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WOMEN AND NATIONALISM: ON THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS OF THE BALKAN PENINSULA*

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I. THE ORIGINS OF THE STATES AND NATIONS OF THE BALKANS

Balkan-type nationalism is closely connected to the origins of the nations of the Balkan peninsula. There is a far greater variety of opinions as to the emergence of nations on the Balkan peninsula, the time of their establishment, and the factors influencing the formation of a sense of nation than can be discussed in detail here.¹ Of importance to our inquiry are the common characteristics in the emergence of the Balkan nations summarized by Mariana Jovevska² under the term "political nation." While the consolidation of the French, Spanish, and English nations took place within existing state boundaries and these state borders thus provided a vessel for the consolidation of a sense of nation — accompanied of course by various wars — the development of a sense of nation on the Balkan peninsula began under the foreign occupation of the Ottoman Empire and the Hapsburg monarchy and preceded the development of states and the establishment of state boundaries.

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1. See Andrej Pantev, *State for the Nation or Nation for the State?*, in 1-2 PANORAMA: SPISANIE ZA LITERATURA I HUMANISTIKA XIV, at 5-13 (1993); see also HUGH SETON-WATSON, *NACIJE I DRZAVE* 37-149 (1980).

2. Mariana Jovevska, *Zu einigen Aspekten des Nationon-problems auf dem Balkan*, in 3 TRADOVE NA VELIKOTARNOVSKI UNIVERSITET, Sv. Sv. KIRIL I METODII, pt. 27, at 131-33 (1992).

As a result of both the Ottoman Empire in the wake of the Russo-Turkish war, and of wars of national liberation, three things occurred: (1) Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, Rumania and Albania were founded in gradual succession as states, (2) a Macedonian liberation movement began, and (3) Bosnia dropped out of the Austro-Hungarian Empire — all in the course of the period from 1804 to 1918. The term "Balkanization," which was coined in the Twentieth Century to describe this constant splitting off of new states, derived from the identification of national liberation with the foundation of a new state. Within historical consciousness, this identity bears the primary danger that nationalism both aggravates and suspects in every minority: *the threat of territorial secession*.

A second peculiarity of national consolidation on the Balkan peninsula is the connection of national liberation struggles with progressive movements which, under the slogan "national revival" (*vazrajđane*), developed a historical self-conception of the nation. The second half of the Eighteenth Century was a time in which all of Europe developed an explicit historical consciousness. In Germany,³ the idea of a national literature and culture as the spiritual focal point of the nation developed parallel to the idea of a world citizenship and a common human destiny. Herder's writings, in which he outlined his thoughts on the philosophy of the history of mankind, created the foundation for a historical examination of literature, language, and the Bible in Germany. The rising European bourgeoisie propagated the ideas of a world citizenship and a world literature⁴ in which "an honorable role is reserved for us Germans."⁵

At the same time, prompted by the idea of historicity under the conditions of foreign domination, historical consciousness developed on the Balkan peninsula connected to nationality. From the Greeks to the Serbs, Bulgarians, and Rumanians, histories were written of each of these peoples which hovered between knowledge and speculation, between fact and faction, as did those of their European contemporaries. The histories of the various Balkan peoples, however, took as their object the histori-

3. Translator's note: Germany was not unified until 1871.

4. See WOERTERBUCH VON ADELUNG (1801) (in which "the individual is a citizen or free inhabitant of the world, the earth"); see also Campe (1811) (in which the individual is "regarded and treated as a citizen, a member of a single bourgeois society spread over the entire earth").

5. Goethe (1821), *Goethes Werke in zwölf Baenden*, in 11 SCHRIFTEN ZU KUNST UND LITERATUR 456-57 (1968).

cal roots of their own nationality and proudly drew up an archetype of national greatness which was then elevated to an exemplary model and purpose worth striving for. Each of these histories applies itself to that historical period which was the most glorious for its own people. In this way, the Enlightenment became a self-referencing past: antiquity and Byzantine history in Greece; Roman antiquity in Rumania;⁶ Illyrian antiquity⁷ in Albania;⁸ and in the Slavic countries, a golden Medieval period whose famous kings and large states represented a greatness to be regained.

