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EUI Working Paper SPS No. 94/11

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The Case of Bulgaria**

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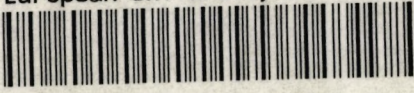
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**EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE**

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

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Printed in Italy in July 1994  
European University Institute  
Badia Fiesolana  
I – 50016 San Domenico (FI)  
Italy**

## BUILDING UP A NATIONAL IDENTITY: THE CASE OF BULGARIA

Roumen Daskalov

The national identity is a kind of "portrait" (or "image") the ethnic group creates and sustains about itself: notions about what it is, how it differs from other nations, how it came to be what it presently is, etc.<sup>1</sup> The national "consciousness", that is the sense of belonging to a national group, is propped on such notions and upon the sentiments invested in them. It is my purpose in this paper to present some notions of the Bulgarian national identity and to reflect upon their functioning. The particular case that I am considering here is a case of the virtually universal phenomenon of identity building and is thus of wider relevance.

Some qualifications are needed. The nation can mean different things according to social group, period and geographic area. There is thus not just one but a variety of national identities, that is, a variety of ways of experiencing the nation and thinking about it.<sup>2</sup> What I am presenting here are some materials which enter into the construction of the various "images" of the nation.<sup>3</sup> These materials are of various sorts: notions about the past of the group, about its characteristic outlook (traits, mentalities), about its culture, etc. Secondly, the notions I am dealing with are primarily of a "public" nature, they are part of official institutions and discourses: school textbooks, mass-media journalism, political speeches and public debates, intellectual reflections, etc. The closer contact with political power accounts for their strongly ideologised and mythologised character. I am not dealing here with the world of everyday lived culture, of individual and

<sup>1</sup> Or, as "collectivist" language may be quite misleading, one may define national identities as ideas held by individuals about what characterises the national community and what it means to belong to it.

<sup>2</sup> This plurality of the images of the nation is pointed for example by VAN SAS, NICOLAAS "Varieties of Dutchness", in: A. Galema, B. Henkes, and H. te Velde (eds.) *Images of the Nation. Different Meanings of Dutchness 1870-1940*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993, 5-16.

<sup>3</sup> One can make a distinction between an identity as a kind of (static) "image" one holds of the nation and "identification" as the (dynamic) process of relating oneself to the community; the second notion referring to psychic processes and modalities of experience.

communal subjectivity, cases where national meanings arise from modest practices and “private” experiences.<sup>4</sup>

Notions about *the past* are one of the components of the national identity.<sup>5</sup> There exist certain analogies between these and the “origin” myths of the so-called “primitive” societies. These narrate the initial times and the forefathers of the tribe, its “proper” institutions and ways of life. The forefathers in particular are always extraordinary and unusual, sometimes superhuman and terrifying. The origins myth traces the peripeties of the legendary “history” of the tribe since the “first times”; there is a standard reference to the “golden ages”, usually placed near the “beginnings” and opposed to later times of deterioration and decay (of the customs, the “morals”, etc.). The legend may speak about the autochtony of the tribe or about its wandering from the legendary proto-motherland to its present-day settlements. It narrates wars with other tribes and peace agreements, loyalties and betrayal. It sanctifies the order and institutions, created by the “cultural heroes” of the tribe and elevates them to a status of higher “civilisation”, while the customs and ways of the others are ridiculed and rejected as undignified and “barbarian”. The tribal myth defines the place of the tribe in the world and reveals the reason for its existence. Rituals enact the myth periodically, thus imprinting it on the “collective consciousness” in a powerful way.

One may say that the nations have their “tribal myths” and historical legends (or sagas). Like the tribal myths these ethno-myths speak about the “forefathers”; they situate the ethnic group in space and time, trace its historical “fate”, assign a meaning to its existence and

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Johnson warns against equating the sphere of public representations with “ideology” (in the sense of false consciousness and distortion) and the “private forms” with some authenticity; both are conventional, structured by language and generic rules; in both we find a mixture of “realist” and fantasy elements, of interest and imagination, of plan and wish. See: JOHNSON, R. “Towards a Cultural Theory of the Nation: A British-Dutch Dialogue”, 171-172, 192-194.

<sup>5</sup> On the use of history: myths of common ancestry, myths of foundation, of the golden age, of liberation, migration and election, etc. in constructing a national identity, see SMITH, A. *National Identity*. London: Penguin Books, 1991, 22-23, 65-66, 128. Historiography can also be used to destroy national identities. See VELYCHENKO, S. *Shaping Identity in Eastern Europe and Russia. Soviet-Russian and Polish Accounts of Ukrainian History 1914-1991*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.

to its future in terms of a special "role", "mission", "destiny", etc.<sup>6</sup> These are "foundation myths" in the widest sense. The purpose of narrating events and deeds, of presenting historical personalities, is to sanctify a beginning, give an exemplum or establish a precedence, thus legitimising the nation (and its state).

Under modern conditions historical "reminiscences" are no longer orally transmitted by the keepers of folk wisdom. They are taken care of by professional historians, concerned with the historical "truth". Nevertheless they undergo mythical transformations in the process of their propagation and popularisation. National history is transformed into ethno-mythology in a variety of ways: in the school teaching of history, then in political speeches and mass-media discourses, in historical films, novels and poems. Nationalist-minded historians are the first to mythologise history.<sup>7</sup> School teaching of history favours mythologising by its very "nature": it is attributed the task of developing patriotism, it is didactically simplifying and it is often performed by conservative persons in routine ways.<sup>8</sup> Intellectuals often refer to the national history in support of their ideas and as a source of wisdom.<sup>9</sup> Myths are narrated by committed nationalists to keep the national "consciousness" alive and by political demagogues in their power struggles. Writers, poets, painters and film producers exercise their imaginative faculties in depicting historical events and figures. Thus propagated, the myths of the national history become a common stock of knowledge, part of one's "general culture". Extensive explanations are hardly needed; an allusion or hint suffice to "call" a

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<sup>6</sup> The ethnohistory may be compared to the myth in that it is quite uncritical, makes use of heterogeneous materials, ignores or does not acknowledge contradictions, furnishes explanations that seem illogical, etc. Still more importantly, like the myth it functions as a special kind of "knowledge", one that furnishes self-justifications and "reasons" for attitudes and behaviour.

<sup>7</sup> There has been an unbroken tradition of nationalist biased presentation of history in Bulgaria since the (national) Revival epoch when it served as a weapon in the struggle against the Ottoman domination. National biases of all sorts are still present and seem so "natural" that are hardly noticed at all. When it comes to the national history it is hardly possible to draw a line between professional history and "lay" knowledge of history.

<sup>8</sup> The teaching of history (and literature) is nation-centred and nationalist in most countries; education often has as its express purpose to form a national "consciousness" and foster patriotism.

<sup>9</sup> The citing of historical "facts" out of their context as an "argument" in debates is already mythologising.

historical episode to the mind and activate self-identification among a receptive public.

Narrating history of the nation (whether in schools or elsewhere) has a number of peculiarities. It does not allow for breaks in the historical development. There passes through all political events a thread that connects the “beginnings” to the present day. It is the nation (or “the people”) that creates the unity and continuity in the historical narrative by acting as the main protagonist. The history is a history of the “nation”, projected back to time immemorial. The nation is represented or more often implied as identical and “equal” to itself through all peripeties of the historical drama. Notwithstanding demographic catastrophes and ethnic creolage, even if these are admitted, “we” living today are identical with the historical “them”, our forefathers. They are the earlier “we”, we are the later “them” - that is what is conveyed and implied by the narrative. There are no limits to the projection of ethnicity back into history; since the tribal period history is “our” history.

The national history is always narrated “from the point of view” of one’s own nation. Grammatically the narrative may use the third person singular (King A acted so and so....) but the real protagonist is the “we” (Bulgarians, French or whosoever). The actions of the ethnic “we” are observed with a deep involvement, a complete identification, in the same way as one sympathises with the “good guys” in a movie. In national history justice and truth are always and only on “our side”, while the “others” (other tribes, nations, states, etc.) are evil, wicked, treacherous. What is more, “their” history does not interest us for its own sake; it comes into focus only when it touches “our” history and to the extent that it does so.

