

Dessislava Lilova
'We, the People' fellow 2004 – 2005

BARBARIANS, CIVILIZED PEOPLE AND BULGARIANS: DEFINITION OF IDENTITY IN TEXTBOOKS AND THE PRESS (1830-1878)

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Are Bulgarians barbarians or civilized? The answer to this question consumed a considerable part of the intellectual energy of the Bulgarian elite in the 19th century. The dilemma was first put up for discussion at the beginning of the century and ever since then each new generation has been joining a fresh round of the debate. Interest in the topic has been sufficiently lively to lend legitimacy to the “barbarism-civilisation” taxonomy as the main framework in which the nation builds its identity. In practice this means that the collective image was being projected onto “the ladder” of human progress where every nation was supposed to take the place it has deserved. The problem was that the intelligentsia had an obvious difficulty identifying the place reserved for the Bulgarian community. There seemed to be a consensus that the nation’s place was in the outer zone but there was no agreement whether it was the periphery of the “barbaric” world or the outskirts of the “civilized” one. The only thing that was considered to be certain was the possibility for simultaneous identification with two alternative groups. The problem which the elite had been trying to solve was how to design a perfectly clear and sufficiently respectable formula of identity on this basis.

My research aims to explore the logic and the effects of this process. Especially promising in this respect would be to study the texts circulating in the educational sphere and the periodical press. Both institutions are well known for their potential to construct their audience as “imagined community” standardizing its linguistic, symbolic and ideological norms.¹ Essential components of this normative

¹ For a theoretical analysis of the educational pyramid and the periodic press as institutions of modernity, see the classics of Benedict Anderson (1983), Ernest Gellner (1983), Eric Hobsbawm (1990).

corpus were the ideas of barbarism, civilization and national identity. My aim is to try and understand what these definitions were, where were they imported from and how were they used in their new context.

The analysis covers the period from the 1830s to the rise of the independent Bulgarian state in 1878, although this dividing line is somewhat artificial: the Bulgarian identity problems did not disappear with the end of the Ottoman rule. The development of a barbaric complex is not directly linked with the existence or absence of sovereignty. It is a by-product of the acceptance of modernity and the latter is a project in which the nation continued to invest its resources in the next century. It is fully possible to trace the constant change of strategies to shed the barbarism stigma but this study focuses on the origins of the problem, not its dynamics. For this purpose the optimum chronological framework is the period in which the intellectual elite imported and promoted the grammar of modernity and the taxonomies of progress. The objective of the analysis proposed here is to shed light on the history, mechanisms and results of their transfer.

1. Mechanisms of Transfer and Adoption of the Definitions of Barbarism and Civilization

1. 1. Geographical Knowledge and the Alphabet of Modernity

The definitions of barbarism and civilization entered the Bulgarian culture as part of the classes in geography. An explanation is needed here, firstly of why this kind of knowledge was taught in the geography, and not the history, courses. The reason lies in the way in which the two subjects structured their field of knowledge in the 19th century. At this time there were two major branches of historiography: general (i.e. of the entire human kind) and special (i.e. of individual nations). The general history however was not precisely universal because it covered only nations deemed to have contributed to the development of world culture. A basic test for such a contribution was the formation of a state. Accordingly, “primitive tribes” and all other nations which did not reach the stage of statehood remained outside the scope of history’s attention. A perfect example of this approach can be found in the introduction to Dragan Manchev’s translation of the general history textbook by the Russian scholar Dmitri Ilovayski:

„General history, one might say, is a history of the states. The nations which have not succeeded to form a state are at a primitive stage and because of this have no history. This is why history studies the nations which were the first to come together and form smaller or larger states”.²

In this respect geography took a more liberal approach. Its subject matter was seen as descriptive, and not explanatory, and for this reason it did not require a preliminary selection of the facts to be studied. In fact, at this time the geography cadre sought to register, count and measure everything related to the Earth’s human, economic and natural resources –from the Solar System to the minerals in the sub-soil. The stages of development reached by the different groups of the world population were also included in the scope of information. They made up the fundamental knowledge of the human kind along with many other classifications based on a multitude of indicators: continents, states, races, religious groups,

² See Manchev (1870: 5-6); cf. the original of Ilovayski (1865). The same views are presented in the introduction to Yoakim Gruev’s general history (1858, reprinted 1867) translated from Sergei Smaragdov’s Russian original (1845).

language families, government structure, types of armies, types of monetary systems, types of livelihood, types of animals in agriculture, and many others.

As a whole the geography textbooks create the impression of an eclectic and totally positivist collection of facts which raises the question as to their effectiveness as a channel of transferring ideological notions. The marginal status of this scientific field in Europe also casts doubts about its potential to function successfully as a mediator.³ In the first half of the 19th century geography was seen as an applied science. It was primarily expected to serve the needs of trade and the government by supplying them with maps and statistical data, especially for the unexplored lands of the colonies. Its low reputation as a support discipline was mainly due to the absence of a distinct subject-matter. At the time geographers were content to catalogue facts whose analysis and explanation were within the know-how of other sciences, like astronomy, meteorology, hydrography, geology, botany, zoology, ethnology, anthropology, history, statistics, demography, topography, agronomy, economics, engineering and communications, administration, commerce and military science.

The inability of geography to establish its legitimacy as an autonomous science was reproduced by its modest place in the curricula. It was called “one of the two eyes of history”, together with chronology, and this cliché reflected objectively its pedagogical status. To put it briefly, geography was used primarily as a visualization of the history scene. The oldest tradition of teaching the subject is in the Jesuit colleges but even their system of *ratio studiorum* was inspired by the idea that history cannot be understood without a little bit geography, and geography cannot be understood without a little bit cosmography (Dainville 1978: 427-454). Similar tendencies could be found in the secular schools: in case geography was brought into the curriculum, it was taught as part of the course in history or another subject. This is one of the reasons explaining for instance the highest popularity of historical atlases as school aids in England, France and Germany during this period (Black 1997: 51-80).

The introduction of geography as an independent subject took place relatively late. In most countries this happened after the 1870s. In Norway for example geography did not become an independent subject until 1889. Before that it had a status of an elective course even though the ministry paid attention to the discipline and did recommend that the teachers include topics in geography in the Norwegian language classes (Stugu 2001: 115-118). In France the situation was similar. Traditionally geography was taught in the form of a short introduction to history. During the Revolution it was excluded from the list of basic courses even though it was indicated that some aspects could be taught by the teachers in natural history, ancient languages or by the librarian (Nordmann 1998: 51).⁴ Geography however had a strong presence in the Greek schools as early as the end of the 18th century. But even there – as it is stated by Christina Koulouri (1992: 397-400) – it was used first and foremost as an illustration to antiquity.

The task to make the geography knowledge autonomous was first undertaken in earnest by the German geographer Karl Ritter in the first half of the 19th century.⁵ Following Humboldt's tradition he hypothesized that man is always shaped by the

³ On the state of geographic studies at the end of the 18th and the first half of the 19th century see Broc (1994: 103-233), Livingstone (1992: 139-177), Nordman (1995: 149-161; 1998: 44-55), Godlewska (1994: 31-53).

⁴ For more details on the use of geography as a support subject see Lefort (1998), Dumoulin (1998), Wolff (1998).

⁵ See Korinman (1981) for an analysis on Ritter's determinism.

conditions of the natural environment and that it is for geography to analyze the connection between the characteristics of nature and those of culture. Ritter's views however had no immediate influence upon the scientific paradigm which did not turn towards determinism until after the 1870s. In the last decades of the 19th century however there was a strong attempt to ideologize the hybrid status between the natural and human sciences. At this point in time geography started to perceive its legitimacy as deriving from the principle of the biological order determining the specificity and potential of the social one. The key figures in the development of these tendencies were Paul Vidal de la Blache in France and Friedrich Ratzel in Germany. Particularly influential were Ratzel's views: he founded anthropogeography as an adaptation of the post-Darwin materialism to the laws of territorial growth of states and postulated physical space (along with ethnic and racial kinship) as the basis of national unity.⁶

Along with establishing itself as an autonomous discipline at the end of the 19th century geography underwent a process of institutionalization. Geographic societies, awards for extraordinary achievements, specialized journals, contacts and exchanges between scholars, conferences and world congresses grew at explosive rates. Many European universities set up departments of geography contributing to the professionalization of the scientific and educational staff working in the field. Gradually the secondary schools began to hire people who graduated in geography in order to teach the same discipline as an autonomous subject. Governments came to realize the patriotic potential of the young science and initiated changes in the curricula to allot more classes. But nevertheless the changes in the inherited status quo did not meet the expectations shared by the ambitious representatives of the newly institutionalized discipline. Despite the new momentum, the position of geography remained weak and poorly equipped to compete with the traditional reputation of subjects like history and literature.

