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The dark intimacy: maps, identities, acts of identification

Alexander Kiossev attempts a cognitive mapping of the multiple, fragmented Balkan identities. Who recognizes himself as Balkan and what customary practices are supposed to reveal a "Balkan communality"? To what extent have the Balkans been constructed as a negative mirrordiscourse to a European identity?

The label "The Balkans" shares with other clichés a kind of automatic essentialism – it is a geographic metonym that presupposes the existence of a nongeographical referent. In political debates, journalistic essays, and everyday conversations this is a self-evident, unquestionable presumption: The name's usage indicates that the Balkans exists as a region with a certain identity established by certain common features. One can ask what exactly these relevant features are – are they historical? cultural? political? – and this will be one possible "politics of questioning." Unfortunately, it shares the presumptions of the clichés.

It is also possible to ask different questions, ones that don't take these presumptions for granted. For instance, one can ask about the uncertain and dynamic relations between names, territorial spans, borders, social groups, individuals, and identities.

The presupposed referent of "the Balkans" is ambivalent. First it claims that there is some cultural and political entity, localized within a certain territory, that can be described by a list of common predicates, following the logical model "X is determined by the possession of the qualities a, b, c, d, ... x, y, z." For instance, the inhabitants of X are a clear, homogeneous group because they share a common religion, language, historical narrative, and pattern of behavior, as well as everyday practices and rituals, political and economic traditions, canons of art and literature, et cetera.¹ Some researchers claim, however, that the determination of collective identity using such a list of predicates is a logical mistake, because it invokes an unjustifiably essentialist core of qualities while excluding those considered to be nonessential. The German scholar Lutz Niethammer claims that: "Strictly speaking, a collective statement is always a false statement. It distinguishes itself from the simple collective signifiers – for instance, 'the Romans' or 'the women' – by the fact that it isn't a simple, shortened linguistic expression, but pretends (confronted with the self-evident internal difference), that the common features are based on a certain essential core and ascribes to these common features a special meaning.

Other authors indicate that, from a logical and pragmatic standpoint, there are several types of identities: logical (where two terms are mutually substitutable in all possible contexts, that is, they share the same "full and close" list of

predicates), "numeric" (where the list of predicates does not fully coincide, but an observer could verify that the spatio-temporal continuity of the object in question was not interrupted), and "personal identity" (where self-consciousness, memory, and narration indicate that "I" is the same "I").²

Collective cultural identity is a fourth, different type, where numeric identity (spatio-temporal continuity plus the incomplete list of shared predicates) is intensified by the political medium. In the case of collective identity, "shared predicates" are not only a question of cognition but also a question of (political) recognition. "I recognize that 'we' (you, I, he ...) share the same essential qualities, you recognize the same for me and the others, he recognizes the same, et cetera." Here the "essentialist reduction" is not a matter of the observer's cognitive illusion, but a question of internal self-recognition and of the self-proclamation of the group "itself" (the illusion, being essentialist from a cognitive point of view, is nevertheless constitutive for the group itself). These mutual and multiple acts of recognition are often accompanied by the feeling of "belonging."

Therefore, to claim that group X is determined by its cultural identity (as the Balkan cliché implicitly does) can be quite an ambivalent claim. Does this claim point to a numerical identity fixed by an external observer, or does it designate a feeling of similarity shared by the members of the observed community? Does it imply "belonging"? Or does it do all of the above?

Things get even harder when we reflect on the fact that the "feeling of belonging" is different in the case of the group than in the case of the individual. In fact, the group cannot "feel," but can only produce the institutional, ritual, or discursive preconditions for feelings, which will then be shared by individuals. The group declares its "belonging to itself" (i.e., its recognition of its own identity) through publicly understood and institutionally reproducible symbols and norms: It maintains (invents, creates, et cetera) tradition, worships a pantheon of heroes and martyrs, fulfills missions, tells narratives, envisages imaginary "homelands," and so on.

The individual has a flexible relationship to the symbolic and institutional identity of the group. In the process of socialization as well as later, in his or her mature life, the individual is caught in peculiar dialectics. At least two alternatives are open to the group member. He or she can either internalize the group symbols or distance him or herself from them; the latter option alienates the individual from the collective "belonging."

Thus, along with questioning the numeric identity of the Balkans, one should also ask whether or not there are groups or individuals who feel that they belong to the Balkans. The first question is, "What are the Balkans?" (Its more sophisticated version might be, "can we describe the Balkans in a satisfactory way?") The second question is then, "Who is Homo balkanicus?" In other words, what collective, and what individual, recognizes itself as Balkan? These questions might further lead us to several others: Does Homo balkanicus exist at all? What nuances distinguish the feeling of belonging, or non-belonging, to the Balkans?

Two Suspicious Examples

Let us approach the subject by means of a very typical personal/collective experience, which is not documented (and remains therefore unproven) but is nevertheless quite common. Every Bulgarian, Greek, or Serb who has spent a

long time elsewhere in Europe knows that if he or she craves a dear old "manja" (meal), he had best go to a Greek restaurant or a Turkish shop. The Bulgarian might order his meals in the Greek restaurant using unfamiliar names – tatsiki, suviaki, giros – but the taste will be much like that of tarator and shish-kebab, whilst the sarmi and musaka stand a good chance of being just like my mother's sarmi and musaka. The Turkish shop will sell white brine cheese, vine leaves, khalva, kashkaval, and boza, as well as the beloved gherkins – real sour ones, unlike the sterilised insipidness they sell in German, French, or Czech supermarkets. Kebabcheta (cevapcici in Serbia and in Macedonia) are obviously a common Balkan phenomenon as are "sljivovica" ("slivova" in Bulgarian, "cuika" in Romanian) and sturdy grape brandy ("loza" in Serbian, "lozova" in Macedonian, "grozdanka" in Bulgarian), to say nothing of shopska salad and emblematic spices like mint, savory, basil, et cetera, which set the overall profile of the Balkan taste.

And then there is another experience – similar, yet different. Each of us Balkan guys who have been abroad knows that we can recognize another Balkan guy by his or her gait, by other mannerisms, by the inimitable mechanics of the body on the street, by the way he or she gets on and off the subway, jay-walks at crossroads, approaches an unknown individual, by his or her behavior at the table, et cetera. It is a kind of spontaneous and abrupt re, an "a-ha" experience of momentous (maybe a little bit joyful, a little bit shameful) identification – But isn't *he or she just like me?*

Identities versus Acts of Identification

In his famous essay *The Mirror Stage as Formative in the Function of the I*, Lacan wrote the following concerning the identification process in a six month old baby: "Unable yet to walk, or even to stand up ... he (the nursling in front of the mirror) nevertheless surmounts in a flutter of jubilant activity, the obstructions of his support in order to fix his attitude in a more or less leaning forward position, and bring back an instantaneous aspect of the image to hold it in its gaze."³ He speaks further about the "problematic libidinal dynamism" of this moment, describing the mirror phase as an act of "identification in the full sense which analysis gives to this term: the transformation which occurs with the subject when he assumes an image."

