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**ALEXANDER KIOSSEV**

**THE REAL CITY IN AN IMAGINARY TERRITORY  
(THE CASE OF PLOVDIV)**

In the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, Plovdiv was a complex multicultural space – a sort of ‘Balkans in miniature’. There lived Orthodox and Catholic Christians, Muslims; Bulgarians, Turks, Greeks, Jews, Armenians, Pavlikyans (Bulgarian Catholics), Roma and even merchants from Ragusa (i.e. Dubrovnik).<sup>1</sup> But the Ottoman city was multicultural in a medieval, not a modern sense. It was far from the ideal of modern multiculturalism – far from being a melting pot, a hybrid place for contacts, conflicts, and re-negotiations of boundaries. The fact that communities met face-to-face did not mean they were in a state of democratic cohabitation, with their cultural identities equally represented in public space, public conflicts or creative dialogues. Before the 1820s, every ethnic-cultural and religious community had its own isolated, localized and strictly defined mode of living, and the contacts between these communities, limited to the practical needs of economic exchange, seem to have been well-regulated and hierarchically structured, also in spatial terms<sup>2</sup>. These communities inhabited different neighborhoods, some of them quite closed and endogamous (the Pavlikyans (Bulgarian Catholics), Jews and Armenians). They had distinct secular and religious cultures, dress, emblematic everyday food; they practiced their religions in separate temples, celebrated their own holidays and performed their religious rituals in different holy languages (Turkish, Greek, Ladino, even Italian). Thus, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the city lived in pre-modern coexistence of small reli-

- 1 Genchev, Nikolay, *Vazrojdenskiat Plovdiv* (“Plovdiv in the Revival Period”), Plovdiv: Hristo G. Danov, 1981. See also Nemski, N. *Plovdiv prez epohata na Vazrajdaneto I natsionalno-osvoboditelnite borbi* (“Plovdiv during the Revival period and the period of struggles for national liberation”), Sofia: OF, 1963; Mutafchieva, Vera; Grozdanova, Elena and others, comp. *Rumeliiski delnitsi I praznitsi ot XVIII vek* (“Roumelian workdays and holydays from XVIII century”). Sofia: OF, 1978. *Solun i Plovdiv i tiahnoto usporedno istorichesko, kulturno i obshtestveno razvitie* (“Solun and Plovdiv and their parallel historical, cultural and social development”). Conference papers, Tessaloniki: Politistike Etaipeia Epixeirmaton Boreyon Ellados, 2000.
- 2 Yancheva, Irena, *Etnologia na vuyroydenskiza Plovdiv* (*Ethnology of Plovdiv from the Revival period*), Plovdiv, Plovdiv University Press, 1996.

gious and cultural communities that perpetuated their own distinct modes of living. The most typical token of this enclosure were the communities' taboos regarding specific eating<sup>3</sup>, drinking or sexual practices of the other communities, stigmatised as repulsive and unclean<sup>4</sup>.

In such an urban environment, the individual's identity, as a rule, is determined by the belonging to one or the other of these small, enclosed, pre-modern groups, defined mostly by language or religion. It seems stable, 'natural', non-negotiable. The only place of official contacts is the high street, but here there is again a hierarchy of ethnic groups, as well as ethnic or denominational monopolies over specific trades.

It is possible that the pre-modern control of communities was not quite so thoroughgoing. Even though we have little information about them due to the nationalist character of most history, ethnography and literature, we may assume that under the surface of pre-modern auto-segregation hybrid cultural phenomena existed. Lyuben Karavelov (1834 – 1879), for instance, describes the hybrid architectural, everyday and culinary traditions of Bulgarians and Greeks<sup>5</sup>; one can interpret them as a sign of very many different kinds of inter-ethnic interactions.

These hybrids show that the static picture of a pre-modern oriental city with stable isolation of the separate ethnic groups is an abstraction – an instant aerial photograph. Actually, under the surface of a seeming feudal immobility, the slow historical process of multidimensional exchange between spaces and cultures was taking place. As a result of the changing economic and political situation of the Ottoman Empire, the city experienced a whole series of voluntary and enforced migrations, an exodus of certain ethnic and denominational groups and an influx of others. After the initial influx of Anatolian settlers in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, who expelled the existing Christian population, in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries the reverse process occurred<sup>6</sup>. For economic reasons or in search of security from violent robber gangs, many Christian (Greek and Bulgarian) families settled in the city, and there came Ragusa merchants, who were afterward pushed out by the Greek and Jewish traders<sup>7</sup>.

Later, in the process of early modernisation demographic processes were intertwined with economic and cultural developments. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Plovdiv's importance as a commercial centre increased. It supplied Istanbul with rice, wheat, sesame, timber, mutton, wool, cloth, and horses.

3 Bogorov, Ivan, *Nyakolko dena razhodka po bulgarskite mesta* (A Several Days Walk in Bulgarian Places), 1868, in Bogorov, Ivan *I se zapochna s bulgarski orel* (One started with the "Bulgarian eagle), Sofia, BP, p. 260

4 Yancheva, *ibid*, p 165 - 193

5 *Ibid*, 104

6 Genchev, N, *ibid*, p. 5 – 70, further in *Solun and Plovdiv*, *ibid*, p. 139 – 165

7 Genchev, N, *ibid*, p. 31- 50.

It traded with cities farther away in the Balkans or in the Near East. Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the export of cloth and rice to Wallachia, Moldova, Russia, Hungary, Austria, Syria (Damascus) grew. Research has even found a Plovdiv colony in Calcutta, India. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, due to its location on the postal route from Constantinople to Vienna, Plovdiv gradually became an important transport hub of the Empire.

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These facts should make clear that a static map of the territorial location of religious and ethnic-cultural groups in the city is inadequate. Mapping cultural identities should be ‘animated’ to take into account the social and historical dynamism, within which the boundaries of ‘own’ and ‘foreign’ in a city are constantly being rewritten. This new, dynamic map should encompass not only the visible ethnic and religious realities of the city and hybrid phenomena, but also the ‘long-distance’ social and spatial relations with other economic or cultural centres and ideas. (a communication which were constitutive for the modernization of the city). The map of the city and its cultural identities will then start to resemble a moving picture dependent on a diversity of processes of exchange – of both material and symbolic products. Never in the city’s existence did communities live in perfect isolation. The city as a whole and its districts, dominated by one or the other ethnic or cultural element, were in continuous communication and exchange with ‘other worlds’, both near and distant. The flows of people, capital and goods, as well as of cultural products – names, emblems, symbols, models and interpretations – constantly introduced non-local elements, from coffee and pepper to political ideas and literary genres, into the city space and way of life.

This communication with the distant world did not leave the city unaffected. The ‘other worlds’ did not simply communicate, they intervened – they sent agents and symbols that changed the city’s cultural map. The forms of intervention varied from economic and material causality to symbolic techniques capturing the collective imagination and changing the sense of group belonging (the latter is my specific object of study). The alien symbols transcended the closed, pre-modern ‘dwelling spaces of identities’ in the city, thus supporting or changing balances, stabilizing or re-inscribing the internal boundaries of its cultural topography.

