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European Union enlargement, post-accession migration and imaginative geographies of the "New Europe": media discourses in Romania and the United Kingdom

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Abstract:

This paper is concerned with re-imaginings of 'Europe' following the accession to the European Union (EU) of former 'Eastern European' countries. In particular it explores media representations of post-EU accession migration from Romania to the United Kingdom in the UK and Romanian newspaper press. Todorova's (1997) notion of Balkanism is deployed as a theoretical construct to facilitate the analysis of these representations as first, the continuation of long-standing and deeply embedded imaginings of the "East" of Europe and, second, as a means of contesting these discourses. The paper explores the way in which the UK press construct Balkanist discourses about Romania and Romanian migrants, and then analyses how the Romanian press has contested such discourses. The paper argues that the idea of the "East" remains important in constructing notions of "Europe" within popular media geographies.

Keywords: media representations, European Union enlargement, post-accession migration, Balkanism, Romania, United Kingdom.

European Union enlargement, post-accession migration and imaginative geographies of the "New Europe": media discourses in Romania and the United Kingdom

Introduction

As Europe commemorates twenty years since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 2009 it is a good vantage point from which to understand the multiple ways in which the "New Europe" is taking shape. While not denying that this reshaping has important economic, political and institutional aspects, this paper explores the role of socio-cultural imaginings of "Europe", particularly following the enlargement of the European Union (EU) in 2004 and 2007. Such imaginings play an important role in mediating and legitimating the new sets of institutional and power relations which are emerging in Europe. They further illustrate the conceptualisation of European borders and identities, and notions of "Europe", as perpetually under renegotiation and contestation (eg. Passi 2001; Kuus 2004).

Examining the current round of social constructions of "Europe" is an important area of study for both cultural geography and critical geopolitics, disciplines which have highlighted the intersection of the media and popular geopolitics as important in the cultural construction of space, identity, power and knowledge (eg. Dodds 2005; Mitchell 2000; Sharp 2000; Dittmer 2007a; Adams 2009). This literature emphasizes how the production and consumption of media representations help to shape our "taken-for-granted" understandings of our lives and other people and places including geopolitical relations. As Dodds (2005: 100) suggests "the media...can contribute to the projection and reinforcement of particular national...identities and ideologies, and [can also] help subvert and contest such hegemonic positions", and thus "One of the challenges for a popular geopolitics must be to interrogate and contest [these] routine representations of place" (Dodds 2003: 148). Recent work has focused on newspapers as important media sources shaping social and geopolitical events (eg. Dittmer 2005, 2007b; McFarlane and Hay 2003; Dodds 2005; Myers and Caniglia 2004). However, as Dittmer and Dodds (2008) suggest, this literature has paid relatively little attention to how geopolitical meaning is made by audiences consuming popular culture and related texts.

To this end this paper focuses on representations of post-accession Romanian migrants to the United Kingdom (UK) in the UK and Romanian newspaper press and how these representations are bound up with larger processes of imagining "Europe" in the post-1989 period. The arrival of new member states into the EU in 2004 and 2007 has raised questions about the idea of "Europe" and about who has the right to speak "about what Europe is and should be" (Feakins and Białasiewicz 2006: 658). Post-accession migration from these new member states is central to both the new economic and institutional geographies of Europe and to various contested imaginings of "Europe". Movement across borders challenges how Europe is envisioned and where its borders lie. New waves of migration also influence popular ideas of "what is Europe" and, significantly, such imaginings are highly mediatised. Thus media representations of migrants and their countries of origin are important in constructing imaginative geographies of "Europe".

The paper analyses how these media representations relate to broader processes of imagining "Europe". Many cultural theorists (eg. Neumann 1999; Todorova 1997; Wolff 1994; Kuus 2004; Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992; Bjelić 2002) argue that the idea of "Europe" has always been founded on a denigration of its "Other" eastern extremities. However, with the end of the Eastern

European and Soviet variants of state-socialism in 1989-91, and the eastward expansion of the EU, one powerful construction of the “East” - as “Communist Other” – has largely disappeared. State and supra-state institutions have deployed powerful discourses about these formerly Eastern European countries’ “return to Europe” based on attempts to erase their socialist and “Eastern” pasts (Ágh 1998; Young and Kaczmarek 2008). However, since much of this literature on the “Europeanisation” of formerly Eastern European countries stresses historical discontinuity with the socialist past, and a return to various pre-socialist European “Golden Ages”, there is a danger that long established imaginings of the European “East” are not recognized thereby neglecting how the idea of “the East” continues to play an important role in socio-cultural constructions of “Europe”.

The paper firstly develops a theoretical perspective through which to analyse how these media representations feed into wider imaginings of “Europe”. To go beyond commonly used frameworks such as Orientalism and moral panics it draws on the relatively under-utilised notion of Balkanism, Maria Todorova’s (1997) theorising of the way the West has represented South-East Europe. The analysis uses Balkanism to explore, first, how the UK newspaper press has represented post-accession Romanian migration and Romania itself to identify how such media discourses construct imaginings of the “New Europe”. Second, it then explores how these processes are represented in the Romanian newspaper press. The paper thus undertakes an international comparison of representations in different national media and in particular how the Romanian media acts as an audience which consumes and then contests Balkanist discourses generated within the UK media, thus challenging notions of “Europeanness” generated within the West.

