

CYRILLO-METHODIAN ANNIVERSARIES IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIALISM (IDEOLOGICAL FUNCTIONS, NATIONAL USES, AND RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES)

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DOI: 10.17846/CL.2024.17.1.122-131

Abstract: DRZEWIECKA, Ewelina. *Cyrillo-Methodian Anniversaries in the Context of Socialism (Ideological Functions, National Uses, and Research Perspectives)*. The aim of the paper is to address the phenomenon of anniversary in regard to the cultural conditions that are typical of the period of socialism in South-East Europe. The focus is on a jubilee discourse that was generated for the purposes of state commemorations of SS. Cyril and Methodius, i.e. the inventors of the first Slavic alphabet and literacy. The starting point is the case of People's Republic of Bulgaria (1946 – 1990), which is perceived as both an example of rewriting the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition under the local conditions of Communist ideology, and a meaningful manifestation of the “culture of jubilee”. The paper discusses the continuity of cultural matrix within the Bulgarian modernity despite the distinct semantic shifts in the Cyrillo-Methodian narrative and suggests a great potential of investigating the phenomena with regard to the past that is shared/contested in terms of different national ideologies. It is suggested that a “contrastive grammar” of competing jubilee discourses and practices would be a promising way of interpreting the Bulgarian-Macedonian confrontations and struggles for primacy that emerged during socialism.

Keywords: *Cyril and Methodius, anniversary, socialism, Bulgaria, Macedonia*

Introduction

Entangled in various ideological agendas and confessional presumptions, the memory of SS. Cyril and Methodius is one of the most interesting phenomena in the modern Slavic world. It has been a subject of many scientific and political discussions since the first half of the 19th century, as the primal focus has always been on the reconstruction of the past with the philological and historical means. However, in the last few decades, there has been an important shift in research topics and practices, partially due to the fact that many facts had been already established and proven based on the sources available, partially due to the new approaches that have emerged in modern humanities and social sciences after the so called poststructuralist turn, but also the growing need to address the political function of the Cyrillo-Methodian cult after the collapse of the Eastern bloc. Today, significantly more attention is drawn to the issues of “inventing” (various variants of) the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition, as well as the role of the national narratives devoted to the “Slavic Enlighteners” in the process of founding the modern Slavic states and societies, especially Bulgarian, (North) Macedonian and Slovak ones.

If the figures of Holy Brothers are an important element of the national master narratives of a few Slavic peoples, then the research objective appears to be twofold. On the one hand, one is indeed required to establish all the possible relations, in both the historical and ideological terms, between the historical past and its contemporary (re)uses. On the other hand, however, one also needs to recognize that in the process of creating the unique status of SS. Cyril and Methodius

within the particular cultural memories, it was the academic experts and the intellectual elites who play a crucial role in it. Studies have shown that the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition was both captured „between Slavic studies and pan-Slavism” (Solak 2013, 13-26) and applied within different modern(ization) ideologies, so that all the national variants of it were formed in the direct relation to the current political debates and struggles for international influence.

The process of emerging the memory of “Slavic Enlighteners” in modern era is usually described in terms of secularization, politization, or nationalization of a cult which was primary related with the Church, but then it was turned into a handful tool among the secular elites and an identity marker. There are case studies regarding Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Slovak Republic and North Macedonia that not only reveal local details of this process, but also confirm that, at general level, there are crucial similarities with regard to both the aim and the way, in which the Cyrillo-Methodian cult has been used. The appropriation served the purposes of legitimization and even sacralization of a nation or people, and it was gained by drawing an analogy between the past and the present, which was possible due to a simplification and reinterpretation of the historical narrative about Holy Brothers and their mission among the Slavs that was based on specific notions and assumptions. Both the relations between the Czech and the Slovak national elites in Czechoslovakia and the Bulgarian-Macedonian dispute over historical past are very significant phenomena in this regard. If the former was based on the different views on confessional identity, then the latter referred to the differences in understanding identity in the ethnic terms.