What is of interest for us here is a kind of structural homology between acts of individual mirror identification and acts of spontaneous cultural identification (self-recognition in the mirror, or mirrors, of culturally similar others). In the latter case the *a-ha experience* and the "*libidinal investment*" are definitely there; present also is the interdependence between "Innenwelt" and "Umwelt" (although all these relations are essentially transformed). And as we will see further, the strange dialectic between dynamism and stillness (the jubilant *activity*, the desire to interact versus the attempt *to behold, to hold* in the gaze) is present too. In fact, one can claim that this dialectic is repeated and transformed on every level that separates the nursling from the mature member of society, and hence at every stage of the psychic and social development of the individual and/or the group. It persists in the opposition between the dynamic mirror stage and the static "symbolic" stage (Lacan describes this transition in metaphors expressive of this opposition: He labels the symbolic identity of the individual as "objectification,"⁴ an "armour of alienating identity," rigidity, "structure,"⁵ et cetera). But elsewhere he points out that the static forms of symbolic "Identity" are not permanently fixed, that signifiers (identity models) float and change, libidinal investments and acts of identification continue and, as he puts it, "to break out of the circle from the

Innenwelt into Umwelt generates the endless quadrature of the inventing of the ego.⁶ So, could we assume that this endless dialectic between flux and fix, between identities and acts of identification, persists in the sphere of culture as well? Society and culture create a lot of possible mirrors for the individual or group, a lot of opportunities for identification. At the same time they try in various ways to force the individual and/or the group to assume a certain "stable" identity, a rigid structure, a fixed and stable totality. Therefore the play between the *a-ha* experience and the "armor," between the libidinal dynamism of spontaneous self-recognition and the "objectification in stable identities," seems infinite in the social and cultural realms.

Everyday Practices and the Maps of Anthropological Similarities

All of the above "examples" – cuisine, eating habits, interpersonal communication, social etiquette – belong to the realm of customary practices. They are a part of the practical and symbolic universe of culture, which is the object of anthropological study. In brief, one is dealing here with "forms of life" (Wittgenstein). Following these "uncertain" examples, could we take a risk and presume a certain common Balkan anthropological type – a "numeric identity" of a deeply embedded "form of life," shared by these ethnic groups and nations that so aggressively pretend to be different from one another? It would be even riskier to presume that this is *the form of life*, the ultimate and deep Balkan communality, which typically remains invisible because it is repressed by the "armors" and "structures" of the dominant national, confessional, and linguistic identities. But its ultimate reality is so strong that in spite of all repression (or because of it, as in "the return of the repressed"), it always bursts out suddenly, becoming visible and forcing the individual into an overwhelming, unintended act of identification: *Isn't he or she just like me?* One might even be tempted to see, in this occasional and unexpected *a-ha* experience of identification, a regression to a certain Balkan mirror-stage: an abrupt and non-voluntary self-recognition in the Balkan Other, a stigmatized label that all emancipated Romanians, Serbs, Greeks, Bulgarians, Croats, et cetera, are eager to avoid.

What might this common Balkan anthropological type be like? Is it feasible to go beyond the random and provisional personal identifications and describe it in an explicit and analytically disciplined manner? Let us attempt such a description and see whether it is possible at all.

A hypothetical "objective observer" (i.e., a positivistic historian or anthropologist), could easily demonstrate that in previous centuries, the rural communities of the Balkans shared a lot of common features in their forms of life. Besides the similarities born of common natural and social conditions (climate, specifics of geography and agriculture, traditional types of livelihood, patterns of settlement and trade, underdeveloped infrastructure, pre-modern kinship and family codes, demographics), and besides the shared "heroic forms of life" or the "common cultural heritage" (shared myths, fairy tales, jokes and rituals, wandering "folklore" motifs, etc.), the fictitious observer will probably also point to the underlying reason for these similarities. The entire region shares a common macro-social frame which originated in the Byzantine and Ottoman legacies and resulted in a lack of Christian aristocracy, a relatively free peasantry, small estates, a specific position of the church, et cetera.⁷

On a more detailed ethnographic level, one could extend the list of similarities, drawing parallels between the ritual cultures of various Balkan ethnicities or areas. Ethnographic and folklorist research in the Bulgarian-Romanian

Danube corridor has clearly documented common forms of rural economy on both sides of the Danube. The societies share analogous links between settled and nomadic forms of life, conduct similar seasonal migrations and consequently exhibit functional similarities in clothing, architecture, housing, cooking, and rituals.⁸ The cult of bread is very popular throughout the area, and the main elements of dress are also shared (long, homespun, male or female garments; breeches, shirts, sandals, fur coats, skirts, breast pieces, and sashes).⁹ There are also common or very similar holidays and rituals. The most common are Christmas caroling, the "sourvakane" (Christmas back-slapping and well-wishing), and Easter. Around Easter there are many overlapping pagan holidays such as "martenitsas" (white-and-red figurines), which is called Tsvetnitsa in Bulgarian and Florille in Rumanian; St. Lazar's fertility rituals overlap with the Rousal gangs (which are in Rumanian called Calus or Calusari); the rain-making rituals – like Skaloyan in Bulgarian, Kaloyani in German, and Calolanul, or Scaloianul, or Ene in Rumanian – overlap with butterfly rituals – Paparuda in Rumanian – and with Bulgarian Eموvden and Rumanian, Dragaica, Cumma, and Sinziene.¹⁰

One could abandon this narrower perspective and compare more distant Balkan areas and broader territories. The list could be extended to other cross-border similarities, for example, among Romanian, Dobrudjan, Macedonian, and Greek costumes; among Bulgarian or Macedonian ring-dances (horo), Serbian dances (kolo), Romanian dances (hora), and the Greek sirtaki, et cetera. Later, parallels could be sought not only on a broad transnational scale but from a micro-perspective in urban environments and architecture. For instance, there are many cultural and architectural similarities among multiethnic villages, and among cities that share the multicultural Ottoman legacy. The famous Plovdiv houses (celebrated in Bulgarian national historiography as the paragon of Bulgarian Renaissance architecture) have often belonged to rich Greek or Armenian merchants. The semi-Ottoman, semi-European style of their architecture and interior design and furniture can hardly be described as "purely Bulgarian."

Another set of similarities will surface if we focus on cuisine. Take, for example, the Bulgarian, Greek, Romanian, Armenian, Macedonian national dishes. The Romanian anthropologists Vintila Mihailescu and Radu Anton Roman begin their article "How National Is 'the National Cuisine'" with the following:

Whoever visits the Romanian restaurants in Montreal may savour some of the "typically Romanian" dishes which are like "home made" – *sarmale, mija, chiftele, pilaf, musaca, etc.* Then if one fancies going to a Bulgarian restaurant, one may have the pleasure of relishing some of the "typically Bulgarian" dishes: *sarmale, mija, chiftele, pilaf, musaca, etc.* Finally, one can check in at a very good Serb restaurant, where a band of Gypsies play Serb music (quite familiar to us, too) and where the chief offers a "typically Serb" menu: *sarmale, mija, chiftele, pilaf, musaca, etc.*¹¹

Other similarities also exist – in architecture and manners, celebrations, attitudes, and household organization.

Differences and Alternative Mappings

The problem with such descriptions, however, is that the list of similarities (which from a logical point of view should amount to a complete description – a full list of predicates, determining and delimiting a certain identity) could never be complete. It remains open–changing, heterogeneous, "multileveled," and infinite. What's more, it could be easily paralleled by another list: In addition to the infinite and heterogeneous enumeration of similarities, one could come up with an infinite and no less heterogeneous enumeration of differences.

Let us once again provide some examples. Historians speak of the great regional differences within the Ottoman empire (especially among Bosnia, Rumelia, and Northern Africa in the area of agriculture or in the way the "Ottoman legacy" was appropriated by the young national states¹²). Perhaps the single most important differences, however, are confessional¹³: The Eastern Orthodox, Muslim, Catholic, and even Evangelical communities comprise a quaint internal patchwork, a differentiated mosaic of borders and crossings. Not only do their official doctrines differ, but they underlie differing practises that include feasts, bans, rituals, costume, cuisine, and sexual mores. No less significant are the variances among the highland, lowland, Mediterranean, and Black Sea regions of the peninsula, which engage in diverse types of trade and cultural communication with the rest of the world, as well as varying patterns of commerce and migration. All this may have (and it did have) a powerful bearing on the differences among everyday life forms, on wealth and poverty, on the openness or hermetism of these relatively autonomous islands of everyday culture.