Balkanism and imaginings of ‘Europe’

In analysing post-accession migration from Romania and its links to the construction of imaginative geographies of “Europe” we wish to highlight the role of long-standing “ways of thinking” about South East Europe that are deeply embedded within the Western imagination. To do this we draw on the growing body of work that examines the construction of the idea of “Eastern Europe” in Western Europe, work which has received surprisingly little attention among Geographers. Much of this work takes as its starting point Edward Said’s celebrated analysis of Orientalism (1995). Said focused on the representational practices within colonial contexts by which the West has constructed myths about the peoples and places to the East of Europe so as to construct them as Others. In particular, Said examined Western ways of representing the Orient and argued that as the West sought to define itself as being modern, rational and progressive, the Orient was represented as somewhere exotic and mysterious, but also static and backward.

In the same way that the West has invented the Orient, Larry Wolff (1994) argues that the West has invented “Eastern Europe”. In particular, the idea that Europe is divided into “West” and “East” is a Western construction dating from the Enlightenment. As Western thinking came to increasingly revolve around an opposition between civilisation and barbarism, the West defined itself as the pinnacle of the “civilised” world in opposition to the territories that lay to the East of Europe (the Orient). However, the Eastern part of Europe occupied an ambiguous status. It was identifiably European in character but characterised by lower levels of economic and social development relative to the West. To the West, Eastern Europe was “within Europe but not fully European” (Wolff 1994: 9). It was identifiably different from the West but not as emphatically

Other as the Orient. This way of thinking about Eastern Europe rapidly became an established part of Western discourse. In particular, Wolff argues that the Cold War – with its binary division of Europe into a "free" West and a Communist East – involved the mobilisation and appropriation of a long established belief about a fundamental division of the continent (cf. Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992)

In a similar manner, Maria Todorova (1997) has examined the way in which Western Europe has defined and constructed that part of South East Europe known as the Balkans as being European but not "fully" European. She identifies a Western discourse about this region which she labels "Balkanism". Although there are parallels with Orientalism, Todorova argues that Balkanism and Orientalism are not the same thing. Specifically, she argues that while Orientalism "is a discourse about an imputed opposition, Balkanism is a discourse about an imputed ambiguity" (17). Moreover, she argues that Balkanism deals with a concrete geographical location compared with the 'Orient' which is a vaguely defined area located somewhere to the east of Europe. Thus, the West had tended to represent South East Europe as a "bridge" or "crossroads" (15) between Europe and Asia. It is an uncertain region characterised by its in-betweenness; it is neither fully European but at the same time is not Asian (Dittmer 2002/3; Blažević 2007). It is an area which is inextricably European - with which it has long historical ties and a shared Christian heritage - but which at the same time is constructed by the West as being the Other "within" (Todorova 1997: 188). The West has a long history of essentialising the Balkans as backwards and uncivilised, lagging behind the West in terms of economic and social development (Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992; Bakić-Hayden 1995; Todorova 1997). In the Western popular imagination the Balkans is a liminal space (Shields 1991), somewhere on the border between the known and the unknown worlds and often envisioned as "beyond normal social and cultural constraints" (Preston-Whtye 2004: 350).

Powerful though the Balkanist discourse is, it does not enjoy hegemonic status even if such a status is sometimes taken as read (Curticapean 2007). Instead, Balkanism can be resisted, contested and even inverted by the countries and people that are the target of this discourse. In this context, Todorova's notion of Balkanism is attracting increased attention among scholars from South East Europe (see for example the chapters in Bjelić and Savić 2002; Blažević 2007) who are engaging with the notion in order to develop a critique of Western "ways of seeing" the Balkans (and South East Europe more generally). In this context the term "Balkanism" has come to refer not only to a Western body of knowledge about the Balkans but also to the critical study of this discourse (Bjelić 2002; Blažević 2007). In particular, Balkan scholars seek to emphasise local voices and local responses in South East Europe to the way in which the West represents them. Moreover, the states and peoples of South East Europe that are the focus and target of the Balkanist trope can actively challenge and contest the representational hegemony of the West. This local critique seeks to gaze back at the West in order "to reverse the panoptical gaze of the center" (Bjelić 2002: 19) and to resist Western representations of the Balkans. Here Balkanism can contribute to the analysis of the formation of geopolitical meaning through audience consumption of popular culture (Dittmer and Dodds 2008).

The paper goes on to employ Balkanism - considered both as Western ways of representing South East Europe and as the critique of such representations – as a theoretical lens through which to analyse media representations of post-accession migration from Romania to the UK. The first section analyses the UK press with reference to broader imaginative geographies of Romania and the Balkanist assumptions that underpin such representations. The second section examines how

the issue of migration (and its coverage in the UK press) was treated by the Romanian press which vigorously contested and critiqued the Balkanist discourses of the UK media coverage.

Post-accession migration and Balkanist discourses in the UK press

The free movement of workers is one of the fundamental principles of the European Union and a key element of the European Single Market (Favell and Hansen 2002). The enlargement of the European Union in 2004 to include eight formerly socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe was followed by unprecedented and largely unexpected migration to the UK particularly from Poland and Slovakia. Romania and Bulgaria were scheduled to join the EU on the 1 January 2007. Consequently, in recognition of the extensive post-2004 migration, the EU allowed some restrictions on access to labour markets for a transitional period from 1 May 2006. Of the fifteen states that had been EU members before the 2004 enlargement, seven (Finland, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and initially the UK) did not impose restrictions. Eight other countries imposed restrictions of some sort. The ten states that had joined in 2004 all liberalised access to their labour markets (European Union 2008).

