

Representations of Identity, Self, and Otherness in the Romanian Memoirs of the Balkan Wars (1912-1913)*

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Abstract: The present article analyzes a selection of Romanian memoirs of the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) in order to reveal the images of our fellow participants in the conflicts and sources of identities and representations that have been formed along the years. The study of these writings in the context of the gripping subject of alterity brings original insight in a matter that is still particularizing South-Eastern Europe. Considering the diversity of perspectives in the selected memoirs, we can paint an overall picture of the conveyed representations that may still overshadow the collective mentality.

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Introduction

Especially when talking about controversial events, history is sometimes suspected to be written in order to influence our conceptions of the past. From childhood stories and tales to school textbooks, history is often presented in brighter colours, with stories that emphasize the heroism of our armies and denigrate the savage behaviour of the ‘others’. We grow up enveloped by images and stereotypes regarding the peoples surrounding us – whether fellow citizens, neighbouring countries, or nations we have barely heard of. Infused to us by stories and school books, these representations are endlessly reiterated and perpetuated over centuries. Teachers are compelled to educate according to the official curriculum, based on historical accounts, and students rarely question the acquired information, coming to learn a perhaps biased version of history. We sometimes live with such images for an entire life, without once wondering if they are truthful. Even when pushed by the need to challenge facts, our understanding of the past is subject to influences of authority. Governments and politicians are only one example of agents that can manipulate us towards perceiving a particular version of history. The remaining question is how can we obtain a complete vision of an event in the past? Every story, recorded either in the form of history, memoirs, or other sources, renders a viewpoint, but never all angles. From this perspective, no discourse can provide a complete representation of an event. We therefore encourage a study from the point of view of the

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complementarity of discourses and sources. Only such a process can lead to the balanced knowledge of a subject.

It is the case of the Balkan Peninsula, whose history has been determining us for hundreds of years to think more and more of our neighbours as the others, instead of striving for inter-ethnic relationships and appreciating our common past and cultural diversity. Ever since ancient times, the identity of the Balkans¹ has been dominated by the region's geographical position: the conjunction of numerous cultures, a crossing area between the Greek and Latin civilizations, and altogether between Christianity and Islam, but also the harbour of a massive influx of pagan Slavs. Located at the point of intersection between Europe, the Middle East and Africa, this position has led to deep scars in its image, the identity of its peoples being a constant oscillation between different civilizations, cultures and religious confessions. Moreover, the Balkans have been perceived as predisposed to territorial, ethno-linguistic, and religious conflicts. This in turn resulted in differences of identity and a high degree of fragmentation among the countries and their populations, marked by the characteristic, often violent, history. As expected, the perception on alterity (and the self) was significantly influenced and various stereotypes related to cultural identities have been inculcated in the collective memory. The objective of the article at hand is to study such illustrations of the *other* and the *self* as depicted by the Romanian memoirists, testifiers of the 1912/13 Balkan Wars – one of the crossroad moments of this area. In this way, our aim is to investigate a facet of the Balkan Wars that is extending beyond the predominantly historiographical standpoint, which has been the main research focus of this particular page of Romanian (and European) history.

Among the numerous conflicts that shook the Peninsula, the Balkan Wars were two of the most important events that left their mark on the history of Europe in the beginning of the twentieth century, thus ending the five-century-rule of the Ottoman Empire in the area. Often labelled as a key precursor of World War I, due to the increased Serbian power seen as a threat by the two Central Powers Austria-Hungary and Germany, the two conflicts are often referred to as having changed the course of European history and that of the world. The First Balkan War started in October 1912, when the Balkan League attacked the Ottoman Empire, fighting for territories and populations under Ottoman sovereignty. Although with certain reservations, Romania remained neutral. The Balkan League won the Ottoman territories of Macedonia and most of Thrace and then came into conflict over the division of the quarry. The Treaty of London (May 30, 1913) put an end to the First Balkan War, but the territorial disputes were left unresolved. As a result, on June 16, 1913 the Second Balkan War started when Bulgaria attacked its former allies Greece and Serbia. This time, Romania decides to intervene with military troops in Bulgaria. Shortly after the Romanian army entered Bulgaria heading towards the capital Sofia, without having had any confrontation with the Bulgarian troops, the initiators of the war called a truce. The peace treaty of Bucharest obliged Bulgaria to give up the territories acquired in the First Balkan War, and Romania obtained Southern Dobruja², occupied during the 1913 campaign (later

¹ The appellation of *Balkan Peninsula* finds its origins in the name of the Balkan Mountains, confirmed by the etymology of Turkish term *balkan*, designating a mountain chain.

² Also referred to as the “Cadrilater” (*Quadrilateral*).

restored to Bulgaria in 1940). The arrangements were, however, once again short-lived, given that only 10 months later, the conflict resumed with WWI.¹

Several Romanian writers were enrolled in the Bulgaria campaign and particularly their participation in the Second Balkan War served as a source of reflection for these events, which were subject to strong propaganda and political interests. Whether war journals, letters, articles, reportages, or literature works, only a handful of them made their way to the printing presses and were collected and published in the form of memoirs in the years up to the First World War. Their appearance was remarkably appreciated, not only as historical documents, but also as literary works of art. Hardly known of or interpreted are works such as *44 days in Bulgaria* by Mihail Sadoveanu, *Journal of Campaign* by George Topîrceanu, *Memoirs of a Former Cholera Sufferer* by Constantin Gane and many others. After 1920 the number of memoirs on the subject is visibly declining, which leads to the widespread view that the 1913 campaign was ignored. Especially after the Second World War, as Ilie Rad (1999) shows in his work about war memoirs in Romanian literature (*Memorialistica de război în literatura română*), “the official political line after 1944, which condemned this war, did not allow the research and valorisation, possibly the anthologization of this literature”.² Moreover, post-war times brought another inclination: numerous volumes were transferred to library secret funds or ruthlessly destroyed, and “When critical comments were however made, they were tendentious and restrictive, distorting certain passages, omitting others, and marching on the traditional Romanian-Bulgarian friendship, cemented in years of ‘the democratic and socialist era after 1944’.”³ With the exception of one chapter in Ilie Rad’s book, dedicated to the memoirs of the Balkan Wars, this apparently taboo topic seems to have been, as the author asserts, “deliberately omitted from the Romanian history”.⁴

