

# SLAVIC NATIONALISM: AN OVERVIEW

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## 1. PROBLEM FORMULATION

Despite the numerous attempts at defining the term “nationalism,” its meaning remains ambiguous with manifestations of nationalism in various parts of the world being interpreted differently. If patriotism is cherished as a virtue, then other varieties of nationalism; i.e., chauvinism, Nazism, anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia and irredentism, draw completely negative reactions. In reality, the various manifestations of nationalism rarely show themselves in pure theoretical form. Sometimes it is hard to distinguish nationalism from patriotism, chauvinism and Nazism, and in some cases (especially with Slavs) internationalism becomes nationalism in disguise.<sup>1</sup>

Every so often universal religions or certain denominations within those religions become either a component of nationalism or its generator. For instance, Judaism is exclusively professed by Jews, while, for Islam, nationality is of no great importance. Christianity is a cosmopolitan concept and is not bound to believers’ nationality, race, sex, or social status, yet some Christian denominations have a clearly expressed ethnocentric character. After the schism of 1054, *filetism* – the question of churches’ national character – has never lost its importance.

More dangerous than “classic nationalism” for the world of today is religious fanaticism, extremism and terrorism.

It is usually believed that nationalism is a phenomenon of

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1 See: Panayot Karagyozov, “Slowianie miedzy nacionalizmem i internatsionalizmem,” in *Wielkie mity narodowe Slowian* (Poznań, 1999), pp. 29-50; idem, “Slavianite mezhdou natsionalizma i internatsionalizma. Internatsionalizmat kato natsionalizam,” in *Niakogashnite slaviani dnes* (Sofia, 1997), pp. 90-114.

the New Era and is related to the formation of nations.<sup>2</sup> However, manifestations of ethnocentrism were also present before and after the European and the Slavic Renaissance. The accent on the “own” and the drive to distinguish oneself from the “foreign” was most active during transitional periods: a transition from tribal status of a social community to an ethnic status, a voluntary or forced change of religion, a transition from ethnicity to a nation, a transition from “coexistence” in multinational state-unions and federations (USSR, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia) to homogeneous states, a transition from one ideology to another (from internationalism to nationalism, or even to Europeism, from Czechoslovakism to Slovakism), and so on.

In a European context, present-day nationalism started taking shape during the Renaissance. The common ground between Humanism and Reformation (which represent the worldly and religious essences of the Renaissance) is the tendency towards individualization. Even though the European Renaissance was anthropocentric, the individualization of the person was taking place along with the formation of whole ethnicities/nations and Christian denominations.

The anthropocentrism in the Renaissance was directly related to the formation of nationalism. Except for the restoration of Latin and Greek as languages of literature, culture and science, ethnic/local languages were being introduced in the liturgy of Catholic “offshoots” such as the Hussites and Protestants and in the literature of a number of peoples. Although humanism was grounded in the drive towards the restoration of classical (pre-Christian) universalism, in reality it was a true attempt to transcend the medieval Christian cosmopolitanism and to form ethnic/national states.

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2 There are also language-related problems in defining “nationalism” as a term. Unlike the Bulgarian language, where distinct concepts exist for “ethnicity,” “people” and “nation,” in many languages it is not possible to make a conceptual difference between the ethnic and national status of a social community.

Nationalism started to manifest itself actively among Slavs during the National Rebirth (starting in the second half of the 18th century) and continues to the present. The reasons for its formation, however, must be sought way back in the Slavic past and the specific *historic fate*<sup>3</sup> of the Slavs. At the base of the Slavic peoples' nationalism lies their strong collectivist feeling, sometimes deteriorating to a *group syndrome*.<sup>4</sup>

The formation of nations is related to the transition from a feudal to a capitalist stage of economic development and also from an ethnic to a national status in social communities. This overview of Slavic nationalism, however, will not deal with the economic base of the social processes. It will track (and at places, just mark) both the reasons for the formation of nationalism in the field of geopolitics, religion/ideology, language and literature, and the typological similarities and differences between the anthropocentric European Renaissance and the ethnocentric Slavic Rebirth.

