

# European Media and ‘Outsiders’ Within— Contemporary Representations of Albania in the British Press

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*Abstract:* Edward W. Said’s *Orientalism* invigorated as never before the debate on the biased representation of the Orient in the West. In the first part of the paper, after highlighting the significance of Said’s work, I identify some weaknesses and limitations of the Saidian approach arguing that, like the Near and the Middle East, other countries and regions around the world have an unsavoury image in the West as a result of an ongoing academic and media demonology. Concentrating on the coverage that the Balkans, especially Albania, have received in the West from the start of the nineteenth century onwards, in the second part of the essay, I argue that the West has traditionally denigrated the European ‘other’ no less than the non-Europeans thus resulting in a cultural, historical and political fragmentation of the European continent which continues to have negative implications for Albania and the neighbouring countries, and more generally for the European Union. In the third part of the paper, through content-analysis of several articles that have appeared in the British press during the 2001–2007 period, the focus is on the disturbing tendency to denigrate the Albanian nation, a tendency which reveals a Euro-centric, post-imperial approach apparent in the Western media towards ‘estranged’ Europeans like the Albanians.

1. *Expanding the Orient*
2. *Racial prejudice towards the Balkans*
3. *Identity crisis*
4. *The exotic archive*
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6. *The price of biased journalism*
7. *The media and double standards*

## 1. EXPANDING THE ORIENT

In the introduction to his acclaimed 1978 book, *Orientalism*, Edward W. Said states that “[t]he life of an Arab Palestinian in the West, particularly in America,

is disheartening" [17, p. 27]. Said was a devout champion of the Palestinian cause but his above remark, like the book in question, was not inspired only by patriotism and nationalism. This is a point he was keen to reiterate throughout his life, and especially in the preface to the 2003 edition:

I do want to affirm yet again that this book and, for that matter, my intellectual work generally have really been enabled by my life as a university academic . . . [F]or all its urgent worldly references [*Orientalism*] is still a book about culture, ideas, history and power, rather than Middle Eastern politics *tout court*. That was my notion from the very beginning, and it is very evident and a good deal clearer to me today [17, p. xii].

The book certainly exonerates Said from any 'accusation' of patriotism but, on the whole, what he claims in this particular work is mainly about how the Orient and the Orientals, especially Muslim Arabs, have been and continue to be misperceived and misrepresented in the West since the 1798 Napoleon expedition to Egypt onwards. In his own words:

The web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, dehumanizing ideology holding in the Arab or the Muslim is very strong indeed, and it is this web which every Palestinian has come to feel as his uniquely punishing destiny. It has made matters worse for him to remark that no person academically involved with the Near East—no Orientalist, that is—has ever in the United States culturally and politically identified himself wholeheartedly with the Arabs; certainly there have been identifications on some level, but they have never taken an 'acceptable' form as has liberal American identification with Zionism, and all too frequently they have been radically flawed by their association either with discredited political and economic interests (oil company and State Department Arabists, for example) or with religion [17, p. 27].

The Saidian predicament is felt in the West not only by the Palestinians or the Arabs (be they Muslims or Christians). The web of 'racism,' 'cultural stereotypes,' 'political imperialism' and 'dehumanizing ideology' holds in not only the Arab or the Muslim but any 'foreigner' in the West originating from other 'lesser' peoples and 'subject races.'

The degradation of the 'other' in the West is not done only for religious purposes, as Said often seems to suggest in this particular work and throughout his *oeuvre*. The negative image of the Orient in the West may have something to do with Islam, but the faith of the Muslims is hardly the main reason why Oriental countries, especially the Middle East, are often misrepresented in the literature produced by and intended for Westerners.

Moreover, contrary to Said's belief, the West's denigration of the Orient started in earnest not at the start of the nineteenth century, but in 32 BC when Octavius crowned himself King of Egypt just over a century after 146 BC, when the fall of Carthage marked the rise of Rome to superpower status.<sup>1</sup> The Romans envied Egypt's success during almost 3,500 years of Pharaonic rule and to si-

lence the Egyptians' pride they were brutally iconoclastic. This is the time when the West first started the looting and the plundering of 'inferior' cultures and civilisations. On the pretext of heresy, Rome exterminated many people in Egypt and across the Middle East, including those who had converted to Christianity.

With the advent of Islam in the seventh century AD, West European countries, now Christianised, would use religion as a pretext any time they tried to exert their power over the peoples in the Middle East and across the expanding Muslim world. The crusades indicate clearly the extent to which the 'pious' West was prepared to use religion for the sake of justifying its looting and pillaging of the 'infidel' Orient. Portugal and Spain also employed religion as an excuse for the colonisation of the 'heathens' in both hemispheres. Christianity offered a smokescreen also to European powers like Britain, France, Denmark, Holland, Belgium and Germany to give 'legitimacy' to their colonial policy and to convince public opinion at home about, to use Rudyard Kipling's infamous phrase, 'the white man's burden' to civilize the 'barbarians.'

If Islam is the only reason why the West apparently has something against the Orient, one would expect the European powers to maintain a friendly attitude towards any Christian country that is not geographically in the West. This, however, has never been the case. The Portuguese, the Spaniards, the Dutch and the Danes, for instance, behaved as cruelly towards the converts to Christianity in the Far East and South East Asia over the last five centuries as they behaved in the colonies where the people refused to accept the Europeans' religion.

The same can be said about the way colonisers from Western Europe treated the peoples of Latin America. In spite of the fact that all the countries in this region adopted the white conquerors' faith, they were hardly treated with any leniency. Nor did their standing enhance in the eyes of the European masters throughout the colonisation period. To this day, in the West, the image of countries like Peru, Brazil, Argentina and Columbia is similar to the image they had when they were colonies. These countries are not geographically speaking in the Orient. All the same, their image in the West is not very different from that of any Oriental country.

Nowadays, the stigmatization of non-Western countries is done mainly through the media. Referring to the negative impact of Western media representations of the Orient, especially the Near East, on the image of the peoples of these regions and their cultures, Said notes:

Television, the films, and all the media's resources have forced information into more and more standardized molds. So far as the Orient is concerned, standardization and cultural stereotyping have intensified the hold of the nineteenth-century academic and imaginative demonology of 'the mysterious Orient' [17, p. 26].

