WESTERN VS. EASTERN MENTALITY

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Abstract

Every nation on Earth has its own characteristics, characteristics which are influenced by the regional mentality (Balkan mentality, Scandinavian mentality, West European mentality). A region and the identity of the people populating this region are defined and explained through geography, common history, stereotypes, habits and some other few criteria.

I choose to analyze in this paper the problem of Eastern Europe mentality, with reference at the Balkan region and making a comparison with the Western Europe mentality. I have choose this topic because, in our daily lives, everywhere we look we face this parallelism with people from France, Spain, England. This image is almost every time the same: people from East are considered inferior to those of West. I have proposed to analyse aspects from daily lives from both sides, attitudes toward money, work, free time and few aspects regarding religion.

Keywords: Western Mentality, Eastern Mentality, Balkanism

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1. Introduction

Pro-Western orientation became even more pronounced after 1989 when, after the fall of communism, all the countries in Southeastern Europe became engaged in a competition for Europe, with each trying to get rid of the Balkan stigma. The degree of interest towards Western European values varied.

In this paper I will analyse two of the most important mentalities from Europe – the Western and the Eastern one. I will start by presenting each of them, separately, after that I will show some few differences between them and in the final chapter part I will point out a few conclusions and positive aspects for both of the chosen topics.

2. Objective

The present work brings to mind the western mentality vs the Eastern mentality, a comparative analysis between them. The current research encapsulates two main objectives within. The primary objective is to conceptually, in a very general way, we can say that the Western world has more faith in science and technology. In the Balkan mentality approximation and improvisation play an important role, which means there is a certain freedom that makes it possible for each individual to find his own way or solution to a certain problem.
3. Literature review

A. Western mentality

When I say Western mentality, I will refer to mentality of people from England, France, and Spain. Those countries are more developed than the country from the East of Europe. Their population is somehow different from the population of Balkans.

Western world has more faith in science and technology, and the scientific achievements are more important than in East Europe. [1]

I consider useful to present Western mentality in few short expressions and explain them after that. I find that western mentality can be expressed in statements like:[1]

- **enjoy the moment (carpe diem)!**
  For people from West Europe free time and holidays play an important part in their lives. They prefer to have fun, spent money instead of saving them.
- **freedom first, relationship/marriage next.** This aspect is related to the first one because Western people have a libertine vision regarding relationships (for instance: they have no problem with marriages between people of the same sex). They usually have a lot of relationships before marriage which affect, in time, a couple’s life. Divorce rate is significantly higher in West than in East, due to this libertine vision.
- **quality first, price next.** Due to better financial situation they prefer quality, no matter which the price for it is.
- **be persistent, and I will get there.** People from West are more interested in career development than in starting for a family. They always put career in the first place
- **women are equal to men.** In the West women are always preaching equality. They consider they deserve same payment, same jobs, same responsibilities.
- **Precision and punctuality are important for people from Western Europe.**

Those few features are representative for people from Western Europe but this doesn’t mean that there aren’t people who cherish family more than career or people who believe in God rather than in science or technology.

Mercury Research in 2016 for the Agency for Governmental Strategies in Romania shows that the first things that Spaniards spontaneously associate with Balkan region are poverty and misery (21%), delinquency (9%), Roma (5%). "If the Balkans hadn't existed, they would have been invented" was the verdict of Count Hermann Keyserling in his famous 1928 publication, *Europe.*

Citizens from Southern and Eastern Europe have vehemently rejected the label often attached to Balkan countries. Over ten years ago, Maria Todorova (2016) traced the relationship between the reality and the invention. Based on a rich selection of travelogues, diplomatic accounts, academic surveys, journalism, and belles-lettres in many languages, *Imagining the Balkans* explored the ontology of the Balkans from the sixteenth century to the present day, uncovering the ways in
which an insidious intellectual tradition was constructed. Maria Todorova, who was raised in the Balkans, is in a unique position to bring both scholarship and sympathy to her subject, and in a new afterword she reflects on recent developments in the study of the Balkans and political developments on the ground since the publication of Imagining the Balkans. The afterword explores the controversy over Todorova's coining of the term Balkanism. With this work, Todorova offers a timely, updated, accessible study of how an innocent geographic appellation was transformed into one of the most powerful and widespread pejorative designations in modern history.

The reason for this defensive attitude is the pejorative connotation acquired by the concept. According to Maria Todorova (2015), it is "one of the strongest pejorative labels in history, international relations, political science and contemporary intellectual discourse."

**B. Eastern mentality**

In the introduction part I said that I would analyze Eastern mentality by making reference to the Balkan mentality. I want to specify that „the Balkan are includes Greece, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Romania, Albania and Hungary”. The etymology of the name is Turkish, the meaning being „mountain chain”: "most of the Ottoman and Turkish dictionaries explain it as a mountain or mountain range."

We cannot really separate Europe into the Balkans and the rest; we cannot state clear borders. Even inside the Balkan area stereotypes are developed. The Bulgarians have a special pejorative word, 'mamaligari', for their neighbors, us, the Romanians. Croats deployed similar Balkan stereotypes to differentiate themselves from their ethnic neighbors. Balkanist rhetoric was utilized to legitimize Croatia's quest for independence as a necessary emancipation from its 'Balkan burden' [2] and its return to its rightful place in Europe. Croats presented themselves as more progressive, prosperous, hard-working, tolerant, democratic, or, in a word, European, in contrast to their primitive, lazy, intolerant, or Balkan, neighbors to the south-east.

