'landmarks in history'.<sup>21</sup> This reference to what was perhaps the pre-eminent example of a liberal morality tale was surely not coincidental at a time when, as discussed below, Balkan Christians were being depicted as an enslaved population.

It was possible to spin a progressive tale with Russia, something that was simply not conceivable with the Ottoman Empire. For John Bright, there were 'glimpses ... of the approaches of freedom' in Russia, whereas Turkey was 'constantly diminishing in force'.<sup>22</sup> Leonard Courtney, who condemned the Russian people as 'ignorant, superstitious, and drunken', her nobility as 'licentious' and her Church as 'a scandal', claimed nevertheless to recognise 'a continuous progress out of barbarism into civilisation, out of ignorance and into knowledge, out of thralldom into freedom – a progress that had possibly been relatively more rapid than elsewhere, because there was a greater barbarism to overcome'.<sup>23</sup> Whereas the Turks were denied the capacity to successfully carry the burdens of empire, British liberals felt confident that Russia had a civilising mission to perform. This was seen as mainly relating to Central Asia, where 'her destiny impels her eastward', though at least one commentator and emerging Balkan expert believed that it also applied to the Balkans: The young Arthur Evans, future Balkan Committee member and later activist in support of the Yugoslav cause, at this stage asserted that 'everything which tends to facilitate the peaceful

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<sup>20</sup> Liddon letter to unnamed recipient (15<sup>th</sup> January 1878), cited in Johnston, *Life and Letters*, p. 222. See also, Millman, R., *Britain and the Eastern Question 1875-1878* (Oxford, 1979), p. 361.

<sup>21</sup> Morris to Charles Faulkner, November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1876, cited in Kelvin, N. (ed.), *The Collected Letters of William Morris, Vol. 1: 1848-1880*, (Princeton, 1984), p. 330-31, Letter No. 335.

<sup>22</sup> Bright, J., *Speech on the Eastern Question delivered in the Town Hall, Birmingham, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1876* (London, 1876), p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> Courtney. L, 'Our Eastern Policy', *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 21, No. 125 (May 1877), pp. 611-14.



influence of [Russia's] literature and her daily developing science among the still semi-barbarous Southern Slavs must be a gain for European civilisation as a whole'.<sup>24</sup>

This is a clear manifestation of the liberal 'civilisational perspective' discussed in the introduction to this thesis. When faced with a choice between supporting the Sultan and supporting the Tsar, the majority of British liberals chose the latter, and rationalised this choice on the grounds that it best served the interests of 'civilisation'. This may have been understood in explicitly Christian terms, as it was for Liddon, or in more secular socio-cultural terms, but the upshot was the same – unlike Russia, the Ottoman Empire lay outside the pale of European civilisation. For British foreign policy to favour 'the Turk' in this Eastern Question was not just injurious to the wellbeing of the population of the Balkans, it was also a crime against civilisation as a whole. This was a remarkable transformation from the mood of the Crimean War. As Freeman wrote at the time of the St James's Hall Conference, 'I did not twenty years back expect to hear some thousands of Englishmen cheering every word in favour of Russia'.<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, the 'civilisational perspective' even seems to have inclined liberals to favour Russia over the other Great Power with direct interests at stake in the Balkans, Austria-Hungary. Although John Bright applauded her 'rapid and remarkable strides in an improved and constitutional government', supporters of the Bulgarian agitation were generally of the view that Austria-Hungary did not represent the cause of humanity and progress in the Balkans.<sup>26</sup> Gladstone remarked that, unlike Russia, Austria 'has perhaps never once been led astray by any accident, into a sympathy with external freedom', whilst Sandwith described the Habsburg Empire as an 'Old Man of the

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<sup>24</sup> Speech of Liberal MP P.J. Smyth in House of Commons on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1877 (Hansard, ccxxxii, pp. 542-45), cited in Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question*, p. 151; Evans, A., 'The Austrian Counter-Revolution in the Balkans', *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 27, No. 160 (April 1880), p. 516.

<sup>25</sup> Freeman to Miss Edith Thompson, 24<sup>th</sup> December 1876, cited in Stephens, W.R.W., *The Life and Letters of E.A. Freeman* (Vol. 2, London, 1895), p. 144.

<sup>26</sup> Bright, *Speech on the Eastern Question*, p. 23.

Sea, throttling with the unrelenting grip of his withered limbs the unhappy Sindbad of liberty and progress'.<sup>27</sup>

Yet, as implied by Arthur Evans in the remark quoted above, it was not just a question of creating a hierarchy of liberal support or opposition to these three regional Great Powers. It is also necessary to consider how British liberals represented the Balkan Peninsula itself at this time.

### **Liberals and the Balkans**

The names of the first relief organisations formed in late 1875 – ‘The Friends of the Suffering Rayah of Bosnia and Herzegovina’ and the ‘League for the Aid of the Christians of Turkey’ – suggest that the Balkan region was viewed primarily as a fiefdom of the Ottoman Empire rather than as a separate geographical region with its own identity and national interests. Previous British liberal support for continental national movements nevertheless provided a precedent and even an inspiration for the Bulgarian agitation. J.R. Green underlined his support for Gladstone against Disraeli by stressing how ‘the one has been on the right side, and the other in the wrong on parallel questions such as the upbuilding of Germany or Italy’. Green also later claimed that the principle of nationality was ‘the great force which has transformed Europe, which has been the secret of its history ever since 1815’.<sup>28</sup> In the pages of the *Northern Echo*, Stead was one of the first to introduce the idea of Serbia as the ‘Piedmont of the Balkans’. He argued that ‘Piedmont was for years to Italy what Servia is to Turkey – a small, compact, hardy State, preserving its liberties in the midst of a country overrun by foreign mercenaries and oppressed by despotic Kings’.<sup>29</sup> The Greek War of

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<sup>27</sup> Gladstone, W.E. ‘The Friends and Foes of Russia’, *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 5, No. 23 (January, 1879), p. 192; Sandwith, H., *England’s Position with Regard to Turkey and the Bulgarian Atrocities* (Liverpool, 1877), pp. 4-5.

<sup>28</sup> Green to Miss Stopford, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1877 and Green to Humphry Ward, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1880, both cited in Stephen, *Letters*, pp. 446-47 and p. 480.

<sup>29</sup> *Northern Echo*, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1876, p. 2.

Independence also provided a rose-tinted tale of successful British liberal intervention in the cause of an oppressed nationality within the Ottoman Empire.<sup>30</sup>

However, this did not mean that British liberal support for the Balkan cause reflected a newfound commitment to national self-determination in the region. The British liberal image of the Balkans was primarily informed not by the language of nationality but by cultural and religious references: faith, appearance, character, rather than what contemporaries referred to as 'race', held the key to the Balkan identity as far as most British observers were concerned. The Balkan Peninsula was commonly depicted as a semi-Oriental borderland, even by sympathetic travellers like Paulina Irby, Arthur Evans and Humphry Sandwith, with distinctly 'un-European' sights and sounds – mosques and minarets, veiled women and 'picturesque' dress, bazaars with exotic merchandise and so on.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, the Christian population was still invariably viewed as 'European' in character and appearance. Sir George Campbell wrote that 'these Bulgarians are European, fair-haired Christians like ourselves'; Bulgarian women, in particular, Campbell 'could not distinguish from those of Kirkcaldy'.<sup>32</sup> Reverend William Denton, perhaps understandably for a man of his calling, chose to stress the more pious qualities of the Slavs. He wrote writing admiringly of Montenegrin chastity and 'personal purity', echoing Paulina Irby and Georgina MacKenzie's belief that this reflected 'what the precepts of Christianity can do for the normal life of a people even when its material life has been reduced to the verge of barbarism'.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the clear markers of 'oriental' rule in the region, the leaders of the Bulgarian agitation were of little doubt that the Balkan Christians in whose name they campaigned were nonetheless essentially still part of their own European civilisation. Indeed, the Balkan peoples were routinely praised for their typically 'Victorian' qualities of honesty, sobriety,

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<sup>30</sup> Gladstone, W.E., 'The Hellenic Factor in the Eastern Problem', *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 29 (December 1876), p. 3, p. 13.

<sup>31</sup> For examples of Slavophil travel writing that portrayed the region in semi-Oriental terms see Evans, *Bosnia and the Herzegovina on Foot*, pp. 4, 76, 90; Irby, A.P. and MacKenzie, G.M., *Travels in the Slavonic Provinces of Turkey-in-Europe*, Vol. 1 of 2, (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Revised, London, 1877), p. 1, p. 25, p. 34; Sandwith, H., 'A Trip into Bosnia', *Fraser's Magazine*, Vol. 8, No. 48 (December 1873), pp. 699, 704.

<sup>32</sup> Campbell cited in Anderson, D., *The Balkan Volunteers* (London, 1968), p. 50.

<sup>33</sup> Denton, W., *Montenegro – Its People and their History* (London, 1877), pp. 121-22 and p. 127 (quoting Irby and MacKenzie, *Travels*, Vol. 2 of 2, Second Edition, pp. 267-68).

industry and thrift. This seems to stand at odds with the concept of balkanism, which, as discussed, is premised on the negative representation of the region by western commentators. For instance, Andrew Hammond has argued that accounts of the region produced by British writers in the 1870s, such as S.G.B. St Clair and Charles A. Brophy's *A Residence in Bulgaria* or Henry Barkley's *Between the Danube and the Black Sea*, served to undermine the claims of the Bulgarian insurgents to autonomy or self-rule.<sup>34</sup> Certainly, the Bulgarian agitation had to overcome well-established prejudices in British society regarding the capacity of the subjects of the Porte to govern their own affairs, as well as the strong historical tradition of support for Britain's fellow imperial rulers, the Turks. This was done by emphasising the familiarity and the virtues of the Balkan Christians, and by placing the Eastern Question within a meta-narrative of British liberal support for 'oppressed nationalities' on the European continent.

Irby and MacKenzie's travelogue, re-published at the height of the Eastern Crisis with a preface by Gladstone, was typical in this respect. It insisted, for example (as Andrew Hammond notes), that in the autonomous principality of Serbia 'brigandage and corruption are kept down' and that this happy state of affairs rested on the fact that the country was ruled according to a 'European' rather than an 'Oriental' idea of 'order and right'.<sup>35</sup> Serbian autonomy was held to be fully justified, and to offer an argument in favour of extending self-rule to other 'Slavonic Christians'.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, writing on Bulgaria, George Campbell claimed that he was 'quite satisfied' that the people were 'a very good, steady, reliable, industrious race – apt in education, apt in all industrious arts; the very people most likely to govern themselves in a sober, temperate manner, and to attain great material prosperity without danger to their neighbours'.<sup>37</sup> Thus, unlike their Ottoman rulers, the Bulgarians and

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<sup>34</sup> Hammond, A., 'Imagined Colonialism: Victorian Travellers in South-East Europe', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2006), p. 92; Hammond, 'Balkanism in Political Context', pp. 11-12.

<sup>35</sup> Irby and MacKenzie, *Travels in the Slavonic Provinces of Turkey-in-Europe*, Vol. 1, pp. 220-21, cited in Hammond, A., 'Memoirs of Conflict: British Women Travellers in the Balkans', *Studies in Travel Writing*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2010), p. 60.

<sup>36</sup> Hammond, 'Memoirs of Conflict', p. 60.

<sup>37</sup> Campbell, G., 'The Resettlement of the Turkish Dominions' *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 23, No. 136 (April 1878), p. 548.

Serbs were routinely attributed qualities regarded as essential for responsible and successful government.

In *Imagining the Balkans* Maria Todorova accepts that ‘there was always a plurality of British sympathies in the East’.<sup>38</sup> However the concept of balkanism that Todorova’s study outlines does not do justice to the strength of liberal support for the Balkan cause in 1876. This is not to suggest that British liberals believed that there was nothing to criticise about the Balkan Christians, but what faults and vices they saw were attributed largely to the influence of Ottoman rule rather than to some intrinsic ‘Balkan’ problem. ‘Five centuries of tyranny’, it was felt, could not be undone overnight.<sup>39</sup> Atrocities on the part of Christians in Bosnia were blamed on the ‘tyrants who have brutalised them for centuries’; atrocities committed against Christians, on the other hand, were invariably the work of ‘Mahometan fanatics’.<sup>40</sup> This was, without doubt, a highly impressionistic and selective image of the Balkans. It focused almost exclusively on the plight of the region’s Christian population without pausing to consider the future of the substantial local Muslim communities, over whom these Christians would presumably one day have to rule. Gladstone’s famous pamphlet on the ‘Bulgarian Horrors’ did admit that the presence of a local Muslim population in the Balkans was a ‘difficulty which had to be grappled with in any satisfactory solution of the problem’, but it has been rightly concluded of the Bulgarian agitation that ‘the majority of these protesters completely ignored the fate of Muslim populations’ and that ‘their humanitarianism was biased and selective’.<sup>41</sup>

British liberal representations of the region were not totally devoid of the kind of balkanist discourses identified by Todorova and others. Even in the context of a campaign to win public support for the cause of the Balkan peoples, positive and negative representations of the region co-existed in the liberal mind. Whilst claiming to believe in the growth of

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<sup>38</sup> Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, pp. 97-98, p. 102.

<sup>39</sup> Fawcett, M., *The Martyrs of Turkish Misrule*, (Papers of the Eastern Question Association, No. 11: London, 1877), p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> Evans, *Through Bosnia and Herzegovina on Foot*, p. 341.

<sup>41</sup> Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, p. 157, and p. 155, citing Thompson, C., *Public Opinion and Lord Beaconsfield 1875-1880, Vol. I* (London, 1886), pp. 171-72.

freedom in the Balkan Peninsula, many writers adopted a tone that was often deeply patronising. The assertion that certain nations were ‘fast rising to manhood’ might be read as a statement of faith in their inevitable progress, but it was also suggestive of a tendency to infantilise the Balkans. This could promote the belief that the region was not yet ‘ready’ for self-rule, at least not without the ‘guidance’ provided by western executive control.<sup>42</sup> Despite her faith in the civilised and progressive qualities of the Bosnian population, Paulina Irby deemed autonomy under the relatively civilised rule of Austria-Hungary to be preferable to full Bosnian independence.<sup>43</sup>

This tendency to infantilise the Balkan peoples has been discerned by Todorova in (among other texts) a slightly later piece of anti-Gladstonian writing on the region, G.B. Shaw’s *Arms and the Man*. Shaw’s play, set against the backdrop of the Servo-Bulgarian war of 1885, is cited as being illustrative of ‘a, no doubt, dismissive but also good-humoured and patient condescension, the condescension of an adult towards a child’.<sup>44</sup> However, even card-carrying Gladstonian liberals of the 1870s, supposed adherents to the dictum ‘the Balkans for the Balkan peoples’, could be susceptible to this kind of sentiment. Despite his fervent opposition to Ottoman rule over the Balkans, John Boyd Kinnear assumed that ‘hostility and jealousy would alike be excited’ if it was attempted to divide the peninsula among independent successor states at this stage. Instead, he called for a ‘neutral’ territory, under the sovereignty of the Sultan but with the administration overseen by western-appointed Christian governors – a ‘benevolent occupation, whose object shall be to promote liberty and to nurse civilisation’.<sup>45</sup> Similar proposals would continue to be voiced by British Balkan experts until well into the twentieth century, particularly with regard to the Macedonian region, as the following chapters will explore. The admission of the post-Ottoman Balkan states to the

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<sup>42</sup> Denton, W., *The Christians of Turkey. Their Condition Under Mussulman Rule* (London, 1876), pp. 234-35.

<sup>43</sup> Anderson, *Miss Irby and her Friends*, p. 168, cited in Hammond, ‘Memoirs of Conflict’, p. 61.

<sup>44</sup> Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, p. 113.

<sup>45</sup> Kinnear, J. Boyd, *The Mind of England on the Eastern Question. What England Thinks. What England Wishes. What England Can Do* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, London, 1877), p. 22.

European ‘family of nations’ was to be made only when the Great Powers deemed it appropriate.

These apparently contradictory attitudes were in fact two sides of the same liberal-internationalist coin. Sympathy for ‘oppressed nationalities’ went hand in hand with a paternalistic determination to carefully manage the political liberation of ‘backward’ populations. Thus, from 1876 onwards, British liberals tended to strike a fine balance in their analyses of the prospects for Balkan self-government. On the one hand, there was sympathy for a European and (so it was invariably assumed) ‘Christian’ population that was felt to be inherently capable of self-rule; on the other, there was concern that the process of emancipation should be controlled by the ‘Concert of Europe’. As a result, liberals constructed an imaginative geography of the Balkans in which positive and negative representations were intertwined. However, as much as they necessitated discussion of the future of the Balkans, debates on the Eastern Question in 1875-8 also refracted back into Britain’s own political culture and identity. It is to the domestic significance of the Bulgarian agitation that this chapter now turns.

### **Against Tory and Turk**

British supporters of the Christian subjects of the Porte claimed that their cause transcended party politics and represented the interests of humanity.<sup>46</sup> Yet, of the 89 MPs who attended the St James’s Hall Conference, 88 were Liberals, and of the 23 Peers only 3 (Shaftesbury, Bath and Seaton) were Tories.<sup>47</sup> The agitation has therefore, understandably, been identified as a Liberal party campaign.<sup>48</sup> It was however characterised by a self-righteousness that was off-putting to many, even if they may have shared the agitators’ opposition to Disraeli’s government. Frederic Harrison doubted whether, given the English record in Ireland and India, the country was justified in condemning Turkish oppression and cruelty. Harrison also

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<sup>46</sup> See, for example, the Duke of Westminster’s speech opening the National Conference in December 1876 in The Eastern Question Association, *Report of the Proceedings of the National Conference*, p. 8.

<sup>47</sup> Milman, R., *Britain and the Eastern Question 1875-1878* (Oxford, 1979), p. 236.

<sup>48</sup> Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation*, p. 260.

criticised the ‘fanatical rhetoric’ and ‘clash of passion’ occasioned by the Bulgarian agitation, as well as its undertones of crusading Christianity against Islam.<sup>49</sup> John Bright cautioned Stead at the time that ‘Europe may resent the insolence of England, and may ask why she should cause all this clamour when other nations nearer to Russia and Turkey are not especially interested’.<sup>50</sup>

The agitators strongly defended their moral stance. Argyll claimed that ‘men who systematically, and upon principle, shut out “sentiment” from the field of national action, are quite sure to turn out no better than blind leaders of the blind in respect to policy’. War against the Ottoman Empire was as necessary to humanity as the war of the American North against the slave-owning South, Argyll argued.<sup>51</sup> William Morris, meanwhile, rather sarcastically ended a letter to the *Daily News* by begging ‘to be allowed to inscribe myself, in the company of Mr Gladstone and Mr Freeman, and all men that I esteem, as an hysterical sentimentalist’.<sup>52</sup> This readiness amongst British liberal activists to embrace the charge of ‘sentimentalism’ as far as Balkan questions were concerned would decline over the years ahead, as the following chapters will make clear. Nevertheless, the idea that supporters of the Balkan peoples were guilty of indulging in an overly emotional or subjective approach to foreign affairs would prove to be a persistent thorn in the side of British liberal engagement with the Balkan cause.

Behind this moral crusading there lay an intense ideological belief in the necessity of ‘freedom’ for human progress. For William Denton, as for Gladstone, the ‘slavery’ suffered by the Balkan Christians made them ‘lazy’, ‘cowardly’ and ‘cringing’, leading to ‘unmanliness and effeminacy of character’. This was what made the romanticised example of Montenegrin resistance to the Ottoman Empire so compelling – a tale more suited ‘for the

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<sup>49</sup> Harrison, F., ‘Cross And Crescent’ *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 20, No. 120 (December 1876), p. 711, p. 718, p. 713, pp. 729-30.

<sup>50</sup> Bright to Stead, 13<sup>th</sup> November 1876: Papers of William T. Stead Churchill Archives Centre, University of Cambridge (STED 1.7).

<sup>51</sup> Argyll, ‘Morality in Politics’, *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 30 (July 1877), pp. 331-32.

<sup>52</sup> Morris in *The Daily News*, 26<sup>th</sup> October 1876, cited in Henderson, P. (ed.), *The Letters of William Morris to his Family and Friends* (London, 1950), p. 83.



verse of the poet than for the sober pen of the historian'.<sup>53</sup> For some liberal activists, pity for the suffering Bulgarians stemmed naturally from earlier sympathy for the victims of the controversial repression by Governor Eyre of the Morant Bay rebellion in Jamaica in 1865. However, both supporters and critics of this earlier example of liberal moral protest entered enthusiastically into the Bulgarian agitation, united in opposition to the 'Unspeakable Turk' (a term coined by Thomas Carlyle, one of the most prominent defenders of Eyre to take the liberal side on this occasion).<sup>54</sup> In 1875, the Christian theologian John Llewelyn Davies, a firm supporter of the Bulgarian agitation, had written that slavery 'keeps the man a child' and 'stunts and dwarfs his humanity'. Oppressive foreign rule, moreover, was clearly seen as a form of slavery. For Llewelyn Davies, such rule brought the subject population 'moral humiliation' as much as material impoverishment. It followed that 'the freedom which has answered the trumpet-notes of song and nerved the patriot to effort and endurance and sent its bracing breath through human history has generally been the deliverance of a people from a foreign yoke'.<sup>55</sup> The support that Llewelyn Davies and others of similar background and outlook gave to the agitation movement is best understood as an expression of this highly politicised moral conscience.

The crusading idealism of the Bulgarian agitation was therefore deeply rooted in the British liberal and British Christian worldview, and it resonated particularly strongly with the anti-slavery culture that was such a prominent feature of Victorian society. The celebrated 1867 visit to Britain by the American anti-slavery reformer Garrison had occurred in the same year as the visit of the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Aziz – a juxtaposition that was perhaps significant to the development of both liberal and evangelical Christian hostility towards the Ottoman Empire in this period.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the representation of Balkan Christians as an enslaved population underlines just how malleable the cultural memory of the campaigns

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<sup>53</sup> Gladstone, *Sclavonic Provinces of the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 10-11, p. 14; Denton, *Fallacies of the Eastern Question*, p. 14; Denton, *Montenegro*, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, pp. 156-57.

<sup>55</sup> Llewelyn Davies, J., *The Christian Calling* (London, 1875), pp. 48-49.

<sup>56</sup> Skinner, R. and Lester, A., 'Humanitarianism and Empire: New Research Agendas', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 40, No. 5 (2012), p. 736.

against the slave trade had become. As Richard Huzzey points out, anti-slavery ‘interfered’ with various other reformist causes in the Victorian and Edwardian age, such as women’s rights, franchise extension and labour conditions.<sup>57</sup> The example of the Bulgarian agitation highlights that the anti-slavery culture of British liberalism also extended into European foreign policy debate. It had already provided an inspiration for earlier campaigns against Ottoman rule of Balkan Christian groups, including the pro-Greek activism led by the London Greek Committee formed in 1823.<sup>58</sup>

It is important, however, to bear in mind that the Bulgarian agitation occurred within a specific political context. Though genuine in their moral opposition to Ottoman oppression, liberals saw the agitation as an opportunity to arouse public opinion against the Conservative government. Gladstone’s involvement in the campaign (comprising rousing public oratory, parliamentary debate and the famous pamphlet on *The Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*) ensured that it acquired, both to contemporaries and to historians, the characteristics of a clash of personalities between the semi-retired elder statesman of British liberalism and the enigmatic Tory Prime Minister.<sup>59</sup> Stead, in particular, was quick to see promise in the political implications of Gladstone’s involvement. As early as August 1876 he wrote to Gladstone expressing ‘the decided hope of the North Country that you may once more lead us to victory’, and claimed that ‘that hope has certainly not been weakened by circumstances abroad’.<sup>60</sup> With the possible exception of Freeman, who later complained to Stead that Gladstone had stolen the limelight from him, the early leaders of the agitation seemed to welcome Gladstone’s involvement as offering proof of the humanity and righteousness of their cause.<sup>61</sup> Sandwith informed Gladstone in December 1876, in gushing admiration, that ‘having long laboured to change public opinion on the “Turkish question”, I now recognise

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<sup>57</sup> Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, p. 76.

<sup>58</sup> Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, p. 76, p. 316 (Endnote 51).

<sup>59</sup> Seton-Watson’s *Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question* is an obvious example of this.

<sup>60</sup> Stead to Gladstone, 26<sup>th</sup> August 1876: W.E. Gladstone Papers, The British Library Manuscript Collections, London (Add. MS: 44303, f. 230).

<sup>61</sup> Freeman to Stead, 25<sup>th</sup> December 1879: Stead Papers (STED 2.28).

the presence of a giant in the field, and consequently feel that my work is done'.<sup>62</sup> The agitation was a great moral crusade underpinned by a calculated political opportunism.

Gladstone's supporters were keen to link the Bulgarian agitation with previous liberal causes. As mentioned, this served both to underline the progressiveness of the Liberal party and to emphasise the allegedly reactionary and misguided nature of Conservative policy. It was stressed in particular that Disraeli had opposed the unification of Italy, whilst his party was presented as having been the enemy of all the great episodes of human progress over the previous century.<sup>63</sup> In a letter to Madame Novikoff, Gladstone himself fulminated: 'They did not emancipate the Dissenters, the Roman Catholics and the Jews; they did not reform the Parliament. They did not liberate the negro slave. They did not abolish the Corn Laws. They did not take the taxes off the Press. They did not abolish the Established Church. They did not cheer on the work of Italian freedom and reconstruction...'<sup>64</sup> To these criticisms of the Tory record may be added, judging from one of Sandwith's pamphlets, their support for Governor Eyre, their support for American slave-owners during the Civil War, and their vilification of Garibaldi following his retirement to Caprera.<sup>65</sup> The Government's most vociferous opponents, in fact, seem to have conflated the Conservatives with other liberal 'enemies'. Freeman was scathing of 'the Mahometan Tory mind'; Stead recalled that he edited the *Northern Echo* with 'the conviction that the Tories were children of the Devil'.<sup>66</sup> Such language made good copy, but it also left a rather partisan legacy as far as British support for the Balkan peoples was concerned. This would be an issue for subsequent generations of British Balkan activists, more mindful of the need to secure cross-party support for their cause.

As well as defining themselves in opposition to the Conservative government, several liberals used the Bulgarian agitation to try and realign their own party along more radical

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<sup>62</sup> Sandwith to Gladstone, 25<sup>th</sup> December 1876: Gladstone Papers (Add. MS: 44452, f. 278).

<sup>63</sup> On Disraeli's opposition to the Risorgimento see for example Goldwin Smith, 'The Eastern Crisis', *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 23, No. 137 (May 1878), p. 655.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Stead, *The MP for Russia*, p. 262.

<sup>65</sup> Sandwith, H., *Shall We Fight Russia? An Address to the Working Men of Great Britain* (London, 1877), pp. 8-13.

<sup>66</sup> Freeman, 'The Relation of the English People to the War', p. 493; Stead cited in Robertson Scott, *The Life and Death of a Newspaper*, p. 95.

lines. This set them against both the Tories and the more Whiggish liberal leadership.<sup>67</sup> Alliances of liberals and radicals in support of foreign causes were certainly not new – they had emerged during the Risorgimento and during the American Civil War for example – and in a sense the Bulgarian agitation followed in this tradition. However, in the context of an expanded political nation following the Second Reform Bill in 1867, and with the Liberal party out of power and seemingly unable to match the Tories in terms of leadership, organisational unity or cohesion, the Bulgarian agitation presented itself to radicals like Dilke, Mundella and Chamberlain as a long-awaited opportunity for renewal and reform.<sup>68</sup> As the inspiration for Gladstone’s subsequent successful ‘Midlothian Campaigns’ for the 1880 General Election, the agitation remains a key reference point in historians’ understanding of the Liberal party’s engagement with ‘the People’ in the post-1867 era.<sup>69</sup> Trades Union leaders such as George Howell and Henry Broadhurst provided willing allies from the ranks of the ‘labour aristocracy’, whilst William Morris, as one of his more recent biographers notes, gave the movement a touch of ‘radical chic’.<sup>70</sup>

The leaders of the Bulgarian agitation were keen to claim the democratic and national appeal of their cause. Supporters of the Turks and of war in their defence against Russia were dismissed as an unrepresentative and unrighteous minority. In campaigning against war with Russia in 1877, Morris appealed directly to his ‘fellow citizens’ the ‘working men of England’. The warmongers were dismissed as ‘greedy gamblers on the stock exchange, idle officers in the army and navy (poor fellows!) worn-out mockers of the Clubs, desperate purveyors of exciting war-news for the comfortable breakfast tables of those who have nothing to lose by war’. Last but not least, to this list of villains Morris added the ‘Tory Rump’ in parliament, presided over by an ‘ancient place-hunter [i.e. Disraeli, the recently

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<sup>67</sup> Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question*, p. 73.

<sup>68</sup> As discussed in Saab, *Reluctant Icon – Gladstone, Bulgaria and the Working Classes, 1856-1876* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), p. 49.

<sup>69</sup> Joyce, P., *Democratic Subjects. The self and the social in nineteenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 204.

<sup>70</sup> MacCarthy, F., *William Morris. A Life for Our Time* (London, 1994), p. 380; Leventhal, F.M., *Respectable Radical. George Howell and Victorian Working Class Politics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), p. 48; Howell, ‘Working Men and the Eastern Question’, *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 28 (October 1876), pp. 866-72; Broadhurst, *Henry Broadhurst MP Henry Broadhurst MP. The story of his life from a stonemason's bench to the Treasury Bench: told by himself* (London, 1901), pp. 79-80.

created Earl of Beaconsfield], who, having at last climbed into an Earl's chair, grins down into the anxious face of England'.<sup>71</sup> The official stance of the Gladstonian liberals was always that what support the Turkish cause did enjoy came not from 'the People' but from an 'aristocratic' foreign office, an unrepresentative government, the City – anxious to safeguard returns on Turkish loan schemes – and a Turkophile press. Gladstone himself believed that 'London is the great focus of mischief through money, rowdyism, and the *Daily Telegraph*'.<sup>72</sup>

Stead and Freeman, in particular, were virulent in their denunciations of London 'Society', casting the agitation in their own image as an anti-Establishment movement of provincial outsiders excluded from the corridors of power.<sup>73</sup> In what Freeman asserted was the 'best paper in Europe', Stead wrote diatribes against 'Cockney journalists and Conservative politicians', whilst applauding the honour and morality of his North Country readers in leading the protests against Disraeli's foreign policy.<sup>74</sup> The Eastern Crisis thus seems to have touched a raw nerve within British liberal culture that associated London with the alleged corruption, immorality, vested interests and snobbery of the Tory party. The Bulgarian agitation offered an opportunity not only to free Bulgaria from Ottoman rule but also 'to free England from the London West End' through the power of 'spontaneous' provincial democracy and moral protest.<sup>75</sup> Stead later claimed that the Bulgarian agitation was 'the first agitation in the long annals of England in which the Democracy sprang to its feet by an instantaneous impulse without waiting for the guidance of its leaders'.<sup>76</sup> This was an approach to dissent over foreign policy that would be later employed with some success by the Edwardian activist E.D. Morel, whose Congo Reform Association, as Chapter Three will show, was in many ways an heir to the Bulgarian agitation.

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<sup>71</sup> Morris, W., *Manifesto: 'To the Working-men of England'* (issued on 11<sup>th</sup> May, 1877), cited in Henderson, *Letters*, pp. 388-89.

<sup>72</sup> Gladstone to Bryce, Bryce Papers, cited in Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation*, p. 154.

<sup>73</sup> For example: Freeman, 'The Relation of the English People to the War', *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 30 (August 1877), pp. 481-510, esp. pp. 482-3, p. 488 and p. 510.

<sup>74</sup> Freeman to W.B. Dawkins, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1877, cited in Stephens, *Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 152; 'England and the Eastern Insurgents', *Northern Echo*, 13<sup>th</sup> July 1876, p. 2.

<sup>75</sup> Freeman to Canon Liddon, 11<sup>th</sup> May 1878, cited in Stephens, *Letters*, Vol. 2, pp. 164-65.

<sup>76</sup> Stead, *MP for Russia*, p. 247. See also Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, p. 327.

## Radicalism, religion, and the ‘Semitic adventurer’

It is therefore clear that events in the Ottoman Balkans resonated far beyond the region itself, encouraging a form of political engagement in Britain that, whilst inspired by sympathy for and solidarity with a foreign cause, was also at times rather inward-looking and more attuned to domestic culture and society. Indeed, the agitation encouraged the production of a specific language of patriotism and ‘Englishness’ that fed directly into the wider process of interaction between British liberal culture and mass politics in this period. Specifically, the agitators linked their cause to a somewhat idealised interpretation of the struggles of the Puritans during the seventeenth century. As Blair Worden has noted, the reputation of Cromwell was rehabilitated during the Victorian period, particularly in Nonconformist and radical circles. The Bulgarian agitation encouraged this trend by linking the struggles of the Balkan Christians with the cause ‘for which Cromwell fought and Hampden died’.<sup>77</sup> Stead, who had reportedly planned from an early age to write a biography of Cromwell, referred repeatedly to his hero in his coverage of the agitation in the *Northern Echo*, and he was not a lone voice.<sup>78</sup> In the ‘inspiring song’ that William Morris was asked to pen for the anti-war meeting at Exeter Hall, convened by Broadhurst on the 16<sup>th</sup> January 1878, he urged ‘London Lads’ not to support a course of action that would crush the liberty being forged in the Balkans. This was presented as a mirror of the struggle that England herself had been through in previous centuries:

Think of your sires! How oft and oft  
On freedom’s field they bled,  
When Cromwell’s hand was raised aloft,  
And Kings and Scoundrels fled  
...  
And shall we now praise freedom’s death  
And rob the years to come,  
And quench upon a brother’s hearth  
The fires we lit at home?<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Worden, B., ‘The Victorians and Oliver Cromwell’ in Collini, Whatmore and Young, *History, Religion, Culture*, pp. 121-22; Finn, *After Chartism*, p. 98; ‘England and the Eastern Insurgents’, *Northern Echo*, 13<sup>th</sup> July 1876, p. 2.

<sup>78</sup> See Robertson Scott, *Life and Death of a Newspaper*, p. 92.

<sup>79</sup> Morris, W., ‘Wake, London Lads!’ cited in Broadhurst, *Henry Broadhurst*, pp. 82-83.

The idealisation of Cromwell that the Bulgarian agitation tapped into was part of the formation of a new radical vision of national belonging in which newly enfranchised social and religious groups demonstrated their political voice, in opposition to an allegedly corrupt aristocratic Establishment.<sup>80</sup> Against this background, it is unsurprising that J.R. Green found the agitation so inspiring. Green's celebrated *Short History of the English People* was a key text in this articulation of a 'radical Whigishness' in which the idea of 'Progress' was given a more democratic and nationalist spin.<sup>81</sup> Green had condemned liberalism if it would not form 'any consistent view of man in his relation to society'. His great work placed emphasis on the 1640s and 50s, rather than the more conventional Whig landmark of the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688, as the defining moment in the development of England's national story.<sup>82</sup> Green was involved in the Bulgarian agitation from an early stage, but he seems to have invested in it hopes for political change within his own country as much as within the Ottoman Empire. In common with Chamberlain and Bryce, he wrote that he wanted the campaigns against Disraeli's foreign policy to usher in 'a new system of political party altogether with principles gathered from the general opinion of all who belong to it rather than given from above by a knot of oldish gentlemen who sit on the "front bench"'.<sup>83</sup> The Balkans was thus not only a liberal cause after 1876 but also a specifically *radical* cause – a fact that would have a significant bearing on the development of British liberal interaction with the region in the Edwardian period.

However, the currents of radicalism within the Bulgarian agitation were intertwined with another and in many respects more socially conservative set of influences – namely, those provided by the central involvement of religious leaders and Christian networks. This was a rather complex alliance, but one which undoubtedly did much to shape the character of the agitation movement, both in terms of how it represented those it supported and how it

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<sup>80</sup> As discussed in Saab, *Reluctant Icon*, p. 57 and Feldman, D., *Englishmen and Jews – Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914* (New Haven, 1994), p. 5, p. 119.

<sup>81</sup> Brundage, *The People's Historian*, pp. 90-94.

<sup>82</sup> Green to Louise von Glehn, not dated [1869] (Bodleian Library, MS. English Letters, e. 48, f. 80 and Stephen, *Letters*, p. 242), cited in Brundage, *People's Historian*, p. 122.

<sup>83</sup> Green to Freeman, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1877 in Stephen, *Letters*, p. 466 and cited in Brundage, *People's Historian*, p. 129.

represented those it opposed. The agitation was always focused on the Christian population of the Ottoman Balkans, ignoring the region's Muslim and Jewish communities. The 'pulpit preaching' style of Stead's journalism gave the agitation movement an emotionalism and idealism that was 'more like a religious revival than a social or political campaign'.<sup>84</sup> In this vein, Gladstone gave a rousing speech in the House of Commons in May 1877 in which he admitted his own feeling of both national and personal guilt for the horrors inflicted by the Ottoman Turks on their Christian subjects since the Crimean War (when, as noted, he had been a member of the Government that had waged war to defend the Ottoman Empire against Russia). As Miloš Ković has put it, 'Gladstone confessed his sins, but it was clear that, in fact, he was asking his audience to engage itself with its own conscience and responsibility'.<sup>85</sup>

The mid-1870s, with the Bulgarian agitation following on closely from the immensely popular national tour by the American revivalists Moody and Sankey, has been aptly described as Britain's 'evangelical moment'.<sup>86</sup> Nonconformists were key participants in the agitation movement; its black-and-white moral certainties closely matched the kind of politics they typically pursued at this time.<sup>87</sup> Like drink, gambling and prostitution, support for the Ottoman Empire was a degrading evil from which British society ought to be purged. Indeed, Stead's one prior excursion into a national political cause before 1876 had been his support for Josephine Butler's campaigns against the Contagious Diseases Acts.<sup>88</sup> With the 1867 Reform Act having led to a doubling in the number of Nonconformist MPs, there was perhaps a search for new targets to demonstrate the strength of this political voice and the moralising potential of this hard-earned civic equality. Foreign affairs was the next logical

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<sup>84</sup> Goldsworthy, S., 'English Nonconformity and the Pioneering of the Modern English Newspaper Campaign including the Strange Case of W.T. Stead and the Bulgarian Horrors', *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2006), pp. 391-92.

<sup>85</sup> Ković, M., *Disraeli and the Eastern Question* (translated by Miloš Damnjanović, Oxford, 2011), p. 206.

<sup>86</sup> Coffey, J., 'Democracy and Popular Religion: Moody and Sankey's mission to Britain, 1873-1875', in Biagini, E.F. (ed.), *Citizenship and Community. Liberals, Radicals and Collective Identities in the British Isles, 1865-1931* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 119.

<sup>87</sup> Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation*, esp. p. 35; Bradley, I. *The Optimists: Themes and Personalities in Victorian Liberalism* (London, 1980), pp. 120-21; Biagini, E.F., *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism 1876-1906* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 37; Bebbington, D., *The Nonconformist Conscience* (London, 1982), p. 11.

<sup>88</sup> Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation*, p. 34.



sphere in which to exert political pressure, particularly when the Foreign Office's apparent tacit acceptance of Ottoman oppression suggested that this was an area in which Christian sensibility was worryingly absent.<sup>89</sup>

Complicating the picture slightly, an equally strong religious impulse within the agitation campaign was provided by figures from the world of High Church Anglicanism, men like Henry Liddon, Malcolm MacColl, William Denton and, of course, Gladstone himself. Further support came from broad churchmen like John Llewelyn Davies. This seems on the surface to have been a rather unlikely alliance. Yet it was a shared belief in the need to moralise society, including domestic and foreign politics, which united such disparate figures. Llewelyn Davies had written in 1868 of the 'hope stirring in many loyal hearths that our national life may be wider, stronger, higher in tone and aspiration'. He reiterated during the Bulgarian agitation that 'if the laws of morality have any force at all they must bind the conduct of the larger societies called nations as much as that of individuals and classes'.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, when addressing the St James's Hall conference on why he had felt it necessary to involve himself in a 'political issue', Liddon explained: 'But morals always underline politics at whatever depth they are below the surface; and sometimes, on an occasion like the present, they come up to the surface; they throw the ordinary material of politics entirely into the background. The question before us now is not a political – it is a moral question.'<sup>91</sup> Although Liddon talked of 'morality' rather than Christianity, the two concepts were clearly interchangeable to him. He had previously asserted that silence on the matter of the Bulgarian atrocities would be 'impossible without manifest disloyalty to the cause of Christ'.<sup>92</sup> The Bulgarian agitation was thus part of a wide-ranging debate within late-Victorian political culture about the relationship between religion and politics, and this debate was not restricted to the 'Nonconformist conscience'.

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<sup>89</sup> As discussed in Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, p. 327.

<sup>90</sup> Llewelyn Davies, 'The Voluntary Principle', cited in Kitson Clark, G., *Churchmen and the Condition of England 1832-1885. A Study in the Development of Social Ideas and Practice from the Old Regime to the Modern State* (London, 1973), p. 317; Llewelyn Davies, *Religious Aspects of the Eastern Question* (Papers of the Eastern Question Association, No. 2: London, 1877), p. 10.

<sup>91</sup> Liddon quoted in The Eastern Question Association, *Proceedings of the National Conference*, p. 60.

<sup>92</sup> Liddon's sermon at St. Pauls, 13<sup>th</sup> August 1876, cited in Johnston, *Life and Letters*, p. 206.

For what unity there was amongst those involved in the agitation to exist, however, there perhaps had to be certain institutions, ideas or value-systems against which the movement could define itself. Anthony Wohl has argued that liberalism ‘was shot through with a keen sense of sin and moral outrage and could damn and condemn without a sense of illogic or betrayal of liberal ideology’.<sup>93</sup> As far as the Bulgarian agitation was concerned, condemnation – and damnation – of alleged enemies was a constant accompaniment to its attempt to weave into a coherent movement such a diverse array of liberals and radicals, Nonconformists and Anglo-Catholics, trades unionists and university dons, poets and newspaper hacks. Some of these ‘Others’ have already been identified: The Ottoman Empire was construed as the antitype of the British Empire; the reactionary, aristocratic self-interest of the Tories was set against the progressive humanity and righteousness of the Liberals; the corruption and decadence of London ‘Society’ was placed in contradistinction to the patriotic vigour of the provinces. The othering processes unleashed by the agitation went further than this, however. The moral earnestness and deep religious conviction of the agitation was in fact intertwined with overt anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and racial stereotyping.

In the figure of Disraeli, it was almost as if the agitators found a chance to attack all their enemies at once. The Tory leader was, as Jonathan Parry puts it, ‘an opponent made in heaven (or perhaps not) when it came to debates about true English character values’.<sup>94</sup> Disraeli’s Jewish ancestry and support for the Ottoman Empire made him a dangerously ‘oriental’ and a decidedly un-English (or even anti-English) alien.<sup>95</sup> Goldwin Smith and Freeman were the most vociferous in this respect, with the latter perhaps most infamously warning his readers: ‘it will not do to have the policy of England, the welfare of Europe, sacrificed to Hebrew sentiment’.<sup>96</sup> Yet Freeman was certainly not unique. The anti-Semitic ‘othering’ of Disraeli was retained in the later liberal accounts of the agitation. Bryce, who

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<sup>93</sup> Wohl, A., “‘Dizzi-Ben-Dizzi’: Disraeli as Alien’, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (1995), p. 399 (note).

<sup>94</sup> Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>95</sup> As discussed in: Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews*, ch. 4; Wohl, ‘Disraeli as Alien’; Gill, “‘A Very Moses in the House of Lords’: Disraeli, Nationality and the “Bulgarian Atrocities” agitation, 1876-78’, *Parcours Judaiques*, No. 8 (2006), pp. 57-75.

<sup>96</sup> Freeman, ‘The English People and the War’, pp. 494-97; Freeman, *Ottoman Power in Europe*, p. xvii.

had earlier described the Prime Minister as ‘this Semitic adventurer’, referred in 1927 to Disraeli’s ‘personal and oriental nature’ and claimed that he (Disraeli) ‘felt himself no Englishman, and watched English life and politics as a student of natural history might watch the habits of bees or ants’.<sup>97</sup> Seton-Watson argued that the significance of Disraeli’s ‘Jewish blood’ could ‘scarcely be exaggerated’.<sup>98</sup>

The Bulgarian agitation encouraged a politics of identity that was as exclusive as it was inclusive. Anti-Semitic attacks on Disraeli contributed significantly to the constructions of English identity that the agitation helped to promote. Whilst the liberal engagement with the Balkans at this time may not have produced the kind of balkanist discourse identified by Todorova and others (or at least not to the extent that such studies would lead one to expect), it nevertheless encouraged a negative process of cultural exclusion and conflict at home, as well as the more positive process of extending support and solidarity to victims of overseas oppression and misrule. As will be detailed in following chapters, this was an equal part of the legacy with which the subsequent generation of liberal activists would have to contend when campaigning around Balkan questions. For in 1878 British liberal political engagement with the Balkans was far from finished. To many British observers at the time, however, it remained rather unclear exactly how events in the region would unfold.

### **The Balkans after Berlin: ‘Progress’ and ‘Civilisation’?**

In April 1878, with Disraeli’s popularity seemingly undiminished despite two years of liberal campaigns against his government, William Morris gloomily predicted that ‘for some years to come ... we shall be a reactionary and Tory nation’.<sup>99</sup> In this respect, it has been observed that the anti-Semitic attacks on Disraeli were as much as sign of political failure as anything else; ‘the Jew’ being made a convenient scapegoat for the wave of jingoism that swept the nation

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<sup>97</sup> Bryce to Freeman, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1868 (MSS Bryce: 9), cited in Seaman, *Citizen of the World*, p. 233; Bryce, J., *Studies in Contemporary Biography* (London, 1927), p. 8, p. 22

<sup>98</sup> Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question*, p. 3. See also Gill, “‘A Very Moses in the House of Lords’”, p. 58 (note).

<sup>99</sup> Morris to Jane Morris, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1878, cited in Kelvin, *The Collected Letters of William Morris* (Vol. 1: 1848-1880: Princeton, 1984), p. 476 (Letter No. 527).

in 1877-8.<sup>100</sup> The popular backing that the agitation had enjoyed in 1876 did not prevent Disraeli from successfully reasserting his credentials as a great imperial statesman in 1878, when he returned from the Congress of Berlin with 'peace with honour' and when a resurgent Tory party seemed secure in power. If the Bulgarian agitation ultimately failed to improve the Liberal party's domestic position, it could also be said to have failed to do much for the cause of the 'oppressed nationalities' in the Ottoman Empire. In the name of the 'balance of power', the Treaty of Berlin (July 1878) undid many of the gains made by Balkan nationalism after the Treaty of San Stefano (March 1878) that had initially ended the Russo-Turkish War. The territory of Serbia was reduced, Austria-Hungary was granted administrative control of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the direct rule of the Porte was re-imposed over much of the southern Balkans, including a substantial portion of Bulgaria and all of Macedonia.

Even at its height, the Bulgarian agitation was more effective as a negative force than as a positive force. In September 1876, Lord Derby had informed Sir Henry Eliott, the British Ambassador in Constantinople, that such was the extent of public indignation at the accounts of the massacres in Bulgaria, 'in the extreme case of Russia declaring war against Turkey, Her Majesty's Government would find it practically impossible to interfere in defence of the Ottoman Empire'.<sup>101</sup> Writing in 1880, Leonard Courtney agreed that the agitators had succeeded 'in diverting the ship from the course the crew had planned, thus saving it from the imminent risk, if not the certainty, of a calamity'.<sup>102</sup> Yet Courtney also had to accept that the agitation had been unable to force the government to adopt an alternative 'pro-Balkan' course. Moreover, whilst war against Russia in defence of the Ottoman Empire may have been outside the scope of practical politics for Disraeli in 1876, there would surely have been considerable public approval (and, in the words of the famous music hall song, 'the ships, the men and the money too') for such a course of action in 1877-8.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews*, p. 106.

<sup>101</sup> Derby to Elliot, Parliamentary Papers: *Turkey, No. 1 (1877)*, p. 105, cited in MacColl, M., *Three Years of the Eastern Question* (London, 1878), pp. 121-22.

<sup>102</sup> Courtney, L., 'Turkish Fallacies and British Facts', *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 27, No. 159 (March 1880), p. 360.

<sup>103</sup> Hunt, G.W., *Macdermott's War Song* (1877).

Despite their unease with jingoism and their disappointment at some of the terms of the Treaty of Berlin, however, many of the leaders of the agitation felt at the time that much had, in fact, been achieved. Liddon was satisfied that the Berlin settlement was ‘a long step towards the destruction of the Ottoman power’. In 1884 he felt that even in the provinces still under Ottoman rule there had been ‘that sort of improvement which would naturally result from nearer contact with Christian and European civilisation, and from the consciousness of all who are entrusted with their power that the eye of Europe is upon them’.<sup>104</sup> Liddon’s assessment reflects the fact that the agitators of 1876 tended to approach the Balkans from the ‘civilisational perspective’, stressing the importance of self-government and institutional, rather than national, independence.<sup>105</sup> The claims or aspirations of specific Balkan nationalities were rarely considered in much detail. Nor did the agitation produce a liberal-nationalist hero figure, in the mould of Kossuth or Garibaldi, who could embody the Balkan cause in the eyes of the British public.

For all Stead’s support for the idea of Serbia as the ‘Piedmont of the Balkans’, this was not a ‘Balkan Risorgimento’. Gladstone wished to uphold the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire, and was hesitant even to call for Serbian independence. Stead himself, like Bryce, preferred the idea of self-governing tributary states under the suzerainty of the Sultan to that of full national independence in the Balkans.<sup>106</sup> Home Rule for the Balkan peoples, within the framework of an Ottoman Empire forced into reform by the ‘Concert of Europe’, was still the more attractive proposition for the majority of Gladstonian liberals, just as Home Rule within the supposedly benevolent British Empire became, in many cases, their solution to the Irish Question during the following decade.

This corresponds to the observations of Miles Taylor and Jonathan Parry, that Victorian liberal and radical sympathy for foreign causes tended to be voiced in terms of

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<sup>104</sup> Liddon to Stead, 9<sup>th</sup> August 1878: Stead Papers (STED 1.47); Liddon to T.H. Ward, 5<sup>th</sup> June 1884, cited in Ward, T.H., *Humphry Sandwith: A Memoir Compiled from Autobiographical Notes by his Nephew* (London, 1884), p. 259.

<sup>105</sup> Mandler, ‘“Race” and “Nation” in mid-Victorian Thought’, in Collini, Whatmore and Young, *History, Religion, Culture*, p. 235.

<sup>106</sup> Gladstone to Stead, 30<sup>th</sup> September 1876: Gladstone Papers (Add. MS: 44303, f. 241); Stead, ‘The Policy of Coercion’, p. 250; Bryce, ‘Russia and Turkey’, *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 20, No. 120 (December 1876), p. 806.

support for their constitutional or liberal objectives, rather than for any narrow ethno-nationalist agendas.<sup>107</sup> In 1882, Gladstone felt able to write to the Croatian Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer of ‘the great work of national emancipation which has to a great extent been accomplished in the region’. In his perspective, ‘national emancipation’ did not necessarily have to mean ‘national self-determination’; it simply meant ‘liberating’ the Christian populations from the direct rule and military control of the Porte.<sup>108</sup> Although even this was not achieved for vast swathes of Balkan territory, the Treaty of Berlin did nevertheless secure autonomy for much of Bulgaria; independence for Serbia, Montenegro and Romania; and place the governance of Bosnia and Herzegovina in what were assumed to be the (relatively) more civilised and progressive hands of Austria-Hungary.

In fact, as early as the time of the Crimean War, Disraeli had perceptibly identified this particularly liberal approach to Balkan national questions when he described the existence of two schools of thought on the Eastern Question. Whilst some statesmen, including Disraeli himself of course, continued to believe that there was ‘vitality in Turkey’, there were others, Disraeli noted, who assumed the Ottoman Empire must inevitably collapse completely before long. It was these latter statesmen, Disraeli continued, who ‘have been of the opinion that by encouraging the Christian subjects of the Sultan, and by advancing the civilisation and increasing the right of these classes, you might in time prepare a population for Turkey which will prevent that intermediate state of anarchy which otherwise would happen between the fall of a great empire and the rise of a new Power’.<sup>109</sup> Over twenty years later, such an approach still seems to have characterised Disraeli’s opponents during the Bulgarian agitation in so far as the future of the Balkan Peninsula was concerned: the Eastern Question would be resolved, in time, by fostering the development of civilisation in the region; this could only be done by freeing the Christian population of the Balkans from the misrule of a barbarous and morally and politically bankrupt empire, thereby promoting self-

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<sup>107</sup> Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, p. 21; Taylor, M., *The Decline of British Radicalism* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 193-95.

<sup>108</sup> Gladstone to Strossmayer, 12<sup>th</sup> October 1882, cited in Seton-Watson, *The Southern Slav Question and the Habsburg Monarchy* (London, 1911), p. 443. See also Gladstone, *Bulgarian Horrors*, p. 51.

<sup>109</sup> Hansard, CXXXII, 31 Mar. 1854, 285, cited in Ković, *Disraeli and the Eastern Question*, p. 57.

government and civil rights. But this did not have to mean national self-determination. The principle of nationality did not really come into it, or at least not explicitly. The Bulgarian agitation was much more a question of securing an end to what was seen as an illiberal, oppressive and inherently un-progressive system of rule than it was a crusade on behalf of any 'oppressed nationality'.

There was little explicit support amongst British liberals for Balkan national movements. Nevertheless, the Bulgarian agitation did encourage an approach to the future of the region that was very much in tune with late-Victorian faith in the 'great political-educational value' of local (and personal) self-government.<sup>110</sup> Historians have noted that Gladstone hoped to oversee the creation of a thriving 'village democracy' that would both check the powers of central government and act as a kind of 'training school' for the recently expanded political nation. It was perhaps the historians Freeman and Green, as well as Stubbs (the latter a Tory, but, notably, a supporter of the agitation), who articulated this belief in the value of self-government most clearly, and certainly most influentially. These writers saw in Anglo-Saxon organs of local government the nuclei of English democracy, freedom and stability, and they venerated the Teutonic *Mark* communities of history and their supposed modern equivalents in places such as the Swiss *Landesgemeinden*.<sup>111</sup> Green's *Short History of the English People* and Freeman's *The Growth of the English Constitution from the Earliest Times* presented a version of the past in which the preservation and development of these traditions of democratic self-government, starting with the Teutonic 'shire moots' of the village communities of the first Anglo-Saxon settlers and culminating in the Parliamentary system of Victorian Britain, was central to English national progress.

Most pertinently to the subject of this thesis, this was an interpretation of the English national past that seems to have fed into liberal understanding of foreign affairs, including the

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<sup>110</sup> Blaas, P.B.M., *Continuity and Anachronism. Parliamentary and Constitutional Development in Whig Historiography and in the Anti-Whig Reaction between 1890 and 1930* (The Hague, 1978), p. xiv, p. 179.

<sup>111</sup> Burrow, J.W., "'The Village Community'" and the Uses of History in Late-Nineteenth Century England', in McKendrick, N. (ed.), *Historical Perspectives. Studies in English Thought and Society in Honour of J.H. Plumb* (London, 1974), pp. 259-60, p. 280.

Eastern Question. As one of Freeman's later critics complained, 'when he talked about the Saxons and the Normans he was thinking about the Victorians, and the nineteenth-century Germans, Italians and Poles' – and, it seems reasonable to assume given his long-standing engagement with the region, about the Balkan Christians too.<sup>112</sup> Freeman, Green, Stubbs, Goldwin Smith and other 'Teutonists' analysed the Norman Conquest as a brutal, albeit temporary, block to the independent self-development of the English nation. Their readers might very well have drawn parallels with the Ottoman occupation of the Balkans. Indeed, in his *History*, Green equated the Papacy's support for the tyrannical rule of King John with the military support offered by the foreign policy of the England of his own day 'to protect the vileness and oppression of a Turkish Sultan or a Nizam of Hyderabad'.<sup>113</sup> The major difference between the English and Balkan cases was that, whilst these English historians argued that the Normans ultimately amalgamated with the Saxons, inheriting and advancing the latter's traditions of self-government in the process, no such intermixing or progress was perceived to have occurred in the Balkans. Here, the Ottoman conquest had, in British minds, simply stopped the history of the Balkan nationalities in its tracks.

To underline the impact of the Balkan example in these liberal-historical debates about self-government, it should be stressed that the Balkan peoples were seen as being something more than just helpless victims of oppression. Their supporters seized on the idea that, even allowing for the destructive impact of Ottoman corruption and misgovernment, strong traditions of independence had survived amongst the 'village communities' of the peninsula. This was felt to have created a congenial environment for the spread of responsible local democracy once the 'Turkish yoke' had been removed. Rather than simply being a negative anti-Ottoman crusade, the Bulgarian agitation actually encompassed a positive appreciation of Balkan peasant communities, which were seen to hold within their culture and traditions the seeds of 'Anglo-Saxon-style' democracy and freedom. Freeman thought that 'the nations of South-eastern Europe are, for good or evil, what the long intermediate time

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<sup>112</sup> J.H. Round, writing in 1893, cited in Briggs, A., *Saxons, Normans and Victorians* (Hastings and Bexhill Branch of the Historical Association, 1966) p. 20.

<sup>113</sup> Green, J.R., *A Short History of the English People* (Revised Edition, London, 1924), p. 130.



[under Ottoman rule] has made them'. Nevertheless, he believed the Christian peasants of the Balkans to be as much a part of European civilisation as the Ancient Greeks or the modern British, French or Germans.<sup>114</sup> He also believed, crucially, that in common with what he termed 'every branch of the Aryan family' the early Slav settlers in the Balkan Peninsula had governed their affairs through a form of 'primitive democracy' similar to the Teutonic folk moot.<sup>115</sup> However questionable the racial ideas underpinning it may have been, with this sense of a shared heritage linking the Balkan Slavs with the other 'Aryan' peoples of Europe – including the English – Freeman was naturally drawn to support their cause.

Freeman was certainly not unique in his admiration for Balkan peoples and in his faith in their capacity for self-government. The *Times* correspondent James Bouchier was struck in the 1880s and 1890s by the 'rugged independence, the self-reliance, the firm solidity of character' of the peasants of Bulgaria. He praised in particular 'the aptitude for self-government, which they have displayed after centuries of oppression, but which other nations have only acquired through the accumulated experience of ages of freedom' (although it must be said that he did not extend these compliments to all Balkan nationalities).<sup>116</sup> Bouchier attributed the Bulgarians' qualities to the absence of feudal structures and the widespread existence of peasant proprietorship, and to the survival of the village commune and other 'primitive institutions of a pre-historic age' such as the patriarchal house-community.<sup>117</sup> Similar expressions of (albeit somewhat paternalistic) sympathy for the Balkan Christians as would be self-governing 'sons of the soil' were a common trope in liberal discourse at this time. One of Gladstone's most prominent supporters, George Campbell, pointed to the 'conservative peasant-proprietor sort of democracy' believed to exist in Serbia as 'a

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<sup>114</sup> Freeman, 'On the Study of History', *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 24 (1880), pp. 335-38; Cosgrove, R., 'A Usable Past: History and the Politics of National Identity in Late Victorian England', *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (2008), p. 33. See also Parker, C.J.W., 'The Failure of Liberal Radicalism: The Racial Ideas of E.A. Freeman', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (1981), p. 834.

<sup>115</sup> Freeman, E.A., *Historical Essays: Third Series* (London, 1879), pp. 397-98.

<sup>116</sup> Bouchier, J., 'Social Life in Bulgaria', *English Illustrated Magazine*, Vol. 79 (April, 1890), p. 522; Bouchier, J., 'Through Bulgaria with Prince Ferdinand', *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 44, No. 259 (July 1888), p. 56.

<sup>117</sup> Bouchier, 'Social Life in Bulgaria', p. 523.

remarkable instance of successful free government'.<sup>118</sup> Similarly, earlier travellers to Serbia such as William Denton and Humphrey Sandwith wrote approvingly of the egalitarian and democratic nature of its society, with local village councils and the traditions of the *zadruga* (house-community) seen to be operating effectively alongside a national parliament (the *Skupština*).<sup>119</sup> Both Sandwith and Denton were, like Freeman, central figures from the outset of the Bulgarian agitation in 1876. Their involvement can similarly only be fully understood if the intrinsic appeal of the Balkan peoples is taken into account alongside the more widely noted British liberal hostility towards Islam and the Ottoman Empire.

The anticipation that the village communities of the Balkans would provide fertile ground for the development of democracy and responsible self-government was, therefore, an important strand in the region's appeal to British liberals. This reinforces the need to reconsider the concept of balkanism in the light of the Bulgarian agitation. Whereas scholars such as Hammond and Todorova have pointed to the prevalence in late-nineteenth century British writing on region of neo-colonialist denials of the Balkan peoples' capacity for self-government, within liberal and radical circles an alternative pattern of representation was clearly being given voice. They may have viewed the Eastern Question through a predominantly 'civilisational' rather than nationalist perspective, but British liberals nevertheless had considerable faith in the capacity of the Balkan Christians to contribute to European progress through the development of their innate traditions of local self-government and village democracy.

This was an approach to the future of the Balkan Peninsula that seems to have been closely connected to ongoing debates within British political culture about the qualities of village life and peasant proprietorship – a point discussed in more detail in Chapter Three. Of course, not all Britons shared this liberal outlook. In considering the condition of the Balkan

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<sup>118</sup> Campbell, 'Resettlement of the Turkish Dominions', p. 550; Campbell, G., *The Races, Religions, Institutions of Turkey and the Neighbouring Countries* (Papers of the Eastern Question Association, No. 4, London, 1877), p. 21.

<sup>119</sup> Bracewell, W., 'Opinion-Makers: the Balkans in British Popular Literature, 1856-1876' in *Yugoslav-British Relations. Reports from the roundtable held from 23-25 September 1987 in Kragujevac on occasion of 150 years of the arrival of the first British Consul to Serbia* (Belgrade, 1988), p. 99, p. 109.

Peninsula in 1878 Disraeli had claimed: ‘Political intrigues, constant rivalries, a total absence of all public spirit and of the pursuit of objects which patriotic minds would wish to accomplish, the hatred of races, the animosities of rival religions, and, above all, the absence of any controlling power that could keep these large districts in anything like order – such were the sad truths, which no one who has investigated the subject could resist for a moment.’<sup>120</sup> Yet, not least as a consequence of the Bulgarian agitation, by the time Disraeli made this assessment, in July 1878, many British liberals *had* investigated the subject and many more still resisted the ‘sad truths’ he claimed to impart.

Perhaps this liberal optimism was misplaced. Leonard Courtney supported his claim that the mixed Muslim, Orthodox and Catholic populations of Bosnia would live peacefully together after the removal of direct Ottoman rule by referring to the precedent of Lebanon in the 1860s. To the twenty-first century reader, this is a rather curious reversal of the (admittedly equally superficial) tendency of commentators in the 1990s to relate the civil war in Bosnia back to that of Lebanon in the previous decades.<sup>121</sup> For Courtney, however, Lebanon offered an example of a multi-religious and multi-ethnic pressure point within the Ottoman Empire being nullified by the introduction of autonomy under initial European supervision and control. The problem, he felt, had ‘been solved, imperfectly, but tolerably, by experience’.<sup>122</sup> It was generally hoped and assumed that, in time, the spread of freedom, civilisation and progress in the Balkan Peninsula would be such that the peoples of the region would form stable and secure states; whether these would be formed on a national or federal basis was a side issue.