The national history manifests a peculiar profile. The most important moments are those of military success and political grandeur of the ethnic group (res. its state), its cultural flourishing and all that may nourish the national pride. On the contrary, the moments of defeat and disgrace are downplayed, if not completely ignored. In the historical narrative they are allowed a very small space. Here are some episodes and personalities of the Bulgarian history as seen through



the nationalist optic.<sup>10</sup> My presentation is based on school textbooks and personal “ethnographic” experience with public historian debates and mass-media discourses, films on the national theme, etc.<sup>11</sup>

The rougher retrospective versions of the Bulgarian national history count the Thracians among the “forefathers”. They are presented as “noble” and “civilised”. Best known are the Thracian musician Orpheus and the great slave leader Spartacus. It is quite instructive to see how this pre-history is integrated into the history of the Bulgarian nation: by “omitting” to speak about the extinction of the Thracians, by speaking about “Bulgarian lands” when no Bulgarians existed, by presentational means that suggest continuity through the very ordering of the material, etc. Nationalist “re-tracing” of origins apart, the national history begins with the establishment of the first Bulgarian kingdom in 681, a result of an alliance between the “proto-Bulgarians”, a semi-nomadic tribe of presumably Turkic origin that came from Asia to the lower Danube, and several Slav tribes that had settled on the Balkans in the previous centuries. The proto-Bulgarians are presented as rough horsemen with flags made of horse brushes, pagan and militarist. They are the state-building “element”, capable of leading wars and of imposing a “state” order, hence they are elaborated into an object of patriotic pride. The Slavs are on the contrary characterised as meek and peace-loving people, often defeated and subjugated by the Byzantine armies. From the nationalist point of view the invasion of the Slavs by the proto-

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<sup>10</sup> When writing the history of his own state (and nation) the historian can hardly avoid nationalist biases of one kind or another. Subject matter and “values” are in this case closely intertwined and quite inseparable; in a certain sense national history tends to become nationalist history. The more so when national feelings and attitudes are very alive and the historian as a person shares these values. Nationalist “prejudicing” of the cruder type is simply inescapable when neither nationalism has been questioned, nor the purposes of history writing discussed. Bulgarian historiography originated in the national Revival epoch when it was considered as a political weapon in national liberation struggles. This national-nationalist tradition of historiography continues quite uninterrupted to the present day and has never been seriously shattered. The official Bulgarian historiography - the “Marxist” clichés in the main but also some nationalist distortions - were satirised by GENCHEV, N. *Kratkosmeshna Istoriia*. Sofia: Sofia University Press, 1990. (The manuscript was read in a closer circle for some years before it became for the author possible to publish it.)

<sup>11</sup> The nationalist school teaching of history has been studied by FERRO, M. *Comment on raconter l'Histoire aux enfants a travers le monde entier*. Paris: Payot, 1973.

Bulgarians (or the alliance between them) appears as a salvation of the Slavs from Byzantine "assimilation", as if there had been a unified Byzantine ethnos or a nationalist policy of "assimilation of minorities".

The "relative weight" of the different ethnies and their "contribution" to the Bulgarian state and the Bulgarian nation present a particularly appropriate topic for nationalist speculation. That is not to say that all scholarly debate and the various hypotheses about the origin of the proto-Bulgarians are falsified with nationalist or other "ideological" purposes in mind, though they often have some motivation in nationalist preferences and biases.<sup>12</sup> But the historical "theories" and hypotheses are introduced for exactly such purposes in the public debates and are assigned a respective interpretation. Thus, depending on the demand, one may put forward the proto-Bulgarian "contribution" (e.g. when military virtues are to be encouraged) or the Slav "element" (if the "brotherhood" with the Russians is to be stressed) or even the Thracians - in looking for old and noble origins, or in stressing the significance of "culture".

The early Bulgarian khans feature primarily with their military exploits. A very impressive figure among them is Krum (nicknamed the Horrible) reputed to have broken the skull of the Byzantine emperor Nicephorus. No school textbook omits to mention this fact, presumably to inspire awe and enhance the national pride of the school-boy. The way the alphabet was introduced in Bulgaria is highly relevant from a nationalist point of view. It is known that the Cyrillic alphabet was invented by the brothers Cyril and Methodius on an order from the Byzantine emperor, as part of his plans for domination over the Slav tribes. This fact was simply absent from school textbooks while a lot of weight was placed on "proving" the Slav background of the two brothers. Whatever the historical truth, the very sensitivity to questions of ethnicity is typical of a nationalist

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<sup>12</sup> In some cases this is quite obvious, as in the militant patriotism of Todor Panov who advocated the hypothesis of the Hun origin of the proto-Bulgarians (inspired, quite explicitly, by the military exploits of Atila), while at the same time denying the role of the Slavs (the "Slav fable" as he called it). See PANOV, T. *Psikhologija na bulgarskija narod*. Veliko Turnovo, 1992 (first edition in 1914) 65-67, 79-82, 87-97, 97-100.

narrative.<sup>13</sup> The wars of the Bulgarian khans (and kings) to annex territories populated by Slavs are presented as “liberation” and salvation of the Slavs from ethnic assimilation. The behaviour of these tribes creates some problems for the nationalist point of view, especially the fact that they seem to have taken belonging to the Bulgarian state quite light-heartedly and often split from it or even preferred to join Byzantine.<sup>14</sup> Not that the existence of the nation is directly posed for those times. But it is the national “idea” (and its presuppositions) that guide the interpretation of events and is responsible for what is stressed and what is omitted from the narrative. The presentation and treatment of a number of issues, even in the early (pre-national) history is thus guided by nationalist biases.

The history of the medieval period (first and second Bulgarian kingdoms) is narrated in different ways. There is first the officially approved narrative (accepted in the history textbooks) which stresses military victories against the Byzantine empire and glorifies successful kings: Simeon the Great (893-927), Kaloyan (1197-1207) who defeated the crusaders, Ivan Assen II (1218-1241). The tragic events of the subjugation of the first Bulgarian kingdom by the Byzantine empire are presented in detail and widely known by the Bulgarian public. The nationalist “rationale” for including such “disgraceful” events in the narrative is that Samuil’s kingdom was based in Macedonia, which is taken as historical proof of the Bulgarian claims over this region.<sup>15</sup> The century and a half long Byzantine domination (1018-1185) is passed over in haste in the school textbooks as an inconvenient locus for a narrative designed to infuse with national pride. There is in medieval history the never realised dream of the Bulgarian kings (and

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<sup>13</sup> For the same nationalist reasons the official Soviet historiography was very reluctant to admit that the Russians adopted the Cyrillic alphabet from Bulgaria. It was still more reluctant to acknowledge the important role of Scandinavians (Vikings) in the establishment of the Kiev kingdom - this so-called “varyagi hypothesis” was simply waved away.

<sup>14</sup> The same problem for the nationalist historicism arises for the epoch of the Bulgarian higher “Middle ages” and especially the fourteenth century. Various regions split then from the state to be either independent or to join Byzantine - thus contradicting the expectations of the nationalists.

<sup>15</sup> The northern parts of the state and the capital Preslav were first invaded by the troops of the Russian kniaz Svetoslav and then by the Byzantine empire. During the communist rule, the historical episode of the Russian war-march was reinterpreted (in school textbooks) as to mean almost an act of “friendship”.

even more of nationalists) of taking Constantinople, the capital of the empire. Textbook authors (and historians in general) never fail to mention all the occasions when Bulgarian armies besieged the capital city, always presented as on the verge of falling, were it not for unhappy "accidents" or treason.<sup>16</sup> There is alongside this standard narrative the somewhat pessimistic thesis according to which the advancing "Byzantinization" of the Bulgarian aristocracy and clergy exerted a pernicious effect over the historical development of the medieval Bulgarian kingdoms. Instead of allowing for a natural growth and a gradual accumulation of forces, the thesis goes, the imitation and copying of the more powerful Byzantine culture resulted in a fateful and tragic estrangement between "leaders" and "the people" and provoked reactions of "negation" (heresies, social movements of discontent) thus undermining the foundations of the state.<sup>17</sup> This pessimistic version of the medieval history of Bulgaria was suppressed (and even banned) during the state socialist period for ideological reasons: it was suspect for its "elitism", its lack of patriotism, and it was not attuned to the optimistic key of the socialist ideology. Yet it is nonetheless markedly nationalist: such contemporary debates as the role of the national leaders, "negativism" in Bulgarian history, what does a "sound" development mean in terms of tradition versus foreign influences, etc., appear here under historical guise.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Nobody even bothers to ask the question of what would have happened if Constantinople had been taken after all: could it have been kept under Bulgarian rule, which of course is most improbable, and what about the remaining parts of the vast empire. Taking Constantinople even for a very short time would have meant the "crowning" of military exploits in which the nationalist imagination rejoices.

<sup>17</sup> This view was developed most consistently in the thirties by the well-known Bulgarian historian MUTAFCHIEV, P. "Kum filosofiatata na bulgarskata istoriia (Vizantinizmut v srednovekovna Bulgaria)", *Filosofski pregled*, 3, 1, 1931 27-36; MUTAFCHIEV, P. "Pop Bogomil i Sv. Ivan Rilski (Duhut na otritsaniето v nashata istoriia)", *Filosofski Pregled*, 6, 2 (1934), 97-112; MUTAFCHIEV, P. "Bulgaria i hristianstvoto", in: Mutafchiev, P. *Kniga za bulgarite*. Sofia, 1987, 169-189, esp. 187-189.