Unlike the European Enlightenment, which focused on the image of the individual as a citizen, the focus in the Balkans was on the image of one's own nation where the individual, as a member of that greater community, is empowered through the national consciousness and is thereby raised above his status as an individual. Individual self-awareness was vastly increased by the consciousness of national identity and belonging. The individual attains a new status by belonging to a nation as a whole, just as individuals in the Middle Ages had through membership in the group of believers, of the righteous, etc. The individual was homomorphic with the whole — not a fraction of the whole, but its symbol.⁹

These nationally and historically conditioned special characteristics also led to the predominance of historical models in the emancipatory ideas of the Balkan peoples. These models were borrowed either from antiquity or the Middle Ages, giving the South Slavic "vazrajdanje" (national revival) its various past self-references, uniting within itself European Enlightenment as well as romantic features.

These historical preoccupations created the conditions for the development of an individual awareness of self within the national liberation struggle and the national consolidation that followed. At the same time, however, these preoccupations created

6. SAMUIL MIKU-KLEIN, *KURZER UEBERBLICK UEBER DIE GESCHICHTE DER RUMAENEN* (1805–1806).

7. Actually, other south-slavonic peoples claim the illyrical antique. See P. Nulakovskij, at 174–76 (1894); St. MIRKOVIC, *BIOGRAFIJA IV. KUKOLJEVICA-SAKCINSKAGO* (1861).

8. Letter circulated to all wealthy and educated orthodox Albanians, sent by Naum Vekilhadzi. According to: Petrag Pepo, Stojan Maslev. *Flete nga historia e marredhenieve migesore Bullgare-Shqiptare gjate shekullit te IX-te*. Buletini universiteti shtetitor te Tiranës. *Seria Shkencat Shoqerora*, 2, 1961, fq. 200–203.

9. See JURIJ LOTMAN, *KUNST ALS SPRACHE* 149 (1981).

the conditions for a nationalism to emerge whose projection of an idealized past into the future provided the tinder to ignite further wars. For in the process of inventing a lost Eden as the image of a future national paradise, they created a teleological history of the creation of nation and state which contained as well all of the necessary ingredients to take on a theological thrust. Individual consciousness was constituted as the awareness of self as a member of a nation which took upon itself state-building functions.

II. THE TELEOLOGICAL-THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF NATIONALISM

All nationalisms are constructed upon the foundation of a teleological salvation story. The salvationist causality of national evolution is directed toward an ultimate goal which, if not always clearly articulated or even consciously known, is nevertheless always present in latent form. The ideal of the pure nation, whose integrity is threatened by no national minority capable of splitting away, is a basic element of every nationalism. Citizens strive for the purity of their nation whether by means of xenophobia, antagonism toward minorities, or even the awarding of privileges which attempt to alienate rather than honor. Still, the particularities of each nationalistic movement are dependent upon its cultural-historical background. These forms of nationalism have survived to the present day — in a quite militant form in Serbia, introversively inverted in Bulgaria. The re-naming and emigration of the Bulgarian Turkish-Moslem population from 1986–1988 has the same basic nationalistic roots and presuppositions as the Bosnian-Serbian war in Yugoslavia: fear of the processes of national consolidation and state-building among a minority.

In his study of the East and the West in the European Middle Ages, Peter Mutaftschiev points out a very important characteristic of the East. In the East, or more exactly in its uncontested center, Byzantium, the Church was subordinated to the State. What Mutaftschiev characterizes as the Caesaro-papism of the East was utterly foreign to the papal Caesarism of the West.¹⁰ In Byzantium, the Church's role was to serve the secular power. The Church was, so to speak, "in the service of the

10. PETAR MUTAFCHIEV, *IZTOK I ZAPAD W EWROPEJSKOTO SREDNOWEKOWIE* 137 (1993).

state.”¹¹ The secular ruler, the Caesar, also passed judgement in ecclesiastical matters and could banish religious leaders. This scheme differs from the West, where the Pope ruled over the various states and attempted to exercise power over the individual rulers. This primacy of the secular state power over all spiritual and cultural matters in the orthodox religion and the Balkan state assigned religion to a subordinate role. In the course of the national liberation and consolidation struggles, however, nationalism appropriated the role of religion, becoming a sort of state religion or supplementary religion, growing naturally out of the national liberation struggle.

