Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa
Institute of Slavic Studies
Polish Academy of Sciences

“Playing Catch Up”.
The Notion of Needing to Accelerate a Country’s Progress Towards a Civilised Paradise – the Bulgarian Version (a Proposed Entry for a Dictionary of Peregrinating Ideas)

In this article I adopt a terminological distinction proposed by Józef Tischner (1931–2000), a Polish philosopher who distinguished between the relatively well-defined “concepts” (pojęcia) and the more nebulous “notions” or “ideas” (idee), which are “more like models of how things should be, as opposed to how they actually are”.1 Accordingly, I treat the notion of “catching up” as a culturally functional model of “how things should be” – a kind of diffuse, 

non-autonomous concept with a variety of cultural, religious, philosophical, psychological, economic and geopolitical dimensions. In countries characterised by delayed modernisation the notion took on an enormous emotional and normative potential in the 19th and 20th centuries; the language of sports was used to express an optimistic belief that such underdeveloped countries were capable of catching up with those lucky countries which had earlier got on the path of unilineal to reaped its historical benefits. Important aspects of catching up included voluntarism, agonicy and a teleological orientation, where the past and the present of the countries out in front were expected to repeat itself in the future of those countries that were still lagging behind. In this sense, catching up is a shadow image of the idea of progress (Bury, 1987, p. 5; Postman, 2001, p. 33) – an unending process of moral improvement and world transformation (Krasnodębski, 1991, p. 22).

The concept of “accelerated development” stems from a normative and, consequently, ethical paradigm developed in 19th century biological sciences, as subsequently adopted for the humanities. Within this paradigm, immaturity carries a certain stigma, which is perhaps why the perspective of “catching up” held not only the promise of improved living conditions, but also a chance for the social actors to remove the shameful stigma of backwardness and retardation.

Given the long and winding road to Bulgaria’s modernisation, the formula of “retardation” (closely linked with the idea of “catching up”) became part of the discussion on the status of the Bulgarians before Bulgaria even became a political nation in its own right,2 i.e. at the time of the first 19th century modernising reforms in the Ottoman Empire. A sense of inferiority compared to the Western models was assimilated from the outside, mainly under the influence of Greek schools, but also, especially in the second half of the 19th century, as a consequence of the large wave of young Bulgarian students coming to study in other countries, mainly Russia, Germany and France. A number of books, including Maria Todorova’s celebrated Imagining the Balkans (1997), have focused on this problem from the postcolonial studies angle. It is also worth pointing out that the submissive attitude of Balkan populations towards this kind of symbolic violence was fostered by the fact that Christians had for centuries had a subservient status in the Ottoman Empire, and that the Christian milet was dominated by Greeks. The survival of the Bulgarian ethnos as

---

2 Unlike in German culture, where the gap or “retardation” opened up ex post. See Orlowski (2008), in particular Plessner (2008) and Koselleck (2008).
a separate cultural and confessional community (increasingly attributed today to the tolerable living conditions in the Ottoman Empire) was also the result of an effective survival strategy consisting in social practice which guaranteed a sense of cultural affinity within the community, resulting in its perceived “gnomic” advantage over the people in charge of alien instruments of distinction and status. Folk parenetic literature (such as the Cunning Peter stories) and 18th century sermons reinforce this image, but also document cases of Bulgarian apostasy as people traversed the porous boundary between the communities. This was one of the threats perceived by Fr. Paisiy Hilendarski, whose 1762 История Славяноболгарская, strongly mythologised in the 1870s, condemned those who were forgetting their own traditions to follow foreign models (including Orthodox Greek ones), a development Hilendarski dismissed as shameful, unethical and deleterious to human salvation. In the Christian way of perceiving history as a teacher of life and morality, Hilendarski treated the study of history as an antidote to those threats. Enlightenment thinking in the reflection on the status of Bulgarians and modernisation does not make its first clear appearance in Bulgarian writing until 70 years later in the moralising and patriotic dialogues of the Orthodox priest Neofit Bozveli. Taking inspiration from Serbian models, Neofit’s dialogues present the good standing of enlightened states and societies in terms of religion and ethics (Хилендарски-Бозвели, 1985, p. 37), defining the European civilisation as a universal model, and seek to persuade his audience that it is advisable, if not necessary, to imitate the “enlightened Europeans”. An orthodox preacher, Neofit saw material prosperity of his fellow Bulgarians as more important than questions of salvation: “(…) не е ли по-добре чадата ти в други державства да живеят мирно и благополучно, от малки в школи да ходят, да се просвещават,