Even though their educational models were imported from Western Europe, the Bulgarian schools balanced the relative weight of subjects in an alternative way and this difference requires a careful analysis. First of all, geography had strong positions from the very beginning when it was first introduced in the 1830s and they were preserved until the end of the period under consideration. Secondly, it did not have a support function, was not overshadowed by history and did not, therefore, need emancipation. Admittedly we do not have consolidated data about the curricula because the Ottoman ministry did not control the Bulgarian education system and few school records have been preserved.⁷ The processes in the education sector are inevitably reconstructed by indirect means, i.e. school books, publications in the press, memoirs and autobiographies, subscriber lists. Specifically for geography, however, all sources confirm that the subject enjoyed solid reputation and popularity.

One indication is the statistics about the numbers of textbooks in the subject. In the period between 1835 and 1874 there were a total of 41 editions (55 with the reprints). It would be no exaggeration to claim that the body of literature is impressive by the standards of the book market at the time. The only competitor was the holy history literature – a total of 31 (58 with the reprints). By comparison the

⁶ More on the legitimating of geography as an autonomous science at the end of the 19th century and the debates about the principle of determinism see in Robic (1992; 1999), Mucchielli (1996), Broc (1994), Heffernan (1994), Sandner / Rössler (1994), Schröder (2002).

⁷ The absence of centralized control, the network character and the organizational problems of the Bulgarian education system before 1878 are discussed in Lilova (2003), Daskalova (1997), Dimitrov (1987).

first textbook in Bulgarian history (1844) was published exactly nine years after the first geography one. Also, it is remarkable that the total number of Bulgarian history books is 10, i.e. nearly four times less than the total number of geography books. The lack of balance between the two subjects can be traced in the chronology of publications too. Nine out of the ten history textbooks came out during the last 17 years of the Ottoman rule. In other words, this subject developed explosively and relatively late. By contrast, in the geography sector the publications were distributed evenly over a period of 40 years. As a general rule, between 1 and 5 textbooks were coming out every year.⁸

The above data certainly do not suggest that geography was introduced in schools to support training in history. As a matter of fact it seems that in Bulgarian context the young discipline did not need to rely for its legitimacy on a more classical subject. It is symptomatic for instance that historical data were often removed from the translations of textbooks.⁹ The reception of Abbé Gaultier is an excellent example. His geography was translated by three different translators and went through 8 new editions, which made it the most popular textbook in the subject.¹⁰ As a typical representative of the French Jesuit school the author included short information about the past of each country before the geographical description.¹¹ However, none of the translators considered it necessary to preserve these parts of the original.

The absence of historical atlases is another fact which suggests the idea that in the Bulgarian conditions geography did not function as the eye of history. Maps which do not reflect the present can be found only in the general history book by the Russian scholar Nikolai Berte.¹² The only representation of the region showed the high point of the Ottoman Empire which made it unsuitable as a tool of patriotic education. Despite the obvious fascination with geography, no maps to illustrate the Medieval Bulgarian state were produced. What is more, in the 1860s and 1870s publications in the press pronounced historical geography harmful. It was accused of promoting unjustified hostility between the Balkan nations because each one of them controlled the peninsula at a certain point in history and this was no basis on which to claim territorial rights.¹³

How is to be explained this extremely un-classical balance between history and geography in the education system? There is no doubt that geography was the more developed of the two but this does not necessarily mean that it was considered to be the more important one too. It would be more plausible to claim that it was seen as the more easily accessible ideological resource. For the intellectuals of the time it was difficult to write a national history for several reasons. Firstly, there were no mediaeval chronicles in Bulgarian language preserved to the 19th century. The information about the past was therefore hard to be gathered since it was written in foreign languages and kept in libraries that were to be visited abroad. Secondly, being

⁸ See the enclosed table.

⁹ Only four textbooks (i. e. ¼ of all geographies) contain relatively extensive historical information. Normally, the historical aspect is either missing or reduced to short information in the town descriptions (e. g. ancient or medieval capitals, famous citizens etc.)

¹⁰ The three translators of Abbe Gaultier are Yoakim Gruev (1861, reprinted 1865, 1870, 1872, 1874; the section on mathematical geography was published separately twice with the title *Lessons in Mathematical Geography* in 1862 and 1863); Dragan Manchev (1862, reprinted 1864), and Kuzman Shapkarev (1868). Cf. Abbe Gaultier's original (1855).

¹¹ See Olivier (1990) for an analysis of Abbe Gaultier's original.

¹² See Yoshev (1861). Cf. Berte's (1858) original.

¹³ See Slaveykov (1869a, 1869b), Planinski (1870).

a very respected and established field, historiography was seen as a province of specialists with a qualification which the Bulgarian authors did not have. Against this background we could assume that demand for Bulgarian history textbooks was high but there were no authors in Europe to write them which meant absence of material for translation. This is why a long period of time had to pass for a qualified and confident national elite to emerge and start filling the widening gaps. The explosive development during the last two decades of the period is an argument in support of such a hypothesis.

This means that the early emergence, autonomous status and rapid development of geographies could be seen as a compensation phenomenon. The textbooks in this subject were not able not to replace the missing story of the Bulgarian past but provided an alternative resource for collective identity construction. A key factor was the liberalism of their scientific perspective. To put it simply, the geographies distinguished Bulgarians as a separate entity while the general history books ignored them. Even in the shortest textbook the normally indiscernible Balkan ethnos was registered as part of 1) the population of Europe, 2) the subjects of the Sultan and 3) the Slavic language family. The facts were not numerous but they could be amplified by any translator and this is the second advantage of geography. The description of human settlements does not require special expertise and a textbook stands to profit if it is enriched by the personal competence of the translator. In practice, in the first half of the 19th century no other branch of science required a lower level of professionalism and it would have been surprising if the young Bulgarian intellectual elite did not seize this rare opportunity.

One could claim that through a coincidence of circumstances geography in the Bulgarian conditions capitalized on its own imperfections. It was received with strong enthusiasm precisely because the discipline had not its own subject-matter and was devoted exclusively to systematization of the results of analysis conducted by other sciences. Being at the early stages of development it was descriptive, superficial and eclectic. But this is precisely the reason why geography implied the possibility to be used as encyclopaedic data-base of modern rationality. Its framework contains practically everything – the cosmos, the planet, the man, and its social order. When the written tradition of a culture has been interrupted for several centuries the absorption of such an elementary, but exhaustive compendium is more than important. This is a strategic necessity which might explain the unusual status of geography as the backbone of the educational curriculum. It gained ground not merely because it was capable of compensating for the deficit in Bulgarian history textbooks. Geography established its strong position as a tool of priority value which made it possible to promote none other but the alphabet of modernity.

1. 2. Geography Textbooks and Their Definitions

The notions of barbarism and civilization are key elements of the new “alphabet” that the Bulgarians were learning. Each geography textbook contains definitions of the two terms, but considering the large number of textbooks the question arises: Which of the dozens of definitions was normativized? As regards “civilization”, this question is easy to answer since all textbooks define the term through a description of Europe.