Television, the films and all the media's resources, however, have had the same negative impact also on other non-Western countries. The Latin Americans, for instance, are stereotyped and pigeonholed in the West no less than the Orientals. Like the Near East, Latin America makes headlines in the West mainly for the

wrong reasons. Referring to this constant negative media coverage of the region, Richard S. Hillman notes that:

[a]ttitudes, values, beliefs regarding the conduct of politics, business and life in general remain vastly and profoundly misunderstood by many. The media has sensationalised issues such as political corruption and instability, narcotics trafficking and immigration problems, overshadowing attempts to promote democracy, trade and development, tourism and regional co-operation [9, p. xiii].

In his 'quarrel' with the West, Edward Said also seems to ignore the important fact that European powers have a long tradition of denigrating countries and regions which geographically, historically, religiously and politically speaking are part of Europe. One such region is the Balkans, and one such country is Albania.

## 2. RACIAL PREJUDICE TOWARDS THE BALKANS

In the Western psyche the Balkans have been traditionally seen as Europe's 'bad appendix,' a region where ethnic tensions and conflicts are endemic. In the last two hundred years several European leaders have often expressed their low opinions about this region. In the 1820s, for instance, the German-born Chancellor of the Austrian Empire, Prince Klemens von Metternich, who was known as 'the coachman of Europe,' made it clear that as far as he was concerned, the Balkans are not part of Europe. In his words, 'Asia begins at the Landstrasse,' the highway leading south and east of Vienna into Hungary. In the late nineteenth century, 'the Iron Chancellor,' Otto von Bismarck, one of the founders of the German Empire, held that the Balkans were not worth the bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier.

Likewise, several European leaders have often made disparaging remarks about individual Balkan and central European countries. Bismarck, for instance, had no qualms in declaring that 'Albania is merely a geographic expression; there is no Albanian nation,' and Archduke Franz Ferdinand considered it 'an act of bad taste for the Hungarians to have come to Europe.'

As a rule, West Europeans do not consider the people living in the Balkans Europeans. In spite of their contribution 'to the general progress of European civilization' [1, p. 3],<sup>2</sup> these 'outsider' Europeans continue to have a negative image in the West. There are several reasons for this: geographical, ethnic, religious, economic and political.

Western Europe's dominance and its unsavoury opinion of the Balkans have their beginnings in the days of the Roman Empire. Rome's victory over Gent, the last Illyrian king, in 169 BC signalled the start of the colonisation of the Balkans. Since Rome's annexation of Illyria, apart from some spells of self-rule, the Albanians in particular have been constantly living under occupation.

The mass arrival of the Slavs in the Balkans from the fifth century AD onwards, meant that the region became a contested space where tribe-nations

would constantly vie for and fight over territory. The conflicts in the Balkans since the dawn of the Slavic migration have often been and remain to this day essentially conflicts about expansion, colonisation, consolidation and protection of ethnic borders.

This ongoing ethnic strife has often given the Balkans an unsympathetic image in the West. Conflicts between different and similar ethnic groups in the Balkans have made the peoples of the region easy targets for strong colonial powers, whether they came from the West or the East. This was particularly the case in the fourteenth century when the Ottomans' progress into the peninsula was facilitated by the lack of unity among princes of different ethnic groups. In spite of some valiant attempts to unite against the common enemy, initially in 1389 and throughout the 1443–1468 period, the Balkan rulers were too divided to form a common front against the Turks. The old Roman motto *divide et impera* was used skilfully by the Turks throughout their long stay in the Balkans. The Hapsburg Empire was equally eager to exploit the bitter rivalries between the Balkan countries.

The Balkan peoples have also suffered as a result of the several schisms that have befallen Christianity since the fourth century, and the religious decisions they have made at particular moments in their history. In the case of the Albanians, the conversion of a considerable number of them to Islam in the wake of the death of their national hero Skanderbeg in 1468, a conversion which was made possible partly through coercion, partly through bribery and partly as a matter of convenience for the local rulers who wanted to retain their power, was to have a detrimental impact on the image of the Albanians in the West.

The European Powers considered Albania as a Turkish colony for almost five centuries mainly because they wrongly believed—some still do—that all Albanians are Muslims. The West's perception of Albania as an 'Islamic' country has also been reinforced since the end of the nineteenth century by a powerful Serbian propaganda to present the Albanians as 'fanatic adherents' to the Islamic faith, and as such 'non-Europeans.' Documents made public recently by the US government reveal that, during the Cold War, the West as well as the USSR often referred to Albania as a 'Muslim' country in spite of the official atheistic stance adopted by the Communist government in 1967.

Following the disintegration of the Turkish Empire in the early twentieth century, the European Powers were quick to intervene in the Balkans to serve their own interests. The decision to carve up the Balkans, especially Albania, in 1913, remains to this day a blatant act of international thuggery initiated by powerful European states at the expense of one of the oldest European nations. The dismembered Albanian nation is a constant reminder of a festering wound at the heart of Europe which will not simply disappear unless Western leaders today own up to the dreadful miscalculations of their colonial predecessors for whom the territorial integrity and sovereignty of some small nations were hardly an issue.

Western powers' influence over the Balkans waned considerably during the Second World War and especially throughout the Cold War. Except for

Greece's lucky escape, thanks to the financial support coming from the United States in 1947, something which proved vital later for the integration of Greece into the European Community, all Balkan countries adopted Communism.

The Cold War was essentially an irreconcilable ideological conflict during which the differences between the East and the West were often seen as a manifestation of the battle between 'good' and 'evil.' In this bitter contest between two contradicting social systems—Capitalism and Communism—the image of the Communist Balkans suffered further.

The end of the Cold War in 1989 brought to the surface once again the ancient issue about the 'Europeanness' or 'non-Europeanness' of the Balkans. For their part, after several decades of Communist propaganda and isolation, only now the Balkan citizens could see for themselves the negative image they had in the West. The violent disintegration of Yugoslavia throughout the 1990s dented their image in the West even more.

As for Albania, its image was greatly tarnished by the exodus of numerous impoverished Albanians heading towards Italy and other Western countries in the early 1990s, and the civil unrest in the wake of the collapse of the fraudulent pyramid schemes in 1997.

### 3. IDENTITY CRISIS

After the collapse of Communism and the violent fragmentation of Yugoslavia, every Balkan country was keen to join the European Union. So far, however, only Slovenia in 2004 and Romania and Bulgaria in 2007 have been able to join this expanding club. Some of the Balkan countries that have yet to become EU members apparently believe that their accession has been delayed partly because of the negative image the region has in the West. This is the reason why such hopeful candidates are keen to distance themselves from the Balkans.

