

Bulgarian National Culture: Debates during the National Revival Period* “Ex-centrism”, “ego-centrism”, Ottoman Context**

Bulgar Ulusal Kültürü: Ulusal Uyanış Dönemi Tartışmaları “Dış-Merkezcilik”, “Ben-Merkezcilik”, “Osmanlı Bağlamı”

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Abstract

The paper is focused on the problem of conceptualization of the National Culture which took place during the second half of XIX c. That period coincided with so called National Revival Epoch – an emotional concept, particular for Bulgarian popular and academic publicity. The analysis is based on the key notions “ego-centric nationalism” and “ex-centric nationalism”, forged by Nikolay Trubetskoy. The intellectuals, which followed the conception of the “ex-centric nationalism”, used to imagine the national culture representations in accordance with the images of the French culture, dominant that time. Intelligentsia, related to the concepts of the “ego-centric nationalism”, insisted on the representation of national culture as having its own center, and could be defined as oriented to the ideas set of the autochtonism. Thus, the second group is famous with initiatives, related to folklore researches and popularizing the medieval heritage, regarded as “Golden Era”. These two ideological tendencies are marked with one initial paradox. From one side, national cultural policy making emerged in the context of so called National Revival period as an intellectual instrument to establish symbolical distance between the national essentiality and the Ottoman heritage, using Russian culture, the cultures of the Western Europe or of the local “authenticity” and “people’s tradition” as they were accessible through accessible representations of them. From the other side, these debates were born during the Tanzimât era as direct outcome of the modernization projects which were taking place in the Ottoman Empire that time: a context, where so called National Revival Epoch was installed. There is one more paradox: these discussions remained underrepresented and distanced from the mass cultural taste. Peoples’ attitudes towards the image of the national culture, incompatible with the visions by the intelligentsia, neglected the options for civilization orientation and struggles for national essentiality, keeping on numerous Ottoman key cultural elements.

Keywords: Bulgarian National Revival Period, National Culture, Debates, Ex-centrism, ego-centrism, Ottoman Context.

* This concept is obviously burdened with nationalistic pathetic. It is still in use in Bulgarian historiography and in mass consciousness as a marker for the last century of the Ottoman era before Bulgarian statehood was re-established (1877 – 1878). It is widely accepted, that so called Bulgarian National Revival period starts with a literary fact: “Slavic-Bulgarian History”, written by Paisius of Hilendar – a monk from Chilandar monastery, Mount Athos. Russian-Ottoman war (1877 – 1878) is recognized as endpoint of that period. As a result of it, Modern Bulgarian statehood was founded.

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Öz

Makale, XIX. Yüzyılın ikinci yarısında Ulusal Kültürün kavramsallaştırılması problemine odaklanmıştır. Bu dönem, Bulgar popüler ve akademik tanıtımına özgü duygusal bir kavram olan Ulusal Uyanış Dönemi ile çakışmıştır. Çalışmadaki analiz, Nikolay Trubetskoy tarafından oluşturulan “ben-merkezci milliyetçilik” ve “dışmerkezli milliyetçilik” temel kavramlarına dayanmaktadır. “Dışmerkezli milliyetçilik” kavramını izleyen aydınlar, dönemin egemen Fransız kültürü imajına uygun olarak ulusal kültür simgelerini tasavvur etmekteydiler. “ben-merkezci milliyetçilik” kavramlarıyla ilgili olan entellektüeller, kendi öz merkezine sahip olması nedeniyle ulusal kültürün temsil edilmesinde ısrar etmekteydiler ve bu, otoktonizmin fikirlerinin benimsenmesine bir yönelim olarak tanımlanabilirdi. Bu nedenle, ikinci grup, folklor araştırmaları ve “Altın Çağ” olarak kabul edilen ortaçağ mirasının popülerleştirilmesiyle ilgili girişimleriyle ünlüdür.

Bu iki ideolojik eğilim bir başlangıç paradoksu ile işaretlenmiştir. Bir yanda ulusal kültür politikası yapımı, kolayca anlaşılabilir simgeler oldukları için erişilebilir olan Rus kültürünü, Batı Avrupa kültürlerini ya da ‘orjinallik’ ve ‘halkın geleneğini’ kullanarak, Osmanlı mirası ile ulusal gerekler arasında sembolik bir mesafe oluşturmak için entellektüel bir araç olarak Ulusal Kurtuluş bağlamında ortaya çıkmıştır. Diğer taraftan bu tartışmalar Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda gerçekleşen modernleşme projelerinin doğrudan bir sonucu olarak Tanzimat döneminde : Ulusal Uyanış Çağı’nın başladığı bağlamda doğmuştur. Bir paradoks daha mevcuttur: bu tartışmalar kitle kültürü tadından uzak ve bunun temsilinde yetersiz kalmıştır. Halkların ulusal kültür imajına yönelik olarak aydınların vizyonları ile uyumlu olmayan tutumları çok sayıda önemli Osmanlı kültürel unsurunu koruyarak medeniyet yönelimi ve ulusal gerekler için mücadele seçeneklerini göz ardı etmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bulgar Ulusal Uyanış Dönemi, Ulusal Kültür, Tartışmalar, Dış merkezçilik, Ben-merkezçilik, Osmanlı Bağlamı.