By rule, the continent is presented in two aspects: physical characteristics and population. In the case of physical characteristics the focus is commonly on factors such as temperate climate and “central” location in the world. As regards the population of Europe, it is defined on the basis of several elements. Top priority is

given to cultural development. According to all textbooks, what distinguishes the Europeans from the rest of the world's population are above all their high achievements in science, technology and the arts. The second distinctive feature is the language families, which are also called "tribes" (*plemena*), "generations" (*pokoleniya*) or "lines" (*kolena*). According to the data offered in the textbooks, the overwhelming majority of the Europeans are speakers of languages of Latin, Germanic or Slavic origins. Classifications of the population by religion are common too. Here the accent is on the dominant position of Christianity. Racial classifications in general can be found in all geographies, but only one of the translated textbooks includes race in the definition of Europe.¹⁴ Conversely, the civilizational criterion figures in all geography textbooks. It proves to be the condition without which it is impossible to give an adequate answer to the question of "what is Europe". For example, here is the standardized definition of Europe in Yoakim Grouev's geography textbook, published in five editions:

"What distinguishes Europe from the other parts of the world? Europe is the smallest of the five parts of the world but it holds first place; because its population is the most intelligent, the best educated and, with its migrations, has had a great influence on the other parts of the world too. Trade, industry and education are the most developed in Europe, and this is due not least to the seas that wash its coasts from all sides and to its location between Asia and Africa." (Grouev 1861: 75-76)

Similar descriptions are found in the other geography textbooks even though they were translated or compiled from different sources: French, Russian, German, American, and Greek. As the analyses of Miroslav Hroch (2002: 247-248) and Bo Stråth (2002: 131-132) show, the definitions of Europe given in the first Czech encyclopaedia from 1862 and in the first Swedish encyclopaedia from 1881 are almost literally the same. The invariant character and mass reproduction of this definition are symptomatic of its status in the nineteenth-century ideological canon. The concept of Europe as a measure of civilization and as the leader of global progress had acquired the status of elementary, basic knowledge without which it was impossible to enter the project of modernity. Why did the transfer of such a banalized definition cause complications in the Bulgarian context? To put it simply, the problem was that the normative idea of Europe made it difficult for the Bulgarians to identify themselves as Europeans. Admittedly, the Bulgarians met the formal criteria (territorial belonging, religion, language, race) but their level of development made them newcomers who could not measure up to the "leaders of progress".

This structural imbalance could become the basis of the newly forming national identity because it was "scientifically" fixed in the geography textbooks. Here the definition of Europe is commonly in the introductory part and comes into question in the review of the individual countries only if some sort of aberration could be indicated. The lesson devoted to European Turkey is a case in point. By rule, it is noted that the population of this part of the continent is culturally and economically backward. By this cardinal indicator the sultan's subjects, including the Bulgarians, differ from the other Europeans. But then what category do they belong to? Each textbook contains a scheme of the different levels of development, but unlike the definition of Europe these classifications vary from one textbook to another and therefore could not offer a normativized solution to the problem of Bulgarian identity.

¹⁴ The textbook by Russian scholar Kapiton Smirnov, translated by Dimitur Blagoev (1874: 21) mentions the types of races common in Europe, namely Caucasian and Mongolian.

The first inconsistency comes from the lack of consensus about the number of groups included in the classification based on civilizational standard. According to some authors, there are two alternatives: “enlightened nations” (*prosveteni narodi*) and “savage tribes” (*divi plemena*). The scheme in other textbooks, however, is more complicated, containing from one to three intermediate categories: “half-educated” (*polouobrazovani*), “half-savage” (*poloudivi*), “domesticated” (*pitomni*) or “barbarians” (*varvari*). Predictably, the difference in the terms corresponds to a difference in the definitions of all these groups. Only the characteristics of the so-called “savage tribes” are more or less constant. The former are described as hunting communities that live in caves, which makes it impossible to identify the Bulgarians with them. From this perspective, the intermediate groups look more promising but, on the other hand, their definitions vary greatly. According to some authors, the intermediate level is represented by nomads only, whereas other authors include here also sedentary peoples which are literate and agricultural, but lack achievements in the economy and culture.

The majority of classifications contain only a description of the categories without giving any examples. Only a single textbook, whose original is unknown, contains lists of ethnic groups classified by way of life.¹⁵ The composition of the groups is extremely intriguing since it indicates that in itself origin from Asia or Europe is no guarantee of barbarism or respectively of civilizedness. For instance, the Turks are included in the group of the “enlightened” on a par with the French, the English, and the Germans. On the other hand, the Albanians are classified in the group of the “brigands” (*razboynitsi*) on a par with “Moors, Arabs, Malayans, Avghans, Caucasians, Kurds”. The textbook however does not specify which group the Bulgarians belong to.

However, the geographical zones of the “barbarian world” are outlined rather clearly: Southern Africa, Northern Asia, the two Americas, Australia and Oceania. In itself this does not mean that all continents except Europe were regarded as “primitive”. On the contrary, their definitions are balanced. For example, Asia is invariably defined as the cradle of human civilization, the remarkable progress of the “Europeans” in North America is noted, and Egypt’s old glory adds a positive touch to the image of Africa. This compromise approach is more adequate to the Bulgarian case and could have been used as a matrix although none of the textbooks apply it to the definition of Europe. Europe was always considered to be a matrix of progress and in this sense it was simply impossible to imagine the existence of “underdeveloped Europeans”.

It is obvious that the education system found it difficult to give an unambiguous answer to the question of whether the Bulgarians are or aren’t Europeans. It used conceptual apparatus that did not allow clear identification of marginal cases. The most that could be achieved under the circumstances was to problematize the nation’s undecided status as an anomaly. In practice, this basic lesson about Bulgarian identity went as follows:

“There is no nation in Europe today that is contented to have nothing but agriculture, and all are eager to learn and improve everything. To achieve this, all nations in Europe regard school as a source of everything that is good. Only we Bulgarians cannot boast this; but surrounded by an educated world, we will of necessity advance slowly” (Blagoev 1874: 7).

¹⁵ See Odjakov (1866: 51).

1. 3. Recepting the Geographical Lessons

How were the geography lessons received? The reactions of the press are a good indicator in this respect. The first marker is the way in which the new terminology was used. Unlike the textbooks, which avoided directly identifying the Bulgarians with the barbarian world, the newspapers frequently associated the nation's name with expressions such as "barbarians", "immature people" or "infant people". Although such definitions can be found in virtually all sorts of contexts, they are most common in articles on the development of the education system and the press. In the period under review the newspapers and schools designed for the Bulgarian community were founded without any government financial support or control. That is why the very appearance of such institutions was a source of pride and was perceived as convincing evidence of the nation's choice and will to be "Europeanized". At the same time, however, the elite was constantly complaining about the pace of progress: about the number of schools, the quality of curricula, the poor qualification of teachers, the inert attitudes of village parishes, the low level of subscriptions to newspapers and magazines. The press abounded in debates on such issues and the authors were very often brutal in expressing their disappointment. In such cases the Bulgarians were qualified as "unrefined and primitive", "an ungrateful and rude lot" that will "forever live in ignorance and poverty" and that "desecrates with its unworthy mouth the sacred names *nation* and *nationality*".¹⁶

Although the style of the geography textbooks was considerably more moderate, one will also find in them examples of stigmatization on the grounds of "hopeless barbarism" – as in the lessons about the Bushmen and the Hottentots, who were represented as specimens of the so-called "savage tribes". The analogy is symptomatic of the way in which the press put into use the taxonomies of the education system. First and foremost, the classification is simplified, and all intermediate categories are dropped. Consequently, markers such as territorial belonging, religion, language family or race become irrelevant, there is no mention of hunters, farmers, sedentary peoples or nomads, and the world is divided into two: "enlightened" meaning Europeans, and "barbarians" meaning all others. What remains as a norm is the notion that the Bulgarians belong to both spheres at the same time. The textbooks register the dilemma but treat it quite unemotionally, using more complex definitions that give greater room for manoeuvring. The press concentrates on the pragmatic aspect of the modernization process and addresses the problem of the level of education point-blank. From this perspective, there is one valid boundary between the "barbarians" and the "civilized" and it boils down to the will for education. Such an approach does not allow for anything in between, therefore hesitant progress is commonly interpreted as proof that the nation still belongs to the "barbarian" world.

The debate on how to catch up with the "enlightened peoples" dominated the public sphere for decades and left lasting imprints on the collective imagination. After all, the barbarian stereotype of Bulgarian identity wouldn't have been so stable if it hadn't been reproduced within the framework of the modernizational ideology and by means of its rhetoric. The result is that once this inferiority complex had developed, no sphere was sufficiently immune to its vitality. This applies to virtually all spheres, including language, history and folklore or, in other words, the spheres in which the Bulgarians were presumed to have met and even surpassed the standards of "civilizational achievements".

¹⁶ See Krustevich (1859), Genovich (1865), Enchev (1871: 4), Slaveykov (1865).

