Diana Mishkova

Education and Universities in the Modernization and Europeanization Processes in South-Eastern Europe: Some Reflections on Interpretation and Methodology

The role of education and universities in the modernization processes in the Central and South-Eastern Europe has often been taken for granted and self-evident. The precedence of this association can be approached from two different angles: from the point of view of the state which created the institutional framework and set the direction for the operation of the educational establishment, and from the point of view of the university 'graduates' who saw their function either as (high) state employees and social transformers 'from above' or, alternatively, as critics of the 'reckless' Europeanization and state-led modernization. What was common to these different viewpoints was their Western referentiality: in their crux was the question about the transfer and re-conceptualization of modernity and Europeanness, which in turn raised the critical issue about 'foreign forms' and 'local substance', hence about authenticity and identity. That applied to both imperial and national frameworks, even though it will be clear that the locus classicus of the education-modernization nexus was the nation-state. In what follows, I will attempt to take stock of these different aspects of the problem with the aim to chart some of what seems to me to be the major intersections between education and modernization as an area of research.

I.

As a top-down transformation meant to trigger emulation of and facilitating 'catching-up' with the 'advanced' Western world, modernization depended heavily on such powerful instruments for social engineering as education. To begin with, the emerging nation-states, following in the footsteps of or in reaction to the policies of the erstwhile modernizing empires, had major stakes in promoting

modern education, educational institutions and legislation for the sake of their proper functioning.[1]

Education was one of the first, if not the very first, modernized social sphere where Western-European standards were adopted and institutionalized. Thus, education and universities themselves were among the first 'modern' and 'European' institutions in Central and South-Eastern Europe. The consistently high number of state-sponsored scholarships in foreign schools and universities prior to the establishment of national universities, and later the priority which the state attributed to the creation of nationalized networks of secondary and high schools *qua* state institution, also bear witness to the key position assigned to education (esp. to higher education) for the cultivation of a 'state-building elite.' It was not just a bureaucratic elite, but one saddled with the task to institutionalize and nationalize sciences, thus providing a proper – that is, 'rational', 'scientific', 'legitimate' – basis for the nationalization and modernization of society.[2]

Closely related to that was the disproportionate role of the (university) educated 'elites' in defining the course of the state-led modernization and the boundaries of the community entitled to it: in "disciplining the people internally, and enforcing the rules and boundaries of the constituent people".[3] This role was played out primarily in two directions.

The first involved a direct political commitment. In Central and South-Eastern Europe, intellectual professionalism entailed – and indeed made sense above all else in terms of – the ability to win over and exert political power and responsibility. This was true not only for relatively egalitarian societies, such as the Serbian and the Bulgarian, but also for those endowed with traditional elites, such as the Romanian and the Greek, where modern higher education served as a vehicle for smooth transition of political power from the hands of the *boyars* or local *tzakia* into those of their (mostly foreign-educated) sons, from whose ranks the incipient national bourgeoisie was basically recruited.[4] Modern political

1 While being perfectly aware of the significant role of education and universities for the modernization of multiethnic empires such as the Habsburg and the Ottoman in the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, here I shall focus primarily on the national (and cross-national) contexts as this will allow me to trace with bigger clarity and consistency the above-mentioned aspects of the relationship.

2 During the first two decades following the liberation, almost every second Bulgarian studying abroad received state support under one form or another, and the number of those among them who attended higher schools was 3 times higher than the state-supported secondary or professional students. The situation was comparable to that in post-1830 Serbia. The state thus not only stimulated, it directed and controlled the flow, destination, and disciplinary profile of those entitled to its support.

3 Ronald Suny – Michael Kennedy (eds.), *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation* (Ann Arbor, 1999), p. 2.

4 A Romanian historian Elena Siupur had studied in detail this process of 're-qualifying', via education in Western universities, of the traditional social elite into intellectual elite "as a major vehicle for preserving [its] political power" in the Romanian nineteenth-century context (Elena Siupiur, "Les intellectuels roumains du XIXe siècle et la réorganisation de la classe politique et du système institutionnel", *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire* XXXIV 1995, pp. 1-2, 75-95).

power and government, state and civil service became and for long remained the privileged mainstay of the South-Eastern European intelligentsia. (Its autonomous and critical function vis-à-vis the state, on the other hand, only gradually took place and became more visible after the World War I, but never came to dominate its ethos or employment as a social group.) Thus, both in terms of the place assigned to the educated class in society and in view of the role it came to play, the advent of modernity marked a radical transformation of its previous status and function. To a large extent, Central and South-Eastern European projects of modernity were those of the state-nurtured and state-oriented intelligentsia.

