



Stjepan G. Meštrović

THE BALKANIZATION OF THE WEST

The Confluence of Postmodernism
and Postcommunism

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From a purely clinical viewpoint, the violence which has occurred in the former Yugoslavia does not deserve special attention compared with, for example, the genocide in Cambodia and Iraq, and World War II. Yet from the perspectives of postmodernism and postcommunism that are central to this discussion, the butchery in former Yugoslavia is a special case because this violence is occurring in the heart of Europe which had promised never to tolerate such a bloodbath again. "Rational" solutions seem incapable of getting to grips with the problem. The author argues that the media has reduced the world to a collective voyeur that passively watches and monitors horrible crimes against humanity. The Balkan War has produced the Balkanization of the West with the leading Western powers seemingly paralysed by the spectacle of internecine warfare. Meštrović claims that the Balkan war has derailed the movement for unification in Europe. The Islamic world has seen that the West is quite willing to bomb Muslim targets, from Iraq to Somalia, but absolutely unwilling to wage a "just war" to save the Bosnian Muslims. The author concludes that the Balkan War is a key catalyst in the unravelling of the West.

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Preface and acknowledgements

From a purely clinical point of view, the crimes against humanity that have occurred in the former Yugoslavia do not deserve any special attention compared with, for example, the genocide in Cambodia and Iraq, World War II Europe, or other sites in the world. Yet from the perspective of postmodernism and postcommunism that are central to the present discussion, the moral crimes in former Yugoslavia are a special case, for the following reasons: these crimes are occurring in the heart of post-World-War-II Europe which had promised to never tolerate such crimes again. The West had placed its credibility on the line by attempting to solve the current Balkan War through pure negotiation and other rational means derived from Enlightenment narratives. Whereas many can argue that they do not have sufficient information concerning genocide in Cambodia or Hitler's Europe or any other historical or current site of genocide, the miracle of the electronic age has made sure that the entire world can follow the genocide in the former Yugoslavia. Thus, the credibility of the same Enlightenment narratives that is at stake in the postmodern discourse is also at stake in the West's actions *vis-à-vis* the current Balkan War. This claim constitutes the crux of the present study.

Without seeking to repeat any of the arguments in this book, I believe that a few prefatory remarks concerning the motives, background, and context for writing it would be helpful to most readers. Its central ideas occurred to me way back in 1989, as the so-called Velvet Revolution or the fall of communism had just begun. Not for an instant did I believe the widespread views promulgated by American opinion-makers that communism would be transformed easily and swiftly into American-style democracy and free-market institutions. Instead, I told my friends, colleagues, and audiences that a brutal war would emerge in the former Yugoslavia; that it would be a prelude to a much larger and bloodier unraveling of the former Soviet Union; and that Balkanization would eventually engulf the Western world as well. Ridicule emerged as the most dominant reaction from my listeners. Why was I such a pessimist? What was wrong with me?

There was nothing magical about my ability to prophesy. I had simply clung stubbornly to the most fundamental premise of classical sociology, that society consists of habits and traditional ways of thinking and doing things. The lands that

had been ruled by communism did not have a tradition of democracy but did have a tradition of savagery. Postcommunist societies looked to so-called Western Europe in general and the United States of America in particular for guidance in establishing democracy on the ruins of communism. Thus, postcommunist nations lived their democratic fantasies vicariously, through the West. Alas, the cynical West had long ceased seeing itself as a moral power in the world, and Western intellectuals have been writing about narcissism and the end of democracy in their nations for many years now. So the outcome of the fall of communism was easy to predict, or so it seemed to me: most postcommunist nations would not succeed in making the transition to democracy and, for the most part, the West would just monitor their disintegration into chaos. But the American opinion-makers, as well as my colleagues, clung just as stubbornly to the Enlightenment narratives which predicted the end of history, the end of culture, and the ability to transcend habits and traditions. Only they would not admit that these Enlightenment narratives are themselves habits and traditions characteristic of American, British, and French cultures. This is because the Enlightenment, almost by definition, rebelled at the notion that culture and history can constrain the individual. Thus, disciples of the Enlightenment are unconscious traditionalists, conservative despite themselves, and despite their loud commitment to liberalism.