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In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of modernization within the Ottoman Empire and intensification of trade with Western Europe, Plovdiv ‘opened up’ to trade with cities, such as Marseilles and Vienna, and countries, such as Italy, Germany, England, that were ‘distant’ to the medieval imagination. As noted

by many travelers<sup>8</sup>, in 1840 the city was a commercial crossroads between Istanbul, Belgrade, Bucharest, Thessaloniki, and Seres. For years, along the Maritsa River small rafts and boats sailed not only to the Imperial capital, but also to a series of Mediterranean ports, carrying legal or smuggled cargoes of rice, silkworm, vegetables or iron. In 1846, a decree of the Sultan opened the Maritsa River for steamship transportation and abolished internal duties. During the 1830s and 1840s, land trade and transportation routes grew as well. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially after the opening of the Istanbul-Belovo railway, regionally- and eastward-oriented trade was complemented by trade with Western Europe and its modern markets. Astonished by the diverse trading styles of the multiethnic population,<sup>9</sup> in 1850 the English traveller Edmund Spencer advised London merchants to study the techniques of the articulate citizens of Plovdiv<sup>10</sup>.

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However, in spite of all these pre-modern inter-ethnic exchanges and distant interactions, there were no rivaling cultures, no competitions of identities in the city. Before the 1820s and 1830s, the most important condition for this was missing. At the time, Plovdiv had no public spaces and no nationalistic cultural institutions, supporting it (no modern educational systems, no modernised churches, nationalistic press, book-publishing, libraries, museums etc.)

Changes occurred in a gradual way. Together with the new rail- and waterways, Plovdiv also gradually acquired 'symbolic highways': the new cultural institutions of modernity – book-publishing, a new educational network, national churches, press and public opinion, libraries-cum-cultural centres, clubs and charities. The Greek and Bulgarian cultural institutions in Plovdiv were in conflict from the very beginning: one can call this conflict destructive for the pre-modern urban mosaic, but constitutive for Plovdiv's modern public space and its centrifugal, incompatible national geographic imaginations. While the other ethnic groups – Muslims, Jews, Pavlikyans, Wallachians, Roma – were late in the struggle for public space, the Greek Bulgarian rivalry started as early as the late 1840s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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The Greek-Bulgarian competition over the creation of modern cultural institutions deserves more attention. As noticed by the Greek historian Xantipi Kodzageorgi-Zimari, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the 'Hellenic' ideology of the New Greeks required a rejection of the purely religious schools, good classi-

8 Vazvazova-Karateodorova, Kirila, *Nepresachvashti izvori . Documentani materiali is istoryata na Plovdiv I Plovdivsko*. (Never Failing Sources. Documents on the History of Plovdiv and the Plovdiv Region), Plovdiv, Hristo Danov, 1975 p.

9 Genchev, N, *ibid*, p. 31- 50.

10 Vazvazova-Karateodorova, *ibid*. 292

cal education and their own educational network<sup>11</sup>. In the 1820s and 1830s, several schools were opened in Plovdiv. In 1820, the central Greek school was founded, soon to be followed by three private ones. In 1834 the city saw the founding of the first Greek school of mutual education (The Holy Trinity) where all Christian ethnicities were able to educate their children (in Greek). The second school of that kind (St. Paraskeva) was opened in 1847. Greek education in Plovdiv was so advanced that the first Greek girls' school was founded quite early – in 1851 –, while in 1876 the Greek women's society 'Euridice' even founded the first secondary school for girls in this part of the Ottoman Empire. Most of these schools were built and financed with money from Plovdiv's Greek notables (e.g. M. Gumushgerdan, Archimandrite Nikodim, etc.), and attracted good teachers, some of which were even university teachers from the University of Athens that was established in 1837. Churches were built and renovated in the city, and newspapers, including the authoritative *Neologos*, from the Kingdom of Greece were also in circulation.

The cultural initiatives of later Bulgarian settlers from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, living mainly in the Karashiaka and Marash districts, started about thirty years after the Greek ones. The first Bulgarian school was built in 1850 with the money of the Plovdiv notable Stoyan Chalukov. Shortly thereafter, the school attracted important Bulgarian intellectuals, such as Naiden Gerov, Konstantin Gerov and Yoakim Grouev<sup>12</sup> (1928–1912). Several years later other rich Bulgarian merchants and tax-collectors from Plovdiv took part in establishing and renovating schools. Bulgarian newspapers published in various parts of the empire as well as outside it were distributed in the city: from Tsarigrad (*Tsarigrad New, Law, Century, Councillor, Day, Progress, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Windpipe*), the magazines *Chitalishte, A Guide to Basic Education, Turkey*), from Belgrade (*Danube Swan*) and in the 1870s from Bucharest and Braila (*Freedom, Independence, Flag*, the magazines *Knowledge and Bulgarian Bee*).

The main conflict between the two self-modernizing communities is the language of liturgy: the Greeks perceived their language to be traditional and canonical, while Bulgarians wanted Old Slavonic to be introduced in the holy service and later claimed ownership of certain churches in Plovdiv. After a series of scandals, libels, pleas to higher instances, direct physical clashes between youths from both communities, and the change of two metropolitan bishops, the religious community of the Plovdiv municipality split<sup>13</sup>. In 1872,

11 *Solun and Plovdiv*. Ibid, p. 321 -341

12 Grouev, Ioakim. *Moite spomeni* ("My memoirs"). Plovdiv: Hristo G. Danov, 1906.

13 This is part of the all-Bulgarian struggle for an independent Bulgarian church, which took several decades and led to the creation of the autocephalous Bulgarian church in 1870. In its turn that led the ecumenical patriarch to proclaim that Bulgarians were schismatics.

the Bulgarian metropolitan bishop entered Plovdiv and was given a glorious, multitudinous welcome<sup>14</sup>.

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The church struggles and newspapers show well that from the very beginning, cultural institutions were unthinkable without transcending the purely local needs and issues. They created practical communication and solidarity spanning easily the hundreds of kilometres between Istanbul, Bucharest, Belgrade, Turnovo and Plovdiv. Plovdiv's issues were discussed by newspapers in Istanbul and Bucharest, Athens, Braila and Crete. But on a rhetorical level these passionate polemics implied something more: they carried in their tropological lexicons the image of the pure and homogeneous communicative space encompassing and transcending all localities.

Yet, this double function is valid for other cultural institutions as well. The schools in different cities within the Empire exchanged staff, textbooks and ideas. They were effective supra-local networks with great practical impact. Furthermore, books, papers, posters, pictures, and maps from outside Plovdiv entered the city, along with a special type of cultural and commercial pilgrims – teachers who had travelled half the Empire - would stay and work in Plovdiv for several years. These influences introduced arguments and ideas foreign to Plovdiv directly into local cafes and pubs.

Along with these direct influences, the very existence of the newly established networks of cultural institutions also had impact. For instance, the journalistic representations of the (at the time quite humble) Bulgarian publishing network transformed its fragmented character, poverty and hybridity (Bulgarian bookstores sold also Greek, Armenian and Turkish books) into ideological images of homogeneous, purely patriotic institutions encompassing, dense national, purely Bulgarian territories. Similar ideological substitutions occurred in the building of the public images of all other cultural institutional networks in the Ottoman Empire – schools, libraries-cum-cultural centres, boarding schools, book-publishing. In lieu of the actual networks of economic and cultural links, humble in scope and often ethnically diverse, public declarations posited the grand monolithic image of 'our whole country' which was 'pure' Bulgarian or 'pure' Greek and rendered all hybrid phenomena either invisible or portrayed them as a hostile irritant (for instance, some Bulgarian papers were also published in Greek or many towns were inhabited by different ethnic and religious groups).