Admittedly, by the mid-1880s if not earlier, Freeman, Arthur Evans, Bouchier and other new Balkan experts were showing a far greater interest in the ethnography of the region than had been displayed during the Bulgarian agitation. Freeman, for example, anticipated the

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<sup>120</sup> Hansard, CCXLI, 18h Jul. 1878, 17612, cited in Ković, M., *Disraeli and the Eastern Question*, p. 283.

<sup>121</sup> See Bieber, F., ‘Bosnia-Herzegovina and Lebanon: Historical Lessons of Two Multireligious States’, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2000), pp. 269-81.

<sup>122</sup> Courtney, ‘Our Eastern Policy’, p. 616. On the impact of the 1860-1 Great Power intervention in Lebanon and Syria on attitudes towards later nineteenth and early-twentieth century campaigns against Ottoman rule in the Balkans, see Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, p. 116, p. 159.

concerns of the early twentieth-century Balkan Committee when he wrote that the rival Bulgarian/Serb/Greek claims to Macedonia constituted ‘a controversy which, more than any other, darkens the hopes of the regenerate nations of South-eastern Europe’.<sup>123</sup> Five new ethnographic maps of the Balkans were produced in Britain in 1876 alone. Although their influence was primarily over diplomats and ‘official’ policymakers rather than over liberal public opinion, it is nevertheless from the time of the Eastern Crisis that the detailed ethnographic study of the Balkan Peninsula can be traced.<sup>124</sup> At San Stefano and Berlin in 1878, perhaps for the first time in the history of Great Power interaction with the Balkans, the statesmen and diplomats gathered round the conference tables used the language of nationality (‘Bulgarians’, ‘Serbs’, ‘Romanians’ and so on, not necessarily with those exact spellings of course) in deciding the future of the region.

Yet, as Eric Weitz notes, and as discussed above, the international recognition of a particular nationality did not in itself bring access to that most exclusive club, the ‘civilised’ world: sufficient evidence of ‘civilised’ behaviour was also required.<sup>125</sup> In fact, the ‘civilisational perspective’ co-existed with this increased focus on nationality in international politics. As Weitz comments, ‘the Berlin Treaty provided international sanction for a politics of individual national sovereignty and a civilising process of East Europeans’.<sup>126</sup> Even in more positive passages of writing, liberal observers had a tendency to denigrate the Balkan nationalities with whom they apparently sympathised as, at best, ‘younger members of the European family’, whose development and progress would necessarily have to be achieved ‘under European tutelage’.<sup>127</sup> With the Austrian administrative occupation of Bosnia and

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<sup>123</sup> Freeman, *Historical Essays*, p. 125.

<sup>124</sup> St. Koledarov, P., ‘Ethnography in Great Britain and the Bulgarian Question’, *Macedonian Studies*, Vol. 9, Nos. 3-4 (1992), pp. 3-34; Wilkinson, H.R., *Maps and Politics. A Review of the Ethnographic Cartography of Macedonia* (Liverpool, 1951), p. 12 and p. 32 (note).

<sup>125</sup> Weitz, ‘From the Vienna to the Paris System’, pp. 1320-21.

<sup>126</sup> Weitz, ‘From the Vienna to the Paris System’, p. 1321.

<sup>127</sup> Irby and Mackenzie, *Travels*, p. 6, cited in Hadžiselimović, O., ‘Two Victorian Ladies in Bosnia, 1862-1875: G.M. MacKenzie and A.P. Irby’, in Alcock, J. and Young, A. (eds.), *Black Lambs and Grey Falcons: Women Travelling in the Balkans* (Revised and Updated Edition: Oxford, 2000), p. 7; Fawcett, ‘Our Eastern Policy’, p. 626.

Herzegovina, it was felt that ‘the schoolmaster’ had crossed the river Sava, and that the education of the Balkans could therefore begin.<sup>128</sup>

1878 did not mark the end of ‘Turkey-in-Europe’, however. Much of the Balkans still lay under Ottoman rule. This area of territory, stretching from Albania to Thrace, encompassed the debated lands that would present Europe with its ‘Macedonian question’, a thorny subject around which much British liberal interest in the Balkans would come to focus. The Bulgarian agitation was merely the opening, crucial, chapter in the longer history of the Balkans as a British liberal cause.

## Conclusion

In exploring the place of the Bulgarian agitation in British politics, this chapter has shown how the drama that unfolded in the Balkans between 1875 and 1878 resonated beyond the realm of foreign policy or diplomacy to intersect with domestic debates and conflicts. The emergence of a new and enlarged political nation after 1867, and reactions and responses to this within the Liberal party; the moral self-righteousness and crusading idealism of Gladstonian liberal political culture; the articulation of a specifically radical and provincial patriotism set against the aristocratic Tory Establishment and the alleged corruption and immorality of London ‘Society’; the close connections between religious networks and liberal politics, including an unlikely convergence between Nonconformity and Anglo-Catholicism: these were all of central importance to the Bulgarian agitation and helped to define the nature of the movement. Moreover, as a particularly emotive, sensational and divisive episode in Victorian politics, the agitation actually encouraged, informed and stimulated many of these processes. It has been shown that analyses of the issues at stake in the Balkans fed directly into new conceptions of English history and identity, emphasising the value of local self-government and peasant proprietorship, and reinforcing the belief in the necessity of personal and political freedom for material progress to be made. It has been argued that the agitation

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<sup>128</sup> Minchin, J., *The Growth of Freedom in the Balkan Peninsula. Notes of a Traveller in Montenegro, Bosnia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece* (London, 1886), p. 53.

wove 'British' and 'Balkan' themes together, creating a situation in which Tories could be equated with Turks, the English Prime Minister with the 'Orient', Orthodox Christians with Puritan heroes, Balkan peasant village communities with the Anglo-Saxon folk-moot. This was a heady mixture, one from which the agitation drew much of its energy and momentum.

Equally, the chapter has underlined some of the key themes that would characterise British liberal engagement with Balkan questions over the subsequent fifty years, and to which this following chapters of the thesis will return. It is clear that there was a specifically liberal representation of the Balkans that seems rather distinct from the discourse of balkanism. This liberal pattern of perception stressed sameness as much as difference, idealised as much as it denigrated, and expressed solidarity as much as criticism. And yet, it has also been noted that more paternalistic and dismissive attitudes remained deeply embedded within the British liberal approach to the region. Balkan nationalism, in particular, elicited an ambivalent response. As even the generally sympathetic Arthur Evans wrote: 'I don't choose to be told by every barbarian I meet that he is a man and a brother. I believe in the existence of inferior races and would like to see them exterminated.'<sup>129</sup>

It should also be noted that the Congress of Berlin set an important example as far as international management of Balkan questions was concerned. As Carole Fink argues, by raising concerns about the treatment of Jews in the successor states of the Ottoman Empire, and making international recognition of the independence of Romania and Serbia dependent on (albeit somewhat perfunctory and rather vaguely worded) guarantees that Jewish civil liberties would be respected, a precedent for Great Power interference in 'internal' Balkan questions under the guise of humanitarian intervention and protection was set. 'Minority rights' and the complexities and nuances of religious and national difference in the Balkans (or elsewhere) were not at this stage issues to which British liberals gave much attention. What is significant, however, is the point that at Berlin the basic right, the moral obligation even, of the Great Powers to manage aspects of governance in the Balkan states was affirmed. As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, this same interplay between humanitarianism

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<sup>129</sup> Evans, *Bosnia and the Herzegovina on Foot*, p. 312.

and international control was to be a central feature of British liberal interaction with Balkan questions in the years ahead. In the event, the Treaty of Berlin did very little to protect the rights of Balkan Jews, but, as Fink observes, ‘by expanding the principle of internationally dictated, nonreciprocal minority rights in the Balkans, the Great Powers created an onerous legacy of resentment, defiance and frustration’.<sup>130</sup>

All of these aspects of the Bulgarian agitation and its aftermath left their mark on the way the Balkans was imagined in the British liberal conscience, and their thread will be picked up in the chapters of this thesis that cover the history of British-Balkan interaction in the Edwardian era. Before that, the next chapter extends this analysis of the Bulgarian agitation by considering how it related to three particular episodes within late-Victorian politics and society: the dramatic ‘rediscovery of poverty’ in 1880s London, the fractious debates over Irish Home Rule in 1885-6, and what would seem to be the rather analogous Armenian atrocities agitation in the 1890s. These comparisons provide interesting angles from which to further explore the British liberal imagination of the Balkans in the late-nineteenth century, and also enable a more complete understanding of the political significance and impact of the issues and themes discussed so far.

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<sup>130</sup> Fink, C., *Defending the Rights of Others. The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878-1938* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 38.

## **Balkan Legacies: the political memory of the Bulgarian agitation in late-Victorian Britain**

The previous chapter has shown how, during the Eastern Crisis, Balkan questions resonated throughout British politics. As a consequence of the Bulgarian agitation, the Balkan Peninsula had a far greater place within British public debate than had been the case previously (although representations of the region were certainly selective and, at times, contradictory). The agitation also furnished British liberalism with a memorable moral crusade, offering a cherished example of a moment in British politics when the great and the good, the leading lights of British society, had been allied in spirit with ‘the People’ and the Nonconformist conscience, and when British political life had been reinvigorated with a fresh dose of idealism. This was no doubt a highly subjective reading of events, but it was an appealing political memory that had a powerful impact on British political culture in the final two decades of the nineteenth century. This chapter examines the impact of this political memory of the Bulgarian agitation and the Eastern Crisis by focusing on three particular moments of crisis and controversy: the ‘Outcast London’ and ‘Maiden Tribute’ scandals in 1883 and 1885; the Irish Home Rule campaign of 1885-6; and the agitation in response to Ottoman atrocities in Armenia in the 1890s. As well as enhancing our understanding of the Bulgarian agitation, this provides the means to analyse the changing place of the Balkans in the British liberal conscience as the century drew to a close.

### **The ‘East End of Europe’ and the East End of London**

In *Imagining the Balkans* Maria Todorova claims that ‘the coincidence between the discovery of the oppressed Christian nationalities [of the Balkans] and the discovery of the Victorian poor with their respective discourses after the middle of the century was especially remarkable’.<sup>1</sup> It is certainly striking how closely some of the literary and sociological tropes associated with the Victorian East End seem to match British representations of the Balkans

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<sup>1</sup> Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, p. 100.



at this time. The historian Seth Koven remarks that London's East End was 'both within and beyond the boundaries of civilisation'.<sup>2</sup> East End slums were 'peopled by violent and primitive races' but were 'conveniently close, only a short stroll from the Bank of England and St Pauls, inhabited by Christian brothers and sisters'.<sup>3</sup> Koven's primary international reference points are, like most scholars of the Victorian and Edwardian city, imperial. Slums are described as 'anarchic outposts of empire'.<sup>4</sup> However, the metaphorical link between the East End of London and the 'East End of Europe' is worthy of analysis. The Balkans was also a region predominantly inhabited by 'Christian brothers and sisters' but containing significant markers of 'primitive' Ottoman Muslim rule and influence. If, as has been argued, the Eastern Crisis marks the moment when British liberals in particular first began to engage with the Balkans as a foreign cause, what impact did this have on their attitudes towards the problems of their own industrial cities?

It is difficult to draw any direct correlation between political or humanitarian activism regarding the Balkans in the 1870s and sympathy for the victims of urban poverty in late Victorian Britain. Figures whose interests and affiliations straddled both these foreign and domestic contexts were few in number. J.R. Green and William Denton were perhaps the two most prominent examples. Denton was involved in campaigns for improved housing and sanitation for workers in London, whilst Green worked as a curate in the East End between 1861 and 1869, during which time he was active in several social welfare and charitable projects.<sup>5</sup> However, in Green's case, he initially felt compelled to prioritise domestic commitments over his support for the Balkan Christians. He wrote to Freeman in 1876 to explain that his responsibilities in supporting a local school for poor children meant that he

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<sup>2</sup> Koven, S., *Slumming. Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton, 2004), p. 279.

<sup>3</sup> Koven, *Slumming*, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Koven, *Slumming*, p. 4. Other 'postcolonial' analyses of domestic metropolitan social questions include: Bivona, D. and Henkle, R., *The Imagination of Class: Masculinity and the Victorian Urban Poor* (Columbus, Ohio, 2006); Walkowitz, J., *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London, 1992); Ross, E., *Slum Travellers. Ladies and London Poverty, 1860-1920* (Berkeley, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Brundage, *People's Historian*; Denton, W., *Observations on the Displacement of the Poor by Metropolitan Railways and Other Public Improvements* (London, 1861).

could devote little time or money to his friend's relief fund for Bosnian refugees.<sup>6</sup> Freeman's reply, meanwhile, indicates quite clearly that, as far as he was concerned, sympathy for victims of Ottoman oppression did not translate into sympathy for slum children: 'So you have a school at "the East End" which is to hinder your working for my refugees ... O man! They want bread and blankets now, in the snow; you can teach ABC or geopolitics either any time.'<sup>7</sup> Of those involved in the Bulgarian agitation, it appears that Freeman was more typical in refusing to let domestic poverty distract attention from the urgency of the situation in South-East Europe. As Richard Shannon notes, 'no less than the anti-slavery movement could the Bulgarian agitation avoid the taunt that its philanthropy increased at the square of the distance from social injustice at home'.<sup>8</sup>

Even for William Denton, who was reasonably active in addressing social questions, it was not social inequity per se but 'the drinking habit' that was 'the cause of so much misery, poverty, and crime'.<sup>9</sup> Like Denton, Green's concerns focussed as much on the irreligion and supposed immorality of the poor as on their actual material standard of living. Green believed that greater piety, intelligence and thrift among the labouring class were what was required, as opposed to any fundamental reordering of society or social relations. He consistently condemned pauperism, and maintained that there was a clear distinction to be drawn between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor.<sup>10</sup> Denton and Green were mainly engaged with these matters in the 1860s, but similar attitudes have been discerned by Judith Walkowitz and Nigel Scotland in their analyses of middle-class 'moral panics' about poverty in later decades. As these and other historians have argued, fears about the proximity and pervasiveness of vice, incest, prostitution, irreligion and other forms of un-Christian

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<sup>6</sup> Brundage, *People's Historian*, p. 126.

<sup>7</sup> Freeman to Green, 12<sup>th</sup> January 1876 (Jesus College MSS. 202, J 49/6), quoted in Brundage, *People's Historian*, p. 126.

<sup>8</sup> Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation*, p. 229.

<sup>9</sup> Denton, *Observations*, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Green, 'Edward Denison – In Memoriam', *Macmillan's Magazine*, Vol. 24, No., 143 (September 1871), p. 381. See also Green's articles in *The Saturday Review*: 'Pauperism in the East of London' (28<sup>th</sup> December 1867), 'The East End and its Relief Committees' (11<sup>th</sup> January 1868), 'Soupers at the East End' (25<sup>th</sup> January 1868), and 'Benevolence and the Poor' (23<sup>rd</sup> January 1869).

behaviour were as important as any actual concern for the existence of poverty itself in generating unease about ‘Outcast London’.<sup>11</sup>

At the time of the Bulgarian agitation, reform-minded liberals had a greater capacity to tolerate the existence of poverty and social inequity in their own country than they had to tolerate the oppression of Christian peasants in the Ottoman Empire. Looking back to this period, a later advocate of both social reform and the cause of the Balkan peoples, Henry Nevinson, recalled that ‘in those days we knew little about that side of life which was soon to absorb the world – the Social Question, the problems of poverty, the meaning and practice of social revolution.’<sup>12</sup> We thus need to be wary of transferring the concerns of the Edwardian ‘new liberalism’ – when, as the following chapter will explore, domestic and international reform were felt to be closely intertwined – onto the political conscience of its late-Victorian predecessor. There is no direct causal link between the liberal ‘discovery of the Balkans’ in the 1870s and the spread of middle-class social reform networks in the 1880s.

However, there are nonetheless some intriguing points of intersection between the Bulgarian agitation and the way in which, in the following decade, concerns were expressed about social problems associated with London’s slums. The most obvious link here would be W.T. Stead. Having established his journalistic fame and reputation through his coverage of the Bulgarian agitation at the *Northern Echo*, Stead overcame his serious reservations about moving to London (that ‘grave of all earnestness’ as he put it) and joined the *Pall Mall Gazette*.<sup>13</sup> In October 1883, as editorial director, Stead was responsible for serialising Andrew Mearns’ pamphlet on the shocking extent of East End poverty, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*. He then created one of the biggest media sensations of the Victorian era two years later with his exposé of working-class child prostitution, *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon*.

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<sup>11</sup> Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, pp. 28-30; Scotland, N., *Squires in the Slums. Settlements and Missions in Late-Victorian Britain* (London, 2007), p. 199; Stedman Jones, G., *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society* (Oxford, 1971).

<sup>12</sup> Nevinson, H., *Changes and Chances* (London, 1923), p. 46.

<sup>13</sup> Stead quoted in Robertson Scott, *Life and Death of a Newspaper*, p. 113.

The experience of the Bulgarian agitation was undoubtedly pivotal, not just in bringing Stead the national notoriety and success that made the move to the *Pall Mall Gazette* possible, but also in framing his approach to his craft as a journalist and newspaper editor.<sup>14</sup> Judith Walkowitz has noted that Stead used his media scandals to ‘create a single moral majority out of an expanded, heterogeneous public’, and his coverage of the Bulgarian agitation is certainly reflective of this aim.<sup>15</sup> Stead himself recalled that ‘for nearly three years I hardly published an issue in which I did not solemnly commit Lord Beaconsfield to the devil’.<sup>16</sup> His enthusiastic support for the agitation movement was clearly embarked upon as a moral crusade and in the spirit of an evangelical ‘calling’ in which he would be undertaking God’s work: ‘I felt the clear call of God’s voice, “Arouse the nation or be damned”’.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the Bulgarian agitation might well be viewed as a similar kind of ‘Victorian sensation’, in Michael Diamond’s phrase, to these later episodes: a moral panic driven by a melodramatic press and responsible for a frenzy of political controversy and excitement.<sup>18</sup>

There are certainly many reminders of the Bulgarian agitation in the *Pall Mall Gazette*’s coverage of the ‘Outcast London’ controversy. The self-righteous, moralistic tone and the condemnation of ‘the unhallowed influences of pleasure-seeking conservatism’, ‘evil London landlords’ and ‘sleek speculators who fatten upon the wretchedness of the poor’, can be compared to the Stead’s earlier attacks on the corruption and moral bankruptcy of the ‘Upper Ten’.<sup>19</sup> The claim of being at the forefront of a national campaign, with the paper being ‘inundated with correspondence from all parts of the country’, is also something that links the ‘Bitter Cry’ coverage with that of the Bulgarian agitation, as is the publication of letters of support from leading public figures.<sup>20</sup> In both 1876 and 1883, Stead strove to place his paper and its readers at the forefront of the moral outrage of the nation’s democratic

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<sup>14</sup> Goldsworthy, ‘English Nonconformity’, p. 388, p. 396.

<sup>15</sup> Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 130.

<sup>16</sup> Stead quoted in Robertson Scott, *Life and Death of a Newspaper*, p. 96.

<sup>17</sup> Stead quoted in Robertson Scott, *Life and Death of a Newspaper*, p. 104.

<sup>18</sup> Diamond, M., *Victorian Sensation* (London, 2003), p. 41.

<sup>19</sup> ‘The Bitter Cry of Outcast London’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1883, p. 11 and 17<sup>th</sup> October 1883, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> “‘Outcast London’ – Where to Begin’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1883, p. 1; “‘The Bitter Cry of Outcast London’”, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1883, p. 10.

majority.<sup>21</sup> What the Balkans provided during the Eastern Crisis, and what the East End provided during the *Outcast London* scandal, was the ‘copy’ – the raw material – from which pioneers like Stead could construct their campaigns and set about this task of reshaping the relationship between politics, the people and society. Of course, in both cases, the melodrama, sensationalism and radical political edge were vital journalistic additions, but a comparison of the two campaigns reveals that the Balkans and the East End of London shared the potential to shock and excite the imaginations of the public.

In the *Maiden Tribute* coverage the links with the Bulgarian agitation are particularly explicit, both in style and subject matter. Stead wrote of child prostitutes in London that ‘there is a minority which has been as much the victim of violence as were the Bulgarian maidens with whose wrongs Mr Gladstone made the world ring eight years ago’. Elsewhere the revelations of the *Pall Mall Gazette* were reported as being ‘so fearful that compared with them the Bulgarian atrocities were civilisation itself’.<sup>22</sup> When Parliament eventually voted to raise the age of sexual consent to sixteen, it was reported as offering ‘perhaps the most remarkable illustration afforded us since the publication of Mr. MacGahan’s letter from Batak [breaking news of the Bulgarian atrocities in the *Daily News*] of the power of a simple recital of facts in the columns of a newspaper’.<sup>23</sup> As with the Bulgarian agitation, Stead was able to use the *Maiden Tribute* scandal to contrast the ‘heart and conscience of the English folk, the sturdy innate chivalry and right thinking of the common people’, with the ‘aristocratic vice and crime’ of the ‘dissolute rich’ and ‘the bare mass of putrid corruption, which is underlying and festering beneath the surface of so-called “society”’. He also praised the coverage given to the story in the provincial press, comparing this favourably with the ‘friendly shield of impenetrable silence’ displayed in the West End clubs and by the *Pall Mall Gazette*’s London rivals.<sup>24</sup> Just as was claimed with the Bulgarian agitation, Stead wrote that ‘the shudder of

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<sup>21</sup> Joyce, *Democratic Subjects*, p. 181.

<sup>22</sup> ‘The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6<sup>th</sup> July 1885, p. 14; ‘The Press on the Crimes of Modern Babylon’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 14<sup>th</sup> July 1885, p. 26.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Progress Indeed’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1885, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> ‘The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6<sup>th</sup> July 1885, p. 13; ‘The Press on the Crimes of Modern Babylon’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 14<sup>th</sup> July 1885, p. 25; ‘More Views of the Modern

outraged humanity is almost universal, quite universal we might say, except in the offices of certain London newspapers and on the part of our political chiefs'.<sup>25</sup>

This comparison with later 'Victorian sensations' helps to illuminate certain aspects of the Bulgarian agitation's appeal and character. Like the *Outcast London* and *Maiden Tribute* sensations, it had its 'gallery of compelling images' that were used to arouse popular opinion behind the cause.<sup>26</sup> Humphry Sandwith surely recognised this when he urged Paulina Irby to send one provincial paper 'a good, long, descriptive letter ... full of famine, fever, small-pox, starvation, and heart-rending scenes!'<sup>27</sup> Perhaps most compelling of all, as David Bebbington and others have observed, was the image of 'atrocities' and 'outrages' committed against 'female honour'.<sup>28</sup> Gladstone wrote in 1876 that the business of government was, 'above all', to guard 'the sanctity and honour of women', and the inability of the Ottoman Porte to do this in Bulgaria was clearly of great importance in generating sympathy for the Balkan cause.<sup>29</sup> Malcolm MacColl, for example, described the 'peril to which the chastity of his female relations is daily exposed' as 'the most cruel torture of all' suffered by the 'Rayah of Turkey'.<sup>30</sup>

There was no direct correlation between concern with urban poverty and concern for the victims of Ottoman oppression. Yet the sensational and melodramatic aspects of the Bulgarian agitation, when placed in comparison with subsequent media scandals relating to slum areas of London, nevertheless illustrate the concept of the Balkans as 'the East End of Europe'. Just as Stead's journalism did much to cement the image of the East End as an underworld of abject poverty, vice and corruption, the Bulgarian agitation did much to ensure that the Balkans would become associated in the British imagination with tales of violence

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Babylon Revelations', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 20<sup>th</sup> July 20<sup>th</sup> 1885, p. 2; 'More Proof – If Wanted', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 16<sup>th</sup> July 1885, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> 'True', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 30<sup>th</sup> July 1885, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Ginn, G., 'Answering the "Bitter Cry": Urban Description and Social reform in the Late-Victorian East End', *London Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (2006), p. 180.

<sup>27</sup> Sandwith to Irby, 14<sup>th</sup> July 1876: Letters of Humphry Sandwith to A.P. Irby, 1876, Nightingale Papers, British Library (Add. MS 45789, f. 68).

<sup>28</sup> Bebbington, *Nonconformist Conscience*, p. 115; Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, p. 158.

<sup>29</sup> Gladstone, *Sclavonic Provinces of Turkey-in-Europe*, p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> MacColl, 'The Christian Subjects of the Porte', *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 28 (November 1876), p. 979.

and ghoulish horrors. The 'East End of Europe' was therefore an appropriate setting for Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, in the research for which, as Matthew Gibson has pointed out, the author would have been able to draw on the experiences of his own brother, who had travelled and worked in the region in the 1870s as an Ottoman army surgeon.<sup>31</sup> It is something of an irony that a campaign that stressed so frequently the 'European' nature of the Balkans, and which sought to underline the common culture and civilisation of the Balkan and British people, should have also helped in this way to reinforce images of the Balkans as a Gothic 'Other' – an image that, as Vesna Goldsworthy and others have shown, British writers exploited liberally in popular fiction until into the twentieth century.<sup>32</sup> And yet such contradictions are rather typical of the British imaginative geography of the Balkans, drawing as it did on tropes of both attraction and repulsion.

However, in the aftermath of the 'Maiden Tribute' scandal the problems of 'darkest London' were overshadowed, at least for a time, by the increasingly fraught Irish question. Irish Home Rule was of course an issue that would divide and define liberal politics for the next generation. It provides another interesting angle from which to explore both the legacy of the Bulgarian agitation and the wider liberal perception of the Balkans.

### **Imperial analogies? The Irish Home Rule crisis**

The leading presence of Gladstone, again with strong backing from Nonconformists, provides an obvious point of comparison between the moral crusade of 1876 and the campaign in favour of Home Rule ten years later.<sup>33</sup> With many liberals arguing in favour of local self-government for the Balkan states within the Ottoman Empire, it might be expected that the idea of self-government for the Irish within the United Kingdom would have found a ready base of support. It was not coincidental that Disraeli's thoughts turned to Ireland at the time of the rebellion in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1875, when the prospect of Bosnian autonomy

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<sup>31</sup> Gibson, M. *Dracula and the Eastern Question. British and French Vampire Narratives of the Nineteenth-Century Near East* (Basingstoke, 2006), pp. 74-75.

<sup>32</sup> Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania* (New Edition), pp. 81-95; Hammond, A., 'Through Savage Europe. The Gothic Strain in British Balkanism', *Third Text*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (March 2007), pp. 117-27.

<sup>33</sup> On Nonconformist support for Home Rule see Bebbington, *Nonconformist Conscience*, ch. 5.

was raised in the *Times*. Disraeli, unsurprisingly, found both prospects rather fanciful: ‘Fancy autonomy for Bosnia with a mixed population; autonomy for Ireland would be less absurd; for there are more Turks in proportion to Christians in Bosnia, than Ulster v. the three other Provinces.’<sup>34</sup>

But did British liberals find any analogies to Irish Home Rule in the Balkans? It has been noted that support for the Balkan Christians did not signal any outright commitment to the idea of national self-determination, with the ‘liberation’ of the Balkans from the direct rule of the Porte a question of ‘civilisation’ rather than nationalism. Nevertheless, as noted, forms of local self-government and autonomy were a recognised liberal answer to the Eastern Question. If ‘small nations’ had rights in South-East Europe, had they not similar rights closer to home? In fact, although there were certainly numerous supporters of both causes, many liberals who had enthusiastically rallied with Gladstone to the Bulgarian agitation were distinctly lukewarm or openly hostile to his Irish Home Rule scheme in 1885-6. Such figures included Argyll, Goldwin Smith, Kinnear, Courtney, Lecky, Froude and Sidgwick – a significant sample of that ‘most brilliant array of intellectual figures’ that we have noted participated in the Conference on the Eastern Question at St. James’s Hall in December 1876.<sup>35</sup> So how did the Home Rule crisis intersect with liberal attitudes towards the Balkans in this period?

It has been suggested by W.C. Lubenow that, despite the noted liberal preference for the ‘civilisational perspective’, the experience of the Bulgarian agitation still encouraged, almost by default, greater sympathy towards sectarian national movements. The ‘Bulgarian Horrors’, it is argued, led liberals to conclude that the gradual reform of the Ottoman Empire towards a pluralist parliamentary democracy with an enlightened, western bureaucracy was no longer possible; and that instead, greater support ought to be given to the separatist aspirations of the Balkan nationalities. As a result, even if the Bulgarian agitation had not been embarked upon in a spirit of liberal-nationalism, it still gave an implicit boost to the case

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<sup>34</sup> Disraeli to Lady Bradford, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1875, *Letters of Disraeli to Lady Bradford and Lady Chesterfield, 1873-1881, Vol. 1*, pp. 288-89, cited in Ković, *Disraeli and the Eastern Question*, p. 91.

<sup>35</sup> Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation*, p. 26.



for Irish Home Rule by highlighting sympathetically the difficulties faced by subject nationalities. It should be stressed that lingering hopes for Ottoman reform were not completely extinguished by the Bulgarian agitation. As is discussed in the next chapter, there were rarely straightforward or consistent answers to the question of whether liberal progress and civilisation in the Balkans would be better served by a reforming Ottoman Porte or the Balkan nationalities themselves. In the 1880s, with the atrocities of 1876 still fresh in the memory, faith in the prospect of Ottoman reform was certainly at a premium. Attitudes could shift in a relatively short space of time though, as responses to the unexpected Young Turk revolution in 1908 would reveal. However, Lubenow's suggestion is that at least some liberals were reconciled to the idea of Irish Home Rule by the experience of 1876.<sup>36</sup> To critics, on the other hand, support for Balkan national rights set a dangerous precedent as far as Britain's own empire was concerned.

Similar points are raised by E.F. Biagini's argument that Continental parallels – including that of the Balkans – need to be borne in mind as much as imperial ones when examining British attitudes towards Irish nationalism.<sup>37</sup> Biagini writes that the Bulgarian agitation became 'a trial run for the 1886 campaign for Home Rule', and points to the similar emotive language, humanitarian ethos and sense of moral outrage linking the two episodes. Indeed, he deliberately borrows the phrase used by Shannon in the latter's analysis of the Bulgarian agitation to describe the Home Rule issue as a 'crisis of public conscience'.<sup>38</sup> Shannon himself also drew a close connection between Gladstone's engagement with the Bulgarian agitation and his decision to campaign for Home Rule for Ireland, as did J.L. Hammond somewhat earlier.<sup>39</sup> In Shannon's analysis, the agitation 'sharpened Gladstone's sensitivity to the problem of Ireland', not least during his only visit there during the middle of the Eastern Crisis, and stimulated a growing belief in the necessity of giving greater self-

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<sup>36</sup> Lubenow, W.C., 'The Liberals and the National Question: Irish Home Rule, Nationalism, and their Relationship to Nineteenth-Century Liberalism', *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (1994), pp. 120-42, esp. pp. 130-31.

<sup>37</sup> Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism*, p. 25.

<sup>38</sup> Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism*, p. 35, p. 40. See Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation*, p. 42.

<sup>39</sup> Hammond, *Gladstone and the Irish Nation* (London, 1938), pp. 728-29.

government to Dublin if the Irish were ever to be reconciled to English rule or to share in English progress.<sup>40</sup> For Biagini, too, Gladstone ‘was not suddenly converted to Home Rule at the end of 1885, but had privately been considering it from the mid-1870s’.<sup>41</sup> The Midlothian Campaign speeches make evident Gladstone’s belief in the value of local self-government, and indicate his readiness to increase this in Ireland as long as (and this would, of course, be the key caveat for many liberals in 1886) this would not ‘weaken or compromise the authority of the Imperial Parliament’.<sup>42</sup> According to such analyses therefore, although Ireland undoubtedly eclipsed the Balkans in the 1880s as a divisive, passion-stirring political issue, the Home Rule crisis drew heavily on the legacies of the Bulgarian agitation. This did much to ensure that perceptions of the Balkans, and of Balkan claims to greater self-government, remained at the forefront of liberal political debate.

In the arguments of key figures from the Bulgarian agitation who wrote in support of Gladstone and Home Rule in 1886, notably E.A. Freeman and Malcolm MacColl, there are repeated references to the Balkans and the Eastern Question. English rule in Ireland was condemned as having been, in the past at least, ‘little better than the rule of the Turk now in the Christian provinces which still lie under the blight of his sway’, with a ‘foreign’ religion imposed ‘by the Mussulman argument of the sword’. For Freeman, Ottoman rule in the Balkans provided ‘the only parallel in Europe’ to the prolonged state of conquest that had existed in Ireland.<sup>43</sup> James Bryce, who was of Ulster-Scot descent, denounced the English Ascendancy in Ireland as a ‘ruling caste’ comparable to the Muslim minority in the Ottoman Balkans, intent only on preserving their privileges and power over a downtrodden peasantry.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, James Bouchier, an Irish Protestant, drew historical parallels with Ireland in his writing on the Balkans at this time. Just as the ‘misfortunes of its history’ and ‘ages of

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<sup>40</sup> Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation*, pp. 275-80.

<sup>41</sup> Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism*, p.15.

<sup>42</sup> Gladstone, W.E., ‘Second Midlothian Speech’ (26<sup>th</sup> November 1879) in *Midlothian Speeches 1879* (Leicester, 1971), pp. 86-87.

<sup>43</sup> Freeman, E.A., ‘Some Aspects of Home Rule’, *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 49 (February 1886), p. 157; MacColl, ‘Some Forgotten Aspects of the Irish Question’, *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 37 (February 1880), pp. 301-302; MacColl, M., *Reasons for Home Rule* (London, 1886), p. 33.

<sup>44</sup> Bryce, J., ‘Introduction’ to *Two Centuries of Irish History 1691-1870* (London, 1888), p. xix, p. xxxiii.

unsympathetic government' were to blame for the supposed defects of Irish character, he argued, 'centuries of subjection to an alien master have left their mark on the habits and character of the Bulgarian peasant'.<sup>45</sup> Whilst the history of the Balkans provided Freeman and Bryce with analogies to English rule (and misrule) in Ireland, Irish history provided parallels with which Bouchier could sympathetically explain the peculiarities of the Balkans to his readers.

But, again like the Bulgarian agitation, arguments in favour of Home Rule were not just based on negative portrayals of the ruling power. Home Rule was presented as something that would both free the Irish people from an unworkable regime and also set them on a new path of progress. Moreover, the precedents set by the Balkan nationalities that had been recently 'freed' from the direct rule of the Porte, particularly Bulgaria, were used to support such claims. In this context, the peaceful 1885 union of the provinces of Bulgaria and Roumelia (after which the suzerainty of the Sultan was retained) and the Bulgarians' subsequent defensive victory over the Serb army at Slivnitsa, were seen by sympathetic British liberals as signs of an admirable capacity for self-defence, national unity and ordered political and constitutional progress. As MacColl asked, 'if five years of freedom and self-government – for the self-government of Bulgaria must be dated from the departure of the Russian army and administration – can produce such a crop of civic and military virtues, is it not rash to assume that the Irish are as unfit to govern themselves as the Bulgarians were generally believed to be seven years ago?'<sup>46</sup>

The Bulgarian agitation had produced positive patterns of representation for the Balkans, challenging stereotypes about the region's 'backwardness' and barbarity. Home Rulers similarly sought to tackle latent English anti-Irish prejudice. As had been claimed with Bulgarians in the previous decade, it was reiterated that it was entirely unreasonable to condemn the Irish for being unfit for self-rule 'when', as Bryce put it, 'no opportunity of

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<sup>45</sup> Bouchier, 'Social Life in Bulgaria', p. 522.

<sup>46</sup> MacColl, *Reasons for Home Rule*, p. 26, p. 31.

learning it has ever been afforded them'.<sup>47</sup> Should such an opportunity be given, it was argued, the example of Bulgaria promised that Irish self-rule would be orderly, united and progressive. The Ottoman Balkans was admittedly not the only region where increased self-government was seen as having been successfully introduced in this period. Gladstone referred to the precedents of Norway and Sweden, Iceland and Denmark, Finland and Russia, and the Lebanon and Turkey. E.A. Freeman, meanwhile, pointed to the case of Croatia within the Hungarian Kingdom, as well as examples closer to home such as the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.<sup>48</sup> However, the Bulgarian agitation had helped to place the Balkans at the heart of late-nineteenth century political debate about self-government and constitutional reform. Tellingly, when the liberal weekly the *Speaker* was extolling the virtues of self-government for London in the 1890s, it was these very two Irish and Bulgarian examples that were chosen to illustrate its arguments. The capital, it was suggested, had clearly demonstrated its capacity to govern its own affairs despite the fact that 'twenty years ago, like Bulgaria, like Ireland to-day, it had never had the chance'.<sup>49</sup>

Home Rule activists thus referred back to the Bulgarian agitation and to the example of the Ottoman Balkans in arguing for the moral strength and the political efficacy of their cause. They denounced the apparent hypocrisy, or at least intellectual inconsistency, of those Liberal Unionists who had previously defended the claims of national groups within the Ottoman, Habsburg and Russian empires. As the *Westminster Review* mused, 'we can overlook the excesses and misdirected efforts of patriots in their struggles for liberty, anywhere but at home'.<sup>50</sup> If 'legacies of the historical and geological past' had to be accepted in relation to British rule in Ireland, as the Unionist (but prominent supporter of the Bulgarian agitation) Goldwin Smith urged, why could they not be accepted in relation to Ottoman rule

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<sup>47</sup> Bryce, *Two Centuries of Irish History*, p. xxxiii.

<sup>48</sup> Gladstone, W.E., 'Further Notes and Queries on the Irish Demand', *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 58 (March 1888), p. 333; Freeman, E.A., 'Croatia and Ireland', *Times*, 17<sup>th</sup> September 1887, p. 12, Issue 32180, Col. D; Freeman to Gladstone, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1886: Gladstone Papers (Add. MS: 56447, ff. 129-134).

<sup>49</sup> 'London Reform', *Speaker*, 24<sup>th</sup> February 1894, p. 214.

<sup>50</sup> 'John Bright and the Irish Question', *Westminster Review*, Vol. 128, No. 1 (April 1887), p. 530.

in the Balkans? Why was Irish nationalism ‘political brigandage’ when Bulgarian nationalism was not?<sup>51</sup>

The answer to these questions lies in the fact that, for all the relevance of the Balkan case to the Irish Home Rule issue, and for all the legacies left by the Bulgarian agitation in British political discourse, the Balkans was not Ireland. More to the point, the Ottoman Empire was not the British Empire – comparisons between British rule in Ireland and Ottoman rule in the Balkans were essentially more of a rhetorical flourish than a direct geopolitical analogy. Both supporters and opponents of Home Rule recognised this. For example, despite his continuing engagement with the region, the Bulgarian agitation does not feature in James Bryce’s 1887 article explaining ‘How We Became Home Rulers’.<sup>52</sup> The kind of sweeping moral judgments about Ottoman rule that liberals expressed routinely during the Bulgarian agitation were not likely to be made about their own empire. Even if British rule in Ireland was believed to be morally repugnant, this did not invalidate the entire British system of government, as the Bulgarian Horrors were widely felt to have done for that of the ‘Unspeakable Turk’. Irish Home Rule was to be brought about by a complex process of reform and compromise; no one was urging the British to be removed from Ireland ‘bag and baggage’.

Nor were Irish and Balkan nationalism necessarily approached in the same way. The Balkan nationalities had their own national languages and were seen as quite distinct from their imperial rulers. In Ireland, however, ‘the Saxon has commonly to be denounced in the Saxon tongue’, as E.A. Freeman put it. Even a self-governing Ireland, with its own laws and parliament, would, so Freeman asserted, be an ‘English’ state with an ‘English’ civilisation. Freeman pointed out that ‘no Greek, Albanian or Rouman state would be in the same way either Turkish or Austrian’.<sup>53</sup> Although he was a longstanding and committed adherent to

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<sup>51</sup> Smith, G., ‘The Fallacy of Irish History’, *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 35, No. 205 (January 1894), p. 39; Smith G., ‘The Moral of the Late Crisis’, *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 20, No. 115 (September 1886), p. 311.

<sup>52</sup> Bryce, J. ‘How We Became Home Rulers’, *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 51 (May 1887), pp. 736-56.

<sup>53</sup> Freeman to Bryce, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1886, quoted in Stephens, *Life and Letters*, p. 346; Freeman, *Historical Essays*, p. 209, p. 218.

Irish Home Rule, for Freeman the crisis of 1885-6 was probably above all a distraction from the issues at stake in South-East Europe anyway. When writing to Gladstone ostensibly about Irish matters in April 1886 he ‘could not help dropping in a word ... about Greece [and Bulgaria]’, clearly for him – if not for Gladstone – the more pressing national question.<sup>54</sup> Goldwin Smith, as an opponent of Home Rule, actually went much further than Freeman and questioned the very existence of a separate Irish nation. Smith saw the political crisis as essentially a question of tenant right rather than nationalism. (Then again, as observed above, this was also how Arthur Evans had characterised the peasant uprising in Herzegovina that had sparked the Eastern Crisis in 1875).<sup>55</sup>

To return to the main point, undoubtedly the major difference between the situation in Bulgaria and that in Ireland was that, whereas the Ottoman Empire was seen as being intrinsically corrupt and oppressive, liberal faith in the progress and civilisation of the United Kingdom remained undimmed, despite the difficulties across the Irish Sea. Goldwin Smith listed ‘a full measure of representation, religious equality, national education, fiscal indulgence, aid in famine’ among the benefits that Britain – that ‘guiding star of constitutional and ordered freedom’ – had brought to Ireland.<sup>56</sup> Leonard Courtney wrote of the ‘continuous improvement’ in the general condition of Ireland since the famine.<sup>57</sup> This was the most compelling defence used by Liberal Unionists such as these against the charge that they were hypocritically denying to Ireland what they had demanded for Bulgaria. As Smith argued, ‘whereas for the Bulgarians the only hope of civilisation and freedom lay in separation from Turkey, for the Irish people, the only hope of civilisation and real freedom lies in union with Great Britain’. ‘While the dissolution of the Turkish empire breaks up only a power of barbarism which blights some of the finest regions of the earth’, Smith continued, ‘the dissolution of the British Empire [seen as a real risk if Home rule were granted to Ireland]

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<sup>54</sup> Freeman to Gladstone, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1886: Gladstone Papers (Add. MS: 56447, ff. 98-99).

<sup>55</sup> Smith, G., ‘The Fallacy of Irish History’, p. 44; Smith, G., *Dismemberment No Remedy* (London, 1886), p. 9, p. 22.

<sup>56</sup> Smith, *Dismemberment No Remedy*, p. 7, p. 31.

<sup>57</sup> Courtney, L., ‘Ireland’, *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 49 (April 1886), p. 458.

would break up what is ... a power of beneficence and light'.<sup>58</sup> To Gladstone's critics, any attempt to 'Bulgarianise' the Irish question was almost 'ludicrous', for 'to the sane Englishman Michaelstown is not Batak; the Irish constabulary are not Bashi-Bazouks, nor Irish magistrates Turkish pashas'.<sup>59</sup>

Even those Home Rulers who compared the English conquest of Ireland to that of the Ottoman Turks over the Balkans felt obliged to acknowledge that such wrongs were now part of the 'bygone days' of British history rather than contemporary politics. It was argued that disestablishment of the Church of England and land reform had righted many past wrongs, and that the example of Scotland suggested that 'justice and equality' for all the different nationalities within the United Kingdom was very much possible.<sup>60</sup> In contrast to his scathing views on Ottoman imperial history, Bryce did not question the right of the Britain to have an empire, nor even to have initially incorporated Ireland within the United Kingdom. For him, the problem was rather that the upper classes in Ireland had failed to show the kind of moral leadership, public spirit and patriotism required to bring together rich and poor, Protestant and Catholic, Anglo-Saxon and Celt, in loyalty to the common state.<sup>61</sup> In other words, he didn't question the ends of British rule; he only questioned the means. This gives an interesting insight into how Bryce conceived the role of the late-Victorian public servant, and underlines his readiness to believe that divisions of class, religion, race and culture could all be overcome given appropriately disinterested leadership from the governing classes. However, whereas he felt such leadership to exist in Britain, and to be at least possible in Ireland, he certainly did not believe it to exist in the Ottoman Empire.

There was thus no direct parallel between the Balkan and Irish cases. Sympathy for the Balkan Christians did not necessarily imply support for Irish Home Rule. Even those who did support both the Bulgarian agitation and the Home Rule campaign often did so without

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<sup>58</sup> Smith, *Dismemberment No Remedy*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>59</sup> Atherley-Jones, L.A., 'The New Liberalism', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 26, No. 150 (August 1889), p. 190.

<sup>60</sup> MacColl, *Reasons for Home Rule*, p. 48; Bryce letter to *The Times*, 28<sup>th</sup> March 1887, cited in Seaman, *Citizen of the World*, p. 111; Freeman, *The Ottoman Power in Europe*, p. 294.

<sup>61</sup> Bryce, *Two Centuries of Irish History*, p. xxxiii; Bryce, J. 'The Past and Future of the Irish Question' in *Handbook of Home Rule – being Articles on the Irish Question* (London, 1887), pp. 218-19.

assuming that the two things were directly related. Nevertheless, debates about the Balkans arising from the experiences of 1875-8 were clearly still part of political discourse a decade later. The Bulgarian agitation had raised issues relating to self-government and the rights of small nations, and to the relationship between multinational empire and liberal political institutions, and this formed part of the political and cultural context against which the Home Rule crisis was played out. References to the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire – whether done to stress similarities or differences to the British-Irish case – were frequent enough to suggest that the region continued to capture the imagination and interest of the British public. This wasn't an issue that had gone away once the ink had dried on the Treaty of Berlin. Nor had Ireland 'pushed the problems of Turkey into the background', as has been suggested by one historian of the Eastern Question.<sup>62</sup>

Furthermore, the Balkans seems to have retained a largely positive image in British liberal eyes. It offered a case study, to some commentators at least, in the benefits of increased self-government. This was still largely an argument about 'civilisation' rather than national rights, however. Indeed, it was this 'civilisational perspective' that allowed Liberal Unionists to square their sympathy with the Balkan Christians with their opposition to Irish Home Rule. Unlike the Ottoman Empire, the argument ran, Britain was civilised and progressive enough to manage her own subject nationalities without needing to radically reform the structures of the imperial state. For those liberals who did follow Gladstone, however, there is no doubt that the Balkans was also seen to provide a powerful reference point for their (often paternalistic) arguments in favour of letting the Irish manage more of their own affairs. Of course, Home Rule liberals were as guilty of ignoring the implications of their scheme for the relations between different religious communities in Ireland as the Bulgarian agitators were of overlooking the complexities of Balkan nationalism. These were both issues that would be left for later generations of liberals. Yet, regardless of how selective images of the region may still have been, the Home Rule crisis did much to keep the Balkans

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<sup>62</sup> Clayton, G.D., *Britain and the Eastern Question. Missolonghi to Gallipoli* (London: Lion Library Edition, 1974), p. 164, p. 173.



in the liberal political conscience. The following decade, a series of atrocities committed against the Armenian Christian populations in Anatolia and Istanbul ensured that the events of 1876 received further reflection and remembrance.

### **The ‘Bulgarian Horrors’ Revisited?**

In many respects, events in Armenia were a case of history repeating itself: Simmering unrest amongst a Christian population under Ottoman rule led (on an even more horrific scale than two decades earlier) to massacres and violent repression, provoking in turn an outpouring of humanitarian sympathy, anti-Ottoman and Islamophobic rhetoric, moral outrage and political agitation on the part of British liberals and their allies from Church and Chapel.<sup>63</sup> Gladstone was brought out of retirement for a second time, joining several familiar figures from the Bulgarian agitation, notably Argyll, MacColl and Bryce (the founder of the Anglo-Armenian Association and a long-time campaigner of behalf of the Ottoman Armenians). Symbolically, the first mass meeting of this Armenian agitation in May 1895 took place at St James’s Hall, scene of the celebrated Conference on the Eastern Question in 1876. Meanwhile, W.T. Stead, now Editor of the *Review of Reviews*, urged the Nonconformist conscience to once again lead Christendom in condemning the Ottoman ‘Assassin’. As with the support generated for the Serbs and Bulgarians in 1876, this was presented as a moral crusade in which humanitarianism and evangelism could combine, and in which the groundswell of sympathy for the sufferings of ‘fellow Christians’ was more than enough to overcome prejudices against the actual forms of religious practice to which the Armenian people adhered.<sup>64</sup>

And yet, it is generally agreed that, despite these similarities, the Armenian agitation had far less impact than the Bulgarian precedent of 1876 on British domestic politics and public opinion. Whereas the Bulgarian agitation fed directly into Gladstone’s triumphant

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<sup>63</sup> It is estimated that up to 100,000 Armenians were killed during the massacres of 1894-6: Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, p. 185. See also: Salt, J., *Imperialism, Evangelism and the Ottoman Armenians, 1878-1896* (London, 1993).

<sup>64</sup> ‘The Massacres of the Assassin and How to Stop Them’, *Review of Reviews*, October 1896, p. 307; ‘Who Ought to be Damned for This?’, *Review of Reviews*, January 1896, p. 39. See also Tusan, M., ‘The Business of Relief Work: A Victorian Quaker in Constantinople and Her Circle’, *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (2009), pp. 633-63, and Bebbington, *Nonconformist Conscience*, pp. 118-26.

Midlothian Campaigns against Disraeli, Bryce's biographer H.A.L. Fisher conceded that 'no British election has been fought on the Armenian question, no British Government has been materially advanced or imperilled by its handling of a problem so remote and so difficult'.<sup>65</sup> The more recent study of Jo Laycock concurs with this judgment. Laycock stresses the ease and rapidity with which interest in – and notions of British responsibility for – the Armenians could dissipate, and how fully the Armenian question had slipped from the international agenda by 1897.<sup>66</sup> Even at the height of the crisis in 1895-6, public support was 'not on the scale of the Bulgarian agitation'.<sup>67</sup> This was much to the frustration of the more committed activists. A correspondent of Bryce felt that 'the country shudders at the Armenian horrors, yet it ... shirks from giving the only mandate which can put an end to them'.<sup>68</sup> All of which calls for a closer comparison of the Bulgarian and Armenian agitation movements, and for an examination of how perceptions of Armenia and the Armenian Christians might have differed from perceptions of South-East Europe. Such a comparison helps to illustrate certain trends within British liberal humanitarian politics during the twenty years separating the two events. It also helps to pinpoint some of the more specific aspects and defining characteristics of the liberal imaginative geography of the Balkans.

In explaining the limited impact of the Armenian agitation, historians have generally stressed, on the one hand, the difficulties of the geopolitical and strategic situation and, on the other, the domestic political weakness of the Liberal party. The first point is summarised neatly by Jeremy Salt's remark that 'humanity and imperial interests had come adrift'.<sup>69</sup> In 1876 Britain had had no direct strategic interests in the Balkans, perhaps thus allowing

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<sup>65</sup> Fisher, H.A.L., *James Bryce (Viscount Bryce of Dechmont, O.M.) - Vol. 1* (London, 1927), pp. 186-87.

<sup>66</sup> Laycock, J., *Imagining Armenia: Orientalism, Ambiguity and Intervention* (Manchester, 2009), p. 9, p. 79, p. 223. See also, Douglas, R., 'Britain and the Armenian Question', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (1976), pp. 113-33.

<sup>67</sup> Laycock, *Imagining Armenia*, p. 79. Laycock's assessment is shared by Davide Rodogno in *Against Massacre*, p. 205.

<sup>68</sup> Letter from James Ruthersfield to Bryce, 25<sup>th</sup> September 1896: Papers of James, Viscount Bryce, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford (MSS Bryce: 197).

<sup>69</sup> Salt, *Ottoman Armenians*, p. 137. See also: Fitzpatrick, M., "'Ideal and Ornamental Endeavours': The Armenian Reforms and Germany's Response to Britain's Imperial Humanitarianism in the Ottoman Empire, 1878-83', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (2012), pp. 183-206.

humanitarian concerns to be voiced with more force. In the 1890s, by contrast, increased imperial rivalry over Egypt and in the Near East meant that there was a general reluctance to upset the status quo. Compassion and moral outrage were no justification for diplomatic isolation or risking a general war. Even if Britain had felt able and inclined to act alone, it was questioned what use the Mediterranean Fleet would be given Armenia's inland location. Moreover, by 1897 British foreign policy was growing increasingly preoccupied with events in South Africa, something that most liberals felt disinclined to challenge. Bryce wrote to the Duke of Westminster as early as January 1896 arguing that 'the Transvaal trouble', as he put it, made 'it prudent to abstain from pressing the Government' over Armenia, to which the Duke replied: 'I am sure you will allow that the Government has more than enough on its hands just now, and that as outward things are so ominous, it should have the support of the whole nation without distinction of party.'<sup>70</sup> The kind of criticism levelled at Disraeli's government in 1876 for failing to intervene in defence of the Balkan Christians was generally not repeated over Armenia in 1896. Few liberals doubted the significance of what the *Times* called 'the insuperable conditions of geography and European politics'.<sup>71</sup>

Furthermore, the Liberal party was itself far less well placed than it had been in 1876 to rally public support for the victims of Ottoman misrule or to rouse humanitarian agitation against Government foreign policy. Whether voiced in terms of the clash of personalities between a 'moral', patriotic, Gladstone and a cynical, 'cosmopolitan', crypto-Turkish Disraeli, or in terms of the distinction between 'the People' and the 'Upper Ten', the Bulgarian agitation was characterised by humanitarianism with a powerful and incisive political edge. This was not the case with the Armenian agitation. Liberal humanitarianism was far less effective when it lacked strong political backing and when the support of leading public figures was much harder to obtain. Even the eventual intervention of Gladstone, the Grand Old Man of liberal Britain, failed to substantially change this. The Liberal party, under Rosebery, had actually been in power when news of the Armenian massacres first emerged.

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<sup>70</sup> Bryce to Westminster, 6<sup>th</sup> January 1896 and Westminster to Bryce, 8<sup>th</sup> January 1896: Bryce Papers (MSS Bryce: 197). See also: Douglas, 'Britain and the Armenian Question', p. 126.

<sup>71</sup> *Times*, 20<sup>th</sup> February 1896, p. 9.

Whereas the ‘Bulgarian Horrors’ had been presented as a Tory ‘crime’, the same could hardly be said for what Stead called the ‘Haunting Horrors of Armenia’, as he and other radicals in fact acknowledged.<sup>72</sup> During the Eastern Crisis, Gladstone had denounced Disraeli’s ‘imperialism’ and promoted the idea of the Concert of Europe. In 1897, however, it was the new Tory Prime Minister, Salisbury, who seemed more in tune with both the other European Great Powers and with the mood of the country, whilst liberal supporters of the Armenians argued amongst themselves.<sup>73</sup>

This was reflective of the loss of confidence and conviction within British liberalism in the 1880s and 1890s in the face of divisions created by the issue of Irish Home Rule (as discussed above), the emergence of ‘collectivist’ and socialist alternatives to liberal economics, and uncertainty over Britain’s imperial role in Afghanistan, Egypt, Sudan and South Africa. In 1909 James Bryce would pass over the 1880s and 1890s and look back nostalgically to the Bulgarian agitation as ‘practically the last time when the Liberal party acted together as a whole’.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, whereas the Bulgarian agitation occurred at a time when great liberal morality takes like the Repeal of the Corn Laws, the Risorgimento, and the North’s victory in the American Civil War were still relatively fresh in the collective memory, the Armenian agitation took place against a general Continental backdrop of cultural pessimism, rearmament, anti-liberalism, protectionism, anti-alien legislation and economic depression. As Jonathan Parry observes, by the 1890s ‘Liberal narratives about the inevitability of global progress towards liberal constitutionalism and free trade were starting to seem rather naïve’.<sup>75</sup> If British liberals had become less confident about their solutions to the Eastern Question in the 1890s, it was therefore perhaps because they were less confident about liberal progress more generally. The black-and-white moral certainties of 1876 could not be restored.

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<sup>72</sup> Stead, W.T. (ed.), *The Haunting Horrors in Armenia, Or Will I Be Damned For This?* (Popular Papers for the People, No. 1: London, 1896), p. 60; ‘United Against the Turk’, *Speaker*, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1895, p. 119.

<sup>73</sup> Laycock, *Imagining Armenia*, p. 79. For examples, see: Bryce’s letter to Duke of Westminster, 6<sup>th</sup> January 1896 and Francis Stevenson’s letter to Bryce, 6<sup>th</sup> January 1896: Bryce Papers (MSS Bryce: 197); Stead, *Haunting Horrors in Armenia*, p. 60; MacColl letter to *The Times*, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1896.

<sup>74</sup> Bryce to Stead, 14<sup>th</sup> January 1909: Stead Papers (STED 1.11).

<sup>75</sup> Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, p. 398.

Sensationalist anti-Turk rhetoric was also far less effective at the time of the Armenian agitation than had been the case twenty years earlier. The involvement of outspoken clerics such as MacColl encouraged the charge that the agitation was inspired by, at best, high-minded but naïve miscalculation and, at worse, ‘mawkish’ sentimentalism and ‘fanatical’ hostility to Islam.<sup>76</sup> The *Daily Telegraph* accused MacColl of being an ‘amateur politician’ preaching ‘a crusade against the Crescent’. This was a charge that would have been no less true twenty years earlier, and not just of MacColl but also of many other participants in the Bulgarian agitation, but it clearly stung far more this time around.<sup>77</sup> Similar charges had been levelled at the Bulgarian agitators by Frederic Harrison, for example, but to far less effect.<sup>78</sup> This reflected a shift in the climate of foreign affairs analysis in Britain, favouring ‘detached’ and ‘professional’ expertise over impassioned rhetoric and ‘public moralism’. In 1876, widespread support for the Bulgarian agitation had been forthcoming at least in part because the issues at stake were debated within a political culture in which public figures, to quote Stefan Collini, ‘accorded priority to the emotions over the intellect as a source of action, and so addressed themselves particularly to the cultivation of the appropriate feelings’.<sup>79</sup> Leading Victorian liberal intellectuals supported the Bulgarian agitation as a kind of emotional reaction against Disraelian ‘imperialism’ and because they felt that it was, morally, the ‘right thing to do’, not because they necessarily claimed expertise on the region or on the foreign policy questions under discussion. By the 1890s, this kind of reaction could no longer be expected.

In 1897, thinking back to events twenty years previously, MacColl assumed once more that ‘the way to unite the Liberals and win the masses is to appeal to their moral sense and sympathies on some great question that transcends all sectional interests’.<sup>80</sup> Yet humanitarian sympathy and moral outrage were no longer enough, especially when the region

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<sup>76</sup> See the criticism by the Balkan expert Herbert Vivian in ‘Armenia’, *National Observer*, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1894, p. 73 and in his article ‘Servia’, *New Review*, Vol. 15, No. 91 (December 1896), p. 656.

<sup>77</sup> MacColl to Gladstone, 29<sup>th</sup> September 1896, cited in Russell, G.W.E. (ed.), *Malcolm MacColl – Memoirs and Correspondence* (London, 1914), p. 171.

<sup>78</sup> Harrison, ‘Cross and Crescent’, pp. 709-730.

<sup>79</sup> Collini, *Public Moralists*, p. 65.

<sup>80</sup> MacColl letter to George Armistead, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1897, cited in Russell, *Malcolm MacColl*, p. 208.

concerned was little known and when the geopolitics of the situation was seen to be so complicated. The fact that, according to Davide Rodogno, ‘the amount and the nature of the pamphlets, books, and newspaper articles on the Armenian question were comparable to those published in 1876 on the subject of the Bulgarian agitation’ does not mean historians should expect the two campaigns to have had equal impact.<sup>81</sup> Although the example of the Pro-Boer movement might be taken to imply otherwise, public discussion of foreign affairs at the turn of the century was becoming increasingly the preserve of the detached and ‘objective’ expert rather than of the public moralist. This had significant implications for subsequent British liberal engagement with the Balkans. As the Balkan Committee was to find in its campaigns over the Macedonian question a decade later, expressions of sympathy for ‘oppressed Christians’ in the Ottoman Empire were increasingly met with the charge of bias. Doubt was cast on the expertise and objectivity of any explicitly Christian approach to dissent over foreign policy. This is a theme that will be addressed in more detail in the following chapters.

There is, however, one more point of comparison between the Bulgarian and Armenian agitations that merits discussion. This is the question of the British cultural perception or imaginative geography of the two regions. Although this issue has been largely unexplored by historians of the two protest movements, comparing the differing representations of the Balkans and Armenia in British foreign affairs debate helps to reveal the specific nature of the Balkans as a liberal cause. It also does much to explain the failure of the Armenian agitation to match the political impact of the Bulgarian campaign of twenty years earlier.

On one level, there were obvious similarities. The victims of Ottoman atrocities in the Balkans and in Armenia were routinely described as ‘Christians of the East’, and were thus both defined by their religion rather than their nationality.<sup>82</sup> Whereas the Orthodox Christianity of the Bulgarians and the Serbs made them, in some British eyes, susceptible to Russian ‘Pan-Slav’ intrigue and influence, the particular branch of Orthodox Christianity

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<sup>81</sup> Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, p. 205.

<sup>82</sup> For example: ‘Mr Bryce at Aberdeen’, *Times*, 18<sup>th</sup> December 1894, p. 6; ‘Mr Bryce at Aberdeen’, *Times*, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1896, p. 8.

practiced by the Armenians was seen as their ‘own’ religion and, as such, integral to their national identity and culture. Armenia, a land with strong Biblical connections, also had a powerful claim to have been the first nation to adopt Christianity as its religion – a religion the people had clung to, it was approvingly noted, despite centuries of oppression.<sup>83</sup> This did much to override hostility to their ‘primitive’ and otherwise ‘superstitious’ religious rituals, something that was no doubt also encouraged by the work of the numerous Protestant missions that were active in the region at this time.<sup>84</sup> Armenians thus arguably made far better ‘Honorary Protestants’ than the Balkan Christians. Indeed, to Anglicans, the independence of the Armenian Church from both Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic interference suggested a degree of affinity with the Church of England.<sup>85</sup>

Yet, as Jo Laycock has made clear, the image of the Armenians in Britain was in fact characterised by extreme ambiguity and fluidity. Positive and negative patterns of perception intersected to an even more bewildering degree than was the case with British representations of the Balkans. If, on the one hand, the region was a cradle of western civilisation, on the other, it was geographically located in ‘the East’, with all the orientalist connotations this implied.<sup>86</sup> Nor did the possession of an ancient civilisation necessarily inspire positive views of the contemporary Armenian nation. Late-Victorian Armenophiles were rather cautious about the prospects for a return to a ‘Golden Age’ in the region. The civilisation that the ancient Armenian race had nurtured had long since moved from East to West, it was assumed, and could not now simply be ‘restored’ to a ‘backward’ and ‘degenerate’ region, at least not without the agency of a benevolent European imperialism. British portrayals of the Armenian past and present were thus fitted into wider preconceptions about the growth of civilisation and its movements through space and time. This process ‘served to affirm the British position at the “top” of hierarchies of development’.<sup>87</sup> That representations of a foreign land served to reinforce Britain’s own claims to superiority and advancement is perhaps not surprising. Yet

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<sup>83</sup> See Laycock, *Imagining Armenia*, p. 14.