Introduction

In 1860 Dobry Voynikov, a Bulgarian dramaturgist, published “Collection of various essays”. That collection is considered by literary critics as the first analytical attempt, carried out on the terrain of literary theory, because the author made an effort to forge initial conceptualizations of literary genres, narrative types etc. The book was enriched with “Supplement”, where the conceptualizations were exemplified by numerous stories, taken from literature, historiography, including moralizing and didactic texts; para-scientific essays (if we dare to regard texts, marked with certain philosophical pretension, like “Speculation concerning dawn”, “Goodness of winds” etc). All the writings were harnessed to illustrate those basic conceptual notions. Original Bulgarian texts, written by Voynikov himself, were also included in this anthology chapter of the book. French ones were predominant in number. As the editor insisted, those stories were borrowed mainly from the French tradition, from “the most glorious French writers”: Chateaubriand, Buffon, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, La Fontaine etc. (Voynikov 1860: 3).

He also put an accent on the need to stimulate “headway of the people in education” by “studying their mother tongue” and literature. However, there were one objective obstacle – the absence of exemplar texts, written in Bulgarian, in both meanings of the exemplification: regarded as value standards and as illustrations, matchable to certain theoretical standpoints. And, it

was particularly emphasized in the Preface of the book. “For such a collection of essays to be effective, the examples in it must comprise the best texts from the most notable writers, but as everybody knows, for us Bulgarians such a task still remains unrealizable, because there were no writers, matching the idea of using their writings as examples.” That’s why the compiler of the book included French literature texts as examples – a method, which provokes both critical and supportive reactions. Those decisions initiated a debate, defined as “the first literary discussion”, conducted in the framework of modernizing Bulgarian society in the Ottoman context (Markov 1981: 12).

What was the discussion about? Firstly, it could be underlined, that it was the first critical project, intended to put the representation of then-contemporary Bulgarian literature under question, and regarded in the perspective of center searching. Immediately after “Collection” was published, numerous authors wrote articles, supporting the viewpoint it promoted. Basically, that authors had nothing against shifting the center of Bulgarian culture model out of geography of Bulgarian society, precisely Westwards, being oriented to French cultural trends. Following the paradigm of Nikolay Trubetskoy (see Jakobson (ed.), 1975: 13; Kiossev 2008: 244), we could define the ideology of that part of Bulgarian intelligentsia as “ex-centric”, centrifugal. However, the approach of Voynikov were heavily criticized as well. In numerous articles the idea of adopting Western culture, and, to be more precise – the achievements of the French writers – as a model for national literature, was not accepted warmly. The platform of them could be considered as autochtonists’, and, according to the model of Trubetskoy, it could be named as “ego-centric”, centripetal. Generally, Bulgarian essentiality projects, based on the uniqueness of the local culture, expressed from XIX c. on, are hardly separable from a primordial Rusophilia, particular for a group of Bulgarian intellectuals, who were educated in Russia and after that remained under the influence by the ideas of Pan-Slavism. Numerous authors shifted from ego-centric ideology to ex-centric and vice versa once or several times in their biographies. Thus, it could be maintained, that there were not hardcore political attitudes, displayed constantly by certain social leaders, but context-oriented decisions, result of flexible political thinking. For example, in “Collection of various essays” Dobri Voynikov’s position was obviously supportive to French culture, but in his drama “The Misunderstood Civilization” he demonstrated its anti-utopia side as reflected through distorting mirrors, introducing absurd images, even though he made it in comic regime¹.

Let me track the history of these two conceptual tendencies, being stuck on analyzing particular texts. They are highly important, because the debate of the center-searching/forging could be regarded as pivot one, concerning the whole XIX c. Bulgarian culture.

1 The narrative of those drama could be summarized as follows: A credulous Bulgarian girl, aping European and French fashion, and “foreign luster”, was enticed and rapped by self-interested foreigner. Originally published in 1871, it is probably the most popular comedy in Bulgaria even nowadays, although its certain didactic content, given in poetics, which could be thought as outdated.

“Ex-centric” intellectuals’ rhetoric strategies

Shortly after it was published, the “Collection” provoked acute reactions, which came mainly from the intellectuals, considering national culture as self-centered. An anonymous review was printed in “Tsarigradsky vestnik” soon after. His author argued with Voynikov for using French writers as illustrative material. Basically, he opposed to the statement, that “we don’t have writings”. “Do they know about the works of John, the Exarch Bulgarian?” – asked the anonymous author, addressing Voynikov and Rashko Blaskov, who was publisher of the book. It seems to me they don’t! Let’s put aside some more ancient texts and ask: “Do they have any experience with the famous writings of Cyprian from Turnovo or Teophylactos Bulgarian? (...). Have they ever seen all the manuscripts, preserved in Zograph (monastery, A. A.) and Saint John of Rila? – We answer: They have not; we are sure. If they are not informed about existence of these Bulgarian writings, how they can announce, that we don’t have them?” (Unidentified author, 1860: 3).

Referring to the “glorious” Antiquity, applied as a compensatory mechanism in order to overcome the actual shortage of “high” cultural values and conceptualized as imminently present, but forgotten and need re-calling, was dominant discourse in the texts by autochtonists. According to them, the rejection of their argumentation is highly risky, because it could be qualified as deficit of national pride and Bulgarianness. That’s the reason why the ideologists of the centrifugate model acted with extreme care. They were consent, that “firstly, every nation should acquire illustrative material from its national literature, and to seek for examples in foreign authors after that,” as Voynikov replied to the criticism of the anonymous author (Voynikov 1981: 60). But, in their eyes ideological planning of national heritage failed due to several reasons. First of all, it is still inaccessible: Dragan Tsankov, a politician and socially active person, wrote: “it is not easy to select from writings, which still are not published and remain in manuscript versions, for to be used by young Bulgarians.” (Tsankov 1981: 54). Secondly, the accessible part of national antiquity was not sufficient to meet the requirements of one “high” cultural model, even though being under construction: Tsankov continued: “Hence, what were those writings of John Exarch? It is simply about several lines text, and this is not enough...”. On third place, the heritage of the nation, after removal of the idealizing filter, was considered as quite outdated literally, and unable to meet the necessities of XIX century society. In this point of the debate, the rhetoric strategy, introduced by the ex-centric intellectuals, was intended to deconstruct the idea for continuity between Medieval times and XIX c. Todor Burmov, who were the first prime minister of Bulgaria after the Treaty of Berlin (1878), underscored: national writings “should be preferred only if they are able to match the needs of the epoch as equally as the foreign ones”, and continues, maintaining that “they are now unable to familiarize us with the contemporary fashion and taste” (Burmov 1981: 56-57).