<sup>18</sup> Alongside the national perspective to Bulgarian history there was, especially during the communist regime, the Marxist perspective with its typical stress upon "class struggle". For the pre-capitalist epochs it produced some very distorted and even absurd interpretations. Thus, for example, religious heresies such as the "Bogomilism" (exported to France and Italy in the twelfth and the thirteenth century under the names "Kathari" and "Albigenses") were sometimes treated as a class protest ("in a religious form"); the peasant uprising of Ivailo (middle of the thirteenth century) was presented as "antifeudal", although Ivailo does not appear to

Those events that attest of glory acquire special salience in the national perspective. If there is no glory and success, then examples of tragic heroism and staunch resistance are selected, ignoring those of treason and surrendering to the enemy. In Bulgarian history this filter is applied to the events of the Ottoman invasion (at the end of the fourteenth century) and for the almost five century long period of subjugation. The cases of compulsory conversion to Islam are strongly blown up in the national mythology, contrary to the prevalent opinion among Osmanist scholars about the relative religious tolerance of the Ottoman empire and ignoring the fact that a lot of Bulgarians voluntarily accepted Islam, attracted by some privileges of the "true believers". What is more, the fact of religious conversion is equated to ethnic (and national) assimilation, projecting nineteenth and twentieth century concerns back into the fifteenth and the sixteenth century and onto an empire that never really aspired to ethnic homogenisation. But it is not the veracity of the historical facts nor the (unavoidable) selectivity of their representation in the history texts that matters. What matters most is their functioning as explanations and justifications of the present, in the Bulgarian case they could be put forward as a justification for the reprisals against the Turkish minority in 1984 and afterwards. Application to political purposes is what turns history into a mythological narrative.<sup>19</sup>

The almost five century long period of the Ottoman domination appears from the point of view of the national history as a continuous resistance: heroism, sufferance and a fight for survival.<sup>20</sup> The rather

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have been against the "feudal order", as attested by his becoming king, etc., etc.

<sup>19</sup> The anti-Turkish campaign of 1984 in Bulgaria was accompanied by assigning to some subservient historians the task of unearthing facts about the Turkish atrocities in the past as well as evidence that the Turkish minority in contemporary Bulgaria originates for the greater part from Bulgarians, converted by force to Islam, so as to justify their re-christening with Bulgarian names. The problem here is of course not the veracity of the facts (some of these were true, others not), and even not the relevance of singular isolated facts for "proving" a thesis, but the use made of remote history for political purposes. While this is an extreme example of political manipulation of history, nationalist history is always made to bear in some way to the present: providing "reasons" and "justifications", "proving" claims, etc.

<sup>20</sup> The very epoch of the subjugation under the Ottoman empire was (and still is) most commonly referred to as "the yoke". The attempt made by some

heterogeneous "haiduks" who were in most cases bandits, robbing Christian and Muslim alike, are heroised and presented as self-conscious rebels against the "yoke" and "precursors" of the national revolutionaries. Ethno-history cannot admit that the Bulgarian population may have been largely indifferent to the Turkish "oppressors" and may have peacefully coexisted with them for most of the time and in most places.<sup>21</sup> There is still less recognition for the heretic view that until the liberation a great part of the population possessed some kind of local and regional but hardly an enveloping "national" consciousness.

In history narrated from a national perspective the formation of the nation is no doubt the "crowning" epoch. In Bulgarian history this has been the so called (national) Revival epoch, coinciding roughly with the nineteenth century. The period has been heroised and sanctified accordingly. Most of the national heroes and saints are derived from this epoch and for good reasons. While one may call "national heroes" all personalities who played an important role in the history of one of the modern nations, those that contributed to the "making of the nation" are the national heroes par excellence. As "Enlighteners" and "awakers" of the nation, that is, cultivators of a "national consciousness" or arms in hand, they contributed to the national cause and fought for the national liberation.<sup>22</sup> Leaving aside the objective merits and contributions of national heroes, one may go into

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Bulgarian Osmanist historians two or three years ago to introduce the more neutral term "Ottoman domination" in the school textbooks encountered bitter resistance from school teachers in history (and some nationalist journalists), attesting to the deep rootedness and emotional investment in "resistance" and "sufferance" representations. "Why do you insist so much on having been "slaves"? - was the response of the Osmanists who knew how to counter nationalism with nationalism. Intentionally calling (until recently) the domination "Turkish" instead of "Ottoman" and thus making an allusion to Turkey and the Turkish minority in Bulgaria is another instance of history made to bear directly upon the present, and used as a political instrument.

<sup>21</sup> An attitude of betrayal, disgraceful as it sounds, is easier to admit from a national point of view than indifference and the lack of any nationally coloured attitude; besides it serves edifying purposes as a negative example to be condemned.

<sup>22</sup> It is comparatively easy to reach a national "consensus" on the importance of people who fought for a national cause. They "stand for" the nation as a whole, not for a particular political ideology or a party. Besides national revolutionaries only "great statesmen" may aspire to universal recognition, not leaders and martyrs of particular parties and ideologies.

the symbolic use made of them in later periods. They function as "exemplary" personalities, a personification of the virtues of the nation, its worthiest sons, a paragon to be admired and emulated, or at least an "ideal" to be referred to with a moralising intention. They become centres of collective cults and rituals, the national (state) celebrations in the first place.<sup>23</sup> The "heroisation" is thus a way of creating "symbolic capital" to be appropriated by different political forces and used for their own legitimation.

Next in the historical narrative comes the period from the establishment of the independent Bulgarian state as a result of the Russian-Turkish war (1877-1878) until 1944. The national self-respect and pride are once again nourished primarily by military victories<sup>24</sup> and the one successful national undertaking - the Unification (in 1885) of Kingdom Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia, the parts into which the Bulgarian lands were divided by the Berlin Congress in 1878. The national pride is however deeply hurt by the two national catastrophes: the defeats in the Balkan wars and in World War I and the loss of Macedonia - the main motive for the participation of Bulgaria in these wars. As in Germany, the myths about the "stroke in the back", "treacherous allies", etc., appear as typical means for healing the wounds and restoring the national pride.

Most of the political events and personalities of the period from 1878 to 1944 appear in popular ethnohistory (and in the professional history writing) as "controversial". The reasons for that are mainly

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<sup>23</sup> As R. Johnson notes, "quintessential" and exemplary figures presuppose "Others" in an "intermediate position" and outright villains. See JOHNSON, R. "Towards a Cultural Theory of the Nation: A British-Dutch Dialogue", 204-207. National "ideals" are classificatory devices. In Bulgarian historiography this is quite obvious in the established hierarchy with the national revolutionaries on the top, activists in the struggle for an independent Church below them and "pure enlighteners" still further below. Whole classes may function as better or worse embodiments of the nation. As regards the nation, intellectuals and the "bourgeoisie" usually occupy the central position. Contrary to real merits in the liberation struggles there was in Bulgarian Marxist historiography after 1944 the glorification of the peasants; only in the seventies was the leading role of the "bourgeoisie" (in this case mostly traders and craftsmen) asserted, mainly due to the efforts of the Bulgarian historian N. Genchev.

<sup>24</sup> No Bulgarian army banner was captured in the Balkan wars and World War I, as the military often boast, blaming the Bulgarian political leaders and diplomats for the failures.

political. The communist regime had for a time imposed by force its own (party) heroes, especially those of the founder of the party Dimitur Blagoev, and its best internationally known figure Georgy Dimitrov. It tried to raise them to the status of "national" heroes by erecting monuments and setting up official cults, and through intense ideological propaganda. The actual coincidence between state and Party also contributed to the success of this manipulation, as it blurred the distinction between party heroes and national heroes. These heroes did not however outlive the regime; they are demonised today as nationally nihilist, having served as instruments of the Soviet domination, and as perpetrators of Stalinist atrocities and totalitarianism.

The fall of the communist regime precipitated symbolic fights between the political parties for revaluation and reappropriation of the more recent (pre-communist) past. The "resurrected" or even the newly created parties are now taking up "their" political leaders and ideologues in the past as emblem-figures, presenting themselves as heirs to them and claiming their authority. Thus they are obstructing the rise of these figures to a "higher" national level (of "great politicians", "statesmen", perfect "democrats", etc.).<sup>25</sup> As a result no widely recognised national "heroes" stem from this period, except for some "Kulturtraeger" personalities. Now that no single political force is able to usurp the whole political space and to impose its own heroes (and interpretation of the past), elevating personalities from recent history to a status of "national heroes" would require a more "neutral" or "above party" point of view, especially that of "statism". This point of view presupposes however a more "settled" political situation, more stable political parties, firmer rules of political conduct, and a more developed "civil society" in general, than are actually in existence.