The national liberation struggle generally took on religious form and, not coincidentally, clergymen very frequently took part in the liberation struggles. In fact, they were often leaders of resistance forces, like Deacon Wassil Levski in Bulgaria, Dostej Obradovic in Serbia, and Grigorius Dikeus-Papaflessas and the Episcopalian Patron Germanos in Greece. Thus, national consciousness took on a historical-theological orientation through its association with the movement for an independent Church in the Balkans, which developed in tandem with the national independence movements. Dependence upon the Greek-Orthodox Church had to be shaken off for reasons of national sovereignty, causing the struggle for independence against the Greek Church to take on ethnic and linguistic as well as religious motives. On the other hand, this theological orientation arose from the elevation of national feeling to a religion and its transcendence to a theological dimension. Death in the struggle for freedom promised redemption or salvation. A Bulgarian poet and resistance fighter wrote: “He who falls in the struggle for freedom does not die.” Immortality as a religious prerogative is transferred to death for the fatherland. Botev’s poetry is borne by a religious feeling which serves the god of freedom. His poem “My Prayer” is directed to a God who is located not “in Heaven,” but “in the soul” and helps the oppressed: “Support my arm, when the slave arises, that I may receive my death at the height of battle.”

In this way, ethnic and national self-determination, with various shifts in emphasis in the different Balkan countries, played the primary and decisive role in the consolidation of the nations and fused with the problems of language and religion. The lines

11. *Id.* at 134.

of the struggle for religious emancipation were drawn against the Greek Orthodox Church as well as the Ottoman religion and served national consolidation. The process of linguistic self-awareness in the individual nations also led to ever further splits. The development of a Macedonian language within one week of the passage of a party resolution provides a particularly succinct example.¹²

To summarize, it can be said that the tendencies toward ecclesiastical and linguistic consolidation in the Balkans were subordinated to a teleological-theological concept of nation and served the nation as a sort of state religion. They thus differed as much from the Catholic autocracy of Western Papism as from the monotheism of the Islamic states, whose much later development into nation-states can be attributed to the decisive role of religious principle — the laws of the Koran also being normative for the state. The resulting concept of nation(alism) has hardly changed in the Balkans in the Twentieth Century and, rather than being shaken by the two World Wars, was instead affirmed. Nor did the four and a half decades of proletarian internationalism hardly disturb the Balkans' historic nationalism because it continues to flourish and bear its fruits alongside proletariat internationalization in the form of naive, doe-eyed patriotism. In the language of nationalism virtually nothing has changed in the past 150 years. Beginning in nursery school, children are reared on the poems and stories of national pride that their great-grandparents sang in school.

III. THE ROLE ASSIGNED TO WOMEN IN THE NATIONALIST PROGRAM: CARING FOR THE MOTHER TONGUE AND SERVING THE FATHER LAND

Women, too, had to be assigned their preordained mission and integrated into this national-theological vision of the world. The women, whether as members of the women's movement or as individuals who had participated or were to participate in the struggle for national emancipation, received their role assignments in the nationalist program. Given the invariability of the concept of the nation, the enlightened-patriarchal image of woman which developed in the first half of the Nineteenth Century hardly changed in the 150 years that followed despite certain

12. Ivan Kocev & Ivan Alexandrov, *Protokolle zur Erfindung der makedonischen Sprache*, in 10 DIE SLAVISCHEN SPRACHEN 5-26 (1992).

modifications. This is illustrated in my article on Women in Bulgarian Politics of the 1970s and 1980s.¹³ In the following, I will discuss the first historical classification of women within the nationalist program and then describe the typological example of the mother image as the paradigm of a cultural type.