If we look also to Balkan nomads and seminomads (groups such as the Kazalbash, the Yurucks, and the Gagaouz),¹⁴ we can enumerate yet another array of differences and nuances within this Balkan panorama. Furthermore, if we account for the degree of regional involvement in the civilizational orbits of the Great Empires, or in wars, revolutions, modernization processes, and the like,¹⁵ the variances among the peninsula's regions and provinces will change their territorial contours several times more. The invisible (and often politically instrumental) border between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires divides the peninsula even today. It does so not only in terms of politics and religion, but also in everyday life. But the Habsburg–Ottoman border hardly coincides either with contemporary state borders, or with the chaotic multitude of overlapping borders that divide local rural communities. The imperial division is a relative one, too. Cuisine, for example, is definitely influenced and "mapped out" by the empires as well as by the great religions, "minor" cultural influences, random historical fusion, distant contacts, and long durée" legacies. Experts claim that Balkan cuisine descends from the Arab or Ottoman versions of Persian cuisine. Its "natural" borders (which coincide neither with the former empires nor with the contemporary nation states) can be drawn somewhere around Zagreb, where it abuts the mid–European front of chocolate cakes, sugary salads, and milky potages, while to the South, at Rijeka, it shades into the Dalmatian/Mediterranean cuisine of frutti di mare, pizzas, and spaghetti. But the poor highlanders' cuisine, as well as the cuisine of various religious minorities and nomads, remain outside this map; and the various national "cultivations," appropriations, and emblematisations of traditional cuisine demand a different history, different maps.¹⁶

We can observe the unresolved and multidimensional interplay of similarities and differences even through the example of a single cultural phenomenon. In the article quoted above, Mihalesku and Roman praise the "common" Balkan dishes sarmale, chiftale, pilaf, et cetera – but they also write:

In the above story, the description of "sarmale" as a "typically" Romanian, Bulgarian, as well as Serb dish was obviously suggestive of the existence of a common Balkan background, but at the same time it demonstrated the differences: it almost never was the same kind of food. Even when referring to the Romanian sarmale, can we speak of the same type of meal in case of, on the one hand the sarmalute, wrapped in vine leaves, which Moldavian housewives take great lengths to make "as small as a fingernail" and serve with a spoonful of sour cream, and, on the other hand, the Oltenian sarmale which are folded in cabbage leaves and are "as large as a palm"?¹⁷

The Romanian anthropologists further point out that there is always great regional diversity, "which makes it possible for the same dish to be utterly different from one region to another."¹⁸

Thus, we have learned a simple and well-known Nietzschean lesson: that the cognitive "mapping" of a field (in this case, the field of everyday practices in a certain region) is always pluralistic and can be viewed from a variety of perspectives. A perspective, free from all possible ideological premises, cannot describe an "essential" Balkan anthropological type. It can simply articulate and re-articulate this field in alternative ways, producing a series of similarities and/or differences from a multitude of possible points of view. The various acts of cognition draw "borders" between given (actually cognitively constructed) identities, grafting sets of commonalities onto the "territory" in a controversial and manifold way. But the very projection of these similarities or differences onto the given area (i.e., "region," peninsula, "the Balkans") is unreliable, too. Couldn't we assume that the "peninsula" is itself a construct – that it is just a part of this relativistic mapping? (One could further compare Albanians in Albania with Albanians and Italians in Southern Italy, popular culture in Thrace with the popular culture in Anatolia, et cetera, and thus demonstrate that the interaction of differences and similarities neither begins nor ends at the borders of the area called "the Balkans").

Maps of Identities

This seeming relativism is obstructed by the fact that the "territory" is anything but empty for arbitrary cognitive projections. Today, just like centuries ago, it is full of people who clearly recognize their shared characteristics and stable belonging. For centuries, various ethnic, linguistic, confessional, cultural, and other groups have drawn and redrawn borders through this territory (using various forms of military, economic, and cultural power), and in one way or another they have tried to impose rigid models of identity on their members.

It is well known that the Ottoman Empire, although a strong imperial state, allowed some cultural, religious, and administrative autonomy to its vassal communities. As a consequence, these local communities (especially in their predominant, rural variant) became hermetic, autarchic, self-reproducing, and isolated from one another. (Non-intensive trade and bad infrastructure also contributed to that isolation.) Their strong, internal, patriarchal orders subjected the individual to a fixed religious identity. The strength and rigidity of those identities can be illustrated by the fact that in Medieval Ottoman cities, ethnic groups and religious communities lived in close proximity for centuries without mixing or fusing their identities. They lived in different neighborhoods, celebrated different holidays, performed different rituals, wore different clothes,¹⁹ and often – in spite of the everyday communication –

labeled one another in a pejorative way and even hated one another. Under these circumstances ethnonymes, destined later to become national names, didn't designate inclusive, great, homogeneous "imagined communities," but instead referred to the rigid internal divisions among small local communities. In the city of Plovdiv, for instance, until the middle of the nineteenth century, the contemporary "national" ethnonymes articulated the social hierarchy between town and village: "Greek" meant "a citizen of Plovdiv" and "Bulgarian" meant "a simple peasant."²⁰ Even today, examples of this multicultural separatism and isolationism persist. There are still areas in Northeastern Bulgaria where neighboring Bulgarian (Orthodox), Turkish, and Pavlikyan (Catholic) villages lead separate and relatively isolated economic, religious, and cultural lives.

In fact, the play of cognitive perspectives (the changeable recognition of similarities and differences, and their use for delineating certain identical entities) was never free of the historically, politically, and culturally superimposed constraints of the existing identities. Nor was it free from their multiple overlapping tensions, conflicts, competitions, and struggles. The link was always dialectical: The politics of a certain group's identity secretly determined the reception and cognition of "the similar and the different." Inversely, the "recognized" similarities or differences then strengthened and stabilized the initial identities, inscribing them into the group's narrative. The alternative perspective of another community could, in its turn, contest the status quo, highlight other similarities and differences, narrate other stories, and try to re-articulate the mapping of identities. Such, for example was (still is, in some religious communities) the religious regulation of food symbolism in the Ottoman Empire. In spite of all the similarities in eating habits, in spite of the solid penetration of Turkish-Persian cuisine throughout the peninsula, there was a widespread prohibition against members of one religious community eating together with members of other confessions.²¹ The similarities, the influences, and even the fusion of the cuisines were usually not mentioned at all; what mattered was that Christians ate pork and Muslims didn't. Against the backdrop of this archaic attitude (the food of others was deemed "dirty" and repellent²²; in popular folklore, the image of unclean, alien food is a stable, repetitive stereotype²³) the emblematic food differences delineating religious identities were much more important than the similarities.

Does that mean that the figure of the observer, free of any conflicting politics of identity or politically burdened acts of (re)cognition, is a mere fiction? What about the great army of scholars (historians, ethnographers, anthropologists, et cetera) who have been trying to play this role for the last 150 years?

Politics of Cognition

Let us distinguish several types of such "observers." Needless to say, these are "ideal types"; reality offers various "deviations" and admixtures.

A. Patriotic scholar

The first type is the *patriotic scholar* whose research is embedded in the nationalistic ideological project of the nineteenth century. Local scholars such as the Slovene Jernej Kopitar; the Serb Vuk Karadzic; the Bosnian Stefan Verkovic; the Croat Joseph Strossmayer; the Bulgarians Georgi Rakovsky, Petko Slaveykov, and Lyuben Karavelov; the Bulgarian/Macedonian Miladinov brothers; and the Albanian Thimi Mitko were inspired by the example of the German "Ossianism,"²⁴ either through direct contacts with

German scholars²⁵ or through the mediation of Czech, Slovak, and Russian Slavophiles.²⁶ Thus, they began to study the history of the Slavic languages, to compile bibliographies, to write grammars, to collect archeological remnants and medieval manuscripts, to publish folk songs and fairy tales, to collect artifacts with ethnographic value and exhibit them in museums. During the period 1850–1900, several interconnected academic disciplines were created in the newly established national universities. Along with political history, these were philology (the historical study of language and literature), "national" folklore (its literary and linguistic history), and traditional culture (clothing, architecture, food, holidays, et cetera – the objects of ethnography and *Volkskunde*, later also of ethnology and anthropology).