¹ Although the focus of the article at hand reaches beyond the historical aspects of the matter, for further reference we include a selection of valuable works documenting the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913, written both in Romania and abroad: Academia Română. *Istoria românilor* (The history of the Romanians). (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2001); Dabija, G.A. gen. *Războiul bulgaro-turc din anul 1912-1913* (The Bulgarian-Turkish war of 1912–1913). (Bucharest, 1914); Hall, Richard C. *The Balkan Wars, 1912–1913. Prelude to the First World War*. (Routledge Publishing House, 2002); Iordache, Atanasie. *Criza politică din România și războaiele balcanice: 1911-1913* (The political crisis in Romania and the Balkan wars, 1912–1913). (Bucharest: Editura Paideia, 1998); Iorga, Nicolae. *Acțiunea militară a României în Bulgaria cu ostașii noștri* (The military action of Romania in Bulgaria with Romanian soldiers), 2nd ed. (Bucharest: Atelierele grafice Socec & Co., 1914); Iorga, Nicolae. *Istoria războiului balcanic* (The history of the Balkan war) (Bucharest, 1915); Maiorescu, Titu. *România, Războaiele Balcanice și Cadrilaterul* (Romania, the Balkan wars and southern Dobruja). Edited by Stelian Neagoe. (Bucharest: Editura Machiavelli, 1995); Schurman, Jacob Gould. *The Balkan Wars, 1912 to 1913*. (Kessinger Publishing, 2004); Topor, Claudiu-Lucian. *Germania, România și războaiele balcanice. 1912-1913* (Germany, Romania and the Balkan wars, 1912–1913). (Iași: Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2008); Zbucea, Gheorghe. *România și războaiele balcanice. 1912-1913*. Pagini de istorie sud-est europeană. (Romanian and the Balkan wars, 1912–1913. Pages in south-east European history). (Bucharest: Albatros, 1999).

² Ilie Rad, *Memorialistica de război în literatura română* (Timișoara: Augusta, 1999), 95.

³ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Given the diversity of opinions regarding memoirs and the strong controversy in recent years, especially on the relationship between memory and truth, despite the appreciation given to this publishing genre in Europe and overseas, a few considerations have to be made when analysing such a distinctive genre. According to general belief and expectations, memoirs must contain the truth, reported in the most precise manner possible. Generated through a recollection process, memoirs are nevertheless subject to inaccuracies and even deliberate distortions, brought about by the authors' aims. Critics of the genre even claim that memories are selective representations of memory and not of history, reflecting emotional, personal, and associative processes. While naturally, any memoir oscillates between subjectivity and objectivity, what we can affirm with confidence is, however, the testimonial essence of such writings. As confessed by most of the authors included in the present study as well, that desire to record and share a witnessed experience – otherwise inaccessible to the reader – is often originated from a need for justification or even a feeling of responsibility of the witness. With this regard, the Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga pled: "If you have seen historical facts, you are obliged to keep them in the form in which they unfolded in front of you." (Rad, 1999) Ilie Rad traces out the characteristics of the Romanian war memoirs, observing that among the various confessional species, memoirs, and diaries in particular, are documents lacking the literary intent that could jeopardize the feeling of authenticity. Rather, a documentary or historiographical goal emerges from these writings, urged by the authors' interest of reproducing the truth. As far as the relationship between history, reality, and memoirs, differences remain evident. It is, however, important to keep in mind that memoirs do not claim to correct, challenge, or replace history, but rather to offer a point of view, which is the very aim of this article as well.

Otherness, Alterity, Identity

The way a person circumscribes the *other* represents a significant reflection of what defines the very *self* of that person. Likewise, throughout the history of the concept, philosophers such as Hegel, Husserl and Sartre have asserted that the *self* depends upon the *other* to constitute *itself*. However, the concept of alterity has been studied not only from the exclusionary point of view, but also from the more constructive approach of what brings (and keeps) people together in groups, societies and nations, creating identities and characters. The interpretations are countless and transcend the philosophical conceptualization, stretching to political, economic, social and psychological nuances.

In close relation with the *self* and *alterity*, we will discuss the concept of *identity*, which has proven to be a very intriguing research subject in recent years, with implications in political science and theory, international relations and the humanities in general. Psychologists, anthropologists and sociologists use the term *identity* to describe different explorations of the term: cultural identity, ethnic identity, gender identity, occupational identity and so on, emphasizing its multivalence and rendering it difficult to define. Dedicating a study to the question *What is Identity (as we now use the word)?*, James D. Fearon¹ assigns a plural sense to *identity*, referring to "a social category, a set of persons marked by a label and distinguished by rules deciding membership and

¹ James D. Fearon, "What is Identity (as we now use the word)?", (1999), <http://www.stanford.edu/~jfearon/papers/iden1v2.pdf>

(alleged) characteristic features or attributes” – from the social perspective –, as well as “some distinguishing characteristic (or characteristics) that a person takes a special pride in or views as socially consequential but more-or-less unchangeable” – in a personal understanding. In a broad sense, identity can be defined as the specific attribute which distinguishes an individual or which consolidates the members of a social category or group. The origin of the term can be traced back to the Latin noun *identitas*, -tatis, derived from the Latin adjective *idem* meaning *the same*. Therefore, identity is in itself comparative and entails a mutual feeling of uniformity with peers. In his paper about imagology¹, Joep Leerssen states:

*The default value of humans' contacts with different cultures seems to have been ethnocentric, in that anything that deviated from accustomed domestic patterns is 'Othered' as an oddity, an anomaly, a singularity.*²

An important characteristic of identity stands in the influence of the *significant others*³ in the constitution of an individual's identity, through his identifications with these actors, as Berger & Luckmann postulate:

*“the self is a reflected reality, which firstly reflects the attitudes assumed towards the significant others. [...] Indeed, identity is objectively defined as the establishment in a certain world and can be subjectively appropriated only together with this world”*⁴ (my translation).

Particularly in the case of the Balkan area, the issue of identity is amplified by differences in cultural identities. These in turn are responsible for a pervasive feeling of alterity, induced by conditions such as location, race, history, nationality, language, religious beliefs, ethnicity or appearance.

Study

In order to illustrate our research, thirteen titles from the Romanian memoirs of the Balkan Wars have been included in the analysis⁵. Specifically, we are investigating the

¹ Branch of psycho-sociology studying the images peoples have about themselves and about other peoples. Retrieved July 12, 2012 from <http://dexonline.ro/definitie/imagologie>.

² Joep Leerssen, "Imagology: History and method," *Studia Imagologica* 13(2007).

³ A *significant other* is a relative or a person involved in the upbringing of a child during primary socialization.

⁴ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *Construirea socială a realității*, trans. Alexandru Butucelea (Bucharest: Grupul Editorial Art, 2008), 180-81.

