

LITERATURE AND GEOPOLITICS. THREE MODERN BULGARIAN NOVELS

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The modern Bulgarian novel writing consists of significant geostrategic and geopolitical aspects which intuitively indicate current ideas about the place of Bulgaria in the world. The present article explores three of the most widely discussed modern novels, containing emblematical geopolitical conceptions of the modern Bulgarian civil society.

Key words: geopolitics and literature, nationalism, globalism.

Introduction

The Balkan literatures in the modern cultural and analytical discourse are either summarized as similar variations in a common field, or represent differentiated national territories, which are dissimilar both between themselves and from other European literatures. It is obvious that at that moment the Balkan studies cannot and do not want to overcome the nationalisms, which advertise the particular local points of view in the Balkans and draw their geopolitical and mental visions. One of the common characteristics of the Balkan cultural consciousness is that the generalized ideological identities like (socialism, democracy, NATO, Warsaw treaty, etc) disintegrated and grouped around the civilized identities.¹ As an extension of the idea of disintegration of mega ideologies is the fact, that in post totalitarian literatures, for example, the grotesque, demythologization, naturalism prominently made their way and through them the destruction of decade, even age-old cultures and historical myths is accomplished, in order to advertise a new geo strategy, influencing not only the way of thinking and self-promotion, but also the new territorial recast, which if intuitively implanted in literature, not before long becomes the historical state of affair.

The mainstays of Bulgarian literature are the long stories of the national ideologies, of communist ideologies and the social plots dealing with different utopias. In short: till recently existentialism was an opportunity through which small and marginal literatures protected themselves from the unknown. It is their own way to get involved in the great culture trend of the world cultural languages. In the last 25 years, canonical works of art exploit these stories, while shattering their original essentiality and turn them into a new political and existential strategy, necessitating new identities of the modern nationalism. In one of the popular novels – “Summit” by Milen Ruskov –

¹ See the thesis of S. Huntington, according to whom the Balkans start to balkanize again, now on religious basis – in: *Сблъсъкът на цивилизациите и преобразуването на световния ред*, С., 1999, p.177, translated from English. R.Radeva

the national story of the 19th century about Bulgaria liberation is used. This story, by the way, is still alive in its heroic nature and detestation to the Turks. The historic trauma is so deep that it is turned into an educational model even today. “Summit” is the opposite of the heroic, the pathetic mythology of suffering, of the historic high of national struggle for liberty. Ignoring all other meanings of the novel, we will focus on geographical space, embedded in the philosophy of nationalism. This space is turned into a geopolitical vision of the Bulgarian nationalism in 19 c. The image of “liberated Bulgaria” and its territory is one of the most unidentified categories in “Summit”.

The novel is the first conceptual blocking² of the national mythologies in Bulgarian postmodern literature. Restoring the revival national and liberation philosophy, the novel not only makes a parody of its pathos, but also neglects the event-descriptive, romantic implications, as it turns the nationalism to the naivety of illiteracy, to “the internal use” of great historical trends, spread on the Balkans. The “Great Deed” and its equivalents “the Great Home land”, “liberty”, “Revolution” are so primitively imaginative, that the attributes of the ethnic nationalism present at that time— blood and land, have no real outlines. The content-free Bulgaria” comprises of all kinds of Balkan ethnos, the mixture of which is consistent a priori. One can find the unfamiliar and imitative models from France, England, Germany, Europe filled with grotesque admiration for different utopias. In the literary 19th century ethnic nationalism Bulgaria is neither a country, nor a dream with clear territorial boundaries, or with distinct institutions. Neither local nor universal dimensions of nationalism are clear. One of the heroes (the famous national revival revolutionary Dimitar Obsti) who took part in different European revolutions, is “common to all people”³, where the universal for “ all people” are the ethnic conflicts, body strength and self confidence that this is heroic. In that model once again there are neither countries, nor territories, nor institutions. There are conflicts, machismo, and diluted revolutionary ideology, tinted with unclear nationalism. The slogan “A country is what we need!” is an emotional wish, in the boundaries of which the megalopolis of Istanbul is viewed as equal to the familiar and widely travelled over sub-Balkan towns of Kotel, Zheruna and Medven.”The Bulgarian” is the “Great Deed”, but it is also absolutely impossible to distinguish it from the Turkish, the Gypsies, the Greek and the familiar Balkan. “The European”, the “Parisian”, the “English”, etc. are heard over, but unexploited territories. It is obvious, that the country in the pre-liberation nationalism turns into personal imaginary, where everyone assigns their own boundaries, implying familiar geography. This tendency in 19c. is profoundly explored by Maria Todorova. ⁴The 19c national mythology, which is an educational model in the Bulgarian textbooks in history and literature even today, is provoked by the distinct idea for communal and institutional organization; and is