Considering that symbolic struggle for center of the national culture, the attitude of Todor Burmov could be seen as an example for contextual variability: In this case, supporting Voynikov’s point of view, he had nothing against such a planning strategy of the “Collection”, i.e. implying a French-centred model. Contrariwise, in “Fraternal explanation by Bulgarian to his brothers-Bulgarians” – a book published in Bucharest in 1867, he displayed undoubtedly pro-Russian orientation.

Gradually, the most radical argument, belonging to the ex-centric tendency, was articulated and his author was Dragan Tsankov. He claimed, that Bulgarian antiquity was not remarkable enough, and its aesthetic value is dubious: “The author, who wrote the response in Tsarigradski newspaper, was obliged to prove, that the writers he was writing about – John Exarch and all others – were good writers indeed, and the works of them are capable as exemplifiers, wasn’t he? Were all of them good writers? Were all of them usable as exemplifiers?” (Tsankov 1981: 54-55). Voynikov added: “Their texts: were they marked with such an artistic phrase, effective and well-decorate expressions, signifying the rich variety of thoughts” as French ones? (Voynikov 1981: 59).

Here the group of the intellectuals, supporting the ex-centric model, articulated numerous arguments, accenting on the benefit of reading universal literature, claiming that rejecting “shared richness of the peoples’ spirit” and self-restricting in “what belongs to our nation”, could be considered as dangerous (Burmov 1981: 57). It is remarkable, that in concepts of ego-centric nationalism Bulgarian antiquity was nominated as “writings” or “letters”, but not as “literature” – a notion, reserved for modern literature projects, referent to that “shared richness”.

“Ego-centric” project

According to the model, promoted by autochtonists’ ideology, foreign cultural elements were unable to fit the Bulgarian essentiality and thus they could be harmful. Models from abroad were regarded as a source of numerous risks: from national assimilation to physical health damage. The last potential scenario was found particularly embarrassing by Todor Ikonomov – a journalist, writer, publisher and politician. In an article he explained in details the detrimental effect of foreign novels onto Bulgarian female readers: The ladies, while mislead by that imported texts, gain their consciousness darkened, “natural constitution” of their bodies were mutilated, they became weak and pallid. Generally, that readers, being pathologically fervent in imitating fictional characters, exposed their progeny to risk (Ikonomov 1981: 184-188).

Moreover, the models from abroad were regarded as unable to match the spirit of Bulgarianness, conceptualized as essentiality in the paradigm of German Romanticism. Lyuben Karavelov – a revolutionary, writer and journalist – claims that national character, considered by him as constant composition of particularities, makes adopting of foreign models by direct copying to be ridiculous:

One of our writers took a French novel, then changed Louise to Tsvetana, Ludwig to Dragan, Paris to Tarnovo, and the novel was re-fashioned as “Wretched Tsvetana” (...). Honest people don’t steal texts in order to publish them to be read by his compatriots: Firstly, such a person certainly will be regarded as literary thief (robber). Secondly, an act like that could cause dishonor to the nation. To transform a Frenchman into Bulgarian or Bulgarian into Frenchmen is impossible as well as Tsvetana can’t be identical to Louise or Louise – to Tsvetana. Similarly, French national spirit, French customs and national character can’t be identical with Bulgarian ones (Karavelov 1981a: 91).

Foreign texts, according to the supporters of the autochtonist ideological model, as incorporated into Bulgarian culture, were not representative enough. They couldn't be considered as exemplar and "high culture" achievements, ready to be followed by modernizing cultures like Bulgarian one, but they rather belong to literary marginalia. Botev and Karavelov ignored this imported literature, nominating it as "literary rubbish". In their logic those textual waste was able to serve only in its own cultural context, but it was entirely useless for foreign people, so planting it into Bulgarian society made no sense. Or, as it was claimed by Karavelov:

United States of America, England, Methodists, Quakers, Mormons etc. have also produced literary rubbish as well as all other societies, which have their own national literatures. Educated people of them write and publish numerous writings, which meet the needs of their own societies, because such texts are warmly accepted in a particular national context, and because people like Quakers, Methodists or just Protestants, are specifically interested in them. (...) Bulgarian people were born and educated otherwise, not similarly to Quakers and Protestants. Bulgarian national character and peoples' customs are entirely different, compared to those of Americans. Today, Bulgarian society has totally different needs and projects, not the same as Mormons (Karavelov 1981b: 149).

Therefore those group of social leaders introduced a project for constructing of Bulgarian national identity, based on history and folklore, thought as sources, where the substance of the nation lies, being ready to be gathered. These sources – they continued – were originally featured with true examples of "high" culture of the nation, capable of meeting the needs of the group, regardless of the historical context. However, such an idealized vision of the national heritage encountered at least two crucial impediments – sometimes recognized, but in some significant cases intentionally ignored by autochtonist ideologists.