In any event, the tragic war currently being waged in the Balkans vindicates my first prediction, and the ever-increasing bloodshed in the former Soviet Union is beginning to vindicate my second. But the Balkanization of the West? Impossible. Why, the very term, Balkanization, was invented to denote *those people* in the Balkans who seem to like to slaughter each other, as opposed to the civilized Americans, French, and British. I fully expect that most readers who pick up this book will experience some variation of this reaction to my thesis. Yet I insist, knowing full well that fifty to a hundred years from now nobody will remember my argument if I am proven wrong by future events. But if I am right, then I am writing for readers at some future time, not my contemporaries.

Perhaps it is not necessary to wait that long. Without repeating the arguments I make later in the book, let me offer two short reasons why the reader might wish to take my thesis seriously. The first is that my argument falls into that broad discourse called postmodernism, which concerns itself with the end of the Enlightenment project, and which can no longer be ignored. Indeed, the disciples of the Enlightenment who make up the corps of American opinion-makers have projected the most fantastic apocalyptic fears onto this Balkan War (again, despite themselves): it is supposed to signal the end of Europe, the UN, NATO, the New World Order, civilization, and morality. It is also alleged to symbolize the return of Nazism, the Crusades, and the extermination of Islam. One could argue that none of these claims can be defended logically. After all, the current war in the Balkans pales in comparison, quantitatively speaking, with the ongoing genocide in Cambodia and Somalia, or with other historical instances of genocide. But logic is quite beside the point, and besides, recourse to statistics in discussions of genocide is a nasty business. It really should not matter whether millions or

thousands of people are wiped out because of ethnic hatred. When one examines what has been said and written in the postmodern information media, one is confronted with the fact that this relatively limited war in a small corner of Europe has taken on enormous symbolic significance. I shall argue that all this attention and paralysis *vis-à-vis* the Balkans suggests a terror in the Western mind that it is about to succumb to Balkanization.

This leads to my second reason. Consider the definition of Balkanization as the breaking up of a unit into increasingly smaller units that are hostile to each other. There is no good reason to understand Balkanization literally, as something that must apply only to the Balkans. Indeed, the last few years offer a plethora of events that suggest disintegration of alliances and globalizing tendencies that used to be taken for granted. For example, France and Britain blamed Germany in large measure for the current Balkan War, and the strains among these countries caused serious rifts in the plans for establishing a sort of United States of Europe. Various members of NATO, such as Greece and Turkey, renewed their old antagonisms, again largely owing to differing sympathies for parties involved in the Balkan conflict. Even in the United States, California is on the verge of breaking up into three separate states; Hawaii is seeking secession; there is serious talk in Texas of the Southern, Hispanic half seceding from the Northern, Protestant half, and so on. Quite apart from regional hostilities, which are growing louder every day throughout Europe, the USA, and the rest of the world, consider other forms of divisiveness: women, gays, and other minority groups have practically taken on the metaphorical status of ethnic groups within the USA, and are engaged in very hostile relationships with their enemies, including men, straights, and other ethnic groups. President Clinton frequently bemoans the divisiveness within American society, and linked conceptually the Los Angeles riots with the ethnic hatred in the Balkans. Xenophobia and contempt for foreigners is undisguised in Western Europe. Again, I do not wish to engage in a long-winded argument here. My point is simply that it is really not all that funny to consider that the West is slowly succumbing to Balkanization when one takes into account the hate crimes, violence, and savagery in various Western cultures. For example, is the Irish Republican Army practice of shooting people in the kneecaps really that different from the savagery exhibited by Serbs against Muslims?

Another issue that must be confronted honestly is the background of the author. I have grown somewhat used to the ethnic prejudice directed against me, at least initially, by my University students. For example, I evoke a lot of nervous laughter on the first day of classes when I begin with the line, "Don't worry, I really do speak English, despite the strange spelling of my name." I am still somewhat surprised and saddened by the fact that many of my colleagues are just as ethnocentric and prejudiced as my students. Sociologists really ought to know better. For example, a reviewer of one of my other books dismissed it as an essentially Catholic and Croat argument. I realize that even bringing this issue up is going to be perceived as disconcerting by many readers. But the issue is unavoidable: here is an author born in the Balkans (raised in the USA) who has

written a book about the Balkanization of the West. Why shouldn't he be dismissed as a crank?