---

3 My use of this term was inspired by M. Herzfeld (2007).

4 This appraisal is borne out by Bulgarian folklore, primarily proverbs, anecdotes and moralizing tales. This trend is personified by a hero who enjoys a high social status, a clever plebeian like Sly Peter (Hitar Petar) who is capable of outwitting the Turk. Such craftiness with its minor victories was seen as a desirable attribute for Bulgarians. For a discussion of the eastern origins of Sly Peter see Yalamov (Ялъмов, 1997).

5 A monk from Mount Athos, Hilendarski was hailed a century later as “the father of Bulgarian national revival” by Martin Drinov who airbrushed this figure to bring him into line with Enlightenment aesthetics and the interests of national ideology. 130 years later the tendency to debunk grand narratives resulted in Paisiy being first demonized and blamed for Bulgarian complexes, then de-mythologized (Szwat-Gyłybowa, 2011).
At the same time, religiously motivated calls for modernisation were also coming from the journalist and publisher Konstantin Fotinov ( Данова, 1994). In the foreword to the first issue of “Любословие” (1844), a magazine published on the inspiration of Protestant missionaries, Fotinov, similarly to Bozveli, castigates the apathy of his fellow Bulgarians and the gap separating them from the “enlightened” world. Fotinov mentioned the tell-tale absence of philosophy, grammar, rhetoric, logic, mathematics and similar disciplines from Bulgarian culture:

“(…) кой народ е на земята толкова сиромах и отдалечен от просвещението учителско, кое само прави човека да е човек, каквото го е бог создал, а не добитак? И което наставлява човека бога познати, царя покаряти ся, наставника послушати, родители почитати, веру защицвати и сохраният отвчество, братия, любити черковни пастири чествоват и почитати. Как народ е толко без поведения многообразни и познания за человеческата полза списана, каквото е болгарскъто народ отличи от такива человекополезни списания? Кое списание имат нашите братя болгари? Како им землеописанието (…)? Како им граматиката (…)? Како им нравоучителната списания (…)? Како им поведеневния повести и знания (…)? Како им художествената списания, како им риториката, математика, логика, физика, философия и прочая (…)? Како им историята (…)?” (Фотинов, 1969, p. 320).

In praising the “enlightened and industrious” Europe as well as the Sultan (Фотинов, 1969, p. 319), Fotinov was trying to persuade his readers to accept a hierarchy of values such as rationality, learning, fame, strength, wealth and demographic muscle (Фотинов, 1969, p. 321). In diagnosing the extent of Bulgarian retardation, Fotinov remained confident that the Bulgarians were capable of becoming like the European nations within a short period of time (Фотинов, 1969, p. 323).6

Although Fotinov brought together concepts such as time and imitation within the space of a single sentence, it is not until 30 years later that Nesho Bonchev came up with the idea of “catching up”, which appears in his Класическите европейски писатели на български език и ползата от изучаването на съчиненията им (Поради повестта „Тарас Булба”) (1878).

---

6 Thirty years later, a 19th century playwright Dobri Voinikov warned Bulgarians of the dangers of thoughtless and superficial imitation in the first Bulgarian comedy, Криворазбраниятцивилизация (1871), which continues to attract audiences to this day.
Bonchev was a literary critic influenced by Russian culture. Inspired by the debate on Russia’s cultural retardation, Bonchev called for an effort to produce a substitute composite culture for Bulgarian literature, to be made up of the major achievements of other cultures (particularly of Russian culture). Such a substitute literary culture would help to educate reading tastes but also promote a kind of artistic maturity in the Bulgarian nation:

“Ние, българете, стъпваме сега в този нов път на своето самопознание и духовен живот, а пъвите ни стъпки трябва да бъдат обмислени, не скори. Каквато посока вземем отначало, права или крива, по нея щем и да вървим в мъчно е после кривото да изправиш. Нас ни спечат много стъпки при началото на този път, и при всичките стъпки на нашето духовно пробуждане ние сме честити, от една страна, честити сме (за зла чест). Че сме най-млади на този нов път, та имаме пред себе си ръководители много други народи. Едни от тия народи са изминале веке пътя на духовното развиване, други са далече отишле, не мож ги догони и в сто години. Та се разбира, че трябва да се опознаем с тях при началото, да се попитаме за много неща, които са там познати, а за нас са още тъмни въпроси. И така, нужда имаме да изглеждаме внимателно всички тези пъти на духовен живот, който е изминат от другите народи. Кога познаем това, тогава лесно ще ни бъде и себе си да познаем, и своя предлежащи нов духовен живот“ (Бончев, 1969, p. 507–508).