A. *The Historical Classification of Women Within the Bulgarian Nationalist Program*

The origin and development of women's organizations in Bulgaria took place under the aegis of the national resistance and consolidation movement and thus served national interests of a patriarchal character. The enlightenment figures Petko Ratschov Slavejkov and Ljuben Karavelov were the first to consider and express opinions regarding the education of Bulgarian women. Both were poets who expressed their normative assignment of gender roles in their essays and contributions to newspapers and journals.

Against the background of the necessity of a national self-acknowledgment of the Bulgarian people, the two authors realized the importance of drawing women into the national resistance struggle and to that end, the necessity of educating and enlightening them. In a series of essays in the newspapers "Gajda" and "Makedonija," Slavejkov¹⁴ developed his egalitarian conception of the role of women: "A time will come when the woman will be equal to the man" and will take part in dealing with the political, state, economic, and educational problems of the nation.¹⁵ However, this equality remained underdeveloped and was elaborated primarily as a concept of utility for the state and nation, after all an "educated and well-brought-up" woman is of use to "the man, the family, the home region and the entire fatherland."¹⁶

Lyuben Karavelov developed his program for women in the pages of the newspaper "Independence" (Nezavisimost) and the

13. Penka Angelova, *Frauenbilder bilden Bilder, in ICH WILL MEINE TRAUER NICHT LEUGNEN UND NICHT MEINE HOFFNUG* 180-201 (1994) (discussing changes in cultural perception of East-German and Eastern-European women after 1989).

14. P. Slavejkov, On Women, "Gajda" N. 21-22 (April 1865); On the Education of Girls, "Gajda" (July 1866); Women in Relation to National Tradition, "Makedonija" (December 1867); A Word on Women, "Makedonija" (December 1868); On the Women Question, "Makedonija" (January 1870), among others.

15. MARGARITA TSCHOLAKOVA, *BALGARSKOTO JENSKO DVIJENIE PREZ VAZRAJ DANETO 1857-1878*, at 15 n.5 (1994).

16. *Id.* at 16 n.19.

journal "Knowledge" (Znanie), in which he bases the role of women in society on motherhood. In his draft program for resistance and freedom, he recognized that only an enlightened people can carry out a revolution and that women constituted a decisive part of the nation. Thus, Karavelov assigned women a decisive role as mothers and educators coming to the conclusion that "a slave will bear slaves" and that only liberated mothers can bear free individuals.¹⁷ The above illustrates that cheek by jowl with Slavejkov's egalitarian slant, the tendential reduction of women to their reproductive capacity and their maternal role was present from the outset. These progressive or enlightenment ideas display a "supplementary emancipatory" character. They bear witness to the insight on the part of enlightened men who — after centuries of the oppression of women — gradually came to the conclusion that women constituted an important part of the nation, but simultaneously assigned to them the role they were to play as mothers and educators of the nation. Woman's education having become unavoidable in any case, her role is now reduced to raising and recruiting the nation. Because the national program demands free individuals, woman must accept her fate as its child-bearer and educator. The term "free mothers" describes a national rather than individual, and certainly not female, liberty. It must also be remembered that the national, as well as every nationalist program, demands the subordination of the individual to the idea of the nation (in this case it also identifies itself with religious tendencies). However, the subordination of woman is of the second degree, resulting from her reduction to the above named functions, for she is to stand not only in the service of the nation but also the "family, society, and entire father/land."

The women who founded the first women's organizations identified with the traditional patriarchal role assigned to them. The names of these organizations are themselves telling. Of a total of 61 organizations, eight are charities, one of which was named "Bulgarian Mothers" (Gjurgevo), another "Compassion" (Veliko Turnovo), a third "Philanthropic Women's Committee," and five had the term "Charity" in their names. Eight were organizations for girls, and out of the other 45, one quarter have names referring to mothers: "Motherlove" (Gabrovo, Plovdiv, Razgrad and Wraca), "Mother" (Sofia and Karnobat), "Well-

17. *Id.* at 15 n.6.