For example, the Cyrillic alphabet was seen as a priceless cultural heritage, a “patent” on the very tool of literate culture. But contrary to expectations, the literary output in this period did not acquire a high status similar to that of the language and alphabet. On the contrary, it was viewed critically and even negatively. In itself, such an attitude suggests that the nascent literate culture was regarded less as a realization of the potential of the language than as a result of the civilizational stage at the moment. Or to quote the brutal formula of Vassil Popovich (1874), at this stage it was inevitable that Bulgarian writers would produce “*gübre* literature”.¹⁷

“Every nation has such *gübre* literature because every nation sets out from the same starting point as the other educated nations before it, and such literary *gübre* is now being created in our literature too. Young, inexperienced, enthusiastic, undiscerning, impatient, desperate, we Bulgarians will eagerly embrace anything that catches our eye, we will take up anything without seriously considering whether it is appropriate, worthy and beneficial, whether or not we are equal to it, and strike, like inexperienced craftsmen, the chosen material with all our tools: we will break, scrape, carve and hammer with our half-savage, unspent strength and fantasy until we suddenly realize that instead of defining clearly the form of our ideas and giving them adequate expression, we have done something else in addition to breaking and wasting the good things both of others and of our own, and demonstrating our inept infancy.”

History is a classical resource for constructing a prestigious identity and the Bulgarian case is no exception to this common rule. The Bulgarian historical heritage became the core of the national symbolic capital and that is precisely why the fact that even its value was questioned is quite telling. Two factors contributed to the development of such a tendency. In the first place, we ought to bear in mind that Bulgarian historiography was fighting for power over the collective imagination in direct rivalry with Greek ideologues. This practically means that aggressive articles published in the neighbours’ newspapers were being constantly reprinted or discussed. Under the circumstances, it would have been strange if there was anybody who had failed to understand that according to “Homer’s grandchildren” the Bulgarians were heirs of “savage tribes”.¹⁸

World histories are another resource that confirms the impression that the Bulgarian symbolic positions were weak in a comparative context. Ten textbooks on the subject were translated, of which nine of the original books do not mention the name “Bulgaria” at all. Some (not all!) of the translators added passages or even whole chapters on the mediaeval Bulgarian State, but even they did not hide but openly commented on the fact that they’d had to intervene in the text. Therefore, the reading audience was forced to accept the thought that the lack of Bulgarian “trace” did not impede the European science from creating a narrative of the universal history. The foreign point of view could not in itself devalue but it did constantly challenge the optimistic view of the intelligentsia that the story of the Bulgarians’ past consisted of golden pages. The reactions were different and controversial but in our case it is important to point out that in the 1870s leading periodicals have offered strikingly skeptical recapitulations of the national symbolic capital.

¹⁷ *Gübre* (Turkish): fertilizer, manure, dung.

¹⁸ The role of Greek schools as a channel of transfer introducing the concepts of modernity into Bulgarian culture is investigated by Mishkova (2004). The transfer of the barbarity concept through this channel is analyzed by Lilova (2003: 201-228). Detailed review of the literary corpus translated from Greek into Bulgarian in 19th century till 1878 see in Aleksieva (1987). An enlightening study on Greek-Bulgarian cultural relations in the first half of 19th century see in Danova (1994).

“We will only say,” an anonymous writer in *Napreduk [Progress]* notes soberly and sadly, “that world history generally counts Bulgaria as one of the barbarian peoples that over the centuries have attacked, laid waste to and weakened the development of the culture of the Greeks, which culture is regarded as part of the universal heritage of mankind. In a word, the entire past life of the Bulgarian State is presumed to be something ephemeral, unserious and totally in vain.”¹⁹ It is noteworthy that in the eyes of a number of authors even Tsar Simeon’s Golden Age (864 – 927) wasn’t a sufficient guarantee of a “contribution” to civilization. The reason is that not even a single work from this age had survived. “Where is their poetry, where is there literature, where are the traces and lasting evidences of intellectual development, of their moral education, of their social and material well-being?” Marko Balabanov (1871: 325–326) asks in this connection, only to conclude bitterly: “O Sancta Simplicitas! O Holy Bulgarian Innocence!”

Analogous tendencies can be found in the attitude to folklore too. The most scandalous example is Todor Shishkov’s lecture delivered at the *chitalishte*²⁰ in Constantinople in autumn 1869. In it the young speaker explained to his audience that Bulgarian folk songs reflected the status of women as slaves, which in its turn was due to “our distance from Europe” which “prevented us from adopting the chivalric ideas”. In his opinion, folk tales had another flaw, namely “unrestrained imagination full of exaggerations and vulgarity”: “Thus, instead of heroes we see in them monstrous *giants* personifying a material strength; strong people who, even in their childhood, will catch somebody by the hand or head only to tear them off; who have an ovenfull of bread for breakfast and down a pail of wine or brandy in a gulp (...) All of it admittedly good, but the fantastic element in them lacks grace completely, all you see are *male and female dragons big and small* that play an important role in the community of our peasant girls and boys!”²¹

Let us note once again that such debates are not representative of the way in which the national elite discussed Bulgarian history and folklore. But these marginal cases are worthy of note because they show that no zones were completely protected from the shadow of barbarian identity. Arguably, this was a side effect of modernity that was cultivated in the Bulgarian context. The question is what were the results from this phenomenon?

2. Emancipation Strategies from the Barbarian Stereotype

2. 1. Leaving Arcadia: Resistance to the Bucolic Identity

The efforts to adjust the barbarism/civilization taxonomy to the Bulgarian context were energetic but haphazard, and therefore not always effective. The reception of the notion of a “Bulgarian Arcadia” is a typical example of a failed experiment. This vision was introduced into the public sphere through translations of travel accounts recording the impressions of European travellers of Bulgarian-populated lands. The initiative was launched by *Tsarigradski Vestnik [Constantinople Gazette]*. In 1853 the newspaper published an anonymous travel account that tells of young, slim, pretty women who sang and danced continuously while harvesting the fields. Their hair was hanging loose and their eyes were shining but innocent, and the author notes that this scene “calls to mind” scenes of “the pastoral life described so

¹⁹ See “What’s the True Malaise of Our Nation” (1875).

²⁰ Chitalishte = literally, “reading room” – a traditional type of community centre in Bulgarian culture.

²¹ See “A Question to M. Slaveykov” (1869).

well by the ancients”.²² References to Virgil’s *Idyls* and *Bucolica* are common place in European travel accounts and are actually a genre cliché. Pastoral utopia is the product of an erudite perspective that projects its phantasms on unknown areas of the world, including them in such a form in its established cultural order.²³ As is known, Arcadia has been discovered more than once all over the world, therefore it is hardly surprising that at some point it was found on the Balkans too. What is more interesting in this case is how the Bulgarians used the discovery that they were living in a bucolic paradise. How did they use the opportunity of constructing their collective image through the prism of an Arcadian identity?

The readers of *Tsarigradski Vestnik [Constantinople Gazette]* first got the chance of seeing their imagined community in a pastoral light. The text, however, is without comment, so we do not know what the reactions to it were. More illuminating in this respect are the travel notes of the Irishman Robert Walsh, who also sees Bulgarian peasants as innocent children. An abridged version of the text was translated by Petko Slaveykov and published in *Messetsoslov na bulgarskata knizhnina [Menologion of Bulgarian Literature]* in 1859.²⁴ According to the author, the Bulgarians have lost the militant spirit of their ancestors and have become “the simplest, gentlest and most obliging” ploughmen and shepherds. The traveller notes that they “do not have churches, schools or books,” concluding with satisfaction: “Just like the peoples from the Golden Age, evil things are unknown to them.” In his turn, the translator notes that some of those observations are no longer true because they were made thirty years ago, but the travel account is noteworthy because of the “accurate remarks” (*vernite belezhki*) about the national character.

On the whole, one gets the impression that in the 1850s the bucolic version of Bulgarian identity was not resisted. On the contrary, the elite was obviously tempted by its potential for projecting in a prestigious way the disturbing lack of cultural and economic progress. One may say that the transfer of the stereotype got off to a promising start, but then the question arises: what brought about the radical twist in the 1860s? In this period interest in the Bulgarian image in the European imagination grew, and there were daily comments in the press on the opinions of politicians, scholars, writers, missionaries and even random interlocutors. The emerging national identity was influenced by the accumulation of such information, and the transformation of the notion of a Bulgarian Arcadia is a typical example of this.