Although the role of the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition in *modern* Slavic cultures and states has turned to be one of the most important within the Slavic studies, the question of its functioning is raised usually in the context of political and historical discourses during national movements in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century.¹ What interests me more, however, is the existence of the narrative about the “Slavic Enlighteners” after the Second World War, which in the case of Slavic states means the conditions of Marxist ideology and enforced atheism. Indeed, this issue has been already addressed but mainly in regard to the more general problems of the party’s propaganda and the new communist historiography,² both of which tend to be presented as examples of vast manipulations of the national history and tradition. In this context, the notion of socialist or Marxists nationalism is usually introduced and discussed as a kind of ideological hybrid or peculiarity that repeated itself within the Eastern bloc due to the ideological change after Stalin’s death. It seems, however, that, at this point, more attention should be paid to the local dimensions and varieties of this phenomenon, especially if the notion of sovietisation as a complex cultural process is to be perceived as analogous to the notion of modernization. The research question of the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition as a part of cultural memory is particularly promising not only as a strong case which may reveal some meaningful disruptions within the local communisms, but also a pretext for an in-depth analysis of master narratives in the long perspective. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to propose a view on this subject by addressing the question of communist festivity and state anniversaries. It will be elaborated by bringing up the well-known issues of ideological functions and national uses of the communist jubilees, and then by commenting on further perspectives which I consider worth developing in research.

¹ For example, see Angelov 1969; Wojtczak 2006; Lukić 2009, 85-124; Naydenova 2011, 266-276; Naydenova 2013, 237-251; Škvarna – Hudek 2013; Michela 2018, 128-140; Michela 2018, 309-352. Also see: Weber 2006; Rohdewald 2014.

² For example, see: Sygkelos 2001; Górný 2007; Daskalov 2008.

Ideological functions

In his book *The Cultural Front*, the Bulgarian historian Ivan Elenkov called communism a “universal culture of organized ostentation” (Elenkov 2008, 151). It means that the socialist government manages the places of public cultural exchange and controls access to them (Elenkov 2008, 161). In order to preserve the power, however, it constantly needs new events that fulfil the prophecies of ideology: anniversaries, exhibitions, demonstrations. This “countless multiplicity of concrete manifestations of official ostentation”, as called by Elenkov, serves the “daily self-representation of the regime and its unmistakable recognition by the public“. The purpose is threefold: (re)confirmation of the correctness of the party’s order, verification of the correctness of the “execution” and realization of its full-fledged “reflections”. So, one may talk about an “endless rally”, “permanent mobilization” of the masses, but also of the party apparatus. Ultimately, the goal is to achieve “unity”, public and national unanimity (Elenkov 2008, 160-163). And it has been already repeatedly commented that precisely during national jubilees so called “Marxist nationalism” manifests itself, which is usually discussed in terms of rewriting history for legitimizing purposes. As summed up by Yannis Sygkelos, for example, in regard to the case of Bulgaria: “Through historiography the Bulgarian Communist Party present its own tasks as national and itself as the representative and defender not only of working class interests but those of the entire nation” (Sygkelos 2001, 171).

However, as the socialist imperative of organized commemorative festivity seems to be adequately addressed by the notion of “culture of jubilee”, what I would like to suggest is to interpret this question in the perspective of memory and cultural studies. Indeed, anniversaries are most suitable for the ideological purposes, because they address three time-space dimensions: national holiday, historical storyline and future goals. Officially, being under total control of the party, they become a perfect tool for controlling the meaning. Nevertheless, as pointed out by Jan Assmann, commemorative events only actualize cultural memory according to the current situation. Moreover, “any selective acceptance of a tradition, that is, any act of reception, also entails recognition of a specific set of values” (Assmann 2012, 102).

