FONDEMENTS DU DIALOGUE CULTUREL

ROMANIAN BALKANISM OR ABOUT CULTURAL RIFTS

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Abstract:
The term "Balkanism" has two meanings, referring to both something objective and strictly geographic, as well as something subjective – a meaning that describes a certain mentality, a certain manner of thinking and behavior embraced in the Balkans.

This article sets out to analyse the elements that are considered to define the cultural identity of the communities from the area of the Balkans. Their historical events, their linguistic differences and peculiarities, their art (music, cinematography, etc.), their culinary preferences and other elements are approached and described from the perspective of the "cultural crevice" theory.

Keywords:
Balkanism, cultural identity, linguistic unity, cultural crevice.

Rezumat:
Termenul de „balcanism" are doua sensuri – unul obiectiv, strict geografic şi istoric, celălalt subiectiv, vizând un anumit stil de gândire şi de comportament.

Articolul îşi propune să analizeze elementele considerate definitorii pentru identitatea culturală a comunităţilor umane din zonă. Evenimentele istorice, particularităţile lingvistice, arta (muzica, cinematografia etc.), preferinţele culinare sunt descrise din perspectiva teoriei „faliilor culturale".

Cuvinte-cheie:
Balcanism, identitate culturală, uniune lingvistică, falie culturală.

1. The defining value of Balkanism for Romanian cultural identity

Assumed and, at the same time, contested by Romanians, Balkanism remains, indisputably, a defining component of Romanian cultural identity.

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It manifests itself in a protean manner, illustrating the truth that cultural identity is a concept which is being permanently *constructed*, based on *diachronic and synchronic dynamism*, on the one hand, and on the *structural interdependence of its constitutive* elements, on the other hand. Thus, Balkanism has marked, over different epochs and in different, but never negligible, proportions, the historical and geographical component of Romanian cultural identity, in its diverse aspects – regional, psychological, artistic (music, dance etc.), linguistic, architectonic, gastronomic, political and administrative (especially on the score of the distance between individual and community, individual and official authorities). Once again what is worth noting is the *temporal component* in the construction of cultural identities, in the sense that historical evolution can be reflected in its contemporary manifestations through new beginnings, unexpected, often inexplicable, manifestations in continuous transformation, which also relates to the multifunctional, inconstant, unconscious characteristic of the concept under discussion.

2. The two meanings of the notion of "Balkanism"

2.1. From a historical and geographical point of view, the Balkan Peninsula represents the South-East of Europe, the region with the greatest assortment and mixture of different peoples from the "old continent". Different ethnicities, different languages different religions, successive dominations by the great regional powers – Russia and Turkey, in principle, but also Western powers at times, such as Austria, Germany, Hungary etc. – these are the historical realities conducive to permanent modifications of the boundaries of different communities, with the attending discontents, voluntary or enforced migrations of populations[1], but above all with concrete consequences in the forging of states, nations, alliances, and, ultimately, of cultural identities. Winston Churchill typecast it by a witticism said to have proved its validity until the end of the 20th century: "*The Balkans produce more history than they are able to consume*".

[1] Suffice it to say that in the Balkans there are the most Roma ethnics in the world, over 7 million, representing between 0.5 and 5% of the populations of the modern countries in the region, with the problems brought about by the unfavourable status which continues to plight this ethnic group which constitutes, in fact, the most numerous minority in Europe (cf. Nicoleta Scripcariu, „Romii – integrare la cererea Euroei", in: *Dilema veche*, X, 470, p. V, 2013).

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Notwithstanding modern political and economic conditions, many problems have remained unresolved, and some researchers remain circumspect even today, insofar as – they say – history have taught us that in the Balkans "*nothing is forgotten, nothing is fogiven*"[2].