The tendency to present themselves as 'non-Balkans' is strong among the region's EU member states Greece and Slovenia, and among the frustrated hopefuls like Croatia. Many Croats are insulted if foreigners consider their country as part of the Balkans (see [18]). The Croats' aversion towards the Balkans seems to have intensified as a result of the advice given by their Western 'promoters.' One such 'promoter' of Croatia in the UK is Brian Gallagher, who has repeatedly advised the Croats to distance themselves from the Balkans. In his article 'Will Croatia join a Balkan NATO?', which appeared in *Hrvatski Vjesnik* on 26 July 2002, Gallagher praises the Slovenes for their farsightedness to wean themselves from 'the problem region.' In his words, '[b]y simply saying "no," Slovenia has avoided all regional nonsense and has escaped the Balkan image' [11]. Sensing a 'hidden' agenda on the part of NATO to create what he calls 'a West Balkan NATO,' Gallagher concludes that 'NATO clearly considers Croatia to be fully part of this troubled region, which cannot be good news for Croatia's image.' Having argued that 'Croatia and Serbia are not "like-minded" countries,' Gallagher 'reprimands' the Croatian government for its 'naivety.'

Why is Croatia anchoring itself to these problem countries? Is Zagreb unaware of the appalling image these countries have in the EU? The British media—often hysterically—is continually running stories about Albanian criminal gangs in the UK. General Sylvester, Head of NATO in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in relation to dealing with terrorism described the BiH border as 'porous' in *TIME* magazine. Such an image means that Croatia will never join NATO and the EU on an individual basis. But it will certainly end up in some 'West Balkan' structure. The EU makes things clear on their website. They wish to 'encourage the countries of the region to behave towards each other and work with each other in a manner comparable to the relationships that now exist between EU Member States.' A West Balkan EU in other words . . . Croatia will be economically impoverished by 'West Balkans' association. Many investors will take their money to 'safer' countries, not linked to basket case economies such as Serbia. And if there are any conflicts in Serbia or elsewhere, tourism may suffer. Croatia needs to get away from the West Balkan image, not plunge straight into it [11].

Gallagher is right to warn the Croats about 'the appalling image' all Balkan countries have in the West, but he seems to have a rather narrow view about its origin. While the turbulent 1990s hardly endeared the peoples of the Balkans to Westerners, their image as 'uncivilised' had been sealed in the West at least two centuries earlier.

#### 4. THE EXOTIC ARCHIVE

From the early nineteenth century onwards, the West knew the Balkans mainly through the works of Western travel writers and accounts of diplomats and military experts posted across the region. There were even cases when Westerners wrote about the Balkans without ever setting foot in the region, thus constructing, what K. E. Fleming calls, 'fictional Balkan worlds.' In the twentieth century such 'fictional' Balkan worlds appeared in the works of Georges Remi (known mainly as Hergé), Agatha Christie and, towards the end of the twentieth century, in the novels of J. K. Rowling. If the first two writers used fictional names for their Balkan countries ('Syldavia' and 'Borduria' in Hergé's *Le Sceptre d'Ottokar/King Ottokar's Sceptre: Tintin Visits an Exotic Country* (1939), and 'Herzoslovakia' in Christie's *The Secret of Chimneys* (1925)), Rowling has no qualms in using the name of Albania in her *Harry Potter and the Chambers of Secrets* (1998) and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000) as a country where the evil 'Dark Lord' and his dedicated followers find a perfect hideout.<sup>3</sup>

While the West has quite an extensive archive of literary works in which the Balkans and Albania are continuously presented mainly as 'uncivilised,' with the exception of the last few decades, over the last three centuries Western scholars have hardly considered Albania, any other Balkan country or the Balkan Peninsula worthy of a lengthy academic study. As K. E. Fleming notes in her 2000 article '*Orientalism, the Balkans, and the Balkan Historiography*,' there is no history of 'Balkanism' as an established academic field (see [8]).

In the same work, Fleming holds that, different from *Orientalism*, the Balkans scholarship has traditionally been produced by a 'free-lance,' 'pseudo-academic,' 'cottage industry of "specialists"' who, as in the case of the break-up of Yugoslavia, are interested in the subject matter because contemporary conflicts render it 'timely.' I myself have written elsewhere that in the case of Albania, some of its Western image-makers in the past ended up writing about it quite by chance, and not as part of a long thought-out plan to study its people, history and culture [13, p. 25], [14, pp. 25–32], [31]. In most cases, such Western 'specialists' on Albania and the Balkans took to travelling abroad either to escape bad publicity at home, as was the case with Lord Byron, or on medical advice, as in Edith Durham's case. Albania offered to eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth century Western travellers like Byron, Durham, Roland Matthews, Karl May, Franz Nopcsa, British military personnel operating in Albania and elsewhere in the Balkans during World War II, and more recently to Paul Theroux, Robert Carver, Marianne Graf, A. A. Gill and Mike Carter a chance to encounter the 'exotic,' the 'primitive' and the 'uncivilised' at the threshold of Western Europe.

It is no coincidence that for most of these Albanian 'experts,' what is of particular interest is not the 'civilised' Albania, but its backwardness, not the thriving towns and cities like Tirana, Shkodra, Korça and Vlora with a rich and varied cultural, historical, civic and natural heritage but some distant villages, and especially the less developed Northern Albania. Following the example of Durham and Nopcsa at the start of the twentieth century, contemporary travel writers like Carver and Graf pay attention almost exclusively to this particular region of Albania to tell Western readers about their sensational discovery of a 'backwater of life' and its 'primitive virtues' [2, p. 118]. Some of the preferred themes of these devoted chasers of the exotic are *besa* (Albanian for 'word of honour'), the Canon of Lekë Dukagjin, blood feuds and the sworn virgins. Such exotic themes are given priority in the biographies of Albanian personalities penned by Westerners like Gwen Robyns, the author of *Geraldine of the Albanians: The Authorised Biography* (1987), and in the writings of some Mother Teresa scholars such as Eileen Egan and Kathryn Spink.

The American novelist Paul Theroux once said that writing travel books is 'a pretty harmless activity' [5]. This is true as far as the authors of this kind of literature and their intended readers are concerned; after all, most published travel writers in the West are Westerners.

As far as the countries described in this made-in-and-for-the-West travel literature are concerned, however, travel-writing is anything but a harmless activity. As a result of works written by authors who have visited Albania or virtual travellers who used to and still describe this 'exotic' place without ever setting foot there, as was the case with the German writer Karl May and more recently with the Spanish novelist Susana Fortes, the author of *El Amante Albanés* (*The Albanian Lover*, 2003), the West now possesses quite an 'exotic archive' on Albania. This 'exotic archive' is largely responsible for the predominantly negative image Albania has in the West at the moment.



