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The Phenomenon of national identity in the Bulgarian Revival Literature

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summary

There are events and facts in the history of the nations that impact their formation and determine their future in one way or another. The Bulgarian history is full of events related both to progress as well as to stagnation and decay of the Bulgarian nation. In spite of all vicissitudes of fortune our nation has never lost its identity as a whole. The various factors which helped its preservation are dealt with in the following article.

There are events and facts in the history of the nations that impact their formation and determine their future in one way or another. The Bulgarian history is full of events related both to progress as well as to stagnation and decay of the Bulgarian nation. In spite of all vicissitudes of fortune our nation has never lost its identity as a whole. Various factors helped for its preservation.

A leading role for the establishment of the national identity plays the creation of the writing and the introduction of the spoken language to the liturgy. "The Bulgarian people, writes prof. Atanassov, are proud of many historic events of great renown and one of the greatest is the creation of the Slavonic writing."¹ The proverbial striving of the Bulgarians toward education and culture, demonstrated even in the Middle Ages, goes through the important work of Kiril and Metodiy and finds its logical conclusion in the literature of the Revival's leaders. The Revival is time not only for economic, but also for cultural progress, time to give new meaning to the moral values. Even a bit late the Revival bares the characteristic strive for national differentiation with increasing national identification.

It is quite hard to determine the borders between public identity and national identity. The changes in the public identity are in peoples' thoughts, feelings and actions and thus they have an individual character. In certain conditions these changes could become common for a larger group until they reach the uppermost part of the society.

The issue of the national identity is of a great importance for every nation. It arises at a certain point in the social development. For the Bulgarians these processes could be observed during the decay of feudal and the development of bourgeois

¹ Atanassov, J., History of the National Education, S., 1985, p. 155

relations. In general the national identity is a complex of various concepts for your own people and country. The national identity includes an evaluation of the achievements in the field of culture, of the past and the present, of the national interests and etc.² The national identity is related to the distinct awareness that you belong to a particular nation. That involves a certain disposition of the individual, based on the abilities of the people in every field of the social life. Therefore the structure of the national identity includes: “the awareness of belonging to a definite ethnic community, devotion and appreciation of the national values: land, language, culture and etc.; patriotism as a conscious and active feeling; awareness of a national-state community and sense of fraternity in the fight against feudalism and national liberation.”³

At a certain point of its development, the national identity turned into a powerful factor for consolidation of the nation. The origin and formation of the national identity is complex and controversial. This process goes through different states of intensity. With the increasing social differentiation in our country during XVIII and the beginning of XIX century the formation of the national identity represents the social and economic interests of the emerging national bourgeois. That explains their significant efforts for strengthening the national identity among the common people. When the process of formation and recognition of the national identity is complete, then the nation is fully set up.

The process of formation of the national identity went through two lines – in depth and in width. The first is connected with the concept for national values and social problems, and suggests strengthening of the ethnic identity and understanding of the national interests. The second line – the national identity in width, suggests integration of more people from different social background to the national identity. Some very important factors for the formation of the national identity are the social and economic processes. This means that the issue of the national integrity should always be considered in the specific historic time.

In the works of our writers in the XVIII and the beginning of XIX century the issue of the national identity crystallizes and seeks “development vertically and horizontally”.⁴ The beginning is launched with the “Slav-Bulgarian History” of Paisiy. In the XVIII century, due to the social and economic changes in our country and many external factors, there is significant progress in the cultural life of the Bulgarian society. The existing during that time literary schools of Rila, Samokov, Kotel and other help for the formation of a new outlook towards the books and education. The Bulgarian writers, who come mainly from the common people, help in making the books accessible for a wider range of people. As a result of the educational ideas “the Bulgarian writer lives with increasing self-confidence and self-esteem of his/her work.”⁵ The increasing number of the church schools in the XVIII century as well as of the educated Bulgarians contributes for the formation of a national identity in the next century.

² The Bulgarian Nation during the Revival, S., 1980, BAS, p. 178

³ The Bulgarian Nation during the Revival, S., 1980, BAS, p. 179

⁴ Radkova, R., National Identification of the Bulgarian in the XVIII and the beginning of XIX century. The Bulgarian Nation during the Revival, S. 1980, BAS, p. 182

⁵ Angelov, B., Contemporaries of Paisiy, S. 1963, p. 13

The process of collaboration between the emerging Bulgarian bourgeois and the Greeks, including the acceptance of the Greek language, turns to be very dangerous for the formation of the national identity. Part of the Bourgeois collaborate with the Greeks not only in commerce, but started to pursue and be fascinated by the Greek education and culture. When the national identity is not formed it is not an overstating to say that it is dangerous, when part of the citizens renounce their national name. Some of the leaders of the national revival are reasonably concerned about this. In his "Slav-Bulgarian History" Paisiy speaks of the Bulgarian leaders from the Conversion to the XVIII century. His purpose is to give them as an example to be proud of and that way to strengthen the national identity of the Bulgarians. He purposefully describes the history of the independent Bulgarian church since its establishment and states, "...the Bulgarians are the first to call themselves kings, the first, who had patriarch, the first to baptize. Thus from the whole Slavonic family they were the most powerful and respected, the first Slavonic saints shone from the Bulgarian nation and language."⁶ His attacks toward the Greek Church authorities for the lack of care for the Bulgarian schools and education are not aimless. They are necessary in order to impose to the reader the necessity of a cultural freedom of our people.

