

## THE *YAMURLUK*<sup>1</sup> OF THE SONS OF HAGAR<sup>2</sup> AND THE SULTAN'S VELVET COAT. BORDERLANDS BETWEEN CIVILIZATION: THE BULGARIAN PERSPECTIVE

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*Abstract:* The article attempts to reconstruct the patterns of perception documented in Bulgarian cultural texts which conceptualised the Bulgarian land as borderlands of civilization. The author presents the historical and cultural conditions for the deliberate purification of the image of the Bulgarian culture as resistant to Ottoman influences which took place in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, the article demonstrates the ways in which Bulgarian artists and thinkers conceptualised the observations and intuitions inconsistent with this understanding of the national idea. The titular *yamurluk* of the sons of Hagar and the “Sultan’s” velvet coat are metonyms reflecting the pattern of adaptation to the Osman culture which was based on the principle of mimicry. The semantics of the first one suggest stigmatisation of assimilation. The second one – the accepted (although at first unwanted) prosperity of *Pax Osmana*. The article contains also some reflection on the topic of contemporary strategies of Bulgarian researchers that aim to raise the status of folk survival philosophy, advantages of local everyday life and cultural diversity which constitutes the heritage of five centuries of Ottoman rule.

*Key words:* Bulgarian culture, borderlands between civilization, cultural affinity and adaptation.

*“Even on a fleeting visit to Bulgaria on the eve of the last eastern war one saw a society which, when compared to ours, would have appeared strikingly unfamiliar: a society with no beggars, no poets and no illiterates. This would have been the first impression of perhaps the oldest of all the Christian Slavic nations, but also the youngest one in the theatre of modern political history.*

<sup>1</sup> A kind of cape made of felted goat wool; in the period of Ottoman rule it became very popular among Balkan populations.

<sup>2</sup> Bulgarian *агаряни*; this slightly deprecating name was used by mediaeval chroniclers and by writers of the Bulgarian national revival to describe Muslims.

*Located on the very outskirts of the Slavic lands, and contiguous with peoples who did not share their descent or civilization with the Indo-European race, this nation had absorbed much foreign, non-Slavic blood over a period of one thousand years, and it had spent five centuries a part of an oriental and Mohameddan body politic. As such, it does not manifest its nature as readily or as clearly as other Slavic nations do: I would say it retains much of that oriental mysteriousness and other characteristically eastern qualities which, when surfacing in social life, tend to produce surprising effects for good and for ill, **confounding the calculations of political psychiatrists, throwing friends into despair, and astonishing enemies.***" (Grzegorzewski 1883: 3; emphasis mine).

This late-19<sup>th</sup> century semi-poeticized portrayal of the Muslim-Indo-European borderlands on the south-eastern peripheries of Europe is taken from the writings of Jan Grzegorzewski, a Polish traveler, ethnographer and orientalist who founded a scientific station in Sofia (followed by another one in Istanbul) known as the "Hyacinthaeum". Entitled *Spółczesna Bułgaria. I. Przed i podczas wojny 1877/1878* [Modern Bulgaria. I. Before and During the 1877/1878 War] (1883), his short account of 105 pages is an interesting record of an outsider's experience of the borderland identity in the Bulgarian Balkans. With his extensive orientalist expertise, his familiarity with the land and his keen powers of observation, Grzegorzewski was able to include in his account a number of interesting inferences on the hybrid forms of mentality and culture fostered by the local borderlands. In addition to its historical value, Grzegorzewski's account is also notable today as a record of his own sensibilities as a representative of a borderlands culture who nonetheless considered himself as a European, and viewed the world from the vantage point of the cultural centre. This article does not aim to explore the provenance of the categories Grzegorzewski relies on in his characterization of Bulgarians as a borderlands people, but should be pointed out that his categories are external ("etic"). As Maria Dąbrowska-Partyka points out, borderlands tend to be instituted from the point of view of the centre: "Although they remain within the sphere of influence of many different centres, *borderlands* will always remain peripheral when viewed from a central perspective: an exotic province, a folkloristic open-air museum, perhaps a bridgehead or a bulwark, depending on the ideological fads holding sway over the centre at any given time" (Dąbrowska-Partyka 2004: 35). Accordingly, the ideological profile of the verbalizing subject will be crucial to any discussion of borderlands cultures. In every instance, the borderland "emerges" or "comes to be"; when reflected upon and expressed in words, it becomes transformed from an amorphous thing into a structured entity.

The concept of borderlands between cultures/civilizations had emerged in historiography to describe a kind of transition zone that depends on a relative stability of borders. Some people have regarded borderlands as closely guarded security zones, others saw them, and often idealized them, as a kind of connective tissue<sup>3</sup> (Siedroń-Galusek – Galusek 2012: 133) conjoining areas perceived as different. Regardless of the value judgments applied to borderlands (Kolbuszewski 2002), such areas were treated as a locus of disproportionate (and not always predictable) contradictions, an area of antagonisms and hybrid forms where people nonetheless lived normal, active lives (Bhabha 1994).