Despite this endorsement of the use of foreign cultural landmarks, Bonchev was sceptical about the possibility of catching up with the leaders within a short period of time. His words that the effort would take a hundred years to complete sounds like a diplomatic understatement, calculated to sugar-coat the bitter truth. Although the concept of catching up inherently involved a measure of self-doubt, it was nonetheless capable of providing the impulse which successfully spurred the Bulgarian community to organise for two centuries around the idea of the common good (taken to mean the much hoped-for

---

7 This was initiated by Pyotr Chaadayev. According to Dobieszewski (2013), Chadayev’s famous first Philosophical letter (1836) is underpinned by a sense that Russia was experiencing historical retardation in a number of dimensions (Russia as “a country without history”). Equally importantly, Chadayev also recognized that Russia could only be understood properly in relation to Europe. In other words, Russia should measure itself against Europe, and conversely, Russia to an extent became a point of reference for Europe. This was a very important moment that would continue to feature prominently in later Russian thought and culture. The pairing of Russia and Europe remains essential. Despite Russia and Europe being extraneous and discrete cultures and civilizations, to Dobieszewski the pair forms a kind of natural and organic whole.
effects of collectively imitating the Other). This was the case even though the expected fruits of economic change failed to materialise in the early decades after Bulgaria’s liberation from Ottoman rule (1878); given the high hopes of the pre-liberation period, the economic realities on the ground proved to be a dramatic let-down. The loss of the Ottoman markets was a blow to the prosperous local manufacturers and artisans, and the polarised Bulgarian political scene only deepened the crisis. The closing decades of the 19th century were marked by lasting divisions which removed the former binary oppositions in favour of a multivalent discourse.

When the influence of modernism was first felt in Bulgaria, the problem of “catching up” was replaced in high-culture discourse by the problem of cultural universalism and exploring Bulgarian archaicaity, a tendency which found its expression in the artistic programme of the first generation of the so-called “Thought” circle associated with a journal of the same title, “Мисъл” Pencho Slaveikov, an eminent representative of the circle, was contemptuous about the notion of the historical nation, an attitude which undermined all accidental particularisms (Dąbek-Wirgowa, 1973), favouring instead the ancient soul of the people/nation as the source of Nietzschean metaphysical values. However, the universalising aspirations of the elites who complained about the Bulgarian historical pragmatism and ideological indifference (Кръстев, 1994, p. 91–92) did not cause a decline in the programmatic emulation of foreign models, which did not disappear from social discourse, even if the trauma of defeat in World War I initially put a damper on the optimistic projects calculated to heal the nation. Scepticism about the nature of the ongoing cultural change took on a variety of forms, including critiques of Bulgarian intelligentsia as an internally atomized and alienated group, eager to unthinkingly submit to foreign influence. Bojan Penev caused a stir with his article Нашата интелигенция (1924), in which he accused members of the intelligentsia of being unable to manage the distinctions achieved during their studies abroad, and of mind-

---

8 Michael Palairet (1997) posits that political interests took prominence over economic ones in post-Ottoman Balkan countries during 19th century modernization, leading to a rapid loss of economic potential accumulated in the pre-liberation period, now replaced by an uncertain and volatile “evolution without development” that failed to produce improved living standards for the population. In this new political situation a sense of cultural retardation quickly gave way to social unrest. This is vividly illustrated by a scene described by Simeon Radev where Bulgarian peasants went down on their knees to greet a Russian delegation to Sofia and beg it for a return of the Russian tsar and an abolition of taxes (Радев, 1973, p. 13–15).
lessly copying the German, French, English and Russian models but failing to adapt them to local conditions. Although Penev treated those cultures with a lot of respect, his own essentialist treatment did not leave him blind to the more questionable or threatening aspects, especially in terms of the utility of some of the models in Bulgaria. What Penev called for instead was a critical and selective adaptation of outside models, which he treated as a kind of antidote to the shortcomings of the Bulgarian tradition, however he did not associate the benefits of imitation with the idea of “needing to catch up”: “Нашата цел е: една синтеза върху основите на българската душа – едно критично и по-дълбоко вникване в цялостния характер на чуждите култури и усвояване само на онова, което наистина би имало значение за нас и би отговаряло на една действителна потребност. Далечният идеал би бил: да примирим в себе си немската предметност, добросъвестността и глъбината на немската мисъл с живия френски стил, да противопоставим руския нравствен идеализъм на грубата българска практичност, да победим сухия догматизъм със свободните форми на английското творчество, да осмислим и облагородим нашия ограничен индивидуализъм с широката общественост и универсалния дух на Франция. Да бихме могли!” (Пенев, 1994, p. 143).

