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The Notion of the “Other” in Bulgaria: The Turks.  
A Historical Study

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The epitome of Bulgarian notions of “the other” is no doubt the Turk. The image of the Turk is so graphically outlined, there are so many arguments in favour of his the Turk’s “otherness” – both from the distant and more recent past, that we expect it to endure long despite the attempts of some scholars to correct its utter negativism. This ethno-psychological stereotype is justified by objective historical prerequisites. Therefore given our sincere desire to take a momentary snapshot of this phenomenon, we cannot divide it from its past – if we do so, we would adopt inexplicable parameters and a vitality that would defy the comprehensive powers of a foreigner living outside the Balkan Peninsula. It is hardly worthwhile tracing the stages of the Ottoman conquest of Southeastern Europe which began in the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and lasted a century and a half, for they are widely known. Nevertheless, I will mention only the methods of Islamizing the subjugated population which are known to the historical science.

1. Slavery is understood as an institution and not as a definition of a period of Ottoman domination of the Balkans. Among the Ottomans – as a parallel to the barbarian practice in Europe, the slaves were the legitimate spoils – every Muslim warrior could acquire a slave when fighting on the so called *dar-ul harb*, that is to say the “land subject to conquest”. One fifth of the booty was due to the Emir, later on to the Sultan, the rest belonged to the warrior who had gained it. As we learn from the sources, all Ottoman raids preceding the

invasion of the Balkan territories aimed at kidnapping slaves and cattle. Later on the same practice spread to the Sultan's campaigns beyond the Balkans.

2. One of the ways of islamization of the Balkan Christians in the early and, more rarely, in the following periods of Ottoman rule, was "the natural one": marching along as a troop, becoming sedentary for long extents of time, the ottomans lacked women. No doubt one way of procuring women was from the local population. This entailed the inevitable conversion of the wife or mistress, the future mother of Muslim boys.

3. A no less significant human contribution – this time male, not female – to the dominant Islam was the jenissary institution revived by the Ottomans (previously known to Arabs and Romans) of military recruiting. At first under Sultan Orhan I (or Murad I), the new recruits were taken as mere slaves, but later as a special practice was established for this: recruiting of Christian children among the subject peoples. The method has been documented to last from the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and is a major factor accounting for the rise of the of the Muslim population in the Ottoman Empire at the expense of the Christians (Georgieva 1988).

4. Yet another legitimate way adding up to this increase, was that each criminal convicted to death was paroled by the Sultan if he adopted Islam. It is not known whether and to what extent the law had been enforced since it provided objectively a privilege to the Christians over the Muslims, and was probably an expression of religious charity on the part of the ruler.

5. We should also mention the voluntary adoption of Islam. It became effective after the filing of an application with higher state bodies which could return or grant the request. The numbers of applications in the archives hardly reveal the authentic motivation for the undertaking of such a fateful step by Christian subjects of the empire in the conditions prevailing in those days. Sometimes they stated their overt desire to change their social standing, but more often it followed the awareness of the spiritual supremacy of Islam over Christianity. We cannot judge the ratio between granted and returned requests, yet the total number was no doubt considerable. When the result was positive, the neophyte received a significant sum as a gift, allegedly to buy himself Muslim clothes. Most probably the sum

averaged the price of an oxen team, especially in the many cases when poverty was pointed out as the motive for conversion.

6. There were also mass forcible campaigns for imposing Islam on the Christians in a given area. We find evidence of them usually in the folklore of the Balkan peoples which is easy to explain: the Koran prohibited the conversion to Islam by force of the subjugated *ehl-i kitab*, that is the subjects who possessed the Holy Writ. As we have already seen, however, there were exceptions to this rule (the taking of slaves en masse) which were treated by the canon as voluntary by interpretation rather than as a violation of the Sheriate. The local Christians explain the existence of considerable numbers of people who spoke their tongue, but professed Islam with violent actions which in itself testifies to conversion during a particular historical period – that is during the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries (for the Bulgarian Pomaks), or somewhat earlier (the Bosnians and the Albanians). These actions were ascribed (in written documents or by oral traditions), to the policies of a couple of Ottoman rulers who were renowned for their cruelty: Selim II and Mehmed IV. Another type of source – the hagiology of the Balkan Christians from the Ottoman period – illustrates single, not en masse violence over eminent representatives of the enslaved – like for instance, the Lives of the “new” saints Nikola Sofiyski and Georgi Sofiyski (History of Bulgaria 1983, Vol. 4).

The listed above methods through which the Muslim authorities or, simply, the natural course of events, split off a considerable part of the indigenous Christians in order to add them to the master-nationality are neither unknown nor controversial. We recalled them for the mere reason of drawing a dividing line between “forcible” and “voluntary” conversion to Islam. The fact that violence is the key mechanism in the development of human civilization from barbaric times to the New Age hardly needs much proving. It would be unfair to try and pass it off as something inherent to the Ottoman Turks alone for analogies could be found very easily along the chronological horizontal line.