In the globalized world, “borderlands” as a concept have become divorced from any specific territories, and have consequently been redefined. Today, the term “does not indicate a fixed topographical site between two other fixed locales (nations, societies, cultures), but an interstitial zone of displacement and deterritorialization that shapes the identity of the hybridized subject. Rather than dismissing them as insignificant, as marginal zones, thin slivers of land between stable places, we want to contend that the notion of borderlands is a more adequate conceptualization of the “normal” locale of the postmodern subject”. (cf. Gupta – Ferguson 1992: 18). Borderlands have become an attribute of humanity, a melting pot of subjectivity, and as such they have entered the very heart of Western culture. The strategies in which borderlands are experienced seem to be shaped by individual choices, and may not necessarily be stimulated by the experience of direct contact with representatives of other (antagonistic?) norms and patterns.

But the new is always intertwined with the old. Discussions about the Balkans usually tend to be informed by the stereotype which sees the region as a transition zone between European civilization and the Islamic world, a stereotype formed in the modern period (Todorova 1997; Bjelić – Savić 2003). As inhabitants of this area, “regardless of their own will or intention, people living in the borderlands are seen as culturally syncretic. Regardless of the identity they may choose for themselves, when viewed from the centre they will always remain ‘slightly alien’, usually ‘inferior’ (e.g. provincial or backward), often ‘difficult to understand’ and ‘corrupted’ by their daily contacts with the other. They are treated as alienated and ambiguous – unless they agree to wholeheartedly embrace one of the basic roles they are usually allocated, such as ‘defenders of the borders’ or ‘renegades’.” (Dąbrowska-Partyka 2004: 35)

To continue this train of thought, we might add that inhabitants of borderlands usually experience a cognitive dissonance with relation to the centre (however defined),

<sup>3</sup> The term was coined by Czesław Miłosz to describe the planned activity of The Borderlands Foundation, a Polish NGO established in the 1990s.

because their cultural self-identification does not match their external identification, leading to objectification and stigmatization. Central to this way of experiencing the world is the category of “the local” or “the familiar”, meaning a place of coexistence with the Other within a complicated and polyvalent grid of coordinates; to external subjects, however, this way of experiencing the world becomes ineluctably subject to an essentialized and reductive reading which is incapable of resolving the finer details of the picture. This disproportion between the possible ways of understanding the world is studied with great insight in the recent book by Lech Miodyński, *Symbolie miejsca w kulturze i literaturze macedońskiej* [Place symbols in Macedonian literature and culture] (2011). A reflection on the borderland experience and identity, the book offers a wealth of inspiration, particularly because the author laudably chooses a narrow geocultural focus (often a single village, sometimes a village which no longer actually exists). This way, the book demonstrates the illusory nature of what I call “the grand scientific narratives” which tend to essentialize the Balkan borderlands, and all the relics of Orientalism along with them. The book also shows the dynamic formative process of Macedonian geo-cultural symbolism as an element of a grand national narrative which, as with other Slavic-Balkan cultures and elsewhere, prefers to use for its canvas the purity of closed enclaves rather than the insistent dysmorphia of borderlands (Miodyński 2011: 283).

It would probably be easy to explain why those cultures, as they were taking shape in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, did not choose to treat their borderland status as a strategic asset (Lilova 2003: 238–261).<sup>4</sup> In Bulgarian culture, one such attempt to build up an appreciation for its borderland status was the emphasis in the public discourse (mostly in the 1990s) on Bulgarian religious and ethnic tolerance as an internalized product of the Islamic tradition of *komsuluk* (Georgieva 1994: 147–178).<sup>5</sup> At the time of the political transformation, this kind of toler-

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<sup>4</sup> The identification of oppressors as barbarians or, in a milder variant, as representatives of an inferior culture (partly a genuine sentiment and partly a conformist nod to Europe) was to 19<sup>th</sup> century elites an entry ticket to the club of the civilised nations of Europe. Attempts to make sense of Bulgarian culture by elevating the Ottoman Empire to the status of a Bulgarian-Turkish state were rare. In this conception (occasionally made in the period of national revival and ultimately discarded), the blood of the Slavic voivods invigorated the Asian invaders, inducing them to find nobler aims and gentler customs (Petyr Odiakov). The model was ultimately doomed to failure by the low status of the Ottoman state, seen at the time as the “sick man of Europe”, which made it problematic to claim the legacy of its golden age in propaganda efforts. At the same time, the notion of ethnic hybridisation inherent in this model threatened to destabilise religious boundaries and to result in a re-empowering of the “Bulgarian-Turkish” elites.

<sup>5</sup> The rule of good neighbourly relations informed by the Islamic tradition which mandates neighbourly help to the nearest 40 households.