⁵ Constantin Argetoianu, *Memorii. Pentru cei de mâine. Amintiri din vremea celor de ieri* (*Memoirs. For those of Tomorrow. Reminiscences from the Times of those from Yesterday*), vols. I-II. parts I-IV. 1871-1916. 2nd ed., revised by Stelian Neagoe (Bucharest: Editura Machiavelli 2008); General I. Atanasiu, *Avântul țării. Campania din 1913 în Bulgaria* (*The Impetus of the Country. The 1913 Campaign in Bulgaria*), (Cluj-Napoca: Cartea Românească, 1925); Al. Brătescu-Voinești, *În slujba păcii (scrisori)* (*In the Cause of Peace – Letters*), (Bucharest: Editura Cartea Românească, s.a.); General G.A. Dabija, *Amintirile unui atașat român în Bulgaria (1910-1913)* (*Memories of a Romanian Attaché in Bulgaria – 1910-1913*), (Bucharest: Editura Ziarului Universul, 1936); Dimitrie Dimiu, *Amintirile unui rezervist. Note și impresii din campania anului 1913* (*Memories of a Reservist. Notes and Impressions from the 1913*

most common representations throughout these sources: the image of our neighbours the Bulgarians – a nation seen as a friend, but whose image shifted considerably in the eyes of Romanians in the light of the 1912-1913 events –, and that of the Turkish – the people often reproached by Romanians for the tumultuous episodes of shared history. Last but not least, the representations of the Romanians are an important aspect of the research as they are often used as a term of comparison to the two Balkan countries.¹

The context of the epoch is a very important factor, constituting a requisite context for the written memoirs and the resulting representations of alterity. After shedding the yoke of the Turkish domination, Romania and Bulgaria met a dispute in 1913 which brought a growing tension between the two neighbours bordering at the Danube. The Romanians had contributed to Bulgaria's fight for liberation from the Ottoman rule in 1877-1878, and were often advocating that Bulgaria owed a lot to Romania. Historical moments like the 1878 Treaty of Berlin and the 1912 secret military convention between Bulgaria and Serbia – containing an article against Romania² – led Romania to a growing feeling of insecurity for its southern border in Dobruja, an issue which had not been completely settled in 1878. Regarding this matter, Romania was asking for the frontier to be rectified, a compromise which the Bulgarian officials were not willing to accept. The conditional neutrality Romania had assumed at the beginning of the First Balkan War stipulated its reserve towards the developments of the events, as the Finance Minister Marghiloman was writing in his memoir: "The Bulgarian Government asks Bucharest 'to not refuse its benevolent neutrality in the difficult

Campaign), (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1914); V. Dragoșescu, *Amintiri din războiu. Campania anului 1913 în Bulgaria (Memories from War. The 1913 Campaign in Bulgaria)*, (Bucharest: Institutul de arte grafice „Speranța”, 1927); Constantin Gane, *Amintirile unui fost holerici. Din însemnările unui voluntar de campanie. Cu 30 de ilustrații, după fotografiile scoase de D-l Jean de Prato, Sublocot. D. R. și de D-l doctorant Cociu (Memories of a Former Cholera Sufferer. From the Notes of a Campaign Volunteer)*, (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1914); Nicolae Iorga, *Orizonturile mele. O viață de om așa cum a fost*, Vol. II, *Luptă (My horizons. A man's life as it was, Vol. II, Fight)*, Bucharest: Editura N. Stroilă, 1934); Alexandru Marghiloman, *Note politice*, Vol. I, *România și războaiele balcanice (1912-1913), România și primul război mondial (1914-1919) (Political Notes, Vol. I Romania and the Balkan Wars – 1912-1913, Romania and the First World War – 1914-1919)*, (Bucharest: Editura Scripta, 1993); Theodor Râșcanu, *Spre Sofia cu Regimentul 8 de artilerie. Notele unui voluntar. Iulie-august 1913 (Towards Sofia with the 8th Artillery Regiment. Notes of a Volunteer. July-August 1913)*, (Institutul de arte grafice N.V. Ștefăniu, 1914); Mihail Sadoveanu, *44 de zile în Bulgaria (44 Days in Bulgaria)*, (Bucharest: Editura Cartea Românească, 1925); Mihail Sadoveanu, *Războiul balcanic (The Balkan War)*, (Bucharest: Editura Adevărul, s.a.), Biblioteca „Dimineața” nr. 1; George Topîrceanu, *Jurnal de campanie (Campaign Journal)*, in *Luceafărul* 28 (12 July 1969): 4-5.

¹ The difficulty in illustrating this topic lies in the need for the memoir texts to be rendered in English, thus the charm of the original passages risks being literally “lost in translation”. The highest attention has been paid to the translations, all belonging to the author. Occasional excerpts have been displayed in both languages in order to facilitate an ideal understanding and capture the uniqueness of the language in the beginning of the 20th century. With this in mind, the original texts (some written as early as 1912) have not been altered in any way, although we are aware of the rigours for text transcribing.

² Atanasie Iordache, *Criza politică din România și războaiele balcanice: 1911-1913* (Bucharest: Editura Paideia, 1998), 173.

assignment it had taken on'. The Maiorescu government replies: 'In the limits of the Berlin Treaty, Romania's neutrality was natural, but should there be any territorial changes in the Balkans, Romania shall say its word'.¹ In the circumstances of the growing tension as the negotiations between Bulgaria and Romania seemed to be going nowhere, the requests of the latter grew as well towards a strategic border on the line of Turtucaia-Balcic. After a long and unsuccessful process, the powers mediate the issue at Petersburg in April 1913, but the solution dissatisfies Romania, which was only receiving the town of Silistra with 3 km around it. The Bulgarians, however, end up disputing even the point of measurement of the 3 km line. With the start of a second Balkan War in sight just weeks after the London peace treaty was signed, the pacifist position of Romania took a different turn. By this time, the Romanian public opinion was becoming increasingly insistent in demanding a firm and vigorous attitude from the government, in the form of its entrance in the war. The goals were to secure the strategic frontier in Southern Dobruja and to re-establish order and peace in the Balkans. By engaging into the military campaign in Bulgaria, the Romanians' intention was to stop the Bulgarians – seen as greedy and relentless – from carrying on with the fratricidal war against their former allies. This vision of the Bulgarians is also heightened by the general representations of the time – a discourse intensely promoted in the international press – regarding the Balkan people. Described by the civilised world as savages, they were always negatively portrayed. In addition, the frequent reports of atrocities and barbaric behaviour during the First Balkan War, inculcated this image in the eyes of many. Romanians, on the other hand, considered themselves a civilised Latin people, the contrast to the Bulgarians being a very common leitmotif in the press and other writings of the time. As we are about to see, the memoirs of the Balkan Wars (focused mainly on the second one) are abundant in examinations of the Bulgarian population and other nationalities involved in the conflicts. It is mainly the writers who pay attention to this topic, offering detailed descriptions of the characters met.

The authors of the studied memoirs come from the most various backgrounds, from politicians to professors, writers and journalists, supporters of the power or of the opposition, or even politically unaffiliated. In this manner, the stake of the study is to reveal differences in perception and reporting of the events, and particularly of the image associated to the other participating nations in the war. In addition to this, the selection of authors was made taking into consideration the expected differences in perspectives, particular intents, and power of influence of each author. Due to the natural possibility of having propagandistic writings among these memoirs, it is necessary to take a closer look into the authors' backgrounds, including their political affiliations (where applicable):

Constantin Argetoianu (1871-1952) was a renowned Romanian politician of the 20th century, prime minister (1939), lawyer and successful businessman. Descendant of an old aristocratic family, Argetoianu entered politics in 1913 on the side of the Conservatives, but exchanged several parties during the interwar period.

General I. Atanasiu was a Lieutenant Colonel and Commander of the 3rd Regiment Dâmbovița during the Bulgaria campaign in 1913.

¹ Alexandru Marghiloman, *Note politice*, vol. I, România și războaiele balcanice (1912-1913), România și primul război mondial (1914-1919) (Bucharest: Editura Scripta, 1993), 59.