Something should be said at this point about how ethnohistory serves the needs of self-identification. To start with, it creates emotional

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<sup>25</sup> The only Bulgarian statesmen somewhat better placed in both the professional and the lay notions is Stefan Stambolov (prime-minister 1886-1894), who pursued a nationally-oriented policy and has the reputation of resolutely putting Bulgaria on the road of modernisation, while at the same time severely persecuting his political opponents.



investments. It is designed to nourish a feeling of national pride and self-respect - a peculiar ethnic "honour". The national pride can be derived from different sources: from economic, social, political or cultural achievements. In the case of Bulgaria a rather primitive kind of pride was promoted, the one based primarily on military exploits and territorial acquisitions, while the cultural achievements (in school teaching at least) were somewhat in the background. Shameful and disgraceful events are quite unbearable for national self-respect and cannot be accepted in the image of the nation. If not directly forgotten (or ignored) they are reinterpreted, so as to be compatible with the national pride. A history of foreign domination, for instance, becomes more "acceptable" if antedated and accompanied by heroic resistance; national defeats are more tolerable if "exteriorised" and blamed on others. (To speak about the rehabilitative re-direction towards others of the "blame" for failures is not to deny that outside factors *were* active in shaping the historical reality.)

Self-identification through ethnohistory proceeds in a peculiar way, namely by making use of the time dimension.<sup>26</sup> The individual member of the ethno-cultural community perceives himself as the successor and heir of ancestors who authored certain deeds and perpetrated certain events. He identifies himself with an imaginary enduring community, an ever renewed community, whose present-day members are successors of the ancestors; this relation is perceived on the model of kinship, as a "blood tie". The actual and direct bonds between the members of the community - such as the exchange of goods, services, communications, etc. - are complemented by indirect imaginary bonds: the notion of a "common" origin and of marching "together" through history.<sup>27</sup> The collective solidarity thus established extends from the past to the present and leads to an anticipation of a

<sup>26</sup> For the role of the time dimension in establishing the identity of a society (and a nation in particular) see SHILS, E. *Tradition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981, 162-194, esp. 163-168. Identities (and a sense of membership) are established by a common name, a reference to the identity of territory and a belief in some sort of identity of the living generation with the past generations. As Shils points out, such identities are not "mythical" but real, because they are taken seriously by a lot of persons and because of the real consequences.

<sup>27</sup> Already E. Renan in his classical text pointed to the solidarising function of the historical memories, of common fights and sufferance even more than of victories. See RENAN, E. *Che cos'è una nazione?* (traduzione di Gregorio De Paola) Roma: Donzelli Editore, 1993, 19-20.

common future. The fusion between past, present and future, of memories and expectations is best expressed by the word "fate" with its dramatic and tragic undertones. Through historical notions the individual links his own biography to the fate of the nation and experiences the fate of the nation as his own fate.

Certain dangers are inherent in this way of experiencing the past and in basing one's identity upon it. The distinction between past and present may become blurred and may even disappear in extreme eruptions of nationalist sentiment. The remote past may then acquire a powerful actuality and vividness in the minds. Events that happened long ago under a foreign domination seem to have happened only yesterday; what is more, they require retaliation. The individual feels urged to take revenge on that member of the old enemy who happens to be near him at the moment, even if he is his neighbour. Not only are past and present mixed up but nations are assimilated to families and kin and members of nations are supposed to think and act as in a family vendetta; revenge is to be administered indiscriminately and it is of a kind that time does not extinguish.

Personal memories are subject to continuous changes - what I experienced loses its initial contours and presents itself to me in an ever new light. This has to do not only with forgetfulness due to the passing of the time but mainly with the reinterpretation of the events in accordance with new experiences and objectives. The change affects not only separate memories but the past life as a whole. It is reconstituted again and again according to a new teleological logic; autobiography is always being rewritten. One may look at shared history from the perspective of memorisation and speak in terms of collective "recollections" and the making of a collective "biography".<sup>28</sup> In the case of distant events there is no actual recollection, as one generation has a limited life-span and a limited pool of experiences. Unlike personal experiences, historical events are documented and preserved in archives and books; care about the historical "memories"

<sup>28</sup> As E. Shils points out recollection (of the past) cannot be reduced to acts of recollection and involves a sort of sedimentation in tradition. - SHILS, E. *Tradition*, 167. On remembering see for example RADLEY, A. "Artifacts, Memory, and Sense of the Past", in: Middleton, D and D. Edwards (eds.) *Collective Remembering*. London-Newbury Park - New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1990, 46-59.

is entrusted to certain people as their specialised task. But like the memory of the individual the ethnic traditions are highly selective and “plastic”.<sup>29</sup> In shaping the past, “accommodations” of all sorts are made to the new life experiences, needs and wishes of the new generations. What “facts” would be admitted to the “memory” of the nation is also regulated by institutions with their institutionalised objectives and discourses. The system of education plays a major role in this selection, in pseudo “reminding” and keeping distant “memories” alive in the “collective consciousness”.<sup>30</sup> The “biography” of the nation is thus rewritten time and again. And this is hardly perceived.

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Another central notion in building up a national identity is that of a “national character” (or “national mentality”).<sup>31</sup> The national “traits” are often referred to in everyday life, either in criticism or as something to be proud of; they are a theme of myths and jokes. There are even systematic studies under the rubric “national psychology” (Voelkerpsychologie), sometimes claiming the status of a science. There is, furthermore, the reference to a “national culture”, ranging from customs and ways of life to a “national food” and a “national cuisine”.<sup>32</sup> Using Bulgarian materials of a more “learned” type I will

<sup>29</sup> Already Renan pointed out that for a nation to be formed, it is at least as important that the people should forget a lot of things. See RENAN, E. “Che cos’è una nazione?”, 8. Thus forgetting, omission, eclipse or occlusion belong as much, and may be even more, to nation-building, as does remembering.

<sup>30</sup> In speaking about a “collective memory” (or “collective consciousness”, representations, experiences, etc.) there is always the danger of some sort of collectivist metaphysics, that is of attributing mind or spirit to the community as such. Here “collective” is equivalent to “shared” and refers to the fact that representations, memories, etc. have the “community” as their locus.

<sup>31</sup> On the genesis of the notion of “national character” see for example SZEGEDY-MASZAK, M. “The Idea of National Character: A Romantic Heritage”, in: Peter Boerner (ed.) *Concepts of National Identity*. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1986, 45-62 and the extensive bibliography, compiled by Udo Rossbach and Nancy Boerner in the same book, 195-262. On the notions of “national character” and “national genius” see also SMITH, A. *National Identity*, 84-86.

<sup>32</sup> Notions about specific “national food” and the national “cuisine” form part of the complex of national identities. Among Bulgarian specialities in particular are white cheese and yoghurt (of a special type). It is another question whether a “national cooking” is specifically national in origin and geographical range, and whether (and to what extent) people really cook and eat the reputed national food.

consider the forces at work in establishing a "character" type of identity.

The notion of a national character presupposes a set of constant traits, which are attributed to the nation or to its "typical" (or "average") representative.<sup>33</sup> To reach such an abstraction one proceeds by homogenisation, ignoring social differences. De-historisation is also effected, equating mentality characteristics in different phases of the historical development. It is true that some of the Bulgarian authors are registering changes in the national mentality under the impact of the modernisation, differentiating between "the Bulgarian" of traditional society ("patriarchal epoch") and the modern "type"; sometimes social categories are differentiated as well (e. g. the peasants and the educated) and even regional character types<sup>34</sup>. Still, the whole undertaking is driven by the aspiration to discover some "ideal" or authentic (asocial and transhistoric) Bulgarian personality type and there is a marked tendency to consider traits outside the context and to universalise them. The attempts to describe a "national character" are, so to say, predisposed to "essentialism" and eternisation.<sup>35</sup>

Attitudes to work, to the state, to religion and "morals", to sexuality, etc. appear in all possible modalities in descriptions of (the Bulgarian)

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<sup>33</sup> The ideas about a national character or a national mentality in Bulgaria were taken over from nineteenth century German "Voelkerpsychologie". There was also in the U. S. A. (before World War II) a trend in cultural anthropology - the so-called "culture and personality studies" - concerned with how culture, care for the children in particular, shaped character. It was however more cautious in employing the notion of a national character and introduced terms such as "modal" (or "basic") character as a kind of substratum, upon which individual and social group variations were superimposed.

<sup>34</sup> Thus A. Strashimirov differentiates between a "Thracian" (that is, Southern Bulgarian) type, a "Moesian" type (those living in the Northern part), Macedonians, "Shopi" (people from a region near Sofia) and "Ruptsi" - STRASHIMIROV, A. *Kniga za bulgarite*. Sofia, 1918 (cited from Draganov, M. (ed.) *Narodopsikologija na bulgarite. Antologija*. Sofia, 1984, 461-472. The attempts to differentiate regional types may be even more questionable, when names of regions are eo ipso equated to types.