The diverse facts that these new fields of scholarship selected and analyzed had one similarity (and it was considered to be a defining one): they were considered to be representations and manifestations of the national. In its deepest meaning, all the selected and analyzed data was supposed to manifest the unique metaphysical essence of the particular collective soul, the national Self.²⁷ This was not a unique invention of Balkan historians, folklorists, or ethnographers, but an established norm in the humanities in an age of nationalism. Wilhelm von Humboldt formulated this norm: For him, national identity is *der unsichtbare Teil jeder Tatsache*, an invisible part of every fact. The very form and institutionalized standards of academic endeavor allowed the patriotic scholars to presume, with Herderian and Humboldean frivolity, that despite all differences and heterogeneity, linguistic laws, oral culture, works of art and literature, liturgical manuscripts, archeological remnants and such were finally identical in their deepest roots. They formed a precious heritage, an antiquity, the "fruit" or the "expression" of the Popular Spirit (just alternate the predicate – Bulgarian, Greek, Albanian). The dynastic glory and the national cuisine, the revolutionary heroism and the folk costume were considered to be manifestations of the same national metaphysical essence, and thus they were firmly enfolded within the modern concept of "cultural heritage."²⁸ This explains why academic specialization was negligible at the time. If the facts in their deep essence were similar, then literary experts could be cultural historians as well, and historians – ethnographers, folklorists – could be linguists and archaeologists.

As I mentioned above, it was taken for granted that the spatial span of the national "fruits" coincided in a natural way with the boundaries of the imagined homeland. Thus these academic disciplines in fact reaffirmed the national mapping (and the official national identity) and were even used to justify territorial claims. Beyond the politically and militarily determined borders of the Balkan nation states, the cultural heritage was an expression of the deep, trans-empirical unity of all dialects, of all attitudes or versions of material culture. Thus, it served as an imposed framework for both the focus and the limits of research.

This form of cognitive politics proved to be a very stable one. It is still in force in most of the national cultural institutions in the Balkans. Analyzing the history of Romanian ethnology, Mihailescu wrote:

Thus, ethnology goes along with – and is part of – this political process (the shifting of the ethnographic element from local daily life to national representative culture) for more than a century, performing a kind of *defense and illustration* of the authenticity (bridging past and value), unity and specificity of Romanian popular – and thus national – culture. In this

process, such ideological ends were incorporated as scientific means of research. This self-evidence became such that Ion Vladutiti could open his 1973 handbook of "Romanian ethnography" stating that *"The ethnographic data represent, in themselves, proofs of the unity of the Romanian popular culture, expressed in a variety of local forms, the continuity and specificity of our popular culture."*²⁹

B. Western scholar

The second type is that of the *Western scholar* of the nineteenth century (variants include the ethnographer, anthropologist, historian, German scholar in *Volkskunde*, and comparative philologist). As a foreigner, he or she seems free both from involvement in local, pre-modern cultures and from the ideological framework conditioning the academic knowledge and cultural institutions of the nation states. Hence, it seems that this figure has the potential to describe similarities and differences in an "autonomous" way: to forget the "natural" unity of the national cultural territory and to draw new borders by articulating alternative cultural affiliations and to some degree disregarding the local feelings of belonging.

Of course, most of these people were not free enough. They were passionately bound to one or another of the powerful ideological doctrines of their times (pan-Germanism, pan-Slavism, Philhellenism, Turkophilia, et cetera). Therefore, their scholarly scrutiny, too, was pre-conditioned by an ideological doctrine. Here the ideological frameworks were not national, but those of "races," "brotherhoods of nations eternal alliances," "natural cultural dominance," or linguistic genealogies. The policy of selecting and interpreting facts was comparative and transnational, thus creating alternative imagined communities.

This was the case, for instance, with Czech Slavic studies of the nineteenth century, which, under the leadership of Pavel Safarik attempted to develop an "autonomous" philological scholarship of (and also for) the small Slavic nations. Safarik's presentation of the autonomous, unified, and continuous development of the Slavic languages and literatures, *Geschichte der slavischen Sprache und Literatur nach allen Mundarten* published in 1825 presented an ideological and scholarly challenge not only to German philology and its idea of German cultural dominance, but also to the imperial perspective inscribed in Russian Slavonic studies. The latter interpreted the development of Slavic languages and literatures through its own Russian Slavophilia – that is, it envisioned all the small Slavic rivers ending in the great Russian cultural sea. Free from such Russian ideological teleology, Safarik preferred a cognitive strategy that stressed the similarities between relatively distant Slavic nations (Czechs and Bulgars, for instance) in contrast to their non-Slavic neighbors. Thus, regardless of whether its origin was Russian or Czech, the Slavophilic mapping of the Balkans differed considerably from the Ottoman cultural and political mapping, which disregarded the supposed "Slavendom" and articulated the peninsula administratively, in terms of sandjaks, "milets," and confessions, only to the Empire's own (belated) strive for modernization.³⁰

Another example of this type of observer is the famous German Slavic scholar of the 1930s and 1940s, Gerhard Gesemann. A comparatist as well as a Slavist, he nevertheless transgressed the boundaries of his discipline and wrote a book about "Heroische Lebensform"³¹ ("Heroic Form of Life") in the Balkans. In that book, Gesemann disregarded the nationalistic and Slavophilic

ideological mappings of the anthropological cultures there. This freedom to see new similarities and differences, however, had its costs. Envisaging the similarities among the Balkan communities and clearly disregarding national borders and Slavic affiliations, he created types such as "the parasitic Balkanian"³² and "the Levantene," and he was inclined to interpret them as "biological types of survival," thus coming close to the assumptions of racism and biologism.³³

One can continue to articulate the possible politics of cognition by scrutinizing figures such as the English anthropologist studying "primitive cultures," the colonial administrator (whose statistical and administrative maps gradually became a bitter post-colonial reality³⁴), the mobile network scholar, participating in the current global "Invisible college" of cultural anthropology and moving freely between various "identity politics," et cetera. They are all important within the framework of the Balkan problematic, but I will leave them outside my paper.

The Dynamic Field of Identifications

In this chapter I explored only the problems and paradoxes of the elusive "numeric" identity of the Balkans ("Are we able to describe the Balkans in a satisfactory way?"). The other group of problems, those of self-recognized and experienced identity, were addressed only in relation to the diversity of possible cognitive mappings. Thus, we still don't have an answer to the second group of questions: Does *Homo balkanicus* exist at all? Who is he or she? Do certain groups or individuals mutually recognize a shared list of predicates (qualities, similarities)? Under which social and discursive circumstances do they recognize themselves as "Balkan"? What relation does their supposed Balkan identity bear to their national, confessional, ethnic, or other belonging? How has their collective imagination been structured within the spatial frame of the peninsula? What are the emotional nuances of Balkan identification? All these remain open questions.

Although a single paper hardly suffices to answer them all, I will try to address very briefly some of the above questions. I can't stress too strongly that my aim here is to create a certain perspective rather than to propose real, detailed answers.