In the foreign mirror: autochtonists' method verified

Firstly, vocabulary of autochtonal ideas, invoked in order to express "peoples' richness", "antiquity" and "originality", the whole set of notions, harnessed in conceptualizing the national specificity; the embarrassment, shown towards cultural interventions from abroad; and – last, but not least – the initiative, meant to forge such a project, were borrowed from foreign traditions, where such models were result of centuries-long development, dating from XVIII and XIX century Europe. Those models, initiated as "criticism against aristocratic immorality", according to Joep Leerssen, evolved into "criticism against cosmopolitanism of the aristocracy", reflecting the fact, that aristocracy was extremely susceptible to foreign cultures and ready to resemble their manners, mainly French ones. Hence, the resistance against Western influence could be better understood in the framework of widely shared "opposition to the hegemony of the French-oriented cultural elitism in Europe". In England, Netherlands and Germany this resistance motivated new civic virtues projects. Amongst that virtues crucial were patriotism and personal

devotion to the nation. Following on Joep Leerssen, we could state, that those kind of “home-bred” tastes, marking domestic culture and literature, were constructed as projects, antithetic to the advancing of French influence all over the European continent. The basics of those projects were systematically displayed in the philosophy of J. G. Herder, whose cultural relativism revised the ideas of the Enlightenment, which were based on thinking the values as universal, and emphasized on variability and original incompatibility between national cultural systems as ultimate worth and logically valid concept with analytical potential. His ideology fashioned the foundations of Romantics’ passion for folklore and history. It was the needed base, where the enthusiasm to “National Revival” plans in Central, Northern, Eastern and other parts of Europe was rooted (Leerssen 2015: 118-130). Thence, the model of thinking all the antiquity and peoples’ stuff as sacred treasures of the nation are literal translations, repeating foreign Romantic dreams in Bulgarian locality. In 1858 Dimitar Mutev published an article in “Balgarski knizhitsi” journal, where he addressed an appeal to gather and study “our peoples’ antiquity”, exemplifying his idea with achievements of philology and folklore studies in Germany:

... Folklore studies have never been payed so significant attention, as it is payed nowadays in Germany; and folklore have nowhere been studies with more success, but in Germany. More than 40 years have passed until brothers Wilhelm and Jakob Grimm laid stable foundations of that studies with their studious investigations of language, mythology, legislation, poetry, and literature in general. Jacob (Ekov in the original version, A.A.) Grimm were happy to create a new field of research, dedicated to peoples’ essentiality. Writings of him were used as examples by all the nations (Mutev 1981: 44).

“German” illustrative material was often replaced by Slavophil projects, marked – as Dimitar Mutev shared – by “notorious figures of V. Karadžić, Kopitar, Šafárik and Sreznevsky”. It could be stated, that the whole autochtonist excitement about the “revival” of Bulgarian antiquity could be seen as direct consequence of instructions and recommendations, addressed by foreign Slavicists to local intellectuals, which were implemented willingly by Bulgarian intellectuals. As Alexander Kiossev proposed, that implementation could be interpreted as “copying in the meta-language framework of the “Father”, absorbed by the “society in its immature youth” (Vassil Popovich) and used with certain intention to be recognized as identical with the model and to accumulate enough dignity to deserve “father’s love” (Kiossev 1998: 43). It became apparent, that without fraternal support, delivered by foreign Slavic studies, forging local cultural heritages (from distance or directly), it seems that Bulgarian history and peoples’ antiquity won’t have been born as well as Bulgarian nation. “If foreign writers haven’t paid attention to our nation, we were to be still in ignorance about our antiquity and history”, as Mutev continues in the cited publication.

Amongst all the “fraternal figures”, the most distinguished were Youry Venelin², who, Albena Hranova states, could be regarded as cultural hero: his identity was obviously Slavic, i.e. he

2 Youry Venelin (1802-1839) is a pseudonym of Georgy Hutsa – Russian researcher of Slavic and Bulgarian past and present, historian and ethnographer, with Ukrainian background. His writings “Ancient and Contemporary Bulgarian People in political, ethnographic, historical and religious relation to Russian People”, “Concerning the

could be recognized as “own”, but he was “other” enough and therefore capable of maintaining the prestige as distant value at the same time (Hranova 2011: 51). Researching literary history books, published in early decades after the idealized Liberation from the Ottoman dominion, it became evident that Venelin’s figure keep on being core plot of numerous national myths even after 1878. Yet, those mythical plots, forged in essentialist paradigm, were still active and fertile, as producing new forms of admiration and legitimation of him. They could be considered as newly manufactured, because after the Bulgarian statehood were re-established, all the individual voices and efforts to formulate national culture reference standards, remaining non-systematic and isolated until then, were harnessed in a shared project for making literary canon as one of the institutions, pretending to represent the nation. In that initial effort to structure Bulgarian national literary canon, represented by narratives for literary history, written by A. Pipin and V. Spasovich (a Russian literary history, Bulgarian translation of it was published in 1884), G. D. Popov (1886), Dimitar Marinov (1887), M. Moskov (1895), and Alexander Teodorov-Balan (1896), the image of Venelin was considered not only as fundamental one (the only exception here is Moskov’s textbook), he was not only elevated to the most prestigious level of Bulgarian National Revival making, being integrated to Paisius of Hilendar and Sofroniy Vrachansky – figures, conceptualized as “fathers-founders” of the nation. His face was detailed enough to overshadow even key figures from the revolutionary narrative, imagined some decades later as strongholds of Bulgarian nationalistic repertoire. National heroes like Hristo Botev, poet and revolutionary, was not present in the literary history by Pipin and Spasovich. The young poet perished in a battle against Ottoman troops during the April uprising (1876). Pipin and Spasovich published their book just 3 years after his dead (it was initially printed in Russia in 1879), so it could be expected that the time distance were quite short to process the local memory into national one. Botev was still underrepresented in literary history narratives by G. D. Popov and Dimitar Marinov, especially in comparison with the scrupulous portrait of Youry Venelin. Literary history, written by Popov, could be considered as exemplar, because the author made the first attempt to re-evaluate Venelin’s contribution. Scientific importance of his works was questioned hesitatingly and just due for the claim of the Russian Slavacist to resolve most of the “basic tasks of history and ethnography of Bulgarian people for the first time” (Popov 1886: 38). Generally, this textbook was well inscribed into the tendency to impulse the myth for establishment, deeply rooted in the “Revival” as metaphor. Popov wrote, that Venelin “resurrected Bulgarian nation” and “became a reason for revival of Bulgarian nation, which were completely dead before him” (Popov 1886: 38). It is obvious, that after the Liberation, when markers for recognition of own national essentiality from others are more stable and visible, efforts to manufacture nationally loaded aesthetic values and hierarchies are more purposive, and writings by Zachary Stoyanov and Ivan Vazov are more and more widely harnessed into the project of constructing national hero pantheon, the figure of Youry Venelin is still predominant in literary textbooks. That’s why it is hard to imagine, that during the previous period, when reflections about national identity are still under discussion with no institutional policy to lay basic markers and attitudes. In some texts, produced during