With regard to Plovdiv these processes had special consequences. The powerful public images of distant spaces and competing sacred homelands exaggerated its own urban space, threatened the fragile ethnic and religious

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14 Ibid.

balance and re-defined the symbolism of the city space. They required a new type of identification whereby the Plovdiv citizen felt himself or herself not as the real inhabitant of a real city but as the 'brother' or 'sister' of invisible millions within an imaginary native community, inhabiting a similarly imaginary map<sup>15</sup>. The various collectives were seen as parties in ancient hostilities and dramatic conflicts. From this perspective, the representation of the city itself became problematic – it shrank from a self-sufficient world of countless cultures to a dot on the map being pulled by the grand communities in various directions.

Only a few decades of this pedagogical, journalistic and literary treatment of social fantasy changed Plovdiv: the former neighbours started perceiving themselves as participants on both sides of ancient conflicts and large-scale territorial claims. This was a legitimisation of real conflict between the communities: life in the national narrative-territories led to quarrels in the common churches, to street fights and to an asymmetry in the processes of formation of collective identities.

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While the other ethnic groups – Jews, Paulicians, Roma and even the imperial ethnic group – the Turks - still lived in pre-modern closed communities, the Bulgarians and Greeks, who until recently had shared their religion, temples, schools and had accepted mixed marriages, turned into irreconcilable enemies. Each individual seemingly lived less in a specific neighbourhood of multiethnic Plovdiv than in one's own projected ideal territory. The pre-modern neighbourhood and traditional, tolerable differences turned into an irreconcilable conflict of ideal worlds. Since the dot of the city turned out to be a crossroads of differing incompatible imaginary territories, the city's real social space and time were also restructured. This changed the city's topography – it had to accommodate different, modern identities and polemics.

\* \* \*

The Greek ideological position preferred a historicized geography. As Konstantinos Hadzopoulos has stated<sup>16</sup>, at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century about fifteen Greek geographies speak about the lands of 'European Turkey'. They were torn between two tendencies – on one hand, the desire to present Ottoman provinces precisely and objectively with the means of the geography and cartography of the time; on the other, the ideological tendency to project a new Hellenic geography onto the peninsula. The latter prevailed after Adamantios Korais ((1748-1833) translated Strabon's ancient geography and reintroduced

15 See Anderson, B., *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso. 1991

16 Chatzopoulos Konstantinos K *Peri Thrakis, Thraki kata tous Ellines geographous tis Othomanikis epochis* [On Thrace; Thrace according to the Greek Geographers of the Ottoman era]; v.I, Xanthi, 2001, 85-106 pp

Hellenic toponyms for modern geographical and administrative areas. The province of ‘Thracia’ raised particular controversies. Hadzopoulos claims the name was archaic even in Byzantine times, so from the 18<sup>th</sup> century on the province was named ‘Romania’ or ‘Roumeli’. Even when ‘Roumeli’ was accompanied by ‘Thracia’, it was usually mentioned that this was an old name whose territorial reference had shrunk considerably – it bordered on Hemus and Bulgaria and encompassed a modern Ottoman province much smaller than Ancient Thrace which sprawled as far as the Danube. Korais, however, was the first to revive the ‘Hellenic’ notion of Thrace, and the name ‘Thracia’ became a hidden argument for the inclusion of vast lands and provinces into a visionary Greek homeland, which had to breathe new life into its ancient history (and, by implication, its ancient territory). In this context, Thracia was proclaimed to be part of the wider space of ‘Hellas or Grecia’, which in some texts once again encompasses the whole of the Balkan peninsula. When debating ‘who Plovdiv belongs to’, leaders of the Greek party in the city, historians, intellectuals and journalists ardently used the following argument: Philippopolis, the city of emperor Philip II, was a city with a venerable history. They fitted Philippopolis into the centre of a historicized space – the ‘glorious and fertile’ Thrace (an they had in mind the ancient, Hellenic Thrace), a legendary state inherited by Ancient Greece, the Hellenic world and Byzantium). The modern rightful heir of this ancient country, and of course the city, was Greece. According to Georgios Tsoukalas (a prominent Greek teacher in Plovdiv who wrote the first modern book on city history and geography) this was proved by the continuity of the civilizing effort and the ‘holy and divine’ Greek language: “As we demonstrated above, Greek had been used from times immemorial in Thrace and in Plovdiv, the city of Philip. Besides, the same applies to Moesia, Macedonia and Epirus; centuries ago, the Greek language was shared by vast spaces and distant lands in Asia, not to speak of the lands adjacent to Ancient Greece. This is a divine language, the language of Orthodoxy, the language of wisdom, etc.”<sup>17</sup>

Besides, according to the contributor of *Neologos*, Amalia Smirian<sup>18</sup>, the new claimants were part of those nomad, uncivilized tribes who brought nothing but ruin – *Huns, Avars, Pechenegs, Bulgarians and other punished and savage tribes*. In effect, then, they are intruders, interlopers and destructive barbarians with no lawful claim on this ancient land. The Bulgarians are even worse than ‘savages’ because they do not accept the divine gift of the Greek language but prefer speaking an unimaginable Turko-Slavonic mixture of languages. What is more, the Hellenic-Byzantine tradition has given them more than one chance to civilize themselves. The Byzantine emperor endowed

17 Τσουκαλας, Γεωργιος Ιστοριογεωγραφικη πειραφη τεξ επαρχιας Φιλιππουπολεωσ, Vienna, 1851.

18 *Tzarigradski vestnik* (Constantinople’s Newspaper), 13 Oct. 1851, Quoted also in Yancheva, Irena, *ibid.* p. 21.

them with lands that were later Christianized by Byzantine missionaries, but the Bulgarians broke the peace agreements and performed treacheries. Despite all this, they now have yet another chance to become civilized, i.e. to become assimilated. Amalia Smirian sees nothing humiliating about this; on the contrary, this is not a loss of identity but a increase in their civilisational status - this wild and savage tribe could simply become part of the cradle of culture!

\* \* \*

The Bulgarian party in Plovdiv, however, had its counterarguments. First, Bulgarian journalists were acquainted with the thesis of the Austrian historian Fallmerayer who as early as the 1830s expressed his doubts that modern Greeks were heirs apparent of the Ancient Hellenes, and they were more than pleased to repeat it<sup>19</sup>. The notorious continuity of language and civilization is but an illusion of the new Greeks who seek to deck themselves out with ancient glory. As Petko Slaveikov (1827 – 1895) writes: “They do not seek to be Greeks but aspire to be Romans, because when ask any of them who he was, he replies in Greek: Ego imi Romeos (I am Roman). This is how those who take the citizens of Plovdiv for Greeks delude themselves.”<sup>20</sup> In fact according to the Bulgarian versions, history has proven that the Greeks were merely a tribe without autonomy in the multiethnic empire of Eastern Rome<sup>21</sup>.