ance and good neighbourly relations with its allegedly syncretic traditional social practice became a fashionable topic in Bulgarian historiography and cultural anthropology. And unlike Bosnia, which failed to achieve a peaceable outcome despite its similar potential in terms of traditional heritage, Bulgaria came out unscathed from the chaos of Balkan warfare in the former Yugoslavia. Some observers have wryly argued that the peaceful solution was achieved thanks to Bulgarian religious indifference (if not, even more alarmingly, thanks to special interest groups) rather than to the country's tolerant ways. However, it remains a fact that peace in Bulgaria was not violated. Past prejudices (real or imagined) had not been fanned into new flames, but they have not been reconsidered either. As members of the European Union, modern Bulgarians are obviously not quite as vulnerable culturally as they were in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the modernization of the young country was tantamount to a systemic transition from the Ottoman to the European model. However, traces of the five centuries of Ottoman rule survive to this day. Rather laudably, it should be pointed out that the numerous Muslim enclaves in the country (with Turkish or Pomak populations) are not actually the most pressing of its problems (Gradeva – Ivanova 1998; Zhelyazkova 1997: 57–112). The rights of ethnic minorities are safeguarded by the democratic state, and although the memory of compulsory campaigns to change surnames or force the emigration of Turks in the last decade of Zhivkov's rule continue to hold the seeds of a potential conflict, the intercultural relations seem currently stable. For the Bulgarians, mosques, veils and elements of traditional Muslim costume (as well as their actual Muslim users) are an understandable trace of the country's former military and administrative domination by the Ottoman Turks, comfortably rationalized within the Bulgarian national canon – even if Bulgarians clearly distance themselves from Islamic elements in the symbolic area, emphasizing (in line with 19<sup>th</sup> century folklorists and travellers)<sup>6</sup> the distinctness of Bulgarian heritage. Still, everyday culture, which retains palpable Turkish influences in terms of language, architecture, folklore, cuisine, ritual (e.g. animal sacrifices of penitence or thanksgiving, the so-called *kurban*) and custom (e.g. the rule of good neighbourly relations, the so-called *komşuluk*), indicate a considerable staying power of the oriental model, confirming Grzegorzewski's observations about the way Bulgarians have internalized eastern culture.

Obviously, Bulgarian “borderlands between civilizations” cannot be discussed in the abstract, divorced from the historical and cultural specifics. It was different during the Ottoman rule, as daringly pointed out in the 1980s by Nikolay

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, L. Karavelov argued that the Pomaks living in the Rhodope mountains had retained ancient Bulgarian customs, and preserved the Bulgarian language in a pure form.

Genchev (1988) or in 1990s by Tsvetana Georgieva (1994; 1997), and it took on different forms in the early decades following the liberation of Bulgaria in 1878, as studied by Bernard Lory with regard to urban culture (1985); in modern times, it takes yet another shape in the rural areas where Orthodox Christians and Muslims coexist (Lubańska 2012). The conceptualizations of Bulgarian/Turkish coexistence as found in cultural texts (folklore, literature, journalism, scholarship or textbooks) are yet another phenomenon still. Judging by the discourse so far, the continued need to reappraise and redefine this part of historical legacy (which, all too often, tends to get ideological) seems to be caused by the lasting inability of the Bulgarian elites to transform this part of the national experience into an objective area of study, let alone an area of strength. The relations with Bulgaria's "significant other" continue to be haunted by a sense of stigma attached to the experience of political subordination to the Orient, which is seen as "an inferior civilization". Bulgaria is the European Union's poorest state with no spectacular achievements in recent history, and after more than two centuries of playing catch-up with the West, the country still experiences psychological discomfort towards the beneficiaries of history, and the five hundred years of Ottoman rule are traditionally cited as an excuse for the nation's failures (a sentiment derided in the 1990s by the Bulgarian comic Stanislav Stratiev:

"Oh, it's all because of the oppression, this is our oppressors' fault, we were so unlucky in our choice of oppressors. (...) All around the world the liberated nations speak English, they're civilized and they even have actual underground trains. But our oppressors, they were even more savage than us (...) We didn't actually do any better with our liberators, either. Why didn't we wait another three or four centuries and get better ones? There's no harm in waiting. We have botched our geographical location, too. A nation that chooses to settle in the Balkans must be out of its mind. Our folk say that you shouldn't even take a pee at a crossroads, but we came to a crossroads and started a nation there." (Stratiev 1991)

In spite of Bulgaria's vigorous comic tradition, the concept of the "Turkish bondage" remains a relatively stable canonical element in Bulgarian cultural discourse (Szwat-Gylybowa 2011a: 190–196). When terms such as "Ottoman rule" (*османското господство*) or even "Ottoman presence" (*османското присъствие*) had found their way into school textbooks after the collapse of Communism in 1989, some people became reconciled to the idea, but most continue to treat it as a coercive compromise imposed by the new symbolic powers that be, whose symbolic heart is beating in Brussels.

The changes in terminology notwithstanding, the Bulgarian language has not produced a good equivalent for the concept of a borderland between civilizations. Terms like *граничната зона* (border zone), *цивилизационната периферия* (civilization peripheries), *покрайнини* (outskirts) – carry a semantic charge which is different than “borderlands between civilizations”, and they offer a different axiological potential (Dąbek-Wirgowa 1997). Also, such terms do not get applied to the nation’s territory with the Balkan in its symbolic heartland. The history of this Turkish lexeme (*balkan*), which became comfortably rooted in the Bulgarian language during the Ottoman rule and was later enshrined in the national canon, is one of the telling paradoxes of Bulgarian history. During the period of national revival, members of the young intelligentsia were the first to try and paint the Bulgarian territories as an area wholly resistant to external cultural influence – an enclave of pure Bulgarianness guarding the soul of the nation. Paradoxically, the symbolic embodiment of that area came to be associated with the mountain range known as the Stara Planina, but usually referred to as “the Balkan”: by force of linguistic habit, a Turkish word meaning “a wooded mountain range” – an obvious trace of past Ottoman domination – came to be regarded as the perfect term to describe pure Bulgarianness (Szwat-Gyłybowa 2007). In the geosophy of the interwar conservative philosopher Nayden Sheytanov, the Balkan was embodied in the metaphor of a crossroads between the East and the West, but to Sheytanov the location made the Balkan central rather than peripheral, conferring a special mission on its inhabitants as defenders of European culture from the “Asian hordes” (Sheytanov 1925). To Sheytanov, it was completely unthinkable that the Ottoman Turks might have influenced the “self-generated” Orphic-Bogomil culture of the Bulgarian territories.