<sup>84</sup> Fitzpatrick, “‘Ideal and Ornamental Endeavours’”, p. 187.

<sup>85</sup> Noel-Buxton, N., and Buxton, Rev. H., *Travel and Politics in Armenia* (London, 1914), pp. 81-82.

<sup>86</sup> Laycock, *Imagining Armenia*, p. 11, p. 26, p. 29.

<sup>87</sup> Laycock, *Imagining Armenia*, pp. 35-36.

it raises the question of how the image of Armenia compared to that of the Balkans in British eyes.

Firstly, to British travellers in Armenia, the dark-skinned peasantry, housed in ‘primitive’ and ramshackle ‘underground’ dwellings, simply *looked* more ‘oriental’, more of an ‘Other’, than their Balkan counterparts.<sup>88</sup> Davide Rodogno has suggested that ‘the vast majority’ of pro-Armenian activists in Britain and France saw the Armenians as a ‘European’ population.<sup>89</sup> Yet many commentators were less convinced. When an otherwise sympathetic writer argued that he knew of ‘no Asiatic race which adapts itself so readily to European civilisation, or so generally adopts what is good and rejects what is evil in that civilisation’, the Armenians were still clearly conceived as being an ‘Asiatic race’ – as essentially external to the culture and civilisation of the West.<sup>90</sup> At least to their liberal supporters, this was not the case for the Balkan peoples (or the Balkan Christians at least), despite concerns about the effects of Ottoman rule. To someone like E.A. Freeman, the Balkan lands were very much part of European history. As a consequence, their inhabitants were accorded the capacity for self-government and progress once freed from the direct rule of the Porte. In contrast, self-government was felt to be much more difficult to demand for the Armenians. The *Times* was not alone in assuming that the solution to the Armenian problem lay in the Great Powers pressing for the appointment of a ‘capable Governor’ to give ‘the sort of administration to which Orientals are accustomed, instead of the unsuitable machinery of Western institutions’.<sup>91</sup>

Compared to that of Armenia, it was far easier to place the history of the Balkan lands of ‘Turkey-in-Europe’ onto a broadly liberal-nationalist trajectory, making the gradual extension of self-government seem appropriate. This was not necessarily due to any intrinsic British belief in the universal applicability of national self-determination across Europe. As discussed, British liberals tended not to view such questions in those terms. Yet there were

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<sup>88</sup> Laycock, *Imagining Armenia*, pp. 65-68.

<sup>89</sup> Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, p. 185.

<sup>90</sup> ‘Armenia and Bulgaria’, *Speaker*, 9<sup>th</sup> February 1895, p. 159

<sup>91</sup> *Times*, 20<sup>th</sup> February 1896, p. 9.



certainly far more precedents for British intervention in the cause of subject nationalities in Europe (from Greeks and Italians to Hungarians and Poles) than of subject nationalities in the Caucasus and Near East. It may have been the ‘East End of Europe’, but the Balkans had an acknowledged place within European diplomacy to an extent that was never possible for Armenia, the latter being located far too close to potential imperial flashpoints to be viewed as a strictly ‘European’ issue. As Matthew Fitzpatrick notes, prior to the emergence of the Armenian question, ‘Europe’s humanitarianism and imperial considerations pertaining to the Ottoman Empire seemed to be restricted to a geographical zone that was conceived of as *de facto* European’.<sup>92</sup> Yet this was a matter of imaginative as much as political geography: Armenia was an indeterminate region, mediating between East and West. It shared certain western values and characteristics, not least Christianity, yet it was separated culturally from the rest of the continent by the circumstances of its history.

Another factor seen to distinguish the Armenian region from the Balkans was its lack of ethnic homogeneity. As noted, this distinction perhaps says most about the superficiality of British understanding of the Balkans. Nevertheless, the ‘untangling’ of the Balkans from Ottoman rule was assumed to be a relatively straightforward process. It is difficult to support the claim by one historian that ‘most people were probably disposed to regard the Armenians as a more or less compact ethnic, linguistic and cultural group, occupying a fairly defined area, within which they generally predominated over all other peoples’.<sup>93</sup> This assumption is in fact contradicted by the remarks of several commentators from the time, who acknowledged that the Ottoman territory inhabited by Armenians contained equally large numbers of Turks, Kurds and other ‘Mahomedan’ populations. Herbert Vivian, who wrote favourable accounts of Serbia in this period, argued that there was ‘no such country as Armenia’, suggesting that it was not even a geographical expression but ‘a geographical palimpsest’.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Fitzpatrick, “‘Ideal and Ornamental Endeavours’”, p. 185.

<sup>93</sup> Douglas, ‘Britain and the Armenian Question’, p. 115.

<sup>94</sup> Vivian, ‘Armenia’, *National Observer*, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1894, p. 73; Vivian, *Serbia: the Poor Man’s Paradise* (London, 1897).

This served to enhance the ‘oriental’ otherness of the Armenians. As a diasporic people, comparisons were just as readily drawn between Armenians and Jews as between Armenians and their fellow Ottoman Christians in the Balkans, as both Cathie Carmichael and Jo Laycock have commented. The Armenians were liable to be portrayed, like the Jews, as that ‘epitome of incongruity: a non-national nation’.<sup>95</sup> Thus, Vivian asserted that ‘the word Armenian no more connotes a nation than does the word Jew, and it would be a good deal less absurd to demand Judea for the Jews than it is to claim Armenia for the Armenians’.<sup>96</sup> With travellers referring to the ‘distinctive facial peculiarities’ of the Armenian people, analogies to popular anti-Semitic caricature are not hard to find.<sup>97</sup> The Armenians’ role (and success) within the Ottoman Empire as merchants, tradesmen and bankers meant that they were also subject to similar kinds of racial prejudice and negative stereotyping, with one extreme account describing them as ‘rich, tyrannical, ignorant and grasping tradesmen who have money in narrow, sordid business in towns’. The more circumspect Rosebery complained to Gladstone: ‘I do not see why we should bear the whole burden of this astute if pious race.’<sup>98</sup> Even committed supporters of their cause, more likely to stress their piety than their ‘astuteness’, acknowledged that the Armenians were ‘a frugal, money-making race’, that they ‘resembled the Jews in their aptitude for commerce’, and that they were ‘the bankers, usurers, the moneyed men of the East’.<sup>99</sup>

The existence of such prejudice explains why Bryce and other Armenophiles felt the repeated need to argue that, contrary to popular belief, the Armenians were a largely peasant population rather than a commercial, town-dwelling class.<sup>100</sup> In fact, there were more Armenians living in Constantinople at this time than there were living in ‘Armenia’ itself. It

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<sup>95</sup> Bauman, Z., ‘Allosemitism: Premodern, Modern, Postmodern’, in Cheyette, B. and Marcus, L. (eds.), *Modernity, Culture and the Jew* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 153, cited in Laycock, *Imagining Armenia*, p. 221.

<sup>96</sup> Vivian, ‘Armenia’, *National Observer*, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1894, p. 73.

<sup>97</sup> Laycock, *Imagining Armenia*, pp. 29-30; MacDonald, A., *Land of Ararat or up the Roof of the World* (London, 1893), p. 5, cited in Laycock, *Imagining Armenia*, p. 53; Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, p. 188.

<sup>98</sup> Ramsay, W., *Impressions of Turkey during Twelve Years Wanderings* (London, 1897), p. 190, cited in Laycock, *Imagining Armenia*, p. 54; Rosebery to Gladstone, 10<sup>th</sup> August 1893, cited in Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists* and in Seaman, *Citizen of the World*, p. 172.

<sup>99</sup> ‘Armenia and Bulgaria’, *Speaker*, 9<sup>th</sup> February 1895, p. 159; Stead, *Haunting Horrors of Armenia*, p. 12.

<sup>100</sup> See Seaman, *Citizen of the World*, p. 80.

has also been estimated that only 23% of the population of ‘Armenia’ was composed of Armenians, whilst 37% of the Armenian population in Ottoman Anatolia as a whole lived outside of this nominal ‘Armenian’ region.<sup>101</sup> The Armenian merchants, shopkeepers, bankers and civil servants of the capital outnumbered the Armenian shepherds and peasants of Eastern Anatolia. The Balkan Christians, on the other hand, most emphatically *were* a largely peasant population. As discussed, this encouraged their positive representation by British liberals as ‘honest sons of the soil’, living in simple, rooted village communities that were ideally suited to self-government and local democracy. By contrast, as will be explored in the next chapter, the kind of prejudice directed against the Ottoman Armenians was also directed against the ‘Levantine’ Greeks and Jews of the towns and ports of Ottoman Macedonia.

The effectiveness of the Bulgarian agitation rested to a significant extent on its capacity to exploit the positive appeal of the Balkan Christian peasantry. The Armenian agitation, meanwhile, was impeded by the need to overcome negative preconceptions about the Armenian character and their role within Ottoman society, as well as by reservations about the Armenian region’s geographical distance from Europe. There was a far more entrenched sense in British liberal culture of Armenian ‘otherness’ and difference than was the case for the Balkans. The positive aspects of the British imaginative geography of Armenia – the region’s biblical links, its historic civilisation, its strong Christian identity – were never powerful enough to counteract this. The Armenian cause could not be made into the kind of liberal-humanitarian morality tale spun by the Bulgarian agitation, especially given the geostrategic complications and the domestic weakness and disunity of the Liberal party. Although it remained a ‘live issue’ for certain campaigners (notably Bryce) throughout the Edwardian period, the Armenian question was to some extent pushed to one side after 1897, before re-emerging during the First World War.

That said, the fate of the Armenians received far greater attention than that of the Muslim (as opposed to Christian) populations of the Balkans, who were regularly victims of atrocities and political violence at this time. Those who campaigned on behalf of the two

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<sup>101</sup> Douglas, ‘Britain and the Armenian Question’, p. 115; Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, p. 187.

Ottoman Christian groups consistently overlooked the sufferings of Balkan Muslims.<sup>102</sup> A Christian bias, continued hostility to the ‘Unspeakable Turk’, and the casual equation of ‘Turk’ and ‘Muslim’, effectively dented British liberal sensitivity to the plight of Balkan Muslim communities, as the following chapter will discuss further with reference to the Macedonian question. A Christian political culture did not preclude the expression of sympathy with the sufferings of non-Christians in this period. British liberals felt able to denounce the Jewish pogroms in Russia in 1881-2, for instance. Yet even in this case liberal moral protest was rather more tempered than it had been over Bulgaria.<sup>103</sup> Not only was the Liberal government disinclined to sour British diplomatic relations with Russia, outspoken criticism of the Tsarist regime would have also sat uncomfortably with the memory of the Bulgarian agitation. As Tory critics asked, had Gladstone and his supporters not leapt to the defence of Russia in 1876? Did the atrocities committed against Russian Jews not now vindicate Disraeli’s determination avoid weakening the Ottoman Empire at Russian expense? Liberal supporters claimed that Britain had no mandate to intervene in the affairs of the Russian Empire (whereas the 1856 Treaty of Paris had made the treatment of Ottoman Christians an international responsibility), and that there was thus no strict parallel with events in Bulgaria or with the ongoing situation in Armenia. Nevertheless, there were clear liberal-humanitarian ‘hierarchies of sympathy’ as far as the victims of atrocities in the Balkans and Eastern Europe were concerned, and this had a direct impact on the politics of dissent over foreign policy.

## Conclusion

This chapter has covered a period stretching from the end of the Eastern Crisis to the turn of the twentieth century. Its focus has been less on events in the Balkans itself as on the place of the region in the British political conscience. It has considered the impact of this on three different moments of political unrest and crisis. The death of Gladstone – whose last public

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<sup>102</sup> See Carmichael, C., *Genocide Before the Holocaust* (New Haven, 2009), p. 8, p. 76.

<sup>103</sup> Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews*, pp. 132-35.

speech was appropriately enough on the Armenian question – perhaps marked the end of an era in British liberal engagement with the Ottoman Empire. Yet, on the other hand, the continued presence in our narrative of James Bryce, whose political teeth had been cut in the campaigns of 1876 and 1877 but who was now something of an elder statesman as far as the Eastern Question was concerned, indicates an element of continuity as the new century approached. Moreover, the agitation that both Bryce and Gladstone had joined in 1876, and the issues and questions about the Balkans that it had brought into wider public debate, continued to resonate in British liberal political culture and identity. As this chapter has argued, there was not necessarily any correlation between sympathy for the Balkan Christians and involvement in social reform projects and charity work at home, nor were there direct analogies between the Balkans and Ireland, but the Balkans provided a frequent and significant reference point for those who confronted the questions of both ‘Outcast London’ and Irish Home Rule. There were of course more direct parallels between the Balkans and Armenia. However, the two regions were imagined in different ways and the two agitation movements achieved differing levels of impact.

By exploring and analysing these different points of reference, this chapter has sought to further illuminate the particular place of the Balkans in British liberal thought and politics. The Bulgarian agitation, it has been noted, pre-staged the later ‘Victorian sensations’ of the ‘new journalism’ in the 1880s, particularly the social scandals exposed by W.T. Stead. As a great morality tale and sensational crusade against a perceived blot on the conscience of the nation, the agitation helped to define the Balkans as a liberal cause, whilst also generating important positive patterns of perception as far as British images of the region were concerned. Such images, particularly relating to the Balkan peoples’ capacity for self-government and liberal progress, were reinforced by the Irish Home Rule campaign. Yet this remained a question of ‘civilisation’ rather than nationalism. The comparison with Armenia discussed in the final section of the chapter also indicates that British liberal representations of the Balkans were relatively positive compared to other areas of the Ottoman world and,

moreover, suggests that this was an important factor in favouring sustained political and humanitarian activism around Balkan questions.

At the same time, the different ‘Balkan legacies’ explored in this chapter offer insights into changes in British political culture over the course of the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The nature of British political debate around international questions was certainly changing. As E.F. Biagini observes and as this thesis will highlight in the chapters that follow, in the early twentieth century there was ‘no shortage of post-Gladstonian idealists or humanitarian crusaders’.<sup>104</sup> However, such activists would operate in a different political context to that of the Bulgarian agitation. This is already apparent in some of the points discussed above. As the experience of the Armenian agitation highlights, the prospect of another popular ‘Cross versus Crescent’ crusade on the scale of the Bulgarian agitation was fading. The growing cult of the expert, with its prioritisation of detached and ‘scientific’ study, and its scepticism towards overtly ‘Christian’ or ‘sentimental’ approaches to foreign policy questions, had altered the framework around which high-minded opposition to British policy in the Balkans and Ottoman Empire would be constructed. Balkan questions were rather less ‘black and white’ than they had perhaps seemed to Gladstone’s generation. For all the continued preference for the ‘civilisational perspective’ as far as the future of the region was concerned, the complexities of Balkan national questions, and their implications for liberal conceptions of Britain’s own multinational empire – in Ireland and elsewhere – were increasingly unavoidable. This was in turn tied to a more general uncertainty within British liberalism concerning the relationship between empire and subject nationalities, and between the ‘national’ culture of home and the ‘cosmopolitanism’ of imperialism. As the following chapter will show, these were issues that would help to shape the ways in which ‘post-Gladstonian idealists’ and ‘humanitarian crusaders’ approached Balkan questions in the first decade of the new century, when a new wave of British liberal engagement with the region emerged.

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<sup>104</sup> Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism*, p. 374.

## **‘Europe Unredeemed’: the Macedonian question**

When British liberalism turned its attention to the Balkans in the first decade of the twentieth century, discussion invariably led to the Macedonian question – a thorny subject that became emblematic of Balkan tension and obfuscation, but which inspired renewed displays of high-minded liberal political and humanitarian activism. This chapter discusses the reasons for, and impact of, this new engagement with the Balkans. The specificities of the Balkans as a liberal cause are underlined, developing the critique of balkanism introduced in the previous chapters. However, the degree to which the Macedonian question intersected with other liberal agendas and dilemmas is also made clear, as are the implications of this for our understanding of early-twentieth century liberal political culture and foreign affairs debate. It is argued that activism in respect of Macedonia was part of what was, to quote the historian Kevin Grant, ‘a multifaceted, radical campaign for reform in the Edwardian era’.<sup>1</sup> This encompassed domestic social and political concerns, European affairs and imperial questions. The debate around Macedonia, it is suggested, exemplifies the intersection between these different aspects of the radical conscience in Edwardian political culture.

‘Macedonia’ was a geographically imprecise term. It was broadly understood to mean the three *vilayets* of Salonika (Selânik), Monastir (Manastir) and Kosovo (Kosova). This included much of the territory that had been returned to Ottoman rule by the Treaty of Berlin in July 1878, having been initially included in the short-lived ‘Big Bulgaria’ created by the Treaty of St. Stefano four months earlier – although the region was also sometimes held to include parts of Thrace and Albania.<sup>2</sup> It was underlined by watchful critics of the Sultan in Britain that the Great Powers’ acceptance of his rule in these regions was conditional on administrative reform to protect the lives and livelihoods of the local Christian population. By 1903 it seemed increasingly clear that this had not been achieved. However, the Tory Foreign

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<sup>1</sup> Grant, K., ‘British Suffragettes and the Russian Method of the Hunger Strike’, *Contemporary Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (2011), p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> For a map, see above – Figure 1, p. 7.

Secretary, Lord Lansdowne, accepted, with some reservations, that the primary responsibility for addressing this lay with the two states with the biggest strategic interest in the region – Austria-Hungary and Russia. A limited scheme of reforms was agreed at Vienna in February 1903, leading to the appointment of Hilmi Pasha as Inspector General, but otherwise changing little. There was a major revolt amongst the Christian population in August, under the leadership of local Bulgarian nationalist movement IMRO. Its subsequent brutal suppression by the Ottoman government became, according to one analysis, ‘an international media event’ and evoked memories of the *Bulgarian Horrors*.<sup>3</sup>

It was in response to the simmering unrest in Macedonia that a group of largely liberal public figures had formed the Balkan Committee earlier in 1903, under the presidency of James Bryce and the chairmanship of Noel Buxton. Its aim was ‘to maintain a permanent organisation, to obtain accurate news, and voice the public condemnation till the chronic scandal has been removed’.<sup>4</sup> An Austro-Russian convention agreed in the Styrian town of Mürzsteg in October 1903 led to the appointment of Austrian and Russian civil agents and a team of European officers to oversee the local administration. However, the Balkan Committee condemned the half-hearted application of the reform programme, and pressed repeatedly for the British Government to adopt a stronger stance on this issue – ‘if concert is to continue ... let GB be conductor’, as Arthur Ponsonby noted at the time.<sup>5</sup> Yet this campaign for British intervention to prevent Ottoman misrule was complicated by regular reports of atrocities committed not by the Turkish authorities but by rival bands of Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian bandits and nationalist guerrillas. The region acquired a reputation for violence, anarchy, instability and hopelessness. Lansdowne’s Liberal successor as Foreign

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<sup>3</sup> Kardijov, P., “‘Cinematograms’ of a Conflict: Charles Rider Noble in Bulgaria, 1903-1904’ (trans. David Mossop), *Film History*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (2012), p. 303. Kardijov claims to have found reference to 34 foreign correspondents who came to cover events in Macedonia, ‘most of whom worked for British publications’ (p. 317: Endnote 6).

<sup>4</sup> The Balkan Committee, *Report of the Executive Committee with List of Subscribers and Accounts for 1903 and 1904* (London, 1904), p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Notes for a Parliamentary speech on the Macedonian question, July 1908: Arthur Ponsonby Papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford (MS. Eng. hist. c. 657/137).



Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, recalled that the reform scheme was ‘like a bog; the Powers who plunged into it soon sank up to their knees and stuck there, bickering at each other’.<sup>6</sup>

There were other events and issues relating to the Balkans during this period in which British opinion took an interest. The assassination of the Serbian King and Queen in June 1903 (or at least the particularly violent manner in which the coup was conducted) generated a frisson of revulsion in the British press and led to the suspension of diplomatic relations between Britain and Serbia for several years.<sup>7</sup> But it was Macedonia that most fully sustained the engagement of British liberals from the turn of the century until the First World War, during which period the ‘Macedonian question’ and the ‘Balkan question’ were used almost synonymously.<sup>8</sup> Henry Nevinson recalled that in the aftermath of the August 1903 revolt Macedonia was ‘the chief point of interest in European affairs’.<sup>9</sup> In H.N. Brailsford’s case, it became, according to his biographer, ‘the touchstone of his interpretation of foreign affairs, the source of his commitment to national liberation’.<sup>10</sup> Macedonia provided the subject for Arthur Ponsonby’s maiden speech in the House of Commons; it provided Eglantyne Jebb, co-founder of the Save the Children Fund, with her first experience of overseas relief work; it featured heavily in the young careers, inside and outside of Parliament, of the Liberal MPs Charles and Noel Buxton – co-founders of the Balkan Committee. The Buxtons were instrumental in integrating this pressure group into British liberal networks to such an extent that, in the words of one historian, it was ‘a symbol of the party’s last hurrah’.<sup>11</sup> Why did the contested future of a small region of the Ottoman Empire have such an impact? How did this affect British politics in the Edwardian period?

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<sup>6</sup> Viscount Grey of Fallodon, *Twenty-Five Years, 1892-1916. Volume I* (New York, 1925), p. 167.

<sup>7</sup> See Markovich, S., *British Perceptions of Serbia and the Balkans, 1903-1906* (Paris, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> For example: Westlake, J., ‘The Balkan Question and International Law’, *Nineteenth Century and After*, Vol. 60, No. 358 (December 1906), p. 889; Buxton, N. and Leonard Lesse, C., *Balkan Problems and European Peace* (London, 1919), p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> Nevinson, H., *More Changes, More Chances* (London, 1925), p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Leventhal, F.M., ‘H.N. Brailsford and the Search for a New International Order’ in Morris, *Edwardian Radicalism*, p. 203.

<sup>11</sup> McCormick, R., ‘Noel Buxton, the Balkan Committee and Reform in Macedonia, 1903-1914’, in Pappas, N. (ed.), *Antiquity and Modernity: A Celebration of European History and Heritage in the Olympic Year 2004* (Athens, 2004), p. 151.

The chapter begins by exploring the place of the Macedonian question in the political activism of those who supported the Balkan Committee, highlighting its intersection with other aspects of reformist political culture. It then considers the issues that were felt to be at stake in Macedonia in more detail, in order to uncover the region's specific appeal within this wider radical-liberal worldview. This is followed by an analysis of British liberalism's uneasy response to Macedonia's nationalist tensions. The continued preference for a 'civilisational' – rather than nationalist – approach to questions of empire and self-government in the Balkans is examined, with reference to political changes in the Ottoman Empire after 1908, as well as to events in Persia and to Britain's own national question in Ireland. The argument then turns to the domestic context, showing the impact of debate around Macedonia on British social politics and the wider relevance of the Balkans to 'new liberal' conceptions of Englishness. This leads to discussion of the nature of 'otherness' and identity in Edwardian Britain. The final sections of the chapter focus on how these different aspects of the British liberal relationship with the Macedonian question informed the activities and approach of the Balkan Committee. The Committee's campaign over Macedonia is set in comparative perspective with contemporaneous humanitarian and political protest movements, particularly the Congo Reform Association, in order to consider the changing dynamics of dissent over foreign policy in the years leading up to the First World War.

### **The Balkan Committee**

Noel and Charles Buxton were representatives of the radical 'new liberalism', a brand of politics that fused criticism of the 'hopeless disorganisation of the Liberal party and their real need for some social policy' with opposition to jingoistic imperialism.<sup>12</sup> The Pro-Boers provided an existing network from which the Balkan Committee drew heavily. The Stop the War Committee had, indeed, recently denounced the war in South Africa as 'a campaign of extermination, carried out by a policy of systematic devastation, the like of which for atrocity

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<sup>12</sup> Charles Masterman to Noel Buxton ('Beloved Cadet'), 16<sup>th</sup> March 1901, cited in Masterman, L., *C.F.G. Masterman – A Biography* (London, 1968), p. 41.

can only be paralleled by the operations of the Turks in Armenia and Bulgaria'.<sup>13</sup> It was thus with some satisfaction and reassurance that Henry Nevinston noted in his diary the presence of J.L. Hammond and large numbers of other Pro-Boers at the conference on Macedonia organised by the Balkan Committee at St. James's Hall in September 1903.<sup>14</sup> Unlike its near-contemporary pressure group the Congo Reform Association (of which more below), the Balkan Committee could make no real claim to cross-party support. Of the 64 MPs listed as supporters in its annual report for 1906, 55 were Liberals and just 3 were Tories (admittedly, of course, in a Liberal-dominated Parliament).<sup>15</sup> A further 6 MP supporters came from the Labour party, including Ramsay MacDonald, with whom, Noel Buxton recalled, 'we were all sympathetic'.<sup>16</sup>

The Balkan Committee was by no means 'anti-Establishment', counting the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishops of Hereford, Lincoln, Oxford and Worcester, and several Peers amongst its members and supporters. Support from labour leaders was welcomed, but whereas the short pamphlet issued by the Committee in 1903 devoted four pages to expressions of support from various church leaders and religious organisations, a similar resolution passed by the Trades Union Congress received only a short paragraph.<sup>17</sup> This was indicative of the Committee's background and social composition. For all Noel Buxton's commitment as a young man to 'slumming' and spending time amongst the poor of Whitechapel, as H.N. Fieldhouse has observed, his correspondence still evokes 'a world redolent of Cambridge Combination Rooms and bishop's palaces, of rectories and deaneries

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<sup>13</sup> Address of the *Stop The War Committee*, 21<sup>st</sup> January 1901, cited in Koss, S., *The Pro-Boers. The Anatomy of an Antiwar Movement* (Chicago, 1973), p. 73.

<sup>14</sup> Henry Nevinston diary, 29<sup>th</sup> September 1903: Henry Nevinston Papers, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford (Ms. Eng misc. e.612/1).

<sup>15</sup> The Balkan Committee, *Third Annual Report of the Executive Committee* (London, 1907), pp. 5-7; Dackombe, B., 'Single-issue extra-Parliamentary Groups and Liberal Internationalism, 1899-1920' (PhD thesis, Open University, 2008). On the support for the Congo Reform Association, see Porter, *Critics of Empire: British Radical Attitudes to Colonialism in Africa 1895-1914* (London, 1968), pp. 268-70, p. 304 (note), and Grant, K., 'Christian Critics of Empire: Missionaries, Lantern Lectures, and the Congo Reform Campaign in Britain', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 28, No. 2, p. 40.

<sup>16</sup> Noel Buxton Papers: draft for an *Autobiography* (MS 951 c.7/12). See also Fieldhouse, H.N., 'Noel Buxton and A.J.P. Taylor's "The Trouble Makers"', in Gilbert, M. (ed.), *A Century of Conflict, 1850-1950. Essays for A.J.P. Taylor* (London, 1966), p. 177.

<sup>17</sup> The Balkan Committee, *Macedonia 1903* (London: 1903), pp. 21-25.

in the Home Counties and of manor houses in the Cotswolds; a world for which England north of the Trent exists only to provide safe Liberal seats'.<sup>18</sup>

In this worldview, social inequity was to be overcome through gradual reform and greater social interaction rather than class conflict or radical social restructuring. Such attitudes were reflective of the 'social democratic' approach that Peter Clarke suggests was shared by both the 'new liberals' and the Fabians. Democracy and social reform were embraced as being in the best interests of society, and as morally desirable forms of progress. Yet for this progress to be secured, it was assumed, democratisation would need to be guided 'from above' through disinterested leadership by a progressive elite.<sup>19</sup> This was a worldview that could contend, as Charles Buxton did in a letter to his brother at the turn of the century, that 'the balance of happiness is much the same in every class' and 'that the kind of work we do is infinitely more wearing than work which is chiefly manual'.<sup>20</sup> For Noel Buxton, the class system itself was not the real problem; it was rather lack of contact *between* classes, and the fact that in his view many (middle-class) reformers were guilty of 'catching the class bias, and of forming ties which will impede their free criticism of their class'.<sup>21</sup> The mixture of 'utilitarian radicalism' and 'progressive elitism' (Clarke's terms) with which the Buxtons approached the democratisation of society and the opening up of opportunity to working-class communities at home was mirrored in their approach to the 'liberation' of the Balkans. As discussed below, the Balkan peoples were felt to be inherently progressive, yet it was assumed that their progress once freed from the shackles of Ottoman rule would need to be carefully nurtured by the 'progressive' western powers. Local self-government would open up opportunity to previously oppressed Balkan peasant communities, but international executive control would remain necessary in order to secure stability in the region and overcome nationalist antagonisms.

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<sup>18</sup> Fieldhouse, 'Noel Buxton...', p. 187.

<sup>19</sup> Clarke, P., 'The Social Democratic Theory of the Class Struggle', in Winter, J., (ed.), *The Working Class in Modern British History. Essays in Honour of Henry Pelling* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 3-18.

<sup>20</sup> C.R. Buxton to Noel Buxton, 9<sup>th</sup> September 1900: Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951 c. 9/6).

<sup>21</sup> Draft of a letter from Noel Buxton to his wife, dated 20<sup>th</sup> December 1914 but never sent: Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951, c. 8/8). Emphasis in the original.

Just as it had for the leaders of the Bulgarian agitation in 1876, religious conviction lay at the heart of the politics of conscience practiced by the Buxtons and others (notably G.P. Gooch and Charles Masterman) in the campaign over Macedonia. Charles Buxton described ‘the liberal mind’ in one letter to Noel in 1900 as one trusting in ‘an invisible power, which guides human affairs onward and upward’ at the same time as urging men to ‘do their utmost, with brain, tongue and hand, to help themselves’ (the latter characteristic was, he felt, in contrast to the essential ‘fatalism’ of conservatives).<sup>22</sup> It was his belief in ‘the oneness of humanity in God’ that linked Buxton’s support for social reform with his support for the rights of small nationalities – the ‘disinherited poor’ and the ‘disinherited nations’, as he put it, held an equal hold on his moral conscience.<sup>23</sup> For Noel Buxton, deep religious conviction lay as much behind his humanitarian engagement with Macedonia from 1903 as it did behind the philanthropic impulse that had drawn him to settlement work in London in the late 1890s. This was made clear in ‘An Epistle to the Bulgarians’, a private note written with his brother whilst convalescing after narrowly surviving an assassination attempt on both of their lives by a Turkish nationalist during a trip to the Balkans in 1914. Buxton reiterated that all social and secular reforms needed to be underpinned by religious faith, a conviction he based on the belief that ‘Christ above all taught the love of every member of society and occupied Himself with doing material good’.<sup>24</sup>

Christian faith was less prominent within the worldviews of some of the other members of the Balkan Committee. Henry Nevinson was, a recent biographer asserts, ‘a little uncomfortable with the evangelical tone of his colleagues’ on the Committee’s Macedonian Relief Fund, despite growing up in a Nonconformist family environment.<sup>25</sup> Initially at least there was room within the Committee’s brand of political activism for both self-consciously Christian moral outrage and more secular critiques of British foreign policy, just as there was for socially conservative pillars of the Edwardian political establishment and more radical

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<sup>22</sup> C.R. Buxton to Noel Buxton, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1900: Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951, c. 9/6).

<sup>23</sup> Cited in De Bunsen, *Charles Roden Buxton*, p. 98.

<sup>24</sup> Noel Buxton to Charles Buxton cited in Anderson, *Noel Buxton*, p. 68.

<sup>25</sup> John, A., *War, Journalism and the Shaping of the Twentieth Century: the life and times of Henry W. Nevinson* (London, 2006), p. 3, p. 127.

activists such as Henry Brailsford. Over time though, tensions between these different approaches would become more difficult to reconcile. As the final section of this chapter will explore, this had a negative impact on the Committee's effectiveness as a form of dissent over foreign policy.

The Balkan Committee did not operate in isolation. It was part of an inter-connected world of political activism relating to international political and humanitarian issues. The links to the Pro-Boers and the South African war have already been noted. There was also extensive overlap between the membership of the Balkan Committee and that of the Persia Committee, formed to protest against the 1907 Anglo-Russian Agreement over Persia. Noel Buxton, Henry Brailsford, G.P. Gooch, Henry Nevinson and Arthur Ponsonby, among others, joined both committees.<sup>26</sup> Activists interested in either of the Macedonian or Persian questions clearly saw the two issues as related. E.G. Browne, founder of the Persia Committee, corresponded with the MP H.F.B. Lynch on both subjects and accepted an invitation by Noel Buxton to join the Balkan Committee in February 1909.<sup>27</sup> Even more explicit connections were drawn between the Macedonian question and the Congo reform movement (a long-running campaign against the use of forced labour in King Leopold of the Belgians' Congo Free State). In the House of Commons Gooch described Macedonia as 'the Congo of Europe', and it was common for the 'outrages' in both territories to be denounced together in the same public meetings and parliamentary speeches.<sup>28</sup> The missionary John Harris, future secretary of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society and one of the leading figures in the Congo reform campaign, was a member of the Balkan Committee's Executive Committee.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Members of the Persia Committee taken from Bonakdarian, M., 'The Persia Committee and the Constitutional Revolution in Iran', *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (1991), p. 197, p. 199.

<sup>27</sup> Lynch to Browne, 5<sup>th</sup> May 1908: E.G. Browne Papers, Cambridge University Library, Box 11 (11/8/83); Buxton to Browne, 10<sup>th</sup> February 1909, Browne Papers, Box 10 (10/2/124).

<sup>28</sup> G.P. Gooch, House of Commons debate on 'Macedonia', 25<sup>th</sup> February 1908: *Hansard*, Vol. 184, cc 1663-708 – accessed at:

<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1908/feb/25/macedonia> (last accessed 7<sup>th</sup> April 2014); Resolution passed by the Waterloo Liberal Association, 12<sup>th</sup> December 1907 and forwarded to Sir Edward Grey: The National Archives (FO 371/341, 40853).

<sup>29</sup> Dackombe, 'Extra Parliamentary Groups and Liberal Internationalism', p. 230 (Appendix 1).

The close intersection between the Macedonian, Persian and Congo questions suggests that there was no clear distinction between imperial and non-imperial regions in Edwardian foreign affairs debate. Reflecting the reverence within Edwardian political culture for the triumphant abolitionist campaigns of the early-nineteenth century, and amidst the controversy over ‘Chinese Slavery’ in South Africa, Macedonian peasants were often depicted as an enslaved population (echoing the language of Gladstone during the Bulgarian agitation); those who campaigned on their behalf saw themselves as ‘liberationists’.<sup>30</sup> For Nevinson, who led a long-running campaign at this time to expose the slave trade in Portuguese Angola, those who questioned the right of Britain to interfere in the treatment of the ‘subject races’ of other states were simply repeating ‘the same cry as was raised when the right of slave-owners to “wallop their niggers” was first questioned’.<sup>31</sup> Having abolished slavery in her own colonies, it was argued elsewhere, Britain ‘ought not now to shrink from remedying a state of things, in regard to Macedonia, for which she more than any other was responsible’.<sup>32</sup> Whether approached through an explicitly religious worldview, or through a more ‘agnostic morality’, the Macedonian question was presented as a matter of ‘right and wrong’.<sup>33</sup> It was a moral crusade comparable both to the Bulgarian agitation of thirty years earlier and the contemporaneous campaigns against imperial misrule and forced labour in Africa.

Despite suggestions to the contrary at the time, this was not just ‘telescopic philanthropy’. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, a recurrent critique of those engaged with Balkan questions was, to quote Cecil Melville, that their involvement was inspired by ‘our quite genuine, if unduly sentimental, desire to help the underdog, without first enquiring if he were a nice dog’, as well as ‘the capacity of some of us to salve our consciences for neglecting the unpicturesque poor of the East End of London by taking an interest in the

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<sup>30</sup> See for example: ‘Report of a Speech by Noel Buxton’, *Yorkshire Herald*, 19<sup>th</sup> February 1907: Press-cutting in The National Archives (FO 371/341, 5862); Buxton, N. ‘Freedom and Servitude in the Balkans’, *Westminster Review*, Vol. 159, No. 5 (May 1903), p. 489; Noel Buxton letter to A.G. Gardiner, 8<sup>th</sup> October 1907: A.G. Gardiner Papers, LSE Library, London (Gardiner 1/5).

<sup>31</sup> Nevinson, H., ‘The Rights of Subject Races’, *Nation*, 20<sup>th</sup> April 1907, p. 293;

<sup>32</sup> Report of speech by Prof. J. Westlake, *Manchester Guardian*, 19<sup>th</sup> January 1907, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> Chadwick, O., *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 237.

picturesque poor of the East End of Europe'.<sup>34</sup> Henry Hyndman took this stance when he declined an invitation to join the Balkan Committee, informing Buxton: 'I do not observe ... that any member of your Committee has at any time of his life, devoted any considerable amount of his time to helping the 12,500,000 British people whom Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman, Leader of the Liberal Party in the House of Commons, avers are constantly on the brink of starvation.'<sup>35</sup> Such criticism was unfair given the longstanding involvement of Balkan Committee members such as Buxton himself or Charles Masterman, among others, in social work in South and East London (albeit perhaps not the solutions to poverty favoured by Hyndman, but nevertheless reflective of a genuine commitment to improving the 'Condition of England').<sup>36</sup> Parallels were drawn, by the Bishop of Oxford among others, between the case for British diplomatic intervention in Macedonia and the case for Church-led charitable initiatives to relieve poverty in the slums.<sup>37</sup>

Noel Buxton certainly shared this perspective. Perhaps understandably, as he lay in a Romanian hospital bed recovering from the attempt on his life during that near-fatal trip to the Balkans in 1914, Buxton mused at some length in a letter to his wife on his motivations for, as he termed it, 'meddling in such an out of the way affair as the Balkan cockpit'. He explained that travel in the region served a similar purpose to social work in the East End: 'You see some of the realities of life, and become less of a parasite.' Just as he argued 'we can't do much for the poor unless we know what it is like to be poor ourselves', he justified his activities in the Balkans as 'another way to get nearer to reality – hunger and cold, danger,

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<sup>34</sup> Melville, C., *Balkan Racket* (London, 1941), pp. 98-99, cited in Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, p. 100.

<sup>35</sup> Hyndman to Buxton, A. Moore and R. Yerburch, 4<sup>th</sup> March 1905, cited in Fieldhouse, 'Noel Buxton...', p. 181.

<sup>36</sup> Masterman, C.F.G., *The Condition of England* (London, 1960 [1909]); Masterman (ed.), *Heart of the Empire*.

<sup>37</sup> Bishop of Oxford, House of Lords debate on 'Macedonia', 18<sup>th</sup> July 1905, *Hansard*, Vol. 149, cc 1020-39 – accessed at: <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1905/jul/18/macedonia> (last accessed 7<sup>th</sup> April 2014); Earl of Lytton, House of Lords debate on 'The Affairs of South-East Europe', 28<sup>th</sup> March 1905, *Hansard*, Vol. 143, cc 1314-50 – accessed at: <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1905/mar/28/the-affairs-of-south-eastern-europe> (last accessed 7<sup>th</sup> April 2014).



wounds, death, rebellion, sacrifice'.<sup>38</sup> Unlike for those involved in the Bulgarian agitation (as discussed in the previous chapter), there was a thus very clear and direct link in Buxton's mind between the problems of the East End of London and those of the 'East End of Europe'. He believed liberalism ought to be concerned with both. Elsewhere, although he admitted that his 'natural interest' in social reform had taken second place to his desire to remove the 'evil' of Turkish misrule in the Balkans, he argued: 'There might be those who would feel that it was a pity to go in for a foreign thing rather than home reform, but all those who had been concerned with Macedonia were the very people who had been prominent in social reform at the first.'<sup>39</sup> In Buxton's case, other social political 'causes', as listed in a draft of his unpublished *Autobiography*, included temperance, poor law reform, town gardens, agricultural cooperation and housing.<sup>40</sup>

Not all Edwardian liberals made such a direct connection between international and domestic affairs. J. St. Loe Strachey, for example, declined to join the Balkan Committee when invited by Noel Buxton as he preferred to conserve his time and energies for the campaign against tariff reform.<sup>41</sup> However, there is no doubt that the ambitions and interests of Buxton and his supporters went beyond the immediate goal of drawing attention to the plight of the population of Ottoman Macedonia. To dismiss the Balkan Committee, as one critical commentator did in 1909, as 'an odd institution with humanitarian ideals' was to misunderstand its *raison d'être*.<sup>42</sup> As Barry Dackombe points out, if the Balkan Committee had been a humanitarian body and nothing else, its purpose would have been just as easily served by the relief fund for Macedonia formed under the presidency of the Bishop of London.<sup>43</sup> From the start the Committee was explicitly political in its approach and philosophy. It was part of a 'reforming dynamic', to use Brian Harrison's term, that

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<sup>38</sup> Noel Buxton letter to 'L.' 'On Risks', 27<sup>th</sup> October 1914: Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951 c. 8/8); Draft letter from Noel Buxton to his wife (never sent), 20<sup>th</sup> December 1914: Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951 c. 8/8).

<sup>39</sup> Report of a Speech by Noel Buxton, *Yorkshire Herald*, 19<sup>th</sup> February 1907: Press-cutting in The National Archives, London (FO 371/341, 5862).

<sup>40</sup> Draft of an *Autobiography*, Noel Buxton Papers: (MS 951 c. 7/13).

<sup>41</sup> J. St. Loe Strachey to Noel Buxton, undated (1903?): Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951 c. 24/1).

<sup>42</sup> *Saturday Review*, 21<sup>st</sup> January 1909: press-cutting in Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951 c. 19/12).

<sup>43</sup> Dackombe, 'Extra Parliamentary Groups and Liberal Internationalism', p. 37, p. 115.

encompassed support for social reform at home and a high-minded championing of ‘liberty’ and self-government abroad.<sup>44</sup>

Does this therefore mean that, in itself, there was nothing particularly unique about the Macedonian question in terms of its relationship to British liberal culture? Was it just ‘natural’, as one historian has suggested, that Noel Buxton should have responded with sympathy to the plight of the Balkan Christians, given the evangelical traditions of his family and his commitment to social reform?<sup>45</sup> Were the issues raised by the region simply the same as those arising from any number of other domestic or international ‘questions’ and talking-points in this period? In fact, focusing the analysis more specifically on the Balkan context indicates that the region did contain its own particular identity within the British liberal worldview. As the next section of this chapter will explore, Macedonia ‘mattered’ in ways not necessarily shared by other, albeit related, causes. This is key to understanding the British liberal imaginative geography of the Balkans, and to fully appreciating the place of liberal engagement with the region in early-twentieth century British political culture and identity.

### **Why Macedonia mattered**

When leading a Balkan Committee deputation to the Foreign Office in 1907, the Archbishop of Canterbury ‘supposed it would be absolutely admitted that the action taken by England 30 years ago was largely responsible for the rule which extended over Macedonia today’.<sup>46</sup> This was a reference to Disraeli’s decision at the Congress of Berlin to accept the revision of the San Stefano Treaty, resulting in the return to Ottoman rule of the Macedonian territory that had been ‘liberated’ a few months previously following the Russo-Turkish war. This was the most obvious sense in which Macedonia mattered to British liberals – it represented a case of ‘unfinished business’ and an opportunity to put right past wrongs, purging the nation of its guilt – even sin – in the process. To press firmly for the liberation of Macedonia ‘would

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<sup>44</sup> Harrison, B., ‘A Genealogy of Reform in Modern Britain’, in Bolt, C. and Drescher, S. (eds.), *Anti-Slavery, Religion, and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey* (Folkestone, 1980), p. 120.

<sup>45</sup> McCormick, ‘The Balkan Committee and Reform in Macedonia’, p. 152.

<sup>46</sup> *Times*, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1907, p. 4.

relieve the national conscience of a burden which has not wholly been forgotten' the Buxtons affirmed.<sup>47</sup> In this sense, Davide Rodogno is right to present the Balkan committee as 'a direct descendent of the Eastern Question Association' founded during the Bulgarian agitation.<sup>48</sup> Charges of national guilt and responsibility, or arguments that Britain had a moral duty to pursue a certain policy, were not unique to the Macedonian question. They were also present, for example, in the Congo reform campaign (which highlighted Britain's responsibilities to colonial Africa as a signatory of the 1885 Berlin Act) and in the campaign against the slave trade in Angola (in which Nevinson and others underscored the humanitarian cost of the British public's consumption of cheap cocoa). However, the missed opportunities of the Eastern Crisis, and the heroic example of the Bulgarian agitation, provided the Balkan Committee with its own particular platform from which to appeal to the moral conscience of the nation.

Engagement with the Macedonian question was not an impersonal act of disinterested humanitarianism; it was an intrinsic part of the British liberal memory politics. It led liberals to defend their Gladstonian heritage, this time in opposition to both Tory and liberal-imperialist indifference. The political climate was conducive to such appeals. The Boer War had, in radical eyes, tarnished Britain's international reputation for humanity and justice, and sullied the domestic climate with jingoism and imperial chauvinism. Any opportunity to spin a new liberal morality tale was bound to find a receptive audience amongst the war's critics. There was, Davide Rodogno argues, an 'unasked question' within British political culture following the Boer War: 'Were British authorities acting towards Christian Boers (and African heathen populations) as the Ottoman authorities did towards Ottoman Christians?'<sup>49</sup> Whilst this question may not have been asked directly, it was surely the case that radical and liberal unease with British imperialism encouraged a renewed determination to promote humanitarian justice in the Balkans and elsewhere. That the 'civilising mission' of Britain in

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<sup>47</sup> Buxton, N. and Buxton, C.R., 'Public Opinion and Macedonia', *Monthly Review*, Vol. 13 (December 1903), p. 107.

<sup>48</sup> Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, p. 235.

<sup>49</sup> Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, p. 177.

Africa seemed to have gone awry was surely all the more reason (for British liberals if not for British policy makers) for Britain to advance the spread of civilisation through other means, including by honouring her responsibilities towards the Christian subjects of the Ottoman Porte.

It is not surprising to find that the Pro-Boer J.L. Hammond joined the Balkan Committee, for here was a Gladstonian idealist who had in 1900 despaired:

Domestic reform ... has nothing to hope for until the language of England abroad is once again the language of morality, and not the language of pride, of mastery, of force, of violence, of revenge; till England shall honour her old idols in the larger affairs of humanity; till she shall once more win back the respect instead of the drawing upon herself the curses of Liberal Europe.<sup>50</sup>

Noel and Charles Buxton placed an attack on what they termed 'the material aspects of political dominion' and a determination 'to regain for England the moral prestige which she has lost' at the centre of their analysis of the Macedonian question. This made it a rallying call for like-minded liberals such as Hammond, Ponsonby and Gooch.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, Brailsford stressed exactly this point at a Balkan Committee dinner given in Buxton's honour in 1909, claiming:

In him [Buxton] I saw the representative of an older tradition. And from his energy and persistence, and his power of gathering others round him, I learned that this tradition was not effete. I found that there was something in the English people, and in English policy, which was worthy and great.<sup>52</sup>

The Balkan Committee sought to place the country at the forefront of a 'liberal alliance' in Europe, uniting 'altruistic' Britain with France and Italy against the cynical Realpolitik of Germany and 'reactionary' Austria-Hungary and Russia. The latter two states, it was claimed, aimed ultimately at a Machiavellian division of the Balkans that would crush liberty not only in Macedonia but also in the free Balkan states on its borders.<sup>53</sup> However, whilst the Committee did have ties with academics and other Balkan experts in France and

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<sup>50</sup> Hammond, J.L., 'Colonial and Foreign Policy' in *Liberalism and the Empire* (London, 1900), p. 211.

<sup>51</sup> Buxton and Buxton, 'Public Opinion and Macedonia', p. 95, p. 110.

<sup>52</sup> Typescript of report of the dinner given by members of the Balkan Committee to Noel Buxton, 9<sup>th</sup> June 1909: H.N. Brailsford Papers, Labour History Archive & Study Centre, People's History Museum, Manchester (HNB/4/11).

<sup>53</sup> Scott-James, R.A., 'The Austrian Occupation of Macedonia', *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 78, No. 467 (November 1905), pp. 894-95; Lynch, H.F.B., *Europe in Macedonia. Being Five Articles Reprinted from the 'Morning Post'* (London, 1908), p. 9.

Italy, as well as in the United States, there remained something distinctly British about the concern for Macedonia. Lord Newton advised that ‘as a matter of fact, this is the only country, as far as I am aware, in which sentiment plays any real part in the direction of foreign policy’.<sup>54</sup> It was a matter of perspective, of course, whether this was a cause for exasperation or national pride. Brailsford found the German delegate to the Hague Peace Convention in June 1907 completely indifferent to Macedonia, though he reflected that this had ‘the saving merit of frankness’. As Brailsford explained: ‘We are pleased to call the attitude “cynical”; Germans watching coldly the failures and inconsistencies of our more idealistic professions, think us “hypocritical”’.<sup>55</sup>

The Macedonian question fitted neatly into the agendas of British liberal activists keen to refocus their politics around a high-minded cause. But was the future of Macedonia really under discussion in these debates or rather the future of British liberalism? The pro-Albanian traveller, writer and lobbyist Edith Durham, acerbically comparing liberal and conservative press coverage of Macedonia, concluded that ‘not one of the said papers cares twopenny jam about the good of the Balkan peoples; they merely use them as a lever for tipping home governments in or out, and thereby building or blowing up the British Empire’.<sup>56</sup> Davide Rodogno makes a similar point about British humanitarian concern for the Ottoman Christians, arguing that ‘humanitarians pretended to perform “purely” disinterested actions when in fact they were inevitably driven by their own ideology and political agenda’.<sup>57</sup> As discussed, the Balkan Committee was certainly a self-consciously liberal organisation, and many of its members were no doubt politically partisan. Yet this assessment surely understates the emotional appeal of the Macedonian cause to British liberal activists.

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<sup>54</sup> Lord Newton in the House of Lords debate on ‘The Affairs of South-Eastern Europe’, 28<sup>th</sup> March 1905: *Hansard*, Vol. 143, cc 1314-50 – accessed online at: <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1905/mar/28/the-affairs-of-south-eastern-europe> (last accessed 7th April 2014).

<sup>55</sup> Press cutting of Brailsford article in *The Daily News*, 20<sup>th</sup> June 1907: Brailsford Papers (HNB/49). On Austro-Hungarian and German suspicion of British humanitarian interest in Macedonia, see Samardjiev, B., ‘On the role of Public Opinion in Great Britain Regarding the Reforms in European Turkey and the Idea of Autonomy of Macedonia (1903-1908)’, *Balkan Studies (Etudies balkaniques)*, Issue 2 (2002), p. 23.

<sup>56</sup> Durham, M.E., *The Burden of the Balkans* (London, 1905), p. 169.

<sup>57</sup> Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, p. 268.

This transcended party politics. The Macedonian question was, ultimately, about supporting the cause of ‘freedom’ against oppression. Brailsford’s misgivings about Macedonian ‘backwardness’ and violence were set aside when he reflected that he was ‘amid a race that was organising itself for freedom’. The activities of the Macedonian brigands were perhaps distasteful to British liberal sensibilities, but as Brailsford reminded his readers, the bands were striving for a liberty that was ‘no remote or unfamiliar ideal’ but part of their own shared culture and civilisation.<sup>58</sup> This, not party politics, was really the crux of the Macedonian question for British liberals.

Nevertheless, the issue was not so much that the Macedonians were an ‘oppressed nationality’, it was that they were an oppressed nationality *in Europe*. The Macedonian people were being deprived of their due share in the material and cultural progress of the West. Whereas Spain, Greece and Italy, as well as the inhabitants of other parts of the Balkans, had won their freedom in relatively recent times, Macedonia, as Charles Buxton put it, was part of ‘Europe unredeemed’.<sup>59</sup> This gave the Macedonian question a deep cultural and ideological significance that was not necessarily present in other foreign causes and moral crusades, however sympathetic certain members of the Balkan Committee may have been towards subject races in other parts of the globe. It was not just that the Ottoman Empire was illiberal, it was that it was ‘an Oriental tyranny *on the very highways of European commerce and culture*’ – and, as was repeatedly stressed, only three day’s travel from London.<sup>60</sup> Noel Buxton argued that the Macedonian question depended for its solution on more than simply preventing atrocities. It was a question of enabling ‘great populations, and those, too, not ignorant or savage, but of the type which has made civilisation’ to take their rightful place alongside their fellow Europeans.<sup>61</sup> This was why, as his brother argued separately, the

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<sup>58</sup> Brailsford, ‘The Bulgarians of Macedonia’, p. 1050, p. 1057; Brailsford, H.N., ‘A Liberal Policy in the Near East’, *Independent Review*, Vol. 3, No. 11 (August, 1904), pp. 332-33.

<sup>59</sup> Buxton, C., ‘Europe Unredeemed’, *Albany Review*, Vol. 2, No. 10 (January, 1908), pp. 373-82.

<sup>60</sup> Brailsford, H.N., ‘Macedonia: A Possible Solution’, *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 74, No. 442 (October 1903), p. 641 (emphasis added); Buxton, ‘Europe Unredeemed’, p. 378; The Balkan Committee, *Macedonian Massacres – Photos from Macedonia* (London, 1907), pp. 8-9.

<sup>61</sup> Buxton, N., *Europe and the Turks* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition: London, 1912), p. 83.

sufferings of the region had attracted such sympathy: ‘since its inhabitants were Europeans; people who ought to belong to the comity of civilised nations’.<sup>62</sup>

The Ottoman Armenians, as suggested in the previous chapter, were generally denied such a positive evaluation, despite their own claims to the sympathy of Christian Europe. Reforms in ‘uncivilised Asiatic districts’ of the Ottoman Empire, as Noel Buxton put it, were held to be less urgent than in Turkey-in-Europe, where the work of national liberation was in danger of being left unfinished.<sup>63</sup> Later, when looking back and comparing the history of the Armenians and the Macedonians in the years after the Treaty of Berlin, Buxton recalled that ‘the fate of the Macedonians was particularly hard because they are of European stock’ and ‘European mind’.<sup>64</sup> Buxton’s implication seems to be that this was not the case as far as the Armenians were concerned.

The appeal of Macedonia as a liberal cause lay in the fact that its liberation from direct Ottoman rule was felt to represent a key but as yet incomplete chapter in the progress of western civilisation. James Bryce viewed ‘the Mediterranean East’ as ‘almost the only part of the world in which there are left nationalities with the capacity for developing into independent nations that may create new types of character and new types of literary and artistic life’ and ‘which might, in a still distant future, hold a worthy place in the commonwealth of peoples’.<sup>65</sup> Later, during the First World War, Bryce returned to this point:

Not merely because they were delivered from the tyranny of Sultans like Abdul Hamid did the intellect of Europe welcome the successively won liberations of Greece, Servia, Bulgaria and Montenegro; it was also in the hope that those counties would in time develop out of their present relatively crude conditions new types of culture, new centres of productive intellectual life.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Buxton, C., *Turkey in Revolution* (London, 1909), p. 33.

<sup>63</sup> Buxton, N., *How Macedonia Was Given Back to Turkey* (Balkan Committee Leaflet No. 2: London, [1903?]).

<sup>64</sup> Buxton, N., ‘The End of the Turkish Invasion’, *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 147 (January / June, 1935), pp. 397-98.

<sup>65</sup> *The Right Hon. James Bryce on the Near Eastern Question* – a speech at the meeting of *The Eighty Club*, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1905 (Balkan Committee Leaflet No. 7: London, [1905?]); Bryce, J. ‘Introduction’ in Villari, L. (ed.), *The Balkan Question. The Present Condition of the Balkans and of European Responsibilities by Various Writers* (New York, 1905), p. 13.

<sup>66</sup> Bryce, J., ‘Neutral Nations and the War’ (August 1914), in *Essays and Addresses in War Time* (London, 1918), p. 14.

This was something that, in Bryce's case at least, seems to have been linked to an exclusive understanding of 'race'. In the same wartime lecture cited above he identified the Hellenic, Italic, Celtic, Teutonic, Iberian and Slavonic 'races' as each having 'something to give, something to learn' from each other. This begs the question of what Bryce felt might be the contribution of those 'races' omitted from his list. What about the Jewish, Turkic or Albanian communities in the Balkans for example? This issue is explored further below.<sup>67</sup>

It is clear, however, that in general British liberals had hopes and expectations for the Balkan peoples that were not necessarily extended to the victims of misrule in other parts of the world.<sup>68</sup> This reinforces the points made in previous chapters (and discussed further below) about the largely positive British liberal representation of the Balkans. It highlights that the Balkan peoples could be viewed as belonging to the same broad culture and civilisation as the West. It also suggests one clear area of distinction between the Macedonian question and those other liberal-internationalist and humanitarian causes with which many Balkan Committee supporters were involved. The intersection between the Macedonian question and issues relating to non-European and imperial questions – whether in the Congo, Persia or elsewhere – should not be dismissed or understated. Yet there is no doubt that the sense of shared cultural identity with the Macedonian population gave the question of the region's future added resonance in British liberal political culture. Ending forced labour in the Congo might lift a burden from the humanitarian conscience of the West, it might bring greater material prosperity in tropical Africa or pave the way for a more enlightened imperialism, but it was not expected to raise the intellectual life of Europe or contribute directly to the progress of western civilisation. Although the hopes invested in the leaders of the Persian constitutional revolution came far closer to matching the Balkan Committee's

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<sup>67</sup> Bryce, 'Neutral Nations and the War', p. 16.

<sup>68</sup> Although a parallel could be made with the contemporaneous case of Finland, where Russian despotism was felt to be encroaching on the Finns' admirable traditions of self-government and democracy. Henry Brailsford, Professor Westlake (Bryce's successor as Balkan Committee President) and the young R.W. Seton-Watson are all examples of activists who combined sympathy with the Balkan peoples with support for the Finnish cause: Brailsford, H.N., *The Fruits of Our Russian Alliance* (London, 1912), p. 38; Seton-Watson, C. and Seton-Watson, H., *The Making of a New Europe: R.W. Seton-Watson and the Last Years of Austria-Hungary* (London, 1981), p. 16; Reuter, J. N., 'Finland' in Williams, J.F. (ed.), *Memories of John Westlake* (London, 1914), pp. 116-29.



sympathy for the Macedonians, as 'Europe unredeemed' the Balkans definitely occupied its own specific place in the British liberal conscience.

As the following section will highlight, this still raised serious and complex questions about what exactly the hoped-for future of the region was, and how this should be achieved. This in turn raised difficult questions about self-government, nationalism and international politics. As will be discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter, the failure to develop satisfactory answers to these questions would adversely affect the impact and effectiveness of the Balkan Committee as a conduit of dissent over foreign policy. It is therefore important to consider how British liberals responded and reacted to the uncomfortable realities of Balkan nationalism, violence and, to use the language of the time, 'race hatred'.

### **The Balkan dilemmas of British liberal internationalism**

As detailed in Chapter One, in 1876 the Bulgarian agitation had not primarily been seen as a question of nationalism. There had been no widespread commitment to the concept of national self-determination amongst the agitators of 1876; the desire to 'liberate' the people of the Balkans from Ottoman rule had stemmed rather more from sympathy with 'oppressed Christians' suffering under the 'oriental' tyranny of the Sultan. Nevertheless, one of the consequences of the Eastern Crisis had been to raise awareness of and interest in the peninsula's political geography, as evidenced in the writings of scholars such as E.A. Freeman or his son-in-law Arthur Evans in the 1880s. Since then, the fractious debates regarding Irish Home Rule and then the Boer War had pushed questions of nationality, and the relationship between empire and self-government, to the forefront of the liberal political conscience. More tangentially, the early-twentieth century saw the growth of scholarly and literary interest in anthropology, 'primitive' cultures and 'race'.<sup>69</sup> How, if at all, was this reflected in the imaginative geography of the Macedonian question?

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<sup>69</sup> Kuklick, H., *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885-1945* (Cambridge, 1991).

There was arguably no one ‘Macedonian’ nationality, and certainly no clear sense of national identity amongst the Macedonians themselves. As much as one-third of the population were Muslim, including the majority of the population in the *sanjak* to which British officials were stationed as part of the limited Mürzsteg reform programme. Jews formed the biggest single minority in the main urban centre of Salonika.<sup>70</sup> The question of the ‘national’ affiliations of these latter two groups tended to be overlooked, however, with the focus of most writers falling squarely on the sufferings of the supposedly ‘numerous and progressive Christian element’.<sup>71</sup> The Christian Macedonians were claimed, in the contradictory assertions of rival national movements funded and encouraged with varying degrees of official involvement from the neighbouring Balkan states, to be mainly Greeks, Bulgarians or Serbs. Significant Albanian and Vlach minorities were also identified. As a consequence, numerous new ethnographic maps of the region were produced at this time. Brailsford’s 1906 book on Macedonia included a map that was cited by a Bulgarian scholar in the 1990s as ‘a signal contribution to the elucidation of the ethnographic composition of the Macedonian region’.<sup>72</sup>

However, this does not mean that the traditional division of the region’s inhabitants along lines of faith was totally eclipsed. Whilst ‘Turk’ was a term still generally applied to the entire Muslim population, the Balkan Christians were distinguished through a curious mishmash of religious and ethno-national identifiers.<sup>73</sup> The Balkan Committee tended to present the majority of the Macedonians as of Bulgarian ‘race’, but there was little consistency, and even less agreement.<sup>74</sup> In any case, tales such as that of a village that became ‘Bulgarian’ because Bulgaria sent a schoolteacher for free, when the upkeep of the existing Greek school had cost five pounds a year, highlighted the superficiality of national identity in

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<sup>70</sup> Brooks, J., ‘A “Tranquilising” Influence? British “Proto-Peacekeeping” in Ottoman Macedonia, 1904-1905’, *Peace & Change*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (2011), p. 176; Mazower, M., *Salonika, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430-1950* (London, 2004).

<sup>71</sup> Lynch, *Europe in Macedonia*, p. 3.

<sup>72</sup> St. Kolodarov, ‘Ethnography in Great Britain and the Bulgarian Question’, p. 22; Wilkinson, *Maps and Politics*, pp. 133-34.

<sup>73</sup> See for example, ‘Hope for Macedonia’, *Nation*, 29<sup>th</sup> February 1908, p. 783, where it is claimed that ‘there are Moslems on the one hand, and Greeks and Slavs, Catholics, Exarchists and Patriarchists on the other’.