Even though the modern Balkan historiographers treat violence mainly as a purposeful and consistent policy of the Muslim authority, and we will follow the prerequisites of this conception further on, logic should correct this conception in the

following sense. If the Empire would adopt forcible conversion of the “non-believers” to Islam as its policy, it could not help being successful in its intentions for whose realization it had sufficient forces and more than enough time. What could have hampered it? The Balkan historians answer almost unanimously: the resistance of the Christians owing to their deep commitment to their traditional religion. Indeed Christianity gave the subjugated people their common identity. They stuck to it, because it united them in a community, even though discriminated against, it offered them some protection, support, mutual assistance. But they could hardly be successful in resisting an entire political system implemented through administrative and military measures; they could hardly be effective against official mass violence whose objective was to Islamize the population of the peninsula. The exponents of this thesis, instead of quoting unrelated documents about compact conversion campaigns, which they interpret without the support of arguments as being achieved through violence and as an expression of a consistent state policy, should rather strive to explain why this policy failed.

It is a fact that the Ottoman registers of the 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries reveal a considerable number of first generation of Islamized peoples labeled as “sons of Abdullha” (the administrative patronymic for the neophytes). Typically, in the regions with a dense Christian population we often come across *one* such neophyte in every village – a circumstance which we could interpret as a deliberate administrative practice. Generally speaking, these registers are an objective evidence of the multiplied number of Muslims in the Balkan regions which, compared to the slower numerical growth of the Christians, makes it possible for us to conclude that the former was at the expense of the latter. Still, this process should not be considered the result of violence in the sense attributed to it by the Balkan historians, that is to say conversion with the sword and fire, nor should it be regarded as a policy aimed at the islamization of the Balkans.

To begin with, the Ottoman State itself which created and made effective the structure that was best to serve its interests could not possibly have pursued such an end. The *djemaat* categorically divided their subject into “believers” and “non-believers” and levied on the latter the “jizie” tax, which was a major source of filling in the state treasury. The Ottomans also set great store by the prohibition to military service, administrative, and

financial posts of the “infidel” due to which the Muslims enjoyed unnatural advantages. In a state such as the Ottoman, Islam was a privilege in every respect. Therefore, it was unthinkable to impose it by force, except in the cases mentioned above.

The exceptions only reinforced the existence of the rule. Another confirmation was the fact that those who were forcibly converted to Islam, usually ranked among the chosen few due to physical merits or gifts (the boys recruited as janissaries, skilful artisans, beautiful girls). In this way, the state wanted to enhance the prestige of the hegemonic Muslim nationality.

By adopting it, a Christian got rid of the institutionalized religious discrimination to which he or she was subjected. As we know, although the Ottoman Empire tolerated Orthodox Christians, Hebrews and Catholics within its borders, these “infidels” could practice their religion only within certain legal restrictions. They were not allowed to build new homes of prayer or could use make-shift ones only with special permit. They were not allowed to organize public religious festivals and processions, and to summon the believers for prayer by ringing bells. The religious restrictions of the non-Muslims spread to other daily-life prohibitions verging on petty humiliations, such as the following. The Christians could not wear gaily-coloured clothes, could not ride a horse in the presence of a Turk, could not possess weapons (the last prohibition was prescribed by the police). The Jews were expected to wear yellow turbans in order to be told apart from the remaining *zimmi* (“the patronized”), which was rather a small privilege than a humiliation.

From all said so far or omitted for the mere fact that it is known to the general public, it follows that Islam – the state religion in the course of five or six centuries on end – could not, but have been permanently fed with fresh converts from the Balkan Christians. Therefore, it would be very primitive to perceive violence in its romantic aspects and resistance to it in equally romantic colours. Violence was, to begin with, the very status of people who were discriminated against on grounds of their religious affiliation; violence was the double taxes levied on them in favour of their rich masters; ruthless violence was the enslaving and selling on markets of free people; violence against the family was the kidnapping of a male child; violence on the conscience of a female Christian was her

conversion to Islam on marriage or concubinage with a Muslim; violence was the appalling poverty in which a widowed mother or orphans lived and so on and so forth. But it would be equally unfair to use the epithet “voluntary” in the context of a process which took place in times, at a place, and through methods like the ones described above. Yet, for the needs of historical truthfulness, we must make clear what was accepted as “voluntary” by the then Balkan Christians and what they considered conversion through violence.

Parallel with and independently of the islamization of the local population, another process, radically different, but equal in duration, was underway: colonization. It is difficult to separate it from the inevitable migration movements when heterogeneous types of ethnicity were included in a single vast state. The Turkish historical science itself claims that at the very beginning of the Ottoman conquest, colonization was conceived and implemented via administrative means, namely: considerable masses of Balkan population were forcibly re-settled to Asia Minor, and, conversely, Muslims were settled in our lands (Barkan). This is the so called *surgyun* (= dragging) of which the registers bear evidence (Dimitrov in the Provadia region). Another source is the domestic tradition: the stories about the expulsion of the people of Turnovo (Tsamblak) whose destiny was later on shared by the population of Salonica and Constantinople.. As can be seen from the inventory of the small vakifs in Istanbul at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the overwhelming majority of the Muslims there were first generation neophytes who thus saved their landed estates (Barkan and Aiverdi).