2.2. With this evaluation, allegedly historical, but rather subiective and literary in fact, since such stereotypes can be attributed to other regions of the world, we come to the second usage of the notion of "Balkanism" – which relates to the colouring wording of cultural identity, being based on perceptions (subjective by definition) and even prejudice. On the basis of the objective geographical and historical data, certain attributes were constructed, which are as well-known today as they are. In this secondary usage, Balkanism means:

"*...lack of seriosity, broken promises, tribalism, sectarianism, the incapacity of solidarity at crucial moments, contempt for public interest, inadequacy regarding the idea of pluralism, backwardness, underdevelopment – in brief, failed or incomplete modernization*"[3].

The researcher who synthesized these attributes adds that, according to the historical perception, underdevelopment, but also some other flaws enumerated above, have been intensified in the modern era by two factors:

a) Communism – deeply implemented in South-East Europe;

b) The appurtenence to the Orthodox Church, majoritary in four out of the six states included in traditional Balkanism.

Evidently, the essential problem has only been of a generally human nature – the ethnic conglomerate. The respective languages, religions, economies, territories have come into conflict as a result of fundamental ethnic and genetic differences.

Communism knew how to activate the nationalistic streak of these communities, and, once comfortably installed in four out of the six postbelic states of the Balkans, availed itself of the above-mentioned regional frailties, as specialists have observed. From this point of view,

[2] Matei Martin, "Zahărul şi mierea", in: *Dilema veche*, X, 470, 2013, p. I – Supplement *Dosar Dilema veche, Balcanii Europei*.

[3] I have quoted from the study „Balcanismul românilor sub comunism. Câteva speculații", published in the Supplement „Balcanii Europei", cf. *Dilema veche*, X, 470, 2013, p. VI, by the historian Cristian Vasile, researcher on the programme "Romania and Europe in the 20th Century" at the "Nicolae Iorga" Institute of the Romanian Academy.

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even South-European communism has a Balkan streak, distinct from the nature of that in Central Europe (from Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia), as well as from its Oriental or South-American varieties.

But the essential mechanism of regional individualisation remains nationalism.

It is said that in the Balkans "*the state was the one which formed the nations, and the organised solidarities acquired an oppressive role*"[4]. Simplifying things, it was not only the ethnic and linguistic diversity, but also the considerable period of deficient official policies that favoured a permanent clashes – of ideas, mentalities, religions, territories and political and economic power – between the inhabitants within the respective states, beteen these states and not least between Balkan states as a block and other ethno-political entities: from the phobia of the Turks to antisemitism, or from the phobia of the Russians and anti-Sovietism to anti-American and even anti- European attitudes, all kinds of phobias and idiosyncrasies have been manifest in the Balkans, under all possible aspects.

Al. Duțu, one of the great Romanian comparatists and theorists of mentalities, states that this is precisely how the concept of "Balkanism" was actually born:

"*The peninsula gave birth to «Balkanism» right when the newly created states began to fight with each other, when nationalism roused antisemitism*"[5].

3. Historical highlights

The restrictive space of the Balkan Peninsula has naturally created the context for a common history for its peoples. At least three large communities have as an ethnolinguistic substrate the vast population of Thracians. Their dependency to the Greek Empire[6], and to the East Roman Empire have been interrupted by frequent invasions of barbarian peoples. Among them, the Cuman people and the Slavs have played an important role in the area.

As far as their own capacity for geopolitical organization is concerned, these peoples have only acquired it later in their history – and only partially. The Protobulgarian Czardom of Boris (860-1018) and the

[4] In reference to the "nation-state".
[5] Al. Duțu, 1982, p. 196.
[6] Firstly, to the *Grecia Magna* (the ancient empire), and then to the Byzantine Empire.

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Czardom belonging to the Bulgarian Vlachs named the Asan brothers (1085-1205) dominate the history of these peoples located south of the Danube, during the period in which they were being converted to Christianity[7]. The Serbian Kingdom – which included Albania, Macedonia and the north of Greece – has imposed itself later, between the 12th and the 14th Century.