In terms of Charles Taylor (2004; 2007), the new social imaginary does not simply replace the old but reinterprets the most important values of the older tradition while maintaining a sense of connection with it. I suggest jubilees may be interpreted in terms of Taylor’s notion of modernization not just because the period of socialism may be seen as a process of modernization, but also due to the fact that – aimed at creating and maintaining the new sense of the communist ideology – they testify in fact to a clash of two social imaginaries, and as such reveal the fundamental role of the local cultural patterns. In this sense, anniversaries can be analysed as evidence of this particular phenomenon that Katherine Verdery (1995) called “indigenization of Marxism”: “To speak of the indigenization of Marxism is to draw attention to a major problem faced by Eastern Europe’s Marxist Leninist regimes: how could a language of politics that was imposed by force from outside become part of meaningful political action within a society. How did powerful preexisting discourses, such as the national one, domesticate the intruder, becoming in their turn part of its trajectory as the two bonded together toward forming a new hegemonic order?” (Verdery 1995, 139). I would like to argue that jubilees testify for both the current notions that are related to the state policy and cultural changes in longer perspective. They are interesting research material for one more reason: they use all the means and media available. Ultimately, precisely due to their multidimensional totality, they can be seen as a metonymy of the socialist universal culture of organized ostentation, but also a unique material for reflecting on the cultural foundations and their shifts.

What interests me is the discourse that was created in the context of national jubilees by intellectuals, and more precisely the academic elites, especially in regard to the specific situation in which they functioned. Are there any differences or discrepancies, provided that they were forced to reproduce or confirm the official narrative regardless of the imperative of seeking the scientific truth? How the narrative was adapted or developed? What does it tell us about the local variant of communism?

National uses

Every nationally-based case is different, regardless similarities in the official doctrine and its basic methodological principles, as the local conditions and cultural models determine the way and the extend in which communist ideal was implemented and conducted. In every national narrative, there are some events and motifs that can be and are adopted and rewritten. There are also some that need to be domesticated in order to gain the control over social imaginarium. Obviously, the issue of imaginative power and authority is particularly relevant in the case of the Soviet bloc, although the fight over memory that should be exclusively owned had been led before as well. For example, in the 19th century, the Russian imperium turned to the Cyrillo-Methodian cult and appropriated it in terms of the Pan-Slavic ideology and the views of Eastern Orthodox Church only after it was acknowledged and addressed by Austro-Hungary and the Papacy (Eldarov 2012, 132-140; Naydenova 2021, 11-37). In the 20th century, during the interwar period, Slovak elites focused on the Great Moravian legacy and the figures of SS. Cyril and Methodius in order to strengthen their national identity in response to the growing cult of Jan Hus in Czechoslovakia (Michela 2016, 128-140; Michela 2018, 309-352; Macho 2013, 69-81). Bulgarians elites started to pay a special attention to the oeuvre of St. Clement of Ohrid due of the historical claims to Macedonia, which turned out to be even more useful when the Bulgarian army annexed these territories in 1941 (Voytchak 2002, 413-421; Wojtczak 2006). In this paper, I would like to comment on the Bulgarian memory of the Cyrillo-Methodian mission with regard to the period of socialism, when many elements of the tradition became significant in the propaganda of the Bulgarian Communist Party.

In the Bulgarian master narrative, the Slavic Enlighteners function as figures of both the Slavic unity and Bulgarian primacy in Slavic (Eastern-Orthodox) world, although the latter is constantly negotiated or even negated by other national master narratives, especially the Macedonian one. The reason for this alleged primacy of Bulgarians is the fact that after the fall of the mission in Moravia some of the Cyrillo-Methodian disciples found shelter in Bulgaria and continued their work under the reign of newly baptized Bulgarian rulers. As a result, Bulgaria developed its own Christian culture, based on the Cyrillo-Methodian principles, and “imported” it to other Slavic states. That is why Bulgarians call the Old Church Slavonic Old Bulgarian, and as such it is perceived as the first literary Slavic language and the foundation of the Golden Age of Bulgaria, i.e. the period of the Bulgarian cultural prosperity during the reign of Simeon I the Great (889 – 927).