The following section presents a chronological account of UK media representations of post-accession migration from Romania, and utilises Balkanism as an explanatory framework for analysing these representations. The chronological approach allows us to capture the dynamic nature of these media discourses as they evolved alongside political changes and migration events. The analysis focuses on discourses in newsprint media. The UK is noted for having a high level of newspaper readership (estimated at more than ten million readers per day) and a large number of daily papers, making newspapers an important media source which shapes, and reacts to, popular debate in UK society. Newspapers in the UK are divided between those that are categorised as 'tabloid' and populist (notably *The Sun*, the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail*) and the 'broadsheet' or quality press (*The Guardian*, *The Times* and *The Independent*).

Our analysis here focuses mainly on the UK tabloid press for a number of reasons. First, it was in these papers that the debate about Romanian immigration predominantly took place, and these papers gave far more coverage to the issue than the 'quality' press. The tabloid papers were far more active in shaping and responding to popular discourses about this issue, while the quality press only occasionally presented a different view or actively contested representations in the tabloid press. The broadsheet press were more responsive to ongoing media debates compared to the tabloid press which played more of a leading role in provoking debate. In addition, tabloid newspapers have higher circulation figures (between one to three million daily sales) compared to the quality press (between 300,000-600,000 daily sales).[1] Politically, the UK newspaper market is diverse, with *The Guardian* seen as left-of-centre, the *Independent* centrist, and *The Times* a centre-right 'newspaper of record'. Among the broadsheets *The Guardian* and *The Independent* are relatively pro-EU, whilst *The Times* is Euro-sceptic. *The Sun* is populist and was broadly supportive of the Labour Party during the period of analysis, while the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail* are right-wing, conservative and populist. The UK tabloid press tends to be suspicious of the EU and its further expansion.

In the build up to accession media representations in the tabloid press were dominated by Balkanist discourses. Initially these discourses represented the UK as open and vulnerable to mass

migration from Romania. The front page of the *Daily Express* on 2 May 2006 announced that "Britain is opening the door to more migrants". This headline reproduced the idea that EU expansion in 2007 would be immediately followed by mass emigration similar to that following the 2004 enlargement. Moreover, the UK is represented as being the "natural" destination of Romanians, despite their having free access to the labour markets of sixteen other EU states, some of which had greater historical, social and cultural ties to Romania and were more likely destinations. Here migrants from Romania were presented in general terms as a cause for concern.

Concern about immigration in the UK increased during the summer of 2006 with the publication of a Government report in July that attempted to assess the level of immigration to the UK following the 2004 EU enlargement. According to the report an estimated 600,000 "Eastern Europeans" (of whom 300,000 were from Poland) had arrived in the UK after 1 May 2004. The right-wing UK press used this report as the basis for discourses suggesting the "Biggest wave of migrants in history" (*Daily Mail*, 21 July 2006) and the *Mail's* online edition spoke of an "invading army of cheap labourers". The paper noted that Bulgaria and Romania with their combined population of 30 million were due to join the EU at the end of the year. By evoking the total population of these two countries the implication is of a greater immigration problem to come, one that would far exceed migration from Poland or other 2004 accession countries.

Over the summer of 2006 the concerns in the populist press about immigration crystallised around the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU, during which Romania in particular was foregrounded as representing a specific "threat". The headline of the *Daily Express* (23 August 2006) warned "Get ready for the Romanian invasion". The article was a response to "official figures" concerning immigration from "eastern Europe" since 2004. However, again the issue of immigration was structured around a future threat with the article predicting that 450,000 Romanians and 170,000 Bulgarians would "invade" the UK when these countries joined the EU. Romanians in particular are presented as an identifiable, ever-present and imminent threat. At the same time the treatment of migrants is simplistic and reductionist. Migration from Central and Eastern Europe to the UK is assumed to be uni-directional and permanent. There is no acknowledgement that much of this migration is temporary and cyclical with many migrants returning to their home countries after a period of working in Western Europe (Wallace 2002).

The key remaining stages in the progress of Bulgaria and Romania to EU accession were opportunities for further press articles that expressed concern over the "threat" of future immigration. On 26 September 2006 the European Commission published its final monitoring reports for Bulgaria and Romania (Commission of the European Communities 2006) which recommended that both countries were ready for accession at the start of 2007. The report noted that the two countries had made "far-reaching efforts to adapt their legislation and administration to the laws and rules of the European Union" which had "largely brought them into line with prevailing standards and practices within the European Union" (13). The imminent accession of Romania and Bulgaria provoked intensified discourses of threat and invasion. The *Daily Express* (26 Sept 2006a 1) repeated a need to "Get ready for a huge new invasion" and announced that a low-budget airline was introducing flights from Bucharest to the UK. For the paper, these flights would be a vector of mass immigration, allowing 500 people a week to fly to the UK, for prices apparently as low as £8. While low-budget airlines have contributed to the democratisation of international travel the *Daily Express* expressed a sentiment which denied Bulgarians and Romanians the same rights and access as other Europeans. An editorial in the same edition (*Daily Express* 26 Sept

2006b: 12) spoke of “warning bells ringing out about the impending influx of immigrants from Romania and Bulgaria”.