This imaginary isolationism formed a parallel with the vision of the Bulgarian nation as an “unhappy family” and a “victim of Turkish bondage”, as popularized during the period of national revival (Gałązka 1992). As recently shown by Nikolay Aretov (2006), the allegorical portrait of Bulgaria as a violated woman had been developed in the oral culture and writings of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Inherent in the image of an abducted/fighting woman is the idea of confrontation, mutely witnessed by the lands covered by the swarming intruders. The impact of the novel *Neshtastna familiya* (The Unhappy Family), published anonymously by Vasył Drumev, was noted as early as the 1880s by Jan Grzegorzewski, who compared the social influence of this literarily unremarkable text to the role played by *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in America. This is how Grzegorzewski imagined the reactions of the book’s readers (a priest, a teacher or a peasant):

“Having re-read it time and time again, he practically knew the whole book by rote: with constant use, the well-thumbed volume had turned into something like a deck of greasy cards used by an old fortune teller, but its attraction grew daily, intoxicating him as effectively as hashish did his Turkish neighbour; except that his neighbour used opium to exchange reality for a world of airy illusion, and the reader of *The Unhappy Family* constantly saw the fantasy world of the book become reality, impossible to forget even without the constant reminders provided by the Turks. He saw the murdered heroine in the image of the murders committed at Tatar Bazardzhik; the burnt farmyards were the fire of Rushchuk, the murder of the entire family was the crimes committed at Vratsa, Eski Zagra and other towns and villages made immortal by the pamphlet authored by Tsankov and Balabanov.” (Grzegorzewski 1883: 86)

Grzegorzewski’s account seems to confirm that the difficulty of perceiving, in a positive light, the territory of one’s own country as a borderland between civilizations must have stemmed from everyday 19<sup>th</sup> century experience, as reflected in ideologized cultural texts. A rhetorical trope in a variety of forms had gradually taken shape where the Turk was no longer seen as a barbarian threat to the defenceless Christians, and instead came to be seen as the enemy of the Bulgarian nation.<sup>7</sup> At the time, this was an irreversible process shaped by historical events and political pragmatism, and it had left a lasting mark on the writing of numerous writers from the national revival period, such as, among others, Iliya Blyskov, Vasyl Drumev, Georgi S. Rakovski, and above all Luben Karavelov. In his short stories written in Russia and collected in the volume *Pamiatniki narodnago byta Bolgar i Stranicy izh knigi stradaniy bolgarskogo plemeni* (1868), Karavelov argued that ethics was subservient to the interests of the nation, and that the bestialized Turks belonged outside the margins of good neighbourly relations, or indeed of humanity (Dąbek-Wirgowa 1991; Szepietowska 2008). What was random and accidental in the nonliterary world became to Karavelov the organizing principle of reality, presented as a fact from the life of the Bulgarian community, vainly awaiting human and divine justice. In Bulgaria, this vision of an ethical but universally forsaken and defenceless nation became an official one, and was not revised even following the appearance of the widely read and brutally honest memoirs of Zakhari Stoyanov, *Zapiski za bulgarskite vastaniya* (Notes from the Bulgarian Uprisings, 1884–1892), where Stoyanov wrote of his shock at the escalation of

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<sup>7</sup> Relatively the most coherent system of national ideology containing a clear portrayal of an enemy of the nation was developed in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century by Georgi S. Rakovski. Unimpressed by Europe, Rakovski lavished praise on the virtuous sultans of old, but his writings often portray Turks as ruthless and cruel, lascivious and larcenous.



mutual hatred: “Two hostile nationalities, one hungry for freedom, the other for spoils and profits, faced each other, cursing each other from the distance, loading their carbines, gritting their teeth and intending to tear each other to pieces like wild animals on a first encounter. To think that those two nations could live in one country under single rule for all of five hundred years!” (Stoyanov 1962: 683)

Even before the liberation, artists set out to create a stereotypical visual depiction of the victimized Bulgarian. Among others, Henryk Dębicki (1830–1906), a Polish artist working in Bulgaria, played an important role. His lithographs from the 1860s and 1870s, including such works as *The Second Battle of Hadzhi Dimitar*, *Stefan Karadja* or *The Suicide of Angel Kanchev* depict the cruel-faced Turks as a kind of embodied evil afflicting the Bulgarians, their Oriental garb illustrating their religious and cultural otherness, the sword in a Turk’s hand symbolizing “the five centuries of carnage”. In the post-liberation period, the Czech Ivan Mrkvička (1856–1938), who played a key role in the emergence of modern painting in Bulgaria, produced numerous historical paintings, including among others *The Refugees*, *A Moonlit Night (After a Turkish Assault)*, *The Father’s Head*, *Başıbozuk*, *In Macedonia*, *Saints*, *The Time of the Kyrdzhalis* (ca. 1897), where the Turk (a criminal, rapist and murderer) is made present through his victims (Bibina 2001: 411–412). Painted in the same period was also the famous work by the Polish artist Antoni Piotrowski, *The Massacre at Batak* (1892), showing the artist’s vision of a massacre committed during the so-called April Uprising of 1876, a work based on accounts of witnesses and survivors (Baleva – Brunbauer 2007). In the painting, an intimate bond seems to link the perpetrators with their victims, as ineffable as the mystery of evil itself. With his *Massacre at Batak*, Piotrowski became one of people who shaped the collective Bulgarian imagination, even though he later agreed with the work’s debunkers, writing openly in his autobiography of the “artificiality”, theatricality and intentionality of the work (Szwat-Gylybowa 2011b). Invaluably, Piotrowski’s writings contain traces of the dynamic process through which a traumatized community forced to live together manages to negotiate the terms of such coexistence. Piotrowski’s notes seem to have captured a poignant aspect of living in the borderlands (Batak being merely a single specific instance), including the mentality of the local people who were capable of seeing an experienced wrong as a decree of fate regardless of their own role in the tragedy: “Islam created a rift between them [i.e. the Bulgarians and the Pomaks – GSG]. Because of religious differences, one group simply saw themselves as **official** perpetrators, the other as **official** victims. Even more peculiarly, there was no real mutual hatred since that was the way things had to be, and could not possibly have been any different. . .