There exist many reasons. First, my argument is amply documented and, after all, it is an *argument*, and as such, something to be judged on the basis of its merits, not the author's background. Second, an author's place of birth should not preclude his or her being objective any more than being a father and a husband, for example, should prevent one from teaching a sociology course on marriage and the family. Third, the entire issue of objectivity *vis-à-vis* postmodernism and the Enlightenment is infinitely more complex than one's ethnicity, and it is an issue that I treat at length in this book. Fourth, the unthinking expectation that someone from the Balkans will be biased concerning the Balkans betrays a widespread form of ethnocentrism found in nations in which the Enlightenment project took root. This form of ethnocentrism supposes that one is objective if one writes from nobody's point of view. Yet this belief – that one can write from nobody's point of view – is a typically Enlightenment-based point of view, derived from René Descartes' rejection of culture (Gellner 1992a). As such, it is hypocritical, because it holds up a standard of neutrality that is impossible to meet in reality, yet favors the arrogant imposition of American, British, and French points of view in the guise of being nobody's points of view. Consider, for example, the plethora of books by Western authors about postcommunist developments versus the handful of books by native authors.

Fifth, my purpose is less to win an argument – even though one is trained to win arguments in Western academe – and more to open lines of communication that would otherwise remain closed. For example, to sensitize my classes to alternatives to ethnocentrism, I often bring up the fact that when my American wife asks me to take her and our daughter to Disneyworld or some other fun theme park, I comply, but never enjoy the experience as fully as she does. I do not have fun in Disneyworld. Invariably, my classes gasp – collectively and literally. One can scarcely think of a more un-American statement than the admission that one does not enjoy Disneyworld. Even criticizing Presidents Bush and Clinton is okay, by comparison. But to fail to have fun at Disneyworld – that really gets a discussion going. I explain to my students that my purpose is not to criticize Disney or them, but to point out that I was not raised in a fun-culture, and they were. From that insight, can we build dialogue? Usually, we can.

Sixth, and closely related, one can take a completely different attitude toward this author. Was there never a time in which people would approach a stranger with the aim of learning something from them precisely because they think differently to the natives? Why can't a foreigner be exotic, instead of threatening? I am thinking of Georg Simmel's and David Riesman's mutual claim that strangers – as those who are simultaneously in and out of the mainstream group – often make the best sociologists, judges, and other professionals, precisely because they are different at the same time that they are like everybody else. Little wonder, then, that most of the founding fathers of sociology were Jewish, because Jews have consistently experienced this role as strangers, participating in the group, yet

always outside it. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that my place of birth gives me a particular “bias.” At the same time, my thoroughly American education gives me a perspective on that bias that a native American will never possess. Combining the two perspectives may lead to new insights. That is my hope, in any event, and that constitutes a much more charitable and broad-minded approach than ethnocentric prejudice, which is all too common.

Allow me to give one more illustration of what I mean. In the 1920s, the city fathers of Chicago asked my grandfather, who was a famous sculptor by then, to sculpt a monument of an American President. He told them that America had enough monuments to its Presidents, and suggested that they commission a memorial to the true American hero, the American Indian – today, called the Native American in the lexicon of political correctness. Imagine, a Croat telling Americans that they needed a grand monument to the people they had nearly exterminated! The city fathers agreed, and Ivan Meštrović’s monument to the Native American still stands on the shores of Lake Michigan in Chicago. Furthermore, he portrayed the Native American as a noble, muscular warrior seated on a full-bodied Roman horse, not the mustangs that they really rode. My grandfather was postmodern before his time. The important point is that it would be narrow-minded and foolish to dismiss this statue as typically Croat, for it is quite atypical, and cannot be reduced to any cultural point of view. It constitutes the insight of a stranger who reminded the Americans of something that they have quite literally forgotten.

Similarly, this book and my other books are not typically this or that. And I regard myself very much as a citizen of the world. If my religious preference must be known, it is for the Celtic worship of tree spirits. It is regrettable that such issues must be brought up, but it will be of historical interest to my readers in the distant future that I have little choice than to confront ethnic prejudice directed at me daily as a university professor and author. Despite all the *talk* of tolerance and multiculturalism nowadays, in reality one confronts bigotry, hatred, and prejudice on a daily basis, much of it subtle. I have found that eventually, I am able to reach a level of humane dialogue with my students. But my colleagues in sociology strike me as an especially mean-spirited lot.