Then, starting from 1389 (after the battle of Kosovopolje) all the peoples in the Balkans fall under the domination of the Ottoman Empire for nearly four hundred years. This era has left visible marks on their cultural identities.

For Romanians, the 15th and the 17th Century represent an era of tragic oscillation between a Christian Europe and the Ottoman Empire[8]. The battles led by Mircea the Elder (Mircea I of Wallachia), Vlad the Impaler, Michael the Brave, Matei Basarab, Constantin Brâncoveanu (in Muntenia); Alexander I of Moldavia, Ştefan the Great (Stephen III of Moldavia), Vasile Lupu, Dimitrie Cantemir (in Moldavia); Iancu of Hunedoara and Matei Corvin (in Transylvania) have represented heroic attempts to escape from the grip of this state of dependency[9]. Unfortunately, the 18th Century – as well as almost the entire 19th Century – has represented a period of strengthening of this grip of their vassalage to the Ottoman Empire. It was only in the years of 1877-1878 that the Romanians, Bulgarians, Serbians, Albanians and Greeks began to obtain their relative independence from the Turks. Nonetheless, the price that was paid for such a status was a relative submission to the Russian Empire.

As usual, the reputation of this area of Europe as being an epicenter of constant crisis has been reinforced not only by their wars with external

[7] In the case of Romanians, we are talking about a second stage of Christianity, following the ancient period from 1st Century BC – 4th Century AC, of Greek and Roman origins.
[8] Cf. Bogdan Murgescu, 2013.
[9] In reality, the political relationships were being complicated by family kinship between rulers of the Balkans and those of Europe. For instance, Iancu of Hunedoara and Matei Corvin had a Romanian origin by father, but also a Hungarian origin by mother, and had subsequently been assimilated as European magnates; Mircea the Great, by his Bessarabian ancestry was also related to the czars, the kings, the despots, and the kniaz rulers of Serbian, Bulgarian, Bosnian, Albanian and Greek peoples, as well as with princes and emperors of Hungarian, Austrian, Luxembourgish territories – and even with the... Turks. Therefore, the notions of "enemy" and "ally" would become relative during certain periods of time – a phenomenon that could be observed all around the world in certain periods of history.

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threats, but also by wars inside the Balkans between these small peoples – and even conflicts inside of each people. This state of crisis had also rendered the entire zone vulnerable. The two Balkan Wars have succeeded in reuniting the Bulgarians, the Greeks, the Serbians and the Montenegrins against their common enemy – the Turks, in 1912. But it was only one year until the same conflict is reignited, and this time it manages to disunite the conquerors (1913). Romania is most notably involved in the second of these wars, with important consequences for its geo-strategic location.

The First World War (1914-1918), the Second World War (1939-1945) and the "Cold War" (1945-1991) represent, in reality, a "77-year-long War"[10]. This neverending state of struggle took a toll on the Balkan people and each great collision always caught them in the middle of the conflict, although their geographic locations placed them "at the outskirts of empires" and, respectively, at the periphery of different political alliances.

The fall of the Communist regime and the end of the Cold War have not been followed by a period of peace and harmony. Quite to the contrary, epicenters of interethnic and religious conflict have re-emerged in the countries that used to belong to the former Yugoslavia. The map of the territory has evolved and reconfigured itself, and the state of tension has been maintained in virtually all of these countries, due to ethnic, religious and geo-political disputes.

The peninsular syndrome and the peripheral status of these territories continues to generate contrasts and conflicts among their populations. Therefore, conflict seems to be a historical given of this southeastern cultural crevice of Europe.

4. The linguistic component of Romanian Balkanism

Beyond its incontestable Latinity, the Romanian language presents a series of striking common elements with other languages in the geographic region of South-East Europe, which made specialists speak, as early as the 1820s[11], about a "linguistic Balkan unity"[12].