<sup>74</sup> See, for example, the Balkan Committee, *The Macedonian Crisis* (London, 1903).

this part of Europe.<sup>75</sup> The plunder, murder and brigandage of rival nationalist bands, meanwhile, severely undermined the assumption (still cherished in some quarters by the liberal romanticisation of the Greek War of Independence and the Risorgimento) that European national movements were always by their very nature progressive and liberating forces. Even if it had been so desired, unlike with Bulgaria in 1876, Macedonia in 1903 could not be easily fitted into a liberal-nationalist framework. The region was depicted as a land of ‘race feeling and hatred’ and ‘artificial race propagandas’.<sup>76</sup>

This made it difficult for supporters of the Balkan Committee to focus public attention on the case for diplomatic intervention to remove Macedonia from the direct rule of the Sultan. When Charles Masterman asserted in an article for the *Nation*, more as an aside than anything else, that the native population of Macedonia were ‘the Bulgarian population’, he precipitated a string of both critical and supportive correspondence debating this point. This in turn forced Masterman to complain that such arguments were ‘irrelevant’ to the most important issue, which was to secure European control of the region in order to free the population from ‘alien marauders and Turkish misrule’.<sup>77</sup> National questions, it was held, ought to wait until peace and the rule of law had been imposed on the region. The example (and in Noel Buxton’s view ‘splendid achievement’) of the Austrian administration of Bosnia-Herzegovina was taken to suggest that European control would bring material improvement, civil order and tranquillity in the relationships between Christians and Muslims.<sup>78</sup>

There was a basic hypocrisy in the Balkan Committee’s approach to Macedonia. Whilst it urged the necessity of allowing the Balkan states ‘to develop their own national life and institutions free from foreign interference’, its immediate solution to the Macedonian

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<sup>75</sup> Brailsford, H.N., *Macedonia. Its Races and Their Future* (London, 1906), p. 107; Brailsford, H.N., ‘Impressions of Macedonia, II’, *Speaker*, 18<sup>th</sup> July 1903, p. 358.

<sup>76</sup> The Balkan Committee, *Fourth Annual Report of the Executive Committee for Year Ending December 31<sup>st</sup> 1907* (London, 1908), p. 17; Brailsford, ‘Macedonia: A Land of Fear’, *Manchester Guardian*, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1903, p. 10.

<sup>77</sup> Masterman, C.F.G., ‘The Ruin of Macedonia’, *Nation*, 9<sup>th</sup> November 1907, p. 182-83, and subsequent correspondence: 16<sup>th</sup> November, p. 239; 23<sup>rd</sup> November, pp. 274-75; 30<sup>th</sup> November, p. 305; 7<sup>th</sup> December, pp. 344-45; 14<sup>th</sup> December, p. 400; 21<sup>st</sup> December, p. 437.

<sup>78</sup> Buxton, N., ‘Freedom and Servitude in the Balkans’, p. 482; Buxton and Buxton, ‘Public Opinion and Macedonia’, p. 100.

question was a kind of neo-colonial control.<sup>79</sup> As with other ostensibly humanitarian endeavours in this period, the line between the desire to control or manage problematic regions of the globe and ‘illegitimate and paternalistic interventionism and imperialism’ was not always clear.<sup>80</sup> British liberal support for ‘oppressed nationalities’ was never felt to be inconsistent with a worldview that readily distinguished between ‘advanced’ and ‘backward races’, and which assumed that the ‘civilised’ states had the right to occupy regions of the globe deemed to be in need of international development. Such views were certainly held, and expressed publically, by the Balkan Committee’s first two Presidents, James Bryce and John Westlake.<sup>81</sup> There is a clear foreshadowing here of the post-First World War Mandates system overseen by the League of Nations, as is explored further in subsequent chapters of this thesis.<sup>82</sup>

Reluctance to let anything distract from the case for ‘freeing’ the Macedonian population from the direct rule of the Porte encouraged a rather blasé, if not completely naïve, attitude to the fraught national politics of the region. In January 1907 the Balkan Committee’s President expressed the hope that, once their authority had been established, the Great Powers would carry out a census of the population in order to ‘dispose of the country on principles of ethnological justice’.<sup>83</sup> It was never made clear quite how this would be achieved in a region not just without ethnic homogeneity but also without any clear or consistent sense of national identity, and with a substantial Muslim population potentially still loyal to the Sultan. Again, in 1908, a Balkan Committee note to the Foreign Office proposed a ‘modification of territorial boundaries of the administrative units [of Macedonia], with a view to the more

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<sup>79</sup> Point 5 of the ‘Stated aims of the Committee’ listed in the Balkan Committee, *Third Annual Report of the Executive Committee* (p. 10), which is immediately contradicted by Point 6 calling for executive control to be placed in the hands of representatives appointed by the ‘European Powers’; The Balkan Committee, *Fourth Annual report of the Executive Committee* (London, 1908), p. 19.

<sup>80</sup> Bonakdarian, *Britain and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911: Foreign Policy, Imperialism, and Dissent* (Syracuse NY, 2006), p. 33.

<sup>81</sup> Bryce gave the 1902 Romanes Lecture at Oxford on ‘The Relations of the Advanced and the Backward Races of Mankind’, whilst Westlake’s *Chapters on the Principles of International Law* (1894) is referred to by Said as an example of ‘the binary typology of advanced and backward (or subject) races, cultures and societies’ that debate on imperialism in late-nineteenth century Britain fostered (*Orientalism*, pp. 206-07). On Westlake’s approach to international law and the status of ‘barbaric’ states, see Mazower, ‘An International civilisation?’, p. 555.

<sup>82</sup> This is also noted by Barry Dackombe (‘Liberal Internationalism’, p. 129).

<sup>83</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 19<sup>th</sup> January 1907, p. 9.

regular grouping of the different nationalities'. As Davide Rodogno suggests, this scheme 'would have caused a humanitarian tragedy not only for the Muslim populations but also for the vast majority of the Christians, who would have become Bulgarians, Greeks, Serbs, or Rumanians according to decisions made in one or the other European capitals'.<sup>84</sup> Unlike the British approach to national questions in the Balkans (and elsewhere) after the First World War (to be discussed in Chapter Five), there was certainly not at this stage much preoccupation with the potential problems that might be presented by national and religious minorities.<sup>85</sup> The Balkan Committee did issue periodic notes condemning the 'fratricidal strife' in the region, but as Nevinson rather casually remarked: 'it is not as though the problem in Macedonia were insoluble. There have been mixed races and rival races in all the countries that have been delivered from Turkish dominion, and all without exception have prospered.'<sup>86</sup>

Therefore, although the concept of balkanism implies that the western representation of Macedonia stressed the obfuscation and instability inherent in its heterogeneous population, the articles of the liberal commentators associated with the Balkan Committee present a more optimistic picture. In this interpretation, the problem was less the competing nationalisms of Macedonia than the ineffective rule of the Porte. Even when the complexity of the racial, religious and linguistic debates of the Macedonian question was admitted, it was always bemoaned in equal measure that it should have fallen to 'the most ill-fitted to govern in Europe' to rule the region. As far as Charles Buxton was concerned, 'any civilised government – any European government – could draw the lines of division with approximate accuracy'.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, p. 246, citing FO 371/581: 'The Action of the Great Powers in Macedonia Up to the End of 1907', The Balkan Committee, signed by Westlake, Moore and Buxton, 10<sup>th</sup> January 1908.

<sup>85</sup> See Finney, P., "'An Evil for All Concerned": Great Britain and Minority Protection after 1919', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (1995), pp. 533-52.

<sup>86</sup> Note issued by James Bryce (as President of the Balkan Committee), F.S. Stevenson (as Chairman of the Byron Society) and Noel Buxton (as Chairman of the Balkan Committee), dated 28<sup>th</sup> July 1905: Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951 c. 25/2); Nevinson, H.W., 'Macedonia', in Oldershaw, L. (ed.), *England: A Nation* (London, 1904), pp. 178-79.

<sup>87</sup> Buxton, 'Europe Unredeemed', p. 375.

As discussed, this mirrored the ‘new liberal’ assumption that social dislocation and class conflict at home could be overcome through the disinterested leadership of a progressive elite. In his analysis of this approach, cited above, Peter Clarke notes that social democrats clung to the optimistic faith that, through appropriate leadership and reform, the inherent virtues of ‘the People’ as a whole would triumph over jingoism, ignorance and crass materialism. This belief in ‘a sort of superior collective mind ... which guarantees social progress through its capacity to defeat the unpredictable impulses latent in individuals’ was also applied to the Balkan Christians.<sup>88</sup> ‘Racial’ violence was an acknowledged issue, and prejudices against the Orthodox faith of the local population remained strong, but it was assumed that such difficulties would be overcome once Turkish rule had been replaced by more enlightened (and western) leadership. The Honorary Treasurer of the Balkan Committee argued in 1903 that ‘the adherents of the Cross within these regions may identify their creed with their racial animosities, and their religion may be open to criticism on account of its superstition and formalism, but faith, however unproductive it may be, has proved impossible to destroy’.<sup>89</sup> There was no sense that either the ‘racial animosities’ or the religious ‘superstition’ latent in Balkan society would prevent progress in the region once more ‘civilised’ political conditions had been secured. To borrow from Clarke’s assessment of the domestic context, there were both ‘grains of comfort’ and ‘seeds of delusion’ in this approach.<sup>90</sup> As will be discussed below, by underplaying the threat posed by religious and nationalist violence to any successful long-term solution of the Macedonian question, the Balkan Committee arguably undermined its own claims to expertise and objectivity.

Rather than developing a detailed analysis of Macedonian nationalism, many of the Committee’s supporters perpetuated the tried and tested distinction between the Christian (of whatever nationality) and ‘the Turk’. It was the religious divide between the Christian peasantry and their Muslim overlords that was held to lie at the root of the unrest in

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<sup>88</sup> Clarke, ‘Social Democratic theory of the Class Struggle’, p. 13.

<sup>89</sup> P.W. Wilson on ‘The General Situation’ in The Balkan Committee, *Macedonia 1903* (London, 1903), p. 10.

<sup>90</sup> Clarke, ‘Social Democratic theory of the Class Struggle’, p. 13.

Macedonia. The Turks' Islamic faith, with its 'Asiatic' origins and its supposed predispositions against any kind of civic progress, remained at the centre of their perceived incapacity to govern their 'subject races'. Brailsford claimed that the Turks were 'a primitive Asiatic people with gaps in their minds and lacunae in their vocabularies' and identified Islam with 'obedience, resignation'. The ascendancy of this ruling caste was 'completely oriental', that is to say, lacking in order, justice, security, energy, administrative efficiency and any impetus to reform or education. Ill-treatment of women and even ill-treatment of animals were added to this unappealing potpourri of negative stereotypes.<sup>91</sup> In one passage from his most substantial publication on the subject, Noel Buxton reduced the Macedonian question to a clash between 'the Mohammedan principle of fatalism and the Christian principle of progress'.<sup>92</sup> Such language was a throwback to the Bulgarian agitation. It serves as a stark reminder that old discourses died hard, even in a supposedly more secular age far more keenly alive to distinctions of 'race' than had been the case in 1876.

Longstanding prejudices against Islam remained strong. Assumptions about the essentially progressive, western and European nature of the Balkan peasants continued to be made simply on the basis of their Christianity. This presented problems of interpretation in a part of the continent with significant indigenous Muslim and Jewish populations. In neighbouring Albania, for instance, the population was approximately 70 per cent Muslim (either Sunnis or followers of the Bektashi sect). Brailsford thought it necessary to justify his faint praise that the Albanian was 'essentially a European – a European of the middle ages' with the claim that 'Islam sits lightly on him'.<sup>93</sup> It was as if no true European (even one so 'backward' as this) could ever really be a committed member of an 'Asiatic' faith. In general, despite its pertinence to the future of Macedonia, the Albanian question was largely ignored by the Balkan Committee at this stage. Even less was said about the future of Macedonia's own Muslims.

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<sup>91</sup> Brailsford, *Macedonia*, p. x, p. 30.

<sup>92</sup> Buxton, *Europe and the Turks*, p. 87.

<sup>93</sup> Brailsford, H.N., 'An Albanian Spelling-Book', *Speaker*, 28<sup>th</sup> May 1904, p. 199; Brailsford, *Macedonia*, pp. 285-86.

Greater interest in Albania would develop amongst Balkan Committee associates in the years leading up to the First World War, particularly following the 1910 Albanian revolt against Ottoman rule. Yet as late as 1914 the supposed Balkan expert James Bryce admitted his ignorance, in discussing with Noel Buxton a potential post-war territorial settlement in the Balkans: 'I have said nothing about Albania because I do not understand it.'<sup>94</sup> Not surprisingly, as we shall see, what few Albanian experts there were in Britain at this time (Edith Durham and Aubrey Herbert for example) had an uneasy relationship with the Balkan Committee, accusing it of overlooking the claims of the Albanian people. There was thus an inconsistency within the Edwardian liberal image of the Balkans, with traditional 'Cross versus Crescent' rhetoric coexisting rather uneasily alongside the more 'modern' terminology of the nation-state and the ethnographic study. There was without doubt also a delicate balance to be struck in British liberal minds as far as Macedonia was concerned between advancing the cause of 'freedom' and securing the international control and management of a 'backward' and 'barbarous' part of the continent.

These ongoing tensions and dilemmas are illustrated perfectly by the reaction of the Balkan Committee and its supporters to the Young Turk revolution in July 1908. The Young Turks wished to reform and modernise the Ottoman Empire from within, professing adherence to a liberal and secular ideal of government. Hitherto, the possibility of an internal reform of the Ottoman Empire had been dismissed out of hand in British analysis. That a supposedly moribund, degenerate, oriental, Islamic despotism suddenly seemed to be on the brink of transforming itself into a progressive, secular, constitutional liberal state was thus almost overwhelming. Within a month of the initial revolt, the *Daily News* (whose leader-writing staff at this time included both Brailsford and Nevinson) was arguing that the reform programme for Macedonia had become 'obsolete', that liberalism should now to focus its energies on supporting the forces of constitutionalism in Turkey, and that pity for the Christian populations of these regions ought not to stand in the way of bestowing sympathy

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<sup>94</sup> Bryce to Noel Buxton, not dated (1914?): Charles Roden Buxton Papers, Bodleian Library of Commonwealth & African Studies, Rhodes House, University of Oxford (Box 1, File 1, 35/36).



on the liberal Muslim leaders of the new Turkish 'nation'.<sup>95</sup> Alongside exhilaration at the 'miracle of reform', and enthusiastic support for what was seen as a political victory for the forces of liberalism in Turkey akin to the great Whig revolution of 1688 in Britain, there was a palpable sense of relief that an unexpected new solution to the Macedonian question had been found.<sup>96</sup>

With a liberal regime in power at Constantinople, increasingly uncomfortable questions of how to reconcile rival nationalisms in Macedonia, and how to impose order and stability on a region beset by religious hatred and civil disorder, no longer seemed so urgent. Brailsford wrote to Buxton that the demand for Macedonian Home Rule within the Ottoman Empire was now 'an extreme position', that instead 'equal civil and political rights for all Christians' would represent adequate progress. He pondered whether Macedonia might become comparable to Ireland, 'where every good liberal will wish for Home Rule, but no sane man could say that the subject race is really persecuted'.<sup>97</sup> Yet, unlike Ireland, the case of Macedonia was not even on the agenda at the 'Nationalities and Subject Races Conference' held at Caxton Hall in June 1910 (also unlike Egypt, India, Persia, Finland, Georgia, Poland and Morocco).<sup>98</sup> Members of Parliament who had previously signed their names to Balkan Committee resolutions calling for diplomatic intervention on behalf of the Macedonians now signed a letter congratulating the Young Turk leaders on the establishment of a parliamentary government.<sup>99</sup> As for the Balkan Committee, it remodelled itself as an organisation for the promotion of education in the Ottoman Balkans, and as the 'conditional' but 'most earnest' supporter of the new regime.<sup>100</sup> This was a dramatic change in approach.

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<sup>95</sup> *Daily News*, 17<sup>th</sup> July 1908, p. 4; 20<sup>th</sup> July 1908, p. 4; 25<sup>th</sup> July 1908, p. 4; 28<sup>th</sup> July 1908, p. 4.

<sup>96</sup> Nevinson, H.W., 'Notes on the Balkans, with a Table', *English Review*, Vol. 1 (December 1908), p. 186; Brailsford, H.N., 'The Renaissance of Turkey', *Albany Review*, Vol. 3, No. 18 (September 1908), p. 685, p. 687.

<sup>97</sup> Brailsford letter to Noel Buxton, 14<sup>th</sup> August 1908: Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951 c.1/14) cited in Leventhal, *Last Dissenter*, p. 99.

<sup>98</sup> *Nationalities and Subject Races Conference held at Caxton Hall, Westminster, June 28-30, 1910* (London: P.S. King, 1911).

<sup>99</sup> Opening of Turkish parliament – address of congratulation by members of House of Commons: The National Archives (FO 371/561, 43208).

<sup>100</sup> Noel Buxton to E.G. Browne, 10<sup>th</sup> February 1909: E.G. Browne Papers, Cambridge University Library, Box 10 (10/2/124).

As suggested by Brailsford, the Irish case provides another clear example of British liberalism's ambivalence towards ethnic nationalism and the idea of national self-determination (a theme explored further in the following chapter). As with Macedonia, self-government in Ireland was considered to be a very different prospect to full national independence. If Macedonian progress could be achieved through local autonomy under the benevolent rule of the Young Turks, Irish progress could certainly be achieved through Home Rule within the United Kingdom. In a historical overview for a liberal study of *Home Rule Problems* in 1911, G.P. Gooch argued that 'the real union of the two countries will only begin when it rests on the unforced consent of the weaker member, and when scope is found for the national self-consciousness beneath the tolerant sovereignty of the British Empire'.<sup>101</sup> There was no doubt in Gooch's mind, or in that of his liberal contemporaries, that this prospect would be realised once fleeting Unionist obstacles to Irish self-government had been removed. As G.K. Peatling has observed with reference to the Irish case: 'New Liberal models of international relations were ... teleological. Once sources of "friction" had been removed, different national individualities would be harmonious, not antipathetic.'<sup>102</sup>

This corresponds neatly with the Balkan Committee's approach to Macedonia. In the Balkan case, British liberals seemed unwilling to fully appreciate the implications that racial, religious and nationalist tension had for their 'civilisational perspective' on the region's progress. The corresponding approach as far as Ireland was concerned meant that the extent and significance of the opposition to Home Rule in Ulster tended to be overlooked. In the same study of *Home Rule Problems* cited above, Charles Buxton claimed: 'I do not myself believe that Ulster's hostility proceeds half as much from reason as from instinct, whatever Ulstermen may say when they are striving to justify their attitude on rational grounds.'<sup>103</sup> Protestant Ulster, in this analysis, would quickly reconcile itself to Irish self-government, the inherent moral and political benefits of which would soon bridge the Irish sectarian divide. As

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<sup>101</sup> Gooch, G.P., 'The Nationalist Movement since the Union' in Williams, B. (ed.), *Home Rule Problems* (London, 1911), p. 22.

<sup>102</sup> Peatling, G.K., *British Opinion and Irish Self-Government, 1865-1925. From Unionism to Liberal Commonwealth* (Dublin, 2001), p. 104.

<sup>103</sup> Buxton, C.R., 'Home Rule Finance', in Williams, *Home Rule Problems*, p. 149.

in their approach to the Balkans, British liberals saw no reason to let 'clannish' national sentiment prejudice the wider and, it was assumed, universal benefits of self-government and liberal political institutions.

The 'evidence' for such an optimistic perspective on Ireland was generally found not in the Balkans, however, but in South Africa. The granting of self-government to the Afrikaner colonies in 1910 had seemed to reconcile the Boers to their place in the British Empire. As a result, the South African example 'dominated Liberal discourse on home rule in this period'.<sup>104</sup> In hindsight, perhaps the Balkan analogy was more appropriate. For as far as Macedonia was concerned, faith in the progressive and constitutional course of the Young Turk revolution, and in its capacity to find a liberal and peaceful solution to the perennial Eastern Question, proved to be short-lived. The Young Turks were ultimately perhaps no more willing, certainly no better able, than Abdul Hamid had been to reconcile the nationalities of Macedonia, Albania and elsewhere to the rule of the Porte. As discussed in the next chapter, British liberals would soon have to face up to the realities of Balkan nationalism, just as they would to the realities of Ulster Unionism and Irish Republicanism.

Nevertheless, the initial positive reaction of British liberal Balkan experts to the Young Turks (nowhere expressed more clearly than in Charles Buxton's *Turkey in Revolution*) is striking. It cautions against any assumption that British liberals were committed irrevocably to the *national* (as opposed to political) liberation of the Balkans. Ultimately, the Macedonian question, as with the Bulgarian agitation, and as with Irish Home Rule at this time, was understood not as a question of nationalism but as a question of upholding the liberal values of self-government. This is also reflected, to take a further example from the period, in British liberal responses to the constitutional revolution in Persia in 1905-6. In this case, supporters of the Persian revolutionaries also tended to stress the movement's social and political reformist, as opposed to its nationalist, agendas. Events in Persia were related to 'universal' liberal notions of legal rights, social justice and

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<sup>104</sup> Peatling, *British Opinion and Irish Self-Government*, p. 69.

constitutional government, rather than to the narrower doctrine of Persian nationalism, despite Persia's standing as a 'historic nation' and civilisation.<sup>105</sup>

Thus, although the situation in Macedonia presented British liberals with dilemmas and concerns that seem at first far removed from the black-and-white moral certainties of the Bulgarian agitation, one thing that had not changed was the preference for the 'civilisational' rather than the nationalist perspective. The complexities of Macedonia's political geography and ethnography could not be completely ignored, yet British liberals still clung to misleading representations of the region as a 'Christian' land. This in turn reinforced the conviction that its future was a matter of direct importance for European progress and civilisation. British liberal activists retained considerable faith that the violence, brutality and economic and social misery of everyday life in Macedonia could be overcome through the application of self-government, and this was the focus of the Balkan Committee until the Young Turk revolution brought about a re-think. The change of policy after July 1908 did not mean that the Macedonians were being abandoned, but it signalled that the priority of British liberalism was securing orderly and progressive government rather than addressing national questions. The consequences and shortfalls of this approach will be considered further below.

As the next section of the chapter will first explore, however, the Macedonian question related as much to the domestic concerns of British liberalism as it did to these internationalist agendas. An appreciation of the domestic context is essential to complete our understanding of the particular place of the Balkans, and the questions and concerns it raised, in Edwardian political culture. It also offers insights into the liberal imaginative geography of the region. This in turn raises points that relate not just to British representations of the Balkans but also to more general analysis of cross-cultural encounters in the 'Age of Empire'.

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<sup>105</sup> Bonakdarian, *Britain and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, pp. 144-45.

## Balkan peasants and the ‘Condition of England’

The centrepiece of the ‘Balkan States Exhibition’ held at Earl’s Court in 1907, with the support of the Balkan Committee, was a typical ‘Balkan village’, complete with ‘quaint houses’, a mosque, ‘genuine’ local peasants, and gypsy dancers. This was actually somewhat against the will of the organisers’ Serbian and Bulgarian collaborators, who would have preferred to emphasise the technological and economic progress being made in their countries.<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, this focus on Balkan village life was very much in line with the continued appeal of the region as a land of peasant communities, carriers of an organic culture that was rooted in the soil and untarnished by the superficiality and materialism of the modern age. Scenes of country life, including footage of folk-dancing peasants in traditional dress, also featured in the collection of bioscope films shot in the Balkans in 1904 by the English film-maker Charles Rider Noble (titles in the catalogues of the company he worked for include ‘Bulgarian Village Dance’ and ‘Peasant Beauties’).<sup>107</sup> This image was no doubt heavily romanticised. It may also have been misleading at a time when, across the peninsula, the effects of mass emigration, increased reliance on a money economy and the market, growing literacy, increased contact between towns and villages, and acute land-hunger were all helping to undermine the assumptions and attitudes of traditional peasant life.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, it had been a persistent part of the British imaginative geography of the region from the time of the Bulgarian agitation.

As discussed in Chapter One, this highlights the deeply ingrained liberal belief in the value of the ‘village community’, with its traditions of local self-government and peasant proprietorship. Although it was assumed that the immediate establishment of an independent *central* government for Macedonia would be problematic, it was felt that a system of local autonomy would be relatively straightforward to introduce. This would be based around the

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<sup>106</sup> Steward, J., ‘“The Balkans in London”: Political Culture and Cultural Politics of Exhibitions at Earl’s Court 1906-1908’, *Balkan Studies (Études balkaniques)*, Issue 4 (2008), pp. 78-82.

<sup>107</sup> Kardjilov, ‘“Cinematograms” of a Balkan Conflict’, pp. 313-14.

<sup>108</sup> Stavrianos, L., *The Balkans 1815-1914* (New York, 1963), p. 83; Mazower, *The Balkans*. p. 31.

village as a provincial administrative unit.<sup>109</sup> Brailsford claimed that a central parliament would ‘merely be a battlefield between rival races’; a system of local councils elected by universal manhood suffrage, on the other hand, would fit the region’s admirable tradition of self-government.<sup>110</sup> The virtue of ‘democracy’ was commonly placed on the local peasantry in the sympathetic writings of the Balkan Committee and its supporters, as was that of ‘industry’. As we shall see, there was a tendency to contrast favourably the ‘stolid industry’ and ‘prudence’ of the ‘sturdy’ ‘Bulgarian’ peasants in Macedonia with the more commercial (and, it was to be inferred, unscrupulous) qualities of the ‘Greek’ townsmen.<sup>111</sup> Similarly, although Brailsford had a degree of sympathy for the Macedonian revolutionary movement IMRO, he expressed disappointment at the ‘painfully urbanised’ nationalists he met at this time during a visit to Egypt. Whereas city-dwelling Egyptian nationalists were seen as knowing ‘little of their own peasants and caring less’, the Macedonian could be romanticised as a self-sufficient freeholder.<sup>112</sup>

Admittedly, this idealisation of peasant culture did not only apply to the Balkans. It had inspired at least some liberal commentators to have faith in the progress of Russia during the Eastern Crisis. At the time of the South African war, there had been a degree of admiration for the Boers as ‘citizen-farmers’ prepared to fight to defend their rural communities and way of life from the encroachments of a cosmopolitan, profit-driven empire. E.D. Morel also made peasant proprietorship an integral part of his proposed solution to the Congo question.<sup>113</sup> The appeal of peasant cultures has been seen as part of a wider reaction to ‘modernism’ and as a reflection of highbrow unease with the mass culture and

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<sup>109</sup> Hirst, F.W., ‘A Visit to Macedonia’, *Nation*, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1907, p. 453.

<sup>110</sup> Brailsford, *Macedonia*, p. 326.

<sup>111</sup> Brailsford, ‘Albania Visited II: The Most Miserable Corner of Europe’, *Manchester Guardian*, 1<sup>st</sup> July 1903, p. 4; Buxton and Buxton, ‘Public Opinion and Macedonia’, pp. 98-99; Brailsford, H.N., *Who Are the Balkan Peoples?* (The Balkan Committee Leaflet No. 9: London, n.d. [1912?]); Buxton, N., *Travels and Reflections* (London, 1929), p. 114; Lynch, *Europe in Macedonia*, p. 33.

<sup>112</sup> Leventhal, *The Last Dissenter*, pp. 62-63; Brailsford to Seton-Watson, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1908: R.W. Seton-Watson Papers, UCL SSEES Library, London (SEW/17/2/4).

<sup>113</sup> Weaver, S., ‘The Pro-Boers: War, Empire and the Uses of Nostalgia in Turn-of-the-Century England’ in Behlmer, G.K. and Leventhal, F.M. (eds.), *Singular Continuities. Tradition, Nostalgia and Identity in Modern British Culture* (Stanford, 2000), p. 44, p. 55; Mandler, P., *The English National Character. The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven, 2006), p. 132; Porter, B., *Critics of Empire*, pp. 268-69.

commercialisation of the western world.<sup>114</sup> Nevertheless, although idealisation of peasant culture was a general trope in British liberal political discourse in this period, its impact on representations of the Balkans appears to have been particularly pronounced.

Vesna Goldsworthy notes the preference of British travellers and novelists for rural over urban locations in the Balkans, attributing this to ‘the Romantic-inspired idea that the village, rather than the city, offers genuine insight into the “real” culture of an area’.<sup>115</sup> Andrew Hammond similarly notes that the ‘primitivism’ of the Balkan Peninsula could be seen as a source of attraction for British travellers, with the Balkan peasant cast as a figure of innocence and morality in an otherwise cynical and decadent age.<sup>116</sup> A Balkan Committee member (and secretary), Rolfe Scott-James, was actually one of the first literary scholars to explore ‘modernism’, and his influential 1908 study of the concept includes an enthusiastic discussion of Edith Durham’s *Through the Lands of the Serb*. For Scott-James, Durham was an example of someone who had ‘tasted the moral poverty of the West’. Her book brought vividly to life ‘the *people* about whom all the world has been talking, the very men who have hated and fought the Turk, and have set up their governments and thrown them down with so little respect for western ideas’. This was intended not as a criticism of Balkan political instability or backwardness, but rather as an appreciation of the vitality and strength of feeling inherent in the peninsula’s culture and society.<sup>117</sup>

The peasant was thus at the heart of British liberal interaction with the Balkans. The idealised Balkan ‘village community’ was a significant positive counterweight in liberal minds to the uncomfortably negative reports of atrocities and nationalist tension. Yet the imaginative geography produced as a result is nonetheless revealing of certain broader concerns and prejudices within the British liberal conscience. For in defending the inherent virtues of Balkan peasant proprietorship and village life, British liberals not only contrasted

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<sup>114</sup> Carey, J., *The Intellectuals and the Masses. Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia 1880-1939* (London, 1992); Trentmann, F., ‘Civilisation and its Discontents: English Neo-Romanticism and the Transformation of Anti-Modernism in Twentieth-Century Western Culture’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (1994), p. 584.

<sup>115</sup> Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania* (New Edition), p. 183.

<sup>116</sup> Hammond, *The Debated Lands*, pp. 93-94.

<sup>117</sup> Scott-James, R.A., *Modernism and Romance* (London, 1908), pp. 161-65.

the Macedonian peasantry with the corrupt officials of the Ottoman Porte, they also condemned other local enemies. These included the supposedly lawless Albanian brigand, the Muslim landowner, and the 'Jewish tax farmer'.<sup>118</sup> In some accounts, the significant Jewish population of Macedonia (the single biggest community in the major port of Salonika) were essentially caricatured as unscrupulous tax-farmers and loyal agents of the Hamidian tyranny – part of a 'ruling caste' that was content to 'live on the labour of a subject population of Christian serfs'.<sup>119</sup> At the same time, Salonika, Üskub [Skopje] and the other towns of the region were often dismissed by English visitors as 'Levantine' and squalid – not the 'real' Macedonia, and not populated by 'real' Macedonians but by an unattractive mixture of corrupt officials, Greek tradesmen and Jews talking 'a lingua franca of materialism, a patois for nasty pleasures and petty commerce'.<sup>120</sup> Such negative stereotyping was part of a longer anti-Semitic thread within British radical culture (and British popular culture more generally) that was present in the caricaturing of Disraeli during the Bulgarian agitation, as noted in Chapter One, and in the radical condemnation of 'Jewish finance' during the Boer War. It resurfaced in the attitudes of some commentators – G.K. Chesterton (who was also a member of the Balkan Committee) for example – towards the 'Jewish Question' in Eastern Europe and Russia at this time.<sup>121</sup>

Given the righteous condemnation Henry Brailsford displayed in other writings regarding the persecution of Russian Jews, his apparent contempt for the Jewish population of Macedonia is intriguing. Anti-Semitism had been an acknowledged problem in the independent Balkan states of Romania and Serbia. Yet the active involvement of Christian leaders and philanthropists in earlier Anglo-Jewish campaigns to draw attention to the plight

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<sup>118</sup> 'Macedonia', *Speaker*, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1903, p. 5.

<sup>119</sup> See the following articles by H.M. Brailsford: 'The Bulgarians of Macedonia', p. 1057; 'A Liberal Policy in the Near East', pp. 323-24; 'Macedonia: A Possible Solution', p. 644; 'The Macedonian Revolt', *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 74, No. 441 (September 1903), pp. 430-31. Also: The Balkan Committee, *Macedonia 1903*, p. 14.

<sup>120</sup> Brailsford, H.N., 'Salonica', *Manchester Guardian*, 20<sup>th</sup> May 1903, p. 10; Brailsford, *Macedonia*, pp. 83-84.

<sup>121</sup> Mandler, *English National Character*, p. 137. On Britain and the anti-Jewish pogroms in Eastern Europe see Johnson, S., *Pogroms, Peasant, Jews: Britain and Eastern Europe's 'Jewish Question', 1867-1925*, esp. p. 18, p. 28, p. 128, pp. 133-34.



of Jews in Eastern Europe did not translate into any great concern for, or interest in, the future of the Jewish population of Macedonia.

Why was this? The generation of humanitarian sympathy for the Macedonians seems to have necessitated a concurrent ‘othering’ process through which the virtues of the region’s local peasant communities could be underlined. The stereotypical ‘Unspeakable Turk’ was in itself perhaps not sufficient, and thus the stereotypical ‘unscrupulous’ Jew was also incorporated into the mix. This was a time when prejudice against the Jewish ‘alien’ within British domestic culture was particularly intense and politically sensitive.<sup>122</sup> Yet this anti-Semitic thread within British representations of the Balkans was also part of a wider critique of ‘cosmopolitanism’, urban culture and commerce in British culture – hence the already-noted prejudice against ‘Levantine’ Greeks, as well as the ambivalent representation of the Ottoman Armenians. Liberal interaction with the Macedonian question seems to have encouraged various interlocking forms of racial and religious prejudice. This was the other side of the coin forged through the expression of international solidarity with the Christian peasantry.

British liberal engagement with Balkan peasant society is therefore significant as an illustration of both what was idealised and what was demonised through cross-cultural encounters in this period. But liberal interaction with the Balkans arguably did more just reflect latent tensions and prejudices within British society. This was a time when land reform was ‘a central topic of controversy and a crucial dividing line between the two parties’.<sup>123</sup> In view of the historically pro-Ottoman foreign policy of the Conservative party, support for the ‘oppressed peasants’ of Macedonia had an intrinsic appeal for liberals engaged in campaigns against ‘Tory landlords’ at home. It was, after all, a Tory government that had been responsible for the return of Macedonia to the despotic rule of the Sultan in 1878. Was support for land reform encouraged, at least indirectly, by the debates over the Macedonian question? It is certainly striking how many advocates of land reform policies (from

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<sup>122</sup> Glover, D., *Literature, Immigration and Diaspora in Fin de Siècle England: A Cultural History of the 1905 Aliens Act* (Cambridge, 2012).

<sup>123</sup> Packer, *Lloyd George, Liberalism and the Land*, p. 178.

smallholdings through to garden cities) were also members of the Balkan Committee. Examples include Masterman, Hammond, W.A. Moore, G.K. Chesterton, Anuerin Williams, Herbert Samuel and, perhaps most notably, Charles Buxton. The latter was Chairman of the Co-operative Smallholdings Society, worked on the Smallholdings Bill, and was Honorary Secretary to Lloyd George's Land Enquiry.<sup>124</sup> In addition, Buxton's sister-in-law, Eglantyne Jebb, who would later undertake relief work in Macedonia during the Balkan Wars, was at this time active in the Agricultural Organisation Society, editing its newsletter, the *Plough*.<sup>125</sup>

Land reform activists were united by their unease with urbanisation and, in particular, with its impact on the moral and physical lives and the citizenship of working-class communities. It is in the context of this political debate about the 'Condition of England' that the idealisation of the Balkan peasant is best understood.<sup>126</sup> Amid widespread fears of 'racial degeneration' and serious concerns about the 'artificial city civilisation' of the West, the village population of Macedonia showed many of the physical, moral and cultural qualities that were seen to have been so lacking at home.<sup>127</sup> Rolfe Scott-James thought the Macedonians were 'a people full of vital force which Europe can ill afford to lose'. He asked 'whether our almost sterile western civilisation should be content to lose the new stock of vital force which the Balkans can offer'.<sup>128</sup> The typical English city-dweller ('stunted, narrow-chested, easily-wearied; yet voluble, excitable, with little ballast, stamina or endurance') was not compared favourably with the Macedonian peasant, whose morality, martial qualities, virility, self-reliance, industriousness and healthy diet were all commonly noted.<sup>129</sup> Writing shortly after the Balkan Wars of 1912-13, George Young confirmed that 'a Bulgarian peasant

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<sup>124</sup> Buxton, C.R., 'Small Holdings (1) The English Bill', *Albany Review*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (July 1907), pp. 368-73.

<sup>125</sup> Mahood, L., *Feminism and Voluntary Action. Eglantyne Jebb and Save the Children, 1876-1928* (Basingstoke, 2009), p. 2; Mulley, C., *The Woman Who Saved the Children. A Biography of Eglantyne Jebb, Founder of Save the Children* (Oxford, 2009), p. 295.

<sup>126</sup> Masterman, *Condition of England*; Masterman C.F.G. et al., *To Colonise England: A Plea for Policy* (London, 1907).

<sup>127</sup> Masterman, *Condition of England*, pp. 75-76, p. 157.

<sup>128</sup> Scott-James, 'The Austrian Occupation of Macedonia', pp. 902-3.

<sup>129</sup> Masterman, 'Realities at Home', *Heart of the Empire*, p. 8; 'The Austrian Lead in the Balkans', *Nation*, 15<sup>th</sup> February 1908, p. 698; Buxton, N., *With the Bulgarian Staff* (London, 1913), p. 76; Brailsford, 'The Macedonian Peasantry', *Manchester Guardian*, 15<sup>th</sup> May 1903, p. 4; Suonpaa, M.P., 'British Perceptions of the Balkan Slavs: Professional and Popular Categorizations before 1914', PhD thesis (University of Hull, 2008), pp. 122-23, pp. 132-134; Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, p. 234.

is of more value than the proletarian soldier of a developed country such as ours, the latter being often a social surplus product'.<sup>130</sup>

This positive appraisal of the Balkans in comparison to Britain is particularly evident in the 'Epistle to the Bulgarians' that was written by Noel and Charles Buxton in the autumn of 1914. Bulgaria, they affirmed, had much to learn from yet also much to teach other nations, with its 'absence of luxury', its 'democracy', 'toleration' and 'domestic ideals' (including respect for the family, honourable treatment of women and commitment to female emancipation) all singled out for specific praise. Most notably, the Buxtons paid tribute to the fact that the majority of the population were peasant proprietors rather than 'mere wage earners', something that was held to account for the absence of poverty 'in the sense in which that term is used in the West'. Nor was such praise just the patronising regard of the materially privileged for a 'primitive' and 'picturesque' backwater. It rested instead, so the Buxtons maintained, in a genuine hope that Bulgaria 'as a young nation' would escape the 'evils – economic, moral and aesthetic – which are caused by luxury and the over-elaboration of life'.<sup>131</sup>

Political and humanitarian activism in support of the Balkan peoples thus created a discursive space for the expression of angst at the perceived consequences of industrialisation and urbanisation in British society. Such angst was laced with a nostalgic interpretation of English history. Although socio-economic change meant that the English countryside was in deep decline by the early-twentieth century, Edwardian liberals were nonetheless still able to romanticise 'peasants' country' overseas. In so doing, they constructed a popular version of Englishness in which Balkan peasants, like the Boers, were imagined as a 'people of the soil' akin to the 'stout yeomen' of the English past.<sup>132</sup> Debating the virtues of Balkan peasant life therefore had a very real political and cultural significance to activists such as the Buxtons.

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<sup>130</sup> 'A Diplomatist' [G. Young], *Nationalism and War in the Near East* (Oxford, 1915), p. 241.

<sup>131</sup> Noel Buxton and Charles Buxton, 'Epistle to the Bulgarians' (October 1914): Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951 c. 14/5).

<sup>132</sup> Readman, P., 'The Liberal Party and Patriotism in Early-Twentieth Century Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (2001), p. 298 and Readman, *Land and Nation in England*, p. 3. Peter Mandler rather overlooks the international context in his discussion of this issue in his article 'Against "Englishness": English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia, 1850-1940', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6<sup>th</sup> Series, Vol. 7 (1997), pp. 163-64.

The idealisation of the Balkan ‘village community’ was part of a transnational process through which British liberals constructed aspects of their own national identity and addressed a key domestic policy concern.

The wider relevance of the Macedonian question in this respect is indicated by its inclusion as a case study in the 1905 publication *England: A Nation*. In this collection of essays by radical and ‘new liberal’ writers, Macedonia was used as a ‘test case’ for the articulation of an anti-‘cosmopolitan’ foreign policy that was based on the principle that Britain ‘should defend as a whole and throughout the world, the institutions which are the growth of the soil against the institutions which are superimposed upon them’.<sup>133</sup> The other two international test cases chosen for the study were South Africa and Ireland, included alongside familiar domestic concerns such as ‘The English City’, ‘The English Countryside’, Education and Religion. The essays in *England: A Nation* thus exemplify the inter-connected nature of imperial, European and domestic questions in British politics at this time. Understanding this domestic context is surely critical to understanding the liberal imaginative geography of Macedonia. Yet, despite acknowledgement of the ‘primitive’ appeal of Balkan peasant cultures in this period, this has been largely overlooked in previous analysis of British attitudes towards the Balkans.

Positive accounts of Macedonian peasant culture and the Balkan ‘village community’ seem to invert the binary of balkanism entirely. Rather than imagining the Balkans negatively against the West, British liberals actually inscribed the region with characteristics that were felt to be conspicuous by their absence in the more materially advanced half of Europe, certainly in Britain at least. However, conversely, it has been argued that ‘the vilification of the Balkans reached its peak during the nationalist uprisings of the early twentieth century’.<sup>134</sup> Negative reactions to the Balkan socio-economic structure are also seen to have been prevalent at this time. James Evans’ asserts that the peasant democracy of Serbia ‘highlighted the perceived primitivism of Balkan societies lacking a refined class system’. Maria Todorova

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<sup>133</sup> Chesterton, G.K., ‘The Patriotic Idea’ and Oldershaw, L., ‘The Fact of the Matter’, in Oldershaw, *England: A Nation*, p. 13, pp. 257-58.

<sup>134</sup> Hammond, A., *British Literature and the Balkans: Themes and Contexts* (Amsterdam, 2010), p. 10.

argues that ‘democracy in those days was a singular threat to the cherished hierarchies of class internalised by the British’. For Andrew Hammond, Balkan travel writing articulated ‘the appalling outcome in a European context’ of relinquishing the established structures of British society.<sup>135</sup> The depiction of the peasant communities of Macedonia produced by British liberals at this time indicates that the British imaginative geography of the Balkans was more nuanced than this. The outrage directed at the regicides of Belgrade, for instance, was more than matched by the sympathy directed at the downtrodden Macedonian peasants. As has been more recently argued, ‘British people had a real interest in the Balkans that went beyond the horror stories’.<sup>136</sup>

Interestingly, similar points have been made with regard to the British engagement with the Persian question at this time. Mansour Bonakdarian contends that British radicals’ support for the Persian revolutionaries, and their opposition to Grey’s diplomacy in this matter, suggests that interaction with non-western regions was not always and inevitably characterised by orientalist discourse, or by an implicit desire to denigrate or assert power over an ‘Other’.<sup>137</sup> It is likewise difficult to make sweeping conclusions about the supposedly balkanist British imaginative construction of a region such as Macedonia, when forces of attraction and repulsion were often so intertwined. Maria Todorova cites Brailsford’s dictum about ‘there being little to choose between [the Balkan races] in terms of bloody-mindedness’ as indicative of the fact that he was ‘disgusted’ by the gap in moral standards he perceived between the West and the Balkans.<sup>138</sup> For Todorova, this was hypocritical of someone who, it is argued, wrote ‘without second thoughts about English performance in South Africa, the Indian continent, or Ireland.’<sup>139</sup> Yet Brailsford was in fact deeply critical of British imperialism in all three of these cases. Moreover, on the whole, his writing on Macedonia,

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<sup>135</sup> Evans, *Great Britain and the Creation of Yugoslavia: Negotiating Balkan Nationality and Identity* (London, 2008), p. 87; Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, p. 110; Hammond, *The Debated Lands*, p. 14.

<sup>136</sup> Suonpaa, ‘British Perceptions of the Balkan Slavs’, p. 246. Similar points are made in Michail, *British and the Balkans*, p. 8.

<sup>137</sup> See Bonakdarian, *Britain and the Constitutional Revolution*, p. xix, for an elucidation of this point.

<sup>138</sup> Brailsford, *Macedonia*, p. xi, cited in Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Updated Edition: Oxford, 2009), p. 118.

<sup>139</sup> Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, p. 118. Todorova’s argument is repeated by Davide Rodogno in *Against Massacre*, p. 269.

which was a crucial part of this broader political and emotional sympathy with subject races, was a closely reasoned indictment *against* the moral judgment of the Balkan peoples by the West. Brailsford refused to condemn IMRO for inciting violence, and he blamed the ‘backwardness’ of the region firmly on the impact of Ottoman misrule rather than on any intrinsic Balkan inferiority or indeed ‘bloody-mindedness’.<sup>140</sup> That is not to suggest that Brailsford’s understanding of Macedonia was any more ‘correct’ than one which was more explicitly balkanist, only to argue that assessments of his engagement with the region need to take into account the broader cultural and political context from which they emerged.

Again, the analogy with radical engagement with Persia at this time is instructive. Both the Persian question and the Macedonian question were conceived in radical-liberal eyes as campaigns against despotic and inherently illiberal states (Russia and Turkey); both occupied a significant place within the liberal political conscience; and in both cases positive and negative representations of the regions affected co-existed. Although orientalist depictions of backwardness, immaturity, violence and disorder were never absent from the imaginative geography of Persia, the constitutional revolution could equally be fitted into a positive liberal-nationalist framework, with its leaders compared to Garibaldi and Mazzini. As with the Balkans, sympathetic British activists displayed (at least initially) considerable faith in the capacity of Persia to join the ranks of the liberal, civilised and progressive societies of the West. It was similarly argued that misguided British foreign policy was callously obstructing this process from taking place.<sup>141</sup> No doubt, as with the British representation of Macedonia, this image of Persia might tell us rather more about British political culture and self-identity than it does about the ‘actual’ state of affairs in Persia itself. Nevertheless, the liberal engagement with the region seems to warn against the Saidian assumption that

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<sup>140</sup> Brailsford, *Macedonia*, p. 170, p. x.

<sup>141</sup> Bonakdarian, *Britain and the Constitutional Revolution*, p. xxviii, p. xli, p. xxxviii, p. 93; Ross, C.N.B., ‘Lord Curzon and E.G. Browne Confront the “Persian Question”’, *Historical Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (2009), pp. 385-411.

societies tend to ‘derive a sense of their identities negatively’ through contradistinction with ‘Others’.<sup>142</sup>

The imaginative geography of any region must depend to a great extent on who is doing the ‘imagining’, and why. The image of the Balkans presented by the Balkan Committee was certainly not the only one on offer at the time, although it consistently reflected the general liberal position. This may be contrasted, however, with the study of Macedonia produced by Allen Upward, a former colonial administrator. Upward wrote an account of the region in which the undercurrents of humanitarianism, moral outrage and anti-imperial radicalism found in writers like Nevinson, Buxton and Brailsford, are totally absent. *The East End of Europe* offers a pro-Greek repost to the Balkan Committee’s assertion that the Macedonian population were largely ‘Bulgarian’, but it is equally concerned with defending the Turks as Britain’s fellow imperial rulers. The Macedonian question in this study is not part of a reformist political conscience at all, but rather a case study in imperial administration. Upward writes: ‘I came prepared to see if [Macedonia] were less civilised than Nigeria, if the inhabitants were less loyal than the natives of Bengal, if the peasantry were more wretched than the Irish, and if the towns held more misery than the capital of the British empire.’<sup>143</sup> To take another example of an alternative to the liberal perspective, in contrast to Noel Buxton’s praise of the Balkan Christians for their historic ‘defence’ of Europe in the face of the Ottoman Empire, the Tory Prime Minister Balfour remarked in 1905 that it was the ‘mutual divisions and mutual crimes’ of these populations in the Middle Ages that were ‘responsible for the Turk ever being in Europe at all’.<sup>144</sup> Whilst Buxton’s image of the region was designed to promote the case for European intervention, Balfour’s words were

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<sup>142</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 54-55, cited in Hammond, *British Literature and the Balkans*, p. 13.

<sup>143</sup> Upward, *East End of Europe*, p. 111.

<sup>144</sup> Buxton, *Europe and the Turks*, p. 4; Balfour in reply to James Bryce House of Commons debate on the King’s Speech, 27<sup>th</sup> February 1905, *Hansard*, Vol. 141, cc. 1347-99 – accessed at: <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1905/feb/27/kings-speech-motion-for-an-address> (last accessed 7<sup>th</sup> April 2014).

grist to the mill of those (generally Tory) critics who argued that this would be unduly ‘sentimental’ and contrary to the national interest and the balance of power.<sup>145</sup>

If there were various British perspectives on the Macedonian question, this raises the question of how far the Balkan Committee and its supporters were able to influence and inform those in a position to dictate policy. So far, this chapter has explored the impact of the Macedonian question over liberal-internationalist and humanitarian politics and, above, over aspects of British domestic political culture and identity. The liberal imaginative geography produced as a result has been analysed, and the implications of this for our understanding of the intersection between ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ in Britain’s external relationships have been considered. The final sections of the chapter look at how all of this affected the Macedonian question as a form of dissent over foreign policy. What practical impact did the Balkan Committee have on the course of British diplomacy and on the shape of British public opinion? Furthermore, what can the answers to these questions tell us about the changing nature of foreign affairs debate in Edwardian Britain?

### **Organising dissent over foreign policy**

The Balkan Committee had no official standing. It relied on lobbying, rousing public opinion, and the impact of what it felt to be the objective and expert analysis of its members and supporters. Ironically, this liberal pressure group seems to have had more influence under the Conservative Foreign Secretary, Lord Lansdowne, than it did under his Liberal successor, Sir Edward Grey. Lansdowne, it has been claimed, ‘lived in terror of the Committee’ and at least gave the impression that he might be persuaded to press the Great Powers for further reform.<sup>146</sup> This led the Committee to arrange a string of conferences and public meetings, and

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<sup>145</sup> Earl Percy, House of Commons debate on ‘Macedonia’, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1908, *Hansard*, Vol. 184, cc. 1663-708 – accessed at: <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1908/feb/25/macedonia> (last accessed 7<sup>th</sup> April 2014).

<sup>146</sup> Robbins, K., ‘Public Opinion, the Press, and Pressure Groups’, in Hinsley (ed.), *Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 167; Samardjiev, B., ‘On the role of Public Opinion in Great Britain Regarding the Reforms in European Turkey and the Idea of Autonomy of Macedonia (1903-1908)’, *Balkan Studies (Études balkaniques)*, Issue 2 (2002), p. 18.



to encourage and provide speakers, publicity, and news from the region for many more throughout the country (it estimated that over 300 such meetings were held in the autumn of 1903 alone).<sup>147</sup> However, Grey was, initially at least, much more intractable. The *Nation* wrote that the new Foreign Secretary's conduct came 'as a shock to those of us who recall the historic tradition of Liberalism in the Near East'.<sup>148</sup>

Nevertheless, in February 1908, Grey unexpectedly outlined in parliament that he would propose a new reform scheme for Macedonia. This would aim to secure the appointment of a European Governor, irremovable except by the consent of the Great Powers, with complete control over the civil and military administration of the region. For the Balkan Committee this was a 'revelation'. It represented the solution to the Macedonian question it had been advocating since 1903, justifying the campaigns of the previous five years, and offering great hope for the future. Although ultimately never implemented (due to the impact of the July 1908 Young Turk Revolution), at the time Grey's proposal was a moment of triumph for the Committee. Its Annual Report for 1907 (published in 1908) thanked the Foreign Secretary for 'the great humanitarian effort' that he was seen to be leading.<sup>149</sup>

Does this indicate that the Balkan Committee had managed to arouse sufficient public support or assemble so convincing a set of arguments as to force a change in foreign policy? In fact, Grey's initiative can also be explained, in part at least, by the new diplomatic landscape created by the August 1907 Anglo-Russian agreement over Persia. The subsequent entente between the two states undoubtedly made it much easier for Britain, now sure of Russian support, to call for more extensive reforms in Macedonia.<sup>150</sup> On the other hand, it has been argued in a recent study that 'if it were not for the Committee's work, the 1900s would have been a forgotten decade for the Balkans', and that it 'could probably claim that it had achieved the formidable task of bringing about a continued and positive coverage of Balkan

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<sup>147</sup> Balkan Committee, *Third Annual Report of the Executive Committee*, p. 8.

<sup>148</sup> 'England's Duty to Macedonia', *Nation*, 20<sup>th</sup> July 1907, p. 753.

<sup>149</sup> Balkan Committee, *Fourth Annual Report*, p. 22, p. 27.

<sup>150</sup> Steiner, Z., 'Grey, Hardinge and the Foreign Office, 1906-1910', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (1967), p. 419.

affairs in the British public sphere'.<sup>151</sup> This tallies with verdicts offered at the time by the Committee's supporters.<sup>152</sup> When L.T. Hobhouse wrote to Noel Buxton in 1913 urging the Balkan Committee to take up the cause of the Ottoman Armenians, he praised the 'influence' that the Committee had exerted and the 'general efficiency' with which it had operated. It would be far more effective in drawing attention to the plight of the Armenians, Hobhouse reasoned, 'than any scratch crowd got together for the purposes'.<sup>153</sup> Buxton himself recalled that the Committee and its supporters 'secured public notice here and abroad in a measure out of all proportion to our diminutive numbers'.<sup>154</sup>

The Balkan Committee did have a significant presence in the networks of debate over foreign affairs in Edwardian Britain. A.G. Gardiner and J.L. Hammond were members of its Executive Committee, Brailsford reported from Macedonia for the *Manchester Guardian*, and both he and Nevinson contributed regularly to the *Speaker* and its successor the *Nation* at this time, as well as to the *Daily News*. Through liaison with sympathetic Peers and MPs (H.F.B. Lynch, G.P. Gooch and Charles Masterman were the most notable supporters in the Commons), the Committee ensured that the Macedonian question received regular parliamentary attention. It was confidently reported in the aftermath of the 1906 general election that over 150 MPs supported the Committee's policy of placing Macedonia under European control.<sup>155</sup> As Buxton recalled, 'we did not despair of utilizing any means whatever – e.g. social position, money, advertisement of the cause in any way, by any kind of newspaper, or any other agency'.<sup>156</sup>

The depth and scale of the agitation movement generated by the Balkan Committee should not be exaggerated, however. The Congo Reform Association (CRA), with its impressive network of auxiliary organisations, fundraisers and international publicists

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<sup>151</sup> Michail, *British and the Balkans*, p. 14, p. 15.

<sup>152</sup> For example: Young, *Nationalism and War in the Near East*, p. 103; Conwell-Evans, *Foreign Policy From a Back Bench 1904-1918* (London, 1932), p. 3; Anderson, *Noel Buxton*, p. 36.

<sup>153</sup> L.T. Hobhouse to Noel Buxton, 8<sup>th</sup> January 1913: Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951 c. 24/2).

<sup>154</sup> Draft of an *Autobiography*, section on 'Balkan Reform', p. 147: Noel Buxton Papers, (MS 951 c. 8/2).

<sup>155</sup> Balkan Committee, *Second Report of the Executive Committee* (London, 1906), p. 12.

<sup>156</sup> Draft letter from Noel Buxton to his wife, dated 20<sup>th</sup> December 1914 but never sent: Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951 c. 8/8).

(including Arthur Conan Doyle and Mark Twain), was the more redoubtable heir to the Bulgarian agitation as far as Sir Edward Grey was concerned.<sup>157</sup> This was the Foreign Secretary's reference point when he mused of the Congo reform movement that 'no external question for at least thirty years has moved the country so strongly and so vehemently as this'.<sup>158</sup> The impact of the shocking photographs screened in CRA lantern lectures across the country, purporting to show evidence of the brutality of King Leopold's colonial administration (including the severing of limbs and other acts of mutilation), can be compared to the impact of the initial written accounts in the British press of the 'Bulgarian Horrors' in 1876.

Yet, whilst it was not the most high profile campaign of its time, the Balkan Committee is nevertheless instructive as a case study in dissent over foreign policy. The Committee's importance in this respect lies less in its policy impact than in the insights that it offers into the changing nature of foreign affairs debate over the course of the period covered by this thesis. As noted in Chapter Two when discussing the Armenian agitation of the 1890s, by the end of the nineteenth century, it was rather less easy than had been the case in 1876 to fit protest against Ottoman rule over Christian populations into the framework of a 'Cross versus Crescent' moral crusade. A decade later, it would have been just as difficult to apply the emotional rhetoric of the Bulgarian agitation to the Macedonian question. However, the Balkan Committee's tried – not always successfully, as we shall see – to adopt a different approach. As an organisation formed, according to Bryce, 'for the sake of awakening and focusing public interest and of supplying accurate information and just views, to a too ignorant public', the Committee presented itself as a source of detached analysis rather than horror stories.<sup>159</sup> Deliberate sensationalism was notably absent from its publications on the Macedonian question. As H.N. Fieldhouse observes, this was an organisation that targeted

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<sup>157</sup> Grant, 'Christian Critics of Empire', pp. 46-48; Sliwinski, S., 'The Childhood of Human Rights: The Kodak on the Congo', *Journal of Visual Culture*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (2006), p. 347.

<sup>158</sup> Grey cited in Grant, 'Christian Critics of Empire', p. 53.

<sup>159</sup> Bryce to Buxton, 25<sup>th</sup> July 1903: Noel Buxton Papers, cited in Fieldhouse, 'Noel Buxton...', p. 182.

‘the politically established and the culturally articulate’.<sup>160</sup> In this respect, the Committee did enjoy some success. Arthur Evans, Robert Seton-Watson, Ronald Burrows and Arnold Toynbee were all associated with the Committee in this period, and all either were already or would shortly become recognised authorities on international questions. If, as Eugene Michail argues, Balkan questions occupied ‘a central place in the broader history of the rise of international experts on foreign affairs at the turn of the century’, this was in no small part reflective of the influence of the Balkan Committee.<sup>161</sup>

Rather than professing to speak as the voice of the people, supporters of the Balkan Committee presented themselves as an enlightened minority, battling against both public ignorance and an inherently unaccountable, amateurish, ‘secretive’, and misinformed Foreign Office. As Lynch complained in the Commons, for all the views and public debate on Macedonia that had been directed to the attention of Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary remained the ‘organ of a powerful bureaucracy, whose transactions were screened from the representatives of the people by an impenetrable veil of secrecy’.<sup>162</sup> Noel Buxton and Arthur Ponsonby’s experience of the difficulty of uncovering this ‘veil of secrecy’ with regard to the Macedonian question was surely a factor in their decision to form the Liberal Foreign Affairs Committee and campaign for more open diplomacy prior to the First World War. In this case, their approach mirrored that of the Balkan Committee in preferring to combat the ‘secrecy’ and obfuscation of official diplomacy through ‘top down’ parliamentary debate – what Buxton described as ‘a kind of compromise with democracy’. Foreign affairs ‘experts’ in parliament, rather than the general public or the ‘unbalanced enthusiast’, would keep discussion well informed and practical. It was nevertheless hoped that this would achieve a

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<sup>160</sup> Fieldhouse, ‘Noel Buxton...’, p. 186.

<sup>161</sup> Michail, *British and the Balkans*, p. 33, p. 38. Burrows was Professor of Greek at the universities of Cardiff and Manchester, then Principal of King’s College London; Seton-Watson, whose activities are covered in more detail in the following chapter, was co-founder of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies in London and Editor of the influential journal the *New Europe* during the First World War; Toynbee was Director of Studies at Chatham House between 1929 and 1956.

<sup>162</sup> *Hansard*, House of Commons Debates, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1906, Vol. 162, cc 1127-36 – accessed online at: <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1906/aug/01/class-ii-2> (last accessed 7th April 2014).

greater degree of accountability to public opinion than was possible through the ‘privileged caste system’ of the Foreign Office and Diplomatic Service.<sup>163</sup>

The cult of the expert in British culture and society – the growing belief that to be qualified to comment and advise on complex political or social questions, one had to lay claim to some kind of specialist knowledge or first-hand experience – is therefore intertwined with the history of the Balkan Committee. Similarly, the Congo Reform Association, although as we shall see associated with a far more populist and deliberately ‘sensational’ approach to dissent over foreign policy, shared Buxton’s faith in the value of detached ‘scientific’ analysis. E.D. Morel was influenced by the anthropological writings of Mary Kingsley far more than he was by the missionary zeal of his religious supporters, and he was always opposed to Congo reform meetings acquiring an overtly ‘religious flavour’, as he put it. Morel’s own analysis of the Congo question was initially centred on secular economic arguments – free trade and the value of peasant proprietorship – rather than on Christian humanitarianism or the exposure of ‘atrocities’.<sup>164</sup>

In the case of Macedonian question, commentators took care to mention the number of visits they had made to region, or the ‘objective’ evidence on which their arguments were based. When a group of English travellers familiar with Macedonia signed a letter challenging some of the assumptions made in a speech by the Prime Minister, Balfour, in 1903, it was seen to have ‘completely disposed his singular claim to pose as an expert on this question’.<sup>165</sup> Yet often travel to the region was in itself seen as an insufficient guarantor of expertise. In a review for the *Speaker*, Brailsford described Edith Durham as ‘an artist who went to Turkey in search of the picturesque’. Her analysis of the Macedonian question, with its ‘disturbing aesthetic prejudice’, could thus not compare with that of the ‘experts’ whose ‘careful volume

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<sup>163</sup> Buxton, N., ‘Diplomacy and Parliament’, *Nineteenth Century and After*, No. 422 (April 1912), p. 636, pp. 638-41.

<sup>164</sup> Porter, *Critics of Empire*, p. 242; Morel to John Holt, 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1904, cited in Porter, *Critics of Empire*, p. 269; Grant, ‘Christian Critics of Empire’, p. 36, p. 38; Morel to W.T. Stead, October 1902, cited in Louis, W.R., and Strengers, J. (eds.), *E.D. Morel’s History of the Congo Reform Movement* (Oxford, 1968), p. 112.

<sup>165</sup> ‘Macedonia’, *Speaker*, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1903, p. 5.

of essays' had been commissioned by the Balkan Committee for the 'serious purpose of awakening interest and enlightening sympathy' on the same topic.<sup>166</sup>

Durham's book was no more prejudiced than any other, but it seems it was easier to dismiss her work as lacking in scientific scrupulousness or seriousness of purpose than it was to engage with the sometimes salient criticisms it put forward concerning the Balkan Committee's own bias against the region's non-Christian population. Nevertheless, the fact that supporters of the Balkan Committee explicitly distinguished their approach from that of 'mere' travellers to the region is significant. Most historical analysis of balkanism has been based on travel writing, yet Buxton and Brailsford clearly felt at the time that alternative means of engaging with the region were both possible and necessary. Even if 'it was through travel writing that the Balkans was largely constructed in this period', this should not obscure the alternative images of the region constructed through other forms of writing.<sup>167</sup> As noted in the introduction to this thesis, analysis of imaginative geography needs to take account of genre (as well as context). Political debate about the Balkans had a different *raison d'être*, was targeted at a different audience, and was guided by different stylistic conventions than travel writing. It is clear, from the example of liberal political writing at least, that different representations of the Balkans were produced as a result.

Yet just how effective was this 'top down' expert-driven political approach? The regular reports and memos sent to the Foreign Secretary by the Balkan Committee were generally politely acknowledged. The Foreign Office appeared to accept that, at the very least, the Committee's supporters were sufficiently important to occasionally merit its staff's time and attention.<sup>168</sup> This was a long way from having any direct influence over foreign policy though. When G.P. Gooch sent a letter to Grey, signed by sixty-four MPs, calling for Macedonia to be placed under European control, he was assured that the government was 'fully alive to the necessity of still further improving the administration'. However, Grey's

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<sup>166</sup> Brailsford, 'Two Views of the Balkans', *Speaker*, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1905, p. 618.