Naturally, a mass foreign invasion followed by a foreign rule over a long period of time could not help provoking the reshuffling of the already heterogeneous ethnic elements. In this light, the attempts of some historians to ascribe the mixture of Christian and Muslim population mainly to the islamization of the local Christians is not convincing. The mutual assimilation, sometimes final, of world-views coming from South-eastern Europe and Asia, and even from Africa, and moving unobstructed within the Empire, could not be helped. Two other circumstances objectively contributed to this: first, during the initial period of conquest, the Turkic peoples were nomads and remained such (the yurouks) long after they crossed the Straits (Gokbilgin). Second, the relatively small serf dependence of the peasants within the system of the spahiluk allowed them to leave their

villages after buying themselves off for an affordable sum and to choose a new place to settle. The centralized Ottoman financial structure (unlike the European feudal societies of the same age) succeeded in collecting its taxes from each subject, no matter where he was and what his status was. This relieved it of the concern to seek out, recall, sentence, and settle forcibly the moving human streams within the imperial boundaries and even outside them. The entire Ottoman period in the Balkans is characterized by mass resettlements and emigration. Additional conditions for ethnic mixing were created by the incessant Sultan's campaigns towards Central and later on, Eastern Europe, in the course of which the army crossed the Balkans on and off. It is very probable, or even known for certain, that significant numbers of this riffraff deserted long before they reached the front-line and sought livelihood in the Balkan hinterland. Whereas the local population, jeopardized as it was by the organized or spontaneous order, either withdrew to inaccessible mountainous regions which abounded in the Balkans or set out on distant emigration. It is difficult to monitor the results of such movements, since they usually ended in the assimilation of the new settlers.

It is no less difficult to disentangle the ethnic picture obtained in the Balkans in modern times when the big entities had already been established and had identified themselves in terms of language and religion, to such an extent that after the reforms in Turkey, the term *millet* was introduced to mean "people", and to differentiate it from the general notion of *djemaat*. Not long before that, the Balkan Peninsula was reached by the Tatars who have been expelled via administrative means from the Crimea, then by the Circassians and other Muslim peoples of the Caucasus. These peoples partially merged with the Turks due to the religious similarity, and they adopted the Turkish language for daily use. Today, we rarely come across Turkish-speaking people identifying themselves as Tatars after the last members of the Giraev family left Shoumen.

A cursory glance at islamization, colonization and migrations in the Balkans under the Ottoman rule shows that there is no room for an "ethnic" problem here – a category introduced by political and scholarly circles distant from the Balkan realities and the Balkan past. What is taking place in former Yugoslavia has no ethnic foundation. There, a once single ethnic group, later on having split up on the basis of religious denomination

(Croatians and Serbs) or of two different religions (Serbs and Bosnians) reached the stage of individual nations, as a result, namely, of their different histories – a criterion which is usually being underrated. Serbs, Croatians and Bosnians had their own states during the Middle Ages with different duration, but they were sufficient, as it seems, to pre-determine their irreconcilable opposition to one another today, despite their common ethnic origin. Consequently, what is taking place in former Yugoslavia is a national, rather than an ethnic purging, that is to say it is a regular war.

Even less fortunate was the term “ethnic Turks” coined in Bulgaria and a thesis invented in 1984-1989, namely that this Turks had Bulgarian blood running in their veins. We must admit in good faith that there is hardly any difference between the blood of the local population and the newer settlers in our lands, which is hardly a barrier for both to have a different *awareness* of national identity, and to treat each other as “the other”. It was a harmful thesis due to its deliberate inadequacy to the conspicuous facts, a thesis prompted by the striving to brainwash the public opinion with such terms as “origin”, “blood”, “veins”, so as to trigger off non-functional “ethnic” conflicts which served someone’s needs. All this is too transparent as a conception. Conflicts in their essence are political and economic, so in order to manipulate society, those who brewed the conflict shook the dust off national psychology traits, updating them for current use.

Let us trace their development to this day, for the problem about “the other” is above all a psychological one. The genesis of these notions was in the Middle Ages. Then due to the frequent fierce wars against Byzantium, which never reconciled the Bulgarian presence in lands considered as her own legacy from Rome saw in the face of the “Slavophones” “the other” who had dared to encroach upon her own possession. In turn, the Bulgarians conceived an antipode image, that of the Greek. According to this image, the Greek was sly, perfidious, expert in politics and trade, cleverly taking advantage of his adversary’s weak spots, in an erudite, pretentious, and conceited manner. He sum, the Greek was a worthy adversary to the brave, industrious and as yet untempted Bulgarians. Thus this original notion of “the other” among our predecessors was by no means singularly negative. This was probably due to the fact that although fighting each other the two peoples were Christian.



The notion under investigation seems quite different in content. However, when the opposition concerns “Balkans–Ottomans” to use the scientific terms, since the local population thought in “Giaours–Orthodox”, and later on and to this date, “Bulgarians–Turks”. Here we are witnessing a real conflict without any shades of condescending humour whatsoever. The arguments in favour of this are both objectively historical and socio-psychological. We examined part of the historical arguments above when outlining the status of the Christians in the Empire and the ways of their islamization. It is common knowledge that the sufferings of the local population were not confined to this alone. As in every other medieval state, the Ottoman state too, strove to exploit its subjects to the maximum, especially the “infidels”. This has been studied in detail and the writers on the subject have raised no objections at all. Some of them might only remind us that in those days throughout Europe, the subjects (which were not even subjects, but mere serfs) had a more or less similar fate. Why then this mutual intolerance? Why this mutual negation over centuries on end, despite the long centuries of co-existence?