The second direction has everything to do with the double mediating function which South-Eastern European university training and personnel saw as their duty to perform: between the local (popular tradition and identity) and the universal (modernity), and between the authority of Western expertise (think, for example, of the Western contribution to ethno-sciences like Albanology, Turkology, etc.) and the local 'knowledge.'

The intimate connection between the professionalization of sciences and the forging of a modern understanding of the nation and national belonging exemplifies precisely this conceptual and cognitive transfer of modernity through the mediation of education and science. The 'national disciplines' from archaeology and linguistics to anthropology and sociology became "necessary tools of modern social solidarity and citizenship [without which] there could, in a very literal sense, be no nation..."[5] There are many good reasons to argue, together with Anthony Smith, that "[t]he nation can only be imagined through the medium of science." Positivist criticism of romantic nationalism, which came to a head in the second half of the nineteenth and the turn of the twentieth centuries, on the other hand, coincided with the rise of biology, social psychology and phenomenology in the social sciences (Freud, Nietzsche, Bergson) and thence in politics, thus underpinning the crisis of rational liberalism and the beginning of 'post-rational' politics. Biological determinants and naturalistic understanding of all forms of social organization, peoples and states included, were largely the product of these university-nourished counter-Romantic scientific trends. (Their organizational hub was academic and intellectual networks, often gravitating around authoritative scholars and disciplinary paradigms – an illuminating case in point at the time discussed is the Leipzig-based German ethno-psychologist Wilhelm Wundt, whose Balkan disciples formed a numerous cohort of highly influential intellectuals with a conspicuous input in the modernity debates between the two World Wars – which will be discussed further down.) At the hands of the conservative Romanian *Junimists* the critique of the eclectics of romantic science opened the way for an ethno-cultural understanding of the nation; at the hands of democratically-minded intellectuals, such as Bogdan

5 Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (London, 1999), pp. 171-172.

Hasdeu in Romania or Ivan Shishmanov in Bulgaria, the democratization of political life was associated with the rise of what they called "popular sciences" such as ethnography and linguistics. There existed, on top of that, an intense competition among disciplines for control over the symbolic representation of the nation.

This being said, the issue about the relationship between education, intelligentsia and modernization can only be treated diachronically. In the early phases of national consciousness-raising and state-building, the freedom of academics and intellectuals to legislate with impunity on the incipient nation was at its highest. As later on intellectuality was becoming more widely dispersed and mass politics and social nationness were taking root, this freedom was being reduced.[6] But academics and intellectuals remained, nonetheless, as convinced as before of the political value of scholarship.

Finally, the singular notion commonly attached to 'modernity' could be strongly misleading. There were as a matter of fact various competing notions of modernization and Europeanization – different modernities and Europes, that is to say. The examples here are numerous and, arguably, obvious: it is well known that the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries signify a period of intense debates over the nature and purpose of modernization. Any discussion of the role of education and university in the modernization and Europeanization in the Central and South-Eastern European societies ought to be – for that reason – *also* a discussion of the transmission of knowledge and the thematization of sciences in an emphatically transnational key. This would mean to see education and university as steering the cultural transfer between 'core' and 'peripheral' cultures, as crucially partaking in the mechanisms of transmission, exchange and interaction of ideas, paradigms and institutions across national borders, and as being highly instrumental for the local translations and adaptations of intellectual 'imports'.

II.

For all that I consider the processes of transmission, domestication and subversion of notions of modernity and Europeanness – be them political, ideological, economic, or conceptual – via schooling to be of central importance to the theme of this symposium.

The process of cultural negotiation between the nineteenth- and twentieth-century European 'core' and 'peripheries' has been studied from various perspectives. There is a series of works documenting the interaction of a given local tradition with the centre mostly by scholars stemming from the respective East-

6 Ronald Suny - Michael Kennedy, op. cit., pp. 404-405.

Central or South-Eastern European cultures but sometimes also from academic centers of the 'core', who had surveyed the reception of ideas and institutions coming from their respective countries. Many individual cases have already been studied to some extent, the typical research projects being aimed at documenting the itineraries of, say, Romanian or Bulgarian students in Germany in the late-nineteenth century, etc. But we have still not had more synthetic works since the mid-twentieth century phase of the comparativist research, which was marked by a strong sense of cultural superiority on the part of the European 'great cultures' and which commonly described the process of reception in unilinear terms.