What is most important here is that, in the case of Bulgaria, the figures of Holy Brothers seem to have gained a unique place *regardless of the fact* that historically they had no connection with the state. The connecting link is twofold. On the one hand it is a historical fact that some of the Cyrillo-Methodian disciples were saved by the Bulgarian prince Boris I. On the other hand, there is an interesting thesis that St. Cyril invented the Slavic script years before the Moravian mission precisely for the needs of the Bulgarian Slavs (Atanasova – Penchev 2014, 97-106). The key contribution in this regard is made by Paisius of Hilendar, who in his famous work *Slav-Bulgarian history* (1762) connected the work of SS. Cyril and Methodius directly with the history

of Bulgarian people. As a result, Holy Brothers were included in the process of creating Bulgarian national identity in the 19th century and as such were constantly present in various ideological debates in the 20th century. Perceived not only as the enlighteners of Slavic peoples, but also flags of the Bulgarian contribution to the European culture as such,³ they just could not have been ignored by any authorities. Having become a crucial “site of memory” in Bulgarian culture, Ss. Cyril and Methodius were brought up even in the left-wing narrative.

After 1944, when the power was taken by the Bulgarian Communist Party, the Cyrillo-Methodian narrative was marginalized. The reason was that it had been associated with “chauvinist ideology”, shared by the tsar and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church before the war. Moreover, it was about the Bulgarians who gave the script to Russians, i.e. the fact which contradicted the ideals of internationalism and the superiority of the Soviet people. In time, however, Bulgarian communists returned to the figures of Cyril and Methodius. The ideological shift was conducted in the context of the de-Stalinization process, and reflected ideological changes in the Soviet bloc in the 1960’s, particularly in the attitude towards the historical past and social sciences (Naydenova 2017, 1-25; Daskalov 2018; see also Mitewa-Michalkowa 2008, 362-385).

The adaptation of the Bulgarian Cyrillo-Methodian narrative to the needs of the communist ideology has been already investigated, especially in terms of rewriting history. I would like to suggest that the more relevant question is how the religious nature of the work was suppressed, justified and given a new interpretation so successfully in case of Bulgaria. What was the interpretative framework of this? What is the role of the local circumstances? The Cyrillo-Methodian anniversaries during socialism seem to be particularly meaningful in this regard, as they not only became multilateral commemorations of the events of the Church history, but also an effective way of strengthening the non-religious interpretation of the tradition.

In the period 1946 – 1990, there were seven such occasions: 100 years from the first Bulgarian celebration of Cyril and Methodius’ Day, i.e. 24th of May (1957), 1100 years since the Moravian mission (1963), 1050 years since the death of Clement of Ohrid, the most famous of the Cyrillo-Methodian disciples (1966), 1100 years since Cyril’s death (1969), 1050 years since Cyril’s birth (1977), 1300 years since the foundation of the Bulgarian state (1981), 1100 years since Methodius’s death (1985). The jubilee discourse that is related to these events reveals that the main reference points were the ideas of revolution, enlightenment and culture, and all of them were interpreted through the prism of the idea of progress in terms of Marxism *and* Bulgarian National Revival, both of which are founded on the Enlightenment thought. These semantic changes and appropriations have been analysed in details in my book *Jubilee and modern. Cyrillo-Methodian narrative during socialism in Bulgaria* (Dzhevietska 2020). Here, I would like to point out that regardless of various ideological shifts within the triad indicated above, i.e. revolution – enlightenment – culture, there was a fundamental continuity with the previous periods in Bulgarian history as far as interpretative structures and main concepts are concerned. Cyril and Methodius had always been *Bulgarian* cultural heroes, patrons and guardians, and Bulgarian Communists were forced to adjust. It appears that, just as suggested by Verdery with regard to the case of socialist Romania, the language of national identity is not a matter of instrumentalisation for the purpose of legitimization but evidence of the functioning of ideological constructs (“idioms”) that are deeply rooted in the cultural and social tissue. “Because of its [the language of national identity] force in other quarters, because others used it in their own battles and sought to impose their own meanings on it, the Party had to strive as well to control the image of Romanian identity and to defend this image as adequately representing and protecting the Nation’s interests. To say that the Romanian Communist Party was merely one of several social actors who spoke

³ Szwat-Gylybowa 2008, 343-362; Szwat-Gylybowa et al. 2011, 68-77; Drzewiecka 2020, 52-56.

a language of national identity in political struggle is not to say, however, that all these competitors enjoyed equal footing” (Verdery 1995, 132).