The problem is that the pastoral Utopia invented by travellers was transformed by diplomats into a conservative project for the solution of the so-called Eastern Question. The thesis of a peaceful Christian population that was prospering in the increasingly reformed empire was a key argument in favour of the Ottoman status quo. The Bulgarians were often cited as proof owing to the fact that their ethnic stereotype was already established and de facto served the political conjuncture. They were seen as meek, good-natured people who were happy in their patriarchal paradise and did not seem upset in any way by the sultan’s rule. It was also presumed that because of their innocent simplicity the Bulgarians lacked historical potential and therefore did not deserve a chance for independent development.

As one could expect, the elite of the young nation was unpleasantly surprised by this use of the bucolic identity. The strongest reaction came from the political circle of émigrés in Romania, united around the project for a Bulgarian-Turkish

²² See “An Unknown Traveller Describes the Bulgarians” (1853).

²³ For the dominant western discourses constructing the Orient and the Balkans, see Said (1978), Todorova (1997), Wolff (1994).

²⁴ See Slaveykov (1859); cf. Walsh (1828).

monarchy modelled on Austria-Hungary. According to the newspaper of the dualists, *Narodnost* [Nationality], the level of development depends on the level of sovereignty. The prosperity of the Balkan neighbours – Greeks, Serbs and Romanians – whose national cause enjoyed the support of Europe is cited as proof. On this basis Western diplomacy is accused of applying a double standard, which is treated as a crime against the universal laws of progress. The only point of relative consensus is the notion of the Bulgarians as meek people. Yet according to *Narodnost*, these are not symptoms of an “infant nation” but of a fully “mature nation” that is trying to advance through education and hard work rather than through revolutions.²⁵

This is one of the first anti-European debates in the Bulgarian public sphere and it is interesting in itself; what is more important in the context of this study, however, is its impact on the pastoral stereotype. There is no reason to doubt that the translation into political language transformed the blissful Arcadia into an anti-utopia. Child-like innocence proved to be shameful infantilism, predictably evoking a negative reaction which, however, does not necessarily mean that the counter-thesis about the Bulgarians as a “mature nation” was effective. This counter-thesis continued to be advanced in the press, but gradually became a propaganda tool. The context in which it was used hardly ever varies. At any sign of rebellion among the Balkan neighbours, the Constantinople-based Bulgarian press reminds the authorities that the Bulgarian ethnos is an exponent of reason and peaceful development, and therefore deserves greater trust and integration into the government of the empire.

It is noteworthy that apart from this specific context, the press rarely constructs the image of the nation in such a harmonious light. As we have seen, the intelligentsia constantly criticized the pace of the nation’s modernization and in doing so resorted to extremely aggressive rhetoric. Thanks to this pedagogy, the reading public was objectively more familiar with the qualification “barbarians” than with the label “mature nation”. Instead of ceasing or at least becoming less frequent, the reflections on the “infantile” stage in which the Bulgarians were at the time became a genre cliché. The counter-thesis about the “natural maturity” of the national community lost ground. It proved to be an extremely inappropriate ideological tool but there are no reasons to dramatize the consequences of its ineffectiveness. The image of the nation’s “infancy” was indeed asserted as an identity parameter and the attempts at a frontal attack on its reception failed. Yet on the other hand, it entered the collective imagination as an anti-utopia and not as a bucolic idyll. The cultivated sense of shame about the status of an “infant nation” irreversibly devalued the symbolic capital of the pastoral stereotype and motivated a reorientation towards alternatives that had nothing to do with the conservatism of Rousseauesque utopias.

2. 2. Discovering “Savage and Barbarian Europe”: August Schlözer and His Bulgarian Reception

The most productive solution to the task of ideologizing the actual cultural backwardness in a sufficiently prestigious way proved to be that of importing academic works written in the tradition of evolutionism. The strategy was not to avoid the “barbarian” identity but, conversely, to historicize the stereotype of Europe. Simply put, the purpose was to get the collective imagination accustomed to the thought that nobody (the Europeans included) was born civilized, and therefore

²⁵ See [“The Speech of Lord Stanley”] (1868); Kassabov (1869); “What Are the Founding Principles of the West Towards the East” (1868); “A Petition of Bulgarian Notables to the Paris Conference” (1868). The arguments of the dualists against “the infant stage” of the Bulgarians are set out in the booklet *Bulgaria in the Face of Europe* (1865), as well.

nobody (the Bulgarians included) is doomed to remain barbarian. This thesis seems (and is) entirely logical, but its propagation took many years and maximum efforts.

A key role in this process was played by the reception of the German historian August Schlözer (1735–1809). This encyclopaedic scholar was held in exceptional esteem in the second half of the 18th century. His works on statistics made a groundbreaking contribution to the academic recognition of the discipline, and his innovative model of understanding and writing world history triggered a heated debate in intellectual circles.²⁶ Especially influential were his studies on the languages and origins of the Slavs, the Hungarians, and the nations of Northern Europe. It was these studies that placed Schlözer at the centre of an international network of intellectuals who shaped the science of history and linguistics in Central Europe and Russia in the period. As Marie-Elizabeth Ducreux's analysis (2005: 268-276) shows, the Göttingen professor became a cult figure for his Slav and Hungarian fellow scholars. In these circles he was referred to with reverence and cited much more frequently than Herder. It is no accident that in their correspondence two of the founders of modern Slavic Studies, Bartholomäus Kopitar and Joseph Dobrovsky, call their teacher "the immortal Schlözer".

Bulgarian intellectuals from the mid-19th century deeply respected August Schlözer too, but "discovered" him in an entirely different way. Although his contribution to the history of the Slavs was known and appreciated, the work that actually made him an authority in the Bulgarian context was *An Introduction to World History*. This is a book that does not deal with the Slavs at all. Nor does it deal with linguistic or ethnogenetic questions and therefore there was no way for it to be used as a classical tool of forming the Bulgarian national symbolic capital. So whence the strategic interest in it?

Above all we should bear in mind that this was not a standard work in the genre of world histories. In fact, August Schlözer was determined to refashion the tradition in this field and he proposed a new model. In his opinion the classical compilation of separate chapters devoted to the history of different countries was mechanic and conservative and should therefore be abandoned. Generally speaking, his book had two purposes. Firstly, to identify the engines of progress that are not always and not necessarily related to the deeds of rulers or to their wars. The author firmly believed that trade contracts or, say, the history of coffee offer considerably more valuable information in this respect. The second flaw that was to be eliminated was the selective approach. According to Schlözer, world history could not serve its purpose if it discriminated against the majority of nations by excluding them from the historical narrative. To overcome these deficiencies, he proposed an alternative model based on four methods: 1) synchronic (analyzing events in a given period in different parts of the world); 2) technographic (tracing the development of sciences and the arts); 3) geographic (comparing the history of different regions); 4) ethnographic (studying all tribes that were present on the historical scene in a given age).

This was a radical attempt to revise the historiographical tradition and it was met with a mixed reception. Herder subjected the new model to scathing criticism and Schlözer responded by writing an entire book. On the other hand, the former students of the Göttingen professor as well as the members of his wide intellectual network reacted enthusiastically. Some of them founded and chaired departments of world

²⁶ For an exhaustive analysis of Schlözer's contribution to the field of statistics and world history, see Lindenfeld (1997: 40-45) and Escudier (1999: 254-296).

history at their universities to apply their teacher's model.²⁷ Of course, that does not mean that Herder was the loser and Schlözer the winner in this debate. As is known, Herder's views have had a decisive impact on the formation of a new type of historiography that participated directly in the construction of national identity. From this standpoint, the interest in the unique character of each nation obviously prevailed over the motives for seeking a liberal universalistic perspective. By the mid-19th century this tendency had reached its climax and Schlözer's model had long been consigned to oblivion. This however brings us back to the question of why the Bulgarians discovered the unused potential of Schlözer's approach precisely in the period in question.