<sup>35</sup> As R. Johnson puts it, phrases like "cultures or ways of life in Britain" easily slip into "British culture", "the British way of life" or "British character"; some everyday meanings and values become "the" national culture. See: JOHNSON, R. "Towards a Cultural Theory of the Nation: A British-Dutch Dialogue", 185 and 191.

national mentality. Depending on whether the stress is put upon negative or positive characteristics, it is possible to speak of a pessimistic or an optimistic version of "people's psychology". Sometimes the traits are only stated, in other cases reference to historical epochs and circumstances is made to account for them. One may compose a catalogue of the various traits and attitudes and juxtapose contradictory opinions.<sup>36</sup> Some authors are searching (whether explicitly or not) for the authentic traits of the people's character in a highly idealised "traditional epoch"; such typically "collectivist" virtues are then evoked as hard working, love for the soil, hospitality, sociability, etc.<sup>37</sup> A love for liberty, a drive towards equality and democratic dispositions have been derived from the voluntary management of community and school affairs during the national Revival epoch and from the lack of a Bulgarian (feudal) aristocracy (exterminated by the Ottoman invaders).<sup>38</sup> Interest in communal affairs was seen as a durable Bulgarian "stereotype".<sup>39</sup> Others, on the contrary, view the Ottoman domination as a source of serf vices, of social immaturity and cultural backwardness, and refer to it in explaining the lack of a democratic "spirit" to animate the democratic institutions after the liberation.<sup>40</sup> A number of authors evoke such "anti-social" traits as the lack of social responsibility, evading of social duties or incorrectness in accomplishing them, disregard for the laws, extreme corporate egoism, etc.<sup>41</sup> There seems

<sup>36</sup> Sometimes "one and the same" trait may be interpreted as either negative (bad) or positive (good), e. g. the presumably negative attitude of the Bulgarian to the state, which may be read as attesting either an independent spirit or inability for public life.

<sup>37</sup> PETKANOV, K. "Kharakterni cherti na bulgarina" in: Draganov, M. (ed.) *Narodopsikhologija na bulgarite.*, 539-548, esp. 539-541, 548; KOSTURKOV, S. *Vurkhu psikhologijata na bulgarina*. Sofia, 1949 (cited from *Narodopsikhologija na bulgarite*, 647-650, 659-661; PANOV, T. *Psikhologija na bulgarskija narod*, 267.

<sup>38</sup> HADZHIISKI, I. "Istoricheskite koreni na nashite demokraticni traditsii", in: Hadzhiiski, I. *Suchinenia v dva toma*. Vol. 1, 86-87, 89, 95-99; PANOV, T. *Psikhologija na bulgarskija narod*, 225.

<sup>39</sup> STRASHIMIROV, A. *Kniga za bulgarite*. (cited from *Narodopsikhologija na bulgarskija narod*, 494-495); Hadzhiiski, I. "Optimistichna teoriia za nashija narod", in: Hadzhiiski, I. *Suchinenia v dva toma*. Vol. 1, Sofia, 1974, 35-36.

<sup>40</sup> MIKHAILOVSKI, S. "Kak zapadat i se provaliat durzhavite", in: Mikhailovski, S. *Neizdadeni suchinenia*. Vol. 1, Sofia 1940, 183-186.

<sup>41</sup> GULUBOV, K. "Psikhologija na bulgarina", *Bulgarska Misul*, 9, 2 (1934), 115-116; PENEV, B. *Istoria na novata bulgarska literatura*. Vol. 1, Sofia, 1976 (cited from *Narodopsikhologija na bulgarite*, 116-118); KRUSTNIKOV, N. *Opit za psikhologicheski analiz na nashia obshtestven zhivot*. Sofia 1922

to be a far reaching agreement among students of the national character on some negative traits, such as suspiciousness, malice, the inability to work in a team, constant intriguing, etc., derived, it would seem, from regrettable personal experiences with political life and life in institutional settings.<sup>42</sup> Certain accounts render (either approvingly or disapprovingly) "the Bulgarian" as "always" sceptical of the state and the rulers; the lack of an independent state for almost five centuries is cited as an explanation for this "negativism". Religious attitudes are another favourite topic for speculation with opinions ranging from an affirmation of deep Christian religiosity through paganism to atheism. Early (and recurring) paganism and medieval heresies are taken as a proof of assertions that the Bulgarian is "by his nature" an atheist and a non-believer.<sup>43</sup> In discussing sexuality again some are asserting the "prudence" and even great sexual restraint of "the" Bulgarian,<sup>44</sup> while others are imagining "sexual animism" (or "sex-pantheism").<sup>45</sup> Tolerance towards the ethnic minorities (Turks, Gypsies, Jews and Armenians) and towards foreigners has been listed among the specifically Bulgarian virtues.<sup>46</sup>

One may point to a number of weaknesses in the various attempts to provide a description of the "national character" and of the enterprise in general: simplifications and homogenisation of all sorts, arbitrariness as to geographic boundaries, impossibility to test,

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(cited from *Narodopsikholoġiia na bulgarite*, 455-460); SHEITANOV, N. "Duchut na otritsanieto u bulgarina", *Filosofski pregled*, 5, 2 (1933), 128-141, esp. 128-133.

<sup>42</sup> To cite just a few: PENEV, B. *Istoriia na novata bulgarska literatura* (cited from *Narodopsikholoġiia na bulgarite*, 516-518); KOSTURKOV, S. *Vurkhu psikhologiata na bulgarina* (cited from: *Narodopsikholoġiia na bulgarite*, 447); KRUSTNIKOV, N. *Opit za psikhologicheski analiz na nashiia obshtestven zhivot* (cited from: *Narodopsikholoġiia na bulgarite*, 450-453); GULUBOV, K. "Psikhologiia na bulgarina", *Bulgarska misul*, 9, 2 (1934), 116.

<sup>43</sup> SHEITANOV, N. "Khiliada-godishninata na Boian Magesnika", *Zlatorog*, 4, 4 (1923), 242-245; Mikhailovski, N. "Kak zapadat i se provaliat durzhavite", 111-112.

<sup>44</sup> GIDIKOV, S. "Polovata svitost na bulgarina kato osnova na negoviia kharacter", *Filosofski pregled*, 6, 2 (1934), 123-132. The presumed sexual restraint is generalised here to a major explanation for a number of "negative" traits of the Bulgarian character.

<sup>45</sup> SHEITANOV, N. "Seksualnata filozofia na bulgarina", *Filosofski pregled*, 4, 3 (1932), 241-256.

<sup>46</sup> KOSTURKOV, S. *Vurkhu psikhologiata na bulgarina* (cited from *Narodopsikholoġiia na bulgarite*, 666); PANOV, T. *Psikhologiia na bulgarina*, 267-268.

contradictions between the various accounts that lay bare the dubiousness of the whole undertaking, etc. A peculiar mixture of fantasy and reality, wishes and experience, the ideas about a national character recognise few limitations and constraints. They appear thus as highly arbitrary and artificial, as an exercise in pure "imagining".<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, it can hardly be denied that the various descriptions of the national mentality (or culture) contain personal life-experiences which authenticate them. It is rather the "naturalisation" of these experiences into timeless "essences", their universalisation and the closure to other experiences that undermines their credibility. Via notions such as a "national character" (or "traits" or "attitudes" or a "stereotype"), the Nation is "naturalised" and fixed into a "being".

A critique from a purely "veracity to reality" viewpoint would hardly lead us very far. What is more, one may question the line between "imaginative" and "real". Here as elsewhere, social constructions are part of reality itself; representations are "social facts" and may have social effects. It seems more rewarding to view the various attempts to define the nation as proposals to "construct" it in a certain way. They can thus be understood as discursive strategies (or rhetorical moves) in which power is involved, or as work of "education" and "civilisation". The usual descriptive language in which traits are presented as "given" and "natural" may hide prescriptive and normative claims, attempts at social intervention, etc.<sup>48</sup>

To return to the Bulgarian examples. There may be a critical intention tied to the author's contemporary realities. Criticism may be expressed in a number of ways. For instance, by presenting a totally pessimistic account of the national character, "naturalising" some negative features. Or by presenting a positive account of the national mentality and culture while locating virtues in some idealised

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<sup>47</sup> All identities are of course "imagined" as they are created and maintained in people's minds. What strikes in the case of imagining a national community however is that the imagined entity is not immediately "present", unlike the familial or the professional group. That is why they appear as "too" artificial or fabricated. See for a similar argument ANDERSON, B. *Imagined Communities*. Thetford, Norfolk: The Thetford Press, 1983, 15-16.

<sup>48</sup> See JOHNSON, R. "Towards a Cultural Theory of the Nation: A British-Dutch Dialogue", 177-179.