I. Al. Brătescu-Voinești (1868-1946) was a well known Romanian prose writer, awarded by the Romanian Academy in 1945.

General G.A. Dabija was a military attaché at the Romanian embassy in Sofia.

Dimitrie Dimiu (1875-1927) was a professor and editor-in-chief of *Ziarul științelor populare și al călătoriilor* (*Newspaper for Popular Science and Travelling*).

Dr. V. Dragoșescu was a doctor and major. At the time of Romania's entrance in the Second Balkan War he was leading the local hospital in Ploiești, near Bucharest.

Constantin Gane (1885-1962) was an appreciated writer of prose and memoirs, awarded by the Romanian Academy in 1933, passionate about the research of the past. He later took office as the Romanian ambassador in Athens in 1940 and 1941, pleading, among others, for the rights of the Macedonian Romanians. Gane later became a member of the legionary movement and was convicted by the communist regime.

The well known Romanian historian and professor **Nicolae Iorga** (1871-1940) was also known as a documentarist, playwright, poet, encyclopaedist, memoirist, and literature critic. As a politician, in 1910 he co-founded the Democratic Nationalist Party and among other important titles he was the Prime Minister of Romania between 1931 and 1932.

Alexandru Marghiloman (1854-1925) was a famous politician, lawyer, leader of the Conservative Party (after Titu Maiorescu's retreat in 1914) and Prime Minister (1918). In the years preceding the Balkan wars he took office as the Minister of Internal Affairs and Finances.

Theodor Râșcanu (1888-1952) was a writer, journalist, genealogist, and memoirist.

The iconic novelist, short story writer, journalist, and political figure **Mihail Sadoveanu** (1880-1961) was one of the most prolific Romanian writers, remembered for his historical and adventure novels, as well as for his unique descriptions of nature and characters.

George Topîrceanu (1886- 1937) was a famous Romanian poet, short story writer, and humorist.

It is our belief that the best mirror of the events and mentalities are the writings themselves. Therefore we let the words of these authors paint the mind-set of the time, as they were seen through their eyes, and allow the interested reader of this study to discover and interpret the writings in their entirety, guided by the main recurrent themes in the memoirs.

Typically, the books commence with *a justification for our intervention in Bulgaria and an explanation of the context* in which it had been decided – an ever deteriorating situation taking over the peninsula: “yesterday's allies are each others' enemies today; they send ultimatums, because they do not agree on the division of the prey.”¹ As Sadoveanu shows in his analysis on Romania's situation, in the midst of the Balkan turmoil, the country felt that the Silistra issue was being solved in a humiliating way for the Romanians:

*patient, humiliated and sad, stood our poor little country
among other countries in the world. We had been first among*

¹ General I. Atanasiu, *Avântul jării. Campania din 1913 în Bulgaria* (The country's impetus. The 1913 campaign in Bulgaria) (Cluj-Napoca: Cartea Românească, 1925), 9.

*the Balkans, and we were falling to the latter plan. [...] We were being finger-pointed! In the West, on summer theatre stages, revues were played, in which we were ridiculed and dishonoured.*¹

All of the authors mention an “urge of a duty to be fulfilled”², as felt by each and every citizen of the country and disclose the feeling of self-realization for their enrolment in the campaign: “despite all the tiredness I feel, I confess I have carried out a holly duty!”³ A distinct characteristic present in each memoir is the *opinion of the authors regarding the campaign*. Dimitrie Dimiu feels that “our arrival here rushed the neighbours to accept peace as we have dictated it”⁴, while dr. V. Dragoșescu thinks “a Romanian incursion in Bulgaria cannot serve much, but it can hurt more in the future”⁵, given the proximity of Bulgaria and the development possibilities in harmonious circumstances. Constantin Gane appreciates “the historical moment in which the prestige of the country has ascended in such a considerable way and we have gained the gratitude of the entire Europe for the struggle we’ve had in order to restore peace in the Balkan Peninsula”⁶. Moreover, it is noted that “This time our army had the mission of making great marches and enduring at length, – because the population of the neighbouring kingdom had been declared sacred!”⁷

The Romanian soldier is carefully portrayed by the memoirists of the Balkan wars, especially from the perspective of everyday happenings. It is impossible to overlook the glorification tendency of the Romanian soldiers, who are going to war in an atmosphere of extraordinary joyfulness where “they were all laughing and singing”⁸; “There’s so much liveliness in this people eager to go to war”⁹. General I. Atanasiu describes the exaltation throughout the country: “the nation’s soul, transformed into eagle wings, carried the sons of the country [...] with such a momentum that, had there

¹ “răbdătoare, umilită și tristă, stătea biata noastră țărișoară între celelalte țări din lumea asta. Fusesem cei dintâi dintre balcanici, și cădeam pe planul cel din urmă. [...] Ne arătau toți cu degetul! În Apus se jucau pe scenele teatrelor de vară reviste în care eram făcuți de râs și de ocară”, Mihail Sadoveanu, *44 de zile în Bulgaria* (44 days in Bulgaria) (Bucharest: Editura Cartea Românească, 1925).

² Constantin Argetoianu, *Memorii. Pentru cei de mâine. Amintiri din vremea celor de ieri* (Memoirs. For the people of tomorrow. Memories from the times of yesterday) ed. Stelian Neagoe, vol. I-II. Parts I-IV (Bucharest: Editura Machiavelli, 2008).

³ Dimitrie Dimiu, *Amintirile unui rezervist. Note și impresiuni din campania anului 1913* (Memories of a reservist. Notes and impressions from the 1913 campaign) (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1914), 147.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Dr. V. Dragoșescu, *Amintiri din războiu. Campania anului 1913 în Bulgaria* (Memories from the war. The 1913 campaign in Bulgaria) (Bucharest: Institutul de arte grafice „Speranța”, 1927), 4.

⁶ „momentul istoric, în care prestigiu țării s’a înălțat într-un mod atât de însemnat și în care am câștigat recunoștiința Europei întregi pentru eforturile făcute de noi întru restabilirea păcii în Peninsula Balcanică.” Constantin Gane, *Amintirile unui fost holerici. Din însemnările unui voluntar de campanie*. (Memories of a former choleric. From the notes of a volunteer in the campaign) (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1914), 222.

⁷ Sadoveanu, *44 de zile în Bulgaria*.

⁸ Gane, *Amintirile unui fost holerici. Din însemnările unui voluntar de campanie*: 12.