Second, according to their own argumentation the Bulgarians are represented not as plunderers and barbarians but as a new civilizing force called upon to take up the torch of civilization – they are the young blood coming to slavify Byzantium<sup>22</sup>

Here the argument is divided along heroic and peaceful lines. The former stress the preservation of identity and continuous opposition. Albeit a young and small tribe, Bulgarians have managed to conquer their lands and to maintain their independence against the powerful Byzantine empire. In the second case the stress falls on assimilation: after the arrival of the Slavs on the Balkan peninsula the lands of Hellas and Byzantium were peacefully slavified. The Bulgarians outnumbered and assimilated all other tribes (by the way, the same argument is used for the slavification and bulgarianization of the Ottoman Empire).

19 Clogg, Richard, *Concise History of Greece*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, translated in Bulgarian by Margarita Dogramadjan, Sofia, Pigmalion, 2003, p 12.

20 Slaveikov, Petko, “Produlzenie na otgovora zardi bulgarskoto v Plovdiv uchilishte” (Continuation of a Response Concerning the Bulgarian School in Plovdiv), *Tzarigradski vestnik* (Constantinople’s Newspaper), 8 of September 1951.

21 Ibid.

22 Lilova, Dessislava, “Balkanite kato rodina? Versii na teritorialnata identichnost na bulgarite pod osmanska vlast” (The Balkans as a homeland? Versions of Territorial Identity of the Bulgarians under the Ottoman Rule) in *Kraayat na modernostta* (The End of Modernity). Sofia, Litnet, 2003, p. 27 – 62

The third argument is brutal and direct: Thracia, and with it, Plovdiv, are purely Bulgarian; one can find this fact even in Bulgarian textbooks in Greek<sup>23</sup>. It is curious how this argument easily coexists in Bulgarian journalism with comparatively detailed description of the multinational character of both the area and the city. The disclosed facts about the many ethnicities, languages and religions still allow Thracia to be claimed as purely Bulgarian. The rhetorical transition from ‘the majority is Bulgarian’ to ‘therefore Thracia (Plovdiv) is purely Bulgarian’ goes uncontested. This claim sounds even stranger when accompanied by acknowledgement that the area is home to a great number of representatives of the ruling nation, the Turks. However, they take no part in the civilisational linguistic-religious debate between the two leading ethnicities in Plovdiv, the Greeks and the Bulgarians. The Bulgarian press of the period thus features sentences like “There are some Greeks in Thracia, but they are few compared to the large population of Bulgarians and Turks. The real litter of Greeks in European Turkey is the Halkidiki Peninsula where they aren’t mixed with other tribes (south from Thessaloniki<sup>24</sup>) This statement is only one rhetorical step from Petko Slaveikov’s claim: “The whole world sees and they themselves know that the population of Thracia and Macedonia is purely Bulgarian, and yet they still strain to assure the world that these lands are Greek and their inhabitants couldn’t be Bulgarian?”<sup>25</sup>

More interesting than direct arguments, however, are the subtle suggestions incorporated in the images of the imaginary homeland and its territory, along with the location of the disputed city within it. The most substantial assertion is related to the fact that for Bulgarian journalists the name ‘Thracia’ is dehistoricized and transformed into a toponym from physical geography<sup>26</sup>. While the Greeks call it ‘glorious Thrace’, a land with a formidable historical heritage, Bulgarians take it to be merely a fertile field, a meadow, a garden associated with agriculture (a traditional Bulgarian occupation), fertility and abundance. Here are some examples: “This (Plovdiv’s ) eparchy lies in North Thracia and borders on the Balkan mountain range to the north, on the Rila mountain range to the northwest, and on a vast meadow reaching all the way to the Black Sea, a meadow strewn with cities, towns and villages to the southeast<sup>27</sup>, or: this city [Plovdiv] is set on a long hillock rising over or It [Plovdiv] is located in European Turkey as some high poplar in a big garden: equally removed from Edrene, Eski Zaara, Sliven, Kazanlak and Turnovo... coastal towns like Takirdaa at the White Sea and Bourgas at the Black Sea.”<sup>28</sup> The ‘naturalization’ of the area is clearly obvious from the type of metaphors

23 Fotinov, Konsatntin, *Bulgarski razgovorni za oniya, koito obichat da se navikvat da govoryat grecheski* (Bulgarian Phrasebook, For Those Who Are Keen to Learn Greek )

24 Anonimous, *Letostrui ili domashen kalendar za prosta godina 1869* (The stream of years, or a house calendar for the year 1869) Plovdiv-Rousse-Veles, Hristo Danov, 1869

25 Slaveikov, Petko, *Macedonia*, N. 16, 16th of March 1868

26 Bogorov, Ivan, *Kratka geografija*, (Concise geography), In Bogorov *ibid.*, P.123 – 130.

27 Letostrui, *ibid.*

28 Letostrui, *ibid.*

and comparisons preferred by Bulgarian geographers and journalists. When they say that Thracia is “a vast meadow ... strewn with cities, towns and villages”, the image of a forest meadow strewn with herbs and flowers lurks behind the geographical image. This has two consequences. When the valley of Thracia has been purged of foreign cultural and historical signs, its fertile nature and yielding force is easier to relate to the natural, organic and biological metaphors Bulgarians use to describe their presence and prevalence in it. The Bulgarians are more numerous, have assimilated the rest, are part of the big Slavonic sea that sweeps everything, and have pushed the Greeks to the seashore. While the Bulgarian ethnicity is an ‘element of nature’, the Greek one is ‘infection’, etc. Even economic supremacy can be presented by ‘garden’ metaphors – Bulgarian villages are ‘planted’, trade is ‘blossoming’, etc. “All its [Plovdiv’s] citizens have come from the surrounding Bulgarian villages, planted here by the blossoming trade”<sup>29</sup>. It is interesting to see how the image of this natural prevalence is selectively directed against the Greeks only: it is never mentioned whether the Bulgarian population has prevailed over the Turks, for example.

The second consequence of the dehistoricization of Thracia is its transformation into a ‘tabula rasa’ for the writing of another historical grand narrative. It is usually rather humble, such as the story of the settlers of Plovdiv coming from the surrounding Bulgarian villages and the initiative of Bulgarian tax-collectors and traders who started building churches and schools and ‘awakening’ the suppressed Bulgarian ethnos. Yet if the story of the past and present is still humble, this is not necessarily so bad – it could turn into a story of the future and become a utopia for the ‘EuroBulgarian Plovdiv’. As Ivan Bogorov (1820 – 1892) writes: “It [Plovdiv] is situated in the middle of the long postal route from Vienna to Tsarigrad, traveled by two posts every week: the Turkish and the German ones. Every day its central location invites guests from all surrounding cities, guests who fill the inns and stay for a couple of days to sell and buy goods. After the last war Plovdiv became known to the five great powers who were kind enough to send their representatives, so that now their flags are waving magnificently over Plovdiv’s houses. And if one day the fertile fields of European Turkey are traversed by railways, Plovdiv will be in the centre of this pale nodular star. ... In no other city has the element of Bulgarian nationality been so suppressed, so cramped, so forgotten, as it is in Plovdiv; and yet, thanks to the noble hearts of its citizens, today its development is higher than in other Bulgarian cities... And we will not be deluding ourselves if we say that in matters of enlightenment, Plovdiv is for Bulgarians what Paris is for the French, and in matters of the book trade, what Lipiska (Leipzig) is for the Germans.”<sup>30</sup>

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29 Bogorov, Ivan, *ibid*, p. 125.