Bearing in mind that individual acts of identification and official identity patterns are bound in a constant dialectic of flux and fix, let us try to approach the situation we described. We are faced with a lot of overlapping cognitive maps and a multitude of possible or actual identities with competing cognitive strategies. In such a context, the acts of individual identification are performed not against stable identities ("objectifications," "armors," and "rigid structures," as Lacan suggested); rather, they take place in an unstable field, where various identity models are in competition; sometimes they even contradict one another, or transform one another. Two hypotheses (which are, from a certain point of view, complementary) are possible here. According to the first, such conditions could create a feeling of uncertainty and anxiety; deprived of orientation, clear models, and stable positions, the individual doesn't know who he or she is. According to the second, such a dynamic context affords individuals more opportunities and more "free space" for maneuvering; it actually enables them to better display their own energy and choice in confronting, or even rejecting, imposed models.

And yet, several factors seem to influence strongly the dynamics of such a cognitively mobile field. Like magnetic poles of attraction or repulsion, they structure the power profile of the space in which groups and individuals are forced to live, to experience their identities or fulfill their acts of identification.

Besides the memory of pre-modern identities (and its provisional everyday re-appropriation), there are at least two crucial factors that play essential roles in structuring this field of competing forces. Roughly speaking, they are the Western politics of Balkan representation (one can call it the discourse of the Significant Other), and the Ego-discourse of self-representation (the officially and institutionally imposed national identity). Nonetheless, as we shall see, there are also a lot of other possible "identity politics" that spring up from the gaps, niches, and breaks in the field.

The "Two Balkans" as Constraints

The Balkans-cliche – peculiarly enough – conditions this field in two different, if not opposite ways.

Against the background of the multitude of possible mappings, the metonymy "the Balkans," which is so automatically used by Western politicians, human rights activists, journalists, and experts on the region, proves to be a powerful symbolic gesture of reduction and simplification. It neglects and discards the relevance of all the differences and similarities mentioned above (it can even imply disrespect, ignorance, scorn). It simplifies the sophisticated historical and cultural lives of a diversity of human groups on the peninsula and replaces them with a stable "core" identity, which the Western media likes to see. In short, this metonymy is a part of the discourse on *Balkanism*.

In contemporary scholarship, *Balkanism* is interpreted as the dominant Western strategy for representing the East European periphery. In the last ten years it has been critically analyzed in several publications.³⁵ According to Larry Wolf, the symbolic geography of Europe was reshaped during the Enlightenment, and the backwardness and "barbarism" previously attributed to the north was projected over the southeast. Maria Todorova's inspiring book, *Imagining the Balkans* claims that: "Unlike Orientalism, which is a discourse about an imputed opposition, Balkanism is a discourse of imputed ambiguity."³⁶ Todorova draws attention to the Balkans' "transitory character," their "in-betweenness ... [which] could have made them simply an incomplete other; instead they are constructed not as 'other' but as an incomplete 'self'."³⁷

As a rhetorical technique, the discourse on *Balkanism* is double-bottomed, meaning that it always uses two sets of predicates. The first describes details close to the undeniable facts, both historical and contemporary: bloody Balkan wars, political intrigues and irrationality, nationalist hysteria, senseless fragmentation into weak small states, governmental chaos, poverty, economic, and intellectual backwardness. The second series of predicates disregards the facts and details engaged in the ancient asymmetric power play between Occidental and Oriental identities, bearing instead a chthonic aura. It reproduces the archaic sign of mock, shame, and nausea against the "semi-other" who prevents the completeness of the Occidental self. On the level of connotations and tropes, it implicitly claims that the peninsula is a disgusting and obscure place "where everything is perverted," a contaminated kingdom of repressed European demons: cruelty, machismo, hysterical passion, murderousness, barbarism, ignorance, arrogance, undisciplined eroticism, pollution, forbidden corporeal pleasures, and dirtiness.³⁸

Thus, given that Balkanism is a stigmatizing discourse, one is forced to reformulate the questions above. Now we could ask: "Under what circumstances would human groups or individuals prefer, over a variety of other options, to recognize themselves in a discursive pattern that stigmatizes them? Under what circumstances do they feel that they belong to the territorialized image of their own stigma?"

The last question becomes especially important, given the fact that the cultures of the official Balkan nation states have for decades, if not centuries, attempted to escape the image of the "dark Balkans." The process of nation-building and self-determination has been carried out by the different national elites following the traditional models of Western nation-building (emancipation, political sovereignty and cultural authenticity, national right to participate in history, national dignity, and expectation of world recognition, etc.). However, being small and peripheral, these nations were trapped in the contradictory play between the normative and the factual: between the modern imperative (that the nation should be a heroic historical agency of its own emancipation) and their irrelevance in the struggles among the Great Powers. Internalizing both the emotional trauma of non-recognition (public and historical invisibility) and the moral one (failure to fulfill the supposed historical duty), the ideologies and high cultures of the South European nations have always harbored an obsessive concern. They tried to compensate for their geopolitical and geo-cultural irrelevance with certain ideological self-representations. As a result, they ceaselessly reproduced the ideological image of their authenticity and difference from their neighbors (this was the only way to present one's own nation as a separate and recognizable agent on the global scene).

From a historical perspective, this search for a specific national "self," "essence," or "character" resulted in the fervent differentiation of all Balkan nations from one another. The nationalistic imperative produced alternative versions of nationalist movements, fueled the tensions and conflicts between them, and ultimately gave rise to centripetal movements among neighbors and former cultural cooperators. During the period between 1850 and 1912, the nation states in the region developed – slowly but relentlessly – relatively isolated national economies underpinned by hostile cultural codification (mutually antagonistic educational systems, linguistic standards, art canons, etc.). During this period, after several military and cultural wars and a whole series of ideological rivalries, the Balkan nations chose to foster their mutual non-communication, to develop and even to transform into institutions their various political struggles and ideological hostilities, and aggressively to segregate from their neighbors. This differentiation was a complex process that had a deep impact on the constitutive patterns of each nation's high culture. At a certain phase of the nation's building (with some chronological variations, for the Balkan nations it took place between 1850 and 1912), the anthropological similarities and differences were reshaped and re-mapped. They were, in fact, transformed into separate and "authentic" national "folklores" (with the claim that they express the metaphysical depths of this or that National Soul). The different national folklores suspiciously coincided territorially with national borders and imagined homelands (a modern territorialization entirely alien to the local ancient oral tradition). During the same period, the characteristics of the new national high cultures – the structure of historical time and geopolitical space, national heroes, martyrs, leaders, teleological narratives, deeds, and sacrifices that structure the axis of historical time, values, and authorities – distanced themselves to the point of incompatibility. The ever growing isolation from one another, combined with the war traumas (1885, 1912, 1913, 1914–1918), gave birth to the image of the opaque, adversely

deviant, and actively hostile neighbor (upon whom the stigmatizing label of being "Balkan" was usually projected).³⁹

These efforts at differentiation and at producing distinct national politics of representation (institutional, political, and even military ones) clashed with the stubbornness of Western *Balkanism*, which was unwilling to see any differences and perceived the region from a macro-colonial perspective. Despite the availability of good, expert, diplomatic, and journalistic knowledge about the differences, the Western mass media repeatedly reproduced the image of an obscure geopolitical and cultural whole, senselessly fragmented, where unrecognizably small tribes and aggressive micro-states staged long forgotten European dramas in miniature: mutual hatred, uncivilized wars under the banner of hysterical and idiosyncratic nationalisms, cultural oppression, ethnic cleansing.