⁹ Dimiu, *Amintirile unui rezervist. Note și impresiuni din campania anului 1913*.

been battles, would have pulled out only victories, everywhere.”¹ The goodness of the Romanian soldiers is one of the features most accentuated by the authors. Atanasiu describes how “during the meal, groups and groups were passing the Bulgarian soldiers from troops disarmed by our cavalry” and who are given “bread, roast, wine”². In his letters, I. Al. Brătescu-Voinești was making surprising comments about our military men:

*Here, in the yard of the barrack, are people rushed from all corners of the country, coming not willingly, nor driven by hatred, by their desire for revenge, or by a desire to put an end to public sufferings, but brought under the threat of severe punishment in case of disobedience, stated beforehand in the code of military justice, to go and kill other people whom they did not know. Here is how their leaders inflame them, how they pour the poison of hatred into their souls against people towards which they had previously not one bit of resentment. [...] Ah! how they will kill the enemies! How they will chop them up! Where are they? To tear them apart with their teeth! ... In the face of these wild tendencies I was telling myself: What a beast lurks in man! ... Three days later I saw the first Bulgarian soldiers, a group of 70-80 prisoners, worn down by weariness and hunger. When they arrived, our soldiers were just eating. They circled them around; and the same people, who were saying they would tear them to pieces with their teeth, were now, gravely, without scorn, without a word of derision, breaking their bread in two to share it with the enemy.*³

Dimiu illustrates the good conduct of the troops through his stories as well. He first tells how “A little girl about eight approaches me. I give her some coins and she kisses my hand, and I, missing my children, kiss her on the cheeks”⁴. Then he points out an

¹ “sufletul națiunii, transformat în aripi de vulturi, a purtat pe fiii tarii, din Carpați în Balcani, cu un avânt ce de erau lupte, ar fi smuls, peste tot, numai victorie.” Atanasiu, *Avântul țării. Campania din 1913 în Bulgaria*: 3.

² Ibid., 40.

³ “Iată în curtea cazărmei oamenii alergați din toate unghiurile țării, veniți nu de bunăvoie lor, nici mânați de ură, nici de dorința unei răzbunări, nici de dorința de a pune capăt unei suferinți obștești, ci aduși cu amenințare de aspre pedepse în caz de nesupunere, înscrisă din vreme în codul justiției militare, ca să meargă să ucidă alți oameni pe cari nu-i cunoșteau. Iată cum îi înflăcărează șefii, cum le toarnă în suflet otrava urei împotriva unor oameni, contra cărora n-aveau până în ajun nici pic de resentiment. [...] A! cum o să ucidă pe dușmani! Cum o să-i toace! Unde sunt? Să-i sfășie cu dinții!... În fața acestor porniri sălbatice îmi ziceam: Ce fiară stă ascunsă în om!... Peste trei zile am văzut cei d-întâi soldați bulgari, un grup de 70-80 de prizonieri, prăpădiți de osteneală și de foame. Când au sosit, soldații noștri tocmai mâncau. Au făcut roată împrejurul lor; și aceiași oameni cari ziceau că-i vor sfășia cu dinții, acum, cu gravitate, fără o zeflemea, fără un cuvânt de batjocură, își rupeau bucata de pâine în două ca s-o împartă cu dușmanul.” I. Al. Brătescu-Voinești, *În slujba păcii* (Editura Cartea Românească, s.a.), 107-10.

⁴ “O fetiță ca de vreo opt ani se apropie de mine. Îi dau gologani și-mi sărută mâna, iar eu în dorul copiilor mei o sărut pe obraji” Dimiu, *Amințirile unui rezervist. Note și impresii din campania anului 1913*: 64.

initiative of the regiment to clean the places where they would camp: “Ever since this village exists, has it not been as clean as we have made it and our troops clean... 14 backyards.”¹ Also Sadoveanu records the moment when he and the soldiers let a girl take water before them, as well as the captain warning the military men entering a village: “Watch out, boys, [...] not to awaken the children...”² The author also illustrates an episode in which a soldier buys a chicken from a local, stressing that “They both appeared happy with the trade and parted as good friends”³. The vigour of the Romanian soldier is also a topic observed by the authors. Argetoianu notes the outstanding resistance of the troops who “were walking freely, all together, with the basil behind their ears, singing and cheering”⁴, attributing this behaviour to the rural origin of most soldiers – “peasants used to standing and ‘walking’ from mornings to evenings”⁵. As proof, “Out of the 6,000 people, after a march of over 50 kilometres [...] not one straggler was left behind.”⁶ Although the Romanian army was composed of two different castes, Sadoveanu and other authors insist on the equality of the two in wartimes, as soldiers: “If the town man is convinced that he’s not meant to suffer what the humble ploughman endures, if he shall protest against the rigors and raise his voice to the skies, – that means he considers himself holy, descending from heaven on a rope.”⁷ Generally, the relationships inside the Romanian army are reported as harmonious, even between officers and privates, who share food and stories during the campaign. Beyond the Romanian soldiers’ qualities, a strong sense of authenticity of these writings emerges from the recording of both positive and negative images that characterized the army. The memoirists document their negligence and indiscipline, portraying them as not being prepared well enough for the expedition and carried away by “our habit of treating all things with ease”⁸. While fighting their actual enemy – the cholera –, the Romanian doctors were powerless and soon fell prey to the “carelessness and stupidity that reigned in the early days of the epidemic”⁹. The troops do not obey orders meant to protect them from the deadly contagion. Topîrceanu notices the distrust of the peasant soldiers, who were convinced that their fellows were dying because they had damaged their stomachs with the boiled water they were told to drink. Also, regarding the protective measures they were reportedly confident that it will not affect people like them saying that “The Romanian knows that this is all a fabrication of the ‘boyars’ and that the bad breed doesn’t perish”¹⁰. Even some of the army leaders disregard the dangers of the disease and the orders to only drink boiled water:

¹ Ibid., 83.

² “Băgați de samă, băeți, [...] să nu deșteptați copiii...” Sadoveanu, *44 de zile în Bulgaria*.

³ Ibid.

⁴ “mergeau de voie, de-a valma, cu busuiocul la ureche, cântând și chiotind”. Argetoianu, *Memorii. Pentru cei de mâine. Amintiri din vremea celor de ieri*, I-II. Parts I-IV: 214-15.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ “Din 6000 de oameni, după un marș de 50 și mai bine de kilometri [...] nu rămăsese în urmă nici un traânard.” Ibid.

⁷ Sadoveanu, *44 de zile în Bulgaria*: 25-26.

⁸ Argetoianu, *Memorii. Pentru cei de mâine. Amintiri din vremea celor de ieri*, Parts I-IV: 206.

⁹ Ibid., 225.

¹⁰ “Românul știe că toate astea sunt scornituri de-a «boierilor», și că soiul rău nu piere.” Theodor Râșcanu, *Spre Sofia cu Regimentul 8 de artilerie. Notele unui voluntar. Iulie-august 1913* (To

*The Colonel, a brave ignorant, would mock the doctor and, to give a good example, drank a glass of water from the fountain in question. Three days later he was dead.*¹

Recorded rumours of violence, such as the Romanian bicyclists who were shot by the Bulgarians or the ones who had their noses cut, are not absent². Some authors prefer to abstain from naming names and generalize their accounts: “the hardships of the Balkan War and the atrocities committed by some armies, even towards non-combatants, were known by everyone”³. Constantin Argetoianu notes the paradox that “from the Bulgarians, we have born the friendship of the soldiers and the unrelenting enmity of the civilians”, exemplifying that “an officer and five people in the 2nd Regiment Roşiori had been killed in Vratsa by the locals and [...] 15 inhabitants had been shot in retaliation”⁴. However, even cases of brutality from the Romanian army (vastly commented on and exploited by the media of the time, but almost absent from memoirs) are discussed: “among the soldiers – officers or privates – there have been and are villains as well, who have needlessly abused and have disregarded their chiefs”⁵. Atanasiu in turn complains that “With all my sternness, some soldiers indulge in devastations”⁶, while Nicolae Iorga shows that some soldiers “confusing, while walking, the troops they had been assigned to, would simply ‘get angry’ and take the road back to Bucharest, as if it had been a mere stroll without any responsibility.”⁷ Concerned with the image of the Romanian soldiers, General Atanasiu reports one of the neighbouring regiments where “[...] starting with the regiment commander [...] indulged in excesses, abuses of innocent Bulgarians, robbery, which dishonour the soldier in general, and ruin the good reputation of the Romanians in particular”⁸ and blames the conduct of the abusers: “plundering and devastation are shameful actions for an army that has despised the Bulgarians for their killing, robbing and plundering to which they have indulged during these wars”⁹.