In the shifting realities of the period between the world wars, the former rift between the pro-western and pro-Russian policies was becoming fragmented and subject to gradual modification from the shifting ideological matrices with their associated projections of progress. The philosophical and ideological fads reaching Bulgaria at the time (mainly from Germany and Russia) only intensified this kaleidoscope effect. The philosophy of Oswald Spengler gave rise to hopes that the Slavic nations (including Bulgarian culture) might be revitalised in a restorative and revolutionary fashion, paving the way for the rest of the world; the victorious Bolshevik revolution opened up completely new prospects for the notion of catching up, an idea which Stalin updated and adopted in the 1930s with regards to the Russian economy, whose rapid growth was expected shortly to outstrip the achievements of the West. Because the Soviet Union’s position as a leader in cultural change was treated as indisputable, the catching up project did not involve cultural life. Nazi Germany was another, twin model of civilisation. Politically preferred by the nation under Boris III, this model actually provided a formal model for Bulgaria’s modernisation. Wedged between two increasingly powerful totalitarian regimes, the Bulgarian intelligentsia engaged in the debates and controversies of the time, variously arguing for one side or the other. The most valuable achievements which have stood the test of time included attempts to address the question of the
small nation’s specific nature and future. This strand of reflection was ruptured in the geopolitical order installed after World War II. After the war, the achievements of the Soviet Union became accepted in Bulgaria as the official model, and the language of Russian propaganda was adopted in Bulgarian political rhetoric. When the Western humanities rejected the evolutionist approach, and a Marxist variety of the belief in progress began to flourish in Bulgaria, the idea of needing to catch up became an inseparable element of the mechanism of political seduction, and the associated know-how became an attribute of power. At the same time the propaganda apparatus treated the superiority of socialist culture over bourgeois culture as axiomatic. A kind of antidote to the lingering memory of Bulgarian cultural retardation appeared in the 1970s in a reinterpretation of the recent history of Bulgarian literature written by a Soviet scholar Georgi Gachev (who was half-Bulgarian) entitled Ускоренное развитие литературы (1979). Here was an outsider who with all the weight of an actual Soviet authority endorsed the notion that the unique Bulgarian literature had managed to reproduce the complete process of literary development, covering the distance from the Renaissance to realism within several decades of the 19th century.

The collapse of the communist regime in 1989 brought with it a wave of Euro-enthusiasm, but also a sense of frustration typical of periods of political transformation. This produced an environment where interdisciplinary research on the notion and phenomenon of “catching up” at various junctures in Bulgarian history began to take on an ethical slant. The Institute of Philosophy of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences produced two edited books on the subject (ed. Vasil Prodanov), Догонващото развитие (Проданов, 2004a) and Догонващото развитие в глобализираното информационно общество (Проданов, 2007). The perspective in those books is a mixture of the meta-critical (which treats the ideas of Reinhardt Koselleck as its point of reference) and the pragmatic

---

9 Such texts (largely silenced and ignored under Communism) have been codified and canonized in the anthology Защо сме такива (Еленков & Даскалов, 1994).

10 This interpretive matrix outlived the ideological programme which had provided its original basis. For instance, this is apparent in an article by Raymond Detrez, The Bulgarian National Movement in the Light of Miroslav Hroch’s Analysis of National Revival in Europe (2004), published in Bulgarian in 2013. In the article, Detrez questions Miroslav Hroch’s typology of modernization models, and proposes a return to Gachev’s theory of “accelerated development”, an idea which according to Detrez continues to offer an attractive research paradigm.