In such a situation, the national high cultures had no chance to create a positive image of the peninsula. Its inevitable but amorphous geographic space was always perceived as a threat to the national elite's longing for authenticity, a fatal obstacle in the way of achieving clear distinguishability and "moral personality" (Kant). As a trope, presupposing a common cultural, historical and political referent, it threatens to shake up not only the anthropological, but the national borders and differences as well. Thus, for the national ideologies of the Balkan countries, different as they were, the Balkans also had a hidden, dark, mythological aura. It is the non-variable, constantly repeated sign of unsuccessful self-differentiation and self-determination; it signifies the melting and disappearance of the national subjectivity before the gaze of the "Significant Other." In short, for them it always symbolized the lack of "genuine" cultural recognition hidden behind the surface of Western official acts: diplomatic, political, and juridical recognition of the region's independent national states. A detailed discursive analysis of the Balkan trope in the public discourse could demonstrate that it has absorbed all negative energies, accommodating in its semantic vagueness the quasi-mythical image of everything Oriental, everything Ottoman, and everything "anti-progressive." Being a traumatic mirror-discourse, the "native" *Balkanism* seems to share the same stigmatizing series of predicates as the Western one⁴⁰ but associates them with different emotional nuances: at times, with anger and aggression against the Significant Other; at times, with failure and shame, even self-disgust.⁴¹

The Dominant Strategies of (Dis)identification

The force field of competing identity models seems to be constricted between the Scila of the Balkans, seen as the label of external condemnation, and the Haridba of the Balkans, seen as the name of the internal, "native," fear and shame.

This gives birth to two major forms of identification, each escaping one of the Balkan ghosts.

The first option is to leave, to escape, to cast off the unbearable "armor" of the imposed identities: a radical emigration, close to cultural amnesia. In the last ten years, more than two million people left the former Yugoslavia (there is a lack of firm statistical data; some estimates show only 700,000 emigrés, the rest being internal refugees who moved inside the ex-Yugoslavian borders; other observers estimate that as many as three to four million people left ex-Yugoslavia altogether). Croatian emigration during this period has been estimated at 300,000. During the period 1993–1998 alone, Romania exported

more than 120,000 emigrants. The sad story of the unsuccessful emigration of thousands of Albanians to Italy, and their brutal expulsion, is well known.

Unlike Yugoslavia, Bulgaria did not experience war or ethnic cleansing. But despite the country's relative peacefulness, stability, and moderate economic success, more than 600,000 people fled, more than 300,000 of them in the period 1989–1992.

To speculate about "common regional reasons" for emigration against a background of diverse national situations and a variety of centripetal social factors is a risky task. Nevertheless, one is surprised by the proportionally consistent number of emigrants despite the quite different conditions among the Balkan countries. It is as though there are reasons beyond the collapse of communism and the wars, beyond the economic crises and ethnic conflicts. It is as though the wars and the political chaos, the embargo and the bankruptcy of Albanian, Romanian, and Bulgarian banks unlocked another catastrophe. A large number of people experienced it as "bankruptcy" of the symbolic national capital, as an identity crisis. Emigrants' letters, oral accounts, and unofficial reports radiate the irrational fear of belonging to a "fatal" place, haunted by the demons of civilization. The political and economic motives behind this mass emigration are probably also mixed with a spasm of disgust: the wish (or rather the compulsion) to leave definitely, at all costs, despite the unpredictability and misery emigration entails.

Isn't it possible to propose that all these people fleeing war crimes, mass poverty, unemployment, and so on were also running from the stigma?

The escape in the opposite direction – into passionate nationalism and hyperbolic (Serb, Bulgarian, Albanian, Rumanian) pride – is well known and does not need a detailed description. What is difficult is to recognize, behind the face of traditional and official state patriotism, the hysterical attempt to compensate for the stigma. The political instrumentalization of the Kosovo myth, and Slobodan Milosevic's successful propaganda manipulation of "heavenly Serbia" to mobilize millions of ordinary people, offer a provocative case study. What is worth mentioning, however, is that these nationalist reactions were also – not surprisingly – anti-Balkan. They were hysterical forms of differentiation, in which the neighboring nation, ethnicity, or confession was perceived as embodying the Balkan "Gestalt" – of the "Turks," "Ustasha," "Gypsies," or, in the last resort, "the same Balkan shit as us."⁴²

The Balkans as Tricksterlike Field of Counteridentifications

The situation is still more complex. Groups and individuals can choose among these dominant identity models, secretly charging the two extremes (citizen of the [better] world versus national patriot; nomadic versus settled, et cetera) with traumatic energies. But the Balkan patchwork and the above-mentioned cognitive dynamics also open a free space for them to react differently. The old rural and local communities with their rigid identities do not exist any more; the "national" and the "universal" roles are to a certain extent discredited; but the contemporary everyday life of the peninsula repeatedly displays the old–new plethora of pre–modern, modern, and post–modern similarities and differences. The field, which is structured through such a controversial pattern of behavior and discourse, often blocks the dominant identity patterns, opening completely unexpected opportunities for multiple *a–ha* experiences, alternative identifications, and counter–identifications. Placed amidst this unresolved, contesting plurality of cultural paradigms, individuals and groups

often choose to grope for a "third" or "fourth" way, and to escape for a while—both from the rigid "armors" and from the stigma. These are momentous positions, openings for unpredictable and random acts of identification — exploding *a-ha* experiences, not foreseen by any dominant cultural forms.

These experiences could give birth to a short-lived feeling of belonging, in which the image of the Balkans looks different. But some of them could develop into relatively stable countercultural strategies, too.

In the last decade, besides Emir Kusturica's films, the *Mystery of Bulgarian Voices*, and the music of Goran Bregovic (which are the variants of this Balkan image packaged for high culture), a Balkan popular (counter) culture was born in all the Balkan countries: a new mass taste for the old belly dance developed, new-old small taverns and kafanas opened, a new type of arrogant Balkan intimacy haunted the air. The most important symptom of this process was the lack of popular will to be Westernlike (a rejection not only of the current political slogan on the way to Europe," but also of the old Balkan perception of the West as a kind of secular transcendence).⁴³ Marketing agents and managers immediately smelled the new demand on the cultural market, and they hurried to satisfy it with a new Balkan cultural industry: an aggressive and arrogant, yet "democratic" and "intimate," mass media, new types of amusements, a new-old type of music.

Popular music and its various metamorphoses are especially interesting: turbo folk and yugo-rock in Yugoslavia, chalga and folk music in Bulgaria, "manale" in Romania. In Bulgarian cities and villages, chalga music not only killed the old socialist popular amusements but also successfully replaced English and American rock and disco music in clubs and pubs. It represented a culture of enjoyment that opposed both the "post-protestant," globalist ethos of entering capitalism and the hollow slogans of official nationalism. It took elements from traditional "orgiastic" Balkan festivities, from obscene folklore, from Turkish and Gypsy music, and from the newborn semi-criminal subculture and combined them with postmodern electronic synthesizers and rhythm-boxes. The result is less a music of protest and trauma (although some parallels to Afro-American rap music are here possible) than a tricksterlike, comic, and aggressive transformation. It turns the lowermost ⁴⁴ picture of the Balkans upside down and converts the stigma into a joyful consumption of pleasures forbidden by European norms and taste. Contrary to the traditional dark image, this popular culture arrogantly celebrates the Balkans as they are: backward and Oriental, corporeal and semi-rural, rude, funny, but intimate. As an act of counter-identification, it scandalizes what Norbert Elias called the "civilizational standards" and the "borders of taste, shame, and uneasiness," combining into a controversial structure warmth, familiarity, and "Oriental" epatage. It is a kind of willing regression into a great, scandalous, Balkan "neighborhood," away from both Europe and the annoying official homelands.⁴⁵

Surprisingly enough, nostalgia for such counter-models of identification (they are by far not only musical) is especially strong where the familiar "sarmale," "mousaka," and other quasi-Oriental amusements are missing, such as in the sterility of the Dutch or German cultural landscapes. The Balkan cultural diaspora is worth studying from that point of view — for its nostalgic and intimate cooking, celebrating, and chatting.

A Story Instead of an Ending

Unable here to initiate such a study, I would like to finish with a personal story.