With this in mind, what still remains on the agenda can, in the opinion of this author, be summarized in the following few points.

First is the need to expose the inherent ambiguity of the actual intellectual interaction in Europe, where the experience of the distance between the centres and the 'margins' created a fascination but also certain uneasiness and resentment. Much as the West had 'framed' Eastern Europe since the Age of Enlightenment, the 'Other Europe' was creating Western Europe as the 'core' where 'things happened' and 'universalities' were born. The constitution of France or Germany as universal Significant Others, for example, was anything but a single-handed process: as a leading 1848 conspirator and later prime minister of the unified Romanian Principality Dimitrie Brătianu put it, the pilgrims of any race or faith who wanted "to pay homage to the Man in his full grandeur" should be heading for France – "the one sacred land of all." But such myths often coexisted with invectives: the admiration for the universalizing power of a core culture often alternated with resentment over its arrogance, ever insufficient support or *Realpolitik* betrayals of its 'universal' values. More crucially and consequentially: since the last third of the nineteenth century, and especially during the interwar period, the West's critical thought coalesced with a growing frustration on the progressivist comparisons with, and 'importations' of, 'Europeanness', which nurtured self-perceptions of 'belatedness,' 'backwardness,' 'catching-up', to engender strong anti-European and anti-modernist local currents emphasizing the autochthonist singularity, temporality and self-sufficiency of national culture and development.

Modern education and university training in this sense were anything but straightforwardly and unambiguously associated with a Western-type modernization and Europeanization. They are better seen as providing the modern framework of knowledge transfer and interaction which also made possible the articulation and the trans-national validation of autochthonist stances and autarchic policies – either as a form of *ressentiment* or by way of assimilating Western currents which were critical of modernity; or, as most frequently happened to be the case, both. The interwar history of Central and South-Eastern Europe abounds with scholars-cum-politicians (or state functionaries) exemplifying this relationship.

On the other hand, pursuing the 'horizontal' dimensions of the interaction, such as the role of intra-regional mediation and transfer or the mechanisms whereby some of the intellectual and ideological currents became paradigmatic for certain similar cases, could provide us with a more sensitive picture of the multifarious dialogue between European 'cores' and 'peripheries', as well as among the different 'peripheries.' All in all, in mapping external 'influences', we would do better if we avoided a simple (potentially essentialist) 'borrowing' model. Instead, we should try to reveal the strategic way in which 'marginal' thinkers and academic communities were using the ideological and scientific discourse of the more or less 'canonized' West to solve local problems and appease local concerns. The peculiarity of thinking at the margins is, probably, that it consciously seeks resemblance to the 'core', Western theories that legitimize the Central- and Eastern-European scholars as scholars, while trying to use the same theories for purposes not necessarily commensurate with the original ones.

Thirdly, while every national academic tradition had established certain interpretations of the various educational and cultural institutions – German, French, British – which influenced their development, there has not been any attempt to put these pictures together and establish the trans-national influence of certain schools, figures or intellectual milieux from the perspective of an encompassing European intellectual history. For such an agenda, two concepts seem to be of central importance: transfer and networks.

Informing the emphasis on the concept of transfer is an increasing awareness of the need to address the history of political and social modernity and thinking in terms of a continuous dialogue between 'core' and 'peripheral' traditions.[7] Although in differing proportions, what we are confronted with under the headline of conceptual or paradigm transfer has never been a one-way impact (as commonly implied by notions such as 'influence', 'import', 'assimilation') but a circulation of ideas where complex trajectories of interaction and modes of involvement of the 'recipient' culture occupy the centre stage. Thus viewed, the question is not one of how faithfully a 'Western European' practice, school of thought, or institution had been assimilated outside its place of origin and in this way resolving the issue of its 'validity' respectively. The question, the series of questions as a matter of fact, should be about why certain ideas, currents, paradigms etc. became paradigmatic for a variety of structural cases; which were the versions or elements selected for local implementation; what were the expectations pinned on them; with what success; and how should we account for

7 Transfer in this context would concern, e.g.: Professionalization and institutionalization of sciences; Intellectual transfer: schools of thought, paradigms, concepts, scholarly and belles-lettres literature, major protagonists; Institutional transfer, with a special emphasis on state- and education-building institutions; Notions of modern government and society: political transfer; transfer of ideologies, theories, and models; Concepts of Europe and European belonging, of center and periphery, notions of historical regions, etc.

the similarities and the differences in all that. The argument, in other words, calls for bigger attention to the local articulations of a universalist philosophy or a scientific paradigm, which is to say, doing justice to the autonomy of political and cultural values and the timing of cultural transfer but also to social institutions and cultural-political contexts.