To avoid misunderstanding on this point as well, let me note that I do not ascribe meanness as a personal trait to academicians. Personal motives are irrelevant to the point I am making. Rather, the training that university professors receive puts a premium on holding one’s emotions in check – especially tender-hearted emotions – for the sake of neutrality, impartiality, and objectivity. But an unintended outcome of this training is an institutionalized proclivity toward sadism. For almost by definition, sadists are indifferent and “neutral” toward human suffering. I shall not elaborate further here on this point, but wish to emphasize that even when I discuss this topic later in the book, I follow standard academic procedure by documenting many thinkers who were concerned with sympathetic understanding versus cold objectivity, from Max Weber and Emile Durkheim to Pitirim Sorokin. Thus, even when I criticize academic neutrality, I employ neutral methods.

In any event, throughout this book I problematize notions and concepts that are otherwise taken for granted, including but not limited to, objectivity, Western, the Enlightenment, fundamentalism, rape, and truth. The aim is not to win an argument or arrive at dogma, but to ignite the reader's imagination and to engage in constructive dialogue.

Out of all these concepts that are problematized, perhaps rape is the most important for the purposes of the discussion that follows. I will be discussing rape, not from the feminist point of view, i.e. as a reflection of male dominance, but from an ethnic one, the perception by Bosnian Muslims that they are being symbolically raped. As illustration of what I intend, allow me to quote from a speech given by the Bosnian Ambassador to the United Nations, Mr Muhamed Sacirbey, to the United Nations Security Council on 24 August 1993:

The last time that I spoke before this Council, the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was told, in a perversion of the UN Charter and the principles of international justice, that its right to obtain defensive weapons and fully exercise self defense would pose a threat to the UN forces in my country and would prolong the war. Now, in the climax of this continuing perversion, it is subtly suggested that the re-emphasis of principles of the UN Charter, international law, the CSCE, Security Council resolutions, the Decisions of the International Court of Justice and the London Conference on the former Yugoslavia would somehow undermine the chances of a negotiated settlement. *The legal absurdity and moral degradation of this argument can only be compared to a policeman being instructed not to interpret a gang rape because, after resisting, the victim is finally ready to coolly submit to the inevitable. Under this theory, the most heinous of crimes, a gang rape, becomes an act of seduction. Excellencies, Bosnia and Herzegovina is being gang raped.* Once forced into a submissive position by acts of violence and aggression, one does not become any less of a victim of a criminal act just because the victim is exhausted by the struggle. The victim calls out for help. The strong and gallant hear the cries and rush to the scene of the crime. They plead with the criminals to stop. The criminals respond even more loudly with a fierce and perverse determination. Afraid to confront the criminals, the strong avert their eyes. The gallant explain their inaction by the age-old excuse that the "victim was really asking for it." Having failed to confront the rapists, they now hope that the criminals are fatigued from and satisfied with the criminal orgy and prepared to return to the life of a law-abiding member of the community. Excellencies, all have heard the cries of the victim in Bosnia and Herzegovina. . . . I do not lightly apply the analogy of a gang rape to the plight of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As we know, systematic rape has been one of the weapons of this aggression against the Bosnian women in particular.

(emphasis added)

I would like to thank Chris Rojek and Barry Smart for taking me seriously and not ridiculing me when I proposed this project to them, as well as for their

constructive criticisms. I also benefited from the insights offered by the following colleagues: C.G. Schoenfeld, Slaven Letica, Miroslav Goreta, Philip Cohen, Barry Glassner, David Riesman, Susan Greenwood, Akbar Ahmed, Michael Weinstein, and last, but certainly not least, my wife, Amber. Of course, I am solely responsible for all the views put forth in this book, and they deserve none of the criticisms. Special thanks to Amber's grandmother, Doris K. Lee, for meticulously keeping track of and clipping newspaper articles for me.