This also supports the formation of the national identity at a religious base. This process is stimulated by the idea of a printed translation of the New Testament. In the XVIII and the beginning of XIX century the feeling of ethnical integrity is strengthening. The conscious of belonging to your people gives strengths to every person to overcome many difficulties. Not accidentally Paisiy Helendarsky stresses the fact that the Bulgarians have the right to be proud of the past and of the moral values of the Bulgarians from the past. All that could be of great help for the present and the future.

Some common psychological signs, specific only for the Bulgarians become even more obvious during the time when Paisiy writes his "Slav-Bulgarian History". The psychological characteristics of the people mentioned by Paisiy such as simple-heartedness, friendliness, hospitality, courage and etc. are presented as characteristic of all Bulgarians. This sustains the communal feeling of all Bulgarians and gives rise to the national identity. Outlining some of the qualities of the Bulgarians and other Slavs, Paisiy gives an apparent sign of his intentions.

The fact that the author refers to the Bulgarians in works as an entity with definite outlines is not fortuitous. "Be careful, you readers and listeners, Bulgarians, who love and know the well-known about your Bulgarian family..."⁷

In the notion of "people" Paisiy imposes ethnical and political meaning, and not only social and economic."⁸ At the same time words like "fatherland", "native land", "Bulgarian people" become common in the literature during that period. Although the word "fatherland" is used for a long time it with the meaning of a birthplace, gradually it receives a new meaning. As a result of different factors in the XVIII and the beginning of XIX century a process of intensification and reconsideration of the national feelings begins. The work of Paisiy has rendered a great contribution for

⁶ Helendarsky, P., Slav-Bulgarian History, p. 43

⁷ Helendarsky, P., Slav-Bulgarian History, p. 41

⁸ Todorov, G., The Historic View of Paisiy Helendarsky, S. 1968, p. 106

this. The feelings that he demonstrated towards his people and their values – language, customs, culture and etc. are very patriotic and transferable. Via arousing the pride in the Bulgarians of their historic past, Paisiy wants to awaken especially those, who because of different reasons have strayed from their people. His active patriotism turns to be a mobilizing factor among the Bulgarian Revival community. This is also obvious from the fact that the “Slav-Bulgarian History” is delivered from hand to hand and rewritten. Not by chance Sofroniy Vrachansky, who made the first duplicate of the “Slav-Bulgarian History” of Paisiy entrusted it for safekeeping with the words: “Damn it, who steals it” and that is an indisputable prove of the realized national feelings.

The patriotism of Paisiy and his contemporaries is closely connected with the national language. For them people and language, fight for liberty and language are inseparable. The connection between the national language and the national identity is clearly outlined with the words: “Bulgarians, do not be deceived, know your people and learn your language.”⁹ Giving for example the Greeks, who never renounced their language, Paisiy reveals the true face of those “who turn to foreign customs and foreign language, and do not care about their Bulgarian language.”¹⁰ The role of the language as a token of the nation is strengthened, when it is deliberately used in the fight for national freedom. In his attempt to ignite the feeling of love towards the native language, Paisiy points out its advantages. He uses as a main argument the liturgical books, translated for the first time in Bulgarian language by Kiril and Metodiy. Many writers during that period write at language, understandable for the common people and mainly this trend is a consequence of the transformation of the language into a mean for national identification. As Josef Bradata writes: “Could the common people understand psalm-books and canon reading? It is necessary that they have secular church and spoken language so that common people can understand.”¹¹ The “Nedelnik” of Sofroniy Vrachansky defends indisputably the right of the Bulgarians to have printed books on their own language. This book had a great influence upon the consciousness of our fellow-countrymen during that time.

In the XVIII and the beginning of XIX century the Bulgarian Revival’s intellectuals help the common people in realizing their ethnical identity. This happens not randomly and chaotically, but is a purposeful propaganda for the patriotic feelings. This process is closely connected with the attitude towards the cultural values and the native language in particular. Neofit Bozavely in “Slav-Bulgarian Directions” poses the issue of patriotism as well. In the preface he clearly and firmly implies that there should be respect and love toward parents, teachers and fatherland. The representatives of the new Bulgarian educational movement consider the role of the native language in the formation of the patriotic feelings. In addition to their requirements to open Bulgarian school with Bulgarian teachers in our country, the representatives of that movement underline the great role of the native language in the formation of the new Bulgarian. “And that is the Bulgarian with clear Bulgarian consciousness, ready to join the fight for cultural and political freedom of his people.