The Christians and the Mohammedans believed that it had to be that way, and that was that.” (Piotrowski sd.: 86–87)

The category of “fate” eliminates personal responsibility for evil, and while it does not get rid of the opposition of perpetrator/victim, it somehow pushes it beyond the sphere of axiology. It is a fact which must have troubled Piotrowski when he was working on his painting, and it shaped the completed work in a significant way, turning it into an icon of the Bulgarian experience, only later to be treated as a historical account.

The image produced by the high culture was significantly coloured by the folklore studied in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which contained certain topical cycles connected with the Ottoman rule, including such motifs as Tsar Shyshman, the “three prisoners’ chains” (both reflecting events from the earliest period of Ottoman invasion), the so-called blood tax, the women and children led away in captivity or the avenging *hayduks*. Folk songs perpetuated detailed accounts of Christian martyrdom, often with a degree of exaggeration characteristic of folklore, like the song of the heroic Yovo who resisted cruel torture and mutilation to refuse his sister to marry a Turk (Mutafchieva 1994). Based as it is on the authority of folk culture, the text continues to be treated in Bulgarian society as a credible document of Bulgarian life even though its authenticity has been brought into question (Aretov 2006: 475).<sup>8</sup> Given the transformations of historical events in Bulgarian folklore, where undesirable facts (military catastrophes, acts of betrayal or cowardice) tended to undergo an aesthetic treatment to bring them into line with the needs of the community (Ivanova 2005), it can be argued that “the song of the Balkan Yovo”, whether authentic or not, reflects one of the most important complexes related to the ambiguous attitudes towards conversion (or, in today’s terms, acculturation) in the Ottoman period (and following the liberation) as a mechanism of upward social mobility and as a way to escape suffering and death (Zhelyazkova 1997: 11–56; Gradeva 2001: 129–130).<sup>9</sup>

This image of a victim nation inhabiting a “territory of oppression” is belied by the writings of 19<sup>th</sup> century Bulgarian travellers who traversed the Ottoman Empire with the ease of seasoned merchants and adventurers. Accounts of pilgrimages to the Holy Land made to earn the prestigious title of *hadzhi*, and stories of

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, see the online discussion on: <http://nauka.bg/forum/index.php?showtopic=2070>.

<sup>9</sup> The strong anti-Islamic rhetoric and admonitions on contacts with non-believers which permeate 18<sup>th</sup> century Bulgarian writings are interpreted as indirect testimony of the increasingly close contacts among the local mixed population, a development which gave rise to concern among religious rulers (including Ottoman ones).

trade expeditions to the Near East, North Africa or southern France can be found in the writings of Mihail Madjarov, *Na Bozhi grob predi 60 godini i dnes* (To God's Tomb 60 Years Ago and Today, 1929), Hristo Ivanov-Golemia (*Spomeni*, Memoirs, 1984), or even (in some ways) Father Mincho Kanchev *Vidritsa* (The Basket, 1983, 1995), cumulatively produce a picture of the supposed "territory of oppression" is fundamentally different from the fixed stereotypes of contemporary Bulgarian culture. The centres of 19<sup>th</sup> century Near Eastern trade – Alexandria, Cairo, Jaffa or Port Said – provided a natural meeting place for cultures that was free from coercion. The meetings involved a mosaic of participating languages and cultures, with Bulgarians taking an important place alongside the Greeks, Arabs, Turks, Wallachians, Armenians or Jews. Wealthy Bulgarian merchants from Koprivshitsa created their own trading outposts in Alexandria and Cairo; they lived on all of the Mediterranean islands, their friendship with Greeks unruffled by "the conflicts in the tsar's city". Travelling far and wide in search of attractive markets, they ventured as far as Addis Ababa, Djibouti and Port Said. This picture of a Bulgarian comfortably traversing the oriental world, protected from violence in the Holy Land by the Turkish police and living in harmony with Turks and Greeks, sits uncomfortably with the ideologized picture of Bulgarians as ignored martyrs and rebels. However, it should be noted that this encounter between cultures took place outside of their native country, where the rift between Bulgarians and Turks was so great that, in the words of Madjarov: "those two nations were divided on everything: the Bulgarians would choose a Bulgarian inn, the Turks – a Turkish one" (Madjarov 1929: 43). This said, one significant motif which tends to crop up in numerous sources is the multilingualism and mutual cultural closeness of the people living in this area, a state of affairs maintained by the efficient and socially beneficial institutions scattered all over the Empire and operating under the patronage of the Sultans, the so-called *vakufs* (inns, hospitals, postal services etc.). The picture of a cohesive, well-integrated oriental world characterized by cultural syncretism and a tolerance for otherness turns out to be part of a much wider panorama which brings together a number of oppositions.