² For the need of emotional blocking of myths and mythologies in the modern post totalitarian literatures talks L. Voia in *‘История и мит в румънското съзнание’*, Изд. къща КХ, 2010, с. 388-391”, p.388-391, transl. by Stilian Deanov

³ In: Ruskov, M. *Възвишение*, Жанет 45, 2011, p.117

⁴ In: *(Пре)образуване на идентичността сред помаците в България* - in: Todorova, M. *България, Балканите, светът: идеи, процеси, събития*, transl. by Dimana Ilieva, Vanya Peneva, Maria Georgieva, Svetla Hristova, С., Просвета, 2010, p.208-244

presented as irrational spontaneity, characteristic of postmodern societies. The political boundaries of the revolution and the expected outcome are only ideas, but not an organized pragmatic ideology. Slippery area, on which the Bulgarian mentality continues to build up itself, and which mentally suggests impossibility for a complete social and geostrategic model, which can streamline the civil society in Bulgaria in the 21 st century.

The myth for "natural geography" – Bulgaria bordering on three seas is not fulfilled, too. The mountain transitions prevail, not only because the Balkan symbolizes the struggle, but because the practical sense perceives the routine, not the exceptional. Keeping close to this concept, we will explore the second novel – "The Palaveevi Sisters" by Alek Popov, the basis of which is the partisan myth, having its followers in Bulgaria even today. Nearly to the end of the book the geography is constricted to the mountains in the home country and the bilateral link between it and the USSR. The partisan movement uses the mountains as location for struggle and dwelling. The mountain is Bulgarian – both in the national and the partisan myth – it caters for the ideological purposes, which are functioning in the cultural consciousness in different epochs. The more heroic and nation-wide are the national and partisan myths, the more the two novels present it upside-down – as a triumph of the illiterate, the simpletons, for whom the heroic means their own imaginary importance. The faithfulness to the National revolution, to Communism is a grotesque adherence to imaginary utopias, which clash at the end, when touched by the historic realities. According to historic data the establishment of totalitarian regime in Bulgaria in 1944 found the Communist party with a bit over 18 000 members and the partisan movement, accounting for 9 000 people, including the supporters.⁵ The nationalisms, catering for the two myths, insist on showing them as uniquely Bulgarian; but the novels of Milen Ruskov and Alek Popov overturned them into postmodern desacralisation of manipulations, doubtful ambitions and hefty social complexes. The Bulgarian nationalisms have always been closer to Moscow and Istanbul, than the Central Europe and the North America.

London – as a civilizational area, where the mass ideologies are simply pathologies appears at the end of the book "The Palaveevi Sisters". But during communist times London appears to be only a luxurious space, where in an absurd way are implied the fanatic postulates of totalitarianism, which has turned man into automatic and self-destroying warrior; into vulgar and distorted image of heroic and the heroes.