30 Bogorov, Ivan, nontitled, *Dunavski lebed*, [Danube Swan], N 18, year I, 1861.

The discussion of specific practical matters about the transformation of Plovdiv into an European city (how to react to the decline in trade, what are the possibilities for building cotton factories in Plovdiv, even Bogorov's technocratic dreams about the railway via Plovdiv to Bourgas that ought to turn Plovdiv into "a second Manchester"<sup>31</sup>) connect the history of the city to a progressivist narrative that cannot by nature be anything but nationalistic. Bogorov imperceptibly transforms the presentation of the city into a synecdoche for the heroic narrative of the rise and fall of the Bulgarian nation striving to resurrect its suppressed spirit and with it to raise its cities to the prestigious centers of European civilization. And vice versa: the very larger-than-local teleology of this story is already a hidden designation of the city as 'Bulgarian' (i.e. it is purely Bulgarian because it is destined to become purely Bulgarian). Earlier traditional temporal coordinates (the city of Philip II, of Eumolp, etc., of the glorious Hellenic Thrace) have been replaced by the position of the future – this will become a blossoming Bulgarian trade centre in Bulgarian times and on Bulgarian territory. The future Bulgarian (rather than Balkan and hybrid) character of Plovdiv leads to a rather different exchange between the native and the alien, the close and the distant. No more of the relationship of Plovdiv to other neighboring or more distant cities of the Ottoman Empire and the Balkan Peninsula are displayed, despite the fact that on a practical level Bogorov realizes the trade advantages of being located at a Balkan crossroad. Instead, it is a matter of ideal communication, of measuring up to the norm "Europe". With its national cultural achievements, including book printing, churches, education, technological progress, i.e. with its modern symbolic capital, the city seems to leave the Balkans and line up with the supra-spatial, ideal community of great European cities – Paris, Leipzig, Manchester, the centers of world progress.

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In both civilisational utopias and poetic visions about the 'garden on the plain' Plovdiv has a peculiar spatial localization. One cannot fail to notice the fact that Bulgarian journalists and publicists are nearly obsessed with its central position for which they have coined a plentitude of names: 'a poplar in a garden', 'on the crossroad of the future railways', 'the center point of Roumelia', and 'the centre of Bulgaria'. It's 'high' position is also readily underscored: 'rising', 'a high city', 'a high poplar'; although the city walls were destroyed back in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Bulgarian journalists and self-proclaimed geographers saw it "as a fortress rising on three hills, from where the gaze wanders over a picturesque plain intersected by the river Maritza and strewn with villages."<sup>32</sup>

31 Bogorov, Ivan, "Zeleden put ot Plovdiv do Bourgas" (Railroad from Plovdiv to Bourgas), in *One has started...* *ibid.*, p. 213 - 214

32 Letostrui, *ibid.*

On one hand, this “centralizing” is related to a venerable device of every imaginary and real geography: panoptic centering as unification and domination over the imaginary territory, including both the power of the gaze, surveillance, and symbolic ‘condensation’ and emblemization of the space through its centre (capital). On the other hand, it bears the modern, practical motivation of stressing the central location of the city as a commercial, political and military factor – the important intersection of ancient routes could be expected to become a railway centre. The visibility of the centre can also be rationalized in the categories of nature and aesthetics. This is beauty visible from every point, a delightful view, such as a poplar city in a garden, the centre of a star on a picturesque plain. Yet there is something else as well. The excessiveness of this obsession hints at a rather strained tolerance: under the rationalistic motivations, ‘central’ Plovdiv is a scandal to Bulgarian nationalist-territorial imagination. It cannot accept this scandal and often refuses to notice it: a ‘motley’ city in the midst of the ‘purely Bulgarian’ Thracia. As Petko Slaveikov wrote: “Those who do not want the citizens of Plovdiv to be Bulgarians but wish them to be Greeks will have a hard time explaining historically how those Greeks came to reside only in the centre of the city, while the periphery is all populated with Bulgarians. If we leave aside the ruling Turks, the people in the villages all the way to Edrine, including the people near the sea, are all Bulgarian and have never heard the Greek language.”<sup>33</sup> The question is directed at Slaveikov’s Greek opponents, but he is probably tortured by the same dilemma: how those Greeks came to be in the centre of the Slavonic sea? This question could, of course, find an empirical and detailed answer with many elaborate historical, economical and geographical explanations. Slaveikov himself was quite able to provide them, being a clever and well-informed man. Yet the trauma of the question, embedded in the childish idea of the ‘purely Bulgarian land’ lingers on: how those Greeks came to be in the centre of the Slavonic sea? The city torments the image of the imaginary homeland because every attempt at its representation leads to this unbearable, archaic paradox: the impurity of the pure, the heteronomy of the integral. This is also proved by the fact that under the ideological ‘Greek-Bulgarian’ opposition there are other ethnicities which the patriotic imagination of Bulgarian journalists is forced to forget and, if it remembers them, to mention with ridiculous qualifications, such as ‘if we leave aside the ruling nation’ because non-ruling ethnicities in Plovdiv are even easier to forget. Thus in the representations of Plovdiv reaches this obsessive point or, more precisely, this obsessive parabola. From a calm and objective description of hybrids to a flight within the pure imaginary homeland that has absorbed the city, yet then a return, a new collision with the multinational facts of the area and the city - a new torment...

33 Slaveikov, Petko “Produlzenie na...”, *ibid.*

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The symbolic weapon of the “pure territory” able to absorb real multicultural cities was produced by many genres, including historical and geographical textbooks, journalism and pamphlets, but here the genres of fiction and poetry played the major role.

For Bulgarian literature from the National Revival period, the mixed cities were an especially painful semiotic paradox close to what Julia Kristeva calls ‘abject’. The system of national signs clashes in a transgressive way with the unbearable, disgusting hybridity of whatever scandalized its boundaries, being simultaneously inside and outside this system<sup>34</sup>. Usually, the unbearable repulsion was masked and covered over by the biblical cliché of Sodom and Gomorrah, which was documented in lyrical images of Ottoman cities as early as the 1850s in the poems of Zinzifov, Gerov and many others. Plovdiv, for example, often appears as unbearable and shameful oriental Babylons, an imperial Sodom and Gomorrah, loci of sin, forbidden pleasures, places unclean, revolting and perverse. This same image of a scandalously-heterogeneous place of non-identity and moral failure, this Bulgarian version of the Biblical Sodom and Gomorrah is imposed in other works on the cities of Constantinople, Sofia, Rouse, Paris, Bucharest<sup>35</sup>, etc. Those cities are opposed to the ideal Bulgarian territory that shall be discussed below.

The early nationalistic prose of Lyuben Karavelov is scandalized precisely by the linguistic, ethnic and religious ‘motley’ character of Plovdiv<sup>36</sup>, a ready canvas for the archaic mythical figures transferred by the author’s literary imagination. Karavelov projects on Plovdiv’s dangerousness, impurity and perverse sexuality depict this hybrid city as a negative and ambivalent space, which is close to the archetype of the obscure, female and chthonic element of water. The specific reason for this imagery may be that at the time Plovdiv was surrounded by swamps and rice fields.