This overview aims to outline the common preconditions for the formation of nationalism among the majority of Slavs, and not to show the particular manifestations of nationalism, which vary markedly across the different Slavic peoples. Although most of the work is based on West and South Slavic material, some typologically similar conditions are valid for the Eastern Slavs as well. The author has no intention of pointing out any "Slavic uniqueness" in the field of nationalism, because it is quite possible for similar conditions to have influenced to some extent the development of nationalism in other peoples as well.

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3 The term *common historic fate* is first formulated by Adam Mickiewicz, who, during his lectures on Slavic literatures in Collège de France (1840-1844), makes a distinction between the asynchronous development of the Slavic peoples and their *common historic fate*. *Common historic fate* for the Polish poet means the late adoption of Christianity, and continuous, heavy foreign political, religious and linguistic oppression in the Turkish, Habsburg, and Russian empires.

4 See: Panayot Karagyozov, "Grupoviiat sindrom pri slavianite," in *Niakogashnite slaviani dnes*, pp. 71-81.

## 2. WORLD VIEW AND GEOPOLITICAL PREMISES FOR THE DOMINATION OF COLLECTIVISM OVER INDIVIDUALISM AMONG THE SLAVS

The transformation of the basic Slavic pagan individualism into a strongly expressed collectivism happened under the influence of the geopolitical situation in which Slavs found themselves after their final settlement in the lands of South-eastern and Central Europe.

Scattered data on Slavic paganism point to the fact that Slavic tribes had a clearly stratified polytheistic religious system – one that optimally suited their predominant individualism in which the individual Slav had significant rights within the collective.<sup>5</sup> After Christianization, the basic proto-Slavic democratic affinity manifested itself through Bulgarian Bogomilism, Czech Hussitism, and Polish aristocratic democracy – the common denominator being the priority of the individual within the collective.

The dualist ideas of Bulgarian priest Bogomil (10th century) were the most powerful medieval Christian heresy, denying any established (worldly or church) hierarchy.<sup>6</sup> Along with the basic priorities of their dualism, Bogomil's followers strove to restore the early Christian communities (where all believers were equal) and the option of direct communication between the believer and God. Despite its wide-spread adoption in the Balkans and some Western European countries, Bogomilism was persecuted by the church and state authorities in all countries, except Bosnia, where – although shortly – it became an official/state Christian denomination. Bogomil's ideas, however, could not manage to outgrow the boundaries of heresy, and as time passed they were completely destroyed.

To a large extent, the principles of Bogomil's individualism were developed and made concrete by the Czech priest Jan Hus (1369-1415). The latter managed to unite almost the entire Czech

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5 Frank Wollman, *Slovesnost Slovanů* (Praha, 1928), pp. 5-6.

6 See: Dimitar Angelov, *Bogomilstvoto* (Sofia, 1993); Dmitri Obolensky, *The Bogomils. A Study in Balkan Neo-Manicheism* (Cambridge, 1948).

7 In 395 A.D., the last Roman emperor Theodosius the Great divided the

people around the idea of the direct communication of believers with God in an understandable spoken language without the mediation of catholic priests. Hussitism is the first concretization/individualization of the catholic faith, or, to use a later simile – the first “Christianity with an ethnic face.” Born from the need for direct communication between the faithful and God, over time Hussitism turned into a Czech ethnic faith, reaching its organizational completion in the Community of Czech Brothers (1457).

After the Czech lands were totally re-catholicized (1627), Czech-Hussite religious individualism continued to exist only within the emigrant community.