In 1993, I taught Bulgarian language and literature as a lecturer at the University of Göttingen in Germany. One day I was invited to a student party together with a friend of mine, a Yugoslavian PhD student who during the siege of Sarajevo realized that she was Bosnian and Muslim, and so became an anti-war activist. We decided to have a bite before the party. Confronted with the difficult choice between Italian, German, Chinese, and French restaurants, we chose – with a slight twinge of shame – to go to a Greek tavern and enjoy native culinary pleasures. As we ate our "moussaka" and "souvlavki" (not at all different from the Bulgarian–Serbian–Macedonian–Turkish "shish kebab"), we watched the weather forecast for Europe on the restaurant's TV. International borders were delineated with white contours. For no apparent reason, Romania and Bulgaria appeared as a common state with Bucharest as its capital. At the end of our dinner, we asked the Greek waiter for Turkish coffee. He said, however, that at this restaurant they only offered Greek coffee. We ordered it, and it was the same "Ottoman" type: sweet and thick, inappropriate to the German taste for filtered coffee, known in Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, Bosnia, and Turkey as Turkish coffee. Later on, at the party, I was introduced to a nice German girl who, noticing my accent, immediately asked me "Woher sind Sie?" "Aus Bulgarien" I answered, worried about my Bosnian friend, who had meanwhile gotten involved in another verbal war with a bunch of Serbs, Slovenes, and Albanians. I observed the arguing group, their energetic gestures, loud voices, the way they patted one another's shoulders, and I felt a strange feeling of closeness and intimacy. Now I realized what a German student had in mind when she insisted that I demonstrated "Balkan movements" ("eine balkanesische Motorik," she said).⁴⁶

The party went on. Some Germans asked a Turkish girl to do a belly dance for them, which she refused. "Sie sind also ein Rumäne?" the German girl sought to confirm fifteen minutes later. "Nein, ich bin ein Bulgare, aber es ist egal," I replied.

She looked embarrassed.

¹ Paper presented to the Sofia conference *Istoriyata pred predizvikatelstvata na promenite*, October 27–28, 2000. My point here is, however, that such "Kollektivbezeichnungen" (collective significations) are not in principle different from the "collective statement." In their automatic usage, they presuppose the collective statements in question.

² Jean-Marc Tetaz, "Personale Identität, Erinnerung–kollektive Identität," Paper, presented to the Sofia conference *Istoriyata pred predizvikatelstvata na promenite*, October 27–28, 2000.

³ First English translation in *New Left Review* 51 (September/October 1968), reprinted in Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits, A Selection* (London: Tavistock/Routledge, 1989).

⁴ "...before the *I* is objectified the dialectic of identification with the other." *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵ "Armor of alienating identity which stamps with the *rigidity of its structure* the whole subject mental development." *Ibid.*, 96.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁷ Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 161–184.

⁸ See Antonina Kuzinanova, *Roumyana Atancheva and Vassilka Alexandrova, Roumaniya* (Sofia: Otvoreno obshtestvo, 1999), 105–135.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 35–40.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ In *Reflection on Differences: Focus on Romania*, by Irina Culic, Istvan Horvat (Cluj.. Christian Stan, ed., Limes, 1999), 125.

¹² Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 180–183.

- 13 About the division of the Ottoman Empire in "non-nationalistic" confessional categories see Stavrianos, L. S. *The Balkans since 1453*, (London, 1958, 2000), 222.
- 14 Kalyonski, Alexei, "Kazulbashki eyud," *Nova publichnost*, (Sofia, 1998).
- 15 See Stavrianos, *ibid.*, 178–413. See especially 212–213.
- 16 Mihailesku and Roman, *ibid.*, 125–136.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 126.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 134.
- 19 For more details see the book *Predstavata za "drugiya" na Blaknaite* (Sofia: Marin Drinov, 1995).
- 20 See for example the programmatic article of the founding father of Bulgarian ethnography – Prof. Ivan Shishmanov "Predmet I zadachi na nashata ethnographiya" (Sofia: SBNU, 1889).
- 21 See Mihailesku and Roman, *ibid.*, 127.
- 22 Inna Peleva Botev, *Tyaloto na nacionalisma* (Sofia: Mab, 1998), 22–172.
- 23 See Mihailesku and Roman, *ibid.*, 127, see also Peleva, *ibid.*, 49–58.
- 24 See "Slavic Weimar/Jena" by Gabriella Schubert and Miro Masek, forthcoming in *Junctions and Disjunctures: East European Literary Culture*, edited by John Nedubauer and Marcel Cornis-Pope (Oxford University Press). The authors stress the importance of the University of Jena, with its Protestant/Romantic cultural spirit, for awakening interest in "folklore" among the South Slavs. Besides the personal contacts that developed among the Grimm brothers, Wilhelm von Humboldt, L. Ranke, J. S. Vater, J. Kopitar, and Vuk Karadzic, the ideological reception of "Humanitäts Briefe" by J. G. Herder, the celebrated promoter of the Slavs, was here of special importance. His ideas about language as the "immortal property" and genuine expression of the nation, about the "creative people's soul" ("*schaffende Volksseele*") and the specific "*Volkston*" of each popular national "poetry" as the true representation of the people's nature, about the natural, simple-minded "song" as spontaneous "Urpoesie," were very influential in the Balkans during the whole nineteenth century.
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 About the influence of Czech, Slovak, and Russian scholars on intellectuals in the Balkans, see I. V. Yagic, *Istoriya slaviyanskoj filologii* (St. Petersburg, 1910).
- 27 See the symptomatic metaphors of the authentic people's self-expression in Herder's famous title *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* (Voices of the Nations in Songs, 1807), or in J. Grimm's expression "Atem jeder Sprache" (the breath of each language), quoted in Schubert and Masek, *ibid.* Variants of these metaphors are reproduced by all Balkan folklorists. See for example the preface of the Miladinov brothers' song collection (contested by Bulgarians and Macedonians): "Folk songs are an indicator of the mental stage of the nation and a mirror of its spiritual life. The People pours out its feeling in songs" (*Bulgarski narodni pesni, sobrani ot bratya Miladinovci, Dimitar & Konstantin i izdani ot Konstantina* [Zagreb, 1861].)
- 28 The first Bulgarian academic textbook in literary history (Balan, A., *Bulgarian literature: A Brief Manual for Secondary and Specialised Schools*. [Plovdiv, 1896]), is a good example of this unified "philological complex." The author, in spite of the fact that his textbook was the first one in the young Bulgarian university context, structured it according to firm and prestigious models, which came from the established practice of international Slavistics and philology. Without any hesitation, he united in his textbook structure the history of popular oral culture (folklore), the history of medieval religious manuscripts, and modern Bulgarian literature. The argument was a traditional one: According to Balan, (who simply follows Herder and Humboldt, as did the whole of international Slavic philology), national language is the most significant work of the national spirit. Therefore, literature and folklore are akin because they are *verbal*, they are *expressions of the soul* (collective or individual, naive or reflexive), and they are both *ours*. So the textbook secured in an unproblematic way both discursive and institutional continuity between "popular" and "elitist" culture.
- 29 Unpublished manuscript of V. Mihailesku.
- 30 For more details see Yagic, *Istoriya slaviyanskoj filologii*.
- 31 Gesemann, Gerhard, *Heroische Lebensform, Zur Literatur und Wesenkunde der Balkanischen Patriarchaliät* (Berlin: Wicking Verlag, 1942).
- 32 Gerhard Gesemann, "Der Paristäre Balkaner" *Slavische Rundschau*, 1933, 1–16.
- 33 For more details see my articles "The Debate about the Problematic Bulgarian," in *National Character and National Ideology in Interwar Eastern Europe*, ed. Ivo Banac, Katharine Verdery (New Haven: Yale Center for International and Eastern Studies, 1995) and "Racism in Potentia?" in *Usvoyavane I emancipaciya*, ed. Atanas Natev (Sofia, SU, 1997).