(aiming to address the question of what the idea of “catching up” might actually mean for Bulgaria’s modernisation). Regardless of the perspective, the authors incline to the view that the imitative nature of the notion of “catching up” continues to exert a significant negative effect in Bulgarian culture. Rather strikingly, the articles in the first volume tend to consistently regard universalist aspirations within the same paradigm of “inferiority”. This tendency finds expression in traumas caused by Bulgaria’s failed historical attempts to “catch up”. Vasil Prodanov, who interprets Bulgarian culture in Hegelian terms and believes it to be the product of a non-historical nation, writes:

“Дори, ако вземем такава най-висша духовна сфера като философията, основни идеи и проблемни ситуации са внос от развитите страни, поради което Хегел смята, че само историческите народи са способни да създават своя философия, а останалите в най-добрия случай са просто имитатори. Да вземем случая с България – от Петър Берон насам, с неговата натурфилософия, всички ключови имена в българската философия възпроизвеждат, в редица случаи чрез некопосани имитации, парвенюшки езикови главоблъсканици, еклектични съчетания или "прост преразказ с елементи на разсъждене", основни парадигми, теми, идеи, идващи от развитите страни – ремеканство, марксизъм, нитчеанство, фройдизъм, през последните години постмодернизъм и т.н. Равнището на имитативност и външна повърхностност е твърде често високо (Проданов, 2004b, p. 19–20).

Prodanov believes that “catching up” is a “historical necessity” in the processes of modernisation:

“Идеята за догонващото развитие, осъществявано от голяма част от народите, особено от началото на развитие на явленията, наречени модерна епоха, или капитализъм, всъщност е съвършено съвързана с търсене на особеностите и закономерностите на историческия процес на тези нации и региони, които закъсняват икономически и социално-политически в развитието си от процесите, които се разгръщат най-напред в Западна Европа, а след това и в Северна Америка. Дали те са замръзнали във времето, или живеят, както смята Хегел, чужда история, лишаваща ги от правото да бъдат самите себе си? Дали са обречени да останат маргинали и парии на историческия прогрес или техните лидери «западници» да се мъчат, колкото и да изглежда безнадеждно това, да ги изведат от статуса им на изоставащи с непрестанни опити за повторение и настигане на тези, които са преди тях?

Самият процес на догонване носи със себе си противоположни измерения на универсално и локално, на повторение на някакъв модел и творчество, на догонващо развитие и развитие на собствена основа. Той означава достижане на образци и критерии, еталони и модели, създадени вече някъде другаде. В същото време той е и нещо различно от тях. Няколко са главните причини за тази двойственост, които пораждат своеобразието на процеса на догонване” (Проданов, 2004b, p. 22).
However, Prodanov’s optimism about the ultimate success of this effort only relates to institutions and economic aspects, and does not extend to Bulgarian culture, which he believes is predetermined and imitative:

“Въпреки това обаче, такива примери има и очевидно в историята, колкото и да са трудни определени пътища, те не са невъзможни и заслужават внимателно изследване. Само на основата на такова изследване можем да отговорим на въпроса дали определени народи са обречени вечно да бъдат неисторически или в крайна сметка няма нищо предопределено, нищо предварително зададено в историята, всеки може да внесе нещо свое в нея и да върви напред, т.е. те заслужават да бъдат предмет на изследване и на философията на историята. България също би могла да има исторически народ. От нейните учени, от нейните политици, от всички българи зависи това” (Проданов, 2004 b, p. 43).

The scholars writing for the book note that the imperative to “catch up” produces ambivalent effects which may boost as well as hurt modernising tendencies (Николова, 2004; Петрова, 2004, p. 134; Христова, 2004, p. 211–212); however they do not question it outright.

The articles in Догонващото развитие в глобализираното информационно общество (Проданов, 2007) modify the main current of reflection on the phenomenon of “catching up”. This is only partly connected with the fact that Bulgaria is now a member of the European Union. The book contains new reinterpretations of “retardation” and “catching up” which became synonymous with globalization (Prodanov) or even are treated as commercial attributes of familiar Bulgarianness (Bogdana Todorova). Particularly notable is Vasil Penchev’s article written from the post-secularist positions, Исторически път и догонващо развитие (Пенчев, 2007). Following Reinhard Koselleck, Heidegger and other critics of the idea of progress such as Paul Tillich or the Bulgarian émigré philosopher Asen Ignatov (Игнатов, 1998), Penchev constructs the following thesis: since progress can be seen as a secularised version of the Christian concept of history taken to mean progression towards the future, and then “catching up” is a secularised version of the Orthodox Christian variant of this idea, dominated as it is by the teleologically oriented eschatological perspective. To Koselleck progress represents a failure to bring expectation and experience to overlap; Penchev, however, presents progress in opposition to “catching up” since “catching up” is precisely about bringing expectation and experience together. In Heideggerian