<sup>167</sup> Hammond, 'Imagined Colonialism', p. 89.

<sup>168</sup> See, for example, the FO minute dated 9<sup>th</sup> June 1908, in response to a letter from the Balkan Committee to Sir Edward Grey dated 5<sup>th</sup> June 1908: The National Archives (FO 371/536, 19572).

response came with the crucial caveat that ‘progress in the direction must necessarily depend on the view taken by the other European Powers of the situation in Macedonia and the measures which it is necessary to adopt’.<sup>169</sup> In other words, humanitarian sympathy alone would not induce the British government to upset the ‘Concert of Europe’ by insisting on a reform scheme that lacked any wider international support. This was the position that Lansdowne had held from the start. In September 1903 he had written to O’Conor, British Ambassador in Constantinople, that, although the news from the region was ‘terrible’, Britain was ‘powerless unless we can move the other Powers, and in attempting this we must be careful not to overshoot the walls’.<sup>170</sup>

Its diplomatic clout may have been limited, but from the outset the Balkan Committee sought to create an international reputation for expertise on the region. This was pursued through links with likeminded organisations and liberal public figures in America, France and Italy, and in the Balkans itself through relief work and regular ‘fact-finding’ missions. In this aim the Committee had a degree of success, earning the perhaps misleading reputation for being a quasi-official international repository for news, analysis and intelligence. When Noel Buxton visited Constantinople after the Young Turk revolution, he was surprised to find that the Committee was seen in some quarters of the Turkish capital’s foreign press to represent the interests of the British Government, something he was forced to deny. Buxton explained this misapprehension by asserting that the kind of voluntary organisation of public opinion carried out by the Balkan Committee and similar organisations was something laudably common in England but ‘so hard for other nations to understand’.<sup>171</sup>

Although the Committee did not represent the British Government therefore, it did see itself as representing the best traditions of British political culture and informed public interest in foreign affairs. The implication was that ‘less liberal’ nations did not share these

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<sup>169</sup> Letter to Sir Edward Grey signed by 64 MPs, 14<sup>th</sup> March 1906, and FO response, 28<sup>th</sup> March 1906: The National Archives (FO 371/148, 18683)

<sup>170</sup> Lansdowne to O’Conor, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1903: Marquis of Lansdowne Papers, The National Archives (FO 800/143).

<sup>171</sup> Extract from *Levant Herald*, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1908, enclosed in a report for the FO on the Balkan Committee from Sir Gerald Lowther in Constantinople: Lowther to Grey, 17<sup>th</sup> December 1908: The National Archives (FO 371/561, 43986).

traditions. Looking back on this period towards the end of the First World War, Brailsford admitted, in a rather more resigned and cynical manner than Buxton, that British humanitarian campaigns over issues such as the slave trade, Congo misrule or Ottoman atrocities ‘puzzled our neighbours so deeply that they usually interpreted them as a disguise for some Machiavellian design’.<sup>172</sup> It was perhaps for this very reason that Grey took the time to warn Buxton against interfering too closely in the internal politics of the Young Turk regime.<sup>173</sup>

From the Foreign Office’s perspective, the Balkan Committee was more of an irritant than a reason to applaud the liberalism of British political culture. The Foreign Secretary had to contend with the complaints of (among others) Count Mensdorff, the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador to London, concerning the ‘mischief’ created by the activities of certain ‘Committees and independent private people’ over the situation in the Balkans.<sup>174</sup> O’Connor was another regular critic of the Committee in his dispatches to the Foreign Office. In February 1908 he complained to Grey that ‘the violence displayed by these writers and speakers and their determination not to recognise the good really done by the reforms in Macedonia and their practical justification of the methods of the bands must do more than anything to encourage these bands to persist in their campaign of murder’.<sup>175</sup> O’Connor’s reports seem to have won Noel Buxton few friends amongst the Foreign Office staff. One official accused the Balkan Committee’s Chairman of being ‘disingenuous’; Grey thought him ‘an intelligent ass’. To Asquith he was ‘an amiable nincompoop’.<sup>176</sup>

Unpopular though he may have been with those whose policy he was trying to inform, Buxton’s activism with regard to Macedonia clearly received a degree of recognition,

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<sup>172</sup> Brailsford, H.N., *A League of Nations* (London, 1917), p. 7.

<sup>173</sup> Dackombe, ‘Extra-Parliamentary Pressure Groups and Liberal Internationalism’, p. 217; Ünal, H., ‘Britain and Ottoman Domestic Politics: From the Young Turk Revolution to the Counter-Revolution, 1908-9’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (2001), p. 5.

<sup>174</sup> Sir Edward Grey to Sir E. Goschen, 29<sup>th</sup> May 1907, cited in Gooch and Temperley, *British Documents on the Origins of the War*, p. 202 (Document No. 157).

<sup>175</sup> O’Connor to Grey, 4<sup>th</sup> February 1908 (FO 371/581), cited in McCormick, ‘The Balkan Committee and Reform in Macedonia’, p. 156.

<sup>176</sup> Minute on Lowther to Grey, *op. cit.*: The National Archives (FO 371/561, 43986); Vogel, R., ‘Noel Buxton: The ‘Trouble-Maker’ and His Papers’, *Fontanus*, Issue 3 (1990), p. 138; Stavrianos, ‘The Balkan Committee’, *Queen’s Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (1941), p. 266; Minute by Asquith on H. Bax-Ironside to W. Tyrell, 8<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1912 (FO 800/43), cited in Robbins, ‘Public Opinion, the Press and Pressure Groups’, p. 86.



both domestic and international. The example of the Balkan Committee also illustrates the growing concern with expertise and with overcoming public ‘ignorance’ of foreign affairs at this time. This trend would become even more apparent during First World War. As the final section of this chapter will explore, however, there were some fundamental weaknesses with the Committee’s approach to dissent over foreign policy. This served to limit its effectiveness as a conduit for political protest. Uncovering these inherent weaknesses thus provides a more complete picture of the Committee’s ambivalent impact on British policy towards the Balkans. It also highlights certain key dilemmas faced by British liberals in their efforts to shape the contours of British political and public debate on international questions more generally, with regard to both the Balkans and other parts of the world.

### **‘Futile pinpricks’? A case study in humanitarian politics**

Although critical of the Foreign Office’s readiness to disregard moral arguments, supporters of the Balkan Committee did not, at this stage, develop their complaints into a more far-reaching critique of British foreign policy. For instance, Brailsford’s engagement with the Macedonian question was part of a general humanitarianism and sympathy for subject races, but not particularly indicative of the more radical attack on international capitalism, the arms trade and imperialism that would emerge in his later writings such as *The War of Steel and Gold* (1914). In this book Brailsford was actually rather critical of the Balkan Committee, seeing it as one of a host of foreign affairs committees representing tendencies ‘well-established within the governing class’. Such organisations, he wrote, were ‘influential just in so far as they can persuade or delude the Foreign Office that they speak for society and for capital’.<sup>177</sup>

Brailsford was a little disingenuous for failing to mention his own involvement in the very organisation he was criticising, but it is difficult to argue with his analysis. Public dissent over the Macedonian question was essentially a movement of the respectable and the well

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<sup>177</sup> Brailsford, H.N., *The War of Steel and Gold. A Study of the Armed Peace* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition – London, 1915 [1914]), p. 133.

connected – of Bishops, Peers and professors, of Liberal MPs whose dissatisfaction with Grey was inevitably muted by party loyalty. There was no desire in the agitation movement conducted by the Balkan Committee to radically overhaul the structures of British foreign policy, only to plead that concern for strategic interests should not overshadow all moral arguments. This led one contact of the Balkan Committee, H.F.B. Lynch, to ask Buxton in 1906 whether ‘the policy of futile pinpricks in relation to such questions as Armenia and Macedonia’ did more harm than good, by encouraging false hopes of reform when none would be forthcoming. Lynch felt that a more ‘serious’ attack on the government’s policy towards the Ottoman Empire was needed, and that this could never happen if, as he put it, ‘we ... merely play at the question, and go home to our comfortable dinner after an interview with the Foreign Office, feeling “Oh! What a good boy am I!”’<sup>178</sup>

This rather cautious approach reflects the Committee’s close ties with the social and political elite (as discussed at the beginning of this chapter). It also suggests a more fundamental shift in the social politics of dissent over foreign policy since the time of the Bulgarian agitation. Much of the Balkan Committee’s public support came from the very quarter that gave the 1876 agitation movement so much of its drive and radical edge: Nonconformist chapels and provincial Liberal associations. From 1903 to 1908 resolutions from public meetings in support of British diplomatic intervention over Macedonia poured in to the Foreign Office from these organisations.<sup>179</sup> Yet, unlike thirty years previously, this was no longer indicative of a particularly radical political conviction. Despite the Welsh Revival of 1904-5, and the fact that the 1906 election had returned a record number of Nonconformist MPs, the Nonconformist conscience of the Edwardian period posed less of a challenge to British foreign policy than had been the case a generation earlier.<sup>180</sup> The extensive campaigns against the 1902 Education Act suggest that Nonconformist moral outrage could still be

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<sup>178</sup> H.F.B. Lynch to Noel Buxton, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1906: Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951 c. 2/29).

<sup>179</sup> Copies of resolutions passed at numerous public meetings and forwarded to the Foreign Office in the autumn of 1907 and in the first quarter of 1908 can be found in The National Archives (FO 371/342; FO 371/536).

<sup>180</sup> Machin, I., ‘Disestablishment and Democracy, c.1840-1930’, in Biagini, *Citizenship and Community*, pp. 141-42; Koss, S., *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics* (London, 1975).

mobilised to political effect, but it was not necessarily the driving force of Edwardian radicalism.

Resolutions passed to assure the Foreign Secretary of, for example, ‘hearty support in such steps as the Government may think fit to take in order to discharge the grave responsibilities incurred by the country under the provisions of the Berlin Treaty’ would not have caused Foreign Office mandarins too many sleepless nights.<sup>181</sup> Grey would have been able to argue with some justification that, in the context of the many and varied threads running through British foreign policy at this time, he was already taking the steps he thought ‘fit to take’ over Macedonia. The moderate wording of the public resolutions passed regarding Macedonia was typical of the pronouncements made by the various pressure groups and committees of this period, but perhaps the respectability of this rather polite brand of ‘trouble-making’ was also a weakness.<sup>182</sup> In this respect, the relative indifference of the Balkan Committee to the support of trades unions and workers’ associations and its failure, or unwillingness, to tap further into Labour party networks, seems significant. If a real radical edge had been wanted, this was surely the quarter from which it might have been obtained. Yet, as discussed, this was not Noel and Charles Buxton’s style – not that it prevented both brothers from eventually joining the Labour party, as we shall see.

Noel Buxton, as even his political ally Arthur Ponsonby admitted, ‘was single minded, sincere, dependable, but somehow dull and uninspiring’, and perhaps temperamentally unsuited to the task of keeping public attention focused on news from what was still a fairly unfamiliar corner of the globe.<sup>183</sup> What consistent opposition there was to the government’s handling of the Macedonian question was well meaning but also rather vague. Aubrey Herbert recorded in his diary that in one speech to the Young Turks in Constantinople that was ‘full of the highest ideals’ Charles Buxton used the word “‘humanity” ... at least one

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<sup>181</sup> Copy of resolution passed at a Wesleyan Methodist meeting at Potton, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1907, and forwarded to the Foreign Office on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1907: The National Archives (FO 371/341, 3560).

<sup>182</sup> See for example the resolution passed by members of The Persia Committee on 7<sup>th</sup> November 1911, cited in Bonakdarian, ‘The Persia Committee and the Constitutional Revolution in Iran’, p. 196.

<sup>183</sup> Jones, A., *Arthur Ponsonby – The Politics of Life* (London, 1989), pp. 77-78.

sentence in three'.<sup>184</sup> Herbert later characterised the Balkan Committee as 'a lot of cursed old women who cannot even protest with any effectuality about massacres and who do take a ghoulish delight in mentioning them'.<sup>185</sup> The Congo reform movement, by comparison, benefited from the sharp, polemical writing style of E.D. Morel, as well as from his single-mindedness and determination to focus all his energies on this one cause. The Congo Reform Association's extensive network of local auxiliary organisations freed Morel to conserve his energies for the organisation of major national conferences and large-scale meetings. Its greater cross-party support meant that it was less reliant than both the Balkan and Persian Committees were on sympathetic radical MPs retaining their seats (something that became an issue for the latter two organisations after the 1910 general elections).<sup>186</sup>

A more fundamental issue exacerbated these problems of personality and leadership. Despite the rise of the expert in Edwardian Britain, and despite the concerted efforts of the Balkan Committee's leading figures to distinguish themselves from purely 'sentimental' solutions and sensational horror stories, the general public engagement with Macedonia was still based around a self-consciously Christian opposition to Turkish rule over co-religionists. The Balkan Committee may have included several experts on the Macedonian question, but its arguments were often clouded by a Christian bias that critics, both inside and outside the Foreign Office, argued lacked practical application and even-handedness. The studies of the Macedonian question by key Balkan Committee members such as Brailsford and the Buxtons show a far more nuanced and informed (though undoubtedly still prejudiced) understanding of the region than had been offered during the Bulgarian agitation. However, the leading presence of bishops and other clerics, as well as the support from Nonconformist associations, did little to appease criticism that the Balkan Committee was leading what was, at heart, another 'Cross versus Crescent' crusade. In a region with a substantial Muslim population,

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<sup>184</sup> Destani, B. and Tomes, J. (eds.), *Albania's Greatest Friend: Aubrey Herbert and the Making of Modern Albania: Diaries and Papers, 1904-1928* (London, 2011), p. 24.

<sup>185</sup> Destani and Tomes, *Albania's Greatest Friend*, p. 74.

<sup>186</sup> Louis and Strengers, *History of the Congo Reform Movement*, p. 209; Pavlakis, 'British Overseas Humanitarianism and the Congo Reform Campaign'; Grant, K., *A Civilised Savagery: Britain and the New Slavery in Africa, 1884-1926* (New York, 2005), p. 83. On the issue of declining Parliamentary support for foreign policy dissenters, see McLean, 'English Radicals, Russia, and the Fate of Persia 1907-1913', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 93, No. 367 (1978), p. 351.

appeals to ‘the common Christianity that is in us’, and reminders that Macedonia was ‘ground made sacred by the footsteps of St Paul’, were misjudged.<sup>187</sup>

Far more than had been the case in 1876, it was a question of some debate as to who were the main perpetrators and who were the victims of the atrocities being committed in the Balkans. Aubrey Herbert eventually resigned from the Balkan Committee in protest at its apparent indifference to crimes committed by Bulgarian (and other Christian) bands against the local Muslim and Albanian populations. In 1912, the London Muslim League went further and accused the Committee of trying ‘to strangle Islam in Europe’.<sup>188</sup> By 1913, even its former Secretary, W.A. Moore, had come to the conclusion that the Committee was unprepared to accept the ‘truth about the situation’ in Macedonia.<sup>189</sup> The most perceptive critique came from Edith Durham, who pointed out:

When a Moslem kills a Moslem it does not count; when a Christian kills a Moslem it is a righteous act; when a Christian kills a Christian it is an error of judgment better not talked about; it is only when a Moslem kills a Christian that we arrive at a full-blown “atrocit<sup>y</sup>”<sup>190</sup>

Such accusations undoubtedly rang true as far as the Foreign Office was concerned. Grey was informed by his intelligence that it was violence *between* the different Christian nationalities that by 1907 accounted for the majority of the murders and outrages committed in the region.<sup>191</sup>

By contrast, the need to convince the public of the logic of its moral arguments was not an issue faced by the campaign for reform in the Congo. This helps to explain its greater impact, as well as its more effective exploitation of Christian support. The Congo Reform Association made innovative use of the lantern lecture to maximise the emotional impact of its denunciation of King Leopold’s rule over the Congo Free State, and it has been recognised as ‘the first humanitarian movement to use atrocity photographs as a central tool’.<sup>192</sup> The

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<sup>187</sup> Balkan Committee, *Report of the Proceedings of the National Conference on the Macedonian Question held at Caxton Hall, Westminster on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> March 1904* (London, 1904), p. 9; Balkan Committee, *Macedonia in 1903*, p. 24.

<sup>188</sup> Fieldhouse, ‘Noel Buxton...’, p. 181; *Scotsman*, 14<sup>th</sup> October 1912, press-cutting in Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951, c. 24/2).

<sup>189</sup> Moore to E.G. Browne, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1913: Browne Papers, Box 11 (11/9/27).

<sup>190</sup> Durham, *Burden of the Balkans*, p. 4.

<sup>191</sup> *Times*, July 10<sup>th</sup> 1907, p. 4.

<sup>192</sup> Sliwinski, ‘Childhood of Human Rights’, p. 334.

success of this campaign owed much to the vast networks of religious support on which the movement could draw for publicity, speakers, venues, fundraising and so on. But equally important was the perception that the people of the Congo were victims of one particularly obnoxious system of rule that could and should be swiftly brought to an end. The lantern lectures were not about providing objective ‘evidence’ of crimes committed; they were melodramatic ‘phantasmagoric theatrical productions’ underpinned by a Christian evangelism that, as Sharon Sliwinski comments, ‘appealed to a mythic ideal of universal human dignity’.<sup>193</sup>

This morally charged atmosphere could not be recreated in the public debate around the Macedonian question, despite some efforts in this regard. In January 1904, for example, there were public screenings at Music Halls in London of bioscope films (taken in Macedonia by an enterprising British filmmaker) that showed footage of refugees and other victims of the unrest. According to one report, these films made it ‘impossible not to sympathise with the efforts of the insurgent bands who have taken up arms to throw off the yoke of Turkish tyranny’.<sup>194</sup> The Balkan Committee also published some relatively shocking photographs showing mutilated corpses and smouldering villages in the region. Crucially, however, it had to admit in the notes accompanying its photographs that the ‘Macedonian Massacres’ therein depicted were often the result of violence between rival Christian bands, rather than of ‘Turkish tyranny’ itself. The argument that ultimate responsibility for the anarchy and bloodshed lay with the Sultan, for deliberately encouraging violence as part of a policy of ‘divide and rule’, failed to convince.<sup>195</sup> When Eglantyne Jebb was struggling to raise money for the Macedonian Relief Fund in 1913, one of her correspondents remarked: ‘It’s very difficult to rouse people’s imaginations when they think the countries more or less barbarous. Surely barbarians always live on nothing, they think.’<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Grant, ‘Christian Critics of Empire’, p. 43, p. 30; Grant, *Civilised Savagery*, p. 42; Sliwinski, ‘Childhood of Human Rights’, p. 335, p. 348.

<sup>194</sup> ‘The London Music Halls: The Alhambra’, *The Era*, 9<sup>th</sup> January 1904, p. 21, cited in Kardjilov, ‘“Cinematograms” of a Balkan Conflict’, pp. 307.

<sup>195</sup> Balkan Committee, *Macedonian Massacres*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>196</sup> Margaret Keynes to Eglantyne Jebb, cited in Mulley, *The Woman Who Saved the Children*, p. 145.

The Congo Reform Association was thus far better equipped than the Balkan Committee to win mass public support, and far better placed to take up the mantle of earlier high-minded moral protest against international atrocities. The success of earlier protest movements that had campaigned around this kind of single issue ‘cause’, including perhaps the Bulgarian agitation and certainly the movement to abolish the slave trade, had depended heavily on the clarity and moral righteousness of the arguments employed.<sup>197</sup> E.D. Morel, following this pattern of protest, and backed by an extensive network of activists, was able to make a ‘one-sentence answer to a two-volume question’ as far as the issue of Congo reform was concerned.<sup>198</sup> It was almost impossible to present the Macedonian question (or the equally complicated Persian question for that matter) in such terms. Balkan Committee member J.A. Simon admitted as much in a speech to the Eighty Club when he remarked that, such were the complexities and complications of the racial, religious and linguistic divides in Macedonia, ‘only the student with special knowledge could hope to find his way through the labyrinth’.<sup>199</sup> Of course, in part, this says more about the restricted goals of humanitarian protest relating to colonial Africa at this time (and for many years to come): the Congo question could be presented in such ‘black and white’ terms because, unlike with both Macedonia and, to some extent, Persia, the question of self-government was never under discussion. There was no Congolese national movement to take account of, no ‘labyrinth’ of ‘racial’ diversity and conflict, or at least not one through which humanitarian reformers were expected to navigate.

In fact, the Balkan Committee’s claim to hold specialised knowledge with regard to Macedonia was undermined anyway by the partisan stance of many of its members. It never did enough to convince the Foreign Office that it spoke for Macedonia as a whole and not just for the ‘Bulgarian’ element, as critics such as Allen Upward, Edith Durham and Aubrey

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<sup>197</sup> Vogel, ‘Noel Buxton’, pp. 138-39.

<sup>198</sup> Porter, *Critics of Empire*, p. 288.

<sup>199</sup> *Daily News*, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1908, p. 5.

Herbert intimated.<sup>200</sup> It also failed to convince sceptics that the ‘liberation’ of the region would automatically bring peace and civil order, or that under European rule, as one statement claimed, the region’s ‘normal racial tendencies would assert themselves’ as if by some benign, passive process.<sup>201</sup> This stemmed from the fact that the liberal image of Macedonia was to a considerable extent still based around religion as much as ‘race’. A more complete focus on the ethnography of the region might have forced the supporters of the Balkan Committee to address fraught Macedonian national questions more thoroughly. This would have meant engaging more closely with, or at least attempting to answer the criticisms of, people like Durham, as well as giving greater consideration to the future of the native Muslim population. As it was, however, the Committee was unable, and perhaps unwilling, to totally move on from the rather black-and-white generalisations about ‘oppressed Christians’ under the rule of ‘the Turk’ that had characterised the Bulgarian agitation thirty years previously. Despite its repudiation of sensational horror stories and its determination to appeal to informed opinion rather than to sentiment, the Balkan Committee was never fully prepared to shake off this aspect of its Gladstonian heritage.

Nevertheless, to dismiss the Balkan Committee as ineffective would be misleading. Although it was primarily the changed diplomatic situation brought about by the entente with Russia that persuaded Grey to take the initiative concerning the Macedonian question in early 1908, the Balkan Committee could never be totally ignored. Their international prestige did not necessarily translate into policy influence, but the Buxton brothers certainly enjoyed a high standing in the Balkans. Their itineraries during trips to the region included meetings with Ambassadors, Foreign Ministers and Heads of State.<sup>202</sup> Furthermore, despite its limitations, prejudices and inconsistencies as a form of political activism, the Balkan Committee did provide an example for, and encourage the strengthening of, an important

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<sup>200</sup> See the report by Edith Durham, sent to the British Consulate in Scutari, Albania, and forwarded to the Foreign Office in November 1908, where she writes: ‘The Catholic villages were looted and partly burnt last spring and the people are in the most deplorable state but the Balkan Committee I suppose only helps Bulgars’: Durham to McGregor, 5<sup>th</sup> October 1908, received by FO on 7<sup>th</sup> November 1908: The National Archives (FO 371/560, file 38770).

<sup>201</sup> ‘A Macedonian Policy’: *Speaker*, 5<sup>th</sup> September 1903, p. 526.

<sup>202</sup> Vogel, ‘Noel Buxton’, p. 138.



network of dissent over foreign policy. It served as a model for the Persia Committee, for example, and members of both these organisations were at the forefront of the extensive radical campaign against Grey's foreign policy in 1911-12. Although ultimately unable to exert much direct influence over policy, this did at least ensure that foreign affairs received greater critical consideration, both inside and outside parliament, than had generally been the case previously.<sup>203</sup> As the next chapter of this thesis will explore, this experience would have consequences during the First World War, with the formation of the Union of Democratic Control. Dissent over foreign policy would also play a key contributory role in the widespread defection of many radicals from the Liberal party to the Labour party after 1914.<sup>204</sup>

Above all, the Balkan Committee highlights that engagement with international questions in Edwardian Britain involved the negotiation both of issues relating to the region(s) under discussion and of ongoing changes within British political culture. The Committee can be seen as a particularly illuminating example of the interplay between explicitly Christian moral high-mindedness and other more secular forms of protest and dissent. This is something that has previously been studied mainly (though not exclusively) in the context of imperial politics and humanitarianism, and it is certainly very much in evidence in E.D. Morel's engagement with the Congo question.<sup>205</sup> Morel embarked on the issue of Congo reform as a secular cause, before recognising the value and impact of the support of missionaries and Christian religious networks (although this remained a marriage of convenience that was already strained by 1908).<sup>206</sup> This chapter has shown that a similar

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<sup>203</sup> Bonakdarian, *Britain and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, p. 108; Murray, J.A., 'Foreign Policy Debated. Sir Edward Grey and His Critics, 1911-1912', in *Power, Public Opinion and Diplomacy. Essays in Honour of Eber Malcolm Carroll by His Former Students* (Durham, N. Carolina, 1959), p. 170.

<sup>204</sup> McNeilly, E., 'Labour and the Politics of Internationalism, 1906-1914', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (2009), pp. 450-51; Cline, C., *E.D. Morel 1873-1924: The Strategies of Protest* (Belfast, 1980), p. 98.

<sup>205</sup> Hughes, L., 'Dissident Scribes: Some Lesser-Known Activism In and Around Africa in the Early Twentieth Century', *Round Table*, Vol. 99, No. 408 (2010), pp. 249-65; Pavlakis, 'British Overseas Humanitarianism and the Congo Reform Campaign'; Sliwinski, 'Childhood of Human Rights'; Grant, *Civilised Savagery*. Helen McCarthy's study of the League of Nations Union addresses similar themes in the post-1918 interwar period: McCarthy, H., *The British People and the League of Nations. Democracy, Citizenship and Internationalism*, c. 1918-45 (Manchester, 2011).

<sup>206</sup> Grant, 'Christian Critics of Empire', p. 36, p. 39; Cline, *E.D. Morel*, p. 32; Louis and Strengers, *History of the Congo Reform Movement*, p. 204.

dynamic can be found within foreign policy debate concerning non-imperial regions, in this case the Balkans, where missionaries were far less active and evangelical philanthropy less directly involved. In the Balkan Committee, this combination of secular expertise and Christian conviction (and prejudice) was encapsulated perfectly in the character of its first President – James Bryce combined in-depth knowledge of the region with a deep Christian faith and a tendency towards ‘public moralism’. Bryce’s ‘wide experience’, ‘extraordinary knowledge’ and ‘deep moral purpose’, to cite from his obituary by Lord Cecil, were attributes that the Balkan Committee certainly valued.<sup>207</sup>

As noted, however, this ultimately encouraged a rather inconsistent form of ‘trouble making’. The Balkan Committee fell between two stools. It was never objective enough to earn the stamp of expertise it craved; yet, at the same time, it was weakened by a reluctance to appeal directly to the subjectivities of the British public. The Committee’s radicalism was dented by its reliance on members of the Edwardian establishment, and by its apparent reluctance to take its attacks on ‘secret diplomacy’ to their logical conclusion by pushing for a more comprehensive overhaul of the structures of British foreign politics – even if, as noted, this was a position that certain Committee members were to reach before long. The Balkan Committee is nevertheless instructive in helping to expose – through both its strengths and its weaknesses – the changing dynamics of political radicalism and dissent over foreign policy in Edwardian Britain. Its approach to the Macedonian question also illustrates the intersection between Europe and empire in British foreign affairs debate at this time.

## Conclusion

This chapter has shown the relevance of British liberal engagement with the Macedonian question in the first decade of the twentieth century to the history of foreign affairs debate and international activism at that time, as well as to aspects of British domestic politics, culture and identity. The situation in Macedonia was clearly felt to intersect with other liberal-

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<sup>207</sup> Lord Cecil’s obituary to Bryce, in Fisher, *Viscount Bryce*, and cited in Stapleton, J., *Political Intellectuals and Public Identities in Britain since 1850* (Manchester, 2001), p. 17.

internationalist and humanitarian causes and campaigns, pointing to considerable overlap and interaction between Continental and imperial affairs in British liberal politics. This theme will be taken up again in the final chapter of this thesis, but it is worth reiterating that early-twentieth century British debate around international questions was not divided into the two neat and distinct categories of 'foreign' and 'imperial' policy.

Of course there were always points of distinction between approaches to different international causes. The victims of human rights abuses in different parts of the globe were never 'imagined' in the same way, and neither were their oppressors. Davide Rodogno is correct to point out that, whereas humanitarian activism regarding the Balkans (or Armenia) tended to depict the Ottoman Empire as essentially 'barbaric' and inherently 'uncivilised', the campaigns against forced labour in sub-Saharan Africa were directed against the colonial administrations of what were nonetheless felt to be 'civilised' European states. It was the *abuse* of imperial rule, rather than imperialism itself, that was being challenged in the latter case. This was not a political culture characterised by just one 'cosmopolitan' approach to international humanitarianism and political activism.<sup>208</sup> Nevertheless, it was a political culture in which Macedonia could be viewed as the 'Congo of Europe', in which the political memory of the Bulgarian agitation was as relevant to activism concerning Africa as it was to events in the Balkans, and in which the same overarching 'civilisational perspective' was applied to the activities of Balkan peasants, Persian revolutionaries and Young Turks.

Yet the specificities of the Macedonian question should not be overlooked either. Overlapping memberships, shared cultural memories and traditions of activism, common political sympathies, and a general transcending humanitarianism did not mean that all international questions were portrayed in the same way. British activists did not consider all their 'pet nations' and 'good causes' as equally passive victims of hostile forces beyond their control. There were different discourses of humanitarian sympathy, which in turn related in different ways to domestic politics and culture. Debate about Macedonia encouraged, and was itself an important part of, the liberal cult of the peasant and the 'village community'. This

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<sup>208</sup> Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, pp. 176-77, p. 181.

intersected, in turn, with political sparring over land reform at home. The Macedonian question also seems to have intersected with the substantial preoccupation in liberal political culture at this time with the ‘Condition of England’ and with what it meant to be ‘English’ in an increasingly cosmopolitan, industrialised and urban society.

This particular form of political engagement produced a far more nuanced image of the Balkans than is implied by the concept of balkanism. British liberals looked rather enviously at certain aspects of Balkan peasant culture, as it was perceived at the time, in contrast to the social dislocation and cultural and moral degeneration that was widely feared to be underway at home. Nonetheless, idealisation of the Balkan peasant failed to mask growing unease at the nature and implications of Balkan nationalism. It also failed to prevent liberal-internationalist and humanitarian interaction with the Balkans from acquiring a distinctly paternalistic tone. Equally, expressions of sympathy for Balkan Christians seem to have gone hand in hand with the negative stereotyping of a variety of ‘Others’ to whom Macedonia was also home, and a misleading representation of the region was produced as a result. As argued above, this was one factor in the Balkan Committee’s struggle to win more substantial political or diplomatic influence.

At the start of the second decade of the twentieth century, a decade that would see Europe thrown into disarray by world war and revolution, British engagement with the Balkans had thus assumed a rather different hue to that displayed at the time of the Bulgarian agitation. There were certainly elements of continuity – not least the influence of the ‘civilisational perspective’ and the continued failure of so-called Balkan experts to come to terms with the region’s nationalism and diversity. Yet, whilst the Balkans remained as much a liberal cause as it had been to Gladstone’s generation, there were new challenges and dilemmas to face, and new cultural and political contexts to be negotiated. The following chapter will consider how British-Balkan interaction evolved through a decade of conflict and unrest that would have a transformative impact on the histories of both British liberalism and the Balkan Peninsula.

## **“What then is the duty of the civilised world in the Balkans?” Liberalism, nationalism and war, 1912-1918**

In 1915 a hastily penned footnote was inserted ahead of publication into one passage of George Young's *Nationalism and War in the Near East*, a generally positive account of the Balkans originally written after the Second Balkan War two years earlier. Young, a former diplomat and a member of the Balkan Committee, admitted that 'the relapse of Europe into conditions of the bitterest and most barbarous warfare' made his defence of the Balkan states' relative levels of morality and culture 'sadly unnecessary'.<sup>1</sup> This encapsulates the disillusionment with western progress and civilisation brought about by the First World War, particularly amongst liberals who either opposed Britain's participation in the conflict or supported the idea of a negotiated peace. It also underlines the relevance of what had once been 'Balkan questions' to doubts, dilemmas and dangers now faced by Europe as a whole. Another commentator remarked in 1915 that 'the recent history of the Near East is a kind of cautionary tale for European statesmen' who, even assuming the war could be brought to a satisfactory close in the near future, would have to deal on a far greater scale than they could have imagined with questions of nationalism, minorities, population transfers and refugees.<sup>2</sup> Such issues, perhaps already familiar to members of the Balkan Committee, became increasingly prominent within British political debate as the war dragged on. In 1913 the Carnegie Commission – an international body set up to promote world peace (it wasn't to prove the best timing) by the American philanthropist who gave it its name – had launched an *Inquiry into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkans Wars*. The Inquiry's report asked what the duty of the 'civilised world' was in a region that had become synonymous with

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<sup>1</sup> Young, *Nationalism and War in the Near East*, p. 379 (note).

<sup>2</sup> Review in *War and Peace* of Noel and Charles Buxton's *The War and the Balkans* (1915): press-cutting (not dated) in Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951 c. 24/4).

nationalism and, perhaps above all, 'atrocities'.<sup>3</sup> Four years later, many British liberals were asking themselves whether that 'civilised world' could still be held to even exist.

This chapter covers the six tumultuous years from 1912 to 1918, undoubtedly a key period in the history of British attitudes towards the Balkans. The Balkan Wars of 1912-13 are widely seen to have 'crystallised' the negative western image of the region as a nationalistic, violent and unstable 'powder keg'.<sup>4</sup> Yet following the subsequent outbreak of the First World War in 1914 'gallant Serbia' was swiftly re-imagined as a noble and heroic British ally in the common struggle against 'Teuton and Turk'. Whether the region was viewed positively or negatively, however, in this period British public and political debate dealt with the Balkans with a more widespread sense of urgency and importance than had been the case in the previous decade. As discussed, the Macedonian question had occupied a significant place within the specific worldview of British liberalism, but the Balkan Wars and the First World War brought the region dramatically increased coverage within British society as a whole. Propagandists and publicists, military strategists and armchair diplomats, international affairs experts and female suffragists, League of Nations activists and Tory imperialists, all jostled with old hands like Noel and Charles Buxton for the attention of the British press, public and political elite with regard to Balkan matters. This heightened engagement with the Balkans was played out against, and indeed contributed to, a wider process of discussion and debate regarding nationalism, internationalism and empire. Moreover, events in the Balkans continued to be related as much to domestic social and cultural concerns as to the wider international situation. This chapter thus covers not just the place of the Balkans in foreign and imperial politics, but also its contribution to that 'strange death of liberal England' for which this period has become renowned.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *The Other Balkan Wars. A 1913 Carnegie Endowment Inquiry in Retrospect, with a New Introduction and Reflections on the Present Conflict* by George F. Kennan (Washington, 1993), p. 273.

<sup>4</sup> Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Dangerfield, G., *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (London, 1966).

## From 'Autonomy' to 'Anatomy': the Balkan Wars

By January 1912 the Balkan Committee had publically come to the conclusion that the Young Turk regime could no longer count on its support.<sup>6</sup> Yet it remained less clear what alternatives might be supported instead. Events were to prove otherwise, but few British observers at this time imagined that the Balkan states would be able to launch a war against the Ottoman Empire (let alone bring it to a successful conclusion) without creating a general European conflagration. This assumption encouraged most commentators to continue to promote 'Home Rule' under some form of international control as the ideal objective for European diplomacy as far as the Ottoman Balkans was concerned. In April 1912 the Balkan Committee member and *Times* correspondent J.D. Bouchier believed that the Macedonian question presented only two solutions – 'autonomy or anatomy'. As anatomy (i.e. partition of the region between the independent Balkan states) could only be achieved through war, which also risked providing a pretext for Austrian or Russian expansion into the peninsula, Bouchier maintained that his preference was for autonomy.<sup>7</sup> There was considerable reluctance to encourage a military resolution of the Macedonian question. Encapsulating the dilemmas faced by many British liberals when considering this point, Norman Angell remarked that 'polite and good-natured people think it rude to say "Balkans" if a Pacifist be present'.<sup>8</sup>

Not only was a conflict feared as a likely harbinger of yet more Balkan massacres and atrocities, it was also, virtually all commentators agreed, most definitely not in the British national or wider European interest. Similar attitudes were displayed at this time towards national questions in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, many of which, of course, had a direct bearing on the Balkans. R.W. Seton-Watson would soon become perhaps the leading British advocate of the rights of the subject nationalities of the Habsburgs. Yet at this stage he advanced the concept of an autonomous South Slav unit *within* a reconfigured Austro-Hungarian Empire rather than an independent 'Yugoslavia'. A union of the Habsburg South

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<sup>6</sup> Manifesto of the Balkan Committee, dated January 1912: Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951 c. 24/2).

<sup>7</sup> Bouchier to J.A. Symonds, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1912 (copy): Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951 c. 1/12).

<sup>8</sup> Angell, N., *Peace Theories and the Balkan War* (London, 1912), p. 26.

Slavs with independent Serbia and Montenegro, Seton-Watson argued in October 1909, 'could only be attained by means of a general European war ... which it is to the pressing interest of everyone, especially my own country Great Britain, to avoid'.<sup>9</sup> As we shall see, such qualms about the prospect of a European war would not prevent his enthusiastic embrace of 'la victoire integrale' after July 1914, when his analysis of British interests underwent rapid change.

The First Balkan War, as the 'Balkan League' of Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro and Serbia formed a victorious military alliance against the Ottoman Empire, was therefore something of a shock to the liberal conscience. Might liberal political values actually be spread to the Balkans more effectively by war than by international monitoring and control? Eglantyne Jebb accepted that the war presented grave humanitarian challenges. Yet she admitted: 'I cannot help thinking that in the first place we should recognise our debt of gratitude to the small nations which have done what we couldn't do, – put a stop to the suffering which we had watched for so many years with aching hearts.'<sup>10</sup> However, whilst the victories of the Balkan League certainly produced an outpouring of British support and praise for the Balkan states, one did not have to scratch far below the surface of these reactions to detect an underlying sense of unease and concern. The Balkan Committee's support for the Balkan League in October 1912 was tempered by thoughts of the 'terrors' that would now 'fall upon the women and children of the unfortunate peasantry' in a region embittered by 'the hatred of centuries'.<sup>11</sup>

Disinterested humanitarian concerns were intermingled with a determination to bring the war to close before it could have any impact on the fragile European balance of power. The fear was that, if Russia and Austria-Hungary were to get drawn in to the Balkan maelstrom, a major European crisis would be precipitated. Reflecting widespread concerns about the 'quality of Balkan statesmanship' in a delicate diplomatic environment, Henry

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<sup>9</sup> Seton-Watson to Ivo Lupis-Vukić, 17<sup>th</sup> October 1909, in *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs: Correspondence 1906-1941* (Volume I: 1906-1918, London/Zagreb, 1976), p. 51 (letter no. 7).

<sup>10</sup> Typescript of an untitled and undated speech or article by Jebb on her experiences in Macedonia (p. 9): Papers of Eglantyne Jebb, Women's Library, LSE Library London (7EJB/C/04).

<sup>11</sup> Manifesto of the Balkan Committee, 12<sup>th</sup> October 1912: Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951 c. 24/2).



Nevinson pointed with alarm to the potential consequences of the Serbian demand for Albanian territory: 'Are all the most intellectual people in the world to fly at each other's throats because a semi-civilised little country like Serbia asserts a claim to this miserable gateway on the Adriatic, chiefly for the exportation of her hogs?'<sup>12</sup> L.T. Hobhouse informed Buxton that, whilst he was not necessarily 'unsympathetic' towards the Balkan peoples, he was nevertheless 'put off by some of their methods'. In a *Nation* article tinged with regret at the now confirmed failure of the Young Turk 'Asiatic risorgimento', Hobhouse worried about the 'moral effects' of the war on Europe at large. Was it not, he cautioned, a triumph for militarism and the 'armed peace'?<sup>13</sup> As will be explored further below, for liberals, conflict in the Balkans was evidently feared both as a serious challenge for European diplomacy and as an implicit threat to some of the core values of liberal society.

When peace was restored, it served only to focus attention on the region's 'tangled' national questions. Expert opinion divided over the wisdom of granting self-government to Albania, and the 'almost inextricable intermixture of the races hitherto subject to Turkey' made defining the new frontiers, both there and in Macedonia, appear hopelessly complicated.<sup>14</sup> Brailsford felt that 'there never was in all the annals of our Continent a problem which taxed statesmanship, not to mention the Christian virtues, so suddenly and in so many complicated ways as the partition of the territory which the Balkan allies have won'.<sup>15</sup> Before this problem could be answered in the diplomatic and public sphere, it was answered on the field of battle. Bulgaria fought and lost a short and swift but fractious Second Balkan War against her erstwhile allies (who were now joined by Romania and even the old

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<sup>12</sup> 'No More War in the Balkans!', *Nation*, 31<sup>st</sup> May 1913, p. 334; Nevinson, H., 'The Danger Point of Europe. Serbia's Menace to Albania', *Manchester Guardian*, 27<sup>th</sup> November 1912, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Hobhouse, L.T., 'The Moral Effects of the War', *Nation*, 9<sup>th</sup> November 1912, pp. 253-54; Hobhouse to Buxton, 8<sup>th</sup> January 1913: Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951 c. 24/2).

<sup>14</sup> Nevinson, H.W., 'The Causes of Victory and the Spoils', *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 103 (January/June 1913), p. 8; Seton-Watson, R.W., 'New Phases of the Balkan Question', *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 104 (July/December 1913), p. 327; Nevinson, H., 'The Danger Point of Europe'; Brailsford, H.N., 'A Nation to be Made. The Case for Albanian Autonomy', *Manchester Guardian*, 29<sup>th</sup> November 1912, p. 9. On the Albanian Question in particular, see Guy, N., 'Fixing the Frontiers? Ethnography, Power Politics and the Delimitation of Albania, 1912-1914', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2005), pp. 27-49.

<sup>15</sup> Brailsford, H.N., 'Present Day Problems: How to Divide Macedonia', *Nation*, 26<sup>th</sup> April 1913, p. 140.

enemy Turkey). Liberal despair at this turn of events manifested itself in increased criticism of the Balkan states, increased coverage of the 'race conflict' and religious divisions that were now seen to typify the region, and increased condemnation of the supposedly violent and barbaric instincts of the Balkan peoples.

This turn of events seriously shook the Balkan Committee's basic liberal-universalist belief that, when liberated from the worst restraints of Ottoman rule, the region would automatically be set on a path to progress and civilisation. However, if the Balkan peoples had failed to live up to these expectations, it was suggested that they were perhaps just not yet 'ready' to join the civilised communities of the West. Writing in 1918 Aubrey Herbert complained that 'since the last war the public lump the Balkan peoples together indiscriminately as a filthy set of butchers, and care not who is the victim or the murderer in the shambles'.<sup>16</sup> This was exactly the kind of reaction that George Young had feared at the time, when he urged against 'turning away in disappointment' from a region where, he insisted, 'Western interest and Western investment are both urgently required and would be amply rewarded'.<sup>17</sup>

Young was not the only commentator at the time to worry that public perceptions of the Balkans risked becoming overly and unfairly negative. Whilst accepting that the 'extreme barbarity' of certain aspects of the Balkan Wars reflected the specific historical circumstances of the region, the Carnegie Commission's report took pains to remind its readers that the breakdown of civil life and the eruption of acts of violence between neighbours were 'everywhere the essence of war'.<sup>18</sup> Eglantyne Jebb voiced similar sentiments when she returned from Macedonia in 1913. Jebb remarked that activists such as herself who had displayed sympathy for the Balkan cause were now increasingly confronted with the question: 'What do you think of "your Balkans" now?' Her own conclusion was not to put the blame for the atrocities and crushed hopes of the Second Balkan War on what she nevertheless still

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<sup>16</sup> Herbert, A., 'Albania's Claim on England', *Near East*, 24<sup>th</sup> October 1918, cited in Destani and Tomes, *Albania's Greatest Friend*, p. 156.

<sup>17</sup> Young, *Nationalism and War in the Near East*, p. xvi, p. 379.

<sup>18</sup> 'The Report of the Carnegie Commission' in *The Other Balkan Wars*, p. 108.

called the 'Barbarous Balkans'. Instead, Jebb blamed the nature of war itself, and drew attention to the West's own failure to prevent the conflict from occurring in the first place. 'And I cannot cast the first stone: I cannot say, "Events have now convinced me that all the Balkan races are equally barbarous"', Jebb remarked of what was clearly a formative experience in her life prior to the Save the Children Fund. 'Primitive, yes; barbarous ... it is in war itself, not in its victims, that the barbarity lies.'<sup>19</sup>

The Balkan Wars, in this analysis, highlighted the threat to civilisation posed by the volatile combination of war and nationalism in general, rather than some intrinsic Balkan predisposition towards violence. This point has been largely overlooked in studies of British attitudes towards the region. It is therefore important to note that, even at a time of enhanced negative representation of the Balkans, influential voices were raised in defence and mitigation of the inhabitants of the region. The fact that the groundswell of British liberal sympathy for the Balkan peoples had not been exhausted (despite being severely tested) would help to facilitate the emergence of positive pro-Serb publicity during the First World War, as discussed below.

Nevertheless, although not all writers blamed the horrors of the conflict on the Balkans *per se*, the Balkan Wars were widely acknowledged to have confirmed that the region was in particular need of international control and guidance. To an even greater extent than before, events in the Balkans became, as the activities of the Carnegie Commission indicated, something for the world to report, study, monitor and explain. Such benevolent interference was to be distinguished from the 'meddling' of Austro-Hungarian and Russian diplomacy, of course, which British critics continued to denounce and blame for much of the unrest in the region.<sup>20</sup> In this way, the Balkan Wars promoted campaigns for greater public debate of international questions and for 'an immediate inoculation of the governments of

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<sup>19</sup> Typescript of Jebb's report on 'The Barbarous Balkans' (1913), p. 1, p. 8: Eglantyne Jebb Papers (7EJB/A/03/11). Also cited in Mulley, C., *The Woman Who Saved the Children*, p. 167.

<sup>20</sup> See for example: Angell, *Peace Theories and the Balkan War*, p. 11, p. 69; Young, *Nationalism and War in the Near East*, p. xxii; 'Where Was the Concert?', *Nation*, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1913, p. 517-18; 'The Dismemberment of Bulgaria', *Nation*, 19<sup>th</sup> July 1913, pp. 593-94; 'Public Opinion and the Balkan Peace', *Nation*, 9<sup>th</sup> August 1913, pp. 700-01.

Europe with a strong dose of democratic diplomacy’ – thereby prefiguring the stance that would shortly be adopted by many radicals during the First World War.<sup>21</sup> ‘Democratic diplomacy’ did not mean treating all nations equally and in the same way, however. It was assumed that the Great Powers had the right to interfere in the internal policies of their less powerful Balkan neighbours, ostensibly to monitor the treatment of minorities and investigate reports of atrocities. As discussed below, this combination of paternalism and humanitarianism would continue to characterise liberal-internationalist engagement with ‘less developed’ or ‘less civilised’ parts of the world during the First World War and into the post-war period.

The stresses and strains imposed on the liberal conscience by these events in the Balkans in 1912-13 need to be kept in mind when considering the responses of British liberalism to the outbreak of the First World War, as another ‘Balkan crisis’ unexpectedly but inexorably turned into an international catastrophe. Although the majority of British liberals were finally convinced of the justice of Sir Edward Grey’s decision to take Britain into the war, they did not come to this view out of sympathy for Serbia. The *Daily News*, which eventually supported the war, insisted initially that ‘we must not have our western civilisation drowned in a sea of blood to wash out a Serbian conspiracy’.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, British radicals were particularly ill disposed towards Serbian nationalism and highly critical of Serbia’s rule in its newly won Macedonian territory.<sup>23</sup> If there was a specifically anti-Serb thrust to the radical outrage, however, the Sarajevo murder was nevertheless depicted as being symptomatic of a broader problem – what Arnold Toynbee would later call ‘the curse of the Balkans’.<sup>24</sup> The *New Age* reacted furiously to Rolfe Scott-James’ criticism of Habsburg rule in Bosnia-

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<sup>21</sup> Young, *Nationalism and War in the Near East*, p. 386.

<sup>22</sup> *Daily News*, 30<sup>th</sup> July 1914, cited in Watt, D.C., ‘British Reactions to the Assassination at Sarajevo’, *European Studies Review*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1971), p. 246.

<sup>23</sup> Examples include: Nevinson, H., ‘A Hideous Crime’, *Manchester Guardian*, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1914; Brailsford, H.N., ‘Servian Nationalism. Dreams of Expansion Westwards’, *Manchester Guardian*, 28<sup>th</sup> July 1914; Brailsford, H.N., ‘The Empire of the East’, *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 106 (July/December 1914), p. 339, p. 341.

<sup>24</sup> Toynbee, A., ‘Greece’, in Forbes, N. et. al., *The Balkans: A History of Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, Rumania* (Oxford, 1915), p. 247, cited in Michail, E., ‘Western Attitudes to War in the Balkans and the Shifting Meanings of Violence, 1912-91’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (2012), p. 228.

Herzegovina, insisting that ‘the half-savage denizens of the Balkans have still a long hill to climb before they reach the cultural level of the Habsburg dominions’.<sup>25</sup> This balkanist prejudice was enhanced by radical contempt for Russia and fears of Pan-Slavism. Norman Angell conjured up nightmarish visions of ‘a Slavonic federation of say 200,000,000 autocratically governed subjects with a very rudimentary civilisation’.<sup>26</sup> This was a reversal of the situation in 1876, when sympathy for the Balkan Christians had often been encouraged by faith in the progress of the internal reforms being implemented by their main Slavonic ally. Early-twentieth century British radicals had no such faith in Russia; opposition to Tsarist despotism was a central feature of reformist political culture in this period.<sup>27</sup> Anger at the repression of the reforms fleetingly promised by the 1905 revolution, and hostility to the Anglo-Russian alliance, remained strong in 1914.

This also indicates a change in the liberal ‘civilisational perspective’ since the Bulgarian agitation. Russia’s Christianity, which as noted many of Gladstone’s supporters in 1876 had assumed brought with it ‘the germs of a progressive improvement’, was no longer likely to override liberal opposition to her autocratic system of government.<sup>28</sup> We have seen that Edwardian liberals felt able to support constitutional reform movements in the non-Christian states of Turkey and Persia. A reformist and apparently secular Muslim parliamentary regime was perhaps held to have a greater contribution to make to civilisation than a Christian despotism. Certainly, unlike in 1876, there was no sense in 1914 of a shared Christian faith uniting Britain with its Russian ally. If anything, Orthodox Christianity was seen as being part of the problem – a negative force contributing to the backwardness not just of Russia itself but of other Orthodox regions too.

Thus, for all the anger directed at the Balkans specifically, the region actually seems to have merged in some radical minds into a more broadly orientalised ‘Eastern Europe’. As the *Daily News* argued:

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<sup>25</sup> *New Age*, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1914, cited in Morris, *Radicalism Against War*, pp. 220-21.

<sup>26</sup> *Nation*, 8<sup>th</sup> August 1914, p. 701; *Times*, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1914. Both cited in Watt, ‘British Reactions...’, p. 247.

<sup>27</sup> Grant, ‘British Suffragettes...’, pp. 124-25, p. 127.

<sup>28</sup> Cannon Liddon cited in Johnston, *Life and Letters*, p. 222.

What we are being asked to do is to strike a blow at Western culture in order to bolster up the infinitely lower culture of Eastern Europe ... The triumph of the Triple Alliance [i.e. the Entente and Russia] would be primarily a triumph of the debased civilisation of Eastern Europe, and of a Church which has done less than any other for cultural freedom and enlightenment.<sup>29</sup>

Somewhat paradoxically then, as well as highlighting the strong undercurrents of balkanism within the British representation of the Balkans, radical reactions to the outbreak of the First World War also indicate that the region was losing some of its geographical and cultural specificity. As explored further below, this process would continue through the years of the war and its aftermath. That said, the Balkan Peninsula would emerge from the conflict not as part of the feared Russia-dominated Pan-Slav behemoth but as part of a very different looking 'New Europe'.

Nobody foresaw this dramatic geopolitical transformation in 1914. Nor did British liberals ever have any absolute commitment to any one form of state organisation as far as the Balkans was concerned. The map of the peninsula that was drawn by the Treaty of Bucharest after the Second Balkan War (10<sup>th</sup> August 1913) represented a region of 'would be nation-states', but this was by no means the 'Plan A' of British supporters of the Balkan peoples. As initial reactions to the Young Turk Revolution reveal, and as is also made clear by R.W. Seton-Watson's preference for a restructuring of Austria-Hungary at this time, there was considerable support for the concept of autonomous units within *multinational* state structures. Back in 1888, in a *Contemporary Review* article on 'Nationality', the future Balkan Committee President John Westlake had argued that the 'sentiment of nationality' did not, by itself, necessitate the creation of an independent nation-state. 'It may be the symptom of a new growth, entitled to take its place among the groups and arrangements of political order', Westlake had argued, but it might on the contrary be 'a vain clinging to a past which has fallen in the natural course of things, allying itself, as vain retrospects usually do, with

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<sup>29</sup> *Daily News*, 31<sup>st</sup> July 1914, cited in Hanak, H., *Great Britain and Austria-Hungary During the First World War: A Study in the Formation of Public Opinion* (London, 1962), pp. 38-39.

what is worst in the present and least promising for the future'.<sup>30</sup> The general assessment of Serb nationalism in July 1914 would have probably placed it in Westlake's latter category.

British liberal responses to the various questions posed by the Balkans during this period were thus not guided by any intrinsic support for the principle of national self-determination or for the concept of the nation-state. Rather, it tended to come down to an analysis of the relative encouragement any one solution might give to those two liberal shibboleths 'Progress' and 'Civilisation'. As this thesis has argued, this was one area of continuity in British liberal interaction with the Balkans since 1876. The First World War would certainly encourage considerable debate around this issue, as discussed below. In the immediate pre-war period, however, there was no assumption that an explicitly nationalist solution to 'Balkan tangle' should be promoted. This is made particularly clear by considering British liberal responses to the proposed creation of an Albanian state in the aftermath of the First Balkan War.

Those who opposed the creation of an independent Albania tended to assert that the Albanians were, in Seton-Watson's words, 'an alien and barbarous race' who therefore had no right to self-government, and certainly not when such rights were denied to the 'far more civilised subjects' of Austria-Hungary.<sup>31</sup> By contrast, supporters of the Albanians, such as Brailsford and Nevinson, insisted that, with 'a sufficient leavening of a relatively civilised population', an Albanian state would bring 'progress and prosperity' to the region.<sup>32</sup> Brailsford was convinced that in southern Albania there was a sufficient 'foundation of civilisation on which a national structure might be raised', albeit, it was assumed, under the rule of a foreign prince or, perhaps, as an initial Austrian or Italian protectorate.<sup>33</sup> Brailsford opposed awarding 'Albanian' territory to Montenegro or Serbia on the grounds that this was not merited by any cultural superiority or political maturity on the part of the Montenegrins or Serbs. On the other hand, he had more sympathy for the claims of Greece to Epirus because,

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<sup>30</sup> Westlake, J. 'Nationality', *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 53 (February 1888), p. 241.

<sup>31</sup> Seton-Watson, 'New Phases of the Balkan Question', p. 327.

<sup>32</sup> Brailsford, H.N., 'Albania and Armenia', *Nation*, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1913, p. 376.

<sup>33</sup> Brailsford, H.N., 'The Autonomy of Albania', *Nation*, 28<sup>th</sup> December 1912, pp. 566-67.

as he put it, the Greeks ‘have always possessed the magic and prestige of a superior culture’. He also felt that Greeks, unlike Serbs, knew ‘how to assimilate an alien and less advanced race’.<sup>34</sup> Albania’s prospective size and borders was thus essentially a question of civilisation rather than ethnography. Brailsford may have supported Albanian independence, but he could hardly be considered an Albanian nationalist.

Support for the rule of Austria-Hungary in Bosnia and Herzegovina was another example of this ‘civilisational perspective’ within the British liberal approach to national questions. Prior to the summer of 1914, in certain quarters at least, the Austrian administration was seen as a ‘civilising mission’ that, so the *Economist* wrote, had successfully ‘settled and pacified this one-time wild and barbarous country’.<sup>35</sup> R.W. Seton-Watson’s concern with the Austro-Hungarian Empire stemmed at first from the belief that its illiberal and reactionary nationalities policy was undermining the foundations of its true mission as a modernising and civilising force. Seton-Watson supported Habsburg expansion into the Balkans, but believed that this needed to be part of a restructuring that would achieve South Slav unity *within* the Empire. The alternative of a ‘Greater Serbia’ was something that he insisted in 1911 would mean ‘the triumph of Eastern over Western culture, and would be a fatal blow to progress and modern development throughout the Balkans’.<sup>36</sup> There was, indeed, considerable regret in British liberal circles that the assassination of Franz Ferdinand had robbed the Empire of someone supposedly sympathetic towards the Habsburg Slavs and in favour of the restructuring of the state on a ‘trialist’ (that is to say, equal German-Magyar-Slav) basis. The *Nation* even pondered whether, had the Archduke lived, the Habsburg Empire might have eventually been expanded to include within its borders both Serbia and Macedonia.<sup>37</sup>

In this intellectual context, the coming of the First World War seemed to many to undermine all hopes for the spread of western civilisation in the Balkans. Few British liberals

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<sup>34</sup> Brailsford, ‘Albania and the Allies’, p. 617-18.

<sup>35</sup> *Economist*, 16<sup>th</sup> January 1909, cited in Weinroth, ‘Radicalism and Nationalism’, p. 225; Evans, *Great Britain and the Creation of Yugoslavia*, p. 70.

<sup>36</sup> Seton-Watson, *The Southern Slav Question*, cited in Miller, ‘R.W. Seton-Watson and Serbia’, p. 62.

<sup>37</sup> *Nation*, 4<sup>th</sup> July 1914, p. 513.



saw it as an opportunity to realise grand plans to redraw the map of Europe according to the principle of nationality, not least because nobody imagined that the war would lead to the collapse of both the Russian and Habsburg Empires. On the contrary, it was assumed that one or other of the two states would emerge strengthened territorially from the conflict, and so be in a position to dominate the Balkans. Faced with this prospect, Brailsford was not alone in stating his preference for 'the more tolerant and more cultured German influence' represented by Austria-Hungary. It was exasperating, of course, that such a choice had to be made. Brailsford could 'only marvel at the illusions, and curse the fatality which have made us belligerents in this struggle'.<sup>38</sup> To indulge in a counterfactual argument, there seems little reason to suppose that 'Yugoslavism' would have won much support in Britain if the unexpected duration of the First World War had not made the collapse of Austria-Hungary both possible and, to certain commentators, desirable. What mattered in 1914 was whether 'progress' and 'civilisation' were in the ascendancy within a state, not the specific political or national structure on which that state was based. This was entirely consistent with the approach to self-government in the Balkans developed by British liberalism since the time of the Bulgarian agitation.

However, it is clear that, on the outbreak of the First World War, earlier liberal-universalist assumptions about the inevitable 'progress' of the Balkans once the region had been 'liberated' from Ottoman rule had come to appear rather problematic. By 1914 there was impetus within British liberal foreign affairs debate towards finding new ways of dealing with the kind of problems presented by the Balkan 'boiling pot'. Indeed, events in the Balkans (rather like events closer to home in Ireland) raised fundamental questions about the British liberal approach to one of the most important issues of the time – the relationship between nationalism, self-government and empire. Analysis of the Balkan Wars was thus not confined to the issue of what these events might prove about the nature of Balkan nationalism or the peninsula's standing in the hierarchy of European progress and civilisation. War in the Balkans also strengthened calls for democratic control of British and other Great Power

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<sup>38</sup> Brailsford, H.N., 'The Empire of the East', p. 343.

foreign policy, for international arbitration of inter-state disputes, for more effective networks and organisations to maintain peace and control or monitor ‘danger zones’, and for a reduction in armaments. These and other issues that would come to the fore during the First World War – for example, the rights of small nations, the ‘principle of nationality’, the sanctity of international treaties – were already encountered and vigorously debated in the immediate pre-war context of the Balkans.

At the same time, during the immediate pre-war years, liberals who had hitherto shown only passing interest in the region, and who represented alternative traditions of British foreign policy analysis, began to engage publicly with Balkan questions more frequently.<sup>39</sup> As is explored further below, commentators such as R.W. Seton-Watson, though committed to reformist politics and sharing a general Gladstonian sympathy for the rights of small nations, approached this from more of a liberal imperialist than a radical perspective. This approach encompassed greater sensitivity to the demands of the ‘balance of power’ in foreign affairs, and a far more assertive defence of British imperial mission.<sup>40</sup> As H.C.G. Matthew noted, support for social reform and education projects (in Seton-Watson’s case, the Workers’ Educational Association) provided an area of common ground for liberal imperialists and radicals.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, during the First World War, differing conceptions of the relationship between British foreign and imperial policy would cause considerable friction. It was already clear in 1914 that the likes of the Buxtons could no longer claim to represent the sole voice of the British liberal conscience as far as the Balkans was concerned. British-Balkan interaction would become increasingly fractured in the years ahead, as discussed below. However, there were also aspects of the wartime image of the Balkans that drew on the pre-war framework of British liberal engagement with the region. As the next section of this chapter shows, this is particularly noticeable in the way that Britain’s new Balkan ally, Serbia, was represented.

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<sup>39</sup> Seton-Watson and Seton-Watson, *Making of a New Europe*, p. 89; Seton-Watson, ‘New Phases of the Balkan Question’, pp. 322-330; Trevelyan, G.M., ‘A Holiday Among the Serbians’, *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 104 (July/December 1913), pp. 153-63.

<sup>40</sup> Miller, ‘R.W. Seton-Watson and Serbia’, p. 60.

<sup>41</sup> Matthew, H.C.G., *The Liberal Imperialists. The ideas and politics of a post-Gladstonian elite* (Oxford, 1973), p. 236.

## **‘Heroic Serbia’, Ivan Meštrović and the imaginative geography of the Balkans at war**

Prior to 1914 Serbia was perhaps best known in Britain as the ‘nation of regicides’ following the 1903 coup in Belgrade that overthrew the Obrenović dynasty. This was an act of political violence to which the British press at the time had reacted with a notable degree of fury and indignation (which even in July 1914 Seton-Watson felt had been ‘not unnatural’).<sup>42</sup> This changed during the war with the emergence of a positive image of Serbia as Britain’s gallant ally and martyr to the Allied cause. British propaganda had an obvious reason to portray Serbia positively, and the unexpected resistance of the Serbian armies to the initial Austro-Hungarian attacks in 1914 provided plenty of good copy for patriotic newspaper editors. Yet it is striking that British wartime images of Serbia stressed not just her martial qualities but also the democratic traditions of her society, her peasant folk-culture, and the pastoral beauty and majesty of her landscape. It was the peasant, rather than the semi-educated, semi-westernised town-dweller, who was seen to represent the true ‘Spirit of the Serb’.<sup>43</sup> The same tropes, in other words, that had characterised the positive aspects of the liberal image of the Balkans in the pre-war period (as discussed in the previous chapter), which had focused primarily on Bulgaria and Macedonia, were now employed to bolster British propaganda regarding Serbia.