("patriarchal", "traditional", "collectivist") past and opposing them to the present "corruption" of the national character. The mentality of the people during the "capitalist" (or the state socialist) epoch has often been opposed to the unspoiled "authentic" national character in the Revival epoch; in more unrestrained fantasies pristineness is sought as far back as the medieval times or even in the pagan ("barbarian") epoch. When direct social critique is forbidden, as under state socialism, even a wishful evoking of characteristics such as social activism, sense of justice and readiness to fight for it, initiative, scepticism as regards the state and the rulers, etc., may attest to a critical intention.<sup>49</sup> On certain occasions descriptions of national traits may function as an encouragement, an infusion of optimism. It is not rare to hear in the streets, on T. V. and on the radio during the present (postcommunist) crisis that "the Bulgarian" is a practical and sensible person, he learns easily by "nature", he is inventive and can cope with everything. That reassuring figure is ascribed general intelligence or special talents - in music, mathematics, etc. Or, national character notions may serve as explanations of the social reality, e. g. democracy is deficient because mentalities are politically "unripe" (history may eventually be referred to as responsible for shaping those mentalities). There also exists the "metaphysical" interest of certain intellectuals in questions as: how were people formed by the rather stormy "crossroad" history of the Balkans, what does it mean to be a Bulgarian, what experience of life is involved in this, etc. A communication of personal life experiences, a "variable" in explaining social realities, a kind of wishful thinking, a form of social criticism and a bid for change, a way of self-encouragement, a reflection on "destinies" or whatever - ideas about the national "character" have multiple sources of inspiration and fulfil numerous functions, of which the "cognitive" is but one, and it is inextricably intertwined with others.

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Certain objects or persons become *national symbols*, that is they are supposed to contain the national "idea" in a condensed form and to

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<sup>49</sup> It is not by chance that interest in the national character was renewed in the last decades of the socialist regime. It could serve as some vague and indirect (but still perceived) form of criticism. An example is: SEMOV, M. *Bulgarinut, poznat i nepoznat*. Sofia, 1987.



“express” and convey it in a forceful way.<sup>50</sup> Unlike face-to-face relationships symbols bind people indirectly, facilitating the formation of encompassing units (such as nation-states).<sup>51</sup> There are, first of all, the official national symbols, such as the national flag, the anthem, the coat of arms, or the national coinage.<sup>52</sup> Other symbols have been invented for international publicity purposes, e. g. in trade or tourism. A Bulgarian example is the rose, connected with the picturesque “Valley of roses” and the traditional production of rose oil. A sign that simply “designates” may have a glorious career of a “symbol”, when it comes to “express” ideas and convey richer meanings.<sup>53</sup> Conversely, a symbol may “degenerate” into a simple sign, when some of its meanings are lost. Some symbols have a merely “historical value”, that is they had their national meaning in certain historical epochs but lost it afterwards. The “kalpak” (a kind of hat) was an object charged with a national meaning for Bulgarians under the Ottoman domination, when it was opposed (self-consciously so) to the Turkish “fes”.<sup>54</sup>

National symbols are not naturally given. They become symbols as a result of interpretations, which invest them with national meanings. One may find examples of national hermeneutic in the national literature and in studies on its history, in art and art criticism and in intellectual discourses. An important task of the school teaching in native language and literature is to develop the imagination of the children in discovering national meanings and connotations of certain deeds and objects in texts that are especially selected in the curriculum. In what follows I will consider some of the more

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<sup>50</sup> As Anthony Smith puts it, the basic concepts of nationalism are embodied by the national symbols and expressive ceremonials, which are making them “visible and distinct for every member, communicating the tenets of an abstract ideology in palpable, concrete terms that evoke instant emotional responses from all strata of the community” - SMITH, A. *National Identities*, 77. A little further (p. 78) he points that in the national rites and symbols the national community makes itself to an object of self-adoration, dispensing of any mediating referent, such as a totem or a deity.

<sup>51</sup> See ELIAS, N. “Human Interdependencies - Problems of Social Bonds”, in: Elias, N. *What is Sociology?*, London: Hutchinson, 1978, 137-138.

<sup>52</sup> I will not deal here with strongly formalised symbols like these because hardly anyone reflects on their meanings.

<sup>53</sup> Thus blue jeans and coca-cola came to symbolise the “American way of life”.

<sup>54</sup> In later times the “kalpak” came to symbolise rural, as opposed to town life; the national meaning thus giving way to a social meaning.

elaborated Bulgarian national symbols, reflecting on how they came to acquire their symbolic significance.<sup>55</sup>

The Balkans seem to be a naturally given symbol of "Bulgarian-ness". They have played an important role in the history of Bulgaria: as a strategic defensive line of the medieval Bulgarian kingdom in its wars against the Byzantine empire, a fortress where the Bulgarian ethnic potential, the folk customs and ways of life, the ethos of freedom, etc. were best preserved during the Ottoman domination, as a preferred place for hermits and monks, a refuge for the rebellious "haiduks".<sup>56</sup> The historical significance of the Balkans becomes a point of departure for its subsequent poetisation and transformation into a national symbol, first in the folk songs and legends, later in literature and literary essays. Given the actual functions of the Balkans in Bulgarian history it is only "natural" to imagine them as a guardian or a warrior and to "personalise" them. But the poet does not stop here, rather he transforms them into a defendant of "his" people.<sup>57</sup>

During the Ottoman domination the Balkans were a refuge for the most indomitable and intransigent men. They were hiding there while taking revenge on the enemy for violations of their personal and family honour. Now, the Balkans come to substitute human qualities like love for freedom, proud and indomitable "spirit", and the force to

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<sup>55</sup> The examples for this exposition come mainly from works of fiction and literary essays.

<sup>56</sup> The geo-political significance of the Balkans in the Bulgarian history is analysed by MUTAFCHIEV, P. "Balkanut v nashata istoria", in: Mutafchiev, P. *Kniga za bulgarite*. Sofia, 1987, 65-89. He presents the thesis (p. 66) that neither the old Bulgarian kingdom nor its ethnic potential could have survived without the Balkans, because of the unfavourable "crossroad" situation.

<sup>57</sup> The image of the Balkans appears in Pencho Slaveikov's poems: "Na Balkana" in: SLAVEIKOV, P. *Epicheski pesni*. Sofia, 1928, 124-128 and especially in his epic poem "Kurvava pesen" - SLAVEIKOV, P. *Kurvava pesen*. Sofia. 1931, esp. 5-8, 45-50, 283-193. The Balkans are presented here as a powerful and frowning old warrior watching from a distance and from above the historical events that take place on the plains. From an indifferent observer at the beginning this "personality" develops into an active participant in the historical drama on the side of "his" people - the Bulgarians. One may also point to the essayist reflections by the same author, where the Balkans are "generalised" into a designation for all Bulgarian mountains: SLAVEIKOV, P. "Bulgarskata narodna pesen", in: SLAVEIKOV, P. *Subrani suchinenia*. Vol. 6, part II (Bulgarskata literatura), Sofia, 1923, 6-8.

resist.<sup>58</sup> It is thus that they become an “expression” of Bulgarian-ness. Bulgarianness does not mean here a simple aggregate of the people and their customs, their history and mentalities but rather a quasi metaphysical entity - a “spirit” or quintessential “idea” of the nation. The established relationship goes in both directions - from human to nature and from nature to human. The power and the forces attributed to the Balkans because of their size are projected back onto the Bulgarian nation. The “rapprochement” effected between Nature and Culture, Geography and Ethnicity creates a powerful national symbol, invested with a strong affectivity.<sup>59</sup>

The poetic imagination populates the Balkans with “supernatural” creatures, taken from pagan beliefs or from a sort of paganised popular Christianity and invests them with magic potencies.<sup>60</sup> The mountains are thus expanded and “generalised” into a cosmic category. A nation that is destined to inhabit a cosmically significant space (or to come in contact with it in the decisive moments of its historical existence) is sure to partake of its cosmic greatness too. The geographical topos is first exalted, then projected onto the nation, to enhance its dignity and grandeur.

Though most prominent, the Balkans are not the only geographical topos charged with a national meaning. The whole territory of a nation is in a way sacred, and it is strewn with cultural signs. History has left its traces everywhere. There are legends and stories about a

<sup>58</sup> For example in the essay of GULUBOV, K. “Chovekut na kavala, chovekut na ribniiia bukvar, chovekut na Balkana”, in: Gulubov, K. *Zovut na rodinata (Kulturniia put na bulgarina. Literaturni opiti.)* Sofia, 1930, 7-10. The “man of the Balkans” is a metaphor for the politically active Bulgarian who loves his freedom and is ready to fight for it; this also stands for the active “aspect” of the national character.

<sup>59</sup> A similar observation about turning natural features of the homeland into historical ones (thus humanising and historicising them) and about the reverse process of naturalising historical monuments in “cultivating poetic spaces” as a means of forming the nation, may be found in SMITH, A. *National Identity*, 64-66, 127-128.