This sphere of Bulgarian historical experience has become a cultural blind spot, a fact which has impaired the Bulgarian nation's ability to reflect on itself but cannot completely erase the five centuries' worth of a shared life and cultural affinity (Herzfeld 2005), a fact whose revitalizing potential is far from negligible (Szwat-Gylybowa 2008).

Jan Grzegorzewski, an "impartial" witness of the times always watchful for oriental influence, put it this way:

“Against the people’s ostensible or potential susceptibility to political influence from foreign or domestic parties, a contrary symptom must also be noted in its nature, which is often given to contradiction (though the contradiction may perhaps likewise be only ostensible). The symptom in question is a general striving for prosperity shaped over the centuries by the historical experience of foreign rule, a subject already briefly outlined above. But even in this, the Bulgarian nature is remarkably different from that of other nations! Elsewhere, the fiscal policies of governments or of the ruling classes and a sense of insecurity regarding life and property degenerates the subjects, making them reluctant in their work and indifferent to economic opportunity. By way of contrast, there has arisen in this land in spite of all the negative influence an attitude of industry, thrift and prudence. The Bulgarians not only strive for prosperity, but also succeeded in securing it.

In an almost unprecedented way, this proclivity and skill have entered their bloodstream and become part of their nature.

Therefore, the comment made early in this work that there are no beggars to be seen in Bulgaria no longer seems so paradoxical. Those who were pushed close to penury (because of internal violence, as shown above) ran away to the Balkans and became *hayduks*, and those who wanted to push others into penury became a *tchorbadja*.

The general populace lived and worked to earn prosperity.” (Grzegorzewski 1883: 104–105)

Interestingly, Zahary Stoyanov also mentions the impact of material self-interest on the fortunes of the April Uprising. In his *Notes on the Bulgarian Uprisings* he argues that the shortsightedness and lack of military strategy on the part of the insurgents stemmed from their high living standards, which they were afraid to lose: “To put it bluntly, such people – industrious and hard-working Bulgarians, **owners of property of one kind or another who had never in their entire lives gone to bed hungry**, married men with family responsibilities – were hardly good material for determined rebels in every sense of the word. (...) Incidentally, we should not forget the five centuries’ worth of yoke suffered by the remarkably patient Bulgarian. Is there anything he could not endure?” (Stoyanov 1962: 686)

The accusation of conformism echoes a similar opinion from Ivan Vazov, a doyen of Bulgarian literature, who thought that his fellow Bulgarians sought the beauty of life in the easily obtainable pleasures precisely because of their volatile political situation. In his novel *Under the Yoke* Vazov wrote:

“Where the arena of political and scientific activity is closely barred (...) the community squanders its energy on the trivial and personal cares of its daily life, and seeks relief and recreation in simple and easily obtainable material enjoyment. A flask of wine sipped beneath the cool shade of the willows by some clear murmuring rivulet will make one forget one’s slavery; the native *guvech* (stew) with its purple egg-plants, fragrant parsley, and sharp peppercorns, enjoyed on the grass under the spreading branches overhead, through which peeps the blue distant sky, constitutes a kingdom, and if only there be a gypsy piper present, is the height of earthly bliss. **An enslaved nation has a philosophy of its own which reconciles it to its lot.**” (Vazov 1912: 70)

To Vazov, Bulgarian vices caused by the experience of “bondage” (such as the tendency to withdraw into private life, a preoccupation with material prosperity or an attitude of fatalistic resignation) are the effect of a centuries-old survival philosophy requiring a thorough knowledge of the complex rules of coexistence in the borderlands. However, by the time Vazov finished his national epic the economic situation of most Bulgarians had taken a turn for the worse; the loss of the Ottoman markets after 1878 resulted in an economic climate which fell dramatically short of expectations.<sup>10</sup> After enjoying the relative benefits as a part of the Ottoman Empire, Bulgarians now faced the consequences of economic diversification, which meant a desperate struggle for financial success in a new situation where the old rules of cultural affinity no longer applied.

Aleko Konstantinov was the first to point out this problem in his satirical feuilletons on Bay Ganyo, a rose oil merchant selling his commodity in the European markets. Collected posthumously in 1895 as *Bay Ganyo: Neveroyatni razkazi za edin savremen en bulgarin* (Bay Ganyo. The Incredible Stories of a Modern Bulgarian, 1980), the short stories anticipated the future controversies and blind spots related to Bulgaria’s entanglement in the conflict of civilizations. The popularity of *Bay Ganyo* cannot be explained in terms of literary merit or the hero’s attractiveness: Ganyo is shockingly primitive, a selfish and materialistic man always on the lookout for personal gain. Made conspicuous in the foreign territories of Europe by his otherness, Ganyo openly ignores and abuses the foreigners, repeatedly holding forth on the superiority of his hygienic and culinary ways compared