The prerequisite for this was the Sheriate itself and the canon, that is the official ideology which had permeated practice. Let us point out that, unlike Christendom which during the centuries under review lived through its Reformation, religious wars, St. Bartholomew’s eve, Edict of Nantes, etc., Islam was still in its primeval form although it had been in existence for a long time and that form actually belonged to a previous stage in its historical evolution. All pitiful attempts at administrative or military reform which the Ottoman authorities made at a later time – from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century – triggered off the same powerful reaction whose banner was “the revival of the Old Canon”. The Muslim masses interpreted even the slightest reforms as being “pro-Giaour”. It is, therefore, the fault of the nihilistic nation-wide resistance rather than of the authorities that the Empire so tragically lagged behind Europe to which it had been a worthy peer during the 16<sup>th</sup> century in terms of economic and military potential, and in some respects, even excelled it.

Again, prompted by their conservatism that the Turks – from those wielding power at the top to the rank-and-file dervish – sacredly safeguarded their initial attitude towards the Christians, i.e. one of looking down on inferior person even in the period when “the

infidels” were in every respect ahead of the hegemonic nationality. It would be unnatural to expect that such a relationship based not on social, but on religious inequality, should not trigger off the respective reaction.

We will not dwell on all “the good things” that accompanied the life of mediaeval man, not only in the Balkans and under Turkish rule, but everywhere else, but much earlier and not up to the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is a major difference since the reality of the Middle Ages proper was one thing, and that of the New Era with its constitutions and institutions, such as Declaration of Human Rights and the motto “Liberty, Fraternity, Equality”, quite another. The medieval obscurity and violence which all over Europe were considered an out-lived stage in its system. So, even though the relationship “subject-authority” was nowhere one of pure love, the explanation – both objective and subjective – here boiled down to “otherness”.

This relationship produced a result which equals a rare, if not unique socio-psychological phenomenon: the two poles of it, not only did not converge in the course of the 600 years in an ethnic and cultural whole (i.e. a syncretism), but to this date exist in mutual isolation the product of which is mutual ignorance of one another. Lately, we have been witnessing administrative or spontaneous efforts to overcome the isolation; scientific efforts to analyze the errors made on both sides in the past due to which that isolation sprang up and became established. However, the truth is much simpler: the isolation was caused and re-affirmed by each individual on both side sin the course of dozens of generations. No administration or forcible campaign could produce the same results – the fruits of violence are perishable.

A phenomenon exists in the Balkans which is judged upon its merits by the experts – the extremely rich epic folk poetry, especially that of the southern Slavs. It could be compared at random to the poetry of some Asian peoples – the Iranian for example, or that in the Hindi language. The abundance and variety of epic poetry cycles created in these lands is to be explained in the following way: in the course of five centuries, the Balkan peoples were had been divested of cultural and educational institutions which stimulate and direct the human need for artistic creativity and consumption of its products (an example of the role of such institutions was the spiritual life in Bulgaria in the last two

centuries of its mediaeval existence). Folklore became, therefore the vent for the thirst for intellectual and emotional creativity among the peoples under the Ottoman rule, the latter having institutionalized literary and artistic creations that were foreign to them in terms of language, aesthetic means, and ideology. Folklore offered an unlimited scope for the talented among the subjugated Balkan peoples who had long enjoyed a national state of their own.

The fact that local folklore played this role over a long period of time and that it had a nation-wide audience stimulated its creators. This fact also guaranteed its exceptional (due to no competition) impact on the mentality of the public.

The heroic streak is an immanent feature of this epic poetry. Some examples: “The Iliad”, “Shahname”, “Kalevala”, “Chanson de Roland”, “The Tale of Igor's Campaign”, “Poem of the Cid”, “Kyoroglu”. The pompous emotionality of the epic story is hinged on two themes: suffering and fight. During this period in the history of the Balkans when there were no cultural institutions, both subjects drew upon real daily life: suffering caused by the foreign oppressive power and struggle against it. When treating these themes poetically, two protagonists were depicted who were inevitably in conflict: the Christian and the Muslim. They were not portrayed realistically and in nuance for this was not the artistic method employed. Even though sometimes the Bulgarian epics did contain surprising elements of realism, born out of a very familiar reality, the main characters in them were, as a rule, stylized and generalized.

Let us recall some folk poetry cycles which appear in numerous renditions of the selfsame history. If we observe the chronology of historic events illustrated by these cycles, we will obtain approximately the following series.

1. “Tatars in Our Lands”. A relatively limited cycle most probably due to the long time that had elapsed since the Tatars’ invasion and their brief power over the lands of the Bulgarian Turnovo kingdom (13<sup>th</sup> century). It is more a case of telling individual stories about “taking prisoners” and of resistance, rather than of mass violence.

2. “Three Chains of Slaves”. An extensive cycle whose versions are similar :it reflects the raids of the Ottomans in the early period of subjugation of the Balkans. The theme of “suffering” easily cedes to the theme of the “struggle”, ranking these epics to the

class of *yunak* (heroic) songs, for example some hero, most often Krali Marko frees the slaves (Bulgarian Folklore [henceforth B.F.], vol.1, vol.3). The motif of “enslaving” refers singularly to the *Turkish* practice and had obviously been unknown before it. The cycle also contains stories about individual cases of taking maidens or young brides as slaves are part of it.

3. *Momchil yunak*: despite his brief impostor’s rule, this chieftain who fell in battle with the companies of the Emir of Smyrna Umur beg (1345), was a favoured hero in the cycles dedicated to the anti-Turkish struggles. Besides the second omnipresent character, the Turk, we come across here yet another image of “the other”, namely the representative of another Balkan nation, usually a woman: Greek, Croatian, Albanian, or Vlach, who perfidiously betrays the Bulgarian fighter (B.F. vol.1).