It must be noted that what was translated into Bulgarian was not Schlözer's seminal theoretical work *An Introduction to World History* but his adapted version for children.²⁸ This is a textbook that discusses in lay terms not methodological but ideological questions. Schlözer's task is to help young readers understand why everybody – not only the “civilized” but also the “barbarians” – have a place in the historical narrative. For the purpose, the textbook recreates only the age before the discovery of writing and the creation of states when all humankind was in a “savage state”. As Alexandre Escudier (1999: 267) writes, the advantage of this perspective is that it eliminates the sense of a cultural abyss between the different nations and cultivates a consciousness of belonging to one universal brotherhood. In itself the context is unusual for a history textbook but it makes it possible to criticize in a convincing and simple way assorted “proofs” of the hereditary superiority of the civilized over the barbarian world. It is no accident that the key lesson states that the mission of history is to show us how it is possible that all people and nations, however much they might differ today, are actually descended from a common “grandfather” called Adam whose racial characteristics, homeland and language are unknown.

For a community with a low level of development and even lower self-esteem such a lesson on the subject of “barbarism/civilization” was critically important, and we have reason to believe that it was well received. The textbook was translated twice, in the 1850s and in the 1860s,²⁹ it was recognized as a tool of strategic importance and introduced into the curricula as an autonomous subject. The most remarkable evidence of the exceptional productiveness of this ideological transfer is the popularity of the image of the “savage and barbarian Europe”, as August Schlözer describes it in his *Introduction to World History* to persuade readers that civilization is not something hereditary. Although the thesis is simplified to the extreme, in the context of the Bulgarian 19th century it became an ideological tool of enormous motivational power. This explains why the image that embodies it persisted in the press for decades. The pleasure of reflecting on the distant past in which England, France and Germany were “covered with woods and forests in which coarse and beast-like savages lived here and there” did not diminish, and ultimately the image of the “savage and barbarian Europe” was normativized as a counterpoint to the “enlightened Europe” in modern times.³⁰

²⁷ Specifically about the debate between Schlözer and Herder, see the analyses of Escudier (1999: 283-285) and Ducreux (2005: 265-267).

²⁸ See Schlözer (1779).

²⁹ See Cholakov (1851) and Bluskov (1864). For both translations, see the analysis of Lilova (2003: 167-181).

³⁰ See Iliev (1875: 46).

The second important result of Schlözer's productive transfer is connected with the gradual formation of an alternative theoretical canon that did not overlap with the most authoritative names in Western Europe at the time. The need of scientific tools to eliminate the acquired barbarian inferiority complex created extremely unfavourable conditions for the reception of all kinds of ideologies legitimating the boundary between the "civilized" and all others. For example, the theories of segregation on a racial or climatic basis were subjected to sharp criticism, as was the theory of the four temperaments determining the character and hence the potential of every nation. Especially symptomatic in this respect is the blocked reception of Charles de Montesquieu. The response to his theory of the objective superiority of the North over the South was extremely negative. In the 1870s this subject sparked a debate that spread to almost all newspapers and magazines. This practically meant that the public sphere was literally flooded with articles reminding readers of the flowering civilizations of North Africa, Southern Europe and Central Asia at a time when "today's most enlightened inhabitants of the globe were barely different from savages".³¹ Unlike Montesquieu, the German Darwinist W. F. A. Zimmermann (d. i. Carl Gottfried Wilhelm Vollmer) and the French anthropologist Antoine de Quatrefage were immensely popular.³² Their names were cited as authoritative on the questions of racial prejudices, which were likewise discussed frequently in the press. Especially active was the highest-circulation magazine, *Chitalishte*, whose readers were regularly prompted to reflect on the absurdity of measuring the skulls of nations:

"The question then is, is the brain in the skull of the present-day Greeks or Italians less than the one that their ancestors had in the time of Alexander or Ceasar," one of the magazine's contributors asks readers provocatively. "The Turks and the Magyars are nations from the first Asian family line and the make of their skulls is not so pretty, but they nevertheless conquered the Caucasians and for a long time were the scare and horror of the Germans and the other Europeans."³³

As we can see, the composition of the newly forming theoretical canon is quite eclectic. It includes authors who are by rule marginal in their own context and belong to different theoretical traditions but whose visions allow, in one form or another, asserting a fundamental egalitarianism between the "barbarian" and the "civilized" world. Bulgarian intellectuals recognized them as bearers of strategically important knowledge and directly invested this capital in the construction of national identity. In this way they won an ideological ground that allowed the Bulgarians to accept – without enthusiasm but also without a surplus sense of drama – the fact that in many respects the nation was still a "newcomer". As any other stage of development, the spokesmen of modernity claimed, this is an entirely normal period which is to be outgrown in an entirely rational way. Or as the newspaper *Napreduk [Progress]* wrote in the 1870s, it is possible to presume that the Bulgarians had nothing to "bolster and inspire" them. But this does not necessarily mean that it is impossible for "us to create a nation that will be envied by both Germans and Americans".³⁴

³¹ See Balabanov (1870: 135).

³² See Andreeva (2001: 449-455) for an analysis of Zimmermann's works. See Blanckaert (2001: 97-99, 115-117) and Mucchielli (1996: 480) for analyses of Quatrefage's ideological views.

³³ See Doushanov (1873: 887-889). Cf. W. F. A. Zimmermann (d. i. Carl Gottfried Wilhelm Vollmer) (1855).

³⁴ See "What's the True Malaise of Our Nation" (1875).

2. 3. Europe as a Colonial Master: The Debate on Railroads

This is the formula of the boldest dream born of the imagination of the elite in this period, and it obviously contains the entire ideological resource of evolutionism and its liberal perspective. Undoubtedly, the persistent efforts to normativize this paradigm produced a considerably more positive result than the attempt to “enter” the conservative utopia of the bucolic identity. Yet even so, there were zones in which the chosen strategy for “adapting” the project of modernity proved far less productive. A typical example are the reflections of the intelligentsia on the forms, means and technologies of economic contacts with Europe. It is no accident that this subject was much more rarely discussed in the public sphere and, when it was, the opinions lacked the optimism typical of the period in question. An even more symptomatic deviation from the adopted standard is the absence at least of an attempt to identify with Europe where goods and markets are concerned. The catastrophic difference between the Bulgarians and the Western powers in this field blocked the sense of belonging to the “civilized” world and prompted spontaneous empathy with the “barbarian” world.³⁵

One of the early indications that in such a context the concept of Europe spontaneously departed from the sphere of utopia is Ivan Bogorov’s brochure *Sudrouzhestvo za pamouchna fabrika v Plovdiv [Partnership for a Cotton Mill in Plovdiv]*. The brochure was published in 1865 to propagate the idea of the need of developing a Bulgarian industry. The main argument in favour of the idea is the unscrupulous style in which the Western powers exploited undeveloped nations. The author describes in detail the effects of the colonial system that a nation can enter easily but exit with difficulty and with bad prospects of development since the country’s natural resources would have already been exported by the foreigners. He argues that this is the future that lies in store for his compatriots too if they do not invest in industrialization. Otherwise export of strategic raw materials would continue, leaving for the Bulgarian population nothing but cheap necklaces and other “gaudy” (*panairdjiyski*) goods of this sort. “To make it easier for them to take our money,” Bogorov (1865) writes, furious, “they send us assorted rings, brooches, decorative feathers, snuff and tobacco boxes, as well as mirrors that will remind us of our impotence whenever we look at them! This is also what they did to the savages upon the discovery of America, taking away all their gold and silver.”

In the late 1860s and early 1870s Europe was being represented as a colonial master ever more frequently. It is noteworthy that virtually any occasion associated with the economic imbalance between the Bulgarians and Europe was capable of provoking identification with the exploited periphery of the “civilized world”. As a correspondence to the newspaper *Turtsiya* from 1869 shows, Bulgarian intellectuals simply had no arguments in discussions with foreigners who made fun of their “primitive” industry. The author Kostantin Sapounov admits that he had considered hiding the fact that he was Bulgarian when he boarded a ship for Constantinople and someone brought up the subject of the “trademarks” of every national economy. The young patriot had started sweating from shame but nevertheless thought of the Bulgarian gardeners and decided to boast that every summer they planted tomatoes in Austrian gardens. But his interlocutors had voiced doubts about the quality of

³⁵ The clash between utopia and reality in the Bulgarian image of Europe is analyzed from different perspectives by Aretov (1995), Kiossev (1997), Mishkova (2003). See also Genchev (1979) and Trendafilov (1996) for detailed studies on the images of France and England in the Bulgarian 19th century imagination.