<sup>10</sup> During the period of 19<sup>th</sup> century modernization, the post-Ottoman Balkan countries experienced an imbalance between political and economic interests, leading to a rapid loss of the economic potential accumulated before the liberation. This was replaced by an uncertain and volatile “evolution without growth” which failed to produce better living standards. The earlier sense of cultural retardation soon came to be accompanied by a general sense of social unrest (cf. Palairt 1997; Karpat 1990).

to whatever the foreign cultures might have to offer (cf. Stefanov 2000). In a way, Ganyo's message is internally contradictory since he uses two opposing strategies, alternating between conspicuous otherness and mimicry. Konstantinov flags up this paradox in the very title of the book: the honorific title of *bay*<sup>11</sup> (used for addressing older men) is a folk alternative to the official term *gospodin*, and it is still used as a shibboleth of the cozily local and comfortably patriarchal, but also of the oriental. The semiotic value of Ganyo's clothes has a similar function in the text. The various elements of his garb, both those associated with the Orient (the fez, the *yamurluk*), and those associated with Europe (a Belgian cape, a frock coat), are carefully noted by the different narrators, signalling the cultural situation of the main character. This is explained in the "preamble" to the collection, where Ganyo is shown as he is taking off the Oriental *yamurluk* to put on a Belgian cape. "They helped Bay Ganyo slip the Hagaran *yamurluk* off his shoulders, and he threw on a Belgian cape – it was concluded forthwith that Bay Ganyo was every inch an European" (Konstantinov 1980: 109).

However, the short story puts ironic inverted commas around this symbolic metamorphosis whereby the main character becomes transformed into a European. The act of changing from the garb of "the sons of Hagar" into a Belgian cape is a mere change of costume: an ostensible shift of cultural paradigms, an empty gesture unaccompanied by an ability to navigate the complicated network of meanings of the new and unknown cultural model. Bay Ganyo's clothes are nothing more than a fancy dress costume – he may rely on the help of experts and engage in an act camouflage, but his game will soon be up, given away by other elements of his garb, his name and his ways. Ganyo may be entering a foreign territory in the symbolic sense, but he never actually leaves the territory of the familiar: on his travels he is never without his everyday utensils and commodities (peppers, rose oil) which to him are quintessentially local. Using them, Ganyo can tame the foreign territories and prove his superiority over the customs and cultures of the West. Because he cannot understand the languages of the foreigners, Bay Ganyo concludes that they are "barbarians", and resorts to cunning subterfuge, a quintessentially Bulgarian quality tried and tested in his Balkan travels. Perhaps this is why Bay Ganyo's westernized compatriots find his behaviour so shocking: they might be thinking of themselves as an elite, comfortably at home in Europe, but they still feel somehow responsible for the uncouth plebeians descended from the same stock, and they treat Ganyo

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<sup>11</sup> Unlike Nayden Gerov's dictionary (*Rechnik za bulgarskiya ezik 1895–1904*), the 1978 dictionary of loan words (*Rechnik na chuzhdite dumi z bulgarski ezik*) moves away from the idea that the word *bay* might have been derived from a Slavic root, and identifies it as Turkish in origin.

with a mixture of solidarity and embarrassment. In this sense, Bay Ganyo is an example of the ambiguous situation in which the Bulgarians found themselves at a time when the cultural codes were shifting from the Ottoman model to the European one. Ganyo's steadfast loyalty to the stigmatized forms of the Oriental habitus is a frustrating trap since it reflects the deeply concealed sense of superiority harboured by Bulgarians with regard to the Other, a sentiment rooted in the folklore tradition in the stories of the Cunning Peter who always outwits the Turk (which are, incidentally, of oriental origin) (Dinekov 1963).

The material analyzed in this article shows that every attempt to create a synthetic picture of the life of Bulgarians in the borderlands between civilizations runs into insuperable contradictions and surprising paradoxes (Hadjiyisky 1974).

This is well illustrated in a relatively little-studied story *Nay-viarnata strazha* (The Most Loyal Guard) by Yordan Yovkov, a Bulgarian master of the short story. Made into a film in 1929, the piece tells the story of a beautiful Bulgarian woman abducted by a powerful Turkish noble wanting to punish the girl's fiancé for his overreach: in violation of the Ottoman *savoir-faire*, the man has become a falconer. Although the opening of the story rehashes the conventional motif of abduction at the hands of Turks, the reader gets to witness the heroine's vicissitudes and her repeated attempts at escape from the house of *hadja* Emin. The last attempt, involving a deadly clash which results in the death of two Bulgarians seeking her favour, ends on a surprising twist. The heroine voluntarily seeks protection from *hadja* Emin, who covers her with his coat of golden velvet.

Foreign garb – the *yamurluk* of the sons of Hagar or the velvet coat of the “sultan” – amounts to a pair of metonymies which signify an attitude of submission to the protocols of living in an occupied territory through the principle of mimicry. Semantically, the former evokes the stigmatizing aspects of mimic resemblance. The latter – the accepted (though originally unwanted) prosperity of the *Pax Osmana*. Tsvetana Georgieva, a great authority on Ottoman Studies and a student of daily Bulgarian life in the Ottoman Empire, was one of the first scholars to highlight the lack of equivalence between the concepts functioning in the two cultures, Christian Slavic and Muslim, and the brittle nature of the good neighbourly relations with its undercurrent of mistrust and fear (Georgieva 1994: 166–169). At the same time, Georgieva spoke for those who had opted for survival and gave a chance to the future generations by steering clear of the kind of risk-taking characteristic of heroic communities: “Amid violence, fear and uncertainty, the inhabitants of the Balkans are developing forms of coexistence at the meeting point of two world civilizations. (...) From the viewpoint of global

history we might say that this is a rapprochement mission between nations, cultures and civilizations. For this, Bulgarian people have paid a very high price in the destruction wrought by the invaders: the rapes, the poverty, the arrested development (...) Perhaps this is Bulgaria's historical fate as an intermediary between the Mediterranean world and Eastern Europe, between the Slavs and Byzantium, (...) between Christianity and Islam, not only as world religions but also as civilizations, as ideals and as lifestyles" (Georgieva 1997: 101).