[10] Cf. Neagu Djuvara, 2010, pp. 226-227.

[11] For the entire problem, cf. Al. Rosetti, 1978, pp. 201-289, ch. „Limbile balcanice", and pp. 639-651, the paragraph „Balcanica". The author notes that the first observations regarding the Balkan character of the Romanian language were formulated by linguists such as H. Schuchardt (as early as 1893), then B. Kopiter (in 1820 and 1829).

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As in any union, the positions are not symmetrically or equally distributed. Firstly, this would include Romanian, Albanian, Bulgarian and Modern Greek. Then, to a lesser extent, there would be Serbian and Croatian, and, lastly, Turkish.

The formation of this "linguistic union" is explicable by means of well-known factors: a) the substratum common to two or more Romance languages, such as the thracian-illyrian language – in the case of Romanian, Albanian and, partially, Bulgarian; b) a common history, marked by permanent migrations of populations, alliances, conquests, alternate dominations etc., throughout the Middle Ages, but also before and after this period; c) the development of common civilizations over the entire Balkan Peninsula – with influences from Greece, Russia, Turkey. In the case of the Romanian language, a particular element is the history of its formation on both banks of the Danube.

In principle, all the components of the language system are marked by these common evolutions.

a) *In the phonetic structure*, there appeared unstressed vowels with almost identical tonality – *ă, ë, ъ* from the occlusion of *a* in certain positions – in Romanian, Albanian, Bulgarian. Also, the intervocalic consonant *-n-* is rotacized in Romanian and Albanian, and the consonantic groups *ct* şi *cs* are labialized (in *pt* and *ps*) – in Romanian, Albanian, in Macedonian and, dialectally, in Greek (dialectally, the phenomenon is also attested in Italian).

b) *In the morphological structure*, indefinite pronouns and adverbs were built, by being compounded with the verb *vrea* (more precisely *-va*, in Romanian < lat. *volet*), of the type *careva* (anyone), *cineva* (somebody), *cândva* (sometime), *cumva* (somehow), phenomenon also identifiable in Albanian; in the same two languages are formed noun or adverbial derivatives with the suffixes *-eşte*, (*a*)*ş*; *-ză* or with *-a*, cf. Rom. *Ciobăn**eşte*** (shepherdly)*, u**ş**or* (light)*, pupă**z**ă* (hoopoe), (respectively, *aşişdere**a*** – likewise), the first three only in Romanian and Albanian, the fourth one – also in Greek. As well, in Romanian, Albanian, Greek, the future is formed with the verbul *a vrea* (want), at least in some variants.

[12] The term was proposed by the leader of the Phonological School (structuralist) in Prague, N. S. Trubetzkoy, and the group's research became a domain in its own right through the book of the Danish linguist Kristian Sanfeld, *Linguistique balkanique*, 1930.

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c) *At the level of word order and syntax* (with pragmatic and stylistic implications), the most interesting particularity is the post-position of the definite article, in Romanian, Albanian and even Bulgarian – a language which, having been almost completely Slavicised, should not even have articles: Rom. *băiatu**l***, *fat**a*** (***the*** boy, ***the*** girl); Bg. *čoverk**ăt*** "omul" (***the*** man), Alb. *lis**i*** „stejarul" (***the*** oak). We shall not go into the details regarding the contexts specific to each language[13]. We shall just mention that that in Romanian any kind of determination (adjectival, pronominal) is in the same position. More precisely, the determining adjective, for example, is placed *after* the noun, in contrast with all European languages, whether or not geographically related to Romanian: Rom. *fată* ***frumoasă*** vs. Fr. ***belle*** *fillette*; Engl. ***beautiful*** *girl*, Rus. ***krasivaia*** *devuška* etc. (For the Romanians the determiner seems to be more important...).