I am grateful to the Council for the International Exchange of Scholars for a Fulbright grant that enabled me to live, teach, and conduct research in Croatia in 1992. I am also grateful to Texas A&M University for funding three other, shorter trips to the former Yugoslavia, and to the Heads of my Department, Ben Crouch and Dudley Poston, for their enthusiastic support of my research. The reader will notice that the endnotes, as well as the text itself, are crammed full of verbatim quotations from newspapers and magazines concerning postcommunism. The reason that I use verbatim quotes instead of summarizing the thoughts of others is that I wish to maintain a historical record for future generations. I am certain that the revolution initiated by the fall of communism since 1989 will go down in history as one of the most important events in the past few centuries. It will be important for future researchers and interested laypeople to know exactly what was being said and written during this revolution, which has not yet reached its zenith. In the interest of the historical record, I wish to conclude this preface by listing the publications that rejected essays authored by me that I eventually incorporated into this book. I realize that this is an unorthodox move, but my motives are as follows. Opinion-makers are already making the false claim that nobody had predicted the fall of communism and its consequences. I suspect that there were many others who, like me, had made such predictions, but were not given an opportunity to put their views in print. If that is true, it is an important piece of the historical record. Furthermore, if the predictions that I make in this book turn out to be somewhat accurate, I wish to offer a counter to the claims that will undoubtedly be made in the future that nobody suspected the pessimistic scenarios that I offer.

I sincerely hope that I am wrong, because the scenario I offer is frightening even to me. In any event, here are the publications that rejected the ideas which form the basis of this book: *Foreign Affairs*, *The World and I*, *New York Times*, *New York Review of Books*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Freedom Review*, *Orbis*, *Policy Review*, *The National Interest*, *Sociological Inquiry*, *The New Yorker*, *New Republic*, *Commentary*, and *Harper's*. The only exception is the publication of my "West as Post-modern Voyeur" by *Impact International*, 23 (July/August 1993): 27-8. Finally, I would like to quote the response from the President-elect of the American Sociological Association to my offer to establish a session on the current Balkan War and its significance:

Thank you for your January 23 letter suggesting a session on "Sociological Perspectives on the Balkan War of 1991-1993" for the American Sociological Association meetings in Los Angeles, August 5-9, 1994. The Program

Committee has planned several thematic sessions which, while they do not focus exclusively on the Balkan War, take up issues which are highlighted by it. You may want to consider submitting a paper to these sessions.

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Chapter 1

From the postmodern culture of fun to the grim realities of postcommunism

The collapse of communism at the present *fin de siècle* coincided with widespread interest among intellectuals in a phenomenon known as postmodernism, itself a confluence of apocalyptic themes found in the previous *fin de siècle* (Meštrović 1991) and the fun-culture uncovered by David Riesman in his *Lonely Crowd* (1950). The confluence of these two phenomena, postcommunism with postmodernism (as a fun version of the apocalypse), produced the giddy, optimistic belief that democracy and tolerance would emerge from the ruins of communism, a widespread belief that only a fun-culture could produce. This nexus of sometimes contradictory cultural forces, and their consequences, will be the theme of the rest of this book, yet it requires some immediate clarification.

First, the “collapse of communism” was not complete, because communism continues to rule China, Cuba, North Korea and other nations in the world. Communism’s apparent demise in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union does not rule out the possibility that the cultural roots of communism have remained in the countries that were once ruled by this ideology, nor the possibility that these same cultural roots will sprout new forms of authoritarianism.¹ In the words of Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, “Time has finally run out for communism, but its concrete edifice has not yet crumbled. And we must take care not to be crushed beneath its rubble instead of gaining liberty” (1991: 3). Second, it is nearly impossible to settle on a consistent definition of “postmodernism” (Rosenau 1992),² even though this concept seems to imply the collapse of modernism. As with the alleged collapse of communism, this characterization does not preclude the possibility that the cultural roots of what is called modernity will sprout new forms of modernism – despite the rhetoric of protest found in postmodern discourse. Yet, with the notable exception of Akbar Ahmed (1992), most intellectuals involved in this discourse have overlooked Islam as a distinct form of postmodernism or anti-modernism. Third, the French term, *fin de siècle*, which binds much of the rhetoric of protest across the two end-points of the twentieth century, implies so much more than the straightforward translation: end of the century. It connotes a spirit or world-view characterized by anxiety, uneasiness, pessimism and disgust at some of the unwelcome consequences of modernity. Thus, the dramatic, contemporary confluence of the purported endings of

communism, modernity, the twentieth century – even the millennium – demand a new and creative analysis of social phenomena that often have been taken for granted.