Slavic personal individualism reached its peak with the Poles between the 16th and 18th centuries. The Polish political system at that time consisted of local *seims* (parliaments) and a central *seim*, in which all adult male aristocrats had the right to participate. From 1573, kings in the Polish-Lithuanian state were elected (by a specially assembled electoral *seim*) for life, but did not have the right to hereditary succession. The absolute supremacy of the individual over the collective, not only in Poland, but also in Europe, was evident in the establishment of the right of free veto (*liberum veto*), which states that decisions in the *seim* (Polish Parliament) were taken only when a total consensus among the deputies existed.

At the end of 18th century, however, this supreme political democracy became outdated and in 1795 the neighboring absolute monarchies – Russia, the Habsburg Empire and Prussia – divided among themselves the whole territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Rzeczpospolita. From that moment on, the Poles, too, started the conscious formation of a strong collective feeling.

Closely related to the Polish aristocratic democracy was the political system of the Dubrovnik Republic, which also deteriorated after the 17th century.

One could speculate that the Slavs would have developed and deepened their individualism, giving priority to the individual over the collective, had they not fallen under a long period of foreign rule.

As a background to Slavic ethnocentrism, one must emphasize the fact that the Slavic tribes settled in their present territories after the collapse of the Roman Empire. They weren't, therefore, affected by the ideas of supreme imperial power, common laws, and common culture, reducing the tribal and the ethnic in the name of the imperial or universal.

After their final settlement in South-eastern Europe, the Slavs initially constituted a decentralized pagan minority within the well-organized Christian majority. Most Slavic peoples, however, soon established stable state formations, while the others kept striving for their own states up to the end of the 20th century. With the deepening contradiction between Rome and Constantinople, the Slavic states filled the "vacuum" between the West and the East. The geopolitical division of Europe into Eastern and Western, established in 395 A.D.<sup>7</sup> and basically preserved until today, affected the Slavs and created dependency: *the duality became triplicity*.<sup>8</sup>

The formation of the Slavic *triplicity* was seen most distinctly in the fields of religion, language, and literature.

### 3. RELIGIOUS PREREQUISITES TO THE FORMATION OF NATIONALISM AMONG SLAVS

In a European context, the Slavs moved from polytheism to monotheism relatively late. Unlike peoples and tribes coexisting in the Roman Empire, where Christianity spread from the bottom to the top, with the Slavs monotheism was introduced forcefully, top to bottom. First to be converted were the princes, who then imposed an ultimatum onto their peoples to follow them into the new religion. Although with the Slavs "Christian-

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Roman empire between his two sons Arcadius and Honorius. The border between the brothers' lands passed along the Drina River. Despite all the political turmoil and modifications of the terms East and West, the geopolitical division of Europe remains until today.

<sup>8</sup> See: Panayot Karagyzov, "Slaviane mezhdu Vostokom i Zapadom. Religioznye i literaturnye aspecty dvoystvenosti," in *Slavia Orientalis* 46:3 (Kraków, 1997), pp. 363-371.

ity didn't come to replace faith in [pagan] deities that had pretty much faded away,"<sup>9</sup> the last Slavic pagan elders consciously and voluntarily chose the new religion. From *Replies of Pope Nicholas I to Bulgarian Prince Boris I*<sup>10</sup> and from *Povest' Vremennykh Let*<sup>11</sup> one can learn that the Slavic rulers knew well the religious situation in Europe and from all different forms of polytheism, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, they consciously chose faith in Christ. They ignored Judaism, because it was an ethnic monotheism without a state, and Islam, because it was a state religion where ethnicity didn't matter. Slavic elders chose Christianity, which, despite its cosmopolitan nature, allowed the development and strengthening of ethnicity and statesmanship. The "forceful" imposition of Christianity required both worldly and church authorities to adapt the universal faith in Christ to local rites and conditions.

The motives for the change of religion were mainly of a domestic and foreign political character. For the Slavs, the transition from paganism to Christianity coincided with their transition from a tribal to an ethnic communal status. The latter circumstance became a reason for the early identification of religion/faith with ethnicity.