Other syntactic feature would be replacing the infinitive by the subjunctive in object clauses etc., cf. Rom. *vreau să mănânc* for the It. *voglio mangiare*, which is a widespread phenomenon, and the difference in the use of connectors for purpose clauses as compared to object clauses (Rom. *să* or (*ca*) *să*; Alb. *të*; Gr. *νά*, Bg. *da* + subjunctive, vs. the Rom. *că*; Alb. *që* (se), Gr. πῶς (ποῦ, *ὅτι*), Bg. *če*, *što*.

d) *At the lexical level*, the common elements also extend to the Serbian, Croatian and Turkish, in the sphere of proper names (toponymy, hidronymy, oronymy), then in the vocabulary relating to shepherding, bee-keeping, and, as mentioned above, culinary, clothing etc. Of course, in this case, the interculturality of the late Middle-Ages, of the pre-modern and modern eras, had a significant contribution. Especially significant on account of their ancient and widespread character, in forms existing only in the Balkan linguistic union, are certain phraseological structures – typical set expressions and phrases – with a great semantic and stylistic import. Here are some of these, in the Romanian variant: *unul şi unul* "(oameni) aleşi" (la crème de la crème); *babe şi moşi* "anotimp capricios" (capricious season); *cu sufletul la gură* „disperare" (with one's heart in one's mouth); deochi "farmec" (evil eye); *a-l tăia capul* "a gândi la" (cross one's mind); *a se apuca de* "a începe" (start on); *cai verzi pe pereţi* "minciuni" (wild goose chase); *a avea treabă* "a fi ocupat" (have jobs to do); *a-i fi scris*

[13] The specific situations are disscussed in: Al. Rosetti, pp. 257-261.

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"soartă" (be fated); *a strica gura* "a vorbi în zadar" (ramble on) and so on. All these can be found, with slight variations, in Romanian, Albanian and Greek, though transferred by loan translation in other Balkan languages as well[14].

Finally, the last feature Romanian has in common with other Balkan languages is the loss of this archaic stock – primarily lexical – in favour of modern influences. Obviously, this refers to the havoc played by globalising Anglicisation. There are fewer and fewer speakers likely to say "*unul şi unul*" – in Romanian*; unu s'un* – in Aromanian; *një e një* – in Albanian, *ἕνας καί ἕνας* – in Greek (cf. also Fr. *l'un mieux que l'autre*; Germ. *eins und eins*). Now everyone will say: *the best...*

5. Other ingredients of Balkan cultural identity

5.1. Popular culture

Ethnic, linguistic and religious nationalism, blamable for the appearance of conceptual "Balkanism", in its most controversial, but also geo-strategic sense, is undermined and eroded, slowly and effectively, from the most unexpected corner: from the sacred, ancestral and emotionally charged traditional culture. As it usually happens, this operates by syncretism: music, for exemple, is combined with the dance, mimicry and aven the demeanour of musicians and audiences. More recently, due to modern video tehnologies, these are also combined with visual arts, with an original dynamic between diachrony and synchrony, Orient and Occident: they contain images peopled with belly dancers, transparent shalwars, bazaars, big male rings, but also luxury cars, high-power motorcycles, swimming pools, somptuous villas[15].

In other words, popular culture (in fact, by now, semi-popular, since the feature of anonymity is gradually disappearing) – a defining element of cultural identity – proves once more the fact that the Balkans represent a borderland world, an *interland* between the great empires and great cultures.

Of course, all the inhabitants of Balkan countries will easily distinguish the strictly local particularities of their national folk music. Wheras a "foreigner", that is a West European or an American, will only

[14] *Ibidem*, pp. 284-289.

[15] Cf. Speranța Rădulescu, „Globalizarea regională prin manele", in *Dilema veche*, Dossier „Balcanii europei", X, no. 470, p. VII.