Bulgarian vegetables because they had read that French diplomats would bring their tomatoes from Paris when visiting the Ottoman Empire. Sapounov's reaction was spontaneous: "Just you wait, I said to myself, it won't be long before we, too, start creating commercial companies, and then we'll see if you can go on selling [us] your discarded, worthless goods."³⁶

On an entirely different occasion and in a different style, but at the same time and by means of the same ideological model, an anonymous contributor to the newspaper *Makedoniya* from Koukoush expresses his frustration too. He complains that the crafts were dying out under the pressure of imports and people were having to return to the countryside to scrape a living. But the crops were getting poorer and poorer because the local population was cutting down the forests out of poverty and ignorance. The result was a water shortage, dried up wells and a drastic fall in yields. What was nevertheless produced was being sold "to the European emissaries, the Jews, and at that mostly at a loss". The main crop was sesame, but town dwellers now preferred sunflower cooking oil made in Europe. To make matters worse, an automated threshing machine had been imported in Salonika and it had left jobless "half" the Bulgarian population that had no other livelihood except manual farming: "It seems however that the Europeans are going to take that from us, as well (...) It won't be long before we find ourselves, much to our regret, empty-handed and as naked and starving on dry hills as the Africans in their deserts; everything will disappear from our hands, and we will live in misery."³⁷

Still, if we must point out the crucial factor for the stabilization of the colonial model as a pattern of thinking about the economic relations between the Bulgarians and Europe, this is the debate on railroads. It was provoked by the construction of railway lines in the Bulgarian-populated lands. The first one linked Rousse and Varna, two big ports on the Danube and the Black Sea respectively. It went into operation in 1866 and until the beginning of the 1870s it was not the object of strong emotions. News items on the subject are rare but entirely positive until 1869, when the newspaper *Turtsiya [Turkey]* reported that the line was operating at a loss, the local population did not use it because it could not afford to, and officials did not service it because they were not paid for it. According to the newspaper editor Nikola Genovich, it was unforgivable that the Bulgarians were indifferent to such facts. He was convinced that the railroad line was designed precisely for them and that they should treat it as their own "property".³⁸

Several months later the newspaper's position was subjected to radical change. At this point Nikola Genovich was replaced by Todor Ikonov as a chief-editor and the latter marked his entry into office by an editorial headlined "Prazni Nadezhdi" ["Vain Hopes"].³⁹ This is an extremely aggressive article and it criticizes a forecast in the French-language newspaper *Turquie*, according to which "crisscrossing the country with railways" would be enough to "make Turkey a rival of the United States". The new editor thinks that this is impossible. In his opinion, it is a mistake or, rather, an optical delusion, which is attributed to the fact that "*Turquie* is looking at the matter through the eyes of a foreigner, which it really is, and finding that railroads are of benefit to the foreigners, wants to apply those benefits at home too."

³⁶ See Sapounov (1869).

³⁷ See ["Letter from Koukoush"] (1869).

³⁸ See Genovich (1869), "The Varna Railroad" (1869).

³⁹ See Ikonov (1871g).

Ikonomov suggests analyzing the problem from a “Turkish territorial” (*tourskozemna*) point of view. Railroads, he reasons, certainly did not originate as a basis for industry. They were invented only when industrial output grew to an extent that made its quick transportation imperative. The situation in the Bulgarian economy, however, is different. The productivity rate is low and, according to the analyst’s calculations, three calendar months will be enough to export the total output – two months for the grain crop plus another one for the other goods. This raises the question of who has built a railway line with such low effectiveness, and why. Ikonomov’s answer is that the facility does not really belong to the Bulgarians and is not designed to satisfy their modest needs. It is linked to the lines in Europe and, as such, is entirely lucrative because it is designed for import, and not for export. Under such circumstances local industry is doomed, but it is quite likely that the region itself will be quickly europeanized. According to Ikonomov, the problem is, who stands to gain from the shock integration of undeveloped regions into the market of modernity. “This is good, but not for us,” the young critic explains to readers. “Our good will consist in the consolation that we have helped the Europeans to derive all possible benefits from our fatherland and to turn us gradually into their slaves, if not physically than at least mentally – mind-wise.”

In sum, the conclusion is that from a “Turkish territorial” point of view the railroads are harmful because they are a tool of colonial power. The criticism is radical, but this does not necessarily mean that it attacks the basic elements of the normative concept of the technologies of modernity. Ikonomov does not call into question the idea that railway transport is a tool of progress. He does not doubt that huge profits can be made from the quick transportation of goods. He only doubts that the Bulgarians have goods that are worth transporting, but this is a different problem. Ikonomov elaborates an overall programme for its solution, publishing it in a series of seven articles devoted to the different branches of the Bulgarian economy.⁴⁰ The strategy is simple: rapid modernization of industry by introducing new technologies, not only training but also importing qualified specialists, enlargement of enterprises, uniting of financial capital, industrialization and orientation of trade towards promising market segments.

The last thing that can be said of such a program is that it is counter-modern. What is revised is not the project of modernity but the concept of the regime in which it functions. In Ikonomov’s vision, the exchange of ideas, technologies and goods departs from the regime of the utopia and enters the regime of the market. Hence the change of rules: not solidarity and universal fellowship, but interests, competition and, respectively, power, which you either have and exercise or do not have and submit to. The sober and pragmatic logic of this economic nationalism (in the classical tradition of Friedrich Liszt) was popularized very quickly and effectively. Almost all newspapers and magazines took part in the debate on railroads. The expected profits from the new kind of transport were calculated with caution, and this common reserved attitude proved to be one of the few points of relative consensus among otherwise irreconcilable political parties, wings and individual figures in the national elite. Even Nikola Genovich started having doubts, and optimistic and pessimistic visions about the impact of railways on the Bulgarian economy alternated in his newspaper.

We should also take into account the fact that the moral damages from intensive contacts with Europe were mentioned very rarely. We know of just two

⁴⁰ See Ikonomov (1871a, 1871b, 1871c, 1871d, 1871e, 1871f, 1872).

such articles – the first in the newspaper *Pravo [Law]*, and the second published by Hristo Botev.⁴¹ Against the background of the dozens of articles on the subject, such a percentage of moral conservatism is far below the level that could have been expected. Moreover, even in those two individual cases the harm to patriarchal innocence is a marginal argument, the basic thesis being premised on entirely economic grounds. Finally, we ought to keep in mind that the press continued publishing panegyrics on engineering “miracles”, such as tunnels, bridges, canals and railway lines in inaccessible regions – even in the same issues of newspapers in which it was claimed that in the Bulgarian case, in particular, railways did more harm than good.

In itself, the ambivalence of this inconsistency suggests that the elite’s reaction was indeed extreme, but it did not signal a conservative “counter-revolution”. There is much more pragmatism than myth in it, and in this sense it tends to balance rather than to compete with the normative utopia of the idea of progress. In the Bulgarian context, rapid modernization required import and adoption of new cultural products, ideas, technologies and goods. In principle, this active transfer was ideologized as gift-exchange and was therefore perceived positively and even enthusiastically. The expansion of the Western market on the Balkans upset this symbolic economy because it did not function in the gift-exchange regime. It provoked a quest for an ideological model that reflected the real inequality in the competition between European import and Bulgarian output.

Colonialism proved to be an adequate matrix for this purpose because it practically did not require changes in the basic conceptual apparatus. The concept of Europe’s dominance and the “barbarian” status of the Bulgarians had become normativized and that is precisely why it was easily transferred from the utopia to the anti-utopia of modernity. Ultimately, it would have been strange if a community with such a deeply cultivated self-perception of backwardness had failed to discover the “dark” side of its relations with the “civilized” world. What is remarkable in this case is, rather, something else. The debate on railways is indeed a symptom of resistance, but the latter was aimed not against the project of modernity but against the unequal opportunities of those willing to take part in it. This series of publications expresses the deepest reservations against the technologies and ideologies of the progress that the young nation’s ideologues had. But even so, the prospect that was outlined was not of a return to Arcadia by ox-drawn carts but, conversely, an economic leap that would make railroads necessary. The position was anti-European but not counter-modern and this distinction between Europe and modernity deserves attention since it was not a lesson that could be learnt from 19th century’s textbooks. The question is what does this entail? Does it mean that there was an attempt to create an alternative project of modernity from the point of view of the European periphery?