---

13 See also Penchev (Пенчев, 2005, p. 101–134).
terms, Penchev’s conclusion equates the experience of catching up with fate.\textsuperscript{14} Other nations’ past becomes the Bulgarian future, and this process of striving becomes woven together with being as such:

“Така догонването е опънатост между въпроса и отговора, между въпросността и отговорността, между началото и края, между началността и крайността. Смисълът на битието е във времеността, или иначе казано, и тъкмо в тази междинност. Такъв е обаче само екзистенциалният (или екзистенциално-историческият) смисъл на битието. (…) От тази пределна и навярно безсмислена гледна точка, съдбата (историческият път), дадена като грижа в догонването, е просто последната, крайната тавтология, аналогична на въпроса за смисъла на битието” (Пенчев, 2007, p. 147).

This attempt to identify the new difference between those out in front and those lagging behind is oriented towards deepening the dichotomy between the Latin West and the Orthodox East.

This renewed trend is actually quite archaic, predating as it does the Enlightenment, and it is quite widely represented in recent philosophical and theological (post-secular?) Bulgarian thought, especially in the circles associated with the journal “Християнство и култура”. For instance, the essay Народът дете by the film critic Krasimir Krumov (Крумов, 2003) attempts to describe the concept of “catching up” by means of emic categories derived from Orthodox Christianity. Krumov argues that Bulgarian culture, which was shaped by Orthodox Christianity, is characterised at its deepest level by the concept of time which is spherical and modal rather than linear.\textsuperscript{15} The reality which exists in this kind of time has an autonomous and ethical nature, comprising no imperative to make progress; historical time is comprised within this mystical understanding of time, which allows for repetition and undermines the very concept of “catching up”.\textsuperscript{16} However, Krumov’s reflection, which he

\textsuperscript{14} For a discussion of the category of fate in modern culture see Buczyńska-Garewicz (2010).

\textsuperscript{15} Similarly, see Moses (2006–2007, p. 109), who points out that Jewish messianic thinking, which Rosenzweig and Scholem perceived as diametrically opposed to the historical paradigm of modernity, does not take the end of history to be some remote goal in a long process of improvement, an end to an infinite march. Instead, it views it as a different reality suddenly and unpredictably crashing into time.

\textsuperscript{16} Krumov’s comments, inspired by his reflections on Volchanov’s film, suggest that there is an affinity between Orthodox Christianity and the Hebraic tradition, which according to Sergio Quinzio (1990, 2005) is characterized by a radical vision of religion in history, an attitude which becomes relevant to the expectations that Judaism has for future messianic reality as a space in which all meaning reaches fruition (Quinzio, 2005, p. 163). Giorgio Agamben (2000, 2005, 2009)
appplies to reinterpret Rangel Vulchanov’s excellent film Лачените обувки на незнайния воин (1979), ultimately leads to a new quasi-theological vision of the nation as an amoral child engaged in play but governed by chance.

This broad-brush outline of the Bulgarian version of the notion of “catching up” shows that Bulgarian teleological thought has come full circle. The original dream of rapid change in terms of the model of civilisation, a development which would supposedly allow Bulgarians to reach a kind of Kantian maturity and to become like the Europeans and/or the Russians, is now giving way to a contemplation of the differences separating Bulgarians from the West. The difference is defined either in terms of retardation and immaturity (in which case it is stigmatised) or in terms of religious denomination (in which case it is prized despite the fact that Bulgarian public life is strongly marked by religious indifference). Which raises the question: does this turning towards Orthodox Christianity as the source model of the world is inauthentic, yet another product of the effort to catch up, engendered by a belated assimilation of theological and post-secular thought, or is it perhaps an attempt to shake off the poisonous and culturally destructive idea that Bulgarian culture is always somehow lacking behind and needs to catch up17? Only time can tell.