The Serbs were depicted as ‘a healthy, virile people’.<sup>44</sup> Their society, whilst lacking the façade of western political culture, was ‘built on that most solid of foundations, a democratic peasant people owning its own land and irrevocably rooted in the soil’.<sup>45</sup> Arnold Toynbee urged his readers to look beyond ‘the intrigues of a handful of politicians at Belgrade’ and focus instead on the ‘industry of the peasants, who have been purging from the

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<sup>42</sup> Miller, ‘R.W. Seton-Watson and Serbia’, p. 60; Seton-Watson, R.W., ‘The Archduke Francis Ferdinand’, *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 106 (July/December 1914), p. 173.

<sup>43</sup> Seton-Watson, R.W., *The Spirit of the Serb* (London, 1915), p. 13, p. 16, p. 19

<sup>44</sup> Wilson, F., *In the Margins of Chaos. Recollections of Relief Work In and Between Three Wars* (London, 1944), p. 28.

<sup>45</sup> Seton-Watson, R.W., *The Balkans, Italy and the Adriatic* (London, 1915), p. 10.

Morava-basin the traces of Turkish misrule'.<sup>46</sup> G.M. Trevelyan contrasted the weakness of Serbia's political class with the 'independent manliness of the free yeomen' of the countryside.<sup>47</sup> Serbia was portrayed as the home of a gallant citizen-army of peasant freeholders making untold sacrifices for western civilisation and security. As Seton-Watson argued: 'Amidst the threatened collapse of western civilisation, it is well to remember the essential distinction between the primitive and the savage. The Balkan nations have grown to manhood while we slept, and must henceforth be regarded as equals in the European commonwealth.'<sup>48</sup> Even the Buxtons – not the Serbs' greatest British supporters – stressed the virtues of 'their peasant life, founded upon the soil and on a wide distribution of property'.<sup>49</sup>

For all the radical hostility to Serbian nationalism, for all the widespread distaste for the perceived corruption and backwardness of Serbia's politics, and for all the unease generated by the war, there was clearly a groundswell of British liberal sympathy for the Serb people based on an entrenched belief in the inherent qualities of peasant culture and proprietorship, local self-government and the 'village community'. These positive images were not created from scratch. Pro-Serb publicists and propagandists drew on a reservoir of British support for the Balkan peoples that had been built up through the longer history of liberal engagement with the region. This point has been underplayed in historical analysis of British wartime representations of the Serbs. For example, Andrew Hammond presents the wartime lionisation of Serbia as a 'shift from nineteenth-century denigration' and 'an important break in the discourse of balkanism'.<sup>50</sup> As the previous chapters have argued, such denigration had in fact only ever been one side of a rather more nuanced British representation of the Balkans.

Nowhere did this positive image of the Balkans, and of the South Slavs in particular, manifest itself more vividly than in the promotion by British intellectuals and publicists of the

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<sup>46</sup> Toynbee, A., *Nationality and the War* (London: Dent and Sons, 1915), p. 193.

<sup>47</sup> Trevelyan, G.M., 'Austria-Hungary and Serbia', *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 97, No. 582 (June 1915), p. 983.

<sup>48</sup> Seton-Watson writing in Seton-Watson, R.W., Dover Wilson, J., Zimmern, A.E. and Greenwood, A. (eds.), *The War and Democracy* (London, 1914), p. 282.

<sup>49</sup> Buxton, N. and Buxton C., *The War and the Balkans* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition: London, 1915), p. 46.

<sup>50</sup> Hammond, A., 'Memoirs of Conflict: British Women Travellers in the Balkans', *Studies in Travel Writing*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2010), p. 63, p. 65.

sculptor Ivan Meštrović. Drawing heavily on themes from South Slav (particularly Serb) folklore and history, Meštrović, who was of Dalmatian peasant stock, had become a publicist for the Yugoslav idea before the war. Notably, he had chosen to exhibit in the Serbian rather than Austro-Hungarian pavilion at the International Exhibition in Rome in 1911, at which he was awarded the principal prize for sculpture. Meštrović became a key associate of the Yugoslav Committee, a group of nationalist émigrés from the Habsburg Empire that was established in Rome at the start of the war before settling in London to promote the Yugoslav cause, eagerly assisted by Seton-Watson, Arthur Evans and others. A successful one-man show was held from June to September 1915 at the Victoria and Albert Museum (*see Figure 3*) – an event, one review claimed, that ‘sufficed to draw all London to South Kensington’.<sup>51</sup> The exhibition’s artistic merits were widely discussed in the British press, including in the columns of the *Times* and *Daily News*, as well as in the *New Statesmen*, *Westminster Gazette* and *Spectator*.<sup>52</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* later reported that the show had ‘created a public interest in sculpture of which there is no parallel in our time’.<sup>53</sup>

‘The Serbian Rodin’ enjoyed considerable international renown, but the exhibition was as much a piece of wartime propaganda as it was an artistic event. The artist was presented as the embodiment of South Slav culture and unity. This image clashed with the tendency of the Serbian authorities, with whom Meštrović also had close links, to present the work in a narrower Serb (as opposed to Yugoslav) light. Following the close of the exhibition, Serbia offered one of the works on display to the country ‘in recognition of London’s appreciation of their famous peasant-sculptor’.<sup>54</sup> For the Serbs, this was a political initiative designed to raise support for Britain’s wartime ally rather than an attempt to promote the

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<sup>51</sup> ‘The Art of Ivan Meštrović: The One-Man Show at a Museum’, *London Illustrated News*, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1915, p. 51.

<sup>52</sup> Collins, E.H.R., ‘Meštrović in England’, in Ćurčin, M. (ed.), *Ivan Meštrović – A Monograph* (London, 1919), pp. 48-54.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Meštrović Exhibition’, *Manchester Guardian*, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1917, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup> ‘Serbia’s Splendid Gift to London: “The Torso of a Hero”’. By Ivan Meštrović – Called “The Serbian Rodin”’, *London Illustrated News*, 4<sup>th</sup> September 1915, p. 289.

concept of a Yugoslav state (to which the Serbian Government was not at that stage committed).<sup>55</sup>

Nevertheless, with Seton-Watson ‘encouraging a mild personality cult around Meštrović’, the exhibition and accompanying publicity did much to promote the positive British image of the Balkans discussed above – that of a region whose ‘truly primitive’ yet noble culture, and whose rural traditions and way of life, had an important contribution to make towards western civilisation.<sup>56</sup> Echoing Toynbee’s comments cited above, the *Manchester Guardian* regretted that the ‘nation of regicides’ had not always reflected the nobility of ‘her’ great artist: ‘If the rulers of Serbia at all times saw their country and its destiny from the elevation of a Meštrović, the task of establishing Serbia in her rightful place among the nations and at her allotted labour in civilisation would have been easier for some blunders avoided.’<sup>57</sup>

Meštrović’s striking sculptures dealing with aspects of the Serbian historical memory of defeat, resistance and suffering under Turkish rule (see *Figure 4*) were celebrated for their contemporary resonance. It was argued that the exhibition had come ‘at a time when our national mood is attuned to the heroic presence of these strange and tragic figures’.<sup>58</sup> Yet the work was also felt to have intrinsic value as the manifestation of a deep rooted, intensive and sincere peasant culture. Meštrović himself was idealised as the living representative of an historic national spirit, a true ‘son of the soil’, whose artistic talent had carried him, in the words of one article, ‘from Shepherd Boy to Prophet and Leader’.<sup>59</sup> One supporter interpreted the work on display at the V&A as being ‘inspired by a single fury of national memories and aspirations that is without parallel in modern art’. Far from the conditions of life in the Balkans acting as a barrier to the refinement of culture and art, it was instead argued that

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<sup>55</sup> See Clegg, E., ‘Meštrović, England and the Great War’, *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 144, No. 1197 (2002), pp. 740-51.

<sup>56</sup> Clegg, ‘Meštrović, England and the Great War’, p. 741, p. 746.

<sup>57</sup> ‘The Soul of a People’, *Manchester Guardian*, 6<sup>th</sup> October 1915, p. 6.

<sup>58</sup> ‘J.B.’ [James Bone], ‘The Temple of Kosovo’, *Spectator*, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1915, pp. 9-10.

<sup>59</sup> ‘From Shepherd Boy to Prophet and Leader’, *Daily Chronicle*, 19<sup>th</sup> June 1915, cited in Clegg, ‘Meštrović, England and the Great War’, p. 746.

‘Meštrović had the fortune to spend his early days in a land throbbing with an unwearied poetry, and touching on every side the primitive realities of suffering and life and death’.<sup>60</sup>

This was an essential Romanticisation of all those aspects of Balkan backwardness and instability that had made the region such a cause for liberal-internationalist and humanitarian concern. Nevertheless, it recast the ‘burden of the Balkans’ in a positive light, as a source of inspiration and renewal for the more materially privileged West. In a striking counterpoint to the concept of balkanism, in these assessments of Meštrović’s art it is the West, with its ‘artificial’ and materialistic culture, its ‘light-minded, cosmopolitan art public’, and its ‘unhealthy spiritual and economical conditions’, which is seen as being inferior to the Balkans.<sup>61</sup> One supporter urged England to welcome Meštrović with ‘humility’ – ‘all our wealth and all our Dreadnoughts have not given us a greater artist than this’, it was claimed.<sup>62</sup> For Seton-Watson, it was only in the Balkans that art that was so ‘in touch with the great, simple realities underlying the lives of mankind’ could have been produced.<sup>63</sup> When the art critic (and former clergyman) Selwyn Image, in a letter to the *Times*, condemned one sculpture as ‘morally offensive’, a member of the organising committee replied curtly that ‘five centuries of Turkish tyranny do not produce drawing-room emotions’.<sup>64</sup>

As with the wider idealisation of ‘heroic Serbia’, the British public’s identification with Meštrović thus clearly drew on the deeper tradition of sympathy for peasant societies, folklore and ‘primitive’ cultures that had permeated British attitudes towards the Balkans before the war. This further reflects the liberal ‘cult of Nature’ and unease with certain aspects of British modernity and city-life. As we shall see, this was one of several ways in which British representations of the Balkans during the First World War continued to intersect with areas of deep underlying concern within domestic politics and society.

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<sup>60</sup> Bone, J., ‘Meštrović and His Art’, in *Exhibition of the Works of Ivan Meštrović* (London, 1915).

<sup>61</sup> Seton-Watson, R.W., *Exhibition of Serbo-Croatian Artists: Meštrović, Racki, Rosandić – Programme Notes* (London, 1917), p. 2, p. 3.

<sup>62</sup> ‘Meštrović’, *Manchester Guardian*, 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1915, p. 10.

<sup>63</sup> Seton-Watson, *Exhibition of Serbo-Croatian Artists*, p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> ‘M. Meštrović’s Work’, *Times*, 30<sup>th</sup> June 1915, p. 9, and 1<sup>st</sup> July, p. 9.

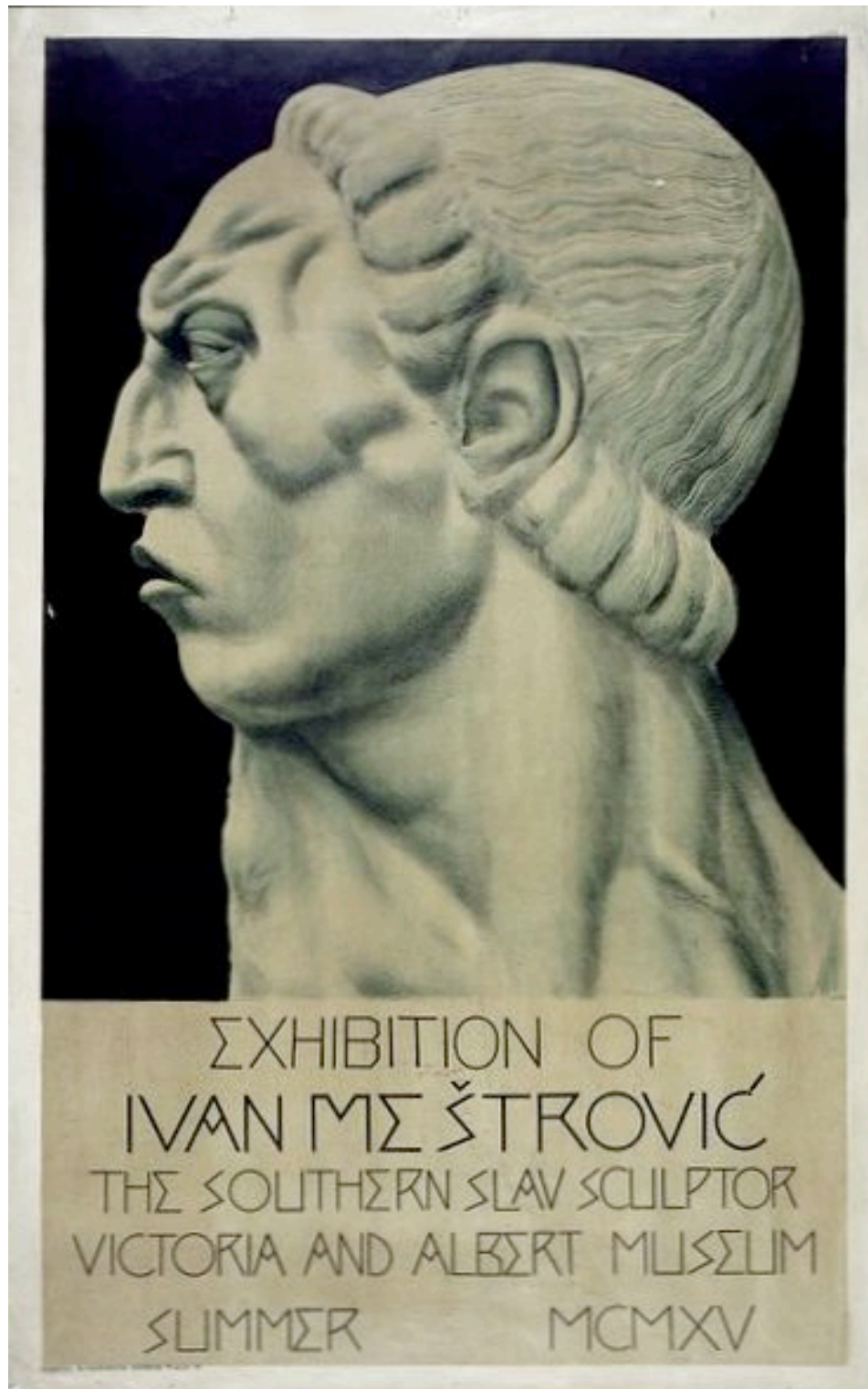


Fig. 3: 'Ivan Meštrović the Southern Slav Sculptor'. Lithograph poster advertising the exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum (1915). From: *Summary Catalogue of British Posters to 1988 in the Victoria & Albert Museum in the Department of Design, Prints & Drawing* (Emmett Publishing, 1990), p. 129. Accessed at: <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O832432/ivan-mestrovic-the-southern-slav-poster-mestrovic-ivan/> (last accessed 10th April 2014).



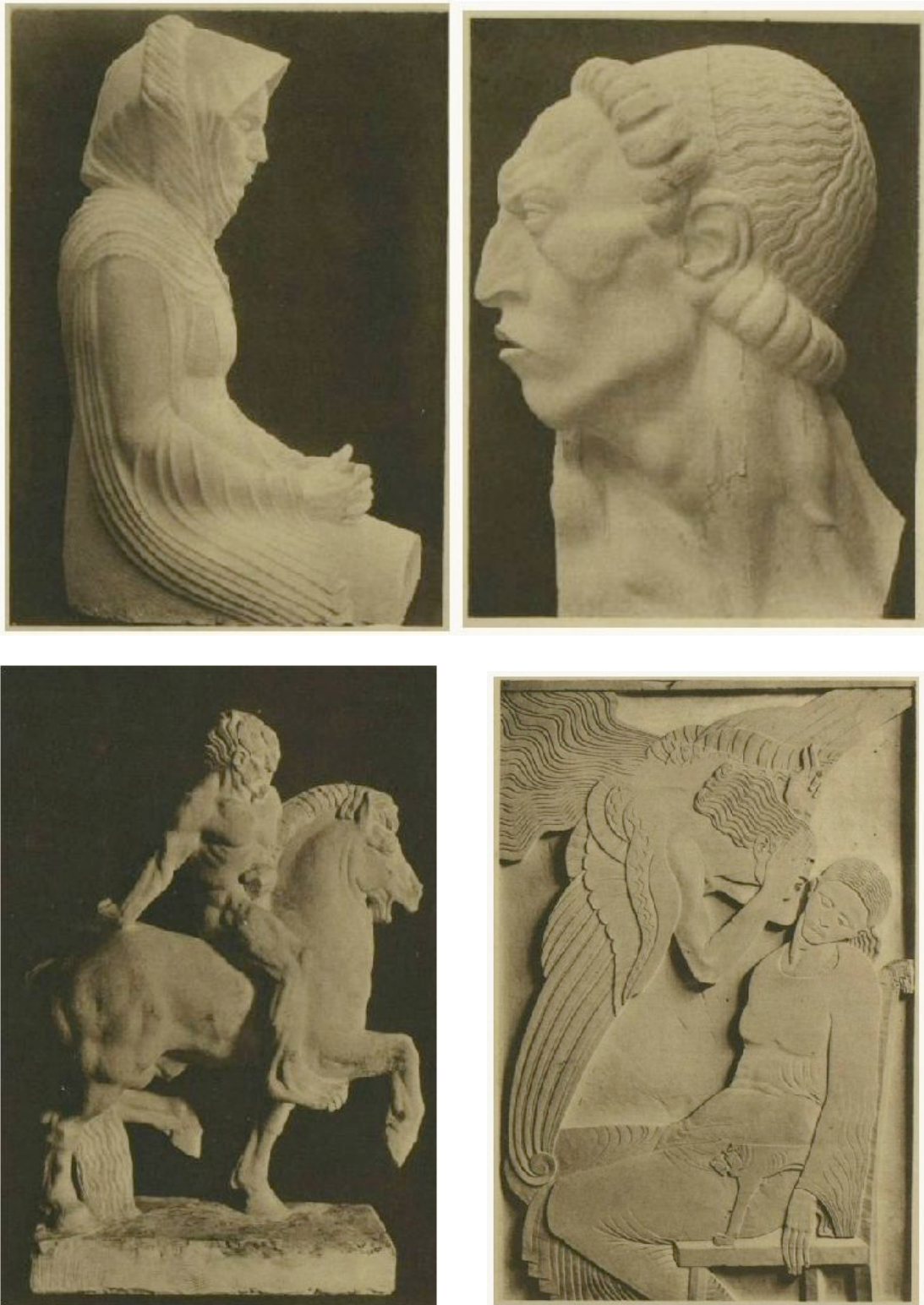


Fig. 4: Meštrović sculptures displayed at the Victoria & Albert Museum, 1915.

Photographs by E.O. Hoppé originally published in the *London Illustrated News*, and entitled as follows (clockwise from top-left): 'A sculpture'; 'Srgja Zlopogledja: This angry hero of the frown, who spits six Turks upon his lance'; 'The Annunciation'; 'Marko Kraljevic: The Serb hero who attacked 300 Turks single-handedly, after Kossovo'. ('The Art of Ivan Meštrović: The One-Man Show at a Museum', *London Illustrated News*, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1915, p. 51).

However, pro-Serb and pro-Yugoslav propaganda and publicity did not completely subsume the more negative and balkanist traditions of British attitudes towards the region. Greater British interaction with Balkan representatives and agents after 1914 consolidated the general impression produced by the Balkan Wars that the region needed to be managed 'from above', by Britain and her Great Power allies, in order for its value and potential to be realised. Noel Buxton's plan to recreate the Balkan League in support of the Allies was typical of this approach, predicated as it was on the understanding that this could only be secured through outside intervention. Essentially, Buxton wanted Britain, France and Russia to secure allies in the Balkans through the imposition of a new territorial settlement on the region. It was assumed that a settlement could be brokered that would satisfy Bulgarian aspirations in Macedonia, Serbian interests in Bosnia and Dalmatia, Romanian aspirations to Transylvania, and Greek interests in Epirus and elsewhere; ideally, this would lead to a permanent Balkan Confederation (a widely-shared if somewhat unrealistic hope of British foreign affairs experts).<sup>65</sup>

Later in the war, Buxton went further still, calling for the territorial settlement to be followed by an exchange of populations. This would be overseen by an international commission with the aim of transferring as many of the Balkan peoples as possible to 'the States to which they rightly belong' and thus achieve a 'sorting out of Nationalities'.<sup>66</sup> Although Buxton's commitment to the policy of the population exchange was never absolute, this does suggest that the 'civilisational perspective' through which he and other liberals approached the Balkans was compatible with what might in other words be described as 'ethnic cleansing'. In this approach, the 'sorting out' of inter-mingled national groups in the region was a means to an end. It was a way of creating a more congenial environment for the development of civilisation. For all the British liberal praise for the 'rootedness' of the Balkan

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<sup>65</sup> See Buxton and Buxton, *The War and the Balkans*, Appendix (pp. 102-12); Toynbee, *Nationality and the War*, p. 243; Hanak, H., 'The New Europe, 1916-1920', *Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 39, No. 93 (1961), p. 378; Typed 'Balkan Note' (unpublished) by R.W. Seton-Watson, 9<sup>th</sup> August 1916: R.W. Seton-Watson Papers, UCL SSEES Library, London (SEW/3/1/1).

<sup>66</sup> Buxton and Buxton, *The War and the Balkans*, p. 97; Buxton and Leonard Leese, *Balkan Problems and European Peace*, p. 113.

peasant communities, and for such communities' cultural attachment to the land, there was a readiness to resort to widespread population displacement if it was felt to best serve the long-term interests of 'progress' in the region. Whether or not the unfortunate 'sons of the soil' in Macedonia and elsewhere actually wanted to have their lives and livelihoods uprooted in this way was not a question to which Buxton appears to have paid much attention.

There was indeed rarely any great concern that the aspirations of the peoples affected by proposed population transfers and territorial changes ought to be taken into consideration. Lacking the supposed 'temper' to agree to the required amount of 'give and take', and incapable of representing themselves, the interests of the Balkan states were to be represented by those in Britain who claimed to know them best.<sup>67</sup> In a letter to Seton-Watson, Sir Edward Boyle expressed his conviction that, in order to expedite the creation of a South Slav Federation, 'we [that is to say those 'disinterested friends' of the Balkan Slavs] should impose a serious recognition of Bulgarian claims in Macedonia'.<sup>68</sup> Henry Brailsford, too, urged Seton-Watson to use his 'great influence' to moderate Serbian claims to Macedonia, at a time when Seton-Watson himself was more concerned with patching up the strained relations between the Serbian Government-in-Exile and the Yugoslav Committee, and with trying to reconcile the aspirations of both these groups with Italian claims to Istria and Dalmatia.<sup>69</sup> Such an enthusiastic embrace of amateur diplomacy surely overestimated the influence of even as well-connected a figure as Seton-Watson over the Foreign Office and War Cabinet.

Whether such confidence was misplaced or not, it indicates the paternalism and self-interest with which British engagement with Balkan questions was infused. Ostensibly 'altruistic' British engagement with foreign causes was never entirely divorced from the existing power structures of international relations. The perceived interests of smaller states were generally analysed and understood only within the broader framework of Great Power relationships and rivalries. This was arguably as true of Noel Buxton's attempt to recreate a

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<sup>67</sup> Bryce, J. 'The Principle of Nationality' (1918), in Bryce, J., *Essays and Addresses in Wartime* (London, 1918), p. 148.

<sup>68</sup> Boyle to Seton-Watson, 27<sup>th</sup> September 1916: Seton-Watson Papers (SEW/17/2/3) – emphasis in the original.

<sup>69</sup> Brailsford to Seton-Watson, (not dated): Seton-Watson Papers (SEW/17/2/4).

Balkan League 'from above' as it was of Seton-Watson's support for Yugoslavism. The latter may have rested in a genuine belief in the 'national oneness' of the Yugoslav people, but it was also driven, as is discussed further below, by Seton-Watson's analysis of British imperial interest. A strong Yugoslav state was supposed to create a barrier to the German 'Drang Nach Osten', neutralise this threat to British strategic concerns in the Near East, and thus ultimately support the 'civilising mission' of British rule in Egypt and India.

It is difficult to credit any of these plans with great foresight or appreciation of the realities of the Balkan situation. Buxton's dream of a Balkan Federation was surely unrealistic. So too, events were to prove, was Seton-Watson's belief that in the future Yugoslavia 'the more civilised Croats and Slovenes will soon assume a lead in the political life and thought of the new state over their gallant but more primitive Serb kinsmen'.<sup>70</sup> Nothing of the sort happened in the Serb-dominated 'Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes' to emerge from the war, by which time the Serbian leader Nikola Pašić had gone down in Seton-Watson's estimation from being 'the Serbian Gladstone' to being an aging tyrant 'too old to shake off entirely the semi-Turkish traditions of his youth'.<sup>71</sup>

Not everyone was as sanguine as Buxton or Seton-Watson about the capacity of British experts to dictate the course of events in the Balkans and elsewhere. Sir James Rennell Rodd, British Ambassador to Rome, felt that 'it is just this claim of certain people in England that they are heaven born interpreters to other nations of what they ought to think and do which so exasperates people who have no doubt in their own minds as to what they want'.<sup>72</sup> Then again, Rodd perhaps had the promises that Britain had made in the secret Treaty of London (April 1915) to consider. This included giving Italy vast swathes of predominantly South Slav inhabited Dalmatia and Istria, to which most Italians had hitherto paid scant regard and to which Mazzini had insisted Italian nationalism had no claim. Plans for the future of

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<sup>70</sup> R.W. Seton-Watson to the Foreign Office, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1914, in *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs*, p. 185.

<sup>71</sup> Seton-Watson, *Balkans, Italy and the Adriatic*, p. 38; Seton-Watson, H. and Seton-Watson, C., *The Making of a New Europe. R.W. Seton-Watson and the Last Years of Austria-Hungary* (London, 1981), p. 300, p. 341.

<sup>72</sup> Rodd to Balfour, 10<sup>th</sup> November 1916 (FO 371/2627), cited in Seton-Watson and Seton-Watson, *Making of a New Europe*, p. 181.

foreign lands that are shaped at least in part by self-centred assessments of national interest are unlikely to produce particularly reliable expertise.

As the war dragged on, radical and dissenting voices, coordinated through the Union of Democratic Control, started to make themselves heard above the noise of the propaganda machine. The idea that the sacrifice and valour of the Serbs might in some way act as an inspiration to the West began to wear thin after 1916. Perhaps already bruised by over a decade's exposure to the national chauvinism and racial intolerance of much of Balkan political culture, Brailsford declined an invitation from Seton-Watson to join the Serbian Society of Great Britain in September 1916. He admitted: 'This experience of backing a little nationality to find that it is only a squalid little Empire – too frequent for all of us – makes me wary of entering any Balkan camp. I'll help them when I can but I won't tie myself to them.'<sup>73</sup> According to Harry Hanak, Brailsford feared that the war would result in 'an enlarged Macedonia stretching from Prague to Vladivostok'. In similar vein, as early as August 1915, Charles Buxton had conceded that 'the destruction of Western European civilisation would be too high a price to pay for the liberation of Eastern Europe, and we have to balance the loss in one direction against the gain in the other'.<sup>74</sup>

The same 'primitive' quality of the Balkans that was championed by Seton-Watson in his admiration for Meštrović's art was denounced with increasing conviction as the conflict progressed, and linked in particular to a disposition towards violence and to a general 'backwardness'. Goldsworthy Lowes Dickenson, writing after the war, described Serbia as 'a little primitive, barbarous, aggressive state' and the Balkan peoples in general as 'bellicose hordes of primitive and violent men'. For both James Bryce and John Holland Rose, the Balkans provided the selfish, jealous and irreflective antitype to the liberal and tolerant conception of nationalism developed in the nineteenth century by Mazzini and others. Arnold Toynbee denounced the populations of the Balkans for being 'possessed by the idea of

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<sup>73</sup> Brailsford to Seton-Watson, 25<sup>th</sup> September 1916: Seton-Watson Papers (SEW/17/2/4).

<sup>74</sup> Hanak, *Great Britain and Austria-Hungary*, p. 140; Buxton, C., 'The Issues in the East', *War and Peace*, Vol. 2, No. 23 (August 1915), pp. 165-66: press-cutting in the Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951 c. 32/3).

nationality to a morbid degree'. Charles Buxton likewise regretted the energy poured by the Balkan states into national questions rather than social questions. Noel Buxton saw Balkan nationalism as being 'cursed' by conflicting memories of medieval empires and by the legacies of five centuries of Ottoman misrule.<sup>75</sup> For all these writers, it was not nationalism *per se* which was the problem, but the specificities of Balkan history and the fact that the region was 'at an earlier and less settled stage of civilisation', as Charles Buxton put it.<sup>76</sup>

The well-established interplay between positive and negative modes of perception within British images of the Balkans was thus continued in the First World War. Noel and Charles Buxton seemed happy to extol the virtues of Balkan peasants as fighting men, and to devise plans to redraw the map of the region 'on the basis of nationality', when it was hoped to create a new Balkan League. Yet once these hopes came to nought, they were increasingly concerned that war for the sake of a new Balkan settlement would mean the collapse of western civilisation.<sup>77</sup> Calls for British support to secure for the Balkan peoples 'a future which holds in its bosom perhaps great and notable things, destined to fill new pages in the book of history' were in the Buxtons' case changed into calls for a separate peace with Austria-Hungary and what was, in effect, 'something not far removed from the balance of power', as Michael Howard noted.<sup>78</sup> This point was made at the time by Seton-Watson, who could not understand how those who actively supported the new liberal internationalism of the League of Nations movement, and who preached the need for 'open diplomacy', could advocate a secretive negotiated peace with the illiberal Habsburg Empire entailing, as he saw

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<sup>75</sup> Lowes Dickenson, G., *War: Its Nature, Course and Cure* (London, 1923), p. 66, p. 69, cited in Howard, *War and the Liberal Conscience*, p. 68; Bryce, *Essays and Addresses in Wartime*, p. 114; Holland Rose, J., 'The National Idea', *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 109 (January/June 1916), pp. 332-336; Toynbee, *Nationality and the War*, p. 138; Buxton, C., 'Nationality' in Buxton, C., Lowes Dickenson, G. *et al.*, *Towards a Lasting Settlement* (London, 1915), pp. 46-47; Buxton and Buxton, *The War and the Balkans*, p. 47; Buxton and Leonard Leese, *Balkan Problems and European Peace*, p. 18.

<sup>76</sup> Buxton, C., 'The Settlement in the East of Europe', *The U.D.C.*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (January 1917), p. 34.

<sup>77</sup> Compare *The War and the Balkans*, p. 16 with Noel Buxton's speeches on the future of Austria-Hungary in Parliament on 24<sup>th</sup> July and 30<sup>th</sup> October 1917: Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951 c. 33/1 and c. 34/4)

<sup>78</sup> Buxton and Buxton, *The War and the Balkans*, p. 35; Howard, *War and the Liberal Conscience*, p. 69.

it, 'the repudiation of treaty pledges and debts of honour'.<sup>79</sup> However, a similar lack of consistency can be seen in Seton-Watson's own attitude. As discussed, until around 1912, Seton-Watson had been rather scathing about Serbian political culture, only to become one of the leading British publicists for 'heroic Serbia' after 1914.<sup>80</sup>

Such conflicting and changeable approaches to Balkan questions, even amongst commentators coming from a broadly liberal or progressive political background, underline the complexities and subtleties of the British imaginative geography of the region. It was certainly far from uniformly balkanist, and the nature of British support for the Serbs, drawing heavily on the pre-war traditions of liberal sympathy for Balkan peasant culture and society, was much more than just convenient propaganda. Nevertheless, the region continued to arouse unease and distrust, not just in pacifist circles but also for those who would have welcomed a new Balkan League in support of the Allies. The fact was that neat and tidy solutions to the national questions presented by the Balkans were not available. The earlier liberal-universalist assumption that the removal of direct Ottoman rule would usher in a new dawn of peace and progress in the region proved to be misplaced.

As British commentators and activists wrestled with the persistent challenges of Balkan geopolitics, depending on the circumstances either the positive or negative aspects of their imaginative geography of the region could achieve prominence. Yet the images that were constructed were always inherently unstable, malleable and subject to revision or counter-argument. Thus, as the war progressed, the Balkans increasingly became the focus of a 'clash of the experts' in British foreign policy analysis. This was part of a broader series of debates within British liberal internationalism, and within British liberal political culture more generally, that will be discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

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<sup>79</sup> Seton-Watson to G.P. Gooch, 31<sup>st</sup> January 1918: Seton-Watson Papers (SEW/17/8/3).

<sup>80</sup> See Peter, L., 'R.W. Seton-Watson's Changing Views on the National Question of the Habsburg Monarchy', *Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 82, No. 3 (July 2004), pp. 655-79.

## Clash of the Experts: the Balkans and the *New Europe*

Underlining the new sense of urgency with which Balkan questions were discussed during the early years of the war, Charles Buxton wrote to Seton-Watson that he felt compelled to challenge some of the remarks made by the latter in a public lecture on the region as the matter was not simply ‘one of academic interest’ but ‘urgent from the immediate military point of view, and also from that of permanent peace and justice’.<sup>81</sup> The war increased the competition faced by radical liberals like Buxton in informing public debate on Balkan matters. A flurry of rival organisations to the Balkan Committee had sprung up in the course of the Balkan Wars and their aftermath, including the Albanian Committee (1912), the Anglo-Hellenic League (1913) and the Ottoman Association (1913) – organisations that reacted to events by, as Bejtullah Destani puts it, ‘firing off letters to the press while their protégés fired off bullets’.<sup>82</sup> This process continued with the formation of the Serbian Society of Great Britain (October 1916) under the Presidency of Lord Cromer – an appropriate choice for an organisation established, at least in part, to popularise the apparent threat to the British Empire posed by ‘Pan-Germanism’.<sup>83</sup> Whereas the Serbian Society could draw on the support of some powerful patrons, the expertise of the Buxtons was now tainted by perceived support for Bulgaria, after September 1915 an enemy state. As a Macedonian Serb soldier complained to the British relief worker Francesca Wilson during the war, the ‘Bracha Buxton [Buxton brothers] ... are good men maybe, but the Bulgars got hold of them’.<sup>84</sup>

The almost axiomatic link between engagement with Balkan causes and British radical-liberal politics, which had existed since the Bulgarian agitation, was changing. The future of the Balkans was now a matter of British strategic and military interest as much as a specifically liberal cause. Perhaps it was no wonder, therefore, that as far as Robert Cecil was concerned in December 1915, ‘the Buxtons had better be kept away from the Balkans at

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<sup>81</sup> C.R. Buxton to Seton-Watson, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1915? (year not stated): Seton-Watson Papers (SEW/17/3/3).

<sup>82</sup> Destani and Tomes, *Albania's Greatest Friend*, p. xx, p. 72.

<sup>83</sup> Hanak, *Great Britain and Austria-Hungary*, pp. 174-202.

<sup>84</sup> Wilson, *Margins of Chaos*, p. 50.



present'.<sup>85</sup> The much-publicised relief work in the region of the Scottish Women's Hospitals, led by the female suffragist and 'child of British Imperialism' Dr Elsie Inglis, generated further coverage of Balkan affairs that viewed the region from alternative perspectives to that associated with the Balkan Committee.<sup>86</sup> Radical liberals still had much to say about the Balkans, but other voices, drawing on different approaches to internationalism and different political traditions, were making themselves heard. Political debate about the Balkans in this period therefore offers insights into the combative and at times acrimonious battle that was being fought for the hearts and minds of the British public on international matters. These competing visions of the post-war world, and Britain's place within it, are the main focus of the argument in this section. Attention is then turned in the final section of the chapter to the way that this intersected with domestic politics and culture.

Perhaps the most powerful attack on the radical traditions of pre-war British engagement with the Balkans came from what was still an essentially liberal quarter, in the form of the writers and foreign affairs experts associated with the wartime weekly the *New Europe*. Sharing the broadly internationalist outlook and hostility towards 'secret diplomacy' of the radicals, the *New Europe* circle nevertheless differed sharply in their approach to the national questions presented by the war. Writing under the banner 'pour la victoire integrale', the journal's contributors and supporters argued, in the words of Arnold Toynbee, that 'the first step towards internationalism is not to flout the problems of nationality, but to solve them'.<sup>87</sup> This was to be done by applying the principle of national self-determination – by supporting, for example, the rights of the Poles to an independent Poland, of the Czechs and Slovaks to an independent Czechoslovakia, and, crucially as far as the Balkans was concerned, the rights of the South Slavs to an independent Yugoslavia. Whether or not a

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<sup>85</sup> Memo, 5<sup>th</sup> December 1915, F.O. 800/445, cited in Lowe, C.J., 'The Failure of British Diplomacy in the Balkans, 1914-1916', *Canadian Journal of History*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1969), p. 87 (note).

<sup>86</sup> Leneman, L., 'Medical Women at War, 1914-1918', *Medical History*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (1994), p. 163, pp. 166-68; Liddington, J., 'Britain and the Balkans: The Response of the Scottish Women's Hospital Units', in Sharp, I. and Stibbe, M. (eds.), *Aftermaths of War: Women's Movements and Female Activists, 1918-1923* (Leiden, 2011), p. 396, p. 415; Gullace, "The Blood of Our Sons", p. 10, p. 118.

<sup>87</sup> Toynbee, *Nationality and the War*, p. 11.

distinct ‘Yugoslav’ nation could be held to exist at this time is, of course, open to debate, but this was the vision of the *New Europe*. It was always a selective vision, however. As discussed below, support for the national self-determination of the peoples of Austria-Hungary and the Balkans did not extend to support for the national self-determination of Britain’s own imperial subjects. Nor did it necessarily signal sympathy for Irish nationalism. In fact, as James Evans observes, Ireland did not feature heavily in British wartime debate on Continental national questions.<sup>88</sup> Arnold Toynbee, who felt that Irish national sentiment was ‘almost unintelligible to an Englishman till he has travelled in the Balkans’, was one exception to this rule.<sup>89</sup> As discussed below, the *New Europe* shared the general liberal position at this time, which was to advocate Irish Home Rule within the British Commonwealth and under the British Crown.

Whilst there was little in the approach of the *New Europe* group to Ireland that distinguished them from the radicals, their call for the dismemberment of Austria-Hungary marked a fundamental split within the broad church of British liberal engagement with Balkan questions. It was the first time when an explicitly nationalist approach to Balkan geopolitics emerged within British foreign affairs discourse. The nation-state was now increasingly held up as the ideal model of political organisation for the Balkans, and for Central and Eastern Europe more generally. Those who advocated federalist or multinational state structures were liable to be denounced as tacit or unwitting supporters of Pan-German oppression. As explored in the next section of the chapter, this did not necessarily signal the end of the ‘civilisational perspective’ within the British liberal approach to questions of empire and self-government, but there is no doubt that the war witnessed a shift in the language of foreign affairs debate as far as the Balkans was concerned.

Those on the radical wing of British liberalism, and particularly those with experience of Balkan nationalism, found this distinctly uncomfortable. It was surely his own experiences in the Balkans that caused Charles Buxton ask in 1915: ‘We sympathise with an oppressed

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<sup>88</sup> Evans, *Great Britain and the Creation of Yugoslavia*, p. 37.

<sup>89</sup> Toynbee, *Nationality and the War*, pp. 12-13.

nation, but when we have set it on its feet, does it not become in turn an oppressor, using the arts of its own former tyrants with an ingenuity born of long experience?’<sup>90</sup> Yet for the *New Europe*, the concept of a reformed, federalised Austria-Hungary in which the South Slavs would have autonomy – previously advocated by Seton-Watson – was now inadequate. Austria-Hungary, it was argued, had become little more than a German satellite state, and only through the comprehensive defeat of Pan-Germanism and ‘Berlin-Baghdad’ could the rights of small nations be adequately secured. The radicals’ call for a negotiated peace was therefore virulently opposed.

Shared support for the League of Nations movement, and shared anger at Grey’s handling of British foreign policy in 1914 and 1915, did little to dilute these increasingly acrimonious and bitter arguments about the future of the Balkans (and Central and Eastern Europe as a whole). This was despite the pre-war collaboration of several members of the *New Europe* group, such as Seton-Watson, Ronald Burrows and Arthur Evans, with the Balkan Committee, which put its activities on hold in 1914.<sup>91</sup> Henry Nevinston, for one, saw no point in reviving the Committee if Burrows were a member, ‘to say nothing of Seton-Watson’, as he confided to Noel Buxton later in the war.<sup>92</sup> For his part, Evans challenged the Committee’s claims to expertise, writing to Seton-Watson in 1915 that ‘neither Buxton nor most of the other members understand the South Slav Question as a whole’. The following year, Evans reiterated to Seton-Watson that the Committee’s members were ‘such kittle cattle one never knows which way they will turn – they generally block the way!’<sup>93</sup> In fairness, to someone like Buxton, who had both very real reservations about the concept of national self-determination (despite his already-noted apparent readiness to consider population transfers) and a longstanding emotional commitment to the peace movement, but who had no desire to turn his back on political life, it probably was difficult to know which way to turn at this time.

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<sup>90</sup> Buxton, ‘Nationality’, p. 44.

<sup>91</sup> Note to members of the Balkan Committee by the Chairman (Buxton), Honorary Secretary (Boyle) and Secretary (Symonds), July 1915: Seton-Watson Papers (SEW/3/1/1).

<sup>92</sup> Nevinston to Buxton, 6<sup>th</sup> March (year not indicated): Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951 c. 2/39).

<sup>93</sup> Evans to Seton-Watson, 14<sup>th</sup> February 1915 and 15<sup>th</sup> April 1916: Seton-Watson Papers (SEW/17/6/13).

In terms of public profile and access to the ‘corridors of power’, Seton-Watson and supporters of the *New Europe* undoubtedly had the edge over their radical critics, particularly by the closing stages of the war. This was the apogee of the independent British foreign affairs expert, reflecting the pressing need of the Foreign Office for knowledge and analysis.<sup>94</sup> However, given the distinctly lukewarm attitude – if not outright opposition – of most radicals towards the war, it was to the likes of Seton-Watson that the diplomats turned. Having been first called up to the Department of Information Intelligence Bureau (March 1917), Seton-Watson then served from March 1918 on its successor body, the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office. He also co-directed propaganda against Austria-Hungary for Lord Northcliffe’s Department of Propaganda in Enemy Countries (established in February 1918) with his friend and ally, the Foreign Editor of the *Times*, Henry Wickham Steed. Developing close contacts with émigré groups such as the Yugoslav Committee, Seton-Watson, Steed and Arthur Evans became key go-betweens for Central and Eastern European and Balkan nationalist leaders and statesmen. They were a noted presence on the margins of the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. This was no guarantee of direct influence over policy, of course, but it contrasted markedly with the marginalisation of the radicals. As Arthur Ponsonby lamented in June 1915, when he was asked by Noel Buxton to help lobby the Foreign Office regarding proposals for an understanding with Bulgaria, ‘they would not pay the very smallest attention to anything I said’.<sup>95</sup>

The clash between the *New Europe* and its radical critics reinforced what had been a pre-war trend by promoting the cult of the expert. Both sides accused each other at various times of being ‘sentimentalists’, implying a lack of real expertise or objectivity, and implying also an outdated ‘Victorian’ and overly ‘emotional’ approach. Noel Buxton was convinced that his policy to bring Bulgaria into the war on the side of the Entente was favoured by those who ‘knew the Serbians and wanted sympathy for them years before their new and noisy

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<sup>94</sup> Sharp, A., ‘Some Relevant Historians – the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office, 1918-1920’, *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, Vol. 34, No. 3, pp. 359-68.

<sup>95</sup> Ponsonby to Buxton, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1915: Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951 c. 14/6).

advocates'.<sup>96</sup> The *New Europe*, in turn, criticised 'the superficial class of writers and the well-meaning sentimentalists to whom a chance pamphlet of Mr Gladstone was the alpha and omega of political wisdom'. In 1917, the journal accused Buxton of writing of Bulgaria 'like the sentimental tourist with good introductions who has secured for his inevitable book of travel the necessary interviews with political personages'.<sup>97</sup> In a private letter to G.P. Gooch, who published articles by both Buxton and Seton-Watson in the *Contemporary Review*, the latter claimed that the former's contribution was 'based upon ludicrous misunderstanding or misconception' and contained 'a mass of half-truths and certain very gross mis-statement'.<sup>98</sup>

This was a very different atmosphere to the pattern of British-Balkan engagement associated with the Bulgarian agitation, with its deliberately sensational and emotionally-charged language, its close ties to the Nonconformist conscience, and its tendency to make dissent over foreign policy a matter of 'black and white' moral judgment rather than detached analysis. As noted in the previous chapter, the Balkan Committee had always tried to distance itself from the sensationalism of the Bulgarian agitation and in many respects the *New Europe* continued this process. There was no room for 'sentiment' in either the policies of the *New Europe* or those of its critics; what was needed, it was felt, were 'facts' and first-hand knowledge, not new Gladstonian moral crusades. The problem was that there were now several different experts competing for the attention of those in a position to inform policy. This crowded marketplace led to a public falling-out between Seton-Watson and Noel Buxton that was much to the regret of mutual friends such as G.P. Gooch or Sir Edward Boyle, who were rather caught in the crossfire. Yet neither expert was prepared to concede the moral high ground, nor to accept the other's point of view.<sup>99</sup>

Historians have presented these mutual attacks and recriminations as a clash between 'Habsburgists' and 'Ottomanists'. For example, James Evans has pointed out that 'the historic

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<sup>96</sup> Buxton and Leese, *Balkan Problems and European Peace*, p. 99; Buxton, N., 'The New Departure in Balkan Diplomacy', *Nineteenth Century And After*, No. 484 (June 1917), p. 1219.

<sup>97</sup> 'The Evolution of Bulgaria', *New Europe*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (23<sup>rd</sup> November 1916), p. 170; 'The Bulgarian Mirage', *New Europe*, Vol. 3, No. 35 (14<sup>th</sup> June 1917), p. 257.

<sup>98</sup> Seton-Watson to Gooch, 31<sup>st</sup> January 1918: Seton-Watson Papers (SEW/17/8/3).

<sup>99</sup> See the letters from Boyle to Seton-Watson (27<sup>th</sup> September 1916) and Gooch to Seton-Watson (3<sup>rd</sup> February 1918): Seton-Watson Papers (SEW/17/2/3 and SEW/17/8/3).

and civilisational divide which separated the Habsburg realm from the territories of the former Ottoman Empire was one seldom convincingly straddled by British scholars, who tended to approach the problems of south-eastern Europe from a perspective either distinctly Habsburg or distinctly “Balkan”. In Harry Hanak’s view, similarly, Noel Buxton had a ‘complete ignorance of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy’.<sup>100</sup> Buxton is seen to have assumed too readily that the solution he generally advocated regarding the national questions of the Ottoman Balkans – local self-government and regional autonomy within a broader multinational state structure – should apply to Central Europe too, and that the Habsburg Monarchy could be adapted to this end. The *New Europe* group, on the other hand, has been accused of underestimating, partly as a result of its ‘superficial’ knowledge of the region, the difficulties presented to the concept of national self-determination by the post-Ottoman Balkans (as opposed to the Habsburg lands). In this analysis, a ‘victoire integrale’ was pursued at great human cost in order to see an idealised nation-state structure imposed on a region to which it was fundamentally ill suited.<sup>101</sup> As Edith Durham is said to have chimed of Seton-Watson and Wickham Steed: ‘SW, WS. The two of them made the hell of a mess.’<sup>102</sup>

There was more to this than the egos of rival foreign policy ‘cranks’, however. To focus solely on the different pre-war regional engagements and interests of such commentators is to overlook the striking political dimension to this wartime clash of the experts. Although he once considered standing for election as a Liberal party parliamentary candidate (for West Perthshire), Seton-Watson was a different kind of liberal to Noel and Charles Buxton.<sup>103</sup> His approach to foreign affairs combined a Gladstonian liberal nationalism with a Roseberian liberal imperialism. Sympathy for the rights of small nations was

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<sup>100</sup> Evans, *Great Britain and the Creation of Yugoslavia*, p. 8; Hanak, *Great Britain and Austria-Hungary*, p. 150. See also McCormick, R., “‘Crusading Sentimentality’: British Intellectuals and the Clash Over National self-Determination in Central and Eastern Europe, 1914-1918”, *Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association* (2007), p. 77.

<sup>101</sup> Miller, ‘R.W. Seton-Watson and Serbia’, p. 67.

<sup>102</sup> Cited by Harry Hodgkinson in his introduction to Durham, M. Edith, *Albania and the Albanians. Selected Articles and Letters 1903-1944*, edited by Bejtullah Destani (London, 2001), p. xvi.

<sup>103</sup> Seton-Watson and Seton-Watson, *Making of a New Europe*, p. 89; Peter, ‘Seton-Watson’s Changing Views on the National Question of the Habsburg Monarchy’, p. 656 [note].

articulated in a manner that displayed a marked sensitivity to the claims of Realpolitik.<sup>104</sup> As noted, Seton-Watson had initially supported the Habsburg Empire as the ‘pivot of the balance of power’ with a civilising mission in the Balkans. However, in the immediate pre-war years, and particularly after the outbreak of the war, he became convinced that this was no longer the case. Indeed, the very opposite situation was now held to exist – Austria-Hungary had been co-opted into the services of an oppressive Pan-German ‘Drang Nach Osten’.<sup>105</sup> Judging by his own writings, Seton-Watson opposed this as much because of the threat it posed to British imperial and strategic interests in the Mediterranean, the Middle East and India, as because of the threat it posed to the rights of small nations or the ‘principle of nationality’.<sup>106</sup> An ‘acute imperial consciousness’ placed Seton-Watson closer in spirit to the *Round Table* than to the radicals of the Balkan Committee.<sup>107</sup> As a consequence, the *New Europe* became, in Harry Hanak’s estimation, ‘a liberal paper which liberals rejected’.<sup>108</sup>

Whilst the war was leading Seton-Watson into an even closer embrace with British imperialism, it was leading several radicals to transfer their loyalties from the Liberal party to the Labour party. This included both Charles and, eventually, Noel Buxton, following a path already taken before the conflict by Nevinson and Brailsford.<sup>109</sup> There is no doubt that disillusionment with Liberal party foreign policy, and with the party’s conduct of the war and the peace process, weighed heavily in radical minds when deciding to ‘move left’ in this period. Noel Buxton, for one, later claimed that ‘until the Great War it never crossed my mind that I might join the Labour Party’. After 1914, however, as Buxton recalled, ‘the result of the attitude of Liberals was to make us who took a special interest in war and peace questions feel

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<sup>104</sup> Peter, ‘Seton-Watson’s Changing Views on the National Question of the Habsburg Monarchy’, p. 677.

<sup>105</sup> Seton-Watson, R.W., ‘The European Outlook’, *Scottish Review*, 18<sup>th</sup> January 1906, cited in Peter, ‘Seton-Watson’s Changing Views on the National Question of the Habsburg Monarchy’, p. 662; Sluga, G., ‘The Nation and the Comparative Imagination’, in Cohen, D. and O’Connor, M. (eds.), *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective* (London, 2004), pp. 106-07.

<sup>106</sup> For prominent examples of Seton-Watson’s combination of imperial and liberal-nationalist rhetoric, see *The War and Democracy* and *The Balkans, Italy and the Adriatic*, esp. pp. 46-47.

<sup>107</sup> Okey, R., *The Habsburg Monarchy, c. 1765-1918. From Enlightenment to Eclipse* (Basingstoke, 2001), p. 378.

<sup>108</sup> Hanak, ‘The New Europe’, p. 397.

<sup>109</sup> Howard, *War and the Liberal Conscience*, p. 73.

keen to support candidates of our own view, even if they were Labour'.<sup>110</sup> Wartime and post-war debates about the future of the Habsburg Empire and the Balkans were therefore an important part of a much wider political process of fragmentation and discord within British liberalism, which exposed and exacerbated the old pre-war divisions between the liberal imperialists and the radicals. By 1919, those who, like Edward Boyle in a letter to Noel Buxton at this time, felt that 'historic Liberalism has nothing to do with either Imperialism or socialism', and who wanted to 'get back to Campbell-Bannerman and Morley', were a minority, swimming against the tide.<sup>111</sup>

Against this background, debates that were ostensibly related to rather specific Balkan and Austro-Hungarian national questions came to intersect with a range of broader dilemmas and concerns within the 'liberal conscience'. This related not only to foreign affairs but also to British domestic society.

### **Citizenship, self-determination and empire**

As noted, the debates of the rival groups of wartime experts discussed above were characterised by the drive to establish a reputation for expertise and objectivity. The assumption was that public debate on international questions should be based, as Charles Buxton argued, on 'the solid basis of reason and forethought'.<sup>112</sup> Arnold Toynbee called for the 'collaboration of experts' and the 'coordination of knowledge on a large scale', objectives he would attempt to achieve after the war through the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House). This top-down 'democratic diplomacy' was also very much aligned with the pre-war 'new liberal' political theory of intellectuals such as L.T. Hobhouse and Graham Wallas, who were perhaps primarily (though by no means exclusively) interested in domestic society.<sup>113</sup> 'New liberalism' strove to provide both moral and social scientific leadership in an age of mass culture and democratisation. It was a brand of politics built on 'faith in rational

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<sup>110</sup> Draft of an *Autobiography* – section on 'Politics': Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951, c. 7/12).

<sup>111</sup> Boyle to Buxton, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1919: Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951 c. 1/13).

<sup>112</sup> Toynbee, *Nationality and the War*, p. 16; Buxton, 'Nationality' p. 41.

<sup>113</sup> Michail, *British and the Balkans*, p. 46.



progress, social harmony, and the notion of a shared, universal knowledge'.<sup>114</sup> It has been argued that such faith was 'shattered' by the war.<sup>115</sup> Yet perhaps these intellectual and reformist energies were actually given a slightly different impetus after 1914 by the transformed international situation?

Other networks established in this period also integrated foreign affairs analysis with efforts to democratise knowledge in British society. Within the *New Europe* group, for example, both Alfred Zimmern and R.W. Seton-Watson were involved in the Workers' Educational Association. As they explained in *The War and Democracy* (1914), they drew a direct link between the call for open diplomacy on the one hand and support for workers' educational initiatives on the other. The latter was often seen as an essential prerequisite for the former to function effectively. On the radical side, Henry Brailsford expressed this sentiment very clearly in *The War of Steel and Gold* (1914), when he called for 'an educative propaganda, a more conscious effort to fix principles, before any democracy can be trusted to stand firm in moments of national crisis'.<sup>116</sup> Brailsford reiterated this point towards the end of the war, musing: 'The masses nowhere in normal times give any effective attention to foreign affairs at all. They will not clamour for war unless an assiduous and interested campaign directed from above has first aroused them. But neither, while this apathy and ignorance continue, are they an effective bulwark for peace.'<sup>117</sup>

This rather pessimistic and condescending assumption that workers would need first to be educated before they could be trusted to act as responsible citizens was a persistent feature of British liberal discourse around international affairs. It can be clearly observed, as Helen McCarthy has highlighted, in the basic approach of the League of Nations Union in the inter-war period. In the LNU, as McCarthy notes, the 'parallel impulses of democratic idealism and cultural pessimism' existed in an uneasy interaction heightened by the post-war

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<sup>114</sup> Mauriello, C., 'The Strange Death of the Public Intellectual: Liberal Intellectual Identity and the "Field of Cultural Production" in England, 1880-1920', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2001), p. 19.

<sup>115</sup> Mauriello, 'Strange Death of the Public Intellectual', p. 19.

<sup>116</sup> Brailsford, *The War of Steel and Gold* (1914), p. 160, cited in Howard, *War and the Liberal Conscience*, pp. 60-66.

<sup>117</sup> Brailsford, H.N., 'Foundations of Internationalism (The League of Nations Prize Essay)', *English Review* (August 1918), p. 98.

extension of the franchise and by the expansion of mass leisure and entertainment industries.<sup>118</sup> It also had a strong pre-war trajectory that can be traced back at least as far as the debates surrounding the 1867 Reform Bill. The assumption that internationalist ideology was a straightforward attempt to apply to international politics the ‘features of progress and order that were seen to characterise domestic politics in Britain’, as Casper Sylvest puts it, overlooks this point.<sup>119</sup> In fact, internationalist attempts to respond to threats to peace and to deal in a progressive and open way with problematic parts of the globe – including with what Bertrand Russell called ‘less civilised communities’ in the Balkans (amongst other regions) – were interconnected with efforts to engage with, and educate, the ‘less civilised’ communities of Britain’s industrial towns and cities.<sup>120</sup> As noted, the town-based society of the West provoked considerable unease amongst ‘progressive’ writers. In contrast, such writers were often more sympathetic towards the peasant-based communities and culture of regions such as the Balkans. Amid concerns over the ‘Condition of England’, democracy – including the democratic control of foreign policy – was a double-edged sword.

This interconnection between domestic social concerns and international affairs can be discerned before 1914 in the response of Norman Angell to the Balkan Wars. For Angell, greater international cooperation and open diplomacy between the Great Powers, which he felt could have resolved the Macedonian question and made the Balkan League’s attack on Turkey unnecessary, were the international equivalents of the basic agenda of social reform and progressive politics at home. The peace movement on the one hand and, on the other, support for ‘the typical great movements of our times – Socialism, Trades Unionism, Syndicalism, Insurance Bills, Land Laws, Old Age Pensions, Charity Organisation, Improved Education’ – were, as far as Angell was concerned, guided by the same desire to apply the ‘final test’ of politics: ‘Does it or does it not make for the widest interests of the mass of the

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<sup>118</sup> McCarthy, *British People and the League of Nations*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>119</sup> Sylvest, C., ‘Continuity and Change in British Liberal Internationalism, c. 1900-1930’, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (2005), p. 266.

<sup>120</sup> From Monk, R., *Bertrand Russell: The Spirit of Solitude* (London, 1997), p. 372, cited in Sluga, G., *The Nation, Psychology and International Politics* (Basingstoke, 2006), p. 46.

people involved?’<sup>121</sup> The President of the Carnegie Commission responded to the Balkan Wars in a similar way. He urged the international community to tackle the ‘destitution’ of the war-ravaged Balkans with something akin to the social reform programmes being designed to tackle poverty in ‘civilised’ countries. ‘Can we picture’, he wondered, ‘what might have been the position today of these unfortunate Balkan peoples, if their patrons, the Great Powers of Europe, had competed with each other in aiding them, in giving them roads, and railways, and water ways, schools, laboratories, museums, hospitals and public works!’<sup>122</sup>

Saving the Balkans from ‘destitution’ was seen to necessitate not just international aid and assistance but also international control. This reinforces the analogy with the domestic sphere and, in particular, with the ‘new liberal’ preoccupation with citizenship, mass culture and urban society. It was widely assumed that part of the duty of progressive politics at home was to take steps to instil within working class communities what Angell termed ‘a better use of leisure’.<sup>123</sup> Drinking, gambling and other frowned-upon leisure pursuits were clearly not perceived to be within the ‘widest interests of the mass of the people involved’, and moral leadership was required to promote more ‘rational’ forms of recreation. A similar kind of leadership was also felt to be required internationally to ensure that the still uncomfortably ‘primitive’ Balkan states were set on the right path to European progress and civilisation. The future of the Balkans was seen as an international problem calling for an international solution, even if this would have to be imposed ‘from above’. As discussed in more detail in the next chapter, this makes the Balkan context extremely relevant to the wartime development of new models of liberal-internationalism, including those such as the League of Nations’ Mandates system that were designed to promote the international management of empire.

Liberal-internationalist concerns regarding the Balkan ‘powder keg’ – and other areas of international instability – were thus related to a similar domestic drive to achieve material

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<sup>121</sup> Angell, *Peace Theories and the Balkan War*, p. 38, p. 41.

<sup>122</sup> Baron d’Estournelles de Constant, Introduction to the Carnegie Commission Inquiry, in *The Other Balkan Wars*, p. 3, p. 19.

<sup>123</sup> Angell, *Peace Theories and the Balkan War*, p. 38.

progress and democracy without threatening liberal ideals of ‘civilisation’ or risking the breakdown of the social order. These questions were part of an overarching progressive and reformist political culture articulated by writers and intellectuals who assumed a moral authority as well as a ‘scientific’ understanding of the issues involved. In both cases, the humanitarian and reformist urge to relieve suffering, address blots on the liberal conscience and support the ‘underdog’, co-existed with a paternalistic and condescending determination to spread a self-centred conception of civilisation and progress. Balkan peasants might have been attributed many of the qualities of citizenship and patriotism that were seen to be so lacking in Britain’s industrial towns and cities, but the region itself was nonetheless perceived as being in need of the control and guidance of the West. This perpetuated the already-noted parallel between the ‘East End of Europe’ and the East End of London. When British liberals engaged with Balkan questions and wider internationalist agendas during the First World War, therefore, there was clearly felt to be more at stake than ‘just’ foreign policy and geopolitics.

The war provoked different responses to these underlying concerns. For Seton-Watson and the *New Europe* group, the British Empire provided a model of ‘common citizenship and common law’ through which the twin objectives of enhanced national education and increased international cooperation could be taken forward.<sup>124</sup> It was argued that European imperialism along the lines of this British model represented ‘a highly beneficial stage in the progress of the world’.<sup>125</sup> This was central to the interest of the journal in the Balkans. For it was here that the advance of an apparent threat to British ‘imperial internationalism’ (to use Mark Mazower’s phrase) had to be halted.<sup>126</sup> As a barrier to the German ‘Drang Nach Osten’, the fate of Serbia and the Balkan states was, as Seton-Watson saw it, ‘bound up’ with the future of the British Empire as ‘an instrument of progress and

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<sup>124</sup> Zimmern, *Nationality and Government*, p. 20.

<sup>125</sup> See the series of articles by Ramsay Muir: Muir, R., ‘Europe and the Non-European World’, *New Europe*: Vol. 3, No. 37 (28<sup>th</sup> June 1917), pp. 321-28; Vol. 3, No. 38 (5<sup>th</sup> July 1917), pp. 260-68; Vol. 3, No. 39 (12<sup>th</sup> July 1917), pp. 403-08; Zimmern, *Nationality and Government*, p. 16; Muir, R., *Nationalism and Internationalism. The Culmination of Modern History* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition: London, 1919), p. 57.

<sup>126</sup> Mazower, M., *No Enchanted Palace: the end of empire and the ideological origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, 2009).

civilisation'.<sup>127</sup> How could this sensitivity to the civilising mission of a multinational state with a multinational empire be reconciled with support for the 'principle of nationality' in the Balkans? The fact was that, to the *New Europe*, the interests of the British Empire and the rights of small nations were perfectly compatible. In contrast to the illiberal and reactionary ideology of Pan-Germanism, the inherent liberalism of British political culture provided the means through which nationalist passions could be tamed. This is illustrated by the journal's approach to the national question that surely occupied centre stage in British politics at this time – Ireland.

