

THE THINKABILITY OF SOMEONE/THE OTHER: EARLY EURASIANISM AND ITS BULGARIAN NEIGHBOURS (SUMMARY)¹

The **Introduction**, “On the Russian-Bulgarian misunderstanding, then and now”, outlines the parameters of lasting intercultural miscomprehension. This part of the investigation relies chiefly on Russian émigré sources from the 1920s – 1930s (used in order to explore past condition(s) of this phenomenon), as well as on a thorough analysis of a recent collection of essays and documents about the Russian émigrés in Bulgaria, issued in Sofia (in order to verify the phenomenon’s present condition).

The exploration of sources shows that the expressions of mutual interest, which have been laid out in print, become fixed in a couple of intertwined stereotypes which automatise shared misunderstanding; that is, the omission and/or underconceptualisation of some core self-identifications on each side. (For example, Bulgarian contestations and concretisations of Bulgarian ‘Slavdom’ have been frequently neglected by Russian recipients; and Russian messianism has been underconceptualised by Bulgarian recipients). While there are two possible reciprocal perspectives of the phenomenon, I am conceptualising the Russian-Bulgarian perspective. I focus on the Russian misconception/denial of Bulgarian self-identifications; a misconception invited and, so to say, sanctioned by Bulgarian self-representations addressing the Russian recipient. Through their conduct, the Bulgarian intellectual elite willingly played the role of an affirming audience in regards to the Russian messianic discourse, making no attempt to evade the stance that this discourse assigned to them – one of self-belittling/ self-neglecting gratitude.

This is the (pseudo)communicative framework which the Bulgarian elite, conceiving ‘Eurasianism’, had – and still have – the chance to break. In other words (and speaking from a self-reflective stance), this introduction investigates the intellectual and sketches the socio-psychological prerequisites from which this book and its viewpoints emerge.

In **Chapter One**, “Bulgaria and the Balkans in the works and anticipations of the early Eurasianists”, I investigate the Russian philosophical ability for dialogism in quite a difficult situation, both intellectual and existential. Russian philosophy had to intellectually overcome the consequences of the catastrophe of 1917-1920, and to survive in an alien cultural milieu (abroad).

In this study, I depart from the assumption that the inner logic of development of this philosophy should lead to what might be briefly designated as *a multipersonalistic ontology and ethics*. I set forth from the belief that, in general, cultural contact on an every-day level might encourage an intercultural dialogism, particularly on occasions when parties involved ‘know each other’, that is, they have an already established ‘platonic romance’ (and such was the Russian-Bulgarian case).

¹ The English version of this summary was kindly edited by Miss Lisa Le Fevre.

Early 'Eurasianism' succeeded in both of the former targets; and achieved neither of the latter.

N. Trubeckoj's book *Europe and the mankind* (1920) could be rendered as a draft of such ontology and ethics (multipersonalistic), not in itself but as a penetrating philosophy of culture. As I have tried to show, P. Savickij's article "Europe and Eurasia" (1921), which should be regarded as a book review as well, mutilates Trubeckoj's radicalism transposing it into the trait of traditional Russian messianism and thus constituting 'Eurasianism' as a philosophy of 'mono-personalism' (or of monological *collective* personalism, cf. *sobornost'* (соборность)). In this chapter I pay attention to G. Florovskij's implicit polemics with Trubeckoj's book, and to his involvement into an enterprise, which might be considered an attempt to manipulate the Bulgarian understanding for/about this book (The Slavonic Association in Bulgaria issued Florovskij's brochure *Dostoyevsky and Europe*, in Bulgarian) (1922) – in a period preceding Florovskij's withdrawal from the group of 'Eurasianists' (A detailed commentary on this work of Florovskij is made in the *second* chapter, see below). It might be said that Savickij's overt criticism of Trubeckoj's radicalism, and Florovskij's apology of Christian culture and civilisation, rendered by Florovskij as European and universal at the same time, turn to be quite interoperable in depth.

The 'Eurasianists' spoke of Bulgaria and the Balkans insofar as they spoke of nations and (their) cultures which are 1) 'small', 2) peripheral to Europe and 3) peripheral to Russia (but comprehended as *Russia-Eurasia*). However, it must be added that Bulgaria and the Balkans were a subject neither to a Slavophil nor to a pan-orthodox intention and reduction.

To put it otherwise, Bulgarians were not overtly included in the 'Eurasianist' version of the 'Russian idea', although they had been in its previous versions (the pan-slavist and the pan-orthodox). We suppose that this strongly affected the Bulgarian attitude to 'Eurasianism' – a specific combination of interest and aloofness.