Albania's image as a 'primitive,' 'uncivilised' and 'dangerous' but still fun-to-visit place, prevails nowadays in spite of the fact that this corner of the Balkans is no longer an isolated country. It is as a result of this long-established tendency to describe this place only in black and white that to this day the West remains largely ignorant of anything positive about Albania in the past, and especially since the fall of Communism in 1991. Anything reported in the West about Albania, even an international football match, has to be politicised for the sake of highlighting this country's 'backwardness.' In his messy article 'Good grass and gun law,' that appeared in *The Observer* on 25 March 2001, for instance, Simon Kuper takes the reader on a journey that has more to do with the 'primitiveness' of the host country, corruption, the donkey carts its people allegedly use as a mode of transportation to travel to Tirana to see international matches, and contract killings than with Albania's World Cup fixture with England. Referring to a photograph an Albanian football historian had taken of the England team before the kick-off when they played Albania in 1989, Kuper cannot contain his surprise when he notices that in the picture 'Bryan Robson, Peter Shilton, John Barnes and Gary Lineker [were] looking as if they had no idea they were visiting Europe's strangest state.' The England team, it seems, had let Kuper and Britain down by looking normal in an 'abnormal' country, surrounded by 'abnormal' football fans.

This biased, sensationalist and exotic literature on and tabloid-like media coverage of Albania have long become 'the norm' in the West especially in the United Kingdom. The articles cited in this part of the essay have appeared in national British newspapers and magazines between 2001 and 2006. The reason for their selection has been determined purely by the fact that during these years Albania has experienced political stability, law and order have been maintained across the country, and many Albanians have seen an increase in their savings [22] and a significant improvement in their living standards. As a result of more opportunities to work and higher salaries, the Albanians who went on holiday abroad in 2004 spent \$560 million (see [19], [20], [22]).

All indications are that the Albanian government is working hard to follow the advice of the European Union on several issues regarding its monetary policy and the management of the economy. Albania is also playing a positive role in the Balkans to further regional cooperation. More recently, the Balkan Council for the Ministers of Culture, which was founded in Copenhagen on 31 March 2005, was the brainchild of an Albanian minister [23]. The Albanian government has initiated several other projects to enhance cultural exchanges and improve trade relations with every Balkan country and has responded positively to similar proposals originating from other governments in the region [21].

Albania's achievements have been noticed by some Western scholars. In the words of James Pettifer and Miranda Vickers:

Albania has undergone a remarkable and unprecedented political, social and economic transformation since it emerged from the ruins of the harshest form of communism in 1991. Then an utterly poverty-stricken population was

wholly dependent upon international food aid, and the state was in a condition of advanced disintegration. Within a year, however, Albania's international isolation had ended as the world's major powers hurried to establish their diplomatic missions in this impoverished but strategically important Balkan state. Despite chronic internal political unrest during the latter half of the 1990s, Albania gradually became a respected partner of the West in the region. During the Kosova crisis [in 1999] the country proved itself a worthy NATO ally, and following the 9/11 attacks on the USA, Albania has resolutely joined the 'War on Terror,' by firmly monitoring the activities of radical Islamic individuals and groups in the country. Albania has also contributed soldiers to US-led coalitions in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq [30, p. 257].

In spite of such positive developments, like other countries in the Balkans, Albania hits the headlines in the West, especially in the British media, mostly for the wrong reasons. Richard Hillman's conclusion, mentioned earlier in this essay, that media has sensationalised issues such as political corruption and instability, narcotics trafficking and immigration problems, overshadowing attempts to promote democracy, trade and development, tourism and regional co-operation, is valid not only for Latin America but also for Albania and the Balkans.

For many British journalists covering Albania, its identity and image are set in stone. Albania was and remains 'Europe's poorest and most isolated country' [15, p. 2]. These are some of the titles of the articles about this country that have appeared in recent years in some of Britain's major newspapers and magazines such as *The Times*, *The Sunday Times Magazine*, *The Independent*, *The Observer* and *The Guardian*: 'The wild frontier,' 'Rocks and hard places,' 'Albanian gangs take control of Britain streets,' 'Balkan criminals better organised than us: Blunkett,' 'Shanty town in Albania built on toxic time bomb,' 'Back home: the child of six sold to traffickers,' 'Streets of despair,' 'Welcome to Tirana, Europe's pollution capital,' 'Partisan war at Albania's paradise bay,' 'Secret Europe,' 'The land that time forgot' and 'Travels through a midlife crisis.'

From these titles it is not surprising that British citizens are strongly advised to think twice before taking the decision to visit Albania. The advice, several British reporters are keen to emphasise, comes mainly from the Foreign Office. This is how Esther Addley opens her article 'Welcome to camp Tirana,' which appeared in *The Guardian* on 11 March 2003:

Planning to visit Albania? If so the Foreign Office has a few tips. 'Public security has improved considerably in Albania . . . but crime and violence still represent a serious problem in some areas,' its website cautions. 'Drink only bottled water and UHT milk. Medical facilities (including accident and emergency) are very poor. We do not recommend using dental facilities.' Of particular concerns, it warns, are hepatitis, rabies (due to 'the large number of stray dogs') and tick-borne encephalitis' ('we advice travellers to keep all areas of the body covered when close to shrubs, and to inspect themselves regularly for ticks'). In fact, it concludes, better safe than sorry: make sure your

medical insurance covers evacuation by helicopter, just in case the worst should happen [12, p. 7].

The Foreign Office website is also mentioned in several other newspaper articles on Albania. In his piece 'Wish you were here,' which was published in *The Guardian* on 11 August 2003, for instance, Tim Dowling notes that the Foreign Office draws attention to "the widespread ownership of firearms," and strongly discourages travel in the north-east of the country' [15, p. 2]. The information Dowling received about Albania from another source is hardly more encouraging:

The Lonely Planet website warns of 'armed robberies, assaults, mobster assassinations, bombings and carjackings,' exhorts visitors to 'avoid all large public gatherings' and says it is inadvisable to travel outside the main cities, or anywhere at night. This doom-laden paragraph is missing from the latest edition of its printed guide to eastern [sic] Europe, but the book does suggest that 'corrupt police may attempt to extort money from you' and the word 'banditry' is used in passing [15].