The third novel - "Decay" by Vladimir Zarev, builds up its narrative again on popular myths for the Bulgarian consciousness - the ones about the social victims, wrongfully enriched and unjustly violated. The Bulgarian literature loves the topics about the rich and the poor. Time in this novel envisages post totalitarian public situation, known as the "Bulgarian transition" which generated a number of works in the modern literature. The boundaries of the country are the same as the ones in socialist times; there are no wars on its territory. But there is not a normal state, because the institutions are destroyed, discredited or corrupted. The traditional social myth lays down the

⁵ See. Minkova, P., Iv. Butovski , *Гешев остава жив след 9 септември 1944 г.*, С., 2014, p.93-94

sentimental ideas, that there are either retaliation or sympathy for the social victims. In “Decay” there is neither sympathy, nor mercy. The state boundaries are open, the routes outside and inside are with no problems, though this is not an export or import of culture. These are the routes for the criminal transactions, the routes of the Balkan underground, visits of doubtful European and Arab blokes. Dubious characters arrive from the ex-Soviet republics, merchants from Central Europe despise the new upstarts from the Eastern Europe; inside the state the moral and the traditional culture is rapidly destroyed; processes which are adverse to the democratic and civil societies go by; buying and controlling the free speech; criminalization of society, cultural disorientation, hefty geostrategic clash between Moscow and Washington. All kinds of nationalisms are totally loosened, the Bulgarians cannot find protection neither in the nationalisms, nor in globalism. The economic profiteering through criminal activities and redistribution of communist funds becomes an obsession; but this, too, is of short duration, because the lack of state organization validates the philosophy of the social jungle. The young Bulgarian citizens immigrate to the USA and Central Europe, with no intention of coming back. Ethnical dispersions turned into economic ones. The novel turns the wars in ex Yugoslavia into a background, mentions similar processes in Romania, but does not include in its geo vision the calm territories of Turkey and Greece at that time. Obviously, the pan Slavonic idea of the 90s in the XXth century is not topical. The Bulgarian geopolitics falls into the head-on collision between the USA and Russia, which finance the economy of the country in a way to ruin it. Identity disintegrates as a category. The ideological integrity of the novels “Summit” and “The Palaveevi Sisters” comes to a naught on the account of the geopolitical maze, provoked by the world wide geopolitical clashes.

Conclusion

Combined, the three popular modern Bulgarian novels demonstrate the clear trends in the civil and cultural consciousness in Bulgaria in the beginning of the XXI c; getting rid of vicious myths, but not losing identity; dread of geopolitical changes, leading to blurring of Bulgarian identity. In other words, modern Bulgaria has neither its internal philosophy, nor the strength and desire to take part in conflicts in the Balkans or anywhere else. If we cite the active thesis of Huntington, that wars on the line of the divide are local wars, because they are civilization clash of cultural identities,⁶ it means that the Bulgarian consciousness has already given up the myths about the “demonized” Turks, the “treacherous” Greeks, the “francophone” Romanians and the “macho” Serbs. The ex foreign minister Nikolay Mladenov made a number of official statements concerning the Balkan integration, in which Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania and Greece are included.⁷ In global aspect Bulgaria continues to look for steady national identities to lean on, and painfully lives through the theories about the collapse of different nationalisms. Having in mind that the Bulgarian literature is not popular outside its boundaries in particular, and consequently the novels, explored, have no particular active reception in other cultures, the thesis of Maria

⁶ In: Сблъсъкът на цивилизациите и преобразуването на световния ред, , С, 1999, transl. from Engl. R. Radeva

⁷ See, for example. България и Балканите – in: <http://nmladenov.wordpress.com/2012/09/05>

Todorova becomes apparent; if one stakes on distinctiveness, the price will be isolation and resorting to pettiness; if one sets stakes on universal language, the result will be a fall under cultural hegemony.⁸ Manifested by the means of literature, the modern Bulgarian situation is at a geopolitical crossroad, where the civil and cultural awareness is hesitant, both in the steady nationalism, and in globalism, too.

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⁸ Todorova, M. *Има ли руският ориентализъм руска душа* – in: *България, Балканите, светът: идеи, процеси, събития*, transl. by Dimana Ilieva, Vanya Peneva, Maria Georgieva, Svetla Hristova, С., Просвета, 2010, p. 103