The main point to us has not been what 'Eurasianists' said about Bulgaria and the Balkans but what they 'pre-saw', or pre-destined – implicitly and still-not-personalising, i.e. while they constructed their basic idea of world; their basic mental map. And the 'pre-seen' turns out to be far more substantial (both in quantity and in quality) than the 'said'.

'Eurasianism' (as observed chiefly in *Exodus to the East/ Izhod k Vostoku*, 1921, in the works already mentioned, and in G. Vernadskij's work *A Draft of Russian history*, 1927) did not recognise Bulgarians and the Balkans as (cultural/political) agents or counteragents. They were not recognised as having personal 'self' and were not to be rendered as a counterpart in a dialogue.

'Eurasianist' thought on Bulgaria, Bulgarians and the Balkans does not differ in its *message* from the traditional Russian thought. A shift in the *expression* of the message could be observed – it becomes an indirect one, and it makes the message readable only if a cooperative and concretising recipient is at disposal.

In **Chapter Two**, "The Bulgarian responses to the works of early Eurasianists", I focus on these responses to *Europe and the mankind* and to *Exodus to the East*, namely, those published in the following periodicals:

Развигор, Везни, Славянски глас, Духовна култура. In this chapter I also pay attention to the reception of works which have noteworthy relation to those of the ‘Eurasianists’, that is: 1) are semantically close/similar to them (O. Spengler, *The Decline of the West*); 2) convey a more or less opposite culture-philosophic message (D. Merežkovskij, *The eternal companions*); 3) display a potential to normalise the radicalism of the ‘Eurasianists’ message, either via simulation/mimicry or via promoting an antithesis (reverse idea and/or thesis) (works by G. Florovskij – an ‘Eurasianist’ himself! – Ervin Grim and, to some extent, Mihail Popruženko). I have not noticed works claiming that ‘Eurasianists’ messages needed radicalisation. It could be concluded therefore that these messages were conceived as radical/new rather than as moderate/trivial. And, in general, their radicalism was conceived selectively (as the published responses show) and was even intentionally screened and/or filtered out (as two undertakings aimed at promoting books which semantically modify/substitute for/conceal the message of *Europe and the mankind*).

I come to some more generalisations which I deliver in the chapter’s conclusion and which I shall repeat now.

First, the examination of sources reveals the following predisposition, which may be a tendency. The idea that European culture ought not to set the cultural standards of other cultures (or to impose its standards upon other cultures as if universal), because taken as a whole it does not exceed in excellence any other culture (an idea clearly portrayed by Trubeckoj in *Europe and the mankind*), is downplayed for another idea. It is downplayed for the idea that Europe is in decline (which was portrayed by Spengler, yet constituting roughly no more than the half of his point in the *Decline of the West*). This inclination, predisposition or tendency has much in common with the degradation of the ethical horizon which comes forth when *Exodus to the East* and *Europe and the mankind* are compared, and might have been stimulated by this degradation. In Chapter 2 I do not give an answer to this question but I point out a similar filtering out of Spengler’s work: issues of poly-culturalism were downgraded, obscured or contested with intellectually quite unsatisfactory arguments. I return to this phenomenon, trying to explain the intellectual and socio-psychological factors which precondition these obscurations, etc., in the concluding chapter of the book.

From the responses explored in Chapter 2, I find worth mentioning here the following (which is singled out against the context of the rest): Stefan Mladenov (among the other Bulgarian authors whose responses I examined were Todor Borov, Hristo Gjaurov, Konstantin Gülübov) evaded the theme of the West’s decline but also the theme of the semblance of European cultural superiority, focusing instead on the ethical core of the Trubeckoj’s message – it is through self-cognition that the *personality* of a culture is created and the eyes to the *personal* value of other (alien) cultures are opened.

Second, the sources lack certain sensitivities and this should be viewed critically. I did not notice, with one exception (Konstantin Bobčev), sensibility to the aesthetical implications of the ‘Eurasianists’ culturoscopy in its *Europe and the mankind* variant (an analogical exception is exemplified by D. Kalinov’s response to Spengler’s *Decline of the West*; I examined it in the concluding chapter). And I did not notice a response to an idea of Aleksandr Herzen,

repeatedly recalled by Georgij Florovskij: 'История никуда не ведет' ('History brings nowhere').

I suggested a parallelism and, moreover, harmony between the low susceptibility to the 'Eurasianists' ideas and especially to those of Trubeckoj, on the one side, and the low susceptibility/acceptance of aesthetic modernisms instead transformed into kinds of daring academisms, on the other. I did not elaborate on this issue.