character of folklore songs amongst Slavs beyond Danube” etc., were considered as highly reputable amongst Bulgarian intellectuals from XIX c.

the so-called Revival period and fitted into the autohtonists’ framework, Venelin was explicitly defined as demiurge of Bulgarian nation. In his book “Ancient and Contemporary Bulgarian People”, as Rayko Zhinzifov interpreted, “Bulgarians were able to see the whole historical life of their nation, all the ancient fame of them, like in a mirror”, and to recognize those things, which they were “only instinctively conscious of, but necessary as daily bread” (Zhinzifov 1981: 156).

Furthermore, it sounds like paradox, but the logic of autochtonists demonstrated a significant effect/deficit: The more uncompromisingly was raised the question about national essentiality and more appeals for preserving “domestic character” were articulated more radically, the more intensified was the need for harnessing foreign emblems. For example, D. Ts. Kotsov, a XIX c. teacher, published an article in “Nova Balaria” newspaper, where he depicted a basic set of virtues of Bulgarian writers, translating them into the language of external prestigious values. Thereby, he acquired unwanted effect, denouncing the idea for Bulgarian classics as existing and worthy. “It could be said, that there are numerous gifted young people amongst Bulgarian nation, but we won’t list them now: I will simply mention, that in Bulgaria there are numerous talents like Shakespeare, Goethe, Dante, Descartes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau etc. (...) and, we have every right adoring all the exquisite creations by our genial authors” (Kotsov 1876).

Back to the glorious past: ideologies of cultural (dis-)continuity. Middle Ages vs. Ottoman context

We could suppose that Bulgarian intellectuals were not fully aware of the problem of viewing the national originality into imported mirrors, because it was quite abstract. But, the second impediment they were faced to were quite practical. It’s about the attempt to draw ideological continuity between Medieval Bulgarian literature and XIX c. one, where it was impossible to be identified or at least very problematic. Medieval Bulgarian literature and folklore are both systems, which were not incorporated into the Modern Bulgarian literature, born during the XIX c. in the Ottoman context. Literature from the splendid Middle Age epoch and folklore were not interconnected. No historical or logical continuity between them could be identified. During the period of Modernization, they either existed as parallel row (folklore) or as fossil form (Middle age literature) with no connection to the XIX century literary processes. In some cases, these incompatible systems were found even in conflict, based on the new tendencies, introduced by the modernization process, took place in the frame of Tanzimât.

Moreover, searching for causality was the main methodological approach, widely used in social sciences and humanities in Bulgaria, and it remains actual even nowadays, no matter how outdated is. Let me express my intuition, concerning the problem above. I’m still wondering whether such a methodological framework could be interpreted as a compensatory reaction, meant to suppress the fear, spontaneously appeared and caused by leaving the history process with no initial reason, and to think Modern Bulgarian literature as initiated by an incidental advent with no stable national background, lacking logical exposition. Impartiality and scientific neutrality as