A discussion of the sort being proposed here would be crippled from the outset if one were to limit it to the analytic issue of whether postmodernism – whatever it is – constitutes a rebellion or extension of modernity. The way this problem is posed in the existing literature betrays the very Enlightenment narratives that are in question,³ for it assumes a “before” and “after” to modernity, as well as a linear progression to history. We shall gain much more room for discussion, and may be able to learn something new, by allowing the possibility that tradition, modernity, and postmodernity (or various forms of postmodernity) are able to co-exist. True, such an assertion seems illogical from the many perspectives found in modernist theories that assume progress from “primitive” to “civilized” societies. Yet the notion of linear progress is one of the assumptions that is called into question by the postmodern rebellion against narratives spun from the Enlightenment. Besides, it often seems that in the present *fin de siècle*, one finds that fundamentalism,⁴ nationalism, and many other sorts of traditional cultural phenomena *do* thrive alongside modernity.

Let us return to the coincidence that was noted in the first sentence of this chapter: namely, that communism seems to have collapsed at nearly the same time that postmodernism asserted itself in intellectual discourse. In rough tandem, the high priest of postmodernism, Jean Baudrillard (1986), declared the *end of modernity and of culture*, Francis Fukuyama (1992) declared the *end of history*, and the high priest of foreign affairs, Zbigniew Brzezinski (1989), pronounced the *death and end of communism*. All these dramatic endings seem to have coincided with the end of the millennium, at a time when the prestige of sociology relative to the other social sciences – not to mention the so-called “hard sciences” – seems to be at an all-time low (Kantrowitz 1992). Thus, one might add the *end of sociology* to the long list of dramatic endings that seem to be invoked in contemporary intellectual discourse (see also Bauman 1992).

To be sure, the meaning of all these alleged endings is far from clear, and such claims provoke controversy in any case. In contradistinction to Baudrillard, Anthony Giddens (1990, 1992) and other modernists deny the existence of any break with modernity, and prefer to speak of “high modernity.” To contradict Fukuyama’s claim that humanity had finally reached the end of history – by which he means that with the end of the Cold War, liberal democracy had triumphed over racism as well as historical wars for ideology, nationalism, and imperialism – one has only to consider the brutal war that has continued in former Yugoslavia since 1991, among many other nationalistic wars currently raging in the world, from formerly Soviet Georgia to Somalia.⁵ Indeed, the race riots that spread from Los Angeles to many other cities in the USA in April 1992 led many commentators to remark, with considerable amazement, that America suddenly seemed like the Balkans – that they could not believe that the United States of America could be racked by ethnic conflict this late in its historical development. The Western media

frequently referred to the Balkan crisis as contagious, as if ethnic hatred were some sort of virus.⁶ I shall have more to say in Chapter 2 and elsewhere on this postmodern use of metaphors such that the modern West became Balkanized while the reality of the current Balkan War became a mere metaphor. At this point in the discussion, it is worth stressing that this ominous conceptual linkage between Los Angeles and the former Yugoslavia was strengthened by President Clinton on 17 April 1993, on the occasion of the reading of the verdict in the second trial of the policemen who abused Rodney King. Mr. Clinton said that the second verdict, in which two officers were found guilty of violating Rodney King's rights, proved that America would not succumb to the ethnic hatred that consumed the former Yugoslavia.⁷ But why should he have made such a statement were it not for the fear, largely unconscious, that the USA *could* fall victim to the "virus" of ethnic hatred? In any event, countering Fukuyama, Alan Ryan (1992: 7) writes that "the most obvious complaint against the view that the whole world is committed to liberal democracy is that most of it is not."⁸

Consider Mikhail Gorbachev's ominous warning, made on the occasion of his resignation as President of the Soviet Union on Christmas Eve, 1991, that the former Soviet Union would follow in the bloody wake of the Balkans. Indeed, the turmoil in the Balkans seems to have foreshadowed ominously the potential for widespread racism and ethnic conflict throughout the world, from China and Africa to Western Europe and the United States. In addition, the news media reported noticeable increases in hate crimes committed by skinheads in Britain, neo-Nazis in Germany, "gaybashers" in the United States military, and anti-Semites in France, among many others. By 1993, the cheerful confidence concerning a New World Order based on rationality and tolerance, which was popularized by postmodern writers as well as by President George Bush in 1991, turned into a cynical pessimism in relation to a New World Disorder (*Wall Street Journal*, 1 June 1992: A13).