Raised Mother" (Jambol), and "Mother-Service" (Sliven). Eight more organizations were virtue oriented: "Virtuous Society" (Lom), "Virtue" (Eski Djumja and Lovetsch), "Constancy" (Lovetsch), "Housekeeper" (Kalofer), "Love of the Fatherland" (Schumen), "Love of Knowledge" (Nevrokop), and "Love of Labor" (Bebrovo).

B. *The Mother Image as the Paradigm of a Cultural Type*

Images of women who work toward and serve the national idea arose from the Bulgarian undertow of maternalism. The image of Mother Tonka can be seen as a paradigm of the cultural type. From Rustschuk (Rousse), a city on the Danube, she raised her seven children — five sons and two daughters — as fighters for national liberation and sent them into the struggle against foreign domination. She also played a role in founding illegal organizations and fighting units, and organized weapons imports together with her two daughters and her oldest son. Not even the death of two of her sons was enough to keep her from continuing her activities and helping the resistance fighters. Having become a legend, she has exercised a formative influence on the maternal image in Bulgarian art and literature for over a century, as well as on the national education of generations. There are two recollections of this woman in literary memoirs — one written by her son Nikola Obretenov and the other by her son-in-law Sachari Stojanov. Her image has become the model for the national education of generations of the heroic Bulgarian mother (mother of heroes/balgarska majka junaschka), who is supposed to raise her sons as warriors and be prepared to sacrifice them for the national interest. Other maternal or benevolent images from other Balkan countries also fit within this paradigm, for example, the famous Bubolina, who took part in the Greek uprising after 1821, was the owner of three ships and also personally participated in the revolt.

Throughout history, the mother image has been reduced to the following functions under varying social and political conditions:

First, the role of the mother in reproducing and recruiting the nation. Associated with this aspect is the prohibition of abortion in periods of crisis as well as antagonism toward minorities who "threaten to overwhelm" the nation by reproducing in greater numbers.

Second, the role of the mother of soldiers and educator of the nation's future soldiers. As a result of mandatory military service, this image concerned all mothers.

Just how insignificant this role can become in nationalist discourse and how other political factors can displace mothers is illustrated by an example from the beginning of this century in Croatia where three sons of one mother found their national identities in three different nations: when a young man, Mehmed Spaho chose a Serbian identity, however, he later changed his mind and in 1919 founded the Yugoslav Moslem Organization (JuMO), which is both anti-Serbian and anti-Croatian; his brother, Fehim Spaho, chose a Croatian identity and became Reys ul ulem, the Chief Mufti of Bosnia; and the third brother, Mustafa Spaho, claimed Serbian identity.

C. *Patriarchal National Self-Awareness as an Anachronistic Linguistics Game*

The maternal image projected as the basic experience in language and literature can be described in the briefest of formulations: Mother Tongue vs. Father Land. The home of the mother is the language and that of the father is the land and everything which can be built upon it. Property belongs to the father, he is the owner, to the mother belongs the ordering power of language.

A well known children's song by Ran Bossilekk goes:
 But tell me, cloud, white and sweet
 Where do you come from, what have you seen
 Have you seen my father's house
 and heard my mother tell stories

The "topos" of the father is land, house, property; that of the mother is the "u-topos" of language, story-telling. A popular poem from the beginning of this century by Dimco Debeljanov, celebrated as the poet of filial love and before whose birthplace stands a memorial to his mother, reads:

Returning to my Father's House
 The evening piously fall into dusk
 And silent bosom silent night opens itself
 To receive sorrow and grief
 Mother meets you at the threshold

A brief glance at the Bulgarian literature that has earned the title "classical" in the international sense and has been adopted into the canon of texts read in public schools shows how property versus the ordering principle or ordering power of language have

been distributed between gender polarities. The novel "Gerazite" by Elin Pelin begins:

The richest man in the village was Jordan Geraka. His large white house, in which the many members of his family lived, held a place of honor on the village square Old Jordan was the head, Grandma Marga, the soul of the house Grandma Marga was the unchallenged mistress of the house When she died unexpectedly in the spring, the strict and benevolent spirit which had been able to keep everything in order disappeared from the house of the Gerazite's with her.