Almost all Slavic statesmen that had led the initial Christianization of their peoples, as well as their heirs, maintained a policy of maneuvering between Rome and Constantinople<sup>12</sup> during the few centuries after the irreversible adoption of Christianity as an official state religion. Their goal was to maximize the political gains at home and abroad with minimal religious

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9 Petar Mutafchiev, "Pop Bogomil i sv. Ivan Rilski. Duhat na otritsaniето v nashata istoriia," in *Zashto sme takiva?* (Sofia, 1994), p. 358.

10 "Otgovorite na papa Nikolay I do balgarite," in *Fotiy patriarkha Konstantinopolski do kniaza Boris I* (Sofia, 1994), pp. 158-159.

11 *Povest' vremennykh let* (Moskva, 1950), p. 258.

12 Bulgarian rulers Boris I, Kaloyan and Ivan Asen sought political gains both from Byzantium and from Rome; St. Vladimir of Kiev was also known for his hesitance as to whether to accept Christianity from the West or from the East; and despite the strong pro-Byzantine attitude of St. Sava, his brother St. Stefan Prvovencani (First-Crowned) was crowned as a king by the Pope.

and political dependence on the party responsible for their conversion to Christianity. Most Slavs (Moravians, Czechs, Bulgarians, Serbs, and Russians) made their first attempts at achieving a decisively ethnic autonomy within Christianity as early as their initial search for a “sponsor” into the Christian. The main “criterion” for them was to pose a minimum threat to state sovereignty.

An important element of the ethnic-religious differentiation among the Slavs became the early canonization of local saints. Thus, for instance, St. Vaclav (935), St. Voitech (997), St. Ivan Rilski (946) and St. Sava (1271) consolidated the national conscience of Czechs, Poles, Bulgarians and Serbs as early as the Middle Ages. Meanwhile the beatification and canonization of St. Josafat Kuncewicz (1623) played an important role in the establishment of the Uniat churches in the East-Slavic region. Local Christian sainthood became an element of nationalism mostly during the Slavic Rebirth.

Because of their closed character, conservatism and religious intolerance, a number of Balkan Orthodox monasteries became “pockets” of nationalism. Unlike the Western church, the Orthodox church didn’t form religious orders (Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits, etc.), and create “affiliates” in different parts of the world, allowing the creation of super-national missionary networks.

Throughout various periods of their history, almost all Slavs have tried to subjugate church and religion to their political interest. Even before the schism of 1054, they formed church organizations independent from (or only distantly dependent on) the universal Christian centers of Rome and Constantinople.

This is a short chronicle of the Slav’s religious “separatism.”

- Thanks to the activity of Konstantin Kiril and Methodius during their mission in Great Moravia in the Slavic Central-European region, a liturgy in a Slavic ethnic language was introduced and, with the approval of Pope Adrian II (867-872), a Slavic diocese was established with Methodius as its first consecrated bishop.

- In 893, a national assembly in Bulgaria declared a Bulgarian church organization, which was autocephalic/independent from Byzantium, and the Bulgarian language became the official liturgical and administrative language. The autonomy of the Bulgarian Orthodox church became an indelible part of the most important problems of the Bulgarian social conscience from the adoption of Christianity to the present.
- In the time of Ban Kulin (1180-1203), the Bogomil heresy received the status of a Bosnian [Bogomil] “state” church.
- After a relatively long period of maneuvering between Constantinople and Rome, Serbs irreversibly joined the Orthodox world. In time, the concepts “Orthodox” and “Serb” merge. In 1345, Stefan Dusan (1331-1355) declared himself king/emperor of the Serbs and Greeks; however, since the official coronation had to be performed by a Patriarch, he “promoted” the Serbian archbishop Ioannicius to Patriarch. After the Balkans fell under Ottoman rule, the Serbian Orthodox church lost its autonomy. Only after the intercession of the Grand Vezir Mehmed Pasha Sokolic (1565-1579), a former Herzegovinian mercenary, Sultan Suleiman I allowed its restoration (1577). Mehmed Pasha’s brother, Markarii, was made Patriarch, to be later succeeded by the Vezir’s nephews, Antonii and Gerasim. With Greek “help,” the Turks liquidated the Serbian Patriarchy in the city of Peč 1766. However, after the “great Serbian migration” from Kosovo to Vojvodina (end of 18th century), the Karlovac Patriarchy was established there.
- As a result of Jan Hus’ (1369-1415) religious ideas, the Community of the Czech Brothers was formed in 1457, becoming the first separate denomination to secede from the Catholic Church. In 1575, the so-called Czech denomination was also confirmed by the Habsburg court. During the period 1627-1780, the only legal religion in the Habsburg Empire was Catholicism. After the *Tolerant Patent* of Joseph II (1780), Czechs begin restoring the forbidden protestant denominations. The Czechoslovak Church, created in 1920, was a religious expression of Tomáš Garrigue