<sup>60</sup> Examples may be found in the poetry of the great Bulgarian poet and revolutionary of the national Revival epoch Hristo Botev: his poem “Hadzhi Dimitur” which depicts the heroic death of another Bulgarian national revolutionary, surrounded by supernatural beings on a Balkan mountain top. One may also mention Naiden Sheitanov’s pantheist fantasies on the theme of “Balkan magic” - SHEITANOV, N. “Zmeiat”, *Zlatorog*, 4, 8 (1923), 493-503; SHEITANOV, N. “Chovekut”, *Zlatorog*, 6, 9 (1925), 395-401, esp. 400-401.

number of places: mountain tops, rivers, ravines, rocks, etc. In a nation-bound interpretation the local "signifiers" are infused with a "wider" national meaning, they come to signify the nation's past and its "destinies". This interpretative task is accomplished in "local historiography", promoted by historians and museum workers, sometimes by school teachers and amateur patriots.

Besides "nature", persons may also embody national meanings and serve the purposes of self-identification. Historical personalities exemplify the best national qualities, the very "spirit" of the nation, and provide paradigms of behaviour. As already mentioned, Bulgarian national heroes and saints are taken mainly from the Revival period. These are usually officially consecrated and sanctified figures, evoked on state and military celebrations. Leaving aside straightforward self-identification with heroes (and the question of to what extent it really takes place) I would like to consider an example of a literary personage that had the extraordinary career of becoming a kind of national symbol in the "popular representations", to the detriment of the official exegesis.

"Bai Ganyo" (the novel bears the name of the hero) was created at the beginning of the century by the famous Bulgarian writer, author of travel descriptions and political pamphlets, Aleko Konstantinov, with the intention of satirising the cultural and political life in Bulgaria at the time. The novel is, in fact, composed of a number of almost independent chapters, with hardly any continuity apart from the main protagonist; the protagonist himself is more of a collection of different traits and characteristics, displayed in various situations, than a consistent figure.<sup>61</sup> Bai Ganyo is a petty trader of rose oil, travelling throughout Europe, shocking "civilised" people with his manners, always suspicious of others and looking for ways to use them and

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<sup>61</sup> It seems that Aleko Konstantinov was mostly interested in exploiting for satirical purposes situations (scenes from the Bulgarian social and political life, travels of the hero to Europe for trade, etc.) and was little concerned with the consistency and psychological unity of his hero. What we thus have is a number of situations with few connections between them and a rather heterogeneous protagonist, displaying different traits in various circumstances. While there is little "personalisation" of the protagonist in the sense of deepening into his psychological experiences, a colourful behaviour and a very picturesque speech create a quite unique personality effect.

take advantages for himself (while not really a “humbug”); inside Bulgaria he is a partisan of the political party in office, one of those that spoil the atmosphere of the political life - in a word, a negative hero. It is the more surprising that precisely this hero should become a standard national reference.<sup>62</sup>

The popularity of Bai Ganyo may, in my view, be explained by the various possibilities of identification and by the actuality of some of the situations described for the present-day Bulgarian. Some ways of identification are direct and simple, others indirect and ambivalent. One may call a particular compatriot “a ganyo” with the intention of offending, the connotations being that he is either “uncivilised”, rough, “uncultured” (in a strongly evaluative sense) or unscrupulous and taking advantage of others. It should be noted that while the speaker is aware of a national connotation in the abuse, he is often excluding himself from the proposed identity. But then a positive reinterpretation of the qualities associated with the hero may be effected, most often in low-class, poorly educated layers.<sup>63</sup> “Ganyo” may refer in a wider sense to the national mentality, and statements like “we are ganyos” can be pronounced in self-depreciation or with a resignation. A challenging use is also possible: be a “Ganyo”, well, why not; one has to take care of his own interests in the first place. Next, a person may call himself “a Ganyo” with a kind of self-irony, e. g. as an excuse for being too insistent and somewhat insolent - in fact this

<sup>62</sup> The issue of what Bai Ganyo stands for has been vigorously debated by Bulgarian literary critics. Two main view points emerged. While Marxist literary criticism insisted on the “social conditioning” of the protagonist and on his historical “determination”, presenting him namely as a “bourgeois” figure of the rough times of “initial accumulation” of capital, other literary historians and critics (Boian Penev in the first place) saw him as an “Oriental man in general”, as standing for “uncivilised” (uncultured) persons altogether, independently of any national qualities. See: PENEV, B. “Prevuplushteniata na Bai Ganyo”, *Zlatorog*, 4, 1 (1923), 22-33, esp. 26 and 29. No one defended in that dispute the view that Bai Ganyo stands for “the Bulgarian” and the whole learned dispute arose precisely to oppose and refute the national identification of the hero and the self-identification with him among the broader public.

<sup>63</sup> Boian Penev regrets the fact that against the critical intention of the author, Bai Ganyo was reinterpreted in a positive way by many people, especially among the poorly educated and the soldiers during World War I, namely as an expression of what is valuable and worthy of admiration in the Bulgarian character: common sense and pragmatism, toughness and other military virtues; the oeuvre was read as “a novel of adventures, narrating the courageous adventures of a new hero”. See PENEV, B. “Prevuplushteniata na Bai Ganyo”, 30-31.

may be a way of denying any resemblance with the hero. Self-irony introduces distance, complexity and ambivalence in the reference. What I would like to suggest here is that a nationally meaningful "symbol" may be referred to in various ways, other than a positive self-identification. Identification may evoke pride as well as shame, and there are also ambiguous modalities of experiencing nationhood.

The way Bai Ganyo refers the Bulgarian nation to European civilisation deserves a special mention.<sup>64</sup> Superficially Europeanised and distortedly "civilised", shocking people with his behaviour while - it should be noted - acting quite consistently according to his own cultural assumptions and to his own purposes, the authentic hero meets Europe without a feeling of shame or an inferiority complex; he is in this sense quite "natural".<sup>65</sup> Now, it is the still uneasy attitude towards Europe that makes Bulgarians compare themselves - individually and as a nation - to this so deficiently "Europeanised" prototype. There is always the question how far away "we" - present-day Bulgarians - have travelled from that hero-compatriot; this sensitivity reveals a kind of inferiority complex as regards (Western) Europe. Ganyo is thus transformed into an inner measure for "Europeanisation" (and for being "civilised" in general) and there is a certain irony in the fact that it is precisely the advance in civility which makes the experience of inferiority possible. Always on the road to Europe and modernity Bulgarians feel themselves to be in the awkward position of following in Bai Ganyo's steps; it is precisely this hero that came to express and dramatise the ambiguous situation of belated and deficient modernisation and (here synonymous with this) "Europeanisation" of the Bulgarian nation.

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So far I have been dealing with the different materials used in identity-building. But the construction of the national identity also proceeds by differentiation, demarcation, even negation and repudiation both on a symbolic level and in the real dynamics of

<sup>64</sup> The literary historian Nikola Georgiev proposed recently the interpretation of Bai Ganyo as a kind of cultural mediator between Bulgaria and Europe - semi-Oriental, semi-European in both outlook and mentality.

<sup>65</sup> Probably it has been Aleko's intention to convey a sense of shame to the more sensitive readers in depicting the "uncivilised" behaviour of the hero, his motives and cultural assumptions.

group formation. The notion of “we” presupposes “them”; what is more, “we” are “we” often only *against* “them”, the constitution of the self then taking the form of repulsion of the “Other”.<sup>66</sup> The differentiation and distancing from the “Other” may become attached to various criteria.<sup>67</sup> I will consider this “negative” work of constitution through differentiation for the case of Bulgaria.

The identification as Bulgarians under the Ottoman domination had to assume different “markers”, depending on who was to be repelled. Thus orthodoxy and language served as divides from the politically dominant Muslims. But the attempts at ethnic assimilation by the orthodox Greeks, further ahead on the road to nationalism at the time when it was making its first converts among the Bulgarians, called for other ways of differentiation: the establishment of an independent national Church and the elimination of the Greek language from Church officiating and from school teaching. The Slav identification has, on certain occasions, been of advantage for the Bulgarians, e.g. in the early ideas of South-Slav co-operation (“Illirism”) or when the expectations for national liberation were turned to Russia. In other cases the Slav identity was felt as a threat: thus late pan-Slavism had to be rejected as an instrument of Russian imperialist ambitions. And neither the Slav identity, nor Orthodoxy (nor language for that matter) could serve as a divide from the Serbs: in this case only history could provide ways of demarcation and it is hardly surprising that the

<sup>66</sup> In the distancing from the “Other” different forces may be at work: class interest, foreign rule, ideology. At a deeper level “othering” seems to result from a deeply felt need in constituting ourselves; it is thus produced even without power asymmetries. See JOHNSON, R. “Towards a Cultural Theory of the Nation: A British-Dutch Dialogue”, 200- 204; For the Orient as an “internal Other” to the West, and the largely imaginative nature of this Other (“imaginative geography”, “imaginative history” of the Orient) see SAID, E. *Orientalism*. London and Henley: Harmondsworth, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, 2, 12, 21-22, 54-55.