This is a stable tradition of fiction. It was continued some 30 years later in a radically different public and cultural context in Ivan Vazov’s (1850 – 1921) *New Land* (1896). This novel repeats to a great extent the traditional metaphoric paradigm, even though Plovdiv was the new capital of Eastern Roumelia and Vazov was residing there with an important national mission as a member of the Regional Parliament and as one of the most important agents

34 Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror. An Essay of Abjection* Columbia University Press, New York Chicago, 1982

35 Penchev, Boyko. *Tsarigrad/Istanbul As A Symbolical Heterotopy of Intersecting Identification Strategies (1870-1913)*, manuscript, paper in the research framework of the NEXUS project, “How to think about the Balkans, Culture, Region, Identities”, Sofia. 2003

36 Peleva. Inna, “Plovdiv v prozata na Lyuben Karavelov” (Plovdiv in the prose of Lyuben Karavelov), in *Vazrodsenskiyat text* (The Text in the Revival Period), Sofia, Srebaren lav, 1998, p. 67 –75.

of Bulgarisation in the city. Plovdiv is once again the alien, big and cold venue, a version of the archaic urban evil. Opposed to the wholesomeness and light of the country, the chthonic, unclean and hostile city is reduced once again to the archaic images of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Vazov's literary representation of the city is very often an 'escape from Plovdiv'. It revealingly privileges a panoramic perspective towards the city, which dissolves the city into the national visionary landscape. The town itself is usually almost excluded from the gaze of the speaker or narrator, who, although physically in it, prefers the view towards the horizons of the majestic landscapes where natural beauty and national-territorial emblems can be discerned. "To the North – the endless plains; in the distance – the Balkan Mountain range with its giant peaks: Yumroukchal, Ostrets, Amabaritsa; a row of white woolly clouds, resembling a marble mountain raised high in the sky. To the South, the dark green Rhodope Mountain range rose. A divine sight."<sup>37</sup> National territoriality is infused with authenticity and powerful emotions. The ideological relationship between the concrete city and the imagined national territory is dis-balanced in favor of the ideological vision. The cherished area that has absorbed the town is complete with sequences of organic metaphors which uphold its belonging. Vazov paints an enraptured canvas of the city as "a panorama great and rare in the world"<sup>38</sup>, without turning a blind eye to the white minarets, Byzantine houses and all the "eastern variety". The gaze of the insider gives way to the all-embracing visionary geography, which may only see Plovdiv as valuable for being halfway between the Balkan Mountain range and the Rhodopes ("a divine sight"). This big-scale lyricism may lull into comfort the potential conflicts of the "eastern variety".

In Bulgarian prose's system of patriotic literary representations of space from the 1860s through the 1880s the negative features of the big heteronomous towns had other counterpoints besides the visionary territory of the homeland. One of them was the idyllic image of the small town seen as a stronghold of Bulgarian authenticity and 'national awakening'. This pure locus of authenticity and emancipation was contrasted in various ways to Plovdiv's motley, unclean hybridity. Even the small town's obvious provinciality was viewed with an idealized, generous, tolerant eye. Parallel to that, in much poetry and prose, both Plovdiv and the networks of idealized small towns, and even the national territory were incorporated in much larger literary geographies. In a nutshell, there are three concentric circles around the represented cities– first, the ideal homeland, second, the ironically portrayed Balkan and Oriental vicinity, and finally the ideal horizons of civilized Europe. Thus the notion of the 'distant world' was doubled, oscillating between parody and norm-setting. The literature of this period managed a successful ideological

37 *ibid*, p. 358

38 *ibid*, 316.

exchange between provincial, national and universal perspectives by using geographic symbols in two or three manners – as ironic, ecstatic and normative. Usually it was precisely the image of the city that communicated with other similar Balkan Babylons: Bucharest, Braila, Ploiesti, Bessarabia, Moldova, Thessaloniki and, of course, Istanbul. These were late images of the mobility of pre-modern Balkan merchants transformed into parody: the distant world looked in fact non-distant and Oriental, just an ironically perceived substitute for the wide world. On the other hand, the national visionary territory was also in constant contact and symbolic exchange with its desired, exemplary Other – Paris, London, Geneva, Berlin, Bern, and Europe in general as a great tradition of culture and civilization. The tensions between these two symbolic economies produced a variety of ironic and parodic effects between pre-modern and modern spaces.<sup>39</sup> They were destined to transcend the boundaries of literature and influence the city’s actual fate.

Yet the main ideological function of this poetry was different. Similar to the prose, Bulgarian poetry from the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century. (Dobri Chintulov (1822 – 1886), Dobri Voinikov (1833 – 1878), Teodosii Ikonov (1836 – 1872), Stefan Bobchev (1853 – 1940), Atanas Shopov (1853 - 1922 ), Ivan Vazov (1850 – 1921) and Hristo. Botev (1848 -1876)) reproduces the cliché “Babylon” and “Sodom and Gomora as well. Yet, unlike the prose, in the lyrical genres what is opposed to the big multicultural and “unclean” cities is not the small provincial town, but the imaginary, even visionary homeland, purified from any alien presence, ideal and homogeneous.

The large landmarks of physical geography, including mountains, plains and rivers, prove to be the privileged signs-boundaries of that space, which are represented in poetry as ‘Bulgarian by nature’, i.e., in its soil and water, air, forests and fields. This integral native space is related to another biblical archetype – that of the earthly paradise: the name (culture) and the land (nature) appear in a happy ontological concurrence:

*“Beautiful you are, my homeland,/ sweet name and Eden-like land,  
The heart, young and innocent,/ for you trembles and flutters.  
Dear to me are the mountains/ to the north and to the south  
Cherished to me are the plains/ furrowed by Bulgarian plough”*  
(Petko Slaveikov, “Fatherland”)<sup>40</sup>.

The typical metaphor of Eden ‘shrinks’ the spatial range and manages to combine the natural and geographical facts with the intimately experienced private space. The mountains and the plains are transformed into a deeply

39 See also Vazov’s short novels *Mitrofan I Dromodolski* (Mitrofan and Dromodolski) 1881, *Chichovci* (Oncles) 1885, in *Subrani suchineniya*, (Collected Works), volume 5, 1976, Sofia, BP.