Masaryk's idea for *czechoslovakisation* in all fields of social life.

- After the division of Czechoslovakia in 1992, the Czechoslovakian Orthodox Church was divided into the Czech and Slovak churches.
- Primož Trubar (1508-1586) introduced the Slovenian language to the liturgy of the Slovenian Protestants, and the translation of the Bible by him and his followers laid the groundwork for the Slovenian literary language. Even if most of the Slovenians were brought back to Catholicism, during the counter-reformation protestant religious individualism in fact strengthened the Slovenian national collectivism.
- While Protestantism had little popularity among the Croats, they were the only Catholic people that constantly used their native Slavic language in their religious practice.
- In 1596, the Brest Unia was formed, setting apart a large part of the Ukrainians and Byelorussians from both the Russian Orthodox Church and Polish Catholicism.
- After the Turks conquered Bosnia (1463), a large part of the local Slavic population was either voluntarily or forcefully converted to Islam, which over time strengthened their local self-consciousness and set them apart from both the Orthodox Serbs and from the Croatian Catholics.

As a result of various geopolitical developments, by the end of the 16th century, the Slavs belonged to different Christian and Islamic confessions and this fact further strengthened their ethnocentrism.

After the 16th century, almost all Southern Slavs fell under a long Turkish rule. From 1620 to 1918, Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, and Slovenians "coexisted" in the Habsburg Empire, and, after 1795, Polish lands were divided between Russia, the Habsburgs and Prussia. During the long foreign domination, the religion or faith of the political enslaver did not in most cases match that of the enslaved peoples. This is why the struggle for religious rights became an indelible part of the Slavic National Rebirth.

It may seem paradoxical at first, but nationalist religious attitudes were manifested also by people of the same faith. Thus,

for instance, the Greek Orthodox priesthood became a generator of Balkan nationalism during the Rebirth, with the predominantly Greek Universal Patriarchy in Istanbul using the Orthodox faith to Hellenize the Orthodox Bulgarians, Macedonians, and Serbs.

#### 4. LINGUISTIC PREREQUISITES TO SLAVIC NATIONALISM

The Slavs were among the first people in Europe to convert their native language (i.e., not Greek or Latin) into a liturgical and literary language. As a result of their geopolitical location, and thanks to the apostolic activity of St. Kiril and Methodius, as early as the 9th century they adopted a new alphabet, different from the other alphabets in medieval Europe, namely the Jewish, Greek, and Latin alphabets. The early translations of liturgical literature, as well as the complete *Bible*, in Old Slavonic (in respective ethnic editions) became a prerequisite to the development of another, autonomous type of Christian culture, different from those of Latin and Greek.

The liturgy and the reading of the *Bible* in the mother tongue was a stimulus for the religious individualism of the Slavic Bogomils, Hussites and Protestants on the one hand, while on the other hand it helped in identifying faith with ethnicity.