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take in the *general impression* – the sound, in the case of music; the rhythm, in the case dance; the image, in the case of visual arts. Sorrow and lament, on the one hand, wild rhythm and passion, on the other hand, stridence and delicacy (sounds, colours, rituals), what they perceive is "Balkan art". The term designates, in specialist treatises[16], the earlier phases, still associated with the Orient, to the dismay of Balkan people, who try to forget several centuries of allegiance to the Sublime Porte. In spite of all these, their esentially paradoxical spirit draws them again towards Oriental motifs, due to the new generation of popular artists who have taken the region by storm, and even spaces beyond it. The songwriters and singers of "manele" do not only use in their creative act heterogeneous, Oriental sources, but, in principle, also have their analogous counterparts throughout the region.

The Romanian song called *Manea* is a close relative of the *arabesk* in Turkey and Macedonia, the *turbofolk* in the countries from former Yugoslavia, the *chalga* in Bulgaria, the *tallava* in Albania or the *laiko* in Greece.

The process of regionalisation, of "Balkanisation", respectively (under the form of nationalism, but also in opposition with those outside the region) has, on the one hand, a diachronic character and, on the other, a double motivation of identity specificity. On a historical scale, the circulation of folkloric motifs – in the present case of rhythms, vocal tonalities, accompanying instruments, dance moves, traditional costumes – is entirely explicable. Such intercultural exchanges occur in any region of the world and even in wider areas. So much higher is the force of this phenomenon within a peninsula (thus isolated from the rest of the world) and, even more justifiably, in a conglomerate of peoples in continuous movement. Transhumance is the most idyllic reason for the movements of these communities...

In terms of historical continuity, modernism strenghens these fusions. Songwriters and singers associate directly, tours are easily organised, *showbiz* companies facilitate cooperation and the *mass-media* support it, as does the "Balkanika" TV channel. The borrowings of motifs, tehniques, instruments, costumes and the duet, group or heterogeneous ensamble performances are becoming highly popular nowadays. Art has its own ways of evolution, just as science or other domains of human pursuits.

[16] Donna A. Buchanan (edit.), 2007, *passim*.

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Small wonder then that Westerners perceive us organically, by means of a simple measure: "Balkanic" – with no local nuances.

Of course, official state institutions try to preserve national traditions. Sometimes, they *do* succeed. In this sense, it is impressive how the hundreds of Romanian festivals (which also have an economic and political rationale, actually), the specialised Radio and TV channels, the Art Schools, Cultural Centres and specialist faculty departments etc. in Romania succeed in keeping alive the love for authentic Romanian folklore. There is an incredible rhythmicity about it, so every 5 years or so new series of young singers emerge – extremely talented artists who take over the ancient folcloric heritage and truly discover/create new value. Things happen in almost the same way in Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia and Turkey. The very small, newly created states and ethnic enclaves, in their turn, are making tremendous efforts to legitimise their identity by essentially local artistic creations. But art cannot be contained by official policies. It is a truth that the EU understood from the outset. That is the very reason why, beyond the proposed programmes aimed at encouraging the diverse local initiatives, *culture is the sole domain for which there are no official communitary policies at the supranational, European level*, as there are in the case of legislation, army, finance, education etc.

Therefore, the tendency of Balkanisation of this artistically driven melange is also motivated by the aspiration for perfection and evolution of those who promote popular art.

There is also another reason, however – more profound, but no less Balkanic. These musical pieces render the present state of the Balkan region. They exalt the region's prevailing mores, with their idea of easy money sometimes gained from economic emigration, which reflects a muddled society, where "banii" (money) rhymes with "duşmanii" (the enemies), where family, children, unrequited love are put on the same plane as the display of *kitsch* luxury, with unnatural hierarchies, with the bundle of "euroi" (euros) thrown at the artist by local "bosses" and "barons" (*conspicuous consumption*), manifestations redolent of the Harlemul of the 1980s, of Sicily etc.