4. *Shishman*. Another tragic hero of the cycles about the resistance against the invader. Typically, his exploits take place all over Bulgaria (B.F. vol.3). This is confirmed by toponyms based on local legends, for example Shishman’s grave, Shishman’s holes in the Iskur River gorge.

5. *Krali Marko* is the hero No 1 in a bulky cycle of the Southern Slavs. The main subject is the struggle against the Turks. Usually, he is the victorious saviour of Christians, but there is a group of poems in which he is defeated, and the epic seeks the reasons for this in his conceit and challenge of God (B.F. vol.1 and 3).

(In parenthesis, we will point out the common features of the cycles about the Bulgarians’ struggles against the Ottoman Turks: the main character is arbitrarily, and even wrongly, picked up to personify “ours”. Momchil was one of the first Turkish dignitaries on this side of the Black Sea, although later on he denounced the alliance. Krali Marko, who inherited the miniature “kingdom” of his father, Vulkashin, fell in the battle of Chernomen in 1371; Marko from Prilep was one of the earliest vassals of the invader and took part on its side in the subjection of the Balkans. There is no written record of even a single battle of Marko’s against the Ottomans. Ivan Shishman, the last Turnovo tsar, never went out in overt fight with them, and in 1373 he probably became Murad’s vassal. After the fall of Turnovo and Nikopol in 1393, he was jailed in the last Bulgarian fortress and two years later executed.

This is how the Bulgarian heroic epic songs created the images of “our rulers” who allegedly fought courageously, but actually became prey to perfidiousness or self-destruction. Most probably they were picked up because each of them was the last local ruler in the respective region, thus persisting in the memory of its annihilation. Logic dictates that he should have put up fierce resistance against his enemy and the folk bard ardently wished that the resistance had been a glorious one.)

6. “The janissaries”. The kidnapping of Bulgarian youths and their dramatic fate after that are the plot of these poem-songs, all the more so that this was, until then, an unknown misfortune in the Balkans. Not quite unknown since the recruiting of new soldiers for the feudal lords’ and rulers’ troops hardly ever took place by voluntary means in the Middle Ages. In this particular case, however, the boys had first to undergo a religious *conversion* and to be taken away from their families and homeland for good, and even would participate in actions against them. The latter phenomenon is the plot of more than one epic poem: a moment before the young janissary was to rape a maiden or woman, he recognizes in her his mother or sister. Incest, the result of mixing of religions and nations, is a frequent theme in folklore (B.F. vol. 3).

7. “Turkicization” is another popular theme in epic songs. The preferred characters are those of Bulgarian maidens and brides who are kidnapped as a rule. The treatment tends to be heroic: the violated Christian women either run away or commit suicide. The most hyperbolic rendition of this motif is offered by the “Song of Balkandji Yovo” who chose rather to die than to see his sister defamed. As for voluntary “turkicization”, the heroes are Christians who are detested by their fellow-countrymen such as bishops, chorbadjis (big landlords), as they usually adopt Islam for self-seeking reasons (B.F. vol. 1).

8. “All kinds of misfortunes are due to the Turks” – a most general formulation. This is a collection of cycles whose plots and motifs are taken from day-to-day life. They all carry the refrain that has come down to us from our great-grandmothers: “Yon Turk, yon trouble!” Then one hears about the trouble only and there is no mention of the Turk. Or in a version from the Ottoman period we come across one and the same exclamation: “Oh, oh, oh, Turks!”, but not followed by a concrete plot (B.F. vol. 3).

9. “The Haidouks” (rebels). So far we listed cycles devoted to the subject of “suffering“ in which “the other” is identified with the Turk. The equation mark between the negative hero and the Unorthodox is preserved also throughout the inexhaustibly rich cycles about the Haidouks, entirely in the heroic tradition.

After everything said so far, it would be superfluous to analyze the image of “ours” and “the other” in their capacity of characters in folk songs. They possess all the necessary features to justify the conflict between them. Yet, not always the portrayal is black-and-white. Reality in all its variety could not help being mirrored in the folklore. Thus, for instance, along with the predominant motif of the Christian resistance to being converted to Islam (usually on the part of maidens), we find the opposite of it: the motive of the voluntary acceptance of the Turkish faith with the view of changing one’s social status favourably. Sometimes even a girl’s or a boy’s mother persuades them to adopt the alien faith (Benovska, 15 ff.). Worth our attention is yet another motif in which the Muslim enemy has not only negative, but also some features that make him superior to the Christian. Obviously the motif came into existence in order to explain the failure of the Bulgarians, that is to say the loss of their statehood. The Bulgarians were the “sinful ones” and the Turks were “rightful”. Therefore the Holy Virgin rewarded them with greater strength as compared with ours (Benovska, 6 ff.). However, mitigating the effect of these motifs on the extreme judgment of “the other”, they are scarce and not typical. The conclusion prevails that “the other” personifies Evil.

This gives us ground to claim that a mentality had been formed in the Balkans which could be defined as “folkloric thinking”. It and its stereotypes had been formed ages ago. These stereotypes survived the Bulgarian national Revival and the post-Liberation period, and the authors of those periods even reinforced them with a new layer of arguments, that is with new, consequently more effective scholarly and artistic means. Oddly, the works created in those periods did not push out the oldest folkloric plots and motifs of the public mind. Thus, for instance, each attempt to attack the stereotypes analyzed here by positive scientifically-proven facts to an audience of students and even to their teachers produced the same, very laconic reaction: What about the three chains of

slaves? Or the Balkandji Yovo? This is a counter-argument (to what, actually – is anyone at all denying the fact that the Ottoman domination was accompanied by violence) which precludes a further dialogue, and a very sturdy counter-argument at that testifying to the vitality of “the folkloric thinking”. It seems to serve the purpose of lifting the blame for the individual, provided he feels some guilt on account of events in his contemporary reality which do not fit into the modern conceptions. It saves the individual the onerous need to cudgel his brains on his own attitude to “the other”.