Language became a component of nationalism during foreign rule. As well as the languages of the main enslavers (Turkish, German, and Russian), which were the official languages in the empires where Slavs coexisted, Slavic languages were also stifled by the Greek and Hungarian languages. The drive to replace the traditional Slavic ethno-lingual conscience with a religious-territorial patriotism that served the enslavers, led to a reaction – Slavs started a struggle for rights to language in the multiethnic empires.

The Slavic alphabet, literature and liturgy have been preserved among the Orthodox Slavs until now. In the Western church, a succession of Popes between the 9th century and 1962 alternately allowed and forbade the Slavic liturgy. For the sake of comparison, let's remember that the Protestant churches in-

roduced an ethnic-language liturgy during the Reformation whereas the Catholic Church allowed the local ethnic languages to be used together with Latin only with the decisions of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

The usage of a different liturgical language by some Slavs provoked the appearance of derogatory terms for foreigners such as “latiners” or “greeks” and “fanariots.”

The linguistic aspects of nationalism were most clearly manifested during the Slavic Rebirth. Philologism and Slavism were among its main components. Gradually, the idea for a Pan-Slavic language with different dialects expanded into the codification of all ethnic languages. During the Slavic Rebirth, language was taken more as a delimiter and not as a link to neighbors, and linguistic purism took on unhealthy proportions. A similar tendency could be seen even in the “neo-Slavic Rebirth” at the end of the 20th century, when a rapid differentiation between Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian languages took place.

The Bulgarians have turned out to be extremely sensitive towards the graphemes of their national identity even at the onset of the 21st century. This fact was evident in the agitated discussion spurred by the Austrian Slavic scholar Otto Kronsteiner’s proposal that the Bulgarian people give up “the old-fashioned Cyrillic alphabet with its Russian and socialist associations” and accept the Latin alphabet.<sup>13</sup>

## 5. ETHNOCENTRIC SPECIFICS OF SLAVIC LITERATURES

Slavs were among the first, within the boundaries of Euro-Christian civilization, to form a distinctly ethnically oriented literature. Starting with translations of parts of the *Holy Scripture*, they created a number of works praising ethnicity within Christianity. Early Slavic literary works such as “Preface to the Gospel,” “Panonian Legends,” “Alphabet Prayer,” “An Argument against Tri-Linguists” and “On Letters” are artistic apologetics of Slavic Christianity. Also worth mentioning are the ha-

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13 “*Sluchaiat*” Otto Kroinsteiner. I: *kirilitsata, balgaristikata, malkite filologii* (Veliko Tarnovo, 2002).

geographical cycle on St. Kiril and Methodius and, especially, the interpretations of the dispute of Konstantin Kiril with the tri-linguists in Venice, in which the Slavic philosopher gave a well-grounded defense for the development of minor languages and cultures.

The medieval slavo-centric literary trend continued during the Renaissance, the Baroque period and the Slavic Rebirth. Initially, it was particularly strongly manifested among Croatian writers and public figures. Vinko Priboević (*De origine succes- busque Slavorum*, 1524/32), Mavro Orbini (*Il regno degli Slavi*, 1601), Juraj Križanić (*Politika*, 1666-7), Pavao Ritter Vitezović (*Stemmatographia*, 1701), and Dr. Ljudevit Gaj (*Proglas*, 1839) were among the most distinguished authors praising the Slavic rebirth as a whole. The books *Razgovor ugodni naroda slov- iskoga* (1756) by Andrija Kačić Miošić and *Slávy Dcera* (1824-52) by Jan Kollár are versified apologetics of Pan-Slavism. The first *History of Slavic Language and Literature* (1826) by P. J. Šafářík and the “utopian literary program” by Jan Kollár (*O literární vzajemnosti Slovanů*, 1836) were followed by a suc- cession of historiographies of Slavic literatures (by A. Mick- ewicz, F. L. Čelakovský, A. N. Pypin, J. Máchal, F. Wollman and others) that pointed out the specifically Slavic elements in the oral and written literature. Literary works praising the com- mon Slavic past and the expected common future were created by other Slavic peoples, as well.