It is in this context that the question of “indigenization of Marxism” manifests itself. It turns out that the jubilee discourse that is documented in commemorative publications of scientific and popular-scientific character was subjected to the idea of Bulgarian *cultural missionism* which consists of two basic identifications. First, the “Slavic enlighteners” are ethnic Bulgarians, then – they are the first communists, which leads to the conclusion that Bulgarian culture has always embodied the Cyrillo-Methodian ideal, as well as the socialist one. Communism is acclaimed as a realization of the Cyrillo-Methodian testament. “The work of Cyril and Methodius gained deepest meaning and significance in terms of socialist Bulgaria. 24th May became a national holiday of socialist cultural revolution” (Vasilev 1969, 1). As a result, the socialist present is the new Golden Age in the history of Bulgaria.

Research perspectives

The great potential that I recognize in research of communist jubilees is not only due to the fact that it reveals a cultural matrix that determines the way in which local communists functioned. It indeed shows how the authorities adapted themselves to both the Soviet order and local circumstances. How they responded to the imperative “to control the image of national identity” by adjusting universalistic message of internationalism to the local conditions as far as semantics and pragmatics are concerned.

The further research potential of communist jubilees is based on two facts. Firstly, in order to maintain the positive self-image, communists used national ideology and history for purposes of the current situation, but they did it according to the local tradition in terms of both narrative structures and interpretative patterns. Secondly, all kinds of media are involved in organizing jubilees, as the leading role is given to intelligentsia – not only due to its official function in socialist society but also because of its traditional involvement in national idiom. In this regard, scholars have a special place. As I have argued before, there is even a specific “symphony” of politics and science (Drzewiecka 2017, 303-331). The communist authorities would ensure proper coordination, financing and popularization of scholars. Scholars would answer with the truth about the nation and would participate in this universal culture of organized ostentation so that the foundation of the communist authorities would be strengthened.

Given this entanglement of political and scientific, local and universal, socialist and national, modern and traditional, I argue that jubilee can be seen as a key for investigating problems of traditions that are perceived as shared or contested, precisely due to the various similarities and ideological tensions within their framework. Thus, I suggest moving towards *contrastive grammar of competing jubilee discourses and practices*.

As an example, I would like to introduce a case of the Bulgarian-Macedonian polemics during the communist period. *The Macedonian question* is not only a reference point for the relations between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, as well as Bulgaria and Soviet Union, but also a factor which determines a way of reproducing the national narratives of Bulgarians and Macedonians for the purposes of both the external and the internal audience. In my opinion, focusing on anniversaries that were related directly to the contested history would reveal both the key differences between discourses and the common interpretative patterns.

Based on my current research, I would suggest that it is the jubilee discourse which emerged in the context of commemorations of the work of St. Clement of Ohrid that needs our special attention. He is not only the most famous disciple of Cyril and Methodius, but is also associated directly with

Macedonia in both of the master narratives that I am interested in. Being a Macedonian Slav, after escaping Moravia, Clement was sent by the Bulgarian prince Boris I to the western lands of the Bulgarian kingdom, where he continued his missionary work and successfully implemented his teachers' legacy.

The significant interest in this figure grew on the occasion of anniversaries. During the socialist period, there was one great anniversary devoted to him – in 1966: 1050 years since his death. There were commemorative events in both socialist republics, such as academic conferences, special publication initiatives, and – of course – official state festivities. However, there were no serious conflicts on this occasion. Bulgarian party even recommended not to provoke any controversies, since it was precisely this period when the tension around the Macedonian question was increasing. Although in 1963, during the meeting of Josip Tito and Todor Zhivkov, the latter acknowledged in a way the notion of Macedonian nation, and both sides agreed that the establishment of “truth” should be left to historians, and that the hostile tone in publications on the subject should be removed, the situation was dynamic and the internal party discourse was more and more oriented toward the national “idiom”, so that the fight against “falsification of history” became an imperative, and the task assigned to scholars (for more see: Kalinova 2011, 125-141).