On the following day both the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail* included further commentary on the Commission’s decision. The *Express* continued with its theme of invasion with headlines such as “Thousands of Romanians and Bulgarians get green light to invade Britain” (*Daily Express* 27 Sept 2006). The headline in the *Daily Mail* (27 Sept 2006) claimed that “On the day 30m citizens of Bulgarian and Romania were given the right to come to Britain, this was the queue for visas in Bucharest”. The accompanying photograph showed a “crowd” which numbered around 65 people (a not atypical number at that time for a queue outside the British Embassy in Bucharest). Several points are significant about this coverage. First is the foregrounding in both articles of Romania. These UK media discourses are dominated by images of Romanians as a recognisable and identifiable menace, while Bulgarians are less understood and represent something much less specific. Second, the combined population of the two countries is used to magnify the nature of the “threat”. The suggestion is of mass migration that can be numbered in the millions therefore far exceeding anything experienced after the 2004 enlargement.

A meeting of the Council of the European Union on 17 October 2006 welcomed the European Commission’s monitoring report, effectively confirming the accession of Bulgaria and Romania on 1 January 2007. Shortly afterwards the British Home Secretary, John Reid, announced a change to UK migration policy imposing limits on the numbers of Bulgarians and Romanians who would be allowed to work in the UK following EU accession. Under these regulations only skilled workers, the self-employed and 20,000 mostly seasonal agricultural workers would be permitted to work in the UK. This decision was widely criticised by the broadsheet press (eg. *The Guardian* 25 October 2006; *The Times* 26 October 2006) as bowing to a xenophobic populist agenda shaped by the right-wing and populist tabloid press. At the same time, the tabloid press criticised the measures as inadequate and unlikely to address the problem.

As accession drew nearer, the nature of press coverage moved away from the generic problems arising from mass migration towards a focus on the “undesirability” of those people who would soon be free to enter the UK, particularly Romanians. In this period dominant media discourses essentialised their apparent negative characteristics. For example, an article in *The Sun* on 1 November 2006 drew attention to a predicted increase in criminality (particularly begging, pick-pocketing, and people-trafficking) once Romanians and Bulgarians could travel freely to the UK. It also claimed that Romanians were responsible for the majority of cashpoint crime in the UK. A similar article the following day discussed the case of a Romanian woman sold into prostitution and warned of “mafias” and “ruthless gangsters…ready to assault Britain” once Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU (*The Sun* 2 November 2006). A third article moved the debate from criminality onto health. An editorial warned of an “explosion” in cases of tuberculosis and AIDS from “infected immigrants” with Bulgaria and Romania identified as having the highest rates of the former in Europe (*The Sun* 16 November 2006). Each of these articles illustrates how immigrants from Romania in particular are evoked in terms of difference and “alien” values. As such, they represent a potential source of destabilisation for the existing order in the UK.

Other critiques were more oblique but equally effective in demonising the people who would shortly be fellow citizens of the EU. An embittered article in the *Daily Mail* (18 November 2006) lamented the failure of British volunteers to bring about long-term change in the management of Romania’s orphanages. The author reviewed Romania’s “orphan problem” at the end of the Ceauşescu era but noted “little has changed in Romania – and little, frankly, is likely to change”

(49). The explanation was to be found in the corruption that was endemic in Romanian society and which frustrated the best efforts of British volunteers. The article continued with an implicit condemnation of the character of the Romanian people noting how "in other cultures, the needy are held in disdain and treated with contempt" (49). Here, Romanians are clearly constructed as Others who do not share the values (especially compassion) of the "civilised" West but who are about to be allowed the freedom of movement to and within the UK. The article also questioned why addressing human rights abuses had not been a condition for Romania's EU accession and implied that it was now too late to change Romania for the better.

An article in the *Daily Mail* (28 December 2006), published three days before Romania's accession to the EU, intensified the negative stereotyping of Romanians. The article also focused on Romania's marginalised Roma community. It argued that this ethnic group were despised within Romania and had an established reputation for begging and petty crime, yet they would soon be able to travel freely to the UK. Moreover, the article noted that Romanians would be pleased to see them go so that the Roma would become Britain's rather than Romania's "unmentionable social problem" (37), thus simultaneously criticising Romania's treatment of its minorities and the Roma themselves. More broadly, Romanians were again portrayed as a source of moral contamination who were ready to "infect" the EU with their "bad ways" (37). Once again, the article assumes that Britain is the natural target for Roma immigration, reproducing notions of a European hierarchy with the UK at the apex.

How these discourses are then interpreted theoretically has implications for understanding their nature and how they link to broader processes of imagining "Europe". Previous research has analysed media and popular discourses around such migration as a "moral panic" and the representations of migrants as "folk devils" (a theoretical framework developed by British sociologists in the 1970s, particularly Cohen 1972). The framework of moral panics has been uncritically embraced in analyses of accession migration to old EU member states such as The Netherlands (Pijpers, 2006) and Italy (Mai and Schwandner-Sievers, 2003) and also to post-socialist/post-conflict states undergoing accession, such as Slovenia (Erjavec, 2003). These analyses do not acknowledge the significant debates surrounding this conceptual framework within sociology and cultural studies (eg. consider McRobbie and Thornton 1995; Garland 2008; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994; Cornwell and Linders 2002; and responses by Cohen 1993/2002 in subsequent editions of his book) and we contend that this critique of moral panics make it of limited use for interpreting these representations of accession migrants to the UK.