As far as Ireland was concerned, the *New Europe* group did have a greater sensitivity to the Ulster issue than their radical critics had tended to show before the war. Arnold Toynbee accepted that political steps would need to be taken to arrange 'that the different national groups in Ireland govern themselves in the way they really wish'.<sup>128</sup> Yet if Ulster opted to remain under the direct rule of London, whilst the rest of the island became self-governing, it was still anticipated that the peaceful co-existence of the two nationalities would be achieved. Protestants living in the South and Catholics living in the North would not become enemies of their respective states. As Toynbee argued:

The drawing of the frontier is only the first step towards the solution of the Irish question. It will be truly settled if the minorities find that the disadvantage to which Geography puts them is more than made up by the good-fellowship of the population with which it yokes them.<sup>129</sup>

The *New Europe* was in any case hopeful that safeguards could be agreed to protect the cultural, religious and political rights of the Ulster Protestant minority, and thereby reconcile this minority to its place in a united but self-governing Ireland within the British Empire.<sup>130</sup> This was the benefit that it was assumed would be accrued by the tolerance and liberalism of

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<sup>127</sup> Seton-Watson, R.W., 'Serbia's Need and Britain's Danger', *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 108 (July/December 1915), p. 576.

<sup>128</sup> Toynbee, *Nationality and the War*, p. 13.

<sup>129</sup> Toynbee, *Nationality and the War*, p. 20.

<sup>130</sup> 'H.M.', 'Self-determination and the British Commonwealth: (I) Ireland', *New Europe*, Vol. 6, No. 66, 17<sup>th</sup> January 1918, pp. 5-8.

the British imperial polity. ‘Savages wipe out minorities; civilised men take testimonials from them’, Toynbee claimed.<sup>131</sup>

By 1919, the *New Europe* had to acknowledge the emergence of Sinn Fein as a potent political force. Yet, even then, it was argued that ‘very few people, in or out of Ireland, really believe in the possibility of making Ireland an independent State’, and that ‘in spite of all that has happened ... a settlement consistent with the continued integrity of the Empire is possible’.<sup>132</sup> Although the journal was happy to publish arguments in favour of Irish independence by the Home Ruler-turned-Sinn Fein activist Erskine Childers, its editorial line in this period was to support the concept of Dominion Home Rule. It opposed the coercion of Ulster, but it maintained that any compromise solution that excluded the Six Counties from a self-governing Ireland ‘must be framed on lines which will render possible, and even encourage, voluntary inclusion at a later date’.<sup>133</sup> The idea that Irish nationalism could not be satisfied within the framework of the British Empire (or ‘Commonwealth’), or that the Irish people might choose to exclude themselves from what the *Daily News* termed ‘the most hopeful example of federation which has yet been tried’, was barely acknowledged.<sup>134</sup> The idea that such a liberal and progressive system of government might prove incapable of reconciling the conflicting national interests and identities of a Catholic-majority South and a Protestant-majority North was similarly absent from the *New Europe*’s analysis.

As this troublesome Irish question bubbled away throughout the First World War, the *New Europe* preferred to focus its energies on making the case for the dismemberment of Austria-Hungary. Indeed, it has been argued that the journal’s attack on the Habsburgs was ‘heavily implicated in the validation of the existence of diversity within Britain’.<sup>135</sup> Presenting the Habsburg polity as ‘an Eastern Sultanate’ that was intent on crushing the rights and

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<sup>131</sup> Toynbee, *Nationality and the War*, p. 20.

<sup>132</sup> Law, H., ‘Sinn Fein and Europe’, *New Europe*, Vol. 10, No. 119, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1919, pp. 42-43.

<sup>133</sup> See: Childers, E., ‘Ireland: The International Aspect’, *New Europe*, Vol. 11, No. 138, 5<sup>th</sup> June 1919, pp. 180-84; Childers, E., ‘The Irish Statesman and the Irish Dominion League’, *New Europe*, Vol. 12, No. 146, 31<sup>st</sup> July 1919, pp. 68-70; Steevens, H., ‘What Will Ulster Do?’, *New Europe*, Vol. 13, No. 166, 18<sup>th</sup> December 1919, pp. 302-4; Gwynn, S., ‘Ireland To-day’, *New Europe*, 16, No. 199, 5<sup>th</sup> August 1920, pp. 88-93.

<sup>134</sup> *Daily News*, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1922, p. 46, cited in Peatling, *British Opinion and Irish Self-Government*, p. 101.

<sup>135</sup> Sluga, ‘The Nation and the Comparative Imagination’, p. 106.

aspirations of its subject nationalities served to highlight by contradistinction the more progressive and liberal ‘western’ version of empire developed by Britain. Austria-Hungary thus became ‘a foil for soothing over the ambivalences and ambiguities in the conceptualisation and management of diversity within the British Empire’.<sup>136</sup>

The ‘satisfaction’ of nationalism, as a *New Europe* associate put it during a parliamentary debate in 1917, was an essential precondition for international solidarity. This was seen to be impossible within the essentially anti-national and reactionary Habsburg Empire.<sup>137</sup> Thus, in the case of Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans, the only way that national questions could be dealt with satisfactorily, so it was argued, was by the dismemberment of the Habsburg state. Whereas the British Empire had become a force for peace and international collaboration, Austria-Hungary – like the ‘Prussian’ empire of Germany and the Ottoman ‘Sick Man of Europe’ – had become a fundamental barrier to European progress and civilisation.<sup>138</sup> As the Irish politician Hugh Law explained in the *New Europe* in March 1917:

Where the dominant State is itself founded upon the denial of the right of small nations to live their own life, as in the German Empire under the Prussians, or where it has shown itself for centuries incapable of government as has the Ottoman, there seems nothing for it but to withdraw subject peoples entirely from its yoke. Where, on the other hand, this right is partially admitted, as by England, and of late by Russia, self-government within the State may reasonably be expected to satisfy the craving of the national self-expression.<sup>139</sup>

Self-government for Britain’s imperial subjects was not to be applied indiscriminately, however, but only to those populations deemed politically and culturally ‘mature’ enough to rule themselves independently of appropriate guidance or ‘tutelage’. This distinction was the crux of the *New Europe*’s argument when it came to consider, and defend, its readiness to grant Poles, Czechs and South Slavs rights that would not be granted to British subjects in India, Africa and elsewhere. A series of articles on ‘Self-Determination and the

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<sup>136</sup> Sluga, ‘The Nation and the Comparative Imagination’, p. 108.

<sup>137</sup> A.F. Whyte M.P., speaking in Parliament on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1917 and cited in ‘The “No-Annexation” Debate’, supplement to *New Europe*, Vol. 3, No. 32 (24<sup>th</sup> May 1917), p. vii.

<sup>138</sup> Muir, *Nationalism and Internationalism*, p. 68, p. 95; Sluga, G., ‘Bodies, Souls and Sovereignty: The Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Legitimacy of Nations’, *Ethnicities*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2001), p. 215.

<sup>139</sup> Law, H., ‘Ireland in Europe’, *New Europe*, Vol. 2, No. 21, 8<sup>th</sup> March 1917, p. 236.

British Commonwealth' developed this point. Taking account of the relative capacity for self-government of the populations concerned, it was argued, 'you cannot tax an Englishman with inconsistency, if he demands self-determination for Czechs or Poles, and he will not grant self-determination to India. He may be wrong in his premise but he is not illogical'.<sup>140</sup> India had yet to discover its 'self', it was contended, even if self-rule was the ultimate goal of the British administration; likewise Egypt was ready only for local, as opposed to national, self-government.<sup>141</sup>

Although, as we shall see, there was still much that radicals found to criticise in the columns of the *New Europe*, this was a distinction that was broadly accepted across the liberal spectrum. Charles Buxton and James Bryce expressed similar views at this time, as did the UDC's Israel Zangwill. The latter, although critical of British support for national self-determination in Central and Eastern Europe, conceded that 'when the Germans retorted "India" and the Turks "Egypt", they forgot that the principle has not yet passed the colour-line'.<sup>142</sup> There was an overarching racism within British approaches to national questions, shared by radical UDC activists and the liberal-imperialist supporters of the *New Europe* alike, regardless of whether the dismemberment of the Habsburg Empire was accepted as necessary or not.

Further common ground linking the different approaches to nationalism advocated by these rival wartime foreign affairs experts is revealed by focusing not so much on the principle of national self-determination itself, but on what the application of this principle was designed to achieve. In a revealing letter to R.W. Seton-Watson before the war, the internationalist and academic Alfred Zimmern, who in his approach to nationalism drew

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<sup>140</sup> Bevan, E., 'Self-determination and the British Commonwealth: (II) India', *New Europe*, Vol. 6, No. 67 (24<sup>th</sup> January 1918), p. 35. Part of the series in *New Europe* on 'Self-determination and the British Commonwealth' – other articles addressed: 'Ireland' (Vol. 6, No. 66, 17<sup>th</sup> January 1918) pp. 5-7); 'Egypt' (Vol. 6, No. 68, 31<sup>st</sup> January 1918, pp. 81-89); 'Equatorial Africa' (Vol. 6, No. 71, 21<sup>st</sup> February 1918, pp. 173-79); 'Nigeria' (Vol. 6, No. 77, 4<sup>th</sup> April 1918, pp. 367-70).

<sup>141</sup> Bevan, 'Self-determination and the British Commonwealth: (II) India', p. 39; Peel, G., 'Self-determination and the British Commonwealth. (III) Egypt', *New Europe*, Vol. 6, No. 68 (31<sup>st</sup> January 1918), p. 85.

<sup>142</sup> Buxton, 'Nationality', p. 42; Bryce, *Essays and Addresses in War Time*, p. 21; Zangwill, I., *The Principle of Nationalities* (London, 1917), p. 23.



heavily on the experience of having spent a year in the Balkans (or what he called the ‘Near East’), had argued:

The main difference between a good and a bad young nation seems to be rather well summed up in the colloquialisms “white” and “dago” (which one can’t help using in the Near East). It is really a question, not of political rights but of what they ought to be ... a symbol of, self-respect and a power of spiritual resistance – a certain toughness of fibre which “will” make the apparently stupid and superficially unprogressive nations come out on top in the end. It is very like the case of the slow-growing public school boy and the precocious Boardschool prize winner.<sup>143</sup>

In other words, national self-determination was never the end in itself, though it might be the most effective means towards ensuring the progress of the society in question – a way of enabling, to use Zimmern’s racist terminology, the ‘white’ elements of that society to triumph over its ‘dago’ elements. Within the British Empire, Zimmern saw national self-determination as unnecessary because liberal government and the rule of law provided a common framework for the peaceful coexistence of different cultures and ‘races’. In the ‘Near East’ (that is to say the Balkans) however, this was not the case. This accounted for the ‘political’ rather than ‘cultural’ nature of nationalism in the region. It suggested the need to break-up both the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires so that nationalist energies could be satisfied and adapted to more progressive cultural and spiritual ends.<sup>144</sup>

Not all commentators addressed this point in such detail or with such candour. Yet it represents an approach that corresponds closely to the overarching ‘civilisational perspective’ from which British liberals tended to approach such questions, even if they now did so using an increasingly nationalist idiom. As discussed in previous chapters, in the nineteenth century ‘oppressed nationalities’ were supported primarily because their ‘liberation’ was deemed to represent the only means through which political, social and cultural progress would be achieved. It was generally not a matter of having sympathy with any particular ethno-nationalist agenda, however. Historians who have raised eyebrows regarding the UDC’s readiness to ‘disregard self-determination as an absolute principle’

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<sup>143</sup> Zimmern to Seton-Watson, 10<sup>th</sup> August (1907? – year not stated): Seton-Watson Papers (SEW/17/31/4).

<sup>144</sup> Zimmern, *Nationality and Government*, pp. 65-66. See also: Zimmern to Seton-Watson, 27<sup>th</sup> March 1909 and 10<sup>th</sup> February 1910: Seton-Watson Papers (SEW/17/31/4); Trentmann, F., *Free Trade Nation. Commerce, Consumption and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 2008), p. 276.

during the First World War overlook this.<sup>145</sup> The Bulgarian agitation had rallied British liberal sympathy for the ‘oppressed Christians’ of Turkey-in-Europe by contrasting their civilised qualities with the barbarous and oriental despotism of the ‘Unspeakable Turk’. This entailed growing awareness of the different national groups of the Balkan Peninsula, but it did not signal a commitment to national self-determination *per se*. What mattered was ‘liberating’ fellow ‘Christian’ and European peoples from an illiberal and oppressive rule – the ethnography of the region once this had been achieved was of far less significance.

The Balkan Committee followed this basic approach in its campaigns around the Macedonian question in the first decade of the twentieth century. Admittedly, the contested nationality of the Macedonians themselves could no longer be totally ignored. However, the overriding goal of the Committee was to secure reform and orderly rule in a region inhabited by progressive, ‘virile’ and industrious populations. If this could be achieved within a reforming and modernising – but still very much multi-national – Ottoman Empire, as appeared to be the case in the immediate aftermath of the Young Turk revolution, so much the better. Zimmermann’s approach to national questions in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans followed this logic, but adapted it to the circumstances of the war. To writers of Zimmermann’s stamp, the war, whilst not perhaps something to be glorified, nevertheless represented an opportunity. It was a chance to secure the triumph of the liberal and inclusive ‘British’ form of empire at the expense of the militaristic and exclusive ‘Prussian’ or ‘Austro-Hungarian’ form of empire. It was consequently a chance to move nationalism from the political to the cultural and educational sphere. Far from being a ‘backward step in human civilisation’, the war actually merely reflected the fact that this civilisation was ‘still grievously incomplete and unconsolidated’.<sup>146</sup>

However, these continuities and commonalities were obscured by increasingly bitter sniping between rival groups of experts, and by a general refusal on all sides to consider

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<sup>145</sup> May, A.J., ‘R.W. Seton-Watson and British Anti-Habsburg Sentiment’, *American Slavic and East European Review*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1961), p. 44; Sluga, *The Nation, Psychology and International Politics*, p. 44.

<sup>146</sup> Zimmermann, ‘Introductory’ in *The War and Democracy*, p. 5. See also: Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation*, pp. 277-78.

points of convergence over those of divergence. And there were certainly areas where these wartime experts differed sharply. Firstly, holding a generally far less rosy view of the British Empire than the *New Europe* did, the radicals and pacifists associated with the UDC were deeply uneasy about British lives and British civil liberties being sacrificed in its defence. Secondly, as mentioned above, critics questioned the nature of the ‘spirit of nationality’ that the British ‘Commonwealth’ was supposed to be advancing and the Austro-Hungarian Empire to be repressing. It was, Israel Zangwill claimed, a principle ‘shrouded in fog’, unsatisfactorily expressed through a myriad of vague and contradictory criteria, whether these had to do with language, history, ‘race’ and religion on the one hand, or with economic and strategic interests on the other.<sup>147</sup> Thirdly, and perhaps most fundamentally, UDC writers failed to see how nationalism, even as a cultural rather than a political force, could serve as a conduit for citizenship and patriotism. Brailsford denounced national self-determination as ‘an inspiration of anarchy and individualism’, and as a recipe for economic dislocation and ‘a decline in civilisation’. Like Zangwill, he believed that a multinational ‘Danubian State’ was an economic necessity. Yet the continuation of the war to achieve a ‘victoire integrale’ would not only risk economic disaster. It would also entrench international grievances, promote revisionism, and encourage conceptions of citizenship that were inward looking, exclusive and unconstructive.<sup>148</sup>

This attitude shaped both the radicals’ opposition to the dismemberment of Austria-Hungary and their growing frustration with and hostility towards Irish nationalism in Britain itself. In the aftermath of the war, stung by the rise of Sinn Fein, radical commentators who had always been sympathetic to the cause of Irish Home Rule started to draw exasperated parallels between the situation across the Irish Sea and that on the Continent. As explored further in the next chapter, the Balkans provided an important reference point in this debate. Indeed, it provided a new term to express unease with the consequences of national self-determination – ‘balkanisation’. As the *Nation* argued in April 1920: ‘We were never in love

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<sup>147</sup> Zangwill, *Principle of Nationalities*, p. 27.

<sup>148</sup> Brailsford, *After the Peace*, pp. 53-55, p. 62; Zangwill, *Principle of Nationalities*, p. 85.

with the politics of the Tower of Babel ... We regard the balkanisation of Central and Eastern Europe as a world disaster and we should use every resource of statesmanship, persuasion and negotiation to prevent the balkanisation of the British Isles.<sup>149</sup> As discussed, the attitudes of the radicals and the *New Europe* group to events in Ireland, if not in Central Europe, were actually rather similar. Yet their different conceptions of the relationship between nationalism and citizenship could not be reconciled. The wider divide between radicalism and liberal imperialism, of which foreign affairs analysis was an important aspect, was becoming increasingly entrenched.

It is clear, however, that wartime national questions were never debated with just the future map of Europe in mind. The concept of national self-determination, for both its supporters and its critics, was intrinsically related to wider concerns about citizenship and about the need to manage or guide the behaviour of 'backward' or 'less civilised' communities towards western liberal ideals and standards. This was the international complement to an ongoing domestic effort to reconcile the concept of democracy with that of social order and control. Support for national self-determination in Central and Eastern Europe and 'la victoire integrale' on the one hand, and a more modest reconfiguration of existing multinational states and a negotiated peace with Austria-Hungary on the other, were essentially two different wartime approaches to one overarching liberal-internationalist agenda: the promotion of civilisation and progress across the globe.

## Conclusion

The story of British liberalism and the Balkans in the period from 1912 to 1918 is one of intense and committed political and humanitarian engagement co-existing with persistent concerns and unease regarding the need for international control, guidance and intervention in the region. This had clear parallels with approaches to citizenship and democracy in the domestic sphere. International questions, and internationalism, were a key part of this aspect

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<sup>149</sup> 'Order and Anarchy in Ireland', *Nation*, 24<sup>th</sup> April 1920, p. 102, cited in Peatling, *British Opinion and Irish Self-Government*, p. 99.

of progressive politics, and the Balkans featured heavily in the debates and discussions this provoked. Despite the concerns many British liberals shared about the nature of Balkan nationalism, and despite the widely recognised obstacles presented by territories such as Macedonia to the ‘principle of nationality’, the Balkan Peninsula emerged from the First World War as a region of independent states that were, in theory at least, finally free from the shackles of empire (both Habsburg and Ottoman). This perhaps marked the culmination of a process of ‘Europeanisation’ in the region. This process had begun with the first national revolts against Ottoman rule in the early-nineteenth century, and would reach its logical conclusion in the establishment of the Turkish Republic under Atatürk after the Greek-Turkish War and resulting population exchange. At this point (1923), it has been suggested, the Balkans finally ‘reached their full potential and the end of the road in their national wars’.<sup>150</sup>

The unsuccessful attempt of Austen Chamberlain, Foreign Secretary in the mid-1920s, to broker a ‘Balkan Locarno’ seems not to have had the same level of public scrutiny as Edward Grey’s handling of the Macedonian question two decades earlier.<sup>151</sup> As the following chapter will explore, there were some notable experts on the Balkans represented on the Labour party’s Advisory Committee on International Questions in the immediate post-war period, including ex-Liberal MPs such as the Buxtons, as well as Henry Brailsford. Yet this did not mean that Balkan affairs received a great deal of attention at the Committee’s meetings or in its numerous reports and memos.<sup>152</sup> In March 1919, Brailsford felt the need to remind readers of the American journal *New Republic* that the war ‘began with a Balkan murder’ and that a lasting peace would require a lasting territorial settlement in the region. Yet Brailsford admitted that the handling of Balkan questions at the Peace Conference ‘may

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<sup>150</sup> Michail, ‘Western Attitudes to War in the Balkans’, p. 230.

<sup>151</sup> Finney, ‘Raising Frankenstein’; Bakić, D., “‘Must Will Peace’: The British Brokering of a “Central European” and “Balkan Locarno”, 1925-9’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (2012), pp. 24-56.

<sup>152</sup> Labour History Archive & Study Centre, People’s History Museum, Manchester: Labour Party Advisory Committee on International Questions (ACIQ): Minutes and Agendas (LP/IAC/1).

seem a small matter' to most Englishmen and Americans, given the many other issues at stake in Paris.<sup>153</sup>

This reflected a changed geopolitical landscape. Many 'Eastern Questions', as they had been understood before the war, no longer existed. Unlike the Romanovs, Soviet Russia had no designs on Constantinople (or Turkish Istanbul); the Habsburg dream of a gateway to the Aegean at Salonika (or Greek Thessaloniki) died with their empire; the Balkan 'powder keg' was not likely to ignite another European war. When Sir Edward Grey came to write his memoirs in the 1920s, he recalled the 'intolerably wearisome, very disagreeable, and painfully futile' diplomatic headaches that had been caused by Macedonia in the decades before the war, but he could also at least console himself with the thought that the issue was no longer important.<sup>154</sup> Perhaps reflecting this, the *Balkan Review* expanded its remit during its short-lived existence (February 1919 to December 1920) from an initially fairly straightforward 'study of the Balkan Peninsula, its peoples, and its politics' to a much broader set of foreign affairs agendas. As the journal's 'Purpose and Policy' preface put it in 1920: 'The future of the Turkish Empire, the claims of the subject peoples of Asia Minor and the Black Sea region, the growth of Arab nationalism and the mandatory responsibilities in the Middle East, these and other questions have introduced new elements into the Eastern Question.'<sup>155</sup>

This was the period in which the region also became noticeably less 'Balkan' and more 'Eastern European' in the British imagination. Admittedly, this was a gradual process. A distinctly 'Balkan' rather than 'Eastern European' strand of popular literature continued to be published throughout the interwar period, as Vesna Goldsworthy has shown.<sup>156</sup> One definite common link between the Balkan states and their Baltic, Central and Eastern European counterparts in the 'New Europe' was their obligation to sign new treaties guaranteeing the civil rights of their national minorities. This was something both Romania

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<sup>153</sup> Brailsford, H.N., 'The Peace of the Balkans', *New Republic*, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1919, p. 140.

<sup>154</sup> Grey, *Twenty-Five Years*, p. 166.

<sup>155</sup> Compare 'The Editor's Causerie' (Vol. 1, No. 1, February 1919, p. 63) with the preface to Vol. 3 (February-July 1920).

<sup>156</sup> Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania* (New Edition), p. 12.

and Serbia had had to do in respect of their Jewish minorities as far back as 1878, but these older treaties were now superseded by those signed in 1919-23. The question of minority rights was the focus of far greater liberal internationalist attention in the wake of Paris than had been the case in the wake of Berlin, as the following chapter will explore.

This new concern with national minorities and with the surveying and organised study of European foreign affairs, indeed the interest in the region of new quasi-academic organisations such as Chatham House, underlines another key development in British-Balkan interaction that has been highlighted in this chapter – the rise of the expert. The *New Europe* may have denounced Noel Buxton's criticism of its arguments as mere 'sentimentalism', but the journal was actually taking forward a trend in British engagement with Balkan questions that Buxton himself had helped to start. This was the conviction that the future of the region was a matter calling for detached, 'objective' and 'scientific' analysis. As this chapter has suggested, there was much about the approaches of both the *New Europe* and its critics that was anything but objective, and the British knowledge base for the study of the Balkans was certainly not comprehensive. Nevertheless, it was no longer seen as appropriate to challenge British foreign policy towards the region without having first laid claim to some degree of first-hand knowledge and understanding.

The emotional and deliberately provocative language of the Bulgarian agitation had no place in wartime foreign affairs debate. Noel and Charles Buxton were not helped by the fact that they were more closely associated with this particular aspect of the Gladstonian liberal heritage than the likes of R.W. Seton-Watson or Arnold Toynbee, their new rivals in this clash of the experts. The apogee of the British Balkan expert (or 'crank') thus came at a time when the long-lasting and morally charged preoccupation of British liberalism with the wider Eastern Question was coming to an end. British engagement with Balkans *as a distinctly liberal cause* did not survive the First World War. The divisions between radical and more imperially-minded approaches to the Balkans, and to foreign affairs more generally, was also central to the fracturing of the Liberal party and the 'strange death' of British liberalism in these years.

However, even if the geopolitics of the Balkans was no longer approached within the cultural framework of the Eastern Question, British political and humanitarian engagement with the region left important legacies for post-war liberal-internationalism. As the final chapter of this thesis will now explore, the Balkan context is relevant not only to the development of ideas about self-government and national sovereignty *within* Europe, but also to the new rationale that was given to the continued existence of multinational empire *outside* Europe.



## After the Eastern Question: the Balkans and British liberal internationalism

In April 1932, Noel Buxton wrote to the *Times* from a country he described as ‘so full of history and so picturesque ... where East and West mingle’ and which ‘excites the sympathy of foreigners for the national independence which it cherishes so dearly.’<sup>1</sup> The language is familiar, and might have been employed in any number of Balkan Committee publications before the First World War. Yet at that time Buxton had not been in the Balkans for the best part of a decade.<sup>2</sup> As Joint President of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, Buxton was writing as part of a delegation to urge Emperor Haile Selassie to step up recent efforts to abolish slavery in Abyssinia. By the 1930s, Buxton’s work for the Anti-Slavery Society, as well as other international projects such as his Presidency of the Save the Children Fund, had eclipsed his earlier preoccupation with the Balkans.

As noted in the previous chapter, like many whose politics had been on the radical side of British liberalism, Buxton’s activism was also now conducted as a member of the Labour party. Having lost his seat as a Liberal MP in the 1918 general election, Buxton won it back under his new party colours in 1922. Charles Buxton made the ‘shift left’ earlier than his brother, joining the Independent Labour Party in 1917. Noel later claimed it was ‘Charlie’s example’ that paved the way for his own transfer of political affiliation.<sup>3</sup> The Buxtons’ fellow Balkan Committee colleagues Brailsford and Nevinson, meanwhile, had both already cut their ties with the Liberal party before the war over the issue of women’s suffrage.<sup>4</sup> Yet this new institutional context did not necessarily imply the abandonment of liberalism. If anything, the Labour party was felt to be more ‘liberal’ than the Liberals. During the war, Noel Buxton had

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<sup>1</sup> Lord Noel Buxton, ‘Slavery in Abyssinia’, *Times*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1932, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Based on the trips to the Balkans recorded in Buxton’s *Draft Autobiography*: Noel Buxton Papers, (MS951 c. 7/1).

<sup>3</sup> Draft of an *Autobiography* – section on ‘Politics’: Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951, c. 7/12).

<sup>4</sup> *Times*, 5<sup>th</sup> October 1909, cited in Grant, ‘British Suffragettes’, p. 134.

gone from viewing Labour as being ‘only for the horny handed’ to viewing it as the political voice of the nation’s liberal conscience, particularly as far as foreign affairs was concerned.<sup>5</sup>

Liberal activists and intellectuals were prominent contributors to Labour foreign and imperial affairs debate after 1918 (although their direct influence over policy has been questioned).<sup>6</sup> From 1925, Charles Buxton was Chairman of the Labour party’s Advisory Committees on International and Imperial Questions (ACIQ), whose members also included Noel Buxton, Brailsford, Alfred Zimmern and David Mitrany.<sup>7</sup> In fact, as a Labour MP, Charles Buxton found himself subject to criticism for, in the words of one disgruntled constituent, spending ‘all his time troubling his head about people many thousands of miles away’ when he ought to ‘get down to brass tacks and let the natives of Rhodesia and Nyassaland look after themselves for a while’.<sup>8</sup> Buxton also served as a member of two British Government delegations to the League of Nations, in 1924 and 1930, where he recalled: ‘I think they considered me (at first, at any rate) as a rather simple sentimentalist, liable, perhaps, to cut up rusty and resign if my opinions were not adopted’.<sup>9</sup>

The charge of ‘sentimentalism’ is intriguing as it was one with which Buxton was already familiar from his work with the Balkan Committee. Although, as discussed in the previous chapter, the First World War had encouraged the cult of the expert as far as British foreign affairs debate was concerned, the relationship between academic expertise and a more explicitly Christian-oriented outlook in approaches to international questions seems to have remained problematic. It has been argued that one of the largest liberal-internationalist movements of the interwar decades, the League of Nations Union, grappled with this very

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<sup>5</sup> Draft of an *Autobiography* – section on ‘Politics’: Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951, c. 7/12).

<sup>6</sup> Winkler, H., *Paths Not Taken. British Labour and International Policy in the 1920s* (Chapel Hill, 1994), pp. 15-18; Bridgen, P., *The Labour Party and the Politics of War and Peace* (Woodbridge, 2009), p. 121, p. 187; Vickers, R., *The Labour Party and the World – Volume 1: The Evolution of Labour’s Foreign Policy 1900-51* (Manchester, 2003), p. 74; Ashworth, L., *International Relations and the Labour Party. Intellectuals and Policy Making from 1918-1945* (London, 2007), p. 33.

<sup>7</sup> Labour Party ACIQ: Minutes and Agendas (LP/IAC/1).

<sup>8</sup> *Bridgehouse and Elland Echo*, 24<sup>th</sup> December 1930, letter from ‘a Labour man’ who was one of Buxton’s constituents: Press-cutting in Charles Roden Buxton Papers (MSS. Brit. Emp. S. 405, Buxton C.R.: Buxton 5/3, ff. 251-2).

<sup>9</sup> De Bunsen, *Charles Roden Buxton*, p. 118; Anderson, *Noel Buxton*, pp. 128-29. See also Hetherington, P., *British Paternalism and Africa, 1920-1940* (London, 1978), p. 16.

issue.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the experience of political and humanitarian activism with regard to pre-war and wartime Balkan questions was not so different to the experience of campaigning around the new agendas of post-war internationalism? As her recent biographers have noted, Eglantyne Jebb surely owed some of the vision that inspired the foundation of the Save the Children Fund to her experience of relief work in Macedonia during the Balkan Wars.<sup>11</sup> The final chapter of this thesis examines the place of the Balkans in British foreign affairs debate in the 1920s, with a particular focus on the careers of Noel and Charles Buxton. It argues that the significance of British liberal engagement with the region went beyond European policy and the agendas of the old Eastern Question to inform broader liberal-internationalist approaches to government and empire. It considers the relationship between old Balkan problems such as Macedonia and new internationalist challenges of the 1920s such as the Mandates system and the reform of empire in Africa. This highlights the intersection between Europe and empire within British foreign affairs discourse. It also underscores the continued relevance of pre-war questions and contexts, and pre-war cultures and traditions of dissent over foreign policy, to post-war developments in international affairs and humanitarianism.

### **The 'Balkanisation of Europe' and Minorities Protection**

Much of the 'New Europe' under discussion at the Paris Peace Conference was starving and beset by political and economic chaos. The successor states of the Habsburg Empire represented to a number of despairing commentators not the triumph of liberal principles but an uncertain and dangerous 'balkanisation of Europe'.<sup>12</sup> This reflected unease at the perceived consequences of the over-zealous application of the principle of national self-determination. As the draft memorandum and pamphlet on Foreign Policy produced by the Labour party in November 1921 argued:

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<sup>10</sup> McCarthy, *British People and the League of Nations*, p. 245, p. 36.

<sup>11</sup> Mahood, *Feminism and Voluntary Action*, p. 148, p. 154; Mulley, *Woman Who Saved the Children*, p. 148, p. 158.

<sup>12</sup> Most notably, Charles and Dorothy Buxton, *The World After the War* (London, 1920): Chapter 2 on 'The Balkanization of Europe'.

Labour welcomes the rebirth of Poland and other oppressed nationalities. But it is not blind to the danger of creating a crowd of new small independent states, before either the spirit or the machinery of neighbourly cooperation has been developed to an adequate extent.<sup>13</sup>

Such language is resonant of liberal angst about declining citizenship and the challenges of democracy at home. In the domestic context, liberals had assumed since 1867 that the expanding political nation needed to be carefully managed and ‘educated’ for democracy through the disinterested leadership of the progressive elite. The new international context created by the Paris peace settlement aroused similar concerns. If, as discussed in previous chapters, the Balkans had been the ‘East End of Europe’ before the war, by the 1920s an even bigger swathe of the continent was cast in similar terms. In this image of a ‘balkanised’ Europe, the successor states of the Habsburg Empire became a menacing ‘crowd’, and Central and Eastern Europe became a threatening and unruly ‘neighbourhood’ in need of careful international management and monitoring. And this was where the example of the Balkans was felt to be so pertinent. Had the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in South-East Europe in 1912 not resulted in a ‘powder keg’ of instability, rivalry and national chauvinism? Had this not ultimately ‘sucked in’ the rest of Europe, creating a conflict that had undermined some of the core values of liberal culture and civilisation? Would the former Habsburg lands now suffer the same fate and have a similar impact? These concerns lay behind much of the appeal of the League of Nations. The League, it was hoped, would act as an international training school for the ‘New Europe’ under the disinterested leadership of the more ‘civilised’ western states – the international equivalent of the progressive social elite at home.

Nevertheless, the precedent of the Macedonian question and the Balkan Wars certainly encouraged concern amongst League of Nations activists at the implications of the new map of Europe. ‘One must have lived in such a country as Macedonia’, Henry Brailsford argued, ‘before one learns to understand and to hate [political nationalism’s] barbarous fascination and its distorted utopianism’.<sup>14</sup> There is a tendency for the enduring salience of

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<sup>13</sup> Labour Party ACIQ: Memos 1921-1924 (numbers 226 and 228a).

<sup>14</sup> Brailsford, H., *Olives of Endless Age. Being a view of this distracted world and the possibility of international unity* (New York, 1928), p. 215

this pre-1914 encounter with the ravages of war and nationalism to be overlooked when considering the rationale behind the post-war critique of national self-determination. This was not just, as one historian of the Labour party suggests, ‘a consequence of the First World War and the resulting deliberations over the establishment of a League of Nations’.<sup>15</sup> As Brailsford’s comments indicate, it also picked up the thread of a longer-term preoccupation with national questions that had centred on the Balkans.

To some, the war seemed to have caused the worst aspects of the Balkan region’s pre-war political culture to radiate across the rest of the continent. As noted, from the time of the Bulgarian agitation in 1876, the British liberal engagement with the Balkans had been characterised by interplay between attraction and repulsion, with both positive and negative assessments of the region, and its capacity for progress and civilisation, co-existing. Yet the trope of balkanisation was overwhelmingly negative as far the imaginative geography of the Balkans was concerned. Writers who had once written optimistically of the contribution to be made to western civilisation and culture by the Balkan lands seemed now to see only the debilitating products of a ‘backward’ Balkan nationalism being exported to the more ‘advanced’ section of Europe. In *The World After the War* (1920), Charles and Dorothy Buxton painted a desperate picture of the Continent by the time ‘peace’ was restored in 1918:

... all the destruction and confusion which had made the Balkans a synonym for political unrest and danger had been reproduced, with tragic exactness, over a far greater area, and had begun to affect the life of peoples more advanced in civilisation and more accustomed to order and culture. The central region of Europe was included, in a very real sense, within the frontiers of the Balkans, now moved Northwards and Westwards to the Baltic, the Oder, and the Rhine.<sup>16</sup>

Activists who had once had such high hopes for the Balkans now expressed a cynicism and disgust born of disappointment and crushed expectations. The prospect of a federation of the post-war Balkan states was dismissed out of hand by Brailsford in a report on the subject for the Labour party: ‘I will not argue this at length’, he wrote, ‘but will merely defy anyone who has lived and worked among the Balkan peoples, as I have done, to say, in a mood of cold

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<sup>15</sup> Vickers, R., *The Labour Party and the World, Volume 1: The Evolution of Labour’s Foreign Policy 1900-1951* (Manchester, 2003), p. 73.

<sup>16</sup> Buxton and Buxton, *World After the War*, p. 23.

reason, that he really believes that in our generation their emotional chauvinism and intellectual immaturity would render such a conception possible'.<sup>17</sup>

Such balkanist rhetoric is a further indication of the displacement of the Balkans as a liberal cause. The positive side of the British liberal imagination of the Balkans that this cause had helped to inspire was certainly no longer widely expressed. The old Gladstonian liberal message of support for 'oppressed nationalities' and sympathy for the sufferings of fellow-Christian and fellow-European peoples was outmoded now that the 'Unspeakable Turk' had finally been driven from the region. Noel Buxton regretted that debate over international questions in the 1920s seemed to be characterised by the 'undue suspicion of everything remotely resembling Gladstonian idealism, and a contempt for those who are associated with the name of Christian'.<sup>18</sup> As Buxton's lament suggests, the Balkans was no longer part of a Christian 'Europe unredeemed', the final missing piece of the jigsaw of liberal progress and cultural and material advancement. Instead, the peninsula was presented as being emblematic of a Europe in chaos – war-weary and starving yet politically unstable and with its inhabitants still half at each other's throats.<sup>19</sup> Brailsford asserted that the Treaty of Versailles represented 'the epitaph of the Liberal age in Europe'.<sup>20</sup> It might also be argued that it represented the epitaph of the age of explicit British liberal support for Balkan causes.

However, critics or sceptics of national self-determination continued to draw heavily on Balkan examples and precedents in articulating alternative approaches to international organisation. This included new international efforts to protect 'minority rights' within Europe's newly devised national borders. As part of the peace settlement, both the successor states of the Habsburg Empire and the already-existing states of the Balkans were forced to sign special treaties guaranteeing a degree of linguistic, educational and religious autonomy

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<sup>17</sup> Labour Party Archives ACIQ: Memos 1918-1920 (Number 16 [not dated] on 'The Danubian Federation' by H.N. Brailsford).

<sup>18</sup> Buxton, N. and Conwil-Evans, T.P., *Oppressed Peoples and the League of Nations* (London, 1922), p. 134.

<sup>19</sup> See in particular the articles by Brailsford in *The New Republic*: 'On Dismembering Austria' (31<sup>st</sup> August 1918) and 'The Peace of the Balkans' (1<sup>st</sup> March 1919); also, Buxton and Buxton, *The World After the War*, ch. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Brailsford, H.N., *Across the Blockade: A Record of Travels in Enemy Europe* (London, 1919), p. 146.

for those members of their populations that did not belong to the majority national group (for instance, Macedonians and Albanians in Yugoslavia, or Hungarians and Bulgarians in Romania). Six of the thirteen states with which these ‘minorities treaties’ were initially signed had been part of (or contained territories that had been part of) the Ottoman Empire.<sup>21</sup> The Balkans had also provided a key reference point in the post-war campaign to secure this international minorities protection regime in the first place. Jewish organisations, having long fought to draw the international community’s attention to the oppression of Jews in Romania, pointed to the atrocities and chaos of the Balkan Wars as evidence of what ‘half-crazed nationalists’ were capable of in newly-formed or politically ‘immature’ states.<sup>22</sup> Macedonia was seen as a key case study in a contemporary account of the League of Nations’ handling of this new international responsibility.<sup>23</sup> As noted in previous chapters, concerns about the status of ‘racial’ and religious minorities in the Balkans had hovered in the background of foreign affairs discourse relating to the region since the time of Treaty of Berlin. Yet it was only in the post-war period that this issue became a mainstream liberal-internationalist cause, and one that was defined as concerned with the protection of collective *national* rights, rather than of individual civil or religious liberties.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, the series of post-war peace conferences and treaties in 1919-23 cemented what has been called ‘a new political language’, that of minority rights and protection.<sup>25</sup> Before the war, when there had been a European ‘national minority’ population of around 60 million (as opposed to around 25 million after 1923), the concept that such people should be given specific forms of international protection to defend their *collective* cultural or political rights had not been a major feature of British liberal-internationalist discourse. It had once been possible to draw Europe’s attention to the sufferings of Poles in Imperial Russia without necessarily having to consider how an independent Poland might treat its Jews, Ukrainians or

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<sup>21</sup> These states were: Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Turkey and Yugoslavia.

<sup>22</sup> Mazower, M., ‘Minorities and the League of Nations in Interwar Europe’, *Daedalus*, Vol. 126, No. 2 (1997), pp. 49-51.

<sup>23</sup> Mair, L.P., *The Protection of Minorities. The Working and Scope of the Minorities Treaties under the League of Nations* (London, 1928), pp. 172-4.

<sup>24</sup> Mazower, ‘Minorities and the League of Nations’, p. 51.

<sup>25</sup> Weitz, ‘From the Vienna to the Paris System’, p. 1325.

Belarusians; just as, as discussed, it had been possible for the Balkan Committee to embark on a moral crusade over the Macedonian question without having anything like a consistent answer to the question of how to draw the map of the region once it had been ‘liberated’ from Ottoman rule. This was no longer the case after 1919.

Many British liberals who were ill at ease with the old language of ‘oppressed nationalities’ embraced the new principle of international minorities protection. This was despite criticism of its one-sided application. For minorities protection treaties were only imposed on the ‘New Europe’. Western European states had no such obligation to protect their own minorities. For example, the Yugoslav state had responsibilities in respect of the Italian population in Istria and Dalmatia that were not shared by the Italian state in respect of the South Slav minority in Italy. The liberal internationalist Gilbert Murray found ‘the whole principle of exempting the great powers ... indefensible’. He argued that as a consequence ‘the new nations do not accept the minority clauses as part of the national duties of a civilised state, but resent them as a limitation of their independence’.<sup>26</sup>

Yet the fact was that the ‘indefensible’ decision to confine international protection of national minorities to Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans rested on assumptions that corresponded closely to the radical angst about the ‘balkanisation of Europe’. It was arguably precisely because the Habsburg and Ottoman successor states were assumed to have low levels of civilisation, relative to the West, that the system of minorities protection had been introduced at all. This was a regime based, as Mark Mazower notes, ‘on the supremely paternalistic stance that “civilised” states such as those in Western Europe had evolved procedures to facilitate the assimilation of minorities that did not exist in “immature” states’.<sup>27</sup> It was an integral part of the wider liberal-internationalist task of ‘educating’ that ‘crowd of new small independent states’ that presented the Labour party Advisory Committee on International Questions with such concern. Along with the Mandates system, discussed below, minorities protection should be understood as one answer to a key question for the

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<sup>26</sup> Murray, G., ‘Introduction’ to Mair, *Protection of Minorities*, p. vii.

<sup>27</sup> Mazower, ‘Minorities and the League of Nations’, p. 53.



new liberal internationalism of the League of Nations. To quote Susan Pedersen, this was the issue of how to ‘reconcile the idea of a world to be composed of formally equal sovereign states, all operating according to agreed administrative and ethical norms, with the reality of member states of very different types and possessed of vastly unequal geopolitical reach and power’.<sup>28</sup>

Despite some misgivings about the one-sided application of the minorities protection system, British liberals – perhaps particularly those with experience of the old Eastern Question – were able to relate very easily to this basic challenge. The protection of national minorities in the Balkans and elsewhere offered the Buxtons and others a similar kind of ‘moral crusade’ to their earlier campaigns in support of Balkan Christians. The language employed in presenting the issue was similar to the appeals of the Balkan Committee over Macedonia before the war. Stress was laid on the ‘duty’ and ‘responsibilities’ of neutral states in enforcing the fulfilment of the minorities treaties, for example, and calls were made for ‘the support of disinterested public opinion’ in ensuring any abuses or injustices were dealt with.<sup>29</sup> These kinds of appeals were almost second nature to Noel Buxton after his experience with the Balkan Committee.

Such appeals were thus clearly felt to be applicable to various geographical and humanitarian contexts. Another instance of their application was the Fight the Famine Council. This precursor to the Save the Children Fund was set up in the immediate aftermath of the war by Dorothy Buxton and Eglantyne Jebb (respectively Charles Buxton’s wife and sister-in-law) in response to the food crisis in Central Europe, which the Council blamed on the continuing economic blockade of Germany. As Treasurer, Noel Buxton issued a fundraising appeal arguing that ‘those who are experts know well the terrible nature of the menace which is confronting European civilisation’. Yet the Council wished ‘to bring home the facts to the whole nation because only a great concerted national effort can avail to save

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<sup>28</sup> Pedersen, S., ‘Back to the League of Nations’, *American Historical Review*, Vol. 112, No. 4 (2007), p. 1099.

<sup>29</sup> Buxton, N., ‘National Minorities To-Day’, *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 140 (July/December 1931), p. 161.

thousands of lives in the near future, and to establish such economic and international relationships as may subsequently afford the people of every country reasonable chances of subsistence'.<sup>30</sup> This familiar desire to win mass public support for a moral cause, whilst at the same time stressing the prior need for 'facts' and 'experts', was an approach first honed through engagement with Balkan questions before the First World War.

Clearly, then, although events in the Balkans were no longer a major area of concern for the likes of Buxton, new causes were approached in a similar fashion to this earlier example of political and humanitarian campaigning. The causes and the contexts may have changed, but the basic model of activism remained the same. Yet, as the Balkan Committee had discovered over the Macedonian question, high-minded appeals to public opinion could not be relied upon to sway policy makers. The blockade of Central Europe remained in place until June 1919. The hoped-for Permanent Minorities Commission to monitor and enforce the protection of minority rights in Central and South-Eastern Europe's successor states never materialised. The 'Bulgarian' Macedonians of Yugoslavia were one of several European minority groups whom Buxton and others felt were suffering as a result.<sup>31</sup>

The protection of minority rights was not the only aspect of post-war internationalism to which the experience of British liberal interaction with the Balkans was relevant, however. The Mandates system adopted by the League of Nations to govern the former Ottoman Middle East and the former German colonies in Africa and the Pacific offered another source of optimism for British internationalists

### **From the Macedonian question to the Mandates system**

The Mandates system provided, like the minorities protection treaties, what one Labour party memorandum described as 'a legal basis for international criticism and control'.<sup>32</sup> As part of the Paris peace settlement, Mandates were awarded to Britain, France, Belgium, Japan, South

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<sup>30</sup> 'Fight the Famine Council' fundraising appeal signed by Noel Buxton (Treasurer), not dated: Eglantyne Jebb Papers (7EJB/C/02).

<sup>31</sup> Buxton, 'National Minorities To-Day', pp. 163-64.

<sup>32</sup> Labour Party ACIQ: Memos 1921-24 (Number 228a: 'Draft Pamphlet on Foreign Policy' November, 1921).

Africa, Australia and New Zealand to be ruled as ‘a sacred trust on behalf of civilisation’ and in preparation for future self-government. The timeframes for this were not explicitly defined, except that there were three ‘classes’ of Mandate, determined by the supposed capacity for self-rule of the populations concerned.<sup>33</sup>

Historians have largely overlooked the relevance of British liberal interaction with the Balkans to the Mandates system. Michael Callahan points to the role played in the development of the system by precedents from European rule in Egypt and Morocco, and by international treaties concerning imperialism in Africa such as the Berlin Act of 1885, but he does not consider the Eastern Question or the pre-war Balkans.<sup>34</sup> As Africa is the focus of Callahan’s study, his reference points are understandable. Yet, as Callahan (among other historians) does note, one of the foremost contributions to the wartime exchange of ideas from which the Mandates system emerged – the 1918 pamphlet on the League of Nations by the South African statesman and British War Cabinet member General Jan Smuts – was not written with Africa in mind at all.<sup>35</sup> Smuts’ pamphlet greatly influenced Woodrow Wilson’s thinking on colonial trusteeship. This ‘practical suggestion’ to make the League of Nations the ‘reversionary in the broadest sense’ of former imperial territories that would require ‘much nursing towards political and economic independence’ was actually addressing the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Turkish empires in Europe, the Caucasus and the Middle East. The African territories, in Smuts’ view, were ‘inhabited by barbarians who cannot possibly govern themselves’, and hence presumably so far removed from any prospect of self-determination as to be irrelevant to the Mandates idea.<sup>36</sup> In fact, Smuts had an alternative and explicitly imperialistic dream of a post-war Africa that would include a continuous belt of the British Empire stretching from Cairo to Cape Town.

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<sup>33</sup> The former provinces of the Ottoman Empire were deemed to be ‘Class A’ Mandates, that is to say the most ready for self-government; all African mandates except South-West Africa were deemed to be ‘Class B’ Mandates; South-West Africa and Pacific islands were deemed to be ‘Class C’ Mandates.

<sup>34</sup> Callahan, M., *Mandates and Empire. The League of Nations and Africa, 1914-1931* (Brighton, 1999), p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Callahan, *Mandates and Empire*, pp. 24-25; Winkler, H., *The League of Nations Movement in Great Britain, 1914-1919* (Metuchen, NJ, 1952); Potter, P.B., ‘Origin of the System of Mandates under the League of Nations’, *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (1922), pp. 563-83.

<sup>36</sup> Smuts, J., *The League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion* (London, 1918), p. vi, p. 11, p. 15.

The geographical focus of Smuts' pamphlet, however, hints at the relevance of European geopolitical questions to the development of a form of government that, ultimately, came to be applied (against Smuts' will, of course) to parts of Africa (as well as to the Middle East as Smuts had anticipated). As Eric Weitz also points out, the Commission of Inquiry set up by President Wilson in 1917 to plan the peace settlement 'ran together widely strewn geographic areas, including Russia, the Balkans, Anatolia, Pacific islands, and Africa, indicating how closely the planners linked Eastern Europe with Africa and other imperial zones'.<sup>37</sup> The *New Europe*, as discussed in the previous chapter, provides one clear example of debate around European national questions and foreign policy leading directly to discussion about the management of empire. Smuts himself may not have been the *New Europe*'s closest friend – the journal had strongly criticised the speculative peace talks the South African had conducted with the Austro-Hungarian intermediary Count Mensdorff in December 1917.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, Smuts did interact with British foreign affairs experts during the war, including British Liberal and Labour party activists such as John Hobson, Charles Buxton and Henry Brailsford.<sup>39</sup> How did British liberal approaches to the Balkans inform the development of the Mandates system?

For Smuts himself, 'the animosities and rivalries among the independent Balkan States in the past, which kept the pot boiling, and occasionally boiling over', served as an example of the challenge that the League of Nations would now face 'on a much larger scale' in dealing with the successor states of the 'New Europe'.<sup>40</sup> At the end of the First World War, for most British commentators, significant parts of the Balkans were felt to be in need of the kind of western 'tutelage' and guidance that lay at the heart of Mandates system. For instance, even pro-Albanians such as Aubrey Herbert seemed ready to put the country under the at least temporary control of either the League of Nations or a Mandatory power thereof – preferably

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<sup>37</sup> Weitz, 'From the Vienna to the Paris System', p. 1331.

<sup>38</sup> Seton-Watson and Seton-Watson, *Making of a New Europe*, p. 242.

<sup>39</sup> Winkler, *League of Nations Movement*, p. 205, p. 218, p. 228.

<sup>40</sup> Smuts, *League of Nations*, p. 25.

(at least prior to Mussolini's coup d'état) Italy.<sup>41</sup> It also seems to have been anticipated that the League of Nations would appoint Mandates not just for 'semi-civilised' but also for 'ethnologically mixed' territories, and this certainly included various parts of the Balkans.<sup>42</sup> At one stage the *Nation* was dreaming of Constantinople becoming the capital of the League of Nations, from where, it was hoped, 'intellectual, and, above all, moral influences may radiate over the Balkan Peninsula'.<sup>43</sup> All commentators assumed that the League would play a central part in the post-war government of the region, but particularly in areas of mixed nationality and religion. In the *Manchester Guardian*, J.D. Burchier expressed regret at 'the mistake made by the Powers in withdrawing their military and civil representatives from Macedonia in 1908' (after the Young Turk revolution).<sup>44</sup> It was suggested that the League might now administer Macedonia so that a plebiscite of the population could be carried out. Proposals were also made for Thrace to be placed under the control of the League, along with disputed regions of Anatolia such as Smyrna and Cilicia.<sup>45</sup>

Clearly, although ultimately no Mandates were awarded for Balkan territory, there was significant support in British liberal-internationalist circles for this prospect. Whilst the Balkans was not the only area of Europe for which forms of international control were mooted, such measures were felt to be particularly applicable. What had essentially been an aspect of European policy, and the wider Eastern Question, influenced the development of an

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<sup>41</sup> Memo by Aubrey Herbert, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1918, Somerset Record Office (DD/DRU 33), cited in Destani and Tomes, *Albania's Greatest Friend*, pp. 227-28; Note to Balfour, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1919, The National Archives (FO 608/151), cited in Destani and Tomes, *Albania's Greatest Friend*, pp. 270-71. See also: Brailsford, 'The Peace of the Balkans', *New Republic*, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1919, p. 143.

<sup>42</sup> *Balkan Review*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (March 1919), p. 155.

<sup>43</sup> 'The Jungle in the East', *Nation*, 6<sup>th</sup> September 1919, p. 662.

<sup>44</sup> Burchier, J.D., 'The Macedonian Question', *Manchester Guardian*, 30<sup>th</sup> July 1919, p. 14.

<sup>45</sup> Labour Party ACIQ: Memos 1918-20 (Number 89: 'Bulgaria: Recommendations for the Executive Committee', October 1919); Toynbee, A.J., 'Western Thrace: Its Future Political Destiny', *Manchester Guardian*, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1922, p. 5; 'The Jungle in the East', *The Nation*, 6<sup>th</sup> September 1919, pp. 662-63; Brailsford, 'The Peace of the Balkans', *New Republic*, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1919, pp. 140-44; Buxton and Conwil-Evans, *Oppressed Peoples and the League of Nations*, pp. 141-45; Buxton, N., 'A Policy for the Near East', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 10 (April 1922), p. 145; Report of Balkan Committee Resolution, *Manchester Guardian*, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1920, p. 8; Labour Party ACIQ: Memos 1918-20 (Number 129: 'Draft Resolution on Armenia', February 1920; Number 103: 'Draft Memorandum on Resolutions Forwarded to the Rt. Hon. Arthur Henderson, MP, by Moslem Meetings in India, on the forthcoming Peace Settlement with Turkey', November 1919).

approach to international government that is now understood primarily as an aspect of the final stages of European imperialism.

It was the territory that had remained under Ottoman rule until 1912 – Albania, Macedonia, Thrace – that was most widely seen as being in need of careful international management. These lands were therefore of most direct relevance to new ideas about empire and the international administration of ‘backward’ or ‘politically immature’ nationalities outside of Europe. James Bryce called for Syria to be administered by ‘a small gendarmerie, organised and officered by a civilized Power’; Henry Brailsford advocated the creation of an international civil service to provide appropriate administration for ‘backward Oriental States like Persia’.<sup>46</sup> In both cases, these proposals echoed their approaches to the Macedonian question a decade earlier. As he had also argued previously with regard to Macedonia, Brailsford maintained that the best hope for stability in post-Ottoman Anatolia and Arabia lay not in national self-determination, but in a system of local self-government based around the ‘village community’ and underpinned, initially at least, by some degree of international executive control.<sup>47</sup>

The southern Balkan sub-region, with its ‘racially’ heterogeneous population and substantial Muslim presence, seems to have still occupied a liminal position between an essentially European belt of land to the north and the more explicitly ‘oriental’ Near East and Caucasus across the Bosphorus and the Black Sea. Such awareness and sensitivity to the diversity of this part of the Balkans had not been a particularly prominent feature of British liberal representations of the region before the war, as has been argued in previous chapters. Yet at the moment when the Balkans seems to be otherwise part of a ‘New Europe’, the legacies of its long rule by a ‘non-European’ empire were perhaps, finally, being taken into account. Brailsford distinguished the familiar ethno-linguistic-based nationalism of ‘Slavs, Italians and Romanians’ from the faith-based identity of the inhabitants of Arabia, Asiatic

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<sup>46</sup> Bryce, *Essays and Addresses in War Time*, pp. 150-51; Brailsford, *After the Peace*, p. 165; Brailsford, *Olives of Endless Age*, p. 335. See also: Noel Buxton and Commander Wedgwood’s proposals for the Middle Eastern settlement in *A Decisive Settlement* (London, 1918), p. 6.

<sup>47</sup> Brailsford, ‘The Future of Turkey’, *New Republic*, 20<sup>th</sup> April 1918, pp. 352-54.

Turkey *and* what had before 1912 been ‘European Turkey’, including Macedonia. (Thus, he was contradicting himself, as the Macedonians were also mainly Slavs). Macedonia, with its more recent memories of Ottoman rule, was deemed to be more comparable than neighbouring Balkan lands to what was increasingly labelled the ‘Middle East’. Here, Brailsford felt, the ‘dividing line’ was ‘not race, language, or nationality, but religion’.<sup>48</sup> Another journalist argued that Britain should promote the creation of an ‘Asiatic Balkans’ in the region.<sup>49</sup> Elsewhere, Brailsford compared Albania’s capacity for self-government to that of Armenia, Syria and Palestine – a further indication of its semi-orientalised status and perceived need for international control and ‘tutelage’.<sup>50</sup> As far as Armenia was concerned, America’s reluctance to take on the responsibility of a Mandate was the cause of much despair to British liberals.<sup>51</sup>

The distinction between different gradations of ‘European-ness’ in the Balkans is intriguing because a similar pattern has been observed in analyses of Balkan self-identity, notably in Milica Bakić-Hayden’s concept of ‘nestling orientalisms’.<sup>52</sup> Bakić-Hayden drew attention to the tropes within (post)-Yugoslav nationalist discourse whereby certain Yugoslav national groups identify themselves as being more ‘European’ or western than their orientalised internal Yugoslav ‘Others’. This is seen as being particularly marked in nationalist discourse distinguishing the inhabitants of the former Habsburg parts of Yugoslavia from the inhabitants of those areas formerly ruled by the Ottoman Empire, as well as in nationalist discourse distinguishing the Christian from the Muslim peoples of the region. Such distinctions also seem to have been present in the writing of British foreign affairs commentators at the dawn of the ‘New Europe’. Monolithic images of the Balkans as a distinct geopolitical unit were thus already breaking down in the early-twentieth century, with

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<sup>48</sup> Brailsford, ‘The Future of Turkey’, *New Republic*, 20<sup>th</sup> April 1918, pp. 351-52.

<sup>49</sup> Renton, J., ‘Changing Languages of Empire and the Orient: Britain and the Invention of the Middle East, 1917-1918’, *Historical Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (2007), pp. 645-67.

<sup>50</sup> Brailsford, H.N., ‘The League and its Mandates’, *New Republic*, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1919, p. 107.

<sup>51</sup> Buxton and Conwil-Evans, *Oppressed Peoples and the League of Nations*, p. 140, p. 151; Labour Party ACIQ: Memos 1918-1920 (Number 129: ‘Draft Resolution on Armenia’, February 1920); ‘The Middle East. Problems of Settlement’, *Manchester Guardian*, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1919, p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> See Bakić-Hayden, M., ‘Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia’, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (1995), pp. 917-31.

some parts of the peninsula merging into a broader 'Eastern Europe', but with some parts continuing to be associated with other areas of the wider post-Ottoman world.

Perhaps most pertinently, the relevance of the pre-war Balkans to these broader wartime and post-war foreign policy debates indicates that there was potential for significant intersection between approaches to international questions in Europe and approaches to the government of the 'wider world'. In this respect, it is not surprising to find that Noel and Charles Buxton were committed supporters of the work of the League of Nations' Permanent Mandates Commission in Geneva. This body was occupied not only with the post-Ottoman Middle East, however, but also with the former German colonies in Africa. Indeed, it was the future of empire in Africa that seems to have become the chief focus of both Buxton brothers' internationalist and humanitarian energies in the 1920s.

### **The Balkans and empire: Noel and Charles Buxton and Africa**

In the decades following the First World War, the Buxtons were active in discussions around African colonial affairs in a number of ways. In addition to his involvement with the Anti-Slavery Society over the question of Abyssinian slavery, Noel Buxton regularly visited Geneva with the Society's long-time secretary, John Harris, to observe the sessions of the Mandates Commission and League Assembly. Charles Buxton, who became the Society's Vice-Chairman, was, as noted, the assistant-delegate to the League for the 1924 and 1930 Labour Governments, where he pushed for the Mandates system to be extended to cover all imperial territories in Africa.<sup>53</sup> Charles Buxton published a number of pamphlets on African questions in this period, and he was also responsible for drafting *The Empire in Africa: Labour's Policy* in 1920, which was finally adopted by the Labour party as its official policy paper (renamed *Labour and the Empire: Africa*) in 1926.<sup>54</sup> It is not immediately clear how to relate this interest in Africa to the Buxtons' earlier engagement with Balkan questions.

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<sup>53</sup> Anderson, *Noel Buxton*, pp. 128-29; De Bunsen, *Charles Roden Buxton*, pp. 118-19; Fieldhouse, 'Noel Edward Buxton ... and British Policy with Respect to Ethiopia', p. 309 (Endnotes, Number 9).

<sup>54</sup> Hetherington, *British Paternalism and Africa*, p. 16; The Labour Party *Labour and the Empire: Africa* (London, 1926).



Outside Egypt and the Maghreb, there was no common history of Ottoman rule such as linked the Balkans to the Middle East. It also perhaps goes without saying that paternalism and basic racial and religious prejudices ran deep enough to clearly distinguish, in even the most reform-minded eyes, the ‘primitive’ societies of tropical Africa from the white, European and predominantly Christian populations of the Balkans.<sup>55</sup>

However, although there were no direct parallels between the two geographical and cultural contexts, support for the work of the Permanent Mandates Commission and the wider reform of imperial administration in Africa should not be seen as a complete break from the concerns of the Balkan Committee. After all, in its most idealistic interpretation, the Mandates system was established to provide a vehicle for a similar sort of humanitarianism and disinterested international diplomacy that had once been demanded of the ‘Concert of Europe’ for Macedonia and other parts of the Ottoman Balkans. In practice, of course, by basing the Mandates system around the assumption that the populations it affected were not able ‘to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world’, the League ensured that, as Susan Pedersen observes, ‘the enforcement of political subjection and the articulation of international humanitarian norms’ went ‘hand in hand’.<sup>56</sup>

Yet this same criticism could also be levelled at the approach of British liberals to the Macedonian question and other Balkan issues before 1914. In Macedonia, the attraction of the progress that it was widely assumed would follow the ending of Ottoman rule had needed to be weighed against the fears of the violence and instability that might take its place. This was not least because it had also been feared that such instability threatened to ‘suck in’ the rest of Europe and spark a major conflict. In the post-war African context, reformist zeal was often checked by the paternalistic assumption that decolonisation would inevitably mean that ‘the world would drift back towards chaos’ and ‘the rule of the Buccaneer’, as Charles Buxton put it. For all his support for greater civil and political rights and education for ‘natives’, Buxton

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<sup>55</sup> On British representations of Africa, see, *inter alia*: Rich, R., *Race and Empire in British Politics* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition: Cambridge, 1990 [1986]), p. 7, p. 22, p. 37; Gupta, P.S., *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement* (Basingstoke, 1975), p. 53; Bush, B., *Imperialism, Race and Resistance: Africa and Britain, 1919-1945* (London, 1999), p. 29.