Albania does not fare any better in other travel guide websites and some simply ignore this country altogether. On 13 July 2003, Andrew Muller wrote in *The Independent on Sunday* that Albania is not mentioned in the current *Rough Guide to Eastern Europe*, and *Fodor's Central & Eastern Europe* also gives it a swerve [16, p. 7]. The lack of information on Albania and the frightening picture painted by the Home Office and the Lonely Planet websites are unlikely to entice foreigners to visit this country. No wonder some people in the West apparently share Muller's sentiment that '[y]ou'd no sooner go to Albania than you'd jump on the tail of a sleeping leopard, and nor would anybody else' [16].

Cases are not rare when British reporters rely entirely on and accept uncritically the little available information on travel to Albania. They are also keen to refer in their articles, often inconsequentially, to some Albanian 'primitive' and 'bizarre' customs and traditions they have picked up from browsing hastily the 'exotic archive' on Albania mentioned earlier. Cases are not rare when British reporters write about Albania without consulting any scholarly book on the country's history. Indeed, many of them have no informed background to make a sensible assessment of the situation in Albania or the Balkans. British journalists who cover this region, as a rule, are commissioned at random for an occasional article, have never studied at any university in the Balkans, speak none of the Balkan languages and, perhaps more significantly, often write about the region without ever going there in person. This reminds me of the former British Minister for Europe Keith Vaz, who was also responsible for the Balkans. Shortly after the fall of Slobodan Milosevic, I attended a meeting with Mr Vaz in Birmingham, where I asked him why the British government was so eager to hail as a huge success the 'half-baked' Serbian revolution of October 2000, considering that Vojislav Kostunica, who succeeded Milosevic as president of

Yugoslavia, was—and remains—as much of an ultra-nationalist as his predecessor when it comes to the issue of the independence of the Albanian territory of Kosova. To this the Minister replied: 'The Balkans, you know, is a very difficult region.' When Mr Vaz resigned in late 2001, it emerged that throughout his four years as a minister responsible for the Balkans, he had never visited the region.

It is unfortunate that some British journalists, who bring the world to the British public, seem to think that they can offer a realistic and impartial picture of a country like Albania by relying exclusively on outdated information coming from government departments, travel guides and sensationalist and biased travel writers. This kind of distance reporting, as was the case with Esther Addley's hurriedly written article 'Welcome to camp Tirana,' is largely responsible for the perennial pauper image reserved for Albania in the British media.

Albania's image has hardly benefited in the UK even from British journalists who are 'brave' enough to take the challenge to visit this 'dangerous' country. The reputation of Albania as an 'unsafe' place often reaches a manic level in the UK. 'When I told my friends—educated, enlightened, citizens of the world—I was going to visit Albania,' Andrew Muller wrote in the article mentioned earlier, 'their initial responses were instructive: "Wasn't Baghdad dangerous enough;" "Could I please have your flat?"; "Bring me back a, erm . . . cabbage?"' [16].

The dispatches most British journalists send from Tirana or other parts of Albania often perpetuate the bad image this country and its people already have in Britain. Tim Dowling is right when he concludes that most information he consulted prior to his visit to Albania in August 2003 'seems designed to instil fear' [15, p. 2].

While many British reporters can be 'forgiven' for not writing sympathetically about Albania as they describe this country from their offices in London, Dowling chose to paint a very gloomy picture of the situation in Albania following his visit there. The article 'Wish you were here' quite often betrays Dowling's lack of objectivity and poor knowledge of the country. 'In Albania,' he claims, 'they worship Norman Wisdom as a cultural icon'. The myth about Wisdom's 'iconic status' among the Albanians is mentioned by most British reporters writing on Albania since the actor visited the country after the end of Communism (see [10, pp. 45, 46], [24]). Therefore, it stands to reason that an alleged bizarre obsession like this would not escape the attention of someone like Dowling who is obviously quite skilled in spotting cultural eccentricities, both real and invented. What Dowling has yet to learn is that in Albania, any foreigner who is anybody is given a red-carpet reception. Cases are not rare when this kind of special treatment is offered even to foreigners who are complete nonentities in their own countries.

As a reporter with a mission, it is not surprising that Dowling would spot and report other 'bizarre' things about the Albanians like their habit to 'shake their heads for yes and nod for no.' The remark which I like most in his article is the one testifying to his expertise as a linguist *par excellence*. The Albanians, he claims, 'speak two languages, Tosk and Gheg' [15, p. 2]. This piece of informa-

tion would give Western readers the erroneous impression that these are not two dialects of one and the same native tongue but two completely different languages.

Dowling is a typical sensationalist journalist who goes abroad not to write about real people with real problems, real achievements and real aspirations but only to look for potholes, concrete pillboxes, rubble, broken glass, twisted iron, and especially people 'walking cows as if they were dogs' [15].

Either because he was not so confident in his ability to capture the 'seamy' side of Albania with absolute accuracy and authenticity, or because he felt that words are never enough to convince the British reader of what an 'appalling' place this corner of the Balkans is, he used the expertise of *The Guardian* photographer Dan Chung to document his historic visit.

The article is accompanied by three pictures. In the first one, Dowling sits smirking somewhere in the coastal town of Durrës in front of a concrete pillbox, a cow and lots of scattered rubbish. The poster-size picture takes the whole front-page of *The Guardian* and has a caption which reads: 'My holiday in Albania.' The second picture, this time in black and white, shows Dowling at the entrance of another concrete pillbox. In the last picture, which occupies more than half of the third page, Dowling sits quite smug at the edge of the beach showing mainly debris, mossy stones and, of course, more rubbish. This time the caption reads: 'Plenty of space by the water: "The beach in Durrës is composed almost entirely of hard-packed dust, concrete rubble, broken glass and twisted iron"' [15, p. 3].

Any British reader who might have considered going to Albania for a bit of sun, sea and sand would have certainly been put off by Dowling's article and the pictures, especially the last one. To the unsuspecting British reader, the buildings shown in the background in the third shot seem to have no seafront worth passing by, let alone sunbathing or swimming facilities.

Like other holiday spots in Albania, Durrës has suffered as a result of pollution and a boom in construction work, often carried out without permission. The sorry picture Dowling and his photographer paint of Durrës, however, is hardly representative of this beautiful seaside resort famous for its golden sandy beaches that stretch for miles on end. It appears *The Guardian* duo did not go to Albania to discover it for themselves, but to hunt around for images that would fit perfectly with what they had heard about this country before arriving there.

In their journalistic mission to document only dirt in non-Western countries, reporters like Dowling often find zealous helpers among the locals who, either because of their naivety, their pathological inferiority complex towards any two-legged creature hailing from the West, or because of their legitimate frustration with rampant corruption, tell Western journalists what they want to hear.