Quite legitimately in the process of formation of nations, the opposition “own-foreign” has become aggravated so as to differentiate one nation from the rest. The germs of a Bulgarian national awareness were sought back in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when the epithet “Bulgarian” meant the ruler, a mediaeval practice. The same epithet occurs rarely in manuscripts or in folklore, unlike “Christian” and “Orthodox”. On the other hand, we encounter pejorative elements in the Anonymous Bulgarian Chronicle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (“Ismaelites”, “children of Hagarians”, “members of hostile tribes”) to describe Turks or those used to depict their ruler (“the Evil One”, “mean soul”, “unbridled ferocity”, “untameable beast”). We also come across qualifications of Ottoman actions, such as: “fearful bloodshed”, “oaths violated”, “they fought in a manner that suited them”, “set to fire and burned down”, “growled like a lion”, “the Sultan and his nobles turned the holy churches in their homes”, etc. (Mircheva). In one word, as early as the first decades of Ottoman rule, intolerance of it among the subjugated people emerged and the enemy image came into existence.

We must not jump to conclusions, however, that this was the tone of the entire Bulgarian pre-Liberation press. In the years of fighting for an autonomous Bulgarian church, the image of “the other” referred, above all, to the Greek – a characteristic that marked all our newspapers published in Turkey (*Turtsia*, *Dunav*, and partially *Tsarigradski vestnik*). In those days, even Rakovski became less extreme in his assessments, looking forward to a favourable solution of the church issue. In the *Dunavski Lebed* paper, he stigmatized, above all, the Greek Phanariots. The same line was followed by P.R.Slaveykov (Mircheva, I, 3 ff.).

Soon after the establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate, however, the Bulgarian press sharply changed its tone with respect to the Ottoman power. The image of the Turk known from Rakovski's writings reappeared in the newspapers that came out in Istanbul and Wallachia. They carried many articles about the Turkish outrages in the Bulgarian lands as a new mean of influencing public opinion. The subject about Turkey's unsusceptibility to reform and its sure decline was exploited to the utmost. The fiercest attacks against Turkey were leveled by the pungently satirical pen of Hristo Botev, who in his poetry also re-affirmed images and themes from the folklore, knowing how deeply rooted the stereotypes of folkloric thinking were in the minds of his compatriots. We might be wondering whether this type of thinking actually would have lasted to our days, had it not been fed in more recent times by Botev's poetry.

The Bulgarians embarked upon their struggle for cultural autonomy and a national state of their own by being ideationally prepared. The credit for this goes to the pleiades of enlightened educators, writers, and organizers who inculcated our people to intolerance towards the enslavers, helping to bring to an explosive outcome the age-old opposition "ours-foreign", the culmination of which was April 1876 Uprising. Then came the Russian-Turkish War and the Liberation. Along with the Turkish troops, the Ottoman administration, too, left Bulgaria and so did thousands of Turks who had inhabited the Bulgarian lands over periods of different duration. Our towns were vacated with exception by the Turkish upper crust: big traders and land-owners. Those who did not followed the troops immediately took some time before leaving eventually. Yet, a considerable number of Turks remained in North-eastern and South-eastern Bulgaria. At first during the early decades of Bulgarian government, they created some turmoil, not without the help of agitators and agents provocateur who came from turkey. Part of the population that had left spontaneously returned very soon (1878-1880) at the suggestion, most probably, of the Turkish government (Stoyanov, I, 8 ff.).

We must recall that despite the fresh memory of the mass slaughter in 1876 and during the Liberation war the Bulgarians did not seek revenge. Individual acts of violence over Turks only confirm the rule; they were punished by the Bulgarian authorities. The latter, however persecuted legitimately all manifestations of dissent among the Turkish



population that were instigated from the outside. A regular source of anti-Turkish moods in Bulgaria was the Macedonian issue which sprang up after the Berlin Congress which left Macedonia within the confines of the Empire. Public opinion was influenced in exactly the opposite direction by the Serbian-Bulgarian War of 1885 and the unification of Bulgaria, when Turkey, despite its suzerainty over Eastern Rumelia authorizing it to occupy that province if eventual changes in its vassal status occurred, did not interfere with force. This gesture and the participation of Bulgarian Turks as volunteers in the War changed the attitude of Bulgarian society to what, until recently, had been traditional enemy. The efforts of Stambolov's government to improve our official relations with Turkey contributed to the mitigation of the centuries-old conflict between Muslims and Christians without, however, eradicating the historical memory which sparked off with fresh vigour, whenever a word came of Turkish punitive actions in Macedonia.

This, in brief, is the political background against which the relations between Bulgarians and Turks developed in liberated Bulgaria. A new conception of the opposition "we-them" was being shaped, an already nuanced stereotype about the other in its capacity of a subject of the Bulgarian state. These nuances could not help being dependent on the foreign and domestic political events and processes. Anyway, the "Turkish issue" was always part of that policy. The fact is that a significant percentage of Muslim population (Turks, Tatars, Pomaks) still lives within our boundaries. This population that could be and often is manipulated from outside and this dictates the need to adopt a special policy towards it.