I had enough reasons to summarise that the messages which were, one way or another, accepted were those which reinforce a stereotype characteristic of Bulgarian-Russian (mind the sequence) cultural interaction: the Bulgarian party entrusted subjectivity (either its own subjectivity or any possible subjectivity) to the Russian messianic discourse. I was able to discern indications of an analogical interaction with what we might call a European culturising discourse (but, given the characteristics of the texts and attitudes discussed, abstaining from specifying it as 'Orientalism').

And I had reasons in this chapter to conclude that, in brief, the reception of 'Eurasianists' works and of their major ideological neighbour from Europe, Spengler's *Decline of the West*, is indicative of a considerable intellectual (with regard to culturosophy) and communicative (on the level of intercultural communication) conformism of the Bulgarian intellectual elite.

In **Chapter Three**, "The Bulgarian 'neighbours' of Eurasianism", I made an overview of Bulgarian reflections on themes, at least at first sight, analogical to the themes of the 'Eurasianists': Bulgaria and Europe, the process of civilisation/acculturation, self-colonisation, self-alienation of the collective agent of a local tradition from this tradition, and self-cognition of the collective self. I attended to texts of Mihail Madžarov, Konstantin Stojanov, Pavel Morozov, Nikolaj Rajnov, Bogdan Filov, Nikola Mavrodinov, Vasil Zahariev, Aleksandŭr Balabanov, Dimo Kjorčev, Nikola Stanišev, Dimitŭr Šuselov et al. which set forth from discussing matters of mentality, art, historiography and philosophy of history, ethnogenesis, education, etc., and which were published in journals like *Zlatorog*, *Razvigor*, *Bŭlgarska misŭl*, *Listopad*, *Učilišten pregled*, etc.

The overview of the sources showed that the main theme of the Bulgarian identity discourse is not Eurocentrism but Graecocentrism (or Hellenocentrism). Texts by Fjodor Schmidt and Konstantin Stojanov from the pre-war (First World War) period as well as by Bogdan Filov (from the mid-/late 1910s to the early 1930s) turned out to be the important ones. In order to check the endurance of Schmidt's, Stojanov's and Filov's concern, I made a brief overview of texts and initiatives from the post-1944 and the post-1989 periods. Thematising of Graecocentrism in Bulgarian culturosophy, having paused for at least twenty years, was renewed in the late 1960s and it still goes on. I was fortunate to be able to support the suggestion that Graecocentrism, as a culturosophic problem, indeed is to Bulgarian thought what is Eurocentrism to the Russian one (including 'Eurasianist'), which is the major outcome of this chapter. Like the historical materialism earlier and probably paradoxically, the radical post-modern nominalism occurred to be counter-positive (inhibitive) to this theme. The latter suggestion was only hinted at in Chapter 3, especially in its concluding part.

From the standpoint of the above mentioned major outcome of the chapter, such vivid Bulgarian self-identification narratives, as the narrative on the Hunnic (Hunnoric) origin of the Bulgarians (D. Sūselov, N. Stanišev: the “Bulgarian Horde” society), though having a non-recent Bulgarian prototype (the ethnogenetic version of Gavril Krūstevič: the Bulgarians are/provene from Huns, but Huns and Slavs are the same people), could be viewed as a manifestation of pseudomorphosis; as a pseudomorphic response to the Russian ‘Eurasianists’ challenge. Chapter 3 has implied this application of the famous Spenglerian concept to the scholarly production of “Bulgarian Horde”, but I am making it explicit now.

Furthermore, the survey made within Chapter 3 lead to one more important suggestion which I again left unarticulated in this chapter. The anticipation and/or preoccupation with its own centre of existential concern prevented Bulgarian culturoscopy from susceptibility to the disputation of Eurocentrism in Russian thought; this being one probable reason among several possible.

One more, and related, suggestion is worth mentioning here. The ‘Eurasianists’ version of the Russian idea could be viewed as a brilliant ‘piracy’, a pre-emptive appropriation of symbolical capital which, potentially, pertained to another agent but which had been left unclaimed: I have in mind the usability of the genealogical (cultural-historical) capital of the Asian nomadic peoples within both identity narratives, the Russian and the Bulgarian. It could be inferred that the ‘Eurasianists’ substitute a traumatic memory for another one, in its turn traumatic as well, but radically rethought (in order to surpass its traumatism). The memory for ‘inviting the Varangians’ has been neutralised via implementing the plot of Russian-Mongol symbiosis. In fact the very archetypal source of traumatism feeding the discourse on Eurocentrism was neutralised. However, I was able to conceive what I just delivered owing to the juxtaposition with the Bulgarian case. The Russian case, in turn, elucidated the Bulgarian one. The Hunnic theme of Bulgarians has the same function of neutralising a core trauma of Bulgarian cultural memory, via redirection of attention. These suggestions are grounded in the analysis of sources performed in Chapter 3 but after juxtaposition of the chapter’s outcomes with those of Chapter 2. I am making them explicit just here.