In addition to the accounts about the fair, good, and generous Romanian soldier and the less flattering record regarding his behaviour, an important concern in some memories takes the shape of an attempt to disclaim compromising rumours published in the press on the abuses of the Roman army. The series of newspaper pieces troubles and confuses Sadoveanu, who in *44 Days in Bulgaria* expresses his concern regarding these

Sofia with artillery regiment 8. Notes of a volunteer. July-August 1913) (Institutul de arte grafice N.V. Ștefăniș, 1914), 85.

¹ “Colonelul, un ignorant curajos, lua în zeflema pe doctor și ca să dea bunul exemplu bău un pahar de apă din fântâna cu pricina. Trei zile după aceea era mort.” Argetoianu, *Memorii. Pentru cei de mâine. Amintiri din vremea celor de ieri*, I-II. Parts I-IV: 225.

² See Dimiu, *Amintirile unui rezervist. Note și impresiuni din campania anului 1913*.

³ Dragoșescu, *Amintiri din război. Campania anului 1913 în Bulgaria*: 6.

⁴ *Memorii. Pentru cei de mâine. Amintiri din vremea celor de ieri*, I-II. Parts I-IV: 219.

⁵ Atanasiu, *Avântul țării. Campania din 1913 în Bulgaria*: 116.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁷ *Orizonturile mele: o viață de om, așa cum a fost* (My horizons: life of a man, as it was) (Editura N. Stroiță, 1934), 191.

⁸ Atanasiu, *Avântul țării. Campania din 1913 în Bulgaria*: 33.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

“unsigned little articles depicting horrors, screaming with terrible pains” which “flooded desperately the newspapers columns”, and records his thoughts:

I was terribly stunned and outraged when, entering the country, after ten weeks of campaign, I found out about the horrors the newspapers were denouncing. There had been people tortured like in the times of the Inquisition, there had been sick soldiers buried alive. The horrors were endless. [...] Where did these things happen? We, the ones returning, had been on the scene, we had lived the camp life, the marches, the fatigue, the hunger, under the threat of cholera. Could we have been such strangers to these atrocities and abominations? [...] What in God's name? [...] I couldn't understand anything anymore.”¹

As a reason for the issue, Sadoveanu is of the opinion that the Romanians' “restless Latin spirit, always turned to exaggeration and generalization, is the big culprit. But Sadoveanu contradicts the allegations publicized in the media, in an attempt to put the record straight and clean the image of the Romanian soldier, accused of violence:

Your country's soldier did not pillage and he did not rape. He endured, like the wounded deer by the springs, while the soldiers of the other nations weltered in the blood and tears of the innocent. He did not reach out to steal and cut. [...] Through his patience and suffering he rose to the heroism of a civilized nation.”²

As an emphasis Sadoveanu shows that “Soldiers, at the gates, were making friendly signs with Romanian money, asking about the pub, about chickens, cheese and corn flour. No one was cutting, no one was shooting, no one was hanging [anyone]”³. However, he admits to the existence of isolated incidents:

To maintain a so-called discipline, some officers committed acts of brutality, beating up and killing poor people... [...] I had heard [...] in the wilderness of sad Bulgaria, about some bad things, about senior officers who, as the spectre of cholera rose, had isolated themselves from the troop with a shameful

¹ “Am fost grozav de uimit și de indignat când, intrând în țară, după zece săptămâni de campanie, am aflat de grozăviile pe care le denunțau gazetele. Au fost oameni schingiuiți ca pe vremea inchiziției, au fost soldați bolnavi îngropați de vii. Ororile nu mai aveau sfârșit. [...] Unde s'au petrecut aceste lucruri? Doar noi cei care ne întorceam fuseserăm la fața locului, trăisem viața de bivouac, de marșuri, de oboseli, de foame, sub amenințarea holerei. Se putea să fim noi străini așa de mult de mizeriile și ticăloșiile acestea? Și încă campaniile gazetelor păreau a se îndrepta asupra tuturor ofițerilor, fără alegeri. Ce Dumnezeu? [...] Nu mai înțelegeam nimic.”

Sadoveanu, *44 de zile în Bulgaria*: 19-20.

² “Ostașul tarii tale n'a prădat și n'a violat. A răbdat, ca cerbul rănit lângă izvoare, pe când osteniile celorlalte neamuri se tăvăleau în sânge și lacrimi de nevinovați. N'a întins mâna să fure și să tae. [...] Prin suferințele și răbdarea lui s'a ridicat la eroismul unei națiuni civilizate.” Ibid., 13.

³ “Soldații, pe la porți, făceau semne prietenești cu bani din România, întrebau de crăsmă, de păseri, de brânză și de făină de păpușoi. Nimeni nu tăia, nu împușca, nu spânzura”. Ibid., 95.

cowardice and selfishness. [...] But the cases were quite rare, so that the shame would not fall [...] over an entire army”¹.

Regarding the *Bulgarian soldiers* encountered during the march towards Sofia, various authors point out that they were surrendering to the Romanian army and they “wanted to hear nothing about war”², appearing “drained by a war too long”³. The goodness of the Romanian army is exhibited once again when they offer food and wine to the disarming Bulgarian soldiers, which are portrayed as having been left to starve by their leaders, who would fill their pockets with food. Emphasizing this episode, General Atanasiu wonders: “Will anyone ever again dare to compare us, Romanian officers, to them?”⁴.