After the Slavs (especially the Southern Slavs) fell under foreign rule, the conditions for the development of individual arts deteriorated and the written literature gradually transformed itself into folklore, orally and collectively created and dissemi- nated. The literature of most Slavs became anonymous, collec- tivized, and even more ethnic. During the Slavic Rebirth some changes took place. These changes, however, were entirely di- rected at ethnocentrism. The homeland, people, language, and faith took the central place in the literature. The genial poets of the Slavic romanticism, Adam Mickiewicz, Jan Kollár, Pavel Josef Šafářík, France Prešern, Ivan Mažuranić, Petar Petrović Njegoš, Ľudovít Štur, Hristo Botev and others, put all their tal- ent into the service of the idea of national independence.

Unlike European Humanism, which relied on Latin and Greek as the languages of literature, culture, and science, and was oriented toward restoring classic cosmopolitanism, Slavic poets reproduced local folk motifs and elements from the history of their own people.

The literary ethnocentrism in the Renaissance was further strengthened by the Slavic messianic drive underscoring the “chosen” and “exclusive” character of the Slavs as a whole as well as that of the separate Slavic peoples.

Compared to the Eurocentric cultural-historic periodical schema (Classic Age, Middle Ages, Renaissance, Baroque, etc.), the Slavic social life and literary history had long periods of theocentrism, ethnocentrism and partocentrism that were dominated by the collective idea. Even though the age of modernism (late 19th and early 20th centuries) significantly reduced the Slavic literary ethnocentrism, its manifestations continue to the present.

## 6. RENAISSANCE, ENLIGHTENMENT AND REBIRTH IN EUROPE AND WITH SLAVS

Besides the other geopolitical factors, foreign rule, under which the Slavs remained for centuries, also played a significant role in the formation and activation of Slavic nationalism. It destroyed individualism among the Poles, Croats (Dubrovnikans), and Czechs, and hampered the creation of an anthropocentric world view among the Southern and Eastern Slavs.

Together with Turkish domination, the arrested development of the Southern Slavs was further impacted by the fall of Byzantium (1453) and the discovery of America (1492). After the forced eclipse of the sophisticated Byzantine culture and the reorientation of the main routes of trade from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, the Southern Slavs moved from being neighbors of European civilization to a place on its cultural-political periphery. Thus, the early pre-Renaissance roots/elements in the Southern Slavic Orthodox area could not develop.

After the battle at Bila Hora (1620), and especially after the counter-reformation (1627) in the Slavic lands under Habsburg

rule, and also after the three-sided division of Poland (1795), the anthropocentric achievements of the Poles, Czechs, Croats and Slovenians were reduced to a minimum. This is why those Slavs as well as their South-eastern brethren needed a “second” Renaissance in the middle of the 18th century; one that had to deal with the problems of the formation of nations, without having achieved sufficient emancipation of the individual from the collective.

To a large extent, the Slavic Rebirth copied the European Renaissance. The main difference between the two was that the Renaissance had a humanist-anthropocentric character, while the Slavic Rebirth had an exclusively ethnocentric character. At the center of the social life of the Slavs, from the second half of the 18th century up to the end of the 19th century (and with some Slavs to the end of the 20th century), remained the primary components of a nation; people, language, religion, and state. Anthropocentrism was suppressed by ethnocentrism; personal individualism was eclipsed by or subjugated to ethnic/national individualism, the individual was subjugated to the struggle for national liberation and the effort of building their own state. In the Slavs’ system of priorities, the homeland was placed higher than their own lives or family happiness.

The main directions of the Slavic Rebirth (philologism, historicism, folkorism, slavism, messianism, and mystification) definitely stressed the collective in both its forms; Pan-Slavic and ethnic. The difference between the different versions of Pan-Slavism and imperial Pan-Russism lies in the fact that while the supporters of the former describe how the Slavic future is supposed to look, the advocates of the latter order what it has to be in the form of an ultimatum. This difference is seen quite clearly in the contradictory “Pan-Slavic” concepts of A. N. Pypin and V. I. Lamanskiy.