approach require to acknowledge, that the relation between folklore and literature lead to intrigue alternative points of view, while seen from the Literary studies dialog. During 70-ties and 80-ties of XX c. in Bulgaria an intense debate, focused on the problem of (dis)continuity between folklore and Modern literature, took place. From one side, Boyan Nichev, literary researcher, claimed that “series of folklore processes ended up in (Modern – A.A.) literature, and numerous important literary phenomena had their beginning as a consequence of the development of folklore” (Nichev 1976: 6). His theses were revised by Nikola Georgiev, who insisted, that “in Bulgaria there were no transition from folklore to Modern literature during XIX”. He states, that folklore and literature are “parallel rows”, whose trajectories run to approaching or to distancing, but they were never merged (Georgiev 2001). Concerning the relation between medieval and modern literature, all the conceptions, formulated by researchers, even though engaged in a more sophisticated regime of explanation, usually consolidate the causality as hegemonizing discourse and stabilize its nationalistic implications. These conceptions worth mentioning additionally because they frequently include information about inconformity between these two epochs as regarded into the framework of differences in dominant social and political ideas. They are deeply rooted in the admission that Modern epoch was closely connected to secularization process, which was originally unconformable with “the ideology of the Middle Ages, ruled by the Church” (Dinekov 2007: 13). But, the conclusion they usually reach to is, that “it is legitimate to maintain, that modern literature could be seen as a successor of medieval one” (Dinekov 1969: 178). The argument that interpretative tendency articulated was based on so called “damaskins” (mixed content collections, where “democratization” and “modernization” of the language norm is recognized), or it used to think certain elements from the Middle Age literature as absorbed by the Modern one. Those elements were considered as re-fashioned in a media discourse (ibid: 178), being tied to the paradigm of Modernity with its universal access to information. Searching for causality goes far beyond the continuity in the field of method of literature-making, stretching to the social functions of the literature, regarded as national mission: Medieval Bulgarian literature – wrote Donka Petkanova – “helped for conservation of the spirit of Bulgarianness, it used to support collective memory, it also created potential for spiritual resistance amongst Bulgarian people in order to save the national consciousness during catastrophic periods of history”. With that nationally oriented function it was seen as considerably influential on writers as Paisiy Chilendarsky and Spiridon Gabrovsky, and it “played a social role with no interruption – not only during the period of its formation, but all the times” (Petkanova 1997: 635-636). Thereby, the globalist statement, claiming for “thirteen centuries-long unity of Bulgarian literature” (Dinekov) was reached. Its inertia was explicitly nationalistic: it imagines a representation of Bulgarian spirit, left “frozen” temporary during the time of the Ottoman dominion (defined constantly as “slavery” in this kind of analyses), and fortunately defrost and waken up for new life, when “National Revival period” arose.

Back to the terrain of XIX c.: supporters of ego-centric conception were thinking in nationalistically-burdened dictionary, ready to convert incompatibility between Middle Age literature and Modern one to a vision for smooth transition, similar to contemporary researchers;

and to fill the gaps between these two different cultural paradigms with evolutionary perspective, imagining it as uninterrupted tradition. Thereby, they were confronted with another significant difficulty: from one side, the sources, which have been gathered up to then, were quite insufficient. They were disciplined by including in numerous catalogs and bibliographies, but not as usable availability. Those concern about insufficiency of national essentiality objects resulted not in traumatic feeling for physical deficit of relics, but mostly in frustration, caused by unfulfilled social mission, shamefully neglecting of the heritage, which were still sunk in oblivion, expecting to be exhumed. G. Rakovsky wrote: “It would be very useful for history narrative about our nation and for the writings our educated Bulgarian people to sacrifice a few hours and to describe in details customs, folklore songs, fairy tales, in one word – everything, related to antiquity”. He continued, claiming that if intelligentsia refuse to make such efforts, it will certainly lead to moral sanctions by posterity: “Yet, children of this nation, should we stay calm? It is a shame on us and progeny won’t leave us with no bitter condemnation!” (Rakovsky 1857: 175-176). In addition to the argument about the antiquity, which was still undiscovered and veiled with “dark curtains” (Rakovsky), the explanation of its lacking in number and representation potential employed the myth about its deliberate devastation (see Aretov 2006: 277-294). According to this narrative, numerous remnants of the past were burnt out by foreigners, but also by Bulgarian people, zealous in Christianity (“they were not simply jealous and fervid to Christian faith, but even more: they destructed not only numerous idols completely, but burnt lots of books (dating from pre-Christian period – A.A.) – Rakovsky 1857: 164), attributing the absent antiquity with parallel, transcendental being. It was traumatically absent in actuality, but it used to occupy the imaginary space of the past: deeply marked with signs of prestige and full with history and cultural presences.

However, that anxiety, caused by the fact, that sources for reconstructing Medieval past were scarce, even though driven aside by the mechanisms as described above, seems to be one of the dark emotional zones of ego-centric nationalism. Another problem leaders of ego-centric nationalism were faced with originated from the fact, that almost all the sources from Middle Ages, which were accessible, are hardly compatible with Modern art projects and resistive to Modern interpretations. Hiring folklore into literary projects, exercised into stylizations, not always finished with satisfactory results. If we remove all the co-notations, dreaming XIX c. in a “high narrative” mode as “National Revival”, and if we demount all the nationalistic reverie about folklore; if we suppress our spontaneous compassion, caused by tragic biography of the author, we could hardly identify poems as “Golapche” and “Na santseto”, written by Constantine Miladinov, as remarkable artistic achievements³. Otherwise, if we decide not to prioritize conclusions, based on professional reception, articulated long after, and focus on how authors from XIX c. perceived

3 Constantine Miladinov (1830-1862) was Bulgarian poet and folklorist, born in Struga town. He compiled a collection, entitled “Bulgarian folklore songs” (1861). He also wrote poems, made under certain influence by folklore, mainly in the stylistic aspect. In 1862 the poet and collector died in prison in Istanbul together with his brother Dimitar Miladinov. Facts about his dead still remain unclear. There is popular narrative, recounting that they were poisoned by Phanariots – Greek nobility from Fener, a part of historical area of Istanbul. Phanariot Greeks played main role for them to be dungeoned earlier out of any justice.

their own texts, we could notice, that there were certain folklore songs, which used to provoke tensions and opposition as well. That's the case with "Gergana"⁴, written by Petko Slaveykov. Ivan Radev, contemporary Bulgarian literary criticist, claims that this text was not accepted by its author as integral part of his original works (Radev 1997: 236-239). The poem was published in "Chitalishte" journal in 1873 with no author's signature or initials. Later on, it was not included in collections of poems, written and compiled by him, although he has had such an option at least twice: in "Verses and Songs" (1879) and in "Mixed bouquet" (1886). That poem was published as late as 1901, when his son prepared Petko Slaveykov's "Selected Works". P. R. Slaveykov was unwilling to underline his authorship of the text and it was probably due to his feeling that the poem was immature folklore imitation, lacking originality. Boyan Penev, a literary historian, also found, that some of the experiments, realized as folklore-based variations, are disputable in the aspect of aesthetics. Concerning the poem quoted, he stated, that Slaveykov resembles one folklore legend with no artistic contribution and personal interpretation of its motives (Penev 1977: 446). Apparently, those aesthetic fiasco was rooted into conceptual and aesthetic mismatch between the two systems – folklore and Modern literature. They were distant, even alienated one from another, and it was hard to be imagined (in spite of the efforts made) as a linked in harmony transition, and capable of producing literature masterpieces.