A detailed description of the celebrations of 1966 itself is a subject of a different paper (Dzhevietska 2020), nevertheless what I would like to emphasize here is the main difference between the two jubilee discourses. According to the Bulgarian one, Clement was a Bulgarian enlightener who worked among the Macedonian population, that is the Macedonian Bulgarians. Such an image referred to the traditional Bulgarian narrative before the war. In the Macedonian jubilee discourse, Clement was presented as a Slavic teacher and patron who enlightened and defended Macedonian Slavs *as Slavs*. The reference point is the idea of yugoslavism and the slogan of “brotherhood and unity”, although the key circumstance was the way in which Bulgarians were perceived and that is *not as Slavs*, which was a common notion for the Greek and Serbian historiography, and later for the Macedonian one (cf. Livanios 2003, 68-84; Milosavljević 2002). If the Bulgarian image of Clement reproduced the model of Cyril, the Inventor of Slavic Script and the Great Enlightener, then the Macedonian image of Clement reproduced the model of Methodius, the Great Defender against the enemies of Slavic culture.

However, I would like to point out that it is not the jubilee of 1966 that is crucial for the Macedonian narrative. At that time first Macedonian textbooks and historiographic models were still in the process of being created. The fundamental *History of the Macedonian people* was to be published in 1969. Moreover, the Yugoslav federation had just been consolidated by the new constitution of 1963. The Macedonian standpoint on the matter of national identity had not been formulated clearly and ultimately. That is why the more significant jubilee for socialist Macedonia was celebrated in 1986. I argue that it is this event that needs further analysis in comparison with the Bulgarian celebrations of 1966.

The jubilee of 1986 is only Macedonian, as it is devoted to 1100 years from returning of Clement to Macedonia. It refers to the year when Clement left the Bulgarian court and started his mission in Kutmichevica. The diversity and the scope of scientific and cultural initiatives related to this jubilee are exceptional, which reflects both the internal situation of the Yugoslav Federation after Tito's death, and the current international situation of Bulgaria, being accused of violation of national minority rights. The jubilee is a pretext for a more diverse response to the official Bulgarian standpoint on the Macedonian question which was formulated in 1978 in two scholarly publications: *Macedonia. Collection of documents and materials* and *The unity of the Bulgarian language in the past and today* (which is still relevant), that the historical continuity of the so called Macedonian nation is false and has no legitimate basis outside the history of the Bulgarian nation.

The jubilee of 1986 can be seen as an eruption of Macedonian national ideology discourse, which appears to be a reproduction of Bulgarian interpretative models but with the opposite sign, at least as far the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition is concerned. Clement seems to be here a new Cyril – a genius writer and inventor, a teacher of Slavs and a patron of Macedonian cultural development. I mention it only briefly in order to emphasise the need of further investigation in the comparative perspective, as the Macedonian jubilee discourse can be seen as a meaningful response to the Bulgarian one.

Conclusion

Communist jubilees should be regarded not only as a part of the ideological calendar that reveals the main features of the party's propaganda, but also as a multidimensional manifestation of all the cultural foundations and shifts during this period. In this context, the Cyrillo-Methodian commemorations seem to have a special place in case of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, since they referred to both the main national and main religious tradition within Bulgarian cultural memory, but they also (re)produced views on historical past in a very specific communicative situation. Therefore, the broader aim of this paper was to call for an approach that combines the hermeneutic perspective of the history of historiography (and humanities in general) and the discourse analysis recently developed in (post)communist studies focusing on everyday life rituals and social practices in socialist states.

Investigating jubilees as an expression of the socialist culture of organized ostentation will help to understand the notion of "socialist nationalism" and its manifestations, as well as to answer the question of the various cultural tensions in the process of an emerging new social imaginary. For the purposes of capturing differences in terms of functions, structures, and idioms, but also similarities in more universal dimension, I suggest considering a contrastive analysis of jubilee discourses and practices. The comparison of certain jubilees should be conducted, however, in two perspectives, which means not only in regard to the same commemorated event, but also to its/their symbolic functions. Analysis of commemorations that take place in the same years, within the same historic conditions and international context, should be complemented by a comparison of jubilees that refer to the same ideological horizon, which – as I have shown – do not necessarily coincide. In my view, precisely this research focus is particularly promising and deserves further consideration.

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