While the moral panic framework does point to the socially constructed and mediatised nature of the "threat" posed by accession migrants, and highlights the disproportionate response in the media to the scale of migration, in many other ways it fails to provide an adequate explanation of these representations. Cornwell and Linders (2002: 309) point out that whether or not a social phenomenon becomes deviantised is not usually the result of panic, but the outcome of a longer and more complex process of social construction involving actors making active and often rational decisions, within which "members of the mass media...are seen as playing key roles in selecting and disseminating information about emerging social problems, thus fuelling the interpretive ambiguities and conflicts surrounding potential moral threats." Newspapers may seek to increase the "fear" associated with certain phenomena to increase sales, but this does not mean that they simply create "news" in isolation, nor is it a panic response. What becomes more important, then, is a more refined and longer-term understanding of the processes which precede and shape perceptions of a threat, a perspective which also allows us to go beyond the limitations of simply

identifying moral panics to explore the wider implications of such media representations (Cornwell and Linders 2002; McRobbie and Thornton 1995).

While the UK tabloids' stereotyping of post-accession migrants may, at first sight, appear to be a moral panic, the situation is more nuanced. For example, there was considerable variation in the representations of migrants of different nationalities throughout the UK newspaper media. Some nationalities were the subject of both positive and negative representations (particularly Poles in the UK case), others received little media attention (such as Czechs or Estonians), and others were subject to almost entirely negative attention (such as Romanians, Bulgarians and Roma). Furthermore, sections of the quality press contested the stance of the tabloid press by publishing articles which recognised the potential contribution of Romanian and other post-accession migrants to the UK economy (eg. *The Times* 28 August 2006; *The Independent* 22 November 2006). There are also competing discourses related to the social differentiation of migrants. For example, women migrants who have been brought to the UK through sex trafficking, or child migrants, are frequently portrayed in the media as coerced, powerless and as victims rather than as a threat (although often the process of trafficking is associated to be the result of the actions of individuals and organisations eg. "mafias" from the "East"). Further, while the concept of moral panics refers to short-lived phenomenon these representations of Romania are actually linked to much more deeply embedded and longer term imaginings of south-east Europe.

Balkanism thus offers a means of engaging with the critiques of moral panics which call for a focus on the longer term work of social construction among a complexity of social actors to generate stereotypes and threats. Interpreting these discourses through the lens of Balkanism gives a deeper insight into how they represent the continuation of much longer-term and more deeply ingrained imaginings of south-east Europe as "the Other within Europe" or as "European yet not fully European". The longer term history of media representations of immigration into the UK reveals that discourses of fear, threat, floods, tides and invasions have been frequently mobilised in response to migration events. What is interesting here is how this language, which was originally applied to immigrants from the Commonwealth and Caribbean countries and asylum seekers, has so rapidly been transferred to immigrants from predominantly white, Christian countries with heritages shared with Western Europe, and here a Balkanist perspective is of value.

Adopting a Balkanist framework involves situating these tabloid discourses about Romanian migrants in their wider historical context. First, these discourses invoke long-standing fears of invasion from "the East" which are deeply embedded in European thinking and can be related back to a number of actual invasions (such as the Huns and the Mongol and Ottoman Empires). The idea of "invasion" can also be directly traced back to representations of the region in popular culture from the nineteenth-century. For example, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) (and the 1931 film version in particular) reflect a long standing fear of "Eastern Europe" as the source of alien values and moral contamination. As such, to talk of the "Romanian invasion" evokes notions of Count Dracula, the predator from the East who is intent on invading and colonising British society but who can pass unnoticed on the streets of London.

In fact *Dracula* represents only one example of how UK media and popular culture have successively portrayed the "Balkans", and Romania in particular, in a negative light for several centuries. The "Balkan problem" featured heavily in early twentieth-century British geopolitical and popular discourses about the region (Gallagher 1998). During World War II Romania had a short-lived anti-semitic and semi-fascist government which aligned the country with Hitler. After World War II Romania became a communist state based on total adherence to the Stalinist model

and thus was viewed within Western Cold War discourse as the feared Communist "Other". During the 1960s Nicolae Ceauşescu attempted some liberalisation and to distance Romania from the Soviet Union for which he received Western praise. However, during the 1970s Ceauşescu descended into despotism and was regarded in the West as an exceptionally evil Communist dictator.

After Ceauşescu's execution in 1989 Romanian politics was associated with the continuity of neo-Communists and corruption (Gallagher, 2005). Moreover, during the early 1990s Romania became synonymous in the Western imagination with orphans. Initial Western media portrayals of Romania's orphan "problem" provoked sympathy. Later, a plethora of horrified articles in the British press portrayed Romania as a country that was unable to look after its children and was in need of Western expertise and compassion to do so. Though no doubt concerned with the plight of Romanian orphans such articles were overt expressions of the Balkanist trope. In short, Romania has repeatedly been portrayed as "horrifically" exceptional and as not conforming to "European" norms or values, and this is the longer term work involved in these constructions of Romanian migrants as deviant.

Second, and related to this point, is the construction of Romania as an ambiguous or liminal space, as "within Europe yet not fully European." EU accession is seen as signalling that Romania has "achieved" standards equivalent and acceptable to "Europe" represented as the EU. Further, Romanians are seen as joining the EU as white, Christian, Europeans. Yet, at the same time they are still presented as "Eastern" and their accession is presented as a threatening invasion. Their difference is essentialised in UK tabloid media discourses which portray them as criminal, deviant, "not the same as 'us''', and the potential source of moral and medical contamination. This was emphasized in the tabloid UK press by articles which suggested that TB and AIDS were rife in Romania and Bulgaria which would cause epidemics in the West following accession, and articles focusing on Romanian orphans. Moreover, Romanians are predominantly Christian but belong mainly to the Orthodox church which has often been seen as not equating to the norms of "Western Europe" (Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992).