## 5. THE DEATH OF THE JOURNALIST

The Dowling-type journalism rarely offers imaginative reporting, and hence is hardly intellectually stimulating. Applying Derrida's deconstructionist approach

to an intentionally derogatory and sensationalist newspaper text reveals some interesting, surprising and disheartening results. Once completed, a literary text, any text, no matter who pens it, can be plural in meaning and interpretation. The newspaper text, on the other hand, often seems stubbornly one-dimensional. The tone, the lexicon and the pictures accompanying it make for a pattern Western readers have been familiar with for at least a couple of centuries. As far as the British print media is concerned, Albania has always been and still is a 'backward,' 'poor,' 'enigmatic' country, just as the Balkans remains a 'powder keg,' the local economies 'dysfunctional,' the regional leaders 'political infants' and 'corrupt,' and the whole peninsula a Pandora's box from where all evil things come to the West, especially Britain: drugs, human trafficking, money laundering, prostitution, contract killers, and the list goes on.

The newspaper 'text' says it all, allowing readers no opportunity to interpret it for themselves. Some British journalists, it appears are 'dead.' However, the demise of these authors is different from the death of the author as perceived by Roland Barthes. The journalist-author appears to be dead not only because the smearing article as a 'genre' predates him. Some reporters in the West seem to have a ghoulish existence also because their output is neither informative nor intellectually challenging. The journalist, to borrow Barthes cryptical line of argument, 'does not write' the 'text.' The newspaper 'text' does not need the 'author' or an 'author.' It already exists without him/her, and the 'author' is incapable of adding any new meaning to it.

The death of the Journalist-Author does not presuppose the birth of the independent reader, as Barthes had implied in the case of the literary Author [3, p. 148]. In this case the reader is not given a chance to interpret the text in a new and imaginative way. The newspaper-text and newspaper-photo only reinforce what the reader has been fed on for years, decades and even centuries regarding the identity and standing of Albania and other 'lesser' countries. The reader is no longer served by a real journalist but by a phantom-writer who is incapable of breaking the mould and whose mission apparently is to keep on churning out scaremongering stories about 'footnote' peoples and countries.

## 6. THE PRICE OF BIASED JOURNALISM

This kind of biased, doom-and-gloom reporting is bound to harm the Albanian economy, especially the prospects of tourism, just as it gives ordinary people, investors and businessmen in the West the misleading impression that Albania has made no progress since the fall of Communism, and that the country is incapable of having a viable tourism industry.

The Albanian government has always been aware of the country's atrocious image in the West. It is only recently, however, that it has tried to do something to rectify the situation. On 23 February 2005, for instance, the Albanian daily *Biznesi* reported that the Albanian government had asked McKinsey & Company to contribute towards improving the country's image in order to attract more foreign investment. According to Ulrich Frincke, McKinsey's Regional

Director for the South East European countries, the cooperation between his management consulting firm and Albania is expected to bring the country more than US\$ 300 million a year.

The Albanian government's decision to seek advice from such a leading global strategic management consulting firm was met with derision by the reporter Robert Shrimsley. His article 'Tirana saw us,' which appeared in the *Financial Times* on 3 March 2005, is rather long but I have quoted it in its entirety because I believe it reiterates some of the issues about biased, and in this case hostile, coverage that Albania often receives in the British press:

The Albanian government has asked McKinsey to develop a strategy to improve the country's image and attractiveness to foreign investors.

To: Albanian cabinet

From: McKinsey, Zagreb Office

Subject: Image refurbishment

Further to our discussions last month we present our preliminary thoughts on upgrading Albania's image to overseas investors.

You are already aware that structural changes are needed. Image makeovers rarely succeed if they are not underpinned by a genuine rethink. The bribery of tax and licensing officials may very well be a proud tradition in your country but it does rather cut against the reform and modernisation drive. You may be aware of the old German joke urging businessmen to 'fly to Albania; your car's already there'. Charming as this is, it is probably not the image you want to project. A requirement for all Mercedes to display a valid receipt in the window would work wonders.

Once these measures are in place however, some cosmetic changes would go a long way towards signalling the birth of a new and modern Albania.

For a start we recommend you consider a name change. Albania is so last century—it seems to date back to the year Zog. Something that suggests a more technologically advanced, even cool, nation. After consultations with branding experts, we recommend aPod. This conjures up a far more buzzing image, especially if U2 could be prevailed on to write your new national anthem.

Finally we find nothing spurs on investors quite so much as a peaceful revolution, preferably one with a colour or material in it. The publicity value of one, if you could organise it, would be immense. Orange, rose, velvet and cedar have already gone but salmon pink is nice and has happy associations with business. Thanks to the widespread global ignorance of Albanian politics, there is probably no need even to oust the existing administration as long as it all takes place so suddenly as to sweep you into power before any foreign press can make it to Tirana. A new communications supremo would also help. Alastair Campbell will be available from May. He's a little brutal by Albanian standards but the great thing is his proven track record of securing such good coverage for reforms that it can be years before people realise they do not quite live up to expectations.

Asked if he would care to comment on the motives that made him write such a piece,<sup>4</sup> Shrimsley's response was: 'My article was primarily a bit of fun towards the end of a column based on the decision to invite McKinsey in.'<sup>5</sup> Shrimsley

sees nothing wrong in the constant degradation that countries like Albania receive in the British press, because, as he puts it, '[i]n my experience countries bear their own responsibilities for the treatment they receive in the press.'

Shrimpsley certainly has a point. It would be absurd to see countries like Albania, indeed any country that receives constant bad coverage in the British press, simply as a 'martyred' party. There is no denying that corruption is rife in Albania, that Albanian politicians have yet to understand the notion of a 'loyal opposition,' that a lot needs to be done so that locals and foreigners feel safe across the country, that its infrastructure has a long way to go before it can match Western standards, and that quality health services are equally available to every citizen. Paul Brown is right to call Tirana 'Europe's pollution capital' in his article which appeared in *The Guardian* on 27 March 2004.

Albania, however, has made considerable achievements since its belated independence in 1912, especially since the end of Communist rule sixteen years ago. Trivialising the efforts of a small ancient nation to join the family of developed countries is not just 'a bit of fun;' it is fun in a bad taste. This fun *à la* Shrimpsley has contributed significantly to sustaining the prevailing 'heart of darkness' image of Albania in the West.