Turks from villages like Ghighen contribute to the tarnished image of the Bulgarian soldiers, qualifying them as mean and vindictive. The Bulgarians are exaggeratedly described by the Turks as barbarians who kill women, children and the elderly: “ever since they’ve been fighting the Serbs [...] they hang people from every tree, cut women open [...]. The Serbs do it as well, – but no one can beat the Bulgarians.”⁵ As a matter of fact, entire chapters from Sadoveanu’s books, as well as other authors, march on the idea of the Bulgarians’ cruelty in contrast with the Romanian army. Yet another representation of the Bulgarian soldiers’ negative image are the accounts about their war prisoners who had been “jailed in Orhanian and Zlatița and abused through hunger”⁶. The images created by Sadoveanu through the description of certain episodes are not easy to forget: “the Greek and Bulgarian bandits” had set fire to the neighbouring villages, “had done their duty to the peasantry”; “they would cut, shoot and stab anyone in their way... [...] Defenceless people were pursued from all sides, caught, tortured, bled, crushed...” The next day, “a squadron of Bulgarian cavalry” arrived in town and the slaughter continued: “the soldiers killed the Turkish in a mosque, up to the last one; they smashed the heads of children against the walls, the elderly had their eyes pulled out, they cut women’s breasts...”⁷ However, we encounter a few favourable passages as well. Râșcanu testifies: “It is said that the Bulgarians were at one time cavaliers: They warned our commanders that in the Zlatița hospital there had been cholera sufferers”⁸. In another episode, the Romanian army is surprised to see that the wells in a village had been marked as being contaminated.

¹ “Pentru a păstra o așa zisă disciplină, o samă de ofițeri s’au dedat la acte de sălbăticie, stâlcind și ucigând în bătai bieții oameni... [...] Auzisem [...] în pustietățile tristei Bulgariei, de unele lucruri urâte, de ofițeri superiori care, cum se ivise spectrul holerei, se izolaseră de trupă c’o lașitate și c’un egoism rușinos. [...] Dar cazurile erau destul de rare, pentru ca să nu cadă rușinea [...] asupra unei oștiri întregi”*ibid.*, 18-20.

² Argetoianu, *Memorii. Pentru cei de mâine. Amintiri din vremea celor de ieri* (For the people of tomorrow. Memories from the times of yesterday) I-II. Parts I-IV: 206.

³ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁴ Atanasiu, *Avântul țării. Campania din 1913 în Bulgaria*: 40.

⁵ Sadoveanu, *44 de zile în Bulgaria*.

⁶ Râșcanu, *Spre Sofia cu Regimentul 8 de artilerie. Notele unui voluntar. Iulie-august 1913*: 67.

⁷ Mihail Sadoveanu, *Războiul balcanic* (The Balkan war) vol. Biblioteca „Dimineța” nr. 1 (Bucharest: Editura Adevărul, s.a.), 61.

⁸ Râșcanu, *Spre Sofia cu Regimentul 8 de artilerie. Notele unui voluntar. Iulie-august 1913*: 81-82.

In a similar way, the image of the Ottoman Empire's soldiers is covered in a gloomy perspective:

undisciplined, most of them old and weak, ragged and barefooted. – Barefooted and especially hungry! [...] sinister armies, hunchbacked by sufferings and endurance, weakened by hunger. [...] Artillerymen did not know how to use the cannon; infantrymen could not use the gun."¹

The Turkish army is depicted by Sadoveanu as "the old lion [...] full of wounds and too weak!": "Oh! I hadn't thought the Turks were so disorganized and decayed. Like everyone, I believed the allies would be easily crushed and the Turks would be in Sofia in two weeks"². Sadoveanu reckons that the current situation of the Ottoman army, acting with an "extraordinary slowness and laziness", is due to the

*Two centuries of development [...]. Then two centuries of gradual decline, lazy life in harems, possession of dishonesty and robbery of the despotic camarillas.*³

Bulgaria, our neighbouring country receives appreciative comments and charming descriptions of the surrounding nature and buildings (e.g. a beautiful rural church), especially as the soldiers are advancing towards the heart of the Balkan Mountains. They pass through Cervenibreg, a "small picturesque town" or Blesnicova, "the most beautiful place in Bulgaria seen so far"⁴. When one of the regiments reaches Etropol, the town is described as a breathtaking area. Nevertheless, the *first impressions of the soldiers* entering the country through the South about its landscapes are frequently bleakly depicted in Argetoianu's work:

*drought parched and empty fields like a heath. [...] Unweeded, unstubbed fields, meadows full of heather, roads left in God's will and the lack of any building or planting proved that over the centuries, the human hands had not improved anything in these places, but had destroyed everything it could.*⁵

The bare, uncultivated plains, the deserted villages "abandoned by people and God"⁶ from the south of the Danube give a feeling of savagery in contrast with the "much praised Bulgaria and implausible percentages of illiteracy (2%)"⁷. Such landscapes are

¹ "nedisciplinați, cei mai mulți bătrâni și slabi, zdrențuiți și desculți. – Desculți și mai ales flămânzi! [...] După veacuri de glorie, Sublima Poartă a nemernicilor Sultani de azi chiamă la luptă armate sinistre, încovoiate de suferinți și răbdare, slăbite de foame. [...] Tunarii nu știau să întrebuințeze tunul, infanteriștii nu puteau să întrebuințeze pușca." Sadoveanu, *Războiul balcanic*, Biblioteca „Dimineată” nr. 1: 28.

² Ibid., 16, 20.

³ "Două veacuri de mărire [...] Apoi două veacuri de treptată slăbire, de viață leneșă în haremuri, de stăpânire de necinste și de jaf a camarilelor despotice." Ibid., 25-26.

⁴ Râșcanu, *Spre Sofia cu Regimentul 8 de artilerie. Notele unui voluntar. Iulie-august 1913*.

⁵ "câmpii arse de secetă și pustii ca un băragan. [...] Miriștile îmbălărite, pășunile pline de buruiănă, drumurile lăsate în voia Domnului și lipsa oricărei clădiri sau sădiri dovedeau că, în cursul veacurilor, mâna omului nu îmbunătățise nimic pe aceste locuri, dar stricase tot ce putuse." Argetoianu, *Memorii. Pentru cei de mâine. Amintiri din vremea celor de ieri*, I-II. Parts I-IV: 216.

⁶ Gane, *Amintirile unui fost holerici. Din însemnările unui voluntar de campanie*: 32.

⁷ Argetoianu, *Memorii. Pentru cei de mâine. Amintiri din vremea celor de ieri*, I-II. Parts I-IV: 216.

compared with the “rich plains of Teleorman, covered with wheat”, in a constant emphasis of the beauty and superiority of our lands: “Such an astounding contrast between the dirt there and the cleanness here [Turnu-Măgurele]. [...] The city is paved, swept, with white clean houses, beautiful public buildings”¹. In his war journal, Topîrceanu as well notices the difference between our country and Bulgaria, describing Romania as “A beautiful and rich country. It would also be happy if it had no boyars.”² His accounts of the campaign are dotted with descriptions of the Bulgarian sceneries and observations regarding the moral and social life of our neighbours. They are recorded, as Săndulescu says, with “the same objectivity, without any resentment toward the neighbouring people”³:

*The tile enveloped houses. The women have no breasts. The peasant women, especially, are all ugly – their mugs, too. ‘Sorrow’ everywhere. Miserable Bulgaria! The villages are empty of sturdy young men.*⁴

Other troops, entering Bulgaria further to the east, towards the “Cadrilater”, present the local peasants and their lives in a different light: “Bulgarian farmers are wealthier than ours, but they lead a more simple life”⁵. In Turtucaia, “the Romanians, Turks and Bulgarians are almost in equal parts, every 4000 each; Turks in the West, Bulgarians to the middle and Romanians to the East, very mixed with the Bulgarians, and equally speaking both languages.” It feels very much like home, the author continues: “The houses in the centre resemble the ones in our countryside towns.”⁶

In a dedicated chapter called *Our neighbours*, Sadoveanu paints the image of the other countries: “The Bulgarians are having a hard time with the war”; the Serbs are “continually victorious”; the Greeks “have been so circumspect all the campaign and conquered some cities so empty (even Thessaloniki), that with a right momentum are the Bulgarians starting to cast them a smirk of discontent and hatred”.