Translated by Piotr Szymczak

BIBLIOGRAPHY


juxtaposes linearly developing secular history and its apocalyptic counterpart on the one hand with St. Paul’s description of the experience of messianic time on the other, shifting the focus from the future to the present by boosting the value of the present moment, which may become revealed as part of the mystical non-linear dimension of being. Agamben’s sensibility to the sacred comes from a background experience of secularism replaced by a search for solace in a new reading of Judeo-Christian tradition. See also (Dupré, 1972, 2003) and (Bielik-Robson, 2006).

17 The Croatian philosopher Boris Buden (2009, 2012) reveals what he calls “the misery of the process of catching up” (Buden, 2012, p. 47–65) to demonstrate how the concept also has a latent destructive influence on “those out in front” because it interferes with their perception of the world.
“Playing catch up”. The notion of needing to accelerate...
Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa  “Playing catch up”. The notion of needing to accelerate...


Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa  “Playing catch up”. The notion of needing to accelerate...

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(TRANSLITERATION)


Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa

“Playing catch up”. The notion of needing to accelerate...


„Doganianie”. Idea przyspieszenia w drodze do cywilizacyjnego raju. Wersja bułgarska

Referat poświęcony jest prezentacji głównych etapów procesu inkorporowania w tkankę bułgarskiej idei narodowej pojęcia doganiania (przyspieszonego rozwoju), które od połowy XIX wieku pozostaje narzędziem konceptualizacji przez Bułgarów ich (równie wartościowanego) miejsca wśród „narodów cywilizowanych”. „Doganianie” rozumieniem jako kulturowo i politycznie funkcjonalny wzór rzeczy, który jest konceptem niesamodzielnym, należącym do różnych systemów idei, mającym swój aspekt ekonomiczny, geopolityczny, religijny, psychologiczny, kulturowy. Formuła opóźnienia, zintegrowana z ideą doganiania zagościła w dyskusjach nad statusem Bułgarów jeszcze przed zaistnieniem narodu politycznego. Wraz z rozwojem ruchu narodowego kompleksy otrzymały swój rewers w postaci wiary w możliwość zrównania poziomu cywilizacyjnego z europejskim. Ta linia rozumowania prowadziła od pierwszych fascynacji dorobkiem „oświeconych narodów” w ramach tzw. oświecenia prawosławnego, przez odwzorowywanie dyskursu rosyjskiego po myśl marksistowską (z jej propagandową dominantą w latach 1945–89) i polityki perswazyjne po 1989 roku. Wydaje się, że współcześnie mamy do czynienia z podzwonnym dla związanej z czasowością idei doganiania, która wyczerpała swój potencjał agonizny a może nawet przyczyniła się do „samozatrucia” absorbujących ją kultur, skazujących się na infantylizację i nudę powtórzeń.

Słowa kluczowe: postęp; oświecenie; rozwój; doganianie; kultura bułgarska

“Playing Catch Up”. The Notion of Needing to Accelerate a Country’s Progress towards a Civilised Paradise – the Bulgarian Version (a Proposed Entry for a Dictionary of Peregrinating Ideas)

This paper outlines the main stages in the process through which the notion of “needing to catch up” (a belief that the country was in need of accelerated development) became incorporated into the idea of Bulgarian national identity. Since the mid-19th century, Bulgarians have tended to rely on the notion of “needing to catch up” as a way of conceptualising their place among “the civilised nations,” a concept they regard with varying degrees of desirability. I use the concept of “needing to catch up” in the sense of a culturally and politically functional standard or template, which nonetheless cannot function as an independent concept since it belongs to different systems of ideas with various economic, geopolitical, religious, psychological and cultural aspects. Inseparably wedded to the idea of “needing to catch up” is the idea of “retardation”, which was floated in discussions on the Bulgarian condition even before the Bulgarian state emerged as a political reality. As the national movement grew in
strength, these inferiority complexes morphed into their mirror image: a belief that Bulgarians were capable of catching up with Europe in terms of cultural advancement. From the early fascination with the cultural achievements of the “enlightened nation” felt by the so-called “Orthodox Enlightenment” thinkers, through a replication of the Russian discourse, this line of reasoning culminated in Marxist ideology (including propaganda between 1945 and 1989) and the post-1989 politics of persuasion. The bell may be tolling for the time-bound idea of “needing to catch up”, a notion which has exhausted its potential to excite intellectual conflict or struggle, and has very possibly resulted is a self-poisoning of the cultures which indulged in it, only to become doomed to dull, infantile repetition.

Key words: progress; enlightenment; development; catching up; Bulgarian culture

Notka o autorze