Shrimpsley, of course, is not the only self-professed 'funny' British journalist. Nor is he the only British reporter who fails to see why not everyone is bending over with laughter as they read such image-smearing articles that appear so often in the British press. A couple of years before the publication of Shrimpsley's 'side-splitting' letter in the *Financial Times*, another British journalist, Charles Rae, was frustrated with '[a] few humourless killjoys' who 'did not see the funny side of *The Sun*'s Mr Men spoof' (C. Rae, 'Mr Moaner and pals rap *Sun*'s spoof', 22 January 2003, p. 7), which the tabloid ran on 21 January 2003. 'We invented seven characters in the style of kids' favourites Mr Men and Little Misses,' the self-appointed Mr Comedienne Rae explains, 'to reflect life in modern Britain.' Two of these 'favourites' are foreigners: Mr Asylum Seeker and Mr Albanian Gangster. This is how *The Sun* portrays the latter:

Mr Albanian Gangster

Mr Albania Gangster didn't like it in Albania so now he lives in Britain. He hangs out with Mr Drug Dealer and Mr Asylum Seeker. He often likes to do the same things as them. But Mr Albanian Gangster has a kind side—he invited all of his friends' sisters to stay. He even gave them a job. He put all his friends' sisters in a house together and then invited lots of men to come and see them so they would never get lonely. The men had such a good time they even paid Mr Albanian Gangster to visit the house. Unfortunately the poor girls saw none of the money. Mr Albanian Gangster pocketed the lot.

Rae's and Shrimpsley's 'harmless' mediatic 'fun' has been going on for far too long, and is largely responsible for the constant demonisation of some peoples, a demonisation which in capitalistic terms translates into a loss of revenue from potential investors understandably unwilling to take unnecessary risks in countries which are always portrayed as incorrigible. 'Let's do some word associa-



tions,' Andrew Mueller invites the readers of *The Independent on Sunday* at the start of his article 'Tirana's true colours,' one of the rare pieces in the British press where there is no intention to denigrate the Albanians:

I say 'Albanian,' you say . . . Gangster? Asylum-seeker? Prostitute? There are viruses breeding in African rivers which have better public image than Albania. Indeed, in London schoolyards, the adjective 'Albanian' has passed into vernacular, descriptive of anything shoddy, unfashionable or criminal [16, p. 17].

The Albanian nation and the overwhelming majority of decent law-abiding Albanian citizens abroad have a lot to thank their criminal expatriates for this unjust collective punishment and humiliation in the West. Some irresponsible individuals, though, should not be seen as representing all the Albanians. Not all Western citizens behave themselves abroad. Yet when some British football hooligans, for instance, wreak havoc overseas, no British journalist sees them as the epitome of the whole British population. When it comes to some Albanian gangsters, however, Britain's 'hilarious' reporters are eager to resort to sensationalisation and tabloidisation of any scrap of evidence, genuine or fabricated, to brand all Albanians as criminals. This kind of reporting is intended not so much to inform and entertain the unsuspecting British readers, who are more sophisticated than some reporters and editors seem to believe, but to boost circulation figures.

As a rule Western journalists reporting on Albania and other former Communist countries see 'corruption' as an 'indigenous' problem. In addition to flagellating Albania's corrupt politicians and businessmen, some 'principled' British journalists and their Western colleagues would do poor Albania a huge favour if they named and shamed its corrupt leaders in the Western Media. And not only Albania. More importantly, such 'conscientious' reporters would benefit their own countries even more if they had both the courage and professional integrity to name and shame those Western politicians and business leaders who condone and even help directly corrupt politicians and entrepreneurs in countries like Albania. Corruption may be rife in Albania and across Eastern Europe, but it would not be a bad idea if Western journalists traced the source of the metastasises of corruption Westwards as much as Eastwards.

James Pettifer and Miranda Vickers identify other reasons why the British media portrayed the Albanians so negatively between 2001 and 2006. Having highlighted the decisive role of the Blair government in defeating Milosevic's ethnic cleansing of the Albanians in Kosova which culminated in their mass expulsion in 1999, Pettifer and Vickers note that the British bureaucracy still contains many people who have never broken with 'the British Yugoslavist psychology and tacit or active collaboration with Serb war crimes in the name of "opposing" Islam in the Balkans' [30, pp. 246–7]. The real worry for the British Serbophiles in the Foreign Office and secret intelligence service (MI6) is not Islam; they meddle in Balkan politics because they are keen 'to protect Serbian

hegemony in the region' [30, p. 247]. This is the reason why they were determined to sabotage Kosova's independence.

To achieve this 'open agenda' against Kosova and the Albanian nation, the British Yugophiles employed the British media, and so 'the anti-Albanian propaganda machine was cranked up in London in police and security circles, with stories fed to sympathetic journalists stressing the alleged and exclusive threat of the "Albanian mafia"' [30]. The employment of ex-Milosevic policemen as 'expert advisers' to international agencies such as Interpol meant that the demonization of the Albanians became a leitmotif also of the media in France, Greece, Italy and the USA.

This is not to say that all Western journalists were happy to besmirch the Albanians. Likewise, not all Western reporters were prepared to applaud 'the largely bogus "revolution" of October 2000 in Belgrade' [30]. Journalists who were likely to be critical of the West's interpretation of the Belgrade 'revolution' and of the handling of the issue of Kosova were left in no doubt that 'disobedience' would not be tolerated. This explains why they 'were as far as possible removed from reporting positions in the region' and replaced with 'pliable figures' [30].

The direct involvement of some people from the Foreign Office, British army and MI6 in the media campaign against the Albanians after 2000 is a disturbing example of the back-stage censorship that goes unchecked in the British media. Unfortunately, this kind of censorship is a feature of the media across the Western world.

## 7. THE MEDIA AND DOUBLE STANDARDS

The United Kingdom, it seems, is obsessed with political correctness and so is the British media. You cannot badmouth or vilify in Britain just any country. This 'preferential' treatment is reserved only for countries like Albania that have yet to produce a vigorous and independent media of their own and a scholarly elite to take on mediocre and ill-meaning Western journalists and biased scholars whose aim, one would argue, is to denigrate any 'other' that does not conform to Western 'norms' and is unable to protect its image.

More recently, the double standards of the British media regarding the treatment of different countries were noticeable in A. A. Gill's article on Albania 'The land that time forgot,' that the *Sunday Times Magazine* ran on 23 July 2006. In Gill's view, Albania is 'funny . . . a punchline, a Gilbert and Sullivan country, a Ruritania of brigands and vendettas and pantomime royalty', and the Albanians are 'short and ferret-faced, with the unisex stumpy, slightly bowed legs of Shetland ponies' [24]. Like Dowling, Gill cannot help showing off what a linguistics expert he is. Different from Dowling, though, Gill does not pay attention to the Albanian dialects. What Gill finds unique about Albanian is that, in his view, this language is 'a ready-made code for criminals,' and 'pathetically, phonetically funny.'