This meandering walk through Bulgarian culture has hopefully produced a very broad brush reconstruction of Bulgaria's dominant model of borderlands. It is obviously impossible to come close to a workable synthetic account within such a short article. But I hope that I have been able to show some of the turning points in Bulgarian self-reflection on the nation's history, which takes place in a borderland territory between civilizations with its various taboos. The modern appreciation of cultural diversity is a major change compared to the attitudes of the last two centuries, which consisted in denying any positive aspects of living as part of the Ottoman Empire. The attendant praise of the plebeian philosophy of survival, especially when confronted with the Polish debates on the "massacres wrought by heroism" and the "life-saving conformism", speaks volumes of the axiological preferences which dominate modern humanities.

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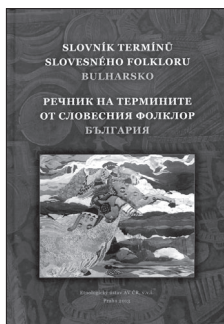
## Jamurluk Hagarčinyh synů a sultánův sametový kabát. Civilizační pomezí z bulharského zorného úhlu.

*Resumé:* Předložený článek se pokouší rekonstruovat způsoby vnímání přítomné v bulharských kulturních textech, které konceptualizují Bulharsko jako hranici civilizace. Autorka představuje historickou a kulturní situaci, která vedla během 19. a 20. století k cílené idealizaci obrazu bulharské kultury jako nedotčené osmanskými vlivy. Dále článek ukazuje, jak bulharští umělci a myslitelé konceptualizovali své pohledy a pocity, které nebyly v souladu s tímto pojetím národní myšlenky. *Yamurluk*, plstěná čapka „synů Hagar“, a „sultánský“ sametový plášť jsou metonyma odrážející způsob adaptace na osmanskou kulturu na bázi mimetismu. Sémantika prvního z nich naznačuje stigmatizaci asimilace, druhé akceptovanou (byť zpočátku nevítanou) prosperitu *Pax Osmana*. Článek také uvažuje nad současnými strategiemi bulharských badatelů, kteří se pokoušejí pozvednout status lidových přežitků v oblasti filozofie každodenního života a zdůraznit kulturní diverzitu, v jejich očích dědictví pěti století osmanské nadvlády.

### Jaroslav Otčenášek – Vichra Baeva a kol.

#### Slovník termínů slovesného folkloru. Bulharsko

Etnologický ústav AV ČR, v. v. i., Praha 2013, 360 s., rejstřík, obrazová příloha, anglické resumé.



Na základě dlouhodobé spolupráce Etnologického ústavu AV ČR, v. v. i., v Praze s Institutem za etnologija i folkloristika s Etnografski muzej BAN v Sofii vznikl pod vedením J. Otčenáška za českou a V. Baevy za bulharskou stranu unikátní terminologický slovník slovesného folkloru. Slovník seznamuje odbornou i laickou veřejnost se současným stavem folkloristického bádání v Bulharsku. Přináší nejprve formou encyklopedických statí vysvětlení termínů z oblasti slovesného folkloru (pohádka, pranostika, lidová balada) a následně přehled a charakteristiku nejvýznamnějších a nejrozšířenějších bulharských folklorních postav (Baba Marta, Kelčo, Krali Marko, Sveta Marina). Kniha je dvojjazyčná, česko-bulharská, doplněná černobílými i barevnými ilustracemi, překladovými tabulkami, slovníčkem méně častých slov, seznamem základní literatury, přehledem českých vydání bulharského folkloru a rejstříky. Tato publikace je první v zamýšlené edici prezentující současnou folkloristiku slovanského světa.

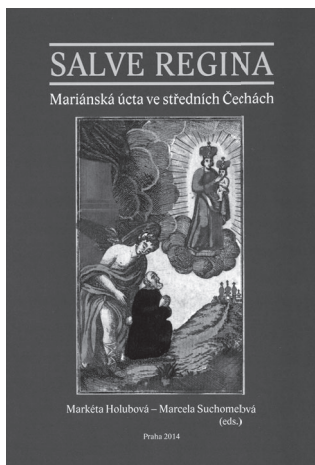
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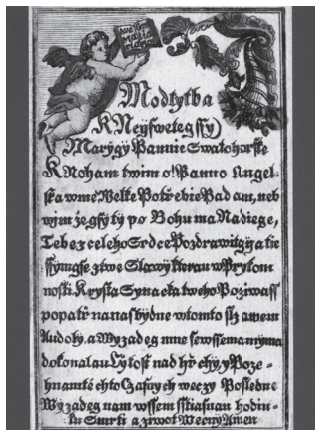


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