

Let's Stop Saying, 'Balkanization'

A word that is oft tossed around freely is Balkanization. In its truest form, it refers to the breakup of the country that was formerly known as Yugoslavia. In its most idiotic form, it is used to refer to collection of smaller items that separate from a larger one. I have a crazy idea: stop using this word.

As you can see from the Wikipedia article that I linked to, there isn't really any history given as to how the word came about. Obviously, it came in to use as former Yugoslavia started to fall apart, but there isn't any mention as to who was the first person to coin it in to the common vernacular. At this point, it doesn't really matter. What does matter is that it's an offensive word. Why people can't simply say, "breakup", "collapse", or "separation" is the same reason that we use French words for wine varietals, or "terroir" instead of locale, in that one believes one has the air of being educated if one is to use this bigger, fancier word.

Do any of you who use this word think of the people who actually live in this region of the Western Balkans and what this means to them? It would be like saying every time you serve a bad meal that it's suffered "Britization". No one wants that and it's an unfair association to a region that never asked for the word to be used in the first place. And I pick on the British in this example as I suspect them of starting common use of the word, such as in this article on the BBC that's actually about Africa. It's just one of many.

Beyond the offense of the term, there is just the complete blindness to history. Yugoslavia was actually comprised of various states that had been independent at various points throughout history. So, Yugoslavia was an artificial entity that was bound to separate just like countless other larger countries that have broken up over the centuries. Of course, we don't say USSRization, Czechoslovakization, British Empirization, or even Austro-Hungarization. No, we say Balkanization and we say it too much. It's a word we need to lose and just revert back to the normal words I mentioned before. Saying Grenache instead of Garnacha may sound "fancier" to some, but saying, Balkanization just shows that you have no true grasp of what you're talking about, leaving you to fumble for large words to attempt to cover that fact up.