Gill's article outraged many Albanians and Westerners who wrote to the *Sunday Time Magazine* to complain. One of the Albanians who contacted the magazine was Lavdrim Terziu, editor of the London-based newspaper *Albanian Mail*. In his reply to Terziu, the editor of the *Sunday Time Magazine*, Robin Morgan, adopts a somewhat patronising tone, lecturing him and other 'unsophisticated' readers on the 'broad-brushstroke British wit', which, apparently, not everyone understands, especially if one is unlucky enough not to have been born British. No wonder Terziu and his fellow Albanians were not hugely impressed by, what they saw as, Morgan's arrogant attitude (see [25]).

Terziu also contacted the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) in London only to be told that:

[Gill] was entitled to take a negative view of the place and to share it with the newspaper's readers, who would have been aware from the manner in which it was presented that the article represented his own subjective position rather than an indisputable statement of fact [27].

To adopt the PCC's perverse logic in this case, a racist bigot like Hitler also was apparently 'entitled' to take a negative view of the Jews and share it with his supporters who, as history tells us, had no qualms in adopting his 'subjective position' as an 'indisputable statement of fact'. The verdict that 'the Commission was satisfied that the newspaper had demonstrated that the journalist had sufficient grounds on which to base his observations and conclusions about the country' will undoubtedly send the wrong message to other similar mediocre and racist British journalists like Gill that it is acceptable to write that what the Albanians do abroad 'is mostly illegal', and that except for Mother Teresa, the rest of them are internationally 'infamous' [24].

British readers, of course, are not so easily duped by a second rate scribbler like Gill whose abrasive style of writing only a handful of editors like Morgan would consider the epitome of British wit. The issue here is would Gill and Morgan have dared to write and defend similar insulting articles against other peoples, especially among those that rank high in the 'hierarchy' of nations or against any other small country with more 'status' and 'weight' on the international stage than the 'insignificant' Albania? The answer to this question is provided by Noel Malcolm of All Souls College, University of Oxford, one of the people who wrote to the *Sunday Times Magazine* to protest against Gill's article:

Imagine if Gill had written the following: 'Jews are ugly, with big noses. Their history shows they are a complete joke—a bunch of losers. They believe in something called the Torah, which is a handbook on stoning people to death. Most Jews outside Israel are engaged in shady business practices and usury.' Would you have published it? Yet you published the direct equivalent about Albanians. Of course, your regular readers may understand that Gill is a self-publicist who thinks that insulting people en masse is a useful way to gain publicity.

But there are many decent, hardworking Albanians, here and elsewhere, who do not know that, and will be deeply upset at seeing such a farrago of prejudice and misinformation.

Echoing Malcolm's last point, James Doherty does not mince words in his letter of complaint to the *Sunday Times Magazine*, when it comes to identifying some of the reasons why Albania does not deserve all the blame for the social ills ascribed to her:

Albania has produced international figures ranging from philosophers, scholars, scientists, Popes (Clement XI) to Hollywood stars. The problem for Albania is that it sits between prostitute-producing and prostitute-consuming countries. If we in the West practised some of the decency we preach, Albania would not be a playground for prostitution-supporting networks ranging from the Italian mafia to the British consumer.

I have worked in the Balkans for over 20 years and, excluding the criminal few, the Albanians are the most generous, faithful, hardworking and loving people in the Balkans [26].

It appears that there are still writers and journalists in the West who seem to believe that civilisation is a virtue, a privilege, a God-given right and the destiny only of a select group of nations. As for countries like Albania, its neighbours and numerous small and large undeveloped nations around the world, the best they can do is vegetate and admire from a distance the achievements of the 'civilised' few, without any hope of ever joining them.

Some writers in the West apparently cannot even bear to contemplate the idea that 'a primitive' country like Albania could ever be civilised. The 'civilisation' of Albania, they seem to think, would be a loss to civilisation itself because without a 'rough,' 'uncouth' and 'untamed' country like Albania, there would be no other way for Westerners to know what being 'uncivilised' means.

Travel writers of the muckraker type such as Simon Kuper, Tim Dowling, Jocasta Gardner, A. A. Gill and Mike Carter and unbiased reporters like *The Guardian* environmental correspondent Paul Brown and Andrew Mueller, are aware that Albania's integration in the European Union is no longer an unrealistic Albanian ambition. This is the reason why in most articles on this Balkan country that have surfaced in the British press over the past few years, readers are often urged to visit the place sooner rather than later. Should they delay going to Albania any further, they would have no one to blame but themselves. Even Tim Dowling can see the light at the end of his journey-to-hell article. 'If you want to see Albania,' he advises the unsuspecting *Guardian* readers, 'see it now. It won't be like this for long' [15, p. 3]. More recently, the call to visit Albania in the British press was repeated by Duncan Campbell. In his article 'Secret Europe,' which also appeared in *The Guardian* on 19 March 2005, Campbell's 'advice for anyone who has harboured any curiosity about Albania has to be—go now before it becomes like everywhere else.'

Until the moment arrives when Albania becomes 'like everywhere else' (read like the West), it seems unlikely that many British journalists would take an interest in Albania and the Balkans other than to keep alive their exotic image for as long as possible. Winston Churchill once remarked that the Balkans produced more history than they could digest. This is perhaps true. It is also true, however, that the Western media, especially the British press, appear to find it rather daunting to break free from a long tradition of employing a discourse that often betrays nuances of the Orwellian Newspeak when depicting the 'other,' including the European 'other.' Edward Said maintains that identity is a process of continuous development and it must never remain static. The identity of countries and nations also is fluid but, unless this is reflected in the media, the outcome will be not just misinformation but, even worse, disinformation. By acting as moral agents, Western journalists can render their own inestimable contribution to make Europe whole.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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#### NOTES

1. For more information on the denigration of Ancient Egypt by Rome see G. Alpion, 'Foreigner Complex' in [31, pp. 123–44].
2. For more information on the negative image of the Balkans in the West see [4], [6], [7] and [28].
3. For more information on J. K. Rowling's references to Albania as a country harbouring the evil 'Dark Lord' and his followers see G. Alpion, 'Images of Albania and Albanians in English literature—from Edith Durham's *High Albania* to J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*', in [31, pp. 103–15].
4. The author wrote to Robert Shrimmsley on 6 April 2005.
5. Robert Shrimmsley's e-mail to the author of 8 March 2005.

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