- 34 See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, revised edition (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 163–187.
- 35 One can find interesting insights into the nature of *Balkanism* in the books and articles of Larry Wolf, Eli Skopetea, Milica Bakic-Hyden, Maria Todorova, Alexander Kiossev, Dimitar Kambourov, and many others.
- 36 Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 17.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 18.
- 38 Of course, one should distinguish the intellectually subtle and invisible Balkanism of Western institutions of knowledge (anthropology, sociology, history, philology, etc.) from the *Balkanism* of the mass media, which reproduces the clichés in a much more brutal way.
- 39 See Diana Mishkova, "Friends Turned Foes: Bulgarian National Attitude toward Neighbors" in *Pride and Prejudice*, Working Paper Series 2, Central European University History Department (Budapest: CEU, 1995), 163–186; Nadezda Danova, "Vzaimnata predstavata na bulgari i garci," XV–M vek, in *Predstavata za drugia na Blakanite* (Sofia: Marin Drinov, 1995), 77; Velichko Todorov, "Znam gi az tyach," *Serbia I serbite v bulgarskata literatura* (Sofia: Kritika, 2000).
- 40 This needs further research; the rhetorical differences between the two could be of great importance.
- 41 A relevant symptom of this *self-stigmatization* is the so-called "nesting *Balkanism*" ("nesting *Orientalism*"), a phenomenon by which one projects negative emotions upon one's neighbors and shifts the image of the shameful peninsula eastward (recently explored by Milica Bakic-Hayden, Maria Todorova, Marko Zivkovic). Slavoj Žižek puts it this way: "For Austrians, the Slovenes are wild hordes they have to protect themselves from by an imaginary wall; the Slovenes erect walls before the onslaught of the "uncivilized" Croats; the Croats are walling themselves up against their neighbors, the "wild" Serbs; the Serbs think of themselves as the last shield of Christendom that protects them (but also Europe!) from the Islamic invasion. Four times, therefore, the culturological borders are shifted and the walls erected—all justified by the protection of Christendom against the onslaught of the wild hordes" ("Uiivanje u pokornosti i sluganstvu," *Nasa Borba*, January 5, 1997). In his unpublished dissertation, M. Zivkovic describes the mental mapping of the Serbs as follows: "Neither close to the West like the Czechs, nor at the extreme end of the East like Russians, neither affiliated with Central Europe like the Croats, nor positioned as 'the Balkans of the Balkans' like Macedonians, Serbs find it hard both to pass the negative valuations further down and to exploit the exotic potential of the extremes. The stigma they bear combines the stigmas of the South and of the East, both Slavdom and Turkish taint, of congenital communism and Balkan violence. They don't have the option of claiming descent from one of the cultures that the West sees as ancestral to itself like Greeks and Romanians do. Accepting this largely negative stigma, their responses oscillate between playing it back in exaggerated form as 'minstrelization' and various shades of ambivalent self-exoticization as, for instance, in 'magic realism.'" (Zivkovic, manuscript) Both his and Žižek's analyses share a deficiency: They are made from an ex-Yugoslavian point of view and, in fact, secretly reproduce the "nesting." They interpret the phenomenon in clear recent national and political categories, creating a new implicit eastern border; besides, they exclude from consideration not only Bulgarians and Turks, but also Roma, Armenians, Jews, and other minorities, which (or the mixture of which) can also provide a focus for the Balkan bogeyman who once again muddles the clear national borders. Especially appropriate for this Balkan projection were the "tyrants," the Turks, who not only embodied for all national ideologies the "sick" medieval imperial power but carried the centuries – old, sinister aura of the demonic foe of Christianity and Europe, and of the scandalous presence of the Other "in our very midst" – of the Orient in the Occident, of Asia in Europe (See, Larry Wolf, *Inventing Eastern Europe, The Map of Civilization and the Mind of the Enlightenment* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994] p. 167.) Another sign of the stigmatization of the Balkans by national discourses is the frequent shameful associations bound to its image: the "dark Balkan," Oriental idleness. Neighboring nations often labeled each other as "gypsies," "Balkan shit," et cetera.
- 42 In *Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and Modern Consciousness* (Vintage: London, 1999) Michael Ignatieff describes the efforts of a Serbian soldier to formulate the difference between Serbs and Croats. The peculiar use of the Balkan trope here is worth quoting. "But the question I've asked bothered him, so a couple of minutes later he tosses the weapon on the bunk between us and says 'Look, here's how it is. Those Croats, they think they are better than us. They want to be the gentlemen. They think they are fancy Europeans. I'll tell you something. We're all just Balkan shit.'
- 43 See my article "The Self-Colonizing Cultures," in *Bulgariatwangarda* (Sofia: Salon Verlag, 1998).
- 44 Todorova, *ibid.*, 18.

- 45 There is much in common between this Balkan culture of familiarity and Michael Herzfeld's concept of "cultural intimacy." See Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 1–37. Much like Herzfeld's "cultural intimacy," Balkan popular culture domesticates the official codes of national representation and auto-representation through the multiple uses, misuses, and flexible appropriations performed by social actors in everyday life. Popular amusements in the Balkans produce ironic self-images and display them in semi-public spaces of insiders' "collective privacy" (thus creating embarrassment and uneasiness when observed by outsiders). Manifesting skeptical self-knowledge of collective defects, it also often scandalously perverts these negative auto-stereotypes into positive ones, still with a peculiar emotional ambivalence: between pleasure, shame, and joyful misuse of the official pomp, between familiarity and aggression against the West, between embarrassment and laughter. An important difference, however, is the fact that in the situation, described above, the agency in power is multiplied: popular Balkan culture is engaged in discursive interactions (or rather battles) with more than two combatants. On this battle field, relics of pre-modern identities still question the ultimate power of national "high" cultures, while the national high cultures passionately reject the apparent Balkan similarities (cultivating simultaneously nesting Balkanisms). These high cultures are still engaged – each for its own sake – in a vain struggle against the arrogance of Western Balkanism. In turn Balkanism, as a variant of a colonial discourse, has to cope with the new discourses in power: cultural globalism, postcolonialism, and multiculturalism. The trained ear can still perceive discursive fights under the current-like *basso continuo* in baroque music echoing the battle between Occident and Orient, Christianity and Islam. In a historically unresolved competition like this one, where the agencies of cultural authority continue to challenge each other, the symbolic economy is not limited to the interaction between the "official idiom" of a single national state and the multiple everyday uses (as Herzfeld suggests). It rather resembles: a struggle among a multitude of official ideologies, cognitive strategies, and competing idioms on a contested field. Therefore the field itself is vague, full of alternative niches and fissures. Accordingly, the intimate interaction between Balkan pop culture and all these cultural authorities resembles a multi-screen trickster performance more than it does a calm, everyday use and appropriation. The main difference between it and Herzfeld's "cultural intimacy" consists in the fact that the popular culture in question scandalizes the official idioms (both high national culture and Western civilizational standards), rather than using and appropriating them. In its extremes, its regional intimacy joyfully breaches national borders, norms of politeness, and archaic taboos, aping a kind of momentous "Balkan identity," which is just a form of anarchic protest against any kind of identity and any kind of symbolic order.
- 46 Several years later I read the following lines in an internet journal: "People here talk with their whole bodies. They lean forward and touch their colleagues. When they meet or depart, they kiss each other on the cheeks and hug passionately." ("The Phlegm and the Anima" by Dr. Sam Vaknin, *Central Europe Review*, no. 4 [July 1999].)

Published 2003–05–19

Original in English

Contribution by Belgrade Circle Journal

First published in *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, eds. Dusan I. Bjelic; Obrad Savic (MIT Press 2002)

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