But Balkan popular art moves forwards, through its purely artistic component. The ethno-musicologist Speranța Rădulescu, from whom I have taken over many of the above data, has called the phenomenon of the

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current artistic Balkanism "regional globalization", with an intentional contradiction in terms. The same researcher notes, however, how the next step is also made: globalization proper. More recently, the *manele* songs and all their Balkan sisters (*chalga*, *laiko* etc.) are expanding the area of their double movement:

a) They absorb in their *melting pot* elements of samba, flamenco, reggae, rock, jazz, hip-hop and even classical music...

b) They take the world by storm, insofar as bands, groups, solo singers of Balkan music (*manele*, traditional party music etc.) appear in France, Belgiuma, USA etc.

Identity in Diversity, as one might say.

5.2. Culinary art

Balkan cuisine identity is as hard to define as any other domain of the culture of the Peninsula. Considering the immensely vast spaces of travelled by food, globalized long ago – in fact, the same questions arise: what should we take into account – "the origin or recent evolution, the native place or the country/countries of adoption"[17]. Since both extremes are equally hard to determine by documentary evidence, we have to work with data taken over and standardised by their use in recent studies, if not even imposed by cultural stereotypes.

In principle, the nucleus must have been Turkish and Greek, which clearly indicates an exotic amalgam with wide reverberations: the intersection of Byzantium with the Ottoman Empire, of Greece, already infused with Mediterranean Latinity, with the Middle and Far East. And thence back to the abovementioned centre, from where it spread through the countries of former Yugoslavia, to Bulgaria, Albania, South-Carpathian Romania, then Transylvania, Hungary, to the Caucasus countries, Israel and so on. Nowadays, as we have already said, globalization is noticeable on two planes. One concerns the continuing, millennia-old migration of people: the Turks from present day Germany (about 3 million, reaching the 4th generation of residents), the ex-Yugoslavs from Austria, the Greeks, the Jews, the Lebanese, the Armenians from North America and from all over the world make gastronomy hard to circumscribe to a single geographic or cultural.

[17] Matei Pleşu, „Turcul din bătătură", in: *Dilema veche*, Dossier „Balcanii Europei", X, no. 470, p. III.

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The other would be the internal plane, that of profound essences, namely of *food and faith*, that of bodily and Christian nourishment. In their search for origins, specialists have come up with a typical formula of the Balkans: "*the baptized Turk and the Turkified Christian*" (Matei Pleşu)[18]. The three "specific" Balkan dishes are based on minced meat – wrapped or not, but always mixed – in a more or less local, national or regional fashion – with rice, vegetables and various spices, especially. These include a) *sarmaua* or *dolma* (according to whether it is wrapped in vine leaves, cabbage leaves or stuffed into various vagetables (bell-peppers, courgettes, tomatoes etc.); b) *chiftea* or *pljeskavica* (meatballs) and c) *mititelul* or *čevapčici* (barbecued meat-rolls). Originally, says the author quoted above, all these are relatives of the Turkish-Arab *kebab*, Christianised by being "baptized with pork" and associated with Orthodox religious holidays. Conversely, Christians still preserve a little minced mutton, to enhance the holy flavour. Anyway, mutton is a common element of the economic and religious area, powerfully symbolised both in the *Bible* and the *Koran*.

The same holds true about *Pastrama* – the fourth "Balkan" dish – dried beef, originally, then also dried mutton etc.

As far as beverages are concerned, things are less clear. The aroma of coffee comes from the Orient, of course, but today it is universal – particularly South-American, where it was brought from Africa. In the Balkans it has only pervaded down to a certain level of civilization – that is down to the urban slums, while in the countryside it has only caught on among the members of the rural "genteel society" (mayor, schoolmaster, priest, notary, gendarme). The other inhabitants of rural localities prefer stronger distillations. But the same thing happened in the latter case. These beverages permeated the Orient, disguised "under the veil of aromas" that were subtle, intense, natural – of mastic rasin and aniseed – only down to a certain social and cultural level, more precisely, to the "higher" social classes. (Nowadays, Oriental young people entered globalization straight away, out of the parents' sight, with the help of whisky...).