Regrettably, we must admit that a strategy often is lacking. Pursuing a single goal, the solution of "the Turkish problem", this policy often resorted to contradicting means of achieving this goal. Partially, this could be explained by the dynamics of the political development in the Balkans which was most stormy in our country. At each turn in this development, the objective need arouse of a change in the attitude to the Bulgarian Turks who, in turn, changed their behaviour accordingly. Quite often, however, the changes in the treatment of the issue were purely voluntaristic, not keeping account of the objective regularities and only being a mouthpiece of the ideas and aspirations of the ruling circles. In order to engage the co-operation of the public in this change in policies towards the

local Turks and Muslims, the respective government hurls into action the propaganda machine, i.e. it manipulates the public mind. The main lever in this propaganda was the revival of the memory, and then guising it in a new attire. It is a European rather than a Balkan feature to adduce historical arguments, when substantiating whatever claims towards “the other”. This is probably, because the history of Europe is characterized by a great mobility so that lessons could be drawn from it to fit one’s current interests. (A glaring example: the extreme pan-Turkists point to the River Danube as being “the natural” frontier of present-day Turkey, because it had not changed in general outline between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century).

The problem of the number of Muslim population in Bulgaria after the Liberation was not solved although it is another point of reference in the bilateral propaganda. The Turkish sources naturally inflate the number, whereas the Bulgarian ones, again naturally, underestimate it (Stoyanov, I, 2 ff.). It is worth noting that, recently, not only Turkey, but also a number of European states accept a larger number than the real one. Obviously, new interests have emerged on the international political scene. In response, the modern Bulgarian historical science is doing its best to establish the exact numbers since the Liberation of 1878, comparing various sources and data. The product of these conscientious efforts is a changing picture, owing to emigration and return migration, or of other demographic factors which were either favourable or unfavourable for the Turkish communities (Stoyanov, I, 3 ff.). The difficulty in these calculations also stems from the fact that the very population whose numbers are being taken often identifies itself according to ad hoc interests. The Gypsies set themselves up once as Turks, another time as Bulgarians, the Pomaks too. Recently, a considerable percentage of Turks prefers to keep their Christian names, so as to have easier access to third countries. Probably, the most rational thing to do would be to take out the column “nationality” as it is practiced in most advanced countries, where nationality origin is replaced by “subject of”. It is absurd at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to be interested in “the ethnic” affiliation of people, when even back in the Middle Ages only “subject of” mattered.

The ebbs and tides in the politics of the Bulgarian governments with respect to the domestic Turks were justified, in a propaganda sense, by two arguments: a historical

and a demographic one. There was one more, external, argument: the current relations between Bulgaria and Turkey, and the emigration agreements they had reached or failed to reach.

The above-said is best illustrated by the attitude of the Bulgarians to the remaining Turkish population in this country. Immediately after the Liberation, Turkish MPs voted in the Constituent Assembly (Parliament) for the Turnovo Constitution. The Turkish traditions were preserved in the institutional structure of the Municipality of Bulgaria through the Muslim spiritual courts. The twelve Muslim muftis were paid by the state, and the Turkish population enjoyed religious and cultural autonomy (Stoyanov, I, 10 ff.). This produced serious results, especially if compared to the same phenomenon in Turkey, still ruled by the Sultan in those days. Thus after the Liberation until 1934 (the end of Parliamentary democracy), some 80 Turkish newspapers and magazines were published with various duration. A law was passed in 1885 which gave the Turks educational autonomy on the basis of which they preserved the 1300 schools (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.), where teaching was done in Turkish and a number of Muslim educational organizations were founded. On several occasions, the Bulgarian state increased the subsidies for enhancing the literacy of the Turks. However, the results did not amount to much. First, because most of the schools were mainly theological, therefore their graduates could not compete with those of the Bulgarian educational establishments. Second, due to the marked lack of interest in education characteristic of the Muslim world in general (Stoyanov, I, 10 ff.). And what mattered most: The Turks who remained in Bulgaria kept their landed estates. The situation was different with regard to those who followed the Ottoman troops and afterwards returned claiming their houses which were already occupied by Bulgarian peasants. The difficulties encountered by these repatriated Turks, forced them to leave for Turkey and make their permanent homes there. (Yet, the richest land-owner in Pleven district up until the end of the Second World War, was the Turk Chakir, whose son recently brought from Istanbul a minister's niece as a bride. At the marriage ceremony he was dressed in tuxedo – his own memento from the evacuation.)

Naturally, we must not consider the relationships between the Bulgarians and the remaining Turks as being idyllic. The good relations were violated for various reasons and

on various occasions. They were exacerbated by the Balkan war, when our troops occupied Eastern Thrace for a short time. A small chunk of it remained Bulgarian even after the war – Kurdjali and Momchilgrad regions. As a result of Turkish reprisals and bloodshed almost all Bulgarians were forced to leave Eastern Thrace. The Turks who lived on this side of the new frontier were likewise subject to violence. The enthusiasm at our military successes cooled down by the peace treaty that was signed. The treaty revived smouldering historical memories which found expression in anti-Turkish moods. The minority status, however, did not undergo any changes. What is more, under the agrarian government, Bulgaria which was defeated in war for the second time did its best to improve the life of minorities, in the hope that its neighboring countries, where large Bulgarian minorities lived by virtue of the treaties, would reciprocate. These policies changed abruptly after the coup of July 9<sup>th</sup> in 1923. The number of Turkish schools was cut down, the Turks' autonomy was curtailed and some Turkish leftist papers were suspended. All in all, prior to the Second World War, sixty papers were published in Turkish, and Turkish deputies sat in the national Assembly.