However, intellectuals, who attempted to seize the heritage of the Middle Ages, encountered similar problems. Their extreme diligence took them in conflict even with representatives of ego-centric line, because adopting linguistic models from the Middle age literature lead to stylistic inadequacy, being overburdened with artificially archaized dictionary and confused syntax. As L. Karavelov insisted:

... Once those scholars took the feather, being willing to help the national development with their writings, they spoiled everything. Quite vibrant patriotism (love towards nation) of them prevented them from clear and true vision of the objects. For to prove (...), that Old Slavonic language is not Serbian, nor Russian or Czech, but Bulgarian, they started to orient Modern Bulgarian language towards one Ancient Bulgarian disposition, decorating it with yusses (nasal vowels, particular for Old Slavonic language – A. A.) – needed or not... (Karavelov 1981a: 88-89).

The situation of slipping continuity arose also strong energies, focused on manufacturing antiquity, on forging traditions, made in order to compensate those cracks in genealogy of the phenomena. I mean mystifications as "Veda Slovena"⁵, and historical reconstructions, contributing to the

4 The original title of the poem is "Izvorat na belonogata", or "The spring of the white-legged maiden".

5 "Veda Slovena" is a collection of folklore songs, published by the Croat folklorist Stefan Verković. It was two-volume edition, released in 1874 and 1881 respectively. It contains mainly ritual and mythical songs, codified by Ivan Gologanov, a local teacher. According to the alternative version, he was not the only collector, but other people helped him. These songs represent pre-Christian, Thracian and Veda content, suggesting sensational depth of Slavic/Bulgarian ethnogenesis. Immediately after, leading researchers as Louis Léger, Konstantin Jireček, Vatroslav Jagić, Ivan Shishmanov, Michael Arnaudov etc. claimed, that this antiquity representation is obviously mistrustful. In a bitter discussion "Veda Slovena" was nominated, together with its editor, as "myth-mania", "megalomaniac passion"

problem of the ethno-genesis of Bulgarians with so called “Indian theory”, formulated by Georgy Rakovsky, “Thracian theory” by Tsany Ginchev etc.

Ottoman cultural code as mass taste model

While dividing nationalisms in ego-centric and ex-centric ones, Nikolay Trubetskoy expresses his hope, that this dialectic will be one of childhood diseases of societies, which are to disappear, when they grow mature. It is obvious, that none of those two projects, imagining the configuration of XIX c. culture of Bulgarian people, reached the desired consistency. Being stretched between Euro-centric, Slavophile and autochtonist ideas, it was constantly under construction, being forged, not re-born. Stabilized center, although strongly desired, were not achieved, so did not literary canon as stabilized institution of the nation.

We should keep into consideration, that these debates were taking place amongst intelligentsia. They were elite phenomena, totally dissociated from the mass taste. In its turn, aesthetic preference of the people remained entirely indifferent to the debates for constructing center of national culture and totally unmoved by instructive discourses, left by “Fathers-founders”. Such a message could be identified in numerous narratives, recounting about peripetia, which foreign travelers passed through, while trying to explain to Bulgarian people their own “national antiquity”:

“... Next year Russian Academy (of Sciences – A.A.) helped Venelin to make his toilsome and very dangerous fieldwork trip to Bulgaria: He met numerous obstacles, caused by Bulgarian people, who were not able to understand his purpose, that’s why they treated him with distrust and suspicion. (..) Alongside all the big troubles he was faced with, Venelin fall into despair not a single time, thinking to quit the project. (Popov 1886: 37).

Moreover, according to Venelin’s narrative, witnessing about his meeting with people from Shumen town, he recounts: “I was able to imprint in their minds forcibly, that it is not correct for Bulgarians to communicate in Turkish language” (quoted in Dechev 2010: 55). Those elite discussions, dedicated to national culture constructing, were able to provoke scarce reaction in the wide social strata. They remained encapsuled in the sphere of “high” thinking of the ideologies and caused almost no influence in the mass taste, which proved to be insusceptible to patriotic education and emotional elevation. The preference of the mass people was deeply rooted in the Ottoman context. It was expressed in everyday-life practices, where all the features of the living in the Ottoman Empire were shared, not ethnically specific. Thence, we are faced with two parallel cultural registers, with cultural dissemymy (Hertzfeld 2007: 32-34). The first one conceptualized itself as “high”, and gained official authority later on. This register was established onto autochtonism – Euro-centrism relation

etc. However, Verković remained convinced in the authenticity of his discovery till the end of his life. The text itself is still matter of dispute amongst professional researchers and non-professionals.