<sup>56</sup> Pedersen, S., ‘Metaphors of the Schoolroom’, *History Workshop Journal*, Issue 66 (2008), p. 199.

had no doubt that to demand self-government for all subject races would be ‘to make ourselves ridiculous’ – although this objective was described as the ‘ultimate ideal’.<sup>57</sup>

In turning to Africa in the 1920s, Buxton was essentially adapting an approach to international government that he had first advanced through his association with the Balkan Committee and his interaction with the Macedonian question. The basic principle that was being expressed – that the progress of ‘backward’ regions towards political independence and self-government could (and should) be managed and monitored through international control and ‘tutelage’ – was applicable across different geographical contexts. Different regions were imagined in different ways, of course, and different political or humanitarian causes presented their own specific challenges to this basic internationalist agenda. Yet there were certainly areas of common ground and intersection. Charles Buxton made it clear in his post-war writings on the subject that the issues he felt were at stake in the reform of empire in Africa could not be divorced from the wider concerns of international government. As Buxton explained, the question faced by reformers of empire was not ‘how are existing Empires governed?’ It was, rather, ‘how is the world to be governed?’ More specifically, Buxton asked: ‘Can we bring into existence a political and economic reorganisation for the whole world, including its so-called “backward” races, so that tolerable conditions of life, including a reasonable degree of order and liberty, be assured to all?’<sup>58</sup>

The challenge of reconciling the conflicting claims of ‘order’ and ‘liberty’ was not restricted to post-war Africa. It had underpinned much of the earlier British liberal preoccupation with Macedonia and the Ottoman Balkans. Indeed, it arguably lay at the heart of British liberal internationalism in general – this was an ideology that, in Casper Sylvest’s neat definition, was ‘focused on encouraging progress, sewing order and enacting justice in

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<sup>57</sup> Buxton, C.R., ‘Colonialism: Its Practical Problems’ (1920s? – not dated): Charles Roden Buxton Papers (Buxton 5/3, ff. 9-13); Buxton, C.R., *The Exploitation of the Coloured Man* (London, 1925), p. 23.

<sup>58</sup> Buxton, ‘Colonialism: Its Practical Problems’: Charles Roden Buxton Papers (Buxton 5/3, ff. 9-13); Buxton, C.R., ‘The Theory of Empire’, published in *World Outlook*, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1926, pp. 28-29; Charles Roden Buxton Papers (Buxton 5/3, ff. 56-60).

international affairs'.<sup>59</sup> It also characterised much of the pre-war 'new liberal' engagement with domestic social questions, as discussed in previous chapters. In other words, there was one overarching paradigm that shaped British liberal approaches to 'backward' or 'problematic' communities, whether these were encountered at home, in Europe, or further afield. The imaginative geography of Africa was not the same as that of the Balkans; Balkan peasants and African 'natives' were not necessarily comparable in British eyes. Nevertheless, in the Balkans, as in Africa, the transition from empire to independence was approached through the 'civilisational perspective'.

In July 1908, as far as the Balkan Committee was concerned, 'good government' for the Macedonians, Albanians and Armenians under what it was hoped would be a reformist and liberal Young Turk regime had been preferable to the self-government of these long suffering 'oppressed nationalities'. In the same vein, the Austro-Hungarian administration of Bosnia and Herzegovina had been presented in some quarters as the Habsburgs' very own 'civilising mission', not dissimilar from that of the British Empire in India and elsewhere.<sup>60</sup> The Mandates system was conceived within this basic framework, although in Africa its application certainly also drew on other traditions of evangelical 'trust' and Christian philanthropy that were more specific to that particular geographical and cultural context.<sup>61</sup> Both inside and outside Europe, however, British liberal internationalists reserved the right to withhold self-government from 'subject races' and 'oppressed nationalities', regardless of their instinctive sympathy for the victims of misrule or economic exploitation. This should not downplay what was unique about each of the different foreign causes and campaigns in which the Buxtons or other activists were involved. As detailed in previous chapters, the Balkan region had occupied its own specific place in the liberal conscience prior to 1914. Yet to shift focus from Balkan questions to African questions in the 1920s did not require the

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<sup>59</sup> Sylvest, C., *British Liberal Internationalism, 1880-1930: Making Progress?* (Manchester, 2009), pp. 3-4

<sup>60</sup> Okey, *Taming Balkan Nationalism*.

<sup>61</sup> The importance of evangelical philanthropy and religious conceptions of 'trust' are analysed in Grant, *Civilised Savagery*.

construction of a totally new framework of reference as far as the role and basic objectives of reform were understood.

This point is worth stressing because there is a tendency to ignore the overarching internationalist context when considering the Buxtons' involvement in African affairs. Contemporaries overlooked their wider reformist agendas in Africa and focused instead on the family 'heritage' provided by Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton's prominence in the great campaigns against the slave trade. Leonard Woolf, for instance, noted the 'hereditary interest and concern' of the Buxton family in 'the protection of the rights of the subject peoples in the colonial empires'; Viscount Cecil also noted Noel Buxton's 'hereditary preoccupation with the question of slavery'.<sup>62</sup> No doubt family background was important in the Buxtons' case. Yet, as an explanation of their engagement with and approach to African questions, this alone is scarcely adequate. The Buxtons embraced the world of imperial politics and humanitarianism not as young inheritors of a traditional family concern but as seasoned activists with a background in dissent over European foreign policy, to say nothing of the numerous domestic causes in which they were involved. Their family background had not been the decisive factor in the Buxtons' interest in the Balkans (although their father had been a firm supporter of Gladstone during the Eastern Crisis), and it is simplistic to assume that this was the only motivation for their interest in Africa.

One historian of Labour's approach to empire has claimed that Charles Buxton had a 'prestige equalled by no other colonial reformer in the party'.<sup>63</sup> This was not only acquired through his much-cited 'family background' but also earned through his involvement in *non-colonial* humanitarianism, activism and reformist politics in the Balkans. A greater appreciation of the wider overarching liberal-internationalism of the time thus helps to 'join the dots' as far as Noel and Charles Buxton's engagement with these different causes and questions is concerned. Internationalism in the 1920s was both the product and the further

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<sup>62</sup> Woolf, *Downhill All the Way*, p. 233. Viscount Cecil, *Parliamentary Debates (Lords)*, 17<sup>th</sup> July 1935, cited in Fieldhouse, 'Noel Edward Buxton ... and British Policy with Respect to Ethiopia', p. 288.

<sup>63</sup> Gregory, R.G., *Sydney Webb and East Africa: Labour's Experiment with the Doctrine of Native Paramountcy* (Berkeley, 1962), p. 91.

stimulator of a transnational process that saw ideas about ‘progress’ and ‘civilisation’ move between different geopolitical and cultural contexts. In the years before the First World War, approaches to the ‘European’ issue of unrest and oppression in the Ottoman Balkans were informed by contemporaneous ‘African’ campaigns against forced labour in the Congo and Angola (as was explored in Chapter Three). The Balkan Committee’s attack on British foreign policy towards the Ottoman Empire also fed into a wider critique of, if not imperialism *per se*, then certainly an imperialism that was seen as being increasingly shorn of liberal values and as having a negative impact on British politics and society. An attempt to reconcile democracy at home and imperial responsibility overseas lay at the heart of the ‘new liberal’ project, as Miles Taylor and others have noted.<sup>64</sup> But *non-imperial* matters of foreign policy were not ignored, as the prominence of ‘new liberals’ on the Balkan Committee’s Executive Committee illustrates.

After 1918, the readiness of these international-minded activists to switch between European and imperial questions was undoubtedly encouraged by the establishment of the League of Nations. In 1926, for instance, the three main threats to peace identified by Alfred Zimmern were: (i) ‘inter-racial relations, the issue between the white and the non-white peoples’; (ii) ‘economic relations, or the issue between the “haves” and the “have nots”’; and (iii) ‘the problem of nationality, or the issue between the cultured and the uncultured, that is between peoples who consider themselves culturally superior and those whom they despise’.<sup>65</sup> Whilst the first threat was likely to be encountered only in an imperial context, the other two were applicable to both Europe and empire. The League of Nations offered hope, however, that through a combination of the Mandates system and minorities protection, an integrated approach to international government could be developed. Noel and Charles Buxton certainly both saw the Mandates system and the minorities treaties as essentially two sides of the same

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<sup>64</sup> Taylor, M., ‘Imperium et Libertas? Rethinking the radical critique of imperialism during the nineteenth century’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 16-18; Harris, J., ‘The Liberal Empire and British Social Policy: Citizens, Colonials, and Indigenous Peoples, circa 1880-1914’, *Historie@Politique: Politique, Culture, Société*, No. 11 (2010), p. 4.

<sup>65</sup> Zimmern, A.E., ‘The Empire and the Non-White Peoples’, in *The Third British Empire. Being a course of lectures delivered at Columbia University New York* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, London, 1934 [1926]), p. 108.

coin.<sup>66</sup> The fact that one initiative was primarily concerned with the imperial world whilst the other was primarily concerned with (Eastern) Europe and the Balkans does not mean that they were approached as totally separate aspects of the internationalist agenda.

It is striking how closely the language the Buxtons employed in presenting the issues at stake in Africa resembled their earlier example of high-minded dissent over foreign policy in respect of the Balkans. As noted, Noel Buxton had always presented the Macedonians as an ‘enslaved’ population. Whereas Ottoman ‘slavery’ in Macedonia was seen to be holding back the progress of the Balkan nationalities, Abyssinian slavery was a check on the progress of the ‘black race’.<sup>67</sup> These were both matters that were felt to necessitate ‘hands on’ international intervention. Just as before 1908 he had urged the imposition of a European Governor to oversee reform in Macedonia, Buxton wanted to see ‘a highly competent official’ in the service of the League of Nations appointed to direct the anti-slavery policies of the Abyssinian Emperor.<sup>68</sup> H.N. Fieldhouse has also noted the parallels between the challenge faced by Buxton in campaigning for the Anti-Slavery Society on the issue of Abyssinian slavery and the challenge he faced with the Balkan Committee when responding to the Young Turk revolution: ‘How does one hit upon the precise degree of pressure which will help and not hinder, fortify and not endanger, stimulate and not irritate, the regime which one wants to guide and influence?’<sup>69</sup> Buxton, typically, put his faith in public opinion and enlightened international diplomacy. The moral force of ‘pressure from abroad’, coupled with ‘the active support and encouragement of the West and of the League’, were the best means of engaging with Selassie government, Buxton asserted. This was a repetition of his understanding of the role of the ‘Concert of Europe’ regarding the Young Turk regime.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Anderson, *Noel Buxton*, p. 126; De Bunsen, *Charles Roden Buxton*, p. 119, p. 121; Buxton and Conwil Evans, *Oppressed Peoples and the League of Nations*, p. 96.

<sup>67</sup> Fieldhouse, ‘Noel Edward Buxton ... and British Policy with Respect to Ethiopia’, p. 303, p. 308.

<sup>68</sup> Letter to *The Times* written with J.A. Harris (November 1935), cited in Fieldhouse, ‘Noel Edward Buxton ... and British Policy with Respect to Ethiopia’, p. 300.

<sup>69</sup> Fieldhouse, ‘Noel Edward Buxton ... and British Policy with Respect to Ethiopia’, p. 293.

<sup>70</sup> Report of Buxton and Lord Polwarth to the Anti-Slavery Society (1932); Buxton reported in *Manchester Guardian* (22 April 1932). Both cited in Fieldhouse, ‘Noel Edward Buxton ... and British Policy with Respect to Ethiopia’, p. 293, p. 296.

In Charles Buxton's case, a further point of intersection between aspects of reformist engagement with the pre-war Balkans and post-war Africa was a strong focus on the land, and, in particular, on peasant proprietorship as a source of cultural vitality and economic development. Frank Trentmann notes that 'the new internationalism was a critique of both the market and the nation-state'.<sup>71</sup> In this vein, Buxton and his long-time collaborator on the Labour party's Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions, Leonard Woolf, argued that it was the duty of the enlightened and progressive form of empire promoted by the Mandates system to protect African subjects from the economic exploitation of settler capitalism. In its official 1925 policy statement on empire (drafted by Buxton, as noted), the Labour party made land tenure for indigenous populations and the fostering of native cottage industries and peasant agriculture key policy commitments.<sup>72</sup> Elsewhere, Buxton argued that the 'Native Races problem' was ultimately a question of 'land and labour', with other factors (including 'liquor, arms, Indian migration, slavery in the old sense of the word, self-government, even education') only 'secondary'.<sup>73</sup> As Penelope Hetherington observes, 'while African political structures and social customs were often dismissed as comparatively barbaric, they were also sometimes idealized because something of value, apparently missing in Western society, seemed to have been preserved in Africa'.<sup>74</sup>

The importance Buxton attached to land-based cultures and institutions mirrored the sympathy shown by pre-war British liberals towards the 'village communities' and peasant society of the Balkans. Although the contexts were different, idealisation of Balkan peasants and concern to protect African communities from the destabilising impact of settler capitalism were different manifestations of one common aspect of British liberal political culture. They should both be understood in the context of unease with the 'cosmopolitanism' of western capitalism and with the perceived consequences for British society of urbanisation,

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<sup>71</sup> Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation*, p. 284.

<sup>72</sup> See *Labour and the Empire: Africa*, pp. 11-13; Buxton, C.R., 'The Rights of the Black Man', published in *The Friend*, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1925, pp. 529-30; copy in C.R. Buxton Papers (Buxton 3/3, f. 23); Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics*, p. 42; Gorman, D., 'Liberal Internationalism, the League of Nations Union, and the Mandates System', *Canadian Journal of History*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (2005), pp. 460-61.

<sup>73</sup> Buxton, 'The Rights of the Black Man', p. 129.

<sup>74</sup> Hetherington, *British Paternalism and Africa*, p. 67.

consumerism and the decline of rural life. Just as Balkan peasants were often imagined as virile sons-of-the-soil whose culture would reinvigorate European civilisation, the ‘primitive’ culture of colonial Africa had its own intrinsic appeal to British commentators with a broader commitment to protecting rural societies and to supporting ‘the institutions which are the growth of the soil against the institutions which are superimposed upon it’.<sup>75</sup>

Placing the African interests of the Buxtons in the context of their earlier engagement with Balkan questions thus suggests that there was a greater degree of intersection between these two radical causes than might have been imagined given the different cultural and geographic contexts. This approach helps to outline the wider framework in which issues of international control and the transition from empire to self-government were understood. It points to a motivation and rationale for the Buxtons getting involved in African affairs that went beyond mere family ‘heritage’. Within this overarching internationalist ethos, imperial questions and the reconstruction of Europe were not discussed in isolation. In the Buxtons’ case, it is clear that, if their increased focus on Africa and empire in the 1920s represents a new chapter in their political and humanitarian activism, it nevertheless contains much that refers the historian back to the pattern of dissent over foreign policy that was established with the Balkan Committee. The traditions and contexts of pre-war activism and moral protest were highly relevant to the internationalist agendas of the post-war world.

## Conclusion

Overall, this chapter has argued that, although the Balkans – as a British liberal political and humanitarian cause – was displaced by other interests and concerns in the years after the First World War, engagement with the region up to this point left legacies for the internationalism of the 1920s. Most directly, the idea that there was a ‘Balkanisation of Europe’ in 1919-23 underlines the relevance of pre-war Balkan questions to the geopolitics of European reconstruction. Through journalism and other forms of political commentary, and through their role as expert advisors to the Labour party, British (ex-)liberals with Balkan-based

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<sup>75</sup> ‘The Fact of the Matter’ in Oldershaw, *England: A Nation*, p. 258.



experience were able to make important contributions to post-war foreign affairs debates. It is clear that their previous interaction with the Balkans helped to shape their attitudes towards key issues and concerns presented by the 'New Europe'. Scepticism and unease towards the principle of national self-determination was encouraged by the recent memories of the Macedonian question and the Balkan Wars. Support for the international protection of minorities followed on logically from this standpoint.

Indeed, minorities protection overseen by an international but western-dominated League of Nations might be seen as the final answer to a question that had been running through British liberal engagement with the Balkans since 1876: How could the transition from Ottoman rule to self-government be achieved in an orderly and progressive manner and without threatening either the peace of Europe or the prospects for the spread of western civilisation in the region? The process of addressing and re-addressing this question, often in reaction to events in the Balkans and in Europe as a whole that rarely ran as hoped or anticipated, was never straightforward. Ultimately, however, British liberal sympathy developed from an initial late-Victorian focus on 'oppressed Christians', to an early-twentieth century focus on 'subject nationalities', and a final post-war focus on 'minorities'. Without doubt, this Balkan historical context was of direct relevance to the British liberal-internationalist preoccupation with minorities protection after 1918.

It is equally clear that the new approach to the international control and management of 'backward' or 'immature' regions that was enshrined in the Mandates system of the League of Nations was initially developed with areas of the Balkans in mind. The collapse of the Habsburg, Romanov and Ottoman empires created a vacuum across territory stretching from the Balkans through to Anatolia, the Black Sea region and the Caucasus, as well as in the Middle East. In the chaotic years before the consolidation of the Paris peace settlement and the establishment of the Soviet Union and the modern state of Turkey, tantalising opportunities presented themselves for the 'progressive' international management of these diverse lands and peoples. This was discussed with reference to earlier questions of international control, not least the example provided by events in Macedonia before 1912-13.

Whether these plans were ever realistic, as far as the Balkans was concerned, remains another matter. The future of the peninsula was certainly never a priority for the official peacemakers at Paris in 1919, for whom time to consider such thorny questions as the future of Macedonia or Albania – and interest in doing so – was relatively limited.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, the relevance of British interaction with the early-twentieth century Ottoman Balkans to the principles and rationale behind the Mandates system, although now somewhat overlooked, underlines the intersection between European and imperial questions at this time. It also exemplifies the overarching ‘civilisational perspective’ from which British liberals approached the issue of the relationship between self-government and empire.

The links between British liberal interaction with the Balkans and British liberal internationalism in respect of Africa are less direct than in respect of the Middle East. Yet, as the example of Noel and Charles Buxton indicates, turning from the Balkans and ‘Europe’ to Africa and empire in the 1920s was possible without a total change of approach or perspective. The experience of dissent over British foreign policy towards the Balkans certainly informed the wider internationalist ethos from which the Buxtons approached African policy. In view of the intersection between the Macedonian question and campaigns against forced labour in Africa before 1914, and considering the way that both these issues related back to domestic political and cultural debates, it seems natural for the Buxtons to have become involved in African affairs in the post-war decade.

Above all, this analysis of the place of the Balkans in British liberal internationalism highlights the value of adopting an approach to the study of foreign affairs debate that is able to consider the intersection between European and imperial contexts on the one hand, and pre- and post-First World War concerns on the other. It can be argued, in conclusion, that only when such an approach is adopted does the impact of the long history of British liberal engagement with the Balkans – from its emergence at the time of the ‘Bulgarian Horrors’ and the Eastern Crisis through to its ‘strange death’ after 1918 – fully emerge.

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<sup>76</sup> MacMillan, M., *Peacemakers. Six Months that Changed the World* (London, 2001), p. 149.

## Conclusion

The introduction to this thesis referred to a recurrent critique of British liberalism's interest in the Balkans in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries: that it was a well-meaning yet misguided, 'sentimental', and increasingly outmoded form of political and humanitarian engagement. To a rather cynical school of thought after 1918, this earlier preoccupation with Balkan matters seemed difficult to applaud or even to take seriously. Rebecca West poked fun at the capacity of pre-war Gladstonian liberals to get 'swept off their feet' by Balkan violence and barbarity; to Leonard Woolf the concern of the Victorians with events in the Balkans reflected their tendency to form a 'not altogether rational attachment' to foreign 'pet nations'; Cecil Melville likewise questioned this 'unduly sentimental' desire to help the underdog.<sup>1</sup> This study has challenged such assessments. It has argued that the dismissive tone of the commentators cited above underplays the significance of what was for many years a persistent and integral feature of British liberal interaction with the world. Far from being a curious footnote in the history of British liberalism, the story of political and humanitarian engagement with the Balkans offers important insights into not only this internationalist world-view but, equally, into British domestic politics and society, and into liberal political culture more broadly.

### **British liberalism and the Balkans: domestic and international contexts**

The Balkans mattered to British liberals not as a form of 'telescopic philanthropy' but because it represented a blot on their moral conscience and on their mental map of Europe. Ottoman rule in the Balkans appeared in British eyes to be ineffective, illegitimate and oppressive – a fundamental barrier to the advance of liberal values. In this representation, the Ottoman Balkans was 'Europe unredeemed', an 'enslaved' territory crying out for liberation and deliverance from the Ottoman yoke. It was home to an inherently progressive and

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<sup>1</sup> West, *Black Lamb*, p. 21; Woolf, *Downhill All The Way*, pp. 245-46; Melville, *Balkan Racket*, pp. 98-99, cited in Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, p. 100.

industrious population that had the potential to contribute actively to European civilisation. And Britain, through her diplomatic support for the Ottoman Empire, held at least some of the responsibility for preventing this from happening. During the Eastern Crisis, Gladstonian liberals looked on with horror and disgust at the cynical Realpolitik of the Tory Prime Minister; their twentieth century counterparts assumed the burden of forcing the governments of their day, whether Tory or Liberal, to right these wrongs. This was what British liberalism was felt to stand for; its noble tradition of solidarity and sympathy for the victims of oppression, and its commitment to support the forces of progress over those of reaction, dictated such a stance.

Of course, the realities of the Balkan situation were rather more complicated and nuanced than this, as even the most ardent liberal opponents of the 'Unspeakable Turk' were more and more likely to acknowledge. It was understood that this was a question calling for concerted international collaboration and careful management. Increasingly, the implications of 'race conflict' had to be taken into consideration. Yet this seemed only to enhance the national burden to engage with the region. Here, surely, was a test case for the successful application of those humanitarian and liberal-internationalist principles that ought to determine Britain's foreign policy. Events in the Balkans were understood as one of several key and interlocking foreign policy concerns that called for high-minded and disinterested action rather than cynical imperialism or 'secret diplomacy'. This linked British policy towards the Balkans with policy towards other contemporary international questions and crises, including those relating to the Russian Empire, South Africa, Persia and the Congo Free State, as well as Ottoman Armenia. Balkan affairs also offered a pertinent reference point for liberals tackling the Irish question.

In all these cases, liberals placed themselves on the side of progress and humanity, battling against the forces of reaction. They vigorously contested the claim that these were 'lost causes', or that their activism was based simply on instinctive support for the 'underdog'. In 1925, Henry Nevinson remarked that he had 'never wasted his time on any lost cause', giving a list of liberal success stories to back up his claim: the Balkans had been freed

from Ottoman rule, the Boer and the Briton had been united in the Union of South Africa, Russian Tsardom had been overthrown, Ireland had secured self-government, slavery had been abolished in Angola.<sup>2</sup> This paints a far rosier picture of events than was really justified. It conveniently overlooks, among other factors, the complications of nationalism in the post-Ottoman Balkans, the oppression of the native population in South Africa, the revolutionary terror in Communist Russia, the traumatic birth of the Irish Free State, the continued existence of slavery in other parts of Africa.

Yet the liberal tendency was always to blame setbacks and complications in their political activism on other 'enemies' rather than on problems or contradictions inherent in any of the 'good causes' themselves. British liberalism produced a number of conspiracy theories in this period, including: a crypto-Jewish plot to subvert Britain's true civilisational mission in 1876-8; a jingoistic imperialism fuelled by 'cosmopolitan' financial interests in 1897-1901; a 'secret diplomacy' holding back the peaceful liberation of Macedonia from 1903-8; a Tory-backed attempt to prevent Irish Home Rule in the interests of a narrow social clique in Ulster in 1912-14. By providing simplistic explanations for the often slow and difficult progress towards cherished liberal objectives such as open and representative government, democratic diplomacy and international harmony, such conspiracy theories encouraged the false conception of complex geopolitical questions as black-and-white liberal morality tales. In the case of liberals and the Balkans, this prompted critics to denounce their Gladstonian 'sentimentalism'. By the close of the period covered by this thesis, there was also a clear sense of frustration amongst the liberal activists themselves at the persistence of Balkan violence and 'backwardness' in spite of the supposedly more 'civilised' environment created by the collapse of Ottoman rule.

Yet for British liberals international affairs were never divorced from domestic concerns. This thesis has argued that it is the domestic political and social context that holds the key to understanding the strength and political intensity of British liberal interest in the Balkans. In 1876, a coalescence of domestic factors gave the Bulgarian agitation much of its

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<sup>2</sup> Nevinson, *More Changes, More Chances*, p. ix

momentum and political edge. Inspired by the Nonconformist conscience and provincial radicalism, a humanitarian protest against a not uncommon example of atrocities in the Ottoman Empire became an avowedly political crusade against Disraeli and all his party was seen to stand for – the corruption and moral poverty of the ‘Upper Ten’, a cynical and ‘imperialist’ foreign policy, an unpatriotic and un-Christian disregard for the responsibilities of Britain towards the world, and a political culture that was divorced from the interests of ‘the People’ and the nation as a whole. The agitation fed into a far-reaching renegotiation of British national identity that encompassed new radical readings of English history, renewed interest in the ‘village community’ and its traditions of local self-government, and a re-affirmation of the active role of Christianity in society. This was not simply a case of attitudes towards Balkan questions mirroring ongoing domestic debates. Interaction with Balkan questions actually helped to shape the way British liberals engaged with a wide range of political issues. The legacies and political memory of the Bulgarian agitation became a significant reference point in the Irish Home Rule crisis in 1885-6, as well as in the sensational concern with the problems of ‘Outcast London’ in the same decade.

In the Edwardian period, political and humanitarian activism around the Macedonian question was part of a wider ‘new liberal’ reforming dynamic that addressed both international and domestic concerns. To a new generation of radicals deeply uneasy with the impact of imperialism on both domestic society and Britain’s image overseas, Macedonia offered an opportunity to reclaim the true liberal mission of Britain in the world, and in the process to complete some unfinished business that had weighed so heavily on liberal minds since the Treaty of Berlin. At the same time, this example of dissent over foreign policy offers historians insights into Edwardian radicalism’s domestic agendas, particularly around land reform, as well as into an intriguing debate within British political culture around the nature of ‘Englishness’ and the problems of city life. The example of the Balkan Committee and the Macedonian question shows how relevant foreign affairs was to the reformist conscience of early-twentieth century Britain, and underlines the need to consider the international context, both within and outside the Empire, for this reformist conscience to be fully understood.

During the First World War and its aftermath, the Balkans was a significant reference point in a ‘clash of the experts’ around issues relating to self-government, empire and internationalism. In particular, wartime and post-war discussion around the principle of national self-determination was informed, and to some extent directly shaped, by the experience of British liberal engagement with pre-war Balkan questions, particularly those relating to Macedonia. Once again, domestic and foreign concerns were intertwined. The liberal-internationalist drive to manage and control ‘less civilised’ regions of the globe was related to a longer-term preoccupation with citizenship, mass culture and the transition to democracy at home. The metaphor of the Balkans as the ‘East End of Europe’ was strangely apt: on the surface there was perhaps not much that could have connected Balkan peasants and London slum-dwellers, but both were inhabitants of environments that seemed to cry out for high-minded intervention in the name of civilisation and progress.

The fear was, however, that the war had revealed those forces of civilisation and progress to be impotent and intrinsically unsuited to the demands of the modern political world. Instead of western civilisation being spread to the Balkans, the opposite had arguably happened – the ‘balkanisation of Europe’. By that point, the future of the Balkans itself was far less prominent a cause than had been the case before the war. The old Eastern Question was no longer relevant after 1923. The radicals who had supported the Balkan Committee, already bruised by the experience of the Balkan Wars, ill-disposed towards Balkan nationalism and sceptical towards the concept of national self-determination, seem to have turned their attention away from the region in the 1920s, focusing instead on new international humanitarian causes and contexts – particularly, in the case of Noel and Charles Buxton, to do with imperial rule in Africa.

Nevertheless, the new agendas of liberal internationalism after the First World War were influenced by the legacies of this previous engagement with the Balkans. The *New Europe* and likeminded commentators saw the application of the principle of national self-determination in Europe and the remodelling of the supra-national British Empire into a progressive ‘Commonwealth’ as complementary rather than contradictory processes.

Similarly, the League of Nations was lauded as a long-overdue mechanism for the progressive management by ‘civilised states’ of international problems both within Europe (through minorities protection, plebiscites and population exchanges) and in the imperial world (through the Mandates system). The history of British liberalism and the Balkans in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries is one of frequent intersection between the agendas of ‘imperial’ and ‘European’ affairs. There was a much closer relationship between Europe and empire in British political culture than historians have tended to acknowledge.

British liberals thus engaged with events in the Balkans with at least one eye on issues and debates concerning other parts of the world, as well as within their own society and culture. Yet this was still a form of political engagement that produced its own specific images of the Balkans itself. What conclusions can be drawn from the example of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century British liberalism and the Balkans as far as analysis of historical representations of the Balkan Peninsula is concerned? How does this relate to our understanding of British encounters with the ‘Other’?

### **Re-imagining the Balkans**

Maria Todorova’s *Imagining the Balkans* and other studies on a similar theme explore the concept of balkanism – the construction of the Balkans as an ‘inferior self’ (if not an outright ‘Other’) of the West. However, the representations of the region generated through the British liberal political and humanitarian engagement covered in this thesis suggest that a more positive appraisal of Balkan society can be discerned alongside, and indeed woven into, accounts of the region’s ‘backwardness’, violence, barbarity, instability and ‘otherness’. Gladstonian liberals routinely cast the Balkan peoples not as members of outlandish or unfamiliar foreign nationalities but as part of a shared European and Christian culture and civilisation. For all the intersections summarised above between the situation in the Balkans and other international questions, the position of the Balkan Peninsula within Europe, not only in a geographical sense but equally in a historical and cultural sense, was felt to be a distinguishing feature of this particular cause. Despite widespread sympathy for the plight of



the Armenians, the ending of Ottoman misrule over Macedonia was thus seen as the more urgent and resolvable of these two related affronts to the moral conscience of British liberalism.

However, the British liberal imaginative geography of the Balkans can only be fully understood when analysed in the context of domestic political culture. Against a background of unease with the effects of urbanisation and the decline of the cultural and economic life of the British countryside, and with land reform and social welfare a central feature of British political debate, the self-sufficient Balkan peasant proprietor was imagined as an almost heroic 'son of the soil'. Balkan peasants were attributed an industriousness, moral strength and cultural vitality that seemed to be so lacking in the urban-majority working-class population at home. This was key to the hopes liberals had at this stage for the progress and material growth of the Balkans once it had been fully 'liberated' from the shackles of Ottoman rule. In some quarters, it even encouraged the conviction that the future development of the Balkan Peninsula would inspire the regeneration of an increasingly artificial, materialistic and 'cosmopolitan' western culture. In this analysis, the 'primitive' nature of Balkan society became, not a source of alarm or discomfort, but one of its defining positive values. This idea provided a rich source of propaganda in the First World War, as exemplified in the promotion of the Yugoslav sculptor Ivan Meštrović.

It does need to be stressed that the liberal image of the Balkans remained, throughout the period covered by this thesis, extremely selective and subjective. Despite the desire of Edwardian activists to distance themselves from the black-and-white 'Cross versus Crescent' image of the Bulgarian agitation, there was an implicit hierarchy of sympathy that privileged the perceived sufferings of Christians at the hands of 'Turks' but showed scant regard for crimes committed by Christians against Muslims. There was also little concern for the fate of local Muslim populations in the territory that it was demanded should be 'liberated' from the direct rule of the Porte. Although it rarely featured in British liberal coverage of the Eastern Question, this was a period of continued and widespread population displacement for historic Balkan Muslim communities, culminating in the population exchange between Greece and

Turkey after 1923. It is also clear that expressions of British liberal sympathy and solidarity with Balkan Christians went hand in hand with extremely negative and prejudiced representations of other communities. The attractive qualities of Balkan peasant communities were routinely set in contradistinction to the 'Levantine' urban population of the region, which included the sizeable Jewish community of Salonika. This reflected liberal unease with urban life and materialism, and a romanticised preference for the culture of the countryside, all of which can also be discerned in the ambivalent liberal representation of the Ottoman Armenians at this time. Yet it also drew upon a deeper prejudice against what was termed 'cosmopolitan' society. This encouraged a picture of the Balkans from which town-based diasporic communities were implicitly excluded.

British liberal interaction with the cause of the Balkan peoples was therefore driven by prejudice as well as by humanitarian sympathy and solidarity. The imaginative geography of the region that was produced as a result was marked by a variety of essentially invented caricatures, both positive and negative. These included the 'pious' Balkan Christian, the 'sturdy' peasant proprietor, the 'decadent' Turk, the 'unscrupulous' Jewish tax-farmer, the corrupt 'Levantine' Greek, and the 'rapacious' Albanian brigand. British liberals may not have always viewed the Balkans through the prism of balkanism, but activism in support of the victims of Ottoman rule relied on both the persistent misrepresentation of Balkan society and the negative characterisation of certain sections of the region's population. Humanitarian sympathy, however heartfelt, was inexorably intertwined with the expression of deep-seated prejudice and ignorance.

Regardless of the positive appraisal of Balkan peasant culture and the significance attached to the region's European identity, British liberal commentators did certainly not feel that the Great Powers should engage with the Balkans on equal terms. It was universally agreed that the region needed to be subject to various forms of international control and monitoring. This was true not only of the territory that remained under Ottoman rule between 1878 and 1912 but also of the already independent or autonomous states of the region – those infantilised 'youngest members of the European family' whose instability was held to pose

such a serious threat to European peace. This was a period of increased western diplomatic, financial and political involvement in Balkan affairs, from the Austro-Hungarian administration of Bosnia-Herzegovina sanctioned by the Treaty of Berlin in 1878, to the international reform scheme for Macedonia in the early twentieth century, the international commission to determine the boundaries of Albania after the First Balkan War, and the minorities protection treaties imposed on all Balkan states (but not their western counterparts) by the Paris peace conference. British liberals were broadly supportive of this ‘top down’ management of Balkan questions and, indeed, felt the reform scheme for Macedonia, for example, did not go far enough in this respect.

The final dissolution of the Ottoman Empire did little to alter this approach. In the aftermath of the First World War, liberal-internationalist analysis of Balkan questions continued to assume that the sovereignty of the Balkan states would need to be curtailed by various forms of international control, including the potential application of the Mandates principle to disputed territories such as Macedonia, Albania and Thrace. Meanwhile, wartime proposals for the future of the Balkans were rarely informed by the wishes of the Balkan states themselves, whose interests were generally deemed to be best interpreted by western ‘experts’ anyway. A Balkan Federation was the pipedream of amateur diplomats like the Buxtons, supported by those who saw it as a means to bring Balkan peasant armies into the war (and it was hoped achieve a speedy resolution of the conflict). The *New Europe*’s support for the creation of a Yugoslav state was, at least in part, driven by the self-interested liberal-imperialist preoccupation with the need to create a barrier to the Pan-German ‘Drang Nach Osten’. Such self-centred expectations were always difficult to reconcile with the reality of the Balkan situation, however. The Buxtons became increasingly critical of the militarism of the Balkan states once their hopes for a renewed Balkan League came to nought; Seton-Watson grew increasingly frustrated with Serb national chauvinism when it threatened to derail the Yugoslav movement towards the end of the war. In such situations, the latent negative prejudice within British approaches to the region was always likely to colour the language of even nominally sympathetic commentators.

If anything, British liberal sympathy and solidarity with the Balkan peoples was weakened by the region's independence. After the Balkan Wars, the 'duty of the civilised world' in the region, as the Carnegie Commission's report on the conflict put it, had to be re-addressed. The end of Ottoman rule did not usher in a new dawn of progress, prosperity and peaceful coexistence in the Balkans, nor was the hoped-for transitional period of international control achieved. Under such circumstances, the tropes of the Balkan 'powder keg' or 'boiling pot' were reinforced. To a degree, the blame for the violence and civil unrest that had accompanied the Balkan Wars could be put on the nature of modern warfare and the impact of nationalism in general, rather than being seen as a specific Balkan problem. Nevertheless, the events of 1912-13 clearly left their mark on British liberal attitudes towards the region. There was a distinct cooling of liberal sympathy for its former 'oppressed nationalities' by 1919, as the angst created by the 'balkanisation of Europe' underlines. With the region no longer assured of its place in the moral conscience of British liberalism, the positive aspects of its imaginative geography were far less likely to find expression. In some quarters, it seems as if only a residual and balkanist sense of disappointment and disillusionment remained, with certain 'experts' in effect blaming the Balkans for failing to meet expectations for its future progress that had surely always been unrealistic anyway.

Nevertheless, the persistence of balkanist prejudice and the paternalistic nature of most approaches towards Balkan questions should not cloud the overall analysis of British liberal engagement with the region in the period covered by this thesis. British liberalism was certainly not immune to various forms of cultural, racial and religious prejudice. Yet political and humanitarian interaction with the Balkans in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries also presents historians with images that depict the region as more 'European', more progressive, more attractive and more 'civilised' than studies of balkanism have tended to assume was the case. The attraction of the Balkans to British liberals is, as discussed, best understood through cross-reference with domestic political and social debates. Whether through contrasting the self-sufficient Balkan peasant freeholder with the uprooted and alienated wage-slave of urban Britain, or through contrasting the 'cosmopolitan' and

‘artificial’ society of Salonika with the ‘real’ Balkans of the interior mountains and countryside, British commentators were engaging in debates that related as much to the on-going preoccupation of British liberalism at this time with the land, and with the relationship between land-ownership, urbanisation and national identity, as they did to events in the Balkans itself. Studies of British representations of the Balkans rarely consider this political context, yet it was surely a crucial aspect of Britain’s relationship with the region. To fully understand the British imaginative geography of the Balkans, it is thus necessary to consider the texts and the media through which the political aspect of the British-Balkan relationship was framed. This calls for attention to be given to journalism, parliamentary debate, political correspondence, lobbying, and other records of political engagement and activism, in addition to the travel writing and literary texts on which analysis of the concept of balkanism has tended to be based.

More generally, there seems to be a strong case for ‘putting the politics back in’ as far as historical analysis of Britain’s cultural encounters with the rest of the world is concerned. Edward Said argued influentially in *Orientalism* that ‘imaginative geography and history can help the mind to identify its own sense of itself by dramatising the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away’.<sup>3</sup> On the evidence of the political discourse studied in this thesis, however, we should not rely too heavily on assumptions that the foreign ‘Other’ was always and inevitably cast in negative terms, or that it was invariably the subject of an ‘imperialism of the imagination’. Historical analysis of British engagement with international questions and of British interaction with foreign cultures has to account for an intriguing interplay between forces of both attraction and repulsion. Representations of the Balkans could stress the region’s similarity and ‘sameness’ with Britain rather than its ‘backwardness’ or inferiority. A genuine if at times misguided humanitarian sympathy can still be discerned amidst the underlying currents of cultural prejudice. Genuine solidarity with victims of oppression and misrule undoubtedly existed despite the fact that it tended to go hand in hand with a paternalistic drive to control.

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<sup>3</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 55.

This reinforces similar points made by recent studies of other examples of British interaction with overseas political or humanitarian causes, such as Mansour Bonakdarian's work on Britain and the Persian constitutional revolution in 1906-11 and Jo Laycock's analysis of Britain and the Armenian question. Both these studies have stressed the high levels of ambiguity and fluidity within British representations of foreign lands at this time, with support for the 'civilised' co-existing with contempt for the 'backward' and the 'barbaric'. Whilst the overarching cultural framework through which such causes were approached 'effectively reinforced the British position at the pinnacle of hierarchies of development and civilisation', as Laycock notes of the Armenian example, positive perceptions of foreign cultures and societies were also a notable feature of British reformist political debate.<sup>4</sup> Bonakdarian argues that the case of dissent over British foreign policy towards Persia indicates that British radicals were capable of cross-cultural encounters that went against the grain of the imperialistic and orientalist tendencies of British society as a whole (even though orientalist tropes were certainly never completely absent from this process either).<sup>5</sup> In a similar vein, this thesis argues that the political context of British liberal interaction with the Balkans encouraged representations of the region that acted as a significant counterweight to the (admittedly undoubtedly still prevalent) negative tropes of balkanism.

Such comparisons reinforce how interconnected approaches to events in the Balkans were with approaches to other international questions at this time. Nevertheless, the specificities of the British liberal representation of the Balkans should not be overlooked either. The Balkans occupied its own particular place within British liberal political culture. As such the region made its own particular contribution to the interlocking 'imaginative geographies' that underpinned Britain's complex relationship with the world.

At the same time, it needs to be borne in mind that this was a political culture that was itself subject to change and transformation. It goes without saying that British society did

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<sup>4</sup> Laycock, *Imagining Armenia*, p. 222.

<sup>5</sup> Bonakdarian, *Britain and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, p. xli.

not stand still during the fifty-year period covered by this thesis, and neither did the nature of political debate and dissent over foreign policy. How did the way in which Balkan questions were received and discussed in British liberal political culture change over time from the 1870s through to the 1920s?

### **‘Sentimentalism’ and expertise**

The Bulgarian agitation was a moral crusade led by a self-consciously Christian public in opposition to an aspect of British foreign policy that was deemed to be injurious both to Britain’s standing as a Christian nation and to the well-being and safety of a fellow Christian population overseas. It was the Nonconformist conscience, roused by Stead and given political leadership by Gladstone, which gave the agitation much of its impetus. Few claimed to possess a detailed knowledge or understanding of the Balkans (or ‘Turkey-in-Europe’), but the newspaper reports of the atrocities committed in Bulgaria seemed clear enough: an industrious Christian population was being left defenceless and at the mercy of a decadent, ‘Asiatic’ and barbarous regime that nevertheless continued to enjoy the support of the British government. This was a remarkably successful political protest in so far as it made it impossible, as Lord Derby admitted at the time, for Britain to go to war in defence of the Ottoman Empire. It also made Gladstone a Balkan hero. As late as 1935, R.W. Seton-Watson wrote with evident pride that ‘the name of Gladstone is still held in equal honour in Sofia and Belgrade, in Athens and Bucarest, in Cetinje and Zagreb, and wherever the principle of “the Balkans for the Balkan peoples”, or indeed the wider principle of self-government for small nations, has any meaning’.<sup>6</sup> However, the agitation did not really try to resolve the question of exactly what ‘the Balkans for the Balkan peoples’ meant in practice. As a melodramatic ‘Victorian sensation’, it thrust the Balkans into the British liberal political conscience, but it left no blueprint or ‘roadmap’ for dealing with the region’s geopolitical future.

Amidst the emotionally charged rhetoric and sensational horror stories of the Bulgarian agitation, a slightly different approach to Balkan questions was already emerging.

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<sup>6</sup> Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question*, p. 370.

This valued area-specific expertise and first-hand knowledge as much as (or at least as well as) a general moral and intellectual righteousness. The archaeologist Arthur Evans would be a good example of this: Having been travelling in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the time of the insurrection against Ottoman rule that precipitated the Eastern Crisis, a journey captured in *Trough Bosnia and Herzegovina on Foot* (1876), Evans became a noted authority on Balkan affairs. He joined (and later fell out with) the Balkan Committee in the early-twentieth century, contributed to the *New Europe* during the First World War, and played an active role ‘behind the scenes’ for the British Delegation at the Paris Peace Conference (although his main claim to fame would be his archaeological work unearthing the Minoan remains at Knossos on Crete). Figures such as Evans were very much in the minority as far as the agitation movement of 1876 was concerned. This was the heyday of the ‘public moralist’ rather than the foreign affairs expert. Yet British liberal engagement with Balkan questions from this point on was characterised by a close interplay between a rather black-and-white sense of moral duty and a growing concern with the need for objectivity and detached analysis.

This desire to occupy the moral high ground whilst also establishing a claim to expertise was difficult to satisfy. Images of the Balkans remained highly selective and prejudiced, as discussed, but activists from the Treaty of Berlin onwards were less and less able to ignore the region’s national questions and their threat to the harmony of the ‘Concert of Europe’. In this context, support from Christian networks, whilst almost always welcomed, was not always helpful. As the agitation movement in response to the atrocities in Ottoman Armenia in the 1890s also found out, what was needed, it could be argued, was not another ‘Cross versus Crescent’ crusade, but a more in-depth understanding of the issues involved, and a more realistic assessment of the practical options open to British diplomacy in managing a delicate international flashpoint. Whereas the agitators of 1876 had revelled in the charge of being ‘sentimentalists’, the early-twentieth century Balkan Committee, claiming to serve as a conduit for reliable knowledge and expertise, made a conscious effort to adopt a less ‘emotional’ – and, it was implied, outdated and unreliable – approach to dissent over



foreign policy. The events of 1876 arguably had a more direct influence over the sensationalist ‘new journalism’ dealing with poverty and crime in London in the 1880s than they had over this later example of British liberal political activism regarding Balkan affairs.

Despite the fact that several key members of the Balkan Committee supported the concept of democratic control over foreign policy, this was a rather elitist and undemocratic form of political activism. The Bulgarian agitation had been at least in part a deliberate attempt on the part of British liberalism to engage with ‘the People’ and win the support of a new mass public. Yet the Buxtons – far more radical in their social politics than many of those who had been on the platform at the National Conference on the Eastern Question in December 1876 – preferred to operate through the backbenches of Parliament and respectful communications to the Foreign Office. There was no great ‘democratic imaginary’ in this model of public protest.<sup>7</sup> What the Balkan Committee seems to reveal, in fact, is something of a paradox concerning liberal political activism. At a time when ‘new liberal’ progressives championed the need to democratise British political debate, and in a political culture that encouraged middle-class engagement with social and educational initiatives such as Toynbee Hall and the Workers’ Educational Association, dissent over foreign policy was being ‘cordoned off’ from the British public. The concern to avoid charges of ‘sentimentalism’ created an implicit tension between the new cult of the expert and the democratic idealism of the wider reforming dynamic within British politics.

This shift from ‘public moralism’ to expert analysis as far as Balkan questions were concerned was far from straightforward. The support of Christian networks, for instance, continued to be sought and welcomed by the Balkan Committee, which in this respect clearly still saw some value in the Victorian model of public protest employed so effectively during the Bulgarian agitation. Yet this should not be taken to indicate any direct influence over policy, nor necessarily be seen as a sign of mass public support. Unlike in 1876, the Nonconformist conscience could not be roused sufficiently by events in Balkans to pose a serious challenge to the course of British foreign policy. The well-to-do public meetings

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<sup>7</sup> Joyce, *Democratic Subjects*, p. 204.

organised over the Macedonian question were arguably just ‘futile pinpricks’, as H.F.B. Lynch remarked at the time.<sup>8</sup> The Balkan Committee’s close association with Church and Chapel may in fact have done more harm than good, in so far as this encouraged charges of Christian bias and subjectivity – and thus arguably undermined the very claims to detached expertise that the Committee’s leading members were so keen to present. Given this contradiction, should the Committee not have done more to tap into more radical networks of working-class political activism? Was this a missed opportunity to galvanise greater public support and exert more meaningful pressure on the political and diplomatic establishment?

This remains a difficult question to answer. It was not so misguided for the Balkan Committee to prioritise the support of organised religion over that of more secular or radical bodies. The impact of the Congo reform movement suggests that campaigns based around the support of religious networks and self-consciously Christian moral outrage could still be effective in the Edwardian period. If there was a ‘secularisation’ of British political culture at this time, this was a very much contested and convoluted process. It was also a process that was incomplete by the end of the period covered by this thesis, as is indicated, for example, by Helen McCarthy’s study of the activism of League of Nations Union in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>9</sup>

The problem for those inspired by the Gladstonian liberal tradition of sympathy for ‘oppressed Christians’ in the Ottoman Empire was that it was becoming ever more difficult to reconcile the idea of the Balkans as a Christian morality tale with the complex realities of Balkan nationalism and the apparently endemic political violence of the region. Whereas the native population of the Congo were presented as essentially passive and helpless victims of imperial misrule and economic exploitation, the inhabitants of the Balkans had a less straightforward claim to the sympathy of the British public. As discussed, the supposedly virile, self-sufficient and industrious peasant society of the Balkans was deemed to have its own particular contribution to make to a ‘sterile’ and ‘decadent’ western culture and

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<sup>8</sup> H.F.B. Lynch to Noel Buxton, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1906: Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951 c. 2/29).

<sup>9</sup> McCarthy, *British People and the League of Nations*.

civilisation. Yet this could be something of a double-edged sword. It was assumed in some quarters that the Balkan peoples could be expected to look after themselves. Indeed in 1912 and 1913, with the Balkan Wars, they seemed to do just that, but with consequences – war, violence, militarism, civil unrest, national chauvinism, and so on – that many found unpalatable. Several British liberals were, like L.T. Hobhouse, although naturally inclined to sympathise with the Balkan peoples, now ‘put off by some of their methods’.<sup>10</sup> As in the Congo, it was easy to find victims of ‘atrocities’ and ‘barbarism’, but in the Balkan case it was rather more difficult to agree where to point the finger of blame.

This encouraged the trend whereby Balkan questions were left to the experts (or, if one were being unkind, the ‘cranks’), to professional diplomats, academics and policy analysts, and to international organisations and ‘fact-finding’ missions such as that set up by the Carnegie Commission after the Balkan Wars. As British engagement with the Balkans became more and more expert-oriented, it arguably became less and less embedded in the values of British liberalism. The First World War and the Paris Peace Conference marked the apogee of the British Balkan expert, but this role was most effectively filled by those who, like Seton-Watson or Arnold Toynbee, approached the future of the region from the point of view of British military, strategic or imperial interest, rather than (or at least in addition to) as a liberal political and humanitarian cause. The inheritors of the Gladstonian political tradition of sympathy with the Balkan peoples were by the start of the 1920s largely associated not with the Liberal party but with the Labour party. From this new political home, activists like Noel Buxton transferred their model of high-minded political activism from Balkan questions to new international causes – such as, in Buxton’s case, lifting the blockade of Germany, supporting minority rights in Europe, and ending slavery in Africa. There was thus still a broadly liberal tradition of humanitarianism and campaigning around ‘good causes’ overseas, and this was clearly not yet incompatible with the cult of the expert in British public life and foreign affairs debate, but this was no longer played out through engagement with the Balkans.

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<sup>10</sup> Hobhouse to Buxton, 8<sup>th</sup> January 1913: Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951 c. 24/2).

How, then, might this chapter of British liberal history be summarised or most succinctly understood? Accepting that British liberal interaction with the Balkans took place within a changing political culture, can any clear lines be drawn from the reaction to the ‘Bulgarian Horrors’ in the 1870s to the reaction to the ‘balkanisation of Europe’ in the 1920s? What were the elements of continuity within the British liberal relationship with the Balkans?

### **The ‘civilisational perspective’**

One common theme seems to have been as present in the Bulgarian agitation as it was in the activism and analysis of twentieth-century British Balkan experts. Simply put, the question for British liberals was this: Was the state of affairs in the Balkans likely to contribute to the development or the hindering of the core values that comprised western civilisation? In considering this question, the underlying liberal-universalist assumption was that there was a ‘natural’ progression from ‘backward’ to ‘advanced’ states, and that if different peoples occupied different places on the ladder of civilisation, this was due to restraints imposed by the negative social or political environment in which the peoples in question lived, rather than to any intrinsic racial or national inferiority or weakness.<sup>11</sup> The Eastern Question viewed from this standpoint was a libertarian rather than a nationalist struggle. The Balkan peoples required freedom from arbitrary government, the protection offered by the rule of law, basic civil rights and opportunities for economic growth, but not necessarily national independence.

Indeed, it could be argued that the creation of new small and unstable nation-states would impede the development of civilisation by encouraging atavistic conceptions of identity, whilst creating a vacuum that would ‘suck in’ the Great Powers and present new challenges to European diplomacy and the balance of power. Hence, from 1876 right through to the time of the First World War, British liberal sympathy for the ‘oppressed nationalities’ of the Balkans tended to go hand in hand with support for international control of the region, or for multinational state structures if this was felt to offer a progressive, stable and orderly form of government. This explains the Balkan Committee’s initial support for the Young

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<sup>11</sup> Mandler, “‘Race’ and ‘Nation’ in Victorian Thought”, pp. 225-44.

Turks after 1908; it also explains why many British liberals were sympathetic to the rule of Austria-Hungary in Bosnia and Herzegovina. When the prospect of Balkan self-government was discussed, as in the case of Albania at the time of the Balkan Wars, it was the relative level of 'civilisation' in the country in question that was invariably felt to be the decisive factor. Henry Brailsford supported the granting of self-rule to the Albanians because he felt they were equipped with a sufficient 'foundation of civilisation'; R.W. Seton-Watson assumed the opposite and thus saw no reason to give the Albanians rights that were not enjoyed by the 'more civilised subjects' of Austria-Hungary.<sup>12</sup>

Within this overarching paradigm, however, there were shifts of focus in terms of how the relationship between the Balkans and western civilisation was conceived. At the time of the Bulgarian agitation, the capacity of the Balkan peoples for progress was invariably linked to the idea that the region was a 'Christian' land. The Christian faith and supposed piety of the population held the key to its membership of a common European civilisation. Later generations of liberals, whilst still somewhat blind to the religious diversity of much of the Balkan Peninsula, and indifferent to the fate of its non-Christian communities, were less likely to conceive of civilisation in such explicitly religious terms. Although sympathy with the Balkan Slavs as 'fellow Christians' remained strong, in the twentieth century the 'European-ness' of the Balkans became associated more with its history and its social structure. This picked up a thread in the British imaginative geography of the Balkans that was already present at the time of the Bulgarian agitation, but which became particularly pronounced in the Edwardian period. It attributed great value to the 'rootedness', vitality and moral strength of Balkan peasant culture, and stressed the significance of the apparent survival in the region of the self-governing traditions of the 'village community'.

Victorian commentators, basking in the glory of the apparent moral, material and intellectual progress of their own society, perhaps assumed that the growth of civilisation in the Balkans was essentially a question of the region 'catching up' with the standards already

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<sup>12</sup> Seton-Watson, 'New Phases of the Balkan Question', p. 327; Brailsford, 'The Autonomy of Albania', pp. 566-67.

set by Britain. Their Edwardian counterparts, by contrast, reveal through their engagement with Balkan questions much about their own cultural pessimism, and expose their deep-seated unease with the decline of citizenship and with the challenge of reconciling liberalism with democracy at home. ‘New liberal’ activists often appear more sympathetic towards the peasant-based communities of the Balkans than they do towards the inhabitants of British towns and cities, despite their commitment to new forms of political engagement with the problems of poverty and social dislocation.

Nevertheless, the positive appeal of Balkan peasant culture was never enough to nullify concerns about the potentially destabilising impact of the Balkan ‘tinder-box’ on the European ‘armed peace’. In this respect, liberal-internationalist attempts to ensure a smooth and controlled transition from Ottoman rule to Balkan self-government were analogous to efforts to educate and ‘civilise’ the British ‘masses’ in preparation for the new democracy. These were two aspects of one common liberal ‘civilisational’ agenda, approached in both cases from a ‘top down’ and paternalistic perspective and characterised by an intriguing ‘wavering between hope and despair’, as Casper Sylvest puts it.<sup>13</sup>

There was thus a flexible and changing liberal language of civilisation in the period covered by this thesis. Social and environmental explanations for progress (or its absence) came to carry more weight than Christian moral rhetoric in framing the liberal worldview. But it was not until the First World War that an explicitly nationalist approach to the future of the Balkans (and other geopolitical questions) emerged. The *New Europe* and its supporters promoted the ‘principle of nationality’ (on the European continent at least) and incorporated the Balkan Peninsula into a vision of a reconfigured Central and Eastern Europe made up of new nation-states. This certainly signalled a change of tone. The history of Balkan liberation from Ottoman rule was now viewed as the ‘rise of nationality’, rather than as a Christian struggle against ‘the Turk’ or as the pursuit of universal liberal goals such as constitutional government and freedom from ‘slavery’.<sup>14</sup> Yet the concept of civilisation remained at the

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<sup>13</sup> Sylvest, ‘Continuity and Change in British Liberal Internationalism’, p. 269.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Seton-Watson, R.W., *The Rise of Nationality in the Balkans* (London, 1917).

heart of the wartime debate around national self-determination, even if it was a civilisation now based around 'race' rather more than religion. R.W. Seton-Watson's interest in the Balkans extended out of an initial preoccupation with the civilising mission of the multinational Habsburg Empire. It was the apparent failure or incapacity of the Habsburgs to perform this civilising mission that led Seton-Watson to support the concept of Yugoslavia, and to embrace the idea that Balkan progress would be best achieved independently of Austria-Hungary.

The *New Europe* promoted national self-determination as an inherently civilising force. It was seen as a way of 'de-politicising' nationalism so that its energies could be directed towards cultural ends and thus foster citizenship and patriotism – a process that would strengthen European civilisation as a whole. Critics found such arguments spurious. UDC activists such as Henry Brailsford and Charles Buxton failed to see how nationalism could be anything other than a destabilising and destructive force, particularly in a region such as the Balkans, where it seemed impossible to satisfy any one state's nationalist appetite without arousing the hostility of its neighbours and risking the oppression of minorities. In this analysis, the 'balkanisation of Europe' would be both an economic disaster and the bedfellow of militarism, national chauvinism and 'race hatred'. Yet this was an argument about means rather than ends. For both the *New Europe* and its critics the ultimate goal was arguably the same: to enable the peoples of the Balkans to fulfil their potential to contribute to European civilisation.

The persistence of this 'civilisational perspective', despite changes in the political language through which it was articulated, is key to understanding how engagement with the Balkans relates to approaches to questions of self-government and empire in other parts of the world, including in Britain itself. Liberals who supported Gladstone in 1876 were not necessarily drawn to support him again in 1885-6 over Irish Home Rule. The Bulgarian agitation served as an inspiring example of the kind of high-minded public outcry that was being called for again to ensure the triumph of the 'right' liberal principles. Yet there was certainly no sense that the Irish and the Balkan peoples were on the same trajectory towards

national self-government. J.L. Hammond's epic study of Gladstone's Irish policy looked back admiringly to the Grand Old Man's handling of the Eastern Crisis in 1875-8, and 'the splendid lessons he taught the new democracy about the principles that should guide the foreign policy of a self-respecting people', but there was never a direct analogy between British rule in Ireland and Ottoman rule in the Balkans.<sup>15</sup>

In the early twentieth century, British liberals were able to relate the Macedonian question to other struggles ostensibly concerning 'oppressed nationalities', both within Europe (e.g. Finland) and outside it (e.g. Persia). However, the common agenda for activists in these cases was not the 'principle of nationality' itself but the expansion of political freedom and the triumph of liberal-constitutional government. During the First World War, this overarching 'civilisational perspective' meant that it was possible for the *New Europe* to reconcile support for the application of the nation-state model within Europe with support for the rule of the multinational British Empire over vast swathes of the non-European world. Whereas the Austro-Hungarian Empire was deemed incapable of managing the new force of nationality in a progressive way, the British 'Commonwealth' offered an alternative model: it guaranteed the rule of law and basic civil rights for all its peoples (so it was argued), granting self-government to those who were 'ready' or 'mature' enough for this responsibility, whilst providing 'tutelage' to those who were not. Radicals were sceptical of this rose-tinted image of British imperialism. However, the distinction between 'advanced' and 'backward races', and the need for those at a higher rung on the ladder of civilisation to benevolently manage the political and economic development of those further down the ladder, was widely accepted. What the British Commonwealth offered for the liberal imperialists, the new League of Nations, and more specifically its Mandates system, offered for those more critical of empire – a way of dealing with the challenges presented by the existence of 'advanced' and 'backward' societies in a progressive and forward-looking manner.

As far as the Balkans was concerned, the region still occupied an uncertain position on this ladder of civilisation at the close of the First World War. On the one hand, the Balkan

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<sup>15</sup> Hammond, *Gladstone and the Irish Nation*, p. 143.



Peninsula was inherently part of Europe; it had a clear potential for civilisational growth and was home to a population that was seen as being at a relatively advanced stage of political and social development. On the other hand, British liberals still had reservations about the ‘maturity’ of the Balkans, particularly that part of the region that had remained under Ottoman rule until 1912. As the various proposals made in the aftermath of the war for international control, mandates and other limitations on the sovereignty of the Balkan states indicate, the future of the peninsula was approached in ways that related very closely to the future of the post-Ottoman Middle East. By the same token, the fact that Noel and Charles Buxton moved apparently so seamlessly in the 1920s from activism in respect of Balkan questions to activism in respect of the reform of empire in Africa surely underlines how interconnected liberal-internationalist approaches to the Balkans and empire were. An overarching ‘civilisational perspective’ ensured that, despite the different cultural and racial lenses through which different parts of the world were seen, British liberals felt able to fit questions about the relationship between nationalism, empire and self-government onto one common global agenda. This further underlines the potential of historical analysis of British engagement with the Balkans to serve as a means by which to integrate the study of the European and the imperial aspects of Britain’s external relationships.

This thesis has shown the importance of the Balkans to British liberalism in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and argued that understanding why the region and ‘the interesting nationalities whose home it is’ attracted such concern and interest brings fresh insights into a range of themes and questions in British history.<sup>16</sup> It is clear from the example of British liberalism and the Balkans that interest in domestic reform did not preclude concern with international affairs; it is equally clear that the apogee of the British Empire did not exclude ‘European’ questions from political debate. Dissent over British foreign policy towards the Balkans was part of an inter-related set of political and social talking points that crossed between different international and domestic agendas. There is thus a ‘Balkan’

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<sup>16</sup> Undated press-cutting of a *War and Peace* review of Noel and Charles Buxton’s *The War and the Balkans* (1915); Noel Buxton Papers (MS 951 c.24/4).

context to issues that were at the forefront of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century British political debate, including: the political role of organised religion; the nature of national identity, citizenship and patriotism; the balance between ‘expertise’ and moral high-mindedness in public life; the relationship between the nation and the state; the concept of trusteeship and the future of empire. Exploring the twists and turns of British liberal engagement with the Balkans over the course of this period is an extremely useful approach to the broader historiographical challenge of examining, and making sense of, the complex intersection between domestic policy, European foreign policy and imperial policy within British political culture.

Placing engagement with the Balkans in these broader yet inter-connected domestic and international contexts is also important in terms of understanding the nuanced British liberal imaginative geography of the Balkans itself. Within the overarching paradigm of the ‘civilisational perspective’ British liberals negotiated a fine line between hope and despair and attraction and repulsion as far as the Balkan Peninsula was concerned. The region was repeatedly invested with a potential for civilisation and progress that seems at odds with the concept of balkanism. Yet the top-down paternalism and drive to control that characterised British liberal responses to Balkan national questions belies the fundamental inequality of the British-Balkan relationship. Idealisation of Balkan peasant culture certainly did not override deep-seated cultural prejudices against the ‘backward’ and ‘barbarous’ nature of other aspects of Balkan society; sympathy for the struggles of these ‘sons of the soil’ also went hand in hand with pernicious racial stereotyping and what was, at best, a casual indifference to the fate of non-Christian communities in the region. British liberals had a laudable capacity to sacrifice vast reserves of political energy in the cause of victims of oppression and ‘atrocities’ (to use the language of the time) in the Balkans and elsewhere. However, such humanitarian sympathy cannot be separated from the drive to control and manage ‘less civilised’ communities, nor can it be viewed independently of the continued propensity to denigrate, infantilise and disempower these communities, and to rely on incredibly subjective and biased analyses of who was ‘to blame’. Nevertheless, the British liberal relationship with the Balkans

suggests that British national identity in the imperial age was not *always and inevitably* constructed negatively through contradistinction with 'Others'. Cross-cultural encounters could give expression to positive as well as negative perceptions of foreign lands, even though such images were certainly malleable, fluid and self-centred.

The significance of the close connection between British liberalism and the Balkans in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries thus lies both in its impact on British society and in its impact on the external relationships that linked that society to the rest of the world.

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