The same holds for the novel "Jeleznijat svetilnik," the first book in Dimiter Talev's tetralogy. Although the central figure of the novel, Sultana, is described as the absolute authority in her elderly father's house, the house is always referred to with her father's name. When she later marries, the house is given her husband's name in the subsequent narrative, despite the fact that she is portrayed as the stronger of the two, the soul, spirit, and ordering principle of the house and the matronly authority over family matters.

The maternal image plays a decisive role in Bulgarian literature addressing social and national problems. In crisis situations, the mother is always called upon for help and advice. The image of the mother is an eternal refuge in language and space. Appeals to the mother, "majko," "male" (vocative form), continually appear in poetry as the verbal incantation against evil and misfortune. But this refuge of order and salvation always remains in the verbal realm, order is conjured up and striven for in and through language. But even this freedom in language is only an illusion, it is limited by and rests upon the approval of the patriarchy and stands in its service, as illustrated by the party resolution on the existence of the Macedonian language. Thus, the mother remains only the custodian of language and the house, locus of patriarchal domination, and her freedom remains self-limited. Patriarchal property belongs to the man, the woman can only administer it and invest it with a soul. The functions of the patriarchy are placed in the hands of the mother as the administrator of this little world, while the task of making decisions regarding the larger world falls to the man, even if the entrance to this larger world is the tavern, in which, as the Bulgarian proverb states "politics are settled."

The "honorable" role assigned to women in this vision of the world — guardian of the house and the traditional national values — the keeper of order, is an image which has lost none of its

fascination to men and which continues to thrive in the Twentieth Century.

IV. DIGRESSION: ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF A COMMON EUROPEAN HOUSE

A new European house is in the process of being built. It represents the yearnings of all of the former socialist, so-called reform countries which felt cut off from the European tradition yet continually endeavored to emulate it, because it meant and still means prosperity, property, and power. Europe itself appears to be in the process of reform and is flowing in baroque abundance into the symbolic shape of the patriarchal household, equipped with many floors, with front and back courtyards, and all the accompanying outbuildings. Among the many disagreements over the distribution of the grand rooms of this magnificent building is the nationalist squabble with the theory that nations have outlived their usefulness, and the increasingly popular advantages of regionalism.

Many Europeans see a "dreadful combination of databank and village gossip, world center and backwater,"¹⁸ a monopolization of power and provincialization of the spirit. The so-called reform countries, however, will not be admitted to this reform, not even to the service quarters, which have already been taken over by the "guest workers." The only opportunity left to them is to receive, according to their rank, admission and assignment as the court servants and stablehands. The great struggle of the Balkan nations and other crisis areas in Eurasia will be fought over this ranking — over the "path to Europe" which will allow the reform countries to take up advantageous positions of servitude.

These two trends are seemingly diametrically opposed — the gradual disappearance of borders within Europe and the erection of new borders and nationalisms in Eastern Europe. In fact, both flow in the same direction: the centralization and hegemony of a single super-power on one side and a struggle for power over the crumbs in the back-courtyard on the other. The nationalist struggle once again arises out of a sense of inferiority — having lost "history" and never having achieved prosperity — into which these nations have been forced by the politics of

18. Karl-Markus Gauss, *Die Vernichtung Mitteleuropas*, in *PROSA-LAND ÖSTERREICH* 68 (1992).

power. And once again nationalism serves as a substitute for the qualities and quantities these nations lack, as it did at their origins. Instead of a plan, which like the Marshall Plan, would stimulate the economies of the reform countries, the master countries will take advantage of them as a potential source of cheap labor, and expect them to be grateful as well. Meanwhile, the costs of the embargo¹⁹ in the name of the security of the so-intensely-desired European house are being borne by the Balkan trading-partners themselves.

The only roles left for women — from the matronly house-keeper, administrator and custodian of the patriarchal rules, to the stable-maid or the “u-tropica” of language are closely guarded by the patriarchal hierarchy. The possibility of thinking otherwise remains in the “u-tropic” of a language which does not yet exist.

19. Translator's note: The author is referring to the embargo on Serbia and Iraq.