40 Slaveikov, Petko “Tatkovina” (Fatherland), 1873

personal and ecstatic experience: Bulgaria, the land and nature (in Bulgarian ‘land’ is a synonym of ‘soil’) is infused into the flesh and the blood of the lyrical protagonist:

“Do you know where lovely nature/to this day has born and bred me? /Do you know where is my homeland/Where my mother has breastfed me?”<sup>41</sup> (Atanas Shopov, “Where I Was Born”) Despite the air of intimate, loving closeness, the contours of this lyrical map were delineated by emblematic sites, including the Danube, the Balkan, the Black Sea, Maritsa, Pirin, Rila, the Rhodopes, which are the marks of “the motherland”. Furthermore, this imaginary “map” is not simply the national territory delineated by its “natural” borders: it is a communicative cultural-and-natural space permeated by vision, unified by a supra-natural, mighty “voice”. Within these sacred borders, outlined by emblematic national sites, the voices of the others (other ethnic, social, denominational groups) are muted by a fictional national voice. The very universe is filled by this grand voice, i.e., by the Bulgarian “mourn and weep”, by the Bulgarian song for liberation hyperbolized into a cosmic element. Over the period from 1850 to 1925, the lyric poetry of the foremost national poets, including Gerov, Chintulov, Botev, Vazov, Peyo Yavorov, Furnadjiev, has offered variants of this booming native voice blended with the elements of the wind, storm, forests, and mountains, echoed by “beast and nature” (Botev)<sup>42</sup>. Borne on the wings of its hypnotic omnipotence, the voice negotiates the distances from Strandja to Pirin (mountains on the opposite sides of the country), from the Danube to the Aegean Sea, and from the Albanian desert-land to the Black Sea waters. The nationalist ideology in its literary form strove for the “authentic” overlapping of *territory, communication and society* discussed by Andersen.

The main rhetorical trick of literature (and here lyric poetry is the extreme case) lies in creating a ‘obviously-native’, Bulgarian space, which represents a visionary transcendence and ideal contrast to the everyday empirical and hybrid Ottoman empire with its multiethnic territories, villayets, kaazas and cities. The lyrical territory of ‘Bulgaria’ is presented neither in the motley character of its various languages, cultures and ethnicities, nor in the factual hybridity and dispersion of its populations, creeds and settlements. With an admirable disregard for such facts, lyrical poetry moulds Bulgaria into a pure and immediate presence as a land pierced by the Bulgarian Spirit/Word/Blood. It is the self-revealing, pure unity dear to one’s heart, which, self-evident in its natural boundaries, is reduced to the point of the ecstatic ‘here’

41 Shopov, Atanas, “De sam sya rodil” (Where I Was Born), *Chitalishte*, year IV, 1874, N 9.

42 Kiossev, Alexander, “Proleten vyatar v hudozestveniya kontext na svoeto vreme (The poem-collection “ Spring Wind” of N.Furnadjiev and its historical context). Sofia, University of Sofia Press, 1989.; “Rechev zest I metaforichnost v poeziyata na Botev” (Oral gesture and metaphoricity in Botev’s poetry), in *Hristo Botev, Novi izsledvaniya*, (Hristo Botev, New investigations), Sofia, Sofia University Press, 1990, 258 – 69.

(replaced by the emigrant Botev with ‘there’). This ‘here’ (conjugated with the other deictics of nationalism ‘us’ and ‘now’) in its paradoxical extension/contraction leaves no space for cities.

Of course, this powerful lyrico-ideological figure, which is doomed to be the staple of mass song, songbooks, children’s rhymes and textbooks, excludes what is typical of other genres – elaboration, polemics, questions of ‘what is and what isn’t ours’, the exchange of arguments, reasoning, and weighing of facts. Thus, if we grade the genres of public discourse, lyrical poetry will be the ultimate point of the scale: it is national ideology in its chemically pure form described by Slavoj Žižek<sup>43</sup>: the lyrical homeland as a sublime, irrational territorial object of Desire.

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During the final thirty years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a period I will describe only in brief, Plovdiv belonged to three successive state formations – the Ottoman Empire (until 1878), its new province Eastern Roumelia, and after 1885 – the newly united principality of Bulgaria.

After the Russian-Turkish war of 1878, a considerable number of foreigners, including Russians, Czechs, Frenchmen, Englishmen and Germans, arrived in Plovdiv to take up political posts or to work in the new industries of the modernizing city, which was the capital of the new autonomous province.<sup>44</sup> This formed an alternative to the earlier Ottoman and Greek elites, the former military and administrative, the latter economic and cultural. At the same time, a considerable number of Turks left Plovdiv, while whole provincial ‘fellowships’ of Bulgarian intellectuals and revolutionaries from Sopot, Karlovo, Kalofer, Koprivshtitsa and Panagyurishte arrived in the city that had to be claimed for Bulgaria. In short, the elites of small ‘purely Bulgarian’ towns intervened in ‘motley’ Plovdiv, nationalistic representatives of the ‘pure’ homeland entered the urban mosaic. Besides, most of those young and mobile Bulgarians had traveled and studied in coveted Europe, so they naturally intermingled with the foreigners and formed the new high society in the city. The newcomers ousted the old local elites and created their own public and social life excluding the old ones. This led to the gradual withdrawal of the Greek elites and their ever weaker contacts with the Bulgarian and international circles, even though the main point of conflict – the struggle for ecclesiastic independence – had already faded away. The Bulgarian press was in full swing. Alongside the plentitude of Bulgarian newspapers coming from the principality, Plovdiv was also home to *Maritza*, *Nezavisimost (Independence)*, later *Yuzhna Bulgaria (South Bulgaria)*, *Naroden Glas (People’s*

43 Žižek, Slavoj, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, London, Verso, 1989.

44 Stoyanov, Manio. *Kogato Plovdiv beshe stolitsa (When Plovdiv was a capital)*. Sofia: OF, 1973.

*Voice*), *Borba (Struggle)* and literary magazines like *Zora (Dawn)*<sup>45</sup>. Social events and balls were organized, and bars, cafes, beer halls and clubs opened along the central streets. Academic societies were founded, and the girls' and boys' high schools were given new impressive buildings.

And yet the Greek cultural elite did not quite give up. Greek was chosen as one of the three official languages of the area. According to the Greek historian Kodzageorgi-Zimari<sup>46</sup>, in 1880 eight Greek schools were functioning in Plovdiv, including one boys' school, three mutual education schools, one central and one district girls' schools and two pedagogical schools. There were also two private parish schools with clerics as teachers, and the Zariphios high school established in 1875 with the sponsorship of the Tsarigrad notable Zariphios was a great educational institution for Greek communities inside and outside Roumelia. To increase its authority, the Zariphios high school intensified its contacts with the Greek and the European 'centers', and attracted university teachers in philology, mathematics and theology from Athens and music from France and Germany, respectively. The academic program of the Greek schools in Plovdiv was synchronized with the curriculum in Greece since 1881, and beginning in 1885 the Greek high school issued certificates identical to those of high schools in Greece. The most important newspaper of the period, *Philipoupoulis* (bilingual until 1882, Greek only since 1886), was published by the journalists A. Nikolaidis and D. Komarianos. They had previously published the newspaper *Constantinople* in Tsarigrad. *Philipoupoulis's* scope was not limited to Plovdiv; it aspired to become the forum of the Greeks from all Eastern Roumelia with the support of the Greek state and the Greek nationalistic foundations (sylogos).