What is specifically Romanian herer? Maybe the association of foods/beverages: *micii* (barbecued meat-rolls) "are washed down" with beer (and pickled cucumbers?); *sarmalele* (stuffed cabbage leaves) "go well"

[18] *Ibidem*. Cf. and Radu Anton Roman, 2004.

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with hominy/polenta (the national dish, indisputably, whatever they may say about *polenta* etc., especially in its soft variant, supposedly unexplosive, according to a standing joke) and, of course, with "ţuică" (plum brandy), while chiftelele "are served" with mashed potatoes and grilled pepper salad – I got it from Radu Anton Roman and at home, from my mother.

According to the study quoted above, it is inconceivable to envisage common, peaceful and enduring fatherland in the Balkans, "Europe's gunpowerder barrel". Even now, as always, the wars between Christians and Muslims have just ended, not without the intervention of the world's powerful states, while inter-ethnic conflicts are continually brewing, with short but frequent outbursts throughout the countries of the Peninsula. By contrast, on the gastronomic plane, a kind of ecumenism has developed over the past few centuries in the Balkans – tasty and savoury, able to appease any dogmatic fury.

Naturally, if we have discussed about *origins* and about *evolutions in the composition of diverse mixtures* (gastronomic, ethnic, religious, cultural), we should also add, as is usual in any analysis of identity construction, the positioning in relation to the "Other". Here, alterity does not consist in identifying similar foods, possibly identical elsewhere in the world. The three foods based on minced meat are to be found in the American *hamburger,* so modern, so notorious a *brand* and so widespread in Europe (whence it must have come, since it is called "Hamburg mince"), in Asia, in Africa...Here, too, on the American continent, was where, by tradition, pastrami was attested. The proof is in the road picnic scenes of the period representations realised in the patently American *cowboy* films.

But cinematography is another story...

5.3. Cinematographic art

One of the most recent brands of identity is Balkan cinematography, as it has been known ever since the 1980s, although it still appears to be *in statu nascendi*. The successful films released by Theo Angelopulos and particularly Emir Kusturica are said to have imposed the "ethno" genre in an art which hardly lends itself to national or regional identifications[19]. In

[19] Cf. Marian Ţuţui, „Cinematografia balcanică în şi dincolo de clişee", in: *Dilema veche* (the Supplement „Dosar Balcanii Europei"), X, no. 470, p. VII. The author mentions

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fact, it was started by the *outsiders*, great masters such as Roman Polanski, Francis Ford Coppola, Woody Allen and others or, alternatively, great Euro-Atlantic film directors of Balkan origin (such as Elia Kazan, Jean Negulesco, Henri Verneuil, Michael Kakoyannis, Costa Gavras and others).

The international awards won by Romanian, Serbian, Croatian, Bulgarian directors (noteworthy, among the Romanians, are Cristian Mungiu, A. Porumboiu, Călin Netzel) sustain the idea that there exists a Balkan filmography. The content is the same: a world of contrasts (wealth and poverty, passion and apathy, violence and tenderness), exotic landscapes, extreme meteorological conditions (on top of all the spiritual and economic contrasts), devoutness verging on fanaticism or, conversely, revolting indifference. As film critics observe, Romanian and Balkan cinema is here to stay: as the barriers of ideological censorship fell, there sprang a fresh generation of film-makers, vigorous and talented, animated by an immense desire for artistic self-expression. These people, or only their parents, have lived incredible experiences under communism, so they have a story to tell. They have their own particular mentality, which means they usher in a new spirit to the reception and cinematographic rendition of reality.

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Romanian cultural identity is, therefore, imbued in all its components by a fundamental Balkanism funciar.

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"Scandinavian cinema", "Latin-American cinema", in order to illustrate the possibilities of national, regional or continental definitions of the seventh art.

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