Neither Mr. Gorbachev nor popular opinion-makers have explained *why* the Balkans emerged as the paradigm for dissolution and hatred in a world that was assumed to be moving in the contrary direction of postmodern tolerance, the modernist unification of markets, and the growth of democracy. The remainder of this book is devoted to explicating this unexpected turn of events, so that only a thumbnail sketch of the argument will be offered in this chapter.

Let us begin with the widespread understanding of postmodernism as rebellion against the grand narratives of the Enlightenment (Gellner 1992b, Lyotard 1984, Rosenau 1992). Again, this is a deceptively simple definition that begs many questions which will be taken up later, including the following: are these "narratives" mere fictions or are they truths rooted in reality? In other words, are these "narratives" actually "traditions," such that the Enlightenment constitutes a tradition even though the hallmark of the Enlightenment was rebellion at all traditions, customs, and other components of culture? Does the period referred to as the Enlightenment signify a particular time and place in European history, as argued by Ernest Gellner (1992a), or does it imply a universal stage of

development through which all of humanity passes on the road from traditionalism to modernity? Is the postmodern focus on circulating fictions really new, or merely the latest version of Sophistry that even Plato had to contend with? Let us set aside these important issues for now, and focus on how rebellion at Enlightenment narratives might lead to the unwelcome turn of events described above, as opposed to tolerance and democracy.

One of the most notable, and ironic, examples of promoting tolerance through intolerant methods is the following: "Speaking on the opening day of the first World Conference on Human Rights in 25 years, Secretary of State Warren Christopher said the universality of human rights set a single standard of acceptable behavior around the world, a standard Washington would apply to all countries" (*New York Times*, 15 June 1993: A1). He added that "we cannot let cultural relativism become the last refuge of repression" (ibid.). But representatives of other nations at this conference accused the West of applying double standards with regard to human rights and, in general, of using the notion of universality as "a mask for Western domination" (ibid.). Ironically, the US was intolerant in pushing its version of tolerance, such that the US "seems to be developing a flexible carrot-and-stick approach, using incentives to modify the behavior of countries it considers capable of improvement, like Turkey and China, while punishing those it considers renegades, like Iran" (ibid.). One should note that sociologists routinely accept the notion that no standards are universal and that all social phenomena are culturally relative. Hence, the official actions of the US government, while promoting the Enlightenment project, go against the grain of a century's worth of sociological theorizing and research.

The ethnocentrism in America's approach lies in the fact that the US focuses almost exclusively on civil and political rights such as free speech, press, and elections, while it does not recognize the tendency in most of the rest of the world to view human rights as a matter of employment, education, housing, and food (Stephens 1993). Moreover, "although most nations have banned the death penalty, [the US] refuses to acknowledge international law on this issue" and the US ignores the international requirement that refugees be given an opportunity to apply for political asylum, particularly with regard to Haitian refugees (ibid.).

Communism emerged as an important narrative spun from the Enlightenment, with its utopian assumptions, emphasis on central planning and bureaucracy, and disdain for the traditionalism suggested by nationalism and religion, among other characteristics (Bauman 1992). Barry Smart (1992) is right to conclude that neither socialism nor communism was a fundamental alternative to capitalism, and that all three politico-economic systems were refractions of modernity. It seems to follow logically that rebellion against communism as a modernist system would unleash the anti-modernist forces that communism tried to contain, among them Islamic cultural identity, nationalism, fundamentalism, separatism, anti-Semitism and other phenomena up to and including the white heat of hatred demonstrated in the Balkans since 1991. Moreover, if it is true that communism, socialism, and capitalism are all modernist doctrines, and if all three doctrines are collapsing as