In my opinion such a hypothesis would be much too radical. There are no real grounds to speak about some “Bulgarian grammar of modernity”. There are however grounds to acknowledge the development of peculiar model that helped to adapt the basic ideological concepts of modernity for Bulgarian use. The emergence of that model was provoked by the transfer of the new ideological dictionary introducing the idea of progress. The reception of the definitions of barbarism and civilization proved to be especially difficult as the Bulgarians failed to reach completely neither the first nor the second set of standards. The construction of collective identity on the base of “anomaly” was not a promising start and predictably the search for solution

⁴¹ See “Against the Railroads” (1873), Botev (1876).

consumed a lot of intellectual energy. Of course, the Bulgarian nation was not the only one that came up against such a problem. On the contrary, most of the nations throughout the world have stepped into modernity from the poor position of “beginners”. From this point of view the situation was actually standard and the only peculiarity lies in the way the Bulgarians tried to cope with the problem. To put it briefly, they did not follow either of the two classical models of emancipation from the barbarian stigma. The first model entails the use of the historical past as a priority resource to build an identity. The ancient and/or medieval accomplishments are incorporated in the national image as a guarantee for the “natural” right of affiliation to the “civilized world”. In the second model the barbarian is not rejected. Instead it is aestheticized as a sign of vitality, primal force, innocence and morality, i. e. qualities which compensate for the lack of “contribution” to the world culture.

As we have seen, the 19th century Bulgarian elite explored the potential of both strategies. The results however remained only relatively successful. The political implications of the bucolic utopia were the main factor leading to the marginalization of Arcadia as a projection of identity. History proved to be much more productive resource, although its effectiveness was also restricted. The lack of local historiographic tradition, the dependence on the import of historical narratives produced abroad, the poor interest of the European science in the Bulgarian past, the difficult competition with the Greek neighbors, the unstable myth of origin varying from the Tartars, Huns and Slavs to the ancient Indo-Arians – all those factors allowed the barbarian stereotype to keep dominating the collective imagination despite the ancestors’ glory. This failure to create sufficiently prestigious identity for the emerging nation motivated the reorientation towards different sort of strategies.

The alternative chosen by the elite was to make the definition of Europe more relative. This way the simultaneous belonging to both the “barbarian” and the “civilized” sphere was supposed to loose its status of anomaly and become a norm. The design was neither easy nor trivial since it necessitated changes in the basic taxonomies of modernity. This explains the emergence of theoretical canon which was borrowed from Europe and yet did not replicate the western matrix. The main purpose of this selective ideological import was to promote works that represented the lack of essential difference between the civilized and everybody else. As a result, the image of the “savage and barbarian Europe” from the time immemorial has been asserted as a legitimate part of the “enlightened” European identity. And it was this ambivalence that finally allowed the Bulgarians to recognize themselves as Europeans.

Herein lies the peculiarity of the 19th century Bulgarian way of domesticating the taxonomies of modernity. The definitions of civilization and barbarity remained in the form they were fixed in the geography textbooks. What changed as a result of the transfer was the possibility to apply both definitions to Europe and hence to everybody else. This outcome was regarded as a strategic ideological capital and was invested directly in the foundations of the national identity. On this flexible basis the collective subject “we, the Bulgarians” could refer legitimately both to “we, the Europeans” and “they, the Europeans”, “we, the barbarians” and “they, the barbarians”. It is hard to assess the advantages and disadvantages resulting from the chosen strategy to accommodate the project of modernity for Bulgarian use. On the one hand, it certainly helped to marginalize the more conservative ways of coping with the barbarian complex. On the other hand, the constant presence of alternative answers to the question of “who we are” is pregnant with a crisis potential. The equilibrium is delicate. It could be rationalized as a product of transfers caused by

both necessity and initiative. It is precisely this balance of determinism and choice, domination and resistance that is worth investigating because ultimately its consequences make up the history of modernity.

Table

	Geography textbooks	History textbooks
1835	Neophit Bozveli <i>Short Political Geography</i>	
1842	Bogorov, I. <i>Mathematical geography</i> .	
1843	1. Bogorov, I. <i>General Geography</i> 2. Radoulov, S. <i>Lessons of Geography</i> 3. Fotinov, K. <i>General Geography</i>	
1844		Pavlovich, Hr. <i>Book of Kings</i>
1851	Bogorov, I. <i>Short Geography</i>	
1856	Ikonomov, G. <i>Short Geography</i>	<i>Short Bulgarian History</i> (anonymous)
1858	1. Radoulov, S. <i>General Geography</i> 2. Hroulev, T. <i>Short Geography</i> (I ed.)	
1860	Robovski, St. <i>Short Introduction in Geography</i>	
1861	1. Grouev, Y. <i>Lessons in Geography</i> (I ed.) 2. Manchev, D. <i>Geography of European Turkey</i> 3. Paraladov, T. <i>Geography</i> 4. Stoyanov, N. <i>Short Geography</i> 5. Hroulev, T. <i>Short Geography</i> (II ed.)	Voynikov, D. <i>Short Bulgarian History</i>
1862	1. Grouev, Y. <i>Lessons in Mathematical Geography</i> (I ed.) 2. Manchev, D. <i>Short Geography</i> (I ed.)	
1863	1. Grouev, Y. <i>Lessons in Mathematical Geography</i> (II ed.) 2. Hroulev, T. <i>Short Geography</i>	
1864	Manchev, D. <i>Short Geography</i> (II ed.)	
1865	1. Grouev, Y. <i>Lessons in Geography</i> (II ed.) 2. Danov, Hr. <i>Geographical Atlas</i> (I ed.) 3. Danov, Hr. <i>Short School Atlas</i> 4. Petrov, Sp. <i>Complete Mathematical and Physical Geography</i>	
1866	1. Grouev, Y. <i>Short Geography</i> (I ed.) 2. Manchev, D. <i>Short Geographical Atlas</i> 3. Odjakov, P. <i>Introduction in Geography</i> 4. Radoulov, S. <i>Comparative Geography</i>	Tsankov, Dr. <i>Bulgarian History</i> (I ed.)
1867	Ivanov, I. <i>Geography</i>	
1868	1. Grouev, Y. <i>Short Geography</i> (II ed.) 2. Manchev, D. <i>Geography</i> 3. Petkov, B. <i>Shrot General Geography</i> 4. Shapkarev, K. <i>Short Geography</i>	Tsankov, Dr. <i>Bulgarian History</i> (II ed.)
1869	1. Manchev, D. <i>Geography</i> 2. Mihaylovski, N. <i>Short Geography</i> 3. Momchilov, I. <i>Short Political Geography</i> (I ed.) 4. Turnovski, K. <i>A Guide in the Use of Geographical Globes</i>	1. Grouev, Y. <i>Bulgarian History</i> 2. N. G. M. <i>Bulgarian History</i> 3. Tsankov, Dr. <i>Bulgarian History</i> (III ed.)
1870	1. Grouev, Y. <i>Short Geography</i> (III ed.) 2. Grouev, Y. <i>Lessons in Geography</i> (III ed.)	1. Dushanov, D. <i>Short Bulgarian History</i> (I ed.) 2. Tsankov, Dr. <i>Bulgarian History</i> (IV ed.)
1871	Parakoutsov, M. <i>Geography</i> .	
1872	1. Grouev, Y. <i>Short Geography</i> (IV ed.) 2. Grouev, Y. <i>Lessons in Geography</i> (IV ed.) 3. Momchilov, I. <i>Short Political Geography</i> (II ed.)	1. Doushanov, D. <i>Short Bulgarian History</i> (II ed.) 2. Manchev, D. <i>Short Bulgarian History</i>
1873	1. Vitanov, D. <i>Physical Geography</i> 2. Grouev, Y. <i>Short Geography</i> (V ed.) 3. Enchev, D. <i>Cosmography</i> 4. Enchev, D. <i>Physical Geography</i> .	Shishkov, T. <i>History of the Bulgarian Nation</i>
1874	1. Blagoev, D. <i>Short Geography</i> 2. Grouev, Y. <i>Lessons in Geography</i> (V ed.) 3. Danov, Hr. <i>Geographical Atlas</i> (II ed.) 4. Kirkovich, R. <i>Geography</i> 5. Kirkovich, R. <i>European Geography</i> 6. <i>A Textbook in Geography</i> (anonymous)	1. Doushanov, D. <i>Short Bulgarian History</i> (III ed.) 2. Manchev, D. <i>Short Bulgarian History</i> (II ed.)
1876		Fingov, D. <i>Bulgarian History</i>

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