Third, this ambiguous positioning of Romania also places them in an imagined geographical hierarchy of what it means to be "European". Romania is still represented as backward and below the "old" EU members on a normative development ladder. They must aspire to the levels of "success" of countries such as the UK. This imagining is reflected in the tabloid media discourses which assume that Romanians would 'naturally' want to come to the UK, despite the fact that they actually share cultural and other characteristics with other EU member states such as Italy and Spain. Thus these media representations of enlargement and Romanian migrants reproduce notions of hierarchies in "Europe" – "West" as good, "East" as bad; core/periphery notions about the "East"; and the need for the "East" to "catch up" – and therefore the "flood" of migrants from "East" to "West" becomes naturalised in these discourses. Within this hierarchical imagining Romania can thus be placed as "the Other within". More broadly inherent in this imagining is the longer-term continuity of discourses perpetuating a fundamental division between "Western Europe" and "Eastern Europe" (Trandafoiu 1999). Overall, the representations of Romanian post-accession migrants are not panics, but are bound up with the (often rational) actions of a complexity of social actors, including the media, politicians, NGOs, governments, migrants (and people's experience of them), law makers and the process of EU accession and expansion.

The response of the Romanian press: contesting Balkanist discourses

As noted above, an advantage of Balkanism as a theoretical perspective is that it embraces attempts to resist, or at least contest, the construction and imposition of Balkanist discourses. Moral panic perspectives have tended to assume that media audiences are merely passive recipients of media constructed threats and thus analyses have tended to fail to explore how such audiences – including the focus of the apparent panic – are active in reproducing or contesting the negative stereotypes produced (Cornwell and Linders 2002). The largely negative media coverage can also be a stimulus to action among those disadvantaged by those processes. Here Balkanism offers a further advantage because it opens up the possibility for challenges to the construction of external imaginings of "the Balkans" and for exploring how media audiences make geopolitical meanings in response to such representations (Dittmer and Dodds 2008). This has received little attention in the literature and in particular little is known about the international dimension of such challenges and how they link to broader processes of conceptualising "Europe". This section therefore presents an analysis of how the Romanian newspaper press covered the issue of post-accession migration and how the Romanian media responded to the UK press coverage of the issue. This reveals a critique of Balkanist discourses generated in the UK which, in Romania and south-east Europe, extends beyond academia and is mobilised in popular and media discourses about post-accession Romanian migration to the UK. In turn, this contestation also critiques and resists broader attempts to position Romania on the lower rungs of a normative European hierarchy.

The analysis which follows explores this contestation as it appeared in the Romanian newspaper media based on two key Romanian newspapers representing the broadsheet and tabloid press. The first is *Adevărul* ("the Truth") one of Romania's most serious newspapers (equivalent to a UK 'broadsheet') with something of a reputation as a "newspaper of record". For much of the 1990s it was the country's best selling newspaper but by 2006 it was experiencing declining sales (c.25,000 daily copies). The second is *Libertatea* ("Freedom"), a populist tabloid which over the past decade has established itself as the country's best-selling newspaper (over 250,000 daily copies).[2] All Romanian newspapers are strongly pro-Europe and pro-EU, but neither of these particular papers has an explicit political stance.

The Romanian press pays close attention to the way that their country is seen and represented internationally. Romanian journalists regularly monitor the websites of leading European newspapers for stories about Romania, but since English is the second language of many Romanian journalists, particular attention has been paid in recent years to the UK press. Thus, Romanian newspapers were well informed about the populist debate within the tabloid press in the UK about fears of mass immigration following the accession of Romania (and Bulgaria) to the EU. In turn, Romanian newspapers gave extensive coverage to the debate in the British press about Romanian immigration. *Adevărul* and *Libertatea* are representative of the different responses in Romania to the press debate in the UK.

During the summer of 2006 the press in Romania noted with disquiet the emerging debate in the UK about immigration. For example, one article in *Adevărul* (23 August 2006) noted that the subject was making the British "hysterical". The use of this term directly challenges British self-assumptions of rationality, order and calm, particularly when juxtaposed against representations of Romania in the British right-wing press as backward. *Adevărul* also addressed the British fear of Romanian migrants. It pointed out that the UK was of little interest to Romanians who wished to

work abroad (*ibid)* and that such migrants were far more likely to go to Italy or Spain, where the local languages are similar to Romanian and there is a large expatriate Romanian community. It also questioned why Romanians would wish to work in a country where public opinion was so hostile to them (*Adevărul* 28 August 2006). In turn, this debate was also taken up and reported in parts of the British press (*The Guardian* 29 October 2006). Other articles rejected Britain's assumption that it was the natural target of Romanian immigrant workers. One article in *Adevărul* published after accession (20 Feb 2007) profiled a Romanian student working at a British university under the headline "She studies multimedia in England but wants to work in Romania". The article reported that this student had learnt from her time in the UK to appreciate her own country.