as two basic attitudes, both refracted through nationalistic filter. It is worth mentioning that the Ottoman context and cultural code were deliberately disqualified from those elite-made picture. Considered from an ideologically neutral viewpoint, it is obviously manipulative rhetoric technique. Taking into account our centuries-long shared life, this code should be interpreted not as “foreign”, but as domestic and constructive for common everyday-living horizon in the Balkans. From the other side, considering the processes during Tanzimât, the Ottoman context itself had been changing significantly under the influence by the culture of the West, introducing numerous modernization projects. Moreover, this fact puts under question the interpretation of the Ottoman as anti-modern and radical anti-European, as it was and still is supported by loud speaking nationalists. It is precise to maintain, that the institutional framework of Tanzimât was, which initiated debates about “European”, “national”, “Modern” identity of the people, centered on the topics as enlightenment (and Enlightenment), modern education, the role of the monarch, even for Rebirth and Revival processes, as they were seen by minority communities in the Empire (Vezenkov 2006: 82-127). Nonetheless, the first national cultural discourse, the elite one, neglected the processes, which were taking considerable part in the Empire, as sharing one row with the progress of the ideas for national building and so-called Revival process in Bulgarian society. In contrary, it used to interpret every element of the Ottoman contextual frame as a problem. It was seen as a factor, derailing the national development projects and diverting Balkan nations from the model of Europe, which they initially belonged to.

The second discourse, the popular one, used to function with no ideological coordination with the first one. It wouldn't be overstatement, maintaining that during its sporadic contacts with the official culture of intelligentsia, the unofficial one proved to function exactly contrariwise: all the efforts for education and implementation of Enlightenment ideas, imported from Europe, remained unrecognized. This basis became more apparent in the variety of forms of traditional entertainment practices and displayed musical preference of the peoples. During the whole “Revival Period” and some decades after, urban songs, based on Oriental rhythmic and featured with imagery, taken from the Orient, were particularly preferred, not Western ones. Some of those songs contain embarrassing and even obscene scenes, able to cause inconvenience to a refined, cultural taste: “Enchitsa, white hanım, / white breasts tipped, / and, in my poor heart hurt” (Slaveykov 1852: 56-57). It is curious, that amongst the authors, used to promote songs like the quoted one, were intellectuals with active role in shaping the first, the official register of the culture. For example, the song above was written by Petko Slaveykov – an author, famous with his pronounced autochtonist attitude. Along with his erotic songs, rich with images of Oriental beauties, he wrote also revolutionary texts against the Ottoman status quo. Ivan Vazov, a poet, considered as “national emblem” then and now, wrote the following verses: “Hey, Fatma, white yashmak covers / your face, leaving me unfortunate, / but my heart can feel / that you are beautiful and splendid” (Vazov 1880). In his novel “Under the yoke”, the same author, being one of the ideologists of Bulgarian nationalism, promoted the metaphor “slavery” as nominating the period of the Ottoman dominion.

Conclusion

Let me get back to the terrain of “high” nationalistic narrative, which Ottoman context were discarded from, remaining focused on ego-centric and ex-centric poles. The Liberation (1878) didn’t bring those passionate discussions, dedicated to shaping national cultural paradigm, to an end. Furthermore, discussion energies kept on being highly active and were even intensified, regardless of the efforts to forge cultural norms and regulations, made by numerous institutional agents. It could be seen, that ideas for modernization and searching for universal humanity in Bulgarian locality⁶ were confronted with so called folkish literature, introducing imagery as “hothead young people, village squares, sedyankas, wooden flutes, bagpipes, coppers, shepherds’ sandals” (Elenkov 1994 18) etc. traditional elements, signifying for nostalgia towards traditions and utopia of the imagined antiquity. It is interesting to note, that these representations were projected into the past, particularly considering the National Revival period. Indeed, it means, that new autochtonist ideas calculated it not as time of strenuous searching for center of the national culture, but as a period, originally marked with constant values and shared life with no “harmful” alternatives. That’s why later in the interwar period, when nationalism inflamed and even were installed as a core ideology of numerous authoritarian regimes across Europe, the idea for “New National Revival” gained vast popularity. It was considered as based on “original culture” and “organic” development (see Mutafchiev 1935: 3-9; Mutafchiev 1994: 391-400). Of course, the vision for XIX c. period as conceptually unite, marked with shared consent and no cultural tensions, are sometimes questioned. Alongside with its idealized image, forged by the autochtonists, another insight was reached, claiming that Bulgarian culture was compelled to cross the “dangerous strait between Charybdis and Scylla”, between “two hostile antagonists:” Western Europe and Russia” from “the ancient times” on (Sheytanov 1994: 266). However, even in 30-ties, constructions, sanctifying XIX c. as National Revival, gave birth to another paradigm, thinking the epoch as a row of remarkable biographies, introduced in order to preserve its status as “Golden Era”: “... Georgy Rakovsky, a remarkable Bulgarian from the previous century, resisted and didn’t inclined to the West, nor to the East” (ibid: 262). Thereby, while shifting the focus from the National Revival as mythologized epoch, passions about searching for center in their bitterest and crisis version were replaced by an image of the consequent epoch, regarded as “turbulent”. In that vision, civilization concerns and dreams emerged in new edition, being focused on – if not entire removal of “centrist” ideologies in the paradigm of Trubetskoy – some kind of “organic synthesis” (with no regard how we will interpret this notion), as it was offered by Boris Yotsov: “Which sphere of mentality we belong to – Slavic, Russian, or European? And, I wonder whether we will be capable of overcoming this Slavic-European dualism, reaching an organic synthesis.” (Yotsov 1929).

Let me conclude, that even in contemporary context, struggle for center still goes on.

6 The expression belongs to Pencho Slaveykov, a son of the poet Petko Slaveykov, who created a cultural program, based on universal values in opposition to autochtonists’ projects, just in contrary to those, particular for so called National Revival period.

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