<sup>67</sup> That is why closure into nations seems arbitrary; for the same reason exclusive dependence on “objective” criteria in defining a nation is never sufficient and has to be supplemented by “subjective” criteria (self-perception, “consciousness”, will). What is more, differences have to be “felt” (“perceived”) in order to become “objective”. See the treatment of ethnic categories in WEBER, M. *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. Tübingen, 1980, 234-244; For an exposition of the two main approaches in defining a nation - “objectivist” (based on “culture”) and “subjectivist” (or “voluntarist”, based on will) see GELLNER, E. *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983, 7, 53-58. See also the treatment of the concept of nation by HOBBSAWM, E. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992 (first published 1990), 5-8.

historical "debate" between Bulgarian and Serb historians has been most animated and heavily politicised.

From the fifteenth century onwards two quite dramatic forms of "Otherness", that is, of other culture and civilisation, played a role for the Bulgarians - the Oriental (Ottoman) and the (West) European. The Ottoman "Other" was immediately present as a foreign ruler and since the advance of the national processes in the nineteenth century it called forth a reaction of total rejection.<sup>68</sup> At the same time a deep and enduring influence was exercised by the Turkish-Oriental culture on Bulgarian culture, especially in the field of domestic life, in tastes and mental attitudes, etc. In spite of the militant rejection in the political dimension, the "Other" was thus partly internalised.

Many Turks remained in Bulgaria after the liberation in 1877 in the position of a "minority", but lived in a comparatively tolerant atmosphere. Then, more than a century later, in 1984 Zhivkov's regime in Bulgaria started for some reason an unprecedented campaign for driving part of this minority out of the country. There was in the media a propaganda of "historical knowledge", latent nationalist feelings were activated and fervent nationalists mobilised in "othering" and stigmatising the Turkish minority. Being ethnically Turkish (and Muslim) seemed once again incompatible with being Bulgarian by nationality and citizenship. The regime was able to force a re-christening (re-naming) of the Turks with Bulgarian names and to suppress their religious and cultural practices, but the minority was strongly alienated and with lasting consequences. Postcommunism brought the ethnic issue to the political arena again. Organised in a party of its own and manoeuvring between the main political opponents the Turkish minority succeeded in gaining minority rights.<sup>69</sup> It seems that the country's future will depend to a large extent on the success in developing and sustaining a broader (territorial, civic-political) Bulgarian national identity, capable of

<sup>68</sup> On this influence see: GENCHEV, N. *Bulgarskata kultura XV-XIX v.* Sofia: Sofia University Press, 1988, 99-101, 273.

<sup>69</sup> This party entered Parliament in the first and the second elections after communism and has been playing the role of a balance between the Socialist (former Communist) party and its opponents; it led to a fall of the first non-communist government when it withdrew its parliamentary support for it.



tolerating differences and of transcending particular ethno-cultural identities.<sup>70</sup>

“Europe” acted on Bulgaria from a distance with all the attractions of modernity: technical and scientific achievements, progressive ideas and values, prestigious styles of life and consumption, etc. Europe stood for civilisation as such and for “progress”, so that positive attitudes towards it could have the flavour of universalism and cosmopolitanism. Besides, the European West, even in its colonial and semi-colonial expansionism, did not threaten ethnic assimilation. No wonder that along with the development of the national processes and after the establishment of the new Bulgarian state, there was a growing aspiration to appropriate and incorporate European achievements and values. Yet the relation to Europe or to what functioned as “images” of Europe was not exempt from tensions and ambiguities. There was first (and quite early) the apprehension that the European influence is ruinous for the traditional culture and morals and that it somehow conflicts with the consolidation of a national “consciousness”<sup>71</sup>; there were then concerns of how to develop the national culture with some creativity and originality while absorbing influences from the culturally powerful European nations; there were also fears that the “Europeanised” intelligentsia is growing apart from the mass of the “people” and giving up the national ideals.<sup>72</sup> Finally, the belated, uneven and not quite successful modernisation with all its reverse sides and drawbacks engendered uneasiness and frustrations. While this created a certain nostalgia for the past and some militant nationalism, a radically anti-European ideological trend or social movement was lacking in Bulgaria. After communism more than ever, because of the expectations for assistance from Europe and the wish to be “integrated” in it, a

<sup>70</sup> Holding a passport is not equivalent to national identity, as one may not identify himself with his official citizenship.

<sup>71</sup> VOINIKOV, D. “Predgovor” in: Voinikov, D. *Krivorazbranata tsivilisatsiia*. Bukurest, 1871, I-III; “Dluzhnostta i grazhdaninut”, *Chitalishte*, 3, 3 (1872), 335-336.

<sup>72</sup> PETKANOV, K. “Bulgarskata inteligentsiia kato rozhbha i otritsanie na nasheto selo”, *Filosofski pregled*, 4, 2 (1932), 124-135; ILIEV, A. “Inteligentsia i narod”, *Prosveta*, 7, 8-10 (1942), 861-870; ILIEV, A. “Narodnostnoto obosbiavane na bulgarskata kultura”, *Bulgarska misul*, 11, 3-6 (1936); ILIEV, A. “Narodnost i kultura”, *Bulgarska misul*, 10, 7-8 (1935).

national identity and a feeling of belonging to Europe - whatever that may mean - seem to be experienced as easily compatible.

The national identity is in a sense a freely constructed representation; nations are "imagined communities", in the apt phrase of B. Anderson.<sup>73</sup> Speaking about "self-knowledge" and "self-discovery" people are constantly creating and recreating their ethnic identities. While ethnic identities are perceived, believed, imagined or even wished for entities, they are nonetheless "real". They are real in the sense of being deeply rooted in experience and in being able to exert palpable effects upon reality, constituting thus part of it. In another language we may speak of a "dialectical" relationship between those poles. There is in identity building also the relationship between past and present notions. Materials used in the process of imagining the national identity are supplied from the past, transmitted across time as "traditions". But tradition itself - whether historical memories or whatever else - is always interpreted, invented and reinvented.<sup>74</sup> The ethnocultural identities are ongoing processes.

National identity is but one of the identities of modern man. There are other kinds of identities: regional, professional, religious, class, gender, kinship, age and generation identities.<sup>75</sup> The prevalence of certain types of identities (professional, class and national in particular) over the "primordial" kinship identities and over religious identities seems to be a distinctive sign of modernity.<sup>76</sup> Looking at how many people have died for their nation and that such death is experienced as meaningful, one may assert that the national identification (and loyalty) has absorbed some of the power of the primordial identifications and loyalties. At the same time conflicts between the various identities (and the corresponding loyalties) seem to be less dramatic nowadays than in the past, and the different

<sup>73</sup> ANDERSON, B. *Imagined Communities*, 15-16. As Anderson notes, to say that communities - national but also others - are "imagined" ("invented" or created) does not mean that they are for that reason "fabricated" or "false".

<sup>74</sup> HOBBSAWM, E. (ed.) *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

<sup>75</sup> On the multiple identities see for example SMITH, A. *National Identity*, 3-8.

<sup>76</sup> The upsurge of religious fundamentalism is, however, a recent trend that contradicts the thesis for the decline of religious identification.

identities have become more compatible. There is from the perspective of the individual the possibility to shift from one identity to another, depending on the circumstances and in what capacity one is called forth.<sup>77</sup> There is, furthermore, a certain "latitude" within each of the identities for the individual to construct his own version of identity. Generally speaking, these possibilities attest to a growth of individual autonomy and freedom. There are, however, situations when one is forced into an identity, whether in willed self-defence, or as a result of a "definition" imposed on him from the outside. Hard times (of crisis) for a given society are encouraging the search for ethnic identities to serve as a kind of spiritual support. Discrimination along ethnic and national lines forces a minority into a compensatory identity building.<sup>78</sup> Migration and living abroad are among the special circumstances that intensify the individual experience of national identities. There is also the "strategic" use of identity in the struggle for certain advantages. From this point of view, national identities appear as an example of the "classification struggles" (for an usurpation or imposition of a certain "category") and are part of the power struggles between groups.

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<sup>77</sup> An example is provided by HOBBSAWM, E. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 8.

<sup>78</sup> Thus R. Johnson notes the stronger need for identity in the face of "national" misrecognition, sometimes resulting in challenging inversions of the dominant evaluations ("black nation", "queer nation" in the U.S.A.) - JOHNSON, R. "Towards a Cultural Theory of the Nation: A British-Dutch Dialogue", 215-216.





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