During the Slavic Rebirth, the Slavic intelligentsia (except the Polish) was aligned with Russia. Among the Russians, who, like the Southern Slavs, had not experienced the anthropocentrism of the Renaissance either as Humanism or as Reformation, the collective-centralist idea was quite strong. At certain

periods, Russian collectivism and centralism affected the rest of the Slavs, too.

The Slavic Rebirth was almost synchronous with the European Enlightenment. Among the Slavs, changes in the spiritual life were taking place in the form of Enlightenment and Romanticism, in most cases sequentially. The anthropocentric changes not assimilated by the Slavs during the Renaissance, however, prevented the complete adoption, expansion and concretion of the ideas of the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment in Europe turned the class rights of the individual, regulated during the Renaissance, into universal civil rights for all members of society; it brought a tendency towards religious tolerance or even indifference. The Renaissance maxim “I am human and nothing human is strange to me” was combined with the individualist call from the Enlightenment “use your own reason,” while the French bourgeois revolution of 1789 pleaded for “Freedom, equality, and the brotherhood of men.”

During the Slavic Rebirth, it was not a question of the freedom of the citizen, but of the freedom of the nation, which took central place in Slav social life. As paradoxical as it may seem, the Slavic Enlightenment was religiously oriented.<sup>14</sup> All Slavs faced the problem of their religious freedom, while the Orthodox ones also had to deal with the autonomy of their church organizations. Thus, the collective factor once again eclipsed the individual.

Most Slavic peoples had restored their states by the end of the 19th or the beginning of the 20th century. However, the still-underdeveloped democracy on an individual level pushed many of them towards *partocentrism*, which is another variety of ethnocentric collectivism.

After the fall of socialism, the collective essence of the partocentrism was manifested differently. In Poland, the Catholic

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14 See: Panayot Karagyozev, “Slovanští světci a obrození – Kult „jazyka“ mlčení v Čechách,” in *Literární mystifikace, etnické mýty a jejich úloha při formování národního vědomí* (Uherské Hradiště, Czech Republic, 2001), pp. 111-118.

Church used it to try and establish a monopoly similar to that of the party. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, it took the shape of a “velvet nationalism,” while in Serbia and Croatia it degraded into militant chauvinism. In his study *Fascism* (1982), which was actually a transparent allusion to socialism, Bulgarian political scientist and dissident (and future President of Bulgaria) Zhelyu Zhelev made the gloomy forecast that “a totalitarian state cannot liberalize and democratize itself without decaying. It has only one way to democracy – through decay, in which the military dictatorship is only a waypoint.”<sup>15</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This short overview has shown that the geopolitical position of the Slavs between the East and the West played a great role in the formation of their nationalism by provoking the transition of the interstitial religious, linguistic and cultural duplicity into a cultural-religious *triplicity*, different from that of their neighbors.

Nationalism was fed by long period of foreign rule, which didn't allow for the full experience of the anthropocentric attitudes of the European Renaissance and Enlightenment.

Eventually, Slavic Nationalism became grounded in strong collectivist feelings, which caused a great part of the Slavs in the past and today to strive, not for individual/personal rights, but rather for group rights. The weakness of the individual, which has manifested itself at various times in history and was expressed in different ways (ethnic, religious, political, cultural, economic, etc.), becomes a reason for the individual to seek protection from centralist-collectivist structures such as the church, state, and party. As a part of these structures, the individual lacking autonomy was too vulnerable to influences and ideas in which the “innate” group-conscience could be easily directed towards nationalism.

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15 Zheliu Zhelev, *Fashizmat. Dokumentalno izsledvane na germanskiia, italianskiia i ispanskiia fashizam* (Sofia, 1982), p. 325.

One could speculate that with a stronger experience of anthropocentrism, the Slavs would have manifested weaker tendencies towards nationalism.