*“The Bulgarians – are apparently committing a fratricide. Of all the Balkan allies, they alone are blood brothers with the Turks. [...] Historians are indeed proving that the Bulgarians and the Turks are of the same blood. But the transformations of the years and the religious ferment, the sufferings’ bitterness and desire for revenge of the broken have completed the differentiation of two nations and have created two irreducible enemies.”*⁷

About Romanians and Bulgarians the author writes during the time of the First Balkan War that the two peoples “have fraternized in grief”, led by “the tumults of pain and the consorting of those who groan beneath the same burden.”⁸ Sadoveanu particularizes the

¹ Gane, *Amintirile unui fost holerici. Din însemnările unui voluntar de campanie.*: 106.

² Al. Săndulescu, “George Topîrceanu - Jurnal de campanie,” *Luceafărul*, 12.07 1969.

³ Ibid.

⁴ “Casele învăluite cu olane. Femeile n-au sîni. Țărancele, mai ales, sînt toate urîte – și la mutră. „Jale” pretutindenii. Nefericita Bulgarie! Satele sunt pustii de voinici.” Ibid.

⁵ Dragoșescu, *Amintiri din războiul. Campania anului 1913 în Bulgaria*: 38.

⁶ Ibid., 34.

⁷ Sadoveanu, *Războiul balcanic*, Biblioteca „Dimineața” nr. 1: 30-32.

⁸ Ibid.

subject even further in the chapter *The Romanians and the Bulgarians*. He states that Romania is bigger than Bulgaria, has an older age, a superior national wealth and claims that we “descend from a nobler race” and “our intellectual captain is not just a mere word. [...] despite all of this, Western media have shown more sympathy to Bulgaria than to us, the situation over the Danube has been portrayed in a favorable light, while we were left in the shadow”¹. The newspaper articles were painting a remarkable picture. Therefore, in the eyes of all foreign countries, Bulgaria possessed a strong, viable army. The Bulgarians, utter patriots, considered themselves “the pit of the Slavic civilization” and claimed that their army was “as numerous as the sand of the sea, and most of all invincible”. Certain voices were accusing Bulgaria of “paying substantial amounts of money so that the countries abroad would be favorably informed about them”. The Romanians, on the other hand, were “always dissatisfied and ready to see only our own harm, to systematically ignore the much-little good that we have.”²

The population of Bulgaria, scarce as it was, rarely approached the Romanian soldiers, sometimes asking them for help with their wounded: “hundreds of injured received medical care from the Romanian health crew”³. In other episodes, images of women “with scruffy hair, roaring and grasping their heads with their hands”, praying to be spared, are further stressed to show that “Around here this is known: that the army must plunder, burn and kill...”⁴. The Bulgarian people receive harsh judgements, being projected as fools and “the most cruel, most savage people in the peninsula”⁵:

*It seems that God, too, is facing away from this people,
coward, invasive of another's property and belongings.*⁶

Theodor Râșcanu claims that “The Bulgarians, drunk with success, lost their temper and sense of reality. [...] Towards Romania, they had always been hostile and stubborn in recognize its right to Silistra”⁷. Bulgaria is seen as a “Miserable nation brought in this state by the imprudent ambition and fanfaronade of an arrogant, stubborn statesman lacking political sense!”⁸ He continues, saying that “The kneeling of Bulgaria is only due to its too big confidence in its forces, lacking sense of reality and arrogance. [...] The lack of experienced tactful political people.”⁹

The Turks in the Bulgarian villages are positively portrayed in various episodes, from meeting the Romanian army with water, dancing and cheering, to the recorded discussions they have with the Romanian memoirists. Atanasiu observes that the Turks “look at us with more sympathy, as if we were brothers”, comparing them to the Bulgarians, which are assigned the identity of a people that is “evil, vindictive, and

¹ Ibid., 50.

² Ibid., 53-54.

³ Argetoianu, *Memorii. Pentru cei de mâine. Amintiri din vremea celor de ieri*, I-II. Parts I-IV: 216.

⁴ Sadoveanu, *44 de zile în Bulgaria*: 90-92.

⁵ Atanasiu, *Avântul țării. Campania din 1913 în Bulgaria*: 9.

⁶ “Par’că și Dumnezeu, a întors fața de la acest popor, mișel, cotropitor de bunul și avutul altuia.” Ibid., 53.

⁷ Râșcanu, *Spre Sofia cu Regimentul 8 de artilerie. Notele unui voluntar. Iulie-august 1913*: 7, 8.

⁸ Ibid., 37.

⁹ “Îngenunchearea Bulgariei nu se datorește decât prea marei încrederi în forțele ei, lipsei simțului de realitate și trufiei. [...] Lipsei de oameni politici, cu experiență și cu tact.” Ibid., 142.

[who] do not forgive them for the benevolent attitude they have towards the Romanian army.”¹ They speak our language and consider themselves friends with the Romanians: “You Romanians... you good people... You don’t cut throats like the Bulgarians...”²

As the Bulgaria campaign draws to an end, desperate and defeated Bulgaria is shown to be “bow[ing] her head with sadness and resignation”³. For Romania this successful campaign is described as having “destroyed a legend. That of the superiority of Bulgaria to Romania.”⁴ In the view of the writer and journalist Theodor Râșcanu, the Romanians’ “duty” now becomes “to never forget the hatred and hostility of the Bulgarian, who was not been our friend until now *because he was stalking our Dobruja* and who, from now on, will hate us to death *for losing the Cadrilater*.”⁵

Conclusions

A problematic geographical position, doubled by a stormy history, is proving to be the absolute recipe for alterity. For the Balkan area, the tales that are accompanying this history are continuously constructing identity issues and keeping people from abandoning stereotypes and misconceptions. The concept of alterity has taken different proportions in the context of the Balkan Wars, followed by the 1st World War and the reignited conflicts of the 1990s in the region, remaining a very timely issue. Along with geography, politics and economic interests, such events have hindered the creation of a real sense of togetherness, of familiarity with our neighbours. Their culture and true personalities remain overshadowed by century-old stories. However, through our study we have revealed possible new sources of the aforementioned tales, essential to a better understanding of the formation of otherness.

¹ Atanasiu, *Avântul țării. Campania din 1913 în Bulgaria*: 53.

² Sadoveanu, *44 de zile în Bulgaria*: 94.

³ Ibid., 182.

⁴ Râșcanu, *Spre Sofia cu Regimentul 8 de artilerie. Notele unui voluntar. Iulie-august 1913*: 141.

⁵ Ibid., 142-43.