The famous Balkan generosity, one of the most important characteristics of the area, is evident in the attitude towards guests. They are provided with the most beautiful and comfortable room in the house and the food must be in huge quantities, more than necessary, in order to emphasize the consideration of the hosts. The notion of “enough” does not really exist. If the guest refuses to eat or at least to taste everything that is offered, it is considered a kind of offense. Even in times of insufficiency (war time or communist times), the guest had to be given whatever was best in the home. The pride of the Balkan people may be the consequence of a specific experience developed during the decades of military occupation or domestic instability in the region.

To this haughty generosity it is added, in a complex manner, indifference displayed toward money and material goods. The representative trait for Balkan character is common sense [3]. Best part of this common sense is sense of humor, but for Balkan people it is more difficult to accept people who are different, who live differently.

In fact, nothing reflects better the changes in civilization as the history of food. Cooking in the Balkan region has common characteristics, influenced by the barbarian invasions, conquests of Islam, the Italian Renaissance and especially the discovery of America, but the Ottoman Empire is the main source of inspiration for Balkan cuisine. Across the Balkan region there is an abundance of vegetables, spices and special dishes such as lamb on skewers, stuffed vine leaves, rice pilaf, cucumber salad, soups, etc.

M. Razsa and N. Lindstrom (2014) define „Balkanism” as a "dichotomous and essentialist
system of representations which Europe has set itself apart from a Balkan “other”. In "The Balkans. Minorities and States in Conflict", the author, Hugh Poulton (1983), chose a poem written in Skopje:

"Land of our land
We're the sons of
With rifle in hand
We come from the grave

In the lake there's thirty thousand cries
Grom the snow on the hills to the plains inside
The past whispers in the sky...."

This poem does not give us just information about the people, depicting them as "the brave and the righteous", but also geographical information, "mountains, plains, lake", and historical as well - the whispers of the past.

C. Western vs. Eastern

In Europe there was always a conflict between East and West. One of the versions of this dichotomy was felt in the opposition between Greek Orthodoxy and Catholicism, the rift between the two churches being produced in 1054 and never dissolved. Starting with this we have to mention that the Eastern part of Europe, the Orthodox one, is more involved in Church life, they keep and respect traditions and their faith in the divinity is still strong. On the other hand, believe in God in the West is more superficial, people being more interested in providing their comfort and having fun.[4]

The stereotype of “being Balkan” according to Todorova, was founded in the early twentieth century in the absence of a clear idea of what “Balkan” really meant. This term was used to describe regional characteristics such as general hospitality, historical retards or misery. It was much too vague and general so it could therefore have been attached to people outside the Balkan region as well. It is important to mention that “being Balkan” was somehow used in opposition to “being European”, which symbolise cleanliness, order, self-control, strong character, law, justice, etc. It was the perception of the West, derived from the gap between Western Europe and Eastern Europe.

Another defining feature of Balkan culture, the one that gives it a kind of unity, is the fusion of indigenous aspects with imported ones. On the other hand, the West is viewed as a model of civilization, and therefore the desire to synchronize with this culture is the reason for a lot of imports, sometimes inappropriate. In terms of mentality, throughout the entire Balkan area we may find elements imported from the West. These elements, added to the indigenous one with Oriental origins, produce a very original mixture. Even Eugen Lovinescu said that "In our Age and from our place, the light is coming from the West: ex occidente lux!"

Eastern societies believe material wealth is evidence of favour by a higher power. Hence, they are comfortable with ‘keeping their place’ and rarely challenge authority, whether within a family or a nation. The concept of ‘equality’ as we know it is unheard of. [5]

The Western world takes pride in scientific achievements, while the Eastern world prides itself on inner qualities, that is to say, prayerful peace or peaceful prayer. We cannot say that there
are no sincere seekers in the West or no great scientists in the East. Far from it! But if we have to make a comparison, then "the Western world has infinitely more faith in the achievements of science than in the achievements of the inner reality — the soul and the heart".[6]

4. Discussion

The present paper emphasize that one of the most visible differences between people from West and people from East is represented by the desire to possess a house. This difference derived from the attitude towards work and social position. People from East cherish stability so they want to have their own house while people from West are more interested in career development so if for a promotion at work they need to change their domicile that is easy to realize because they are not tied to a particular place. If we look closely we notice in our country too this new attitude among young people which prefer to change their residence for a better work position (in our case this may be due to poverty and lack of jobs in the country).

Although it is difficult to speak about general stereotypes when so many people from different nations are concerned, the conclusion of the ethnographers and anthropologists studying the common characteristics of people living in the Balkan region is that they have a different behavior and a different mentality.

Being Balkan in today’s world means, at least officially, to be European with all the rights and obligations arising from this. It means you are representative of an ancient culture and a worthy citizen, equal to Westerners.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the motto of the European Union is „United in Diversity”, so if we adhere to European values, why should Europeans have something against our values?

If we lend an ear to the stereotypes, the Balkan people are doing unacceptable things for some other Europeans, but who can decide if it is good or bad? How can someone say if our way is worse than their way? Of course, the critics will answer: "because they are more developed than you". This fact cannot be denied.

The aim of presenting some of the Balkan characteristics here was to show that keeping our „Balkan mentality” and also taking over some of the „European values” is not a contradictory fact. Moreover, as I mentioned in the beginning, we cannot really separate Europe into the Balkans and the rest; we cannot state clear borders. In an era of globalization, the connections between cultures are increasing. So, although we can speak about a Balkan identity and characteristic traits, they are no longer limited to a strict area. Through music, architecture, cuisine, the Balkan features are spreading.

Finally, the goal of the European Union is not to mold the member states into a condition of non-identity, but to make us diverse and united at the same time, which means to work together for peace and prosperity, and that means that the many different cultures, traditions and languages must find a way for peaceful cooperation.

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