The Romanian press was also indignant about the exceptional treatment of Romanian migrants in UK migration law. To a certain extent there is an air of reluctant acceptance of this positioning of Romania as a low-wage, low-skill periphery. For example, one article was headlined "The British want only strawberry pickers from Romania" (*Adevărul* 23 October 2006) while another noted that "London wants us for lowly work" (*Adevărul* 25 October 2006). However, there is also an expression of resentment in that Romanians (and Bulgarians) have been singled out as a problem and do not have access to the same rights of free movement that are enjoyed by the other formerly socialist states that joined the EU in 2004.

As the debate in the UK about immigration intensified, an increasing number of articles in the Romanian press started to challenge British self-assumptions of moral and cultural superiority. Indeed there was increasing mockery of contemporary life in the UK, presented in such a way as to ridicule British press reportage about Romania. In so doing, Romania - a country that was normally the target of the Balkanist discourse - generated its own counter-critique of the UK, a country that was vigorously generating Balkanist stereotypes of Romania.

A number of articles in *Adevărul* reported on life in contemporary Britain by inverting the stereotypes that the British press were using about Romania. For example, placed alongside an article about restrictions on Romanian workers was a small feature noting that British prisons were so overcrowded that the British government was considering re-instating prison ships as places of detention (a method of detention utilised in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) (*Adevărul* 23 October 2006). This contests the claims in the British press that Romania's accession to the EU would be followed by increased criminality by highlighting that Britain's prisons are already full. Similarly, an article with the headline "The British no longer feel happy in their own country" (*Adevărul* 8 November 2006) noted that it was "not only Romanians who want to leave their country". It reported a study that found one in four people in Britain (predominantly unskilled workers) would consider emigrating in search of a better standard of living. Romanians were now able to apply exactly the same argument to Britain that parts of the British press had used about Romania.

Another example followed the publication of a UNICEF report that criticised the UK's record on the education and treatment of its children. *Adevărul's* headline was: "British children, the most neglected and the least educated" (15 Feb 2007). It continued: "British youth are more disruptive and unhappy due to the lack of attention from their parents". Such reportage directly challenges and inverts dominant ideas about Romania in the Western imagination. Whereas the Western press has frequently portrayed Romania as unable to care for its children, Romanians were now being invited to gaze back at Britain in wonder and pity for a country that was failing its young people.

However, it was claims in the British newspaper *The Sun* (3 and 16 November 2006) that the accession of Bulgaria and Romania would cause a tuberculosis "crisis" in the UK that generated the strongest response in Romania. These followed articles on 1 and 2 November about a wave of criminality that would follow Romania's accession to the EU. *Adevărul* (4 Nov 2006) noted that "the anti-Romanian campaign of the British press – and especially of the tabloid 'The Sun' – on the theme of immigration has found another cliché concerning Romania". The article went on to refute the claims in *The Sun* by pointing out that Romania had one of the highest rates of detection and treatment of tuberculosis in Europe and that this programme had been recognised as one of the most efficient in Europe by the World Health Organisation.

While *Adevărul* was fairly restrained in its response to *The Sun,* the tabloid *Libertatea* was outraged by a leader in the British tabloid (*The Sun* 16 Feb 2006b) which claimed that Romanian migrants would bring an "epidemic" of tuberculosis and HIV. In response the paper launched an overt attack on the British character. In an article headed "The English = paedophiles, drunkards and hooligans" *Libertatea* argued: "For more than half a year the British press have turned their guns on Eastern Europe, the virulent attacks of journalists being directed particularly towards everything that is or could be related to our country. Leading these attacks is the tabloid 'The Sun' which demonstrates an almost diabolical pleasure in presenting Romanians as the bogeymen of Europe" (17 November 2006). The article went on to list criminal acts committed by Britons in Romania.

While these narratives in the Romanian press could be dismissed as a rather simplistic essentialising of the "British character" in response to similar narratives about Romanians in the UK press, the Romanian press also engaged in a more complex contestation of Balkanist media representations of Romania. In particular, *Libertatea* announced the launch of its "Uite cine vorbeşte" ("Look who's talking") campaign, which was intended to urge British journalists to look first at problems in their own country. The "Look who's talking" campaign had a short but vigorous existence and, according to *Libertatea*, was welcomed by readers (18 November 2006). Further articles set out to refute the claims published in *The Sun* regarding tuberculosis (20 November 2006) and HIV (21 November 2006), the latter pointing out that HIV rates were considerably higher in the UK than Romania. In addition to seeking to put the record straight these articles also directly challenged the honesty and professionalism of British journalists, again contesting British claims to moral superiority. In a move seemingly intended to close the issue *Libertatea* (25 Nov 2006) sent a large package of tourist information, guidebooks and CDs to *The Sun* with an invitation to its journalists to visit Romania and see the country for themselves. *The Sun* does not appear to have responded, although on 27 December the paper published a clarification noting that Romania and Bulgaria did not have high rates of HIV infection.

Libertatea's "Look who's talking" campaign was significant in the way that it directly contested the hierarchical gaze of the West. Instead, any British claims to an innate superiority (which included assuming the 'right' to represent Romania however it chose) were noisily rejected by an increasingly self-confident Romanian media that demanded to be treated on equal terms as a future member of the European Union. What was equally significant was the coverage of *Libertatea's* campaign in some sections of the British press. Both *The Guardian* (17 November 2006) and *The Independent* (18 December 2006) featured articles that were both amused by, but broadly supportive of, *Libertatea*'s challenge to *The Sun*. On the other hand, the *Daily Star* (a populist tabloid in the same vein as *The Sun*) was outraged at *Libertatea's* "astonishing slur" (18 November 2008). Alongside the clearly absurd claim that two million Romanians were waiting to

emigrate to the UK, the article complained about the "outrage" of Romanians daring to talk about "us" in this way. Such a response - which assumes a position of superiority relative to Romania - is classically Balkanist in its tone.