In the **concluding chapter**, “Personalism and the Bulgarian identity discourse between the two World Wars”, I investigated the conditions (cultural-historical) which made the line of argument held in this book possible. The core condition, I tried to show, was the latent possibility of philosophical personalism within the Bulgarian intellectual tradition, a possibility, which in its initial phase, was instigated by the ‘Eurasianists’ texts and by a work by O. Spengler: all of them being texts which challenged the stereotypic ideas of the collective culturised/culturising selves (national, as the Russian, and super-national, as the ‘European’ or ‘Western’) during the post-First World War crisis. In this chapter I tried to follow the threads of the mentioned latent possibility and to grasp my own stance as one bound with these threads – a continuation of this possible (hi)story. Viewed from this stance (one which defines itself through venturing to conjoin the experience of philosophical personalism with the experience of producing and

perceiving national identity narratives), the main question of this book becomes as follows: Do the Other's problems exist to me, His friend?

I approached the mentioned conditions, addressing particular historical material (textual sources and issues which these sources seem to have posed). I attended to the main figures (N. Berdjajev, E. Mounier, L. Karsavin), propositions and contradictions of/within philosophical personalism, a self-aware philosophical current of the second quarter of the 20th century; to the reception of personalism and its closest neighbour in philosophy, the 'religious existentialism' in Bulgaria; to intellectual ventures initiated within the Bulgarian humanities of the 1920s–1940s which anticipated, resembled, approached personalism or were interoperable with it. I juxtaposed the philosophical "tastes" (preferences and predispositions) of secular and of clerical thought in Bulgaria. I touched upon the question of the great encounter between personalisms which happened in the 20th c. – between the secular, anthropocentric and Western one and the one which was clerical, theocentric and developed chiefly within the Byzantine theology and philosophy. I rethought the outcomes of Chapters 2 and 3 with regard to the renewed horizon of the investigation: the attitude of the Bulgarian identity discourse ('Who are we?') towards the *most important* 'foreigners', or alien cultural selves – the Greek, the Russian, the 'European' (the 'Western') – viewing it as an attitude sometimes conceptualised, expressed and implemented in correspondence with the standards of personalism and sometimes disregarding, even not noticing them. I pointed at the most important, in my opinion, 'Other' which the Bulgarians, or rather the Bulgarian elite, of the period faced through their own self-cognition – the (post)Byzantine tradition. I argued that a/the dialogue with 'Him/Her' could have been a prerequisite for solving the most important (and the most deeply traumatic) experience withheld in the Bulgarian cultural memory and identity discourse – the experience of the interactions with the Hellenes/Romanoi ('Byzantines')/Greeks. I briefly analysed the *encounters* with (and not the instances of passing by!) the (post)Byzantine 'Other' and the instances of approaching personalism; I defined both as 'random'. In this chapter I inspected and exploited works and views of (beside the mentioned philosophers-personalists) O. Spengler, L. Šestov; Geo Milev, D. Kalinov, K. Gülübov, N. Rajnov; S. Mladenov, B. Filov, Najden and Marija Šejtanovs, Dimitür Penov, Manjo Stojanov, Boris Popstoimenov, Gančo Pašev et al.

What I explored throughout the book, were the possibilities of the following achievement – to understand an alien's Theme without forgetting/neglecting one's own. In the final chapter I arrived to the conclusion that such an achievement could have been, and still could be, of inaugural importance for the Bulgarian collective self. I regard this conclusion as the most important among those to which I came, either leaving them implicit or explicating them in this chapter.

The **Supplement** section contains a thorough examination of the 1921 volume of *Russian thought* (*Русская мысль*) journal (overwhelmingly from the standpoint of literary criticism), in order to elucidate the immediate psychic and intellectual context which brought 'Eurasianism' to life. The volume (the first to be issued in exile and the only to be issued in Sofia), as well as each of its five issues, is viewed as a textual unit which maintains composition and rhythm which are governed by the ideological and aesthetical implications of the editorial preface

in the first issue. The section ends with an overview of the immediate Bulgarian responses to the Sofia issues of the journal.

The book contains text in Russian (the first and the second parts of the Introduction, which were deliberately and emphatically addressed to the Russian reader), German (a parallel version of the third chapter) and English (a parallel version of the concluding chapter), and, of course, in Bulgarian.

It also contains a “Preface and acknowledgements” section.

This summary deliberately contains explanations which usually find their place in conclusions and epilogues.