When outlining the relations between Bulgarians and Turks in this country, an element which gave a new turn to these relations is usually slighted: the Kemalist revolution followed by a laicization of the official Turkish ideology. This tremendous change, typical of a traditionally Islamic state, had a two-way reflection on the mentality of the Bulgarian Turks. On one hand, here in Bulgarian where Ataturk's drastic measures to eradicate Muslim fanaticism, superstition, and backwardness were not in force, the local Turkish population continued to live as before, that according to their religious tradition. Conducive to this were also the returning immigrants from Turkey who did not want to participate in the revolutionary changes taking place there (Gareva, Appendix No 24). Thus, for instance, parts of the local Turkish newspapers continued to use the Arabic, not the Latin alphabet. Education in the Turkish schools remained strictly religious and foremost among them was Nyuvab, the higher educational establishment training teachers for these schools.

On the other hand, Kemalism, which had a militant ideology as part of the national revolution substituted the notion "Turk" for the old "Muslim" and brought about rapidly nationalism, an inevitable consequence of the success of the national revolutions. Another

ideational consequence was the transformation of pan-Islamism into pan-Turkism, a common awareness of the Turkic-speaking peoples as an entity irrespective of their individual states. The Bulgarian Turks, especially the more active among them, had no doubt about being influenced by that ideology. Naturally, it was to be expected that the influence would come, ever more tangibly, from neighboring Turkey, which was interested in having a fifth column in Bulgaria. The truth is that, despite their closer dependence on religion as compared to the people of Turkey, the local Muslims have, in the course of several generations, identified themselves as Turks and, therefore, part of the Turkish nation. Even though somewhat belated the process has been completed before our very eyes.

Only the Pomaks in Bulgaria identify themselves as Muslims today; this last attribute is no longer valid for the Turks. The Gypsies and the Tatars too try to pass themselves off as Muslims, attracted by the prestige of a numerous and strong neighboring nation. Affiliation to it invokes in the minorities in Bulgaria a feeling of security, a definite hope and even feeds a vague revanchism inspired by not so distant historical memories. The extreme pan-Turkish propaganda that the Danube is Turkey's natural boundary finds propitious soil in Bulgaria. In 1926 they formed an all-national union *Turan* which spread the idea of pan-Turkism, as well as of Kemalism in Bulgaria (Appendix No 28; Stoyanov, I, 24 f.). It was banned after May 19<sup>th</sup> in 1934 (Appendix No 26, 27). It split into clandestine organizations and part of it turned in to an educational society (a reactionary one) which in the course of eleven years published the *Medienet* newspaper in the Arabic script again for that same population. Aware of the danger of the spread of pan-Turkism in our country, the Bulgarian government staked on the prestige of the anti-Kemalist Muslim clergy and supported the anti-laic moods among the Turks.

The formation of a Turkish nation with its own ideology and national strategy called for the need for Bulgaria to seek its own counter-strategy. In order to understand the objective and non-objective reasons for it expressed in various multi-directional measures spanning a period from the Balkan wars up until 1989, we must take into consideration the general condition of the Bulgarian nation over this eventful period. In this period there were two national catastrophes, devastating war reparations were paid, social clashes,

coups d'état, toppling of parliamentary democracy, a third national catastrophe, the country's joining the Soviet bloc. These were the major vicissitudes accompanied in a chain reaction by negative processes in the life of society.

The demographic factor also played a role in shaping the Bulgarian authorities' attitude towards the local Muslims. A nation with a small population (at the time of the Liberation, it numbered between 2.5 and 3 million, according to various sources), the Bulgarians sustained population losses on several occasions due to assimilation, emigration, wars, or hard living conditions. Bulgaria lost 350,000 able-bodied men on the battlefield alone and the nation gained nothing from this. Quite the contrary: huge, compact masses of Bulgarian minorities were left outside its boundaries and were subjected to severe assimilation by modern means and methods. Unlike the Christians who have from an early date introduced some birth control at least, the Muslims consider it their religious duty to procreate intensively. This introduced disproportions in the starting correlation between Bulgarians and Turks, tipping the balance at the initial stage to our disfavour, despite the frequent emigrations of Turks.

The second main argument when seeking to adopt measures against "the other", is our past. There is perhaps no other nation so utterly obsessed by historical knowledge. The Bulgarians' love of "history" is unheard of – the word is in inverted commas, because it designates a strict genre of reading matter: heroic and tragic, the same as mentioned in connection with "folkloric thinking".

We can hardly grasp the tremendously important role in shaping the image of "the other" played by education and above all, the teaching of national history. Unfortunately in both, at the elementary and secondary level, it is taught in isolation from the European and world historical processes that is without whatever comparison, neither vertical nor horizontal, which prevents pupils from forming a clear idea about the place, achievements, and setbacks of the Bulgarian state in the past. This is natural to some extent: everybody should be familiar with their own history, giving it pre-eminence to the other branches of that science. However it creates a serious aberration in the historical thinking of the Bulgarian and a certain dangerous disproportion.

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