By the time that Romania joined the EU on 1 January 2007 migration had become a major media issue in Romania as well as in the UK. It was also an issue that generated strong feelings among Romanians. Many were resentful about the way that the British press portrayed Romania and also the employment restrictions that had been placed on Bulgarians and Romanians by the UK Government but not on the peoples from other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Romanians were also amused at the assumption in Britain that emigrants would rush to the UK since it was widely known in Romania that Spain, Italy and, to a lesser extent, France, were the most attractive destinations for emigrant workers. An increasingly self-confident Romanian media was therefore eager to contest and mock British fears about migration. In the first few days of January 2007 television crews were stationed at Bucharest's airport and at the border with Hungary in order to record the mass exodus that so alarmed the British press. To the surprise of nobody in Romania there was nothing to report. The Romanian press also gave wide coverage to the issue. The front page of one newspaper reported: "After 1 January Great Britain wasn't invaded by 'hoards' of Romanians" (*Gândul* 3 Jan 2007). Another reported: "The first wave of immigrants to Great Britain: Four Romanians" (*Cotidianul* 3 Jan 2007). Ultimately, the fears of the British tabloid press proved to be unfounded. A report published in May 2007 noted that only 8000 Bulgarians and Romanians travelled to the UK in search of work in the first three months following accession (*The Guardian* 23 May 2007).

Tracing Romanian media coverage of post-accession migration to the UK, and the Romanian media's reaction to UK coverage of the issue, reveals the contestation of Balkanist discourses generated within the UK. The Romanian media rejected the UK's self-representation as superior in a normative European hierarchy. They challenged the view of the UK (reproduced in certain sections of the UK press) that Romanian migrants would naturally want to "invade" Britain in huge numbers. Articles in Romanian newspapers which factually challenged the UK press's portrayal of Romania, or which questioned the superiority of British life, contested the assumptions inherent in the UK's self-positioning as above Romania in a European hierarchy, a positioning in which the generation of Balkanist stereotypes about Romania played a key role. In turn this challenged the power of the UK to distinguish itself as superior and to represent Romania as somehow not "European" in terms of its values and standards.

Conclusions

The arrival of 10 new EU member states from the countries of the former Eastern Europe has produced a new round of questioning the idea of "Europe" and about who has the right to speak about what "Europe" is. Taking post-accession migration as a key process shaping new ways of imagining Europe, this paper has analysed how migrants from Romania to the UK are represented in the Romanian and UK newspaper media and how these representations are linked to larger processes of re-imagining Europe. The paper thus contributes to the cultural geography and geopolitical literature examining how popular culture and the media reinforce or contest the socio-cultural construction of geographical and political identities (Dodds, 2005).

As such, the paper also contributes to cultural geographical theory by presenting an empirical exploration of Todorova's (1997) theory of Balkanism which advances beyond the limitations of

previously used theoretical frameworks such as that of moral panics. The adoption of Balkanism to analyse these media representations focuses attention on the longer-term work involved in socially constructed imaginings of Europe as framed with reference to a (re-)imagined "East". In the UK the populist and largely right-wing tabloid press in particular has focused on Romanian post-accession migrants, creating them as a threat to British values. This section of the British press is largely distrustful of the idea of Europe, especially the EU, and is not explicitly debating notions of "Europe" in this reportage. However, these discourses are more than simply a new round of the popular vilification of migrants to the UK. Adopting Balkanism as a theoretical framework reveals that representations of these migrants are underpinned by a Balkanist discourse which posits Romanians as an "Eastern Other", as not like "us". Representing them in this way relates to much longer standing imaginative geographies of the "Balkans" as an ambiguous or liminal space "in Europe yet not fully European". This runs counter to the process of EU expansion as the transfer of a particular normative set of "European" values (eg. equality, the "Common European Home", the "return to Europe" and so on) and also powerful state-level narratives emphasizing the "Europeanness" of these countries' cultural and historical links with the "West". What is apparent, then, is that imaginings of Europe's "East" continue to play an important role in imaginings of what "Europe" means today.

Adopting Balkanism as a theoretical framework also allows analysis of the contestation of these Balkanist discourses about Romania and its place in Europe. Analysis of Romania media coverage of post-accession migration to the UK reveals a set of contestations which explicitly challenge and critique continued views of Romania as some kind of "Eastern Other" which is held not to conform to an assumed set of "European" values. The Romanian press has challenged the self-assumed, naturalised, normative view from the UK which seeks to deny Romanian migrants, and Romania more broadly, their place in Europe. In fact Romania has a very strong sense of being European and popular media and most political discourses are very pro-EU. At a popular level the majority of Romanians see their place as being in Europe and do not understand opposition to them being in the EU. Adopting the perspective of Balkanism has broadened our understanding to include the contestation of powerful discourses which seek to marginalise the new EU entrants as "not fully European". Overall the analysis makes clear the importance of exploring how notions of the European "East" are still important in contemporary re-imaginings of "Europe", but also the need to analyse how such discourses are contested within different situated national contexts.

Notes

[1] http://media.guardian.co.uk, accessed 30 June 2009.

[2] http://www.brat.ro, accessed 30 June 2009.

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