⁹ Helendarsky, P., Slav-Bulgarian History, p. 44

¹⁰ Helendarsky, P., Slav-Bulgarian History, p. 44

¹¹ Angelov, B., Contemporaries of Paisiy, part I, p. 8

People like Paisiy Helendarsky, Peter Beron, Neofit Rilsky, dr. Ivan Seliminsky and other become models and stimulators for the development of these feelings.”¹²

Together with the new attitude towards the language a respect to the historic past is developed. The feeling of pride of the historic past is the base of the historic identity, which is a part of the national identity. And again Paisiy is the first to use the historic past as an important factor for the future of the Bulgarians. The way the author presents the moments of success of the Bulgarians in his “Slav-Bulgarian History”, serves directly for the formation of the national identity. The implicit description of the past greatness and aims for cultural, political and spiritual identification and activation of the national identity formation process. If Paisiy purposefully uses the historic past to waken the pride of the Bulgarians, Sofroniy Vrachnisky depicts the sorrowful doom of the Bulgarians under the ottoman slavery. The purpose though is the same – to make the common people aware, to activate them. The intellectuals strive to point out the positive qualities of the people, but at the same time another trend is born. It aims to deride the unwillingness of those Bulgarians, who do not care for the cultural development of our nation, but pursue only their own material interests. Ivan Seliminsky is particularly sharp in his criticisms towards the Bulgarians abroad, who work for the prosperity of other people rather than “... to stand, each one with what he can and revenge ... the barbarians.”¹³ Again the Greek patriotism is used for comparison, as it makes people think “how to make the fatherland more famous...”¹⁴

A peculiarity could be noted in the strong interest towards the Bulgaria history and historic monuments. There is a process of evolution from common Balkan historic identity to specific Bulgarian identity. In that sense the “Slav-Bulgarian History” is one of the few historic works “addressed directly to the people as a program for its national identification.”¹⁵ More often the new Bulgarian intellectuals start to use facts that could persuade the Bulgarians in their right of independent national church and free country. The mistakes for the past are not concealed, to the contrary. They are revealed as an example to be avoided in the future. “Let us, writes Ivan Seliminsky, use the mistakes of our predecessors. Let the many failures in the past be as wise lessons for the future.”¹⁶

The prefaces of the printed books are successfully used to encourage patriotism and to support the national identity. The forms of address like “dear compatriots” and “dear sons of the country”, and etc. infuse a powerful wave of patriotism into the readers’ minds. All of this supports the process of personal, civic and political awareness of the people. The Bulgarian school is among the rich palette of means, used by the intellectuals to encourage the process of national identification. The use of the spoken Bulgarian language in the teaching turns the Bulgarian school into a factor with great impact. The purpose of the new Bulgarian school is not simply to educate people, but mainly to make them socially engaged and aware, ready for cultural and political changes. On that occasion dr. Ivan Seliminsky writes to his

¹² Radkova, R., The Bulgarian Intellectuals during the Revival, S. 1986, p. 315

¹³ Library, Dr. Ivan Seliminsky, book 3, 1905, p. 25

¹⁴ Library, Dr. Ivan Seliminsky, book 3, 1905, p. 26

¹⁵ Radkova, R., The Bulgarian Intellectuals during the Revival, S. 1986, p. 318

¹⁶ Library, Dr. Ivan Seliminsky, book 3, 1905, p. 24

classmate Peter Ioanidy: “You should keep in mind, my friend Peter, that we are in such position that you need to be not only a teacher but also a patriot... to unite the youths with the aim to create diligent and educated people, who will manage the country.”¹⁷

The periodical press has great contribution to the encouragement of the self-confidence of the Bulgarians and their national identity. Even during its short existence (about two years) the periodical press renders a significant contribution for the formation of the positive attitude towards the national problems, for the future of our people. The article “Duties for the fatherland” in book 18 implies to the readers that the love towards the fatherland “is not a simple case” of adherence and bare declaration of the feelings. “The true lover of the fatherland” should work “thankfully for the welfare of the people and the country, to work for the prosperity, disregarding his personal interests.”¹⁸ The same appeal for the patriotic actions could be found in the “Bulgarian Eagle” and “Istanbul newspaper” as its successor. The same tone of the true patriot could be felt in the words of Neofit Rilsky: “...we are obliged to encourage, to persuade, to advise with all our might, when it is necessary, as well as to reveal the truth until we wake the respect into the soul of those who are not patriots.”¹⁹

The issue of formation and strengthening of the national identity of the Bulgarians during the Revival is closely connected with the liberation of the thought for historic doom of the non-educated and obedient. A significant place in the rich palette of ways and means for catalyzing the process of the national identification has the native language, the historic past and the school. Because of the fact that the fight is against foreign feudal enslaver, the ideas for education of the people in the native language, for Bulgarian national education, for independent church, for the formation of the moral values and strengthening of the national identity acquire a significant political importance.

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¹⁷ Library, Dr. Ivan Seliminsky, book 11, 1905, p. 46

¹⁸ Ljuboslovie Magazine, issue 18, 1846, p. 92

¹⁹ Dimitriev, Letter for the national Revival, issue 31, 1889, p.331-332