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Although Bulgarian political and cultural prevalence in Eastern Roumelia was already a fact, the Bulgarian imagination was not yet satisfied. In its geography the Eastern-Roumelian territory had a temporary and absurd character. For Bulgarian identifications it was part of the ideal homeland and as such it could never have any 'imaginary independence'. Eastern Roumelia could neither be an independent sublime object of imagination, nor codified into "organic" territorial categories. The same was true for its capital, Plovdiv. The advantageous geopolitical localization (centered around a big river in the middle of a plain well fortified by mountains) did not matter at all: in all visionary respects, Eastern Roumelia was still something ridiculous and absurd, which the Bulgarian imagination could never acknowledge<sup>47</sup>. Ample evidence of this can be found, for instance, in the protests of Plovdiv Bulgarians in front of foreign consulates in the city, the fact that one of the central

45 Tzaneva, Milena, *Vazov v Plovdiv*, Sofia, BP, 1966

46 *Solun and Plovdiv*, *ibid.* p. 321 -341

47 Stoyanov, Manyo, *ibid.* p 5 - 6

newspapers of Plovdiv and Eastern Roumelia was arrogantly named *South Bulgaria*, and in the fact that in this period (1878-1885) Roumelia saw the publishing of several Bulgarian maps but not a single map of Eastern Roumelia itself. Here lyrical poetry is once again the most extreme and indicative example: it projects on Eastern Roumelia the disgusting image of the impaired, dismembered whole, another variant of the archetypal object: “Is this a state or a nightmare? What is this thing without middle or end/ That cannot even be drawn?/What is this body with no head, no shoulders,/No legs, no arms, just a stinking maw?”<sup>48</sup>

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In 1885, the Unification was enacted against the clauses of the Berlin Congress. As a result, the ‘nightmare country’ disappeared. It joined the Principality of Bulgaria (united Bulgaria just managed to keep its integrity after an international crisis ending with the Serbo-Bulgarian war, from which Bulgaria was the winner). This had concrete consequences in Plovdiv: although the Bulgarian elite almost unanimously moved to the capital Sofia, the Greek intellectual and commercial circles in Plovdiv became a minority that lost the political contest and was slowly driven out of the public space, while its institutions were either marginalized or closed. I will not go into the details of that process – I will just point out that it ended in 1906, when in response to massacres by Greeks in Bulgarian villages in Macedonia there were series of Bulgarian raids on Greek minorities in Bulgarian cities. The city of Anchialo, for instance, was burnt to the ground, and over 300 Greek citizens were killed. In Plovdiv, Bulgarian mobs attacked Greek houses and shops, beating Greek citizens, while the army stood by passively. The massacres in Macedonia sparked an anti-Greek hysteria in the city, which led to the closure of most Greek schools the emigration of many Greeks from the city. All immigrant intellectuals left, taking with them the Greek newspapers and magazines. We can say that there was a kind of ‘ethnic cleansing’ of the Greeks in the city.<sup>49</sup>

It is worth noting that all this happened for the sake of a “long-term cause”. The conflict was in the name of Macedonia – another coveted part of the Greek and Bulgarian imaginary landscape. The imaginary territory of the homeland, inscribed into already established powerful national identifications and historical narratives, once again interfered in the life of Plovdiv – this time brutally.

48 Stoyanov, Manio. *Kogato Plovdiv...* ibid, p. 6

49 Elenkov, Ivan, manuscript, quoted with author’s permission.

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The struggle between the two modernizing elites and the comparatively swift Bulgarian victory in political representation as well as state and institutional development created sufficient conditions for the intervention of these imaginary geographies and topographies in the city – an intervention that slowly transformed the city and turned nationalistic imagination into Plovdiv’s urban reality.

It would be easiest to trace this process through the symbols that are inscribed straight onto the body of a city – the names of streets, buildings, squares and public spaces. As early as the 1870s, Plovdiv’s neighbourhoods, with their dark corners and small streets, began to be taken over by the emblems of the ‘homelands’ and the imaginary geographies. This was a conversion to Bulgarianness and a gradual contradictory expulsion of the old Greek and Turkish names. The preferred new names came either from the Bulgarian national hall of fame or had a European aura. After 1878 and especially after 1885, they simply flooded the city, in spite of creating the occasional bizarre hybrid: for instance, the Oriental-Occidental name of the Kyuchuk Paris neighbourhood, meaning Little Paris. It created, to the Bulgarian ear, an incongruous clash between the Turkish word and the name of the center of civilization. When the city’s master plan was approved (first version 1891, second version 1900), the renaming of streets continued with the consistency of state policy: heroic royal streets appeared, such as *Tsar Kroum*, a garden was named *Tsar Simeon*. Next to the patriotic hotels called *Independence* (later renamed *Paris*), *Rhodope* and *Sofia* were the French-Bulgarian *Hotel du Bulgarie* and the universal *Metropole*. The ‘*International Theatre*’ *Luxembourg* was opened (1881), and the Plovdiv cinema *Pathe Freres* in 1909. As you can see, some names show that new institutions had been imported, with the intellectuals or clerks required to run them<sup>50</sup>.

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The changes had architectural and urban consequences as well, although these came more slowly. After the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, but especially after 1885, Plovdiv houses started changing. In other words, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century ‘text’ of the urban interior and exterior changed. For a long time houses had maintained the Oriental tradition of facing inward towards their gardens, sheltered from the narrow crooked streets behind their high walls. However, beginning in the 1850s and 1860s, the rickety walls and specific windows were replaced gradually by solid European-style brick buildings. The facades of the houses slowly turned to face the emerging public spaces, where the nation – the Bul-

50 Tzaneva, Milena, *ibid*, Abadjiev, Nikola. *Plovdivska hronika* (“Plovdiv chronicle”). Plovdiv: Hristo G. Danov, 1984.; Gyaurov, A. *Kratki belejki ot minaloto I segashnoto na Plovdiv* (“Short notes of Plovdiv past and present”). Plovdiv: Trud, 1899.

garian nation state – enacted and watched its own self.<sup>51</sup> The ‘Bulgarianization’ and ‘Europeanization’ of the city went hand in hand with the attempt to delete the ‘Oriental’, Turkish and Greek elements in its image. Public buildings were constructed as Bulgarian representatives by default. As early as the 1880s, the Turkish cemetery of Ortamezar, located in the city center was removed and turned into a park, a place for strolling in the European manner, while the former Konak was turned into a French Catholic school. Due to lack of communal care and maintenance, the mosques crumbled and collapsed. Yeshnolou Djami and Choukour Djami collapsed in the 1928 earthquake, while Amer Gaazi Djami was demolished by the city authorities in 1912. The other minorities were slowly and systematically denied public access and symbolic representation, their schools closed down one by one, their newspapers stopped, the names of their neighbourhoods were slowly re-written in a Bulgarian-European way – a process that lasted for more than 40 or 50 years and finally turned Plovdiv – to quote a modern tourist guide – into ‘the most Bulgarian of cities’. The selection of tourist attractions – excavations and remains of the Thracian, Hellenic and Roman period, as well as the tourist-oriented renaming of a series of sites with ancient names was only one strategy for the expulsion of the Oriental, Turkish, Muslim and Greek element from the city.

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I shall finish with this historical analysis and return in conclusion to my central point. In the era of nationalism the city is not and cannot be a self-sufficient cultural universe, a ‘heteroglossia’ of different, negotiating social voices. The reason for this is simple – the imaginary geographies of nationalism are not simply imaginary: they are institutions that control life in the nation state, and change its cities. The fate of Plovdiv over a century and a half is a good example of that.

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51 Kojuharov, Georgi *Balgarskata kashta prez pet stoletia* (“The Bulgarian house through five centuries”). Sofia: BAN, 1967.