This would not relativize, on the other hand, the disparity in radiation and reception between the two ends of the cultural interaction. A number of asymmetries – in vocabulary, conceptual creativity, innovation and authority – constrained the non-Western societies' intellectual autonomy. Paradigms were being imported and then adjusted, sometimes beyond similarity, but always claiming resemblance to the original, thus divesting local cultures of generative and cognitive capability. And yet, if only by evoking the perennial battles over the meaning and purpose of modernization, a great many of which were fought by academics (cum intellectuals or politicians), not infrequently ex cathedra, and almost all of which drew upon the authority of professional knowledge, the cognitive gains of reversing the perspective and seeing Southeast-European academia not as object but as agent of cultural attitudes and policies become obvious.

In this sense, the channels mediating Western academic and intellectual transfer constitute another key aspect. On the one hand, such intermediaries had much to do with the hierarchies among the core cultures, particularly in terms of the institutional models adopted for local implementation. Well-known is the role of the Vojvodina Serbs schooled in the Habsburg lyceums and universities, whose political culture and ideals for good government drew heavily on the 'cameralist' tradition and bureaucratic institutional models, in setting up and staffing the first modern governing institutions in Serbia. The oligarchic "Constitutionalist regime", which they upheld between 1842 and 1868, epitomized these Central European values and models, as did the first liberal constitution of the Serbian Principality of 1869, based largely on the (conservative) Prussian constitution of 1850. Comparable was the role of the Albanians schooled in Southern Italy for the crystallization of the first notions of modern rule among the Albanians in the Empire. The close Bulgarian connections to the Serbian and Romanian nationalists and liberals occured around the universities in Bucharest, Belgrade, and Novi Sad. The Greek schools in Athens and Smyrna, Chios and Andros, as well as the Serbian schools in Belgrade and Novi Sad deserve special mention in this regard. Frequented by representatives of different nationalities, they played a major role in the spread of new ideas and discoveries of the modern age, and especially of French liberalism, throughout the Ottoman Empire.

Such intra-regional channels of transmission, moreover, often had a determining impact on a country's experience with modernity. The framework for the entangled histories of the Greek and the Bulgarian nationalisms in the

first half of the nineteenth century was set by the Greek schools and academies; it was the romantic Central European and Serbian, not the Western, scholarship on Slavic history, languages and literature that defined the parameters of the Bulgarians' modern identity self-projection. And so on...

As for the educational or intellectual networks (or forms of socialization), they acted as a sort of cultural-political *République des Lettres* on a trans-national and trans-regional scale. Those that should specially concern us include: networks built on a shared scholarly paradigm, intellectual authority, or joint schooling; professional networks; personal networks; lobbyist (pressure) groups.

An important feature of all those networks and of the culture they disseminated was their international, although not necessarily consensual, character. Quite often their beginnings can be traced back to seminar courses and institutes in foreign universities, around which widely international student communities took shape. Their members could come from rival nationalist traditions, as was for example the case with the University of Leipzig-based linguist and ethnographer of the Balkans Gustav Weigand's (1860-1931) Institute for Romanian Language (1893), later transformed into an Institute for Balkan languages. Weigand's seminars and his establishment grew into veritable platforms for intraregional transfer: in the Institute for Romanian Language, for example, Bulgarians studied Romanian language and history and vice versa. The "Slavic Academic Society" (1878-1898) was established by students in Leipzig University with the aim to foster "the rapprochement among the Slav students living in Leipzig with the purpose of exploring the life, literature and history of the Slav peoples", while political and social issues were excluded from the discussions.[8] Staying with the German examples, similar was the role played by the universities in Berlin (mainly by virtue of the prominence of Slavic Studies there) and Munich (Byzantine Studies). Back home the political and generally public role of the members of these networks can hardly be exaggerated.[9]

In the earlier, 'nationally-awakening' decades of the nineteenth century, such educational, professional or personal networks of mostly lyceum or university students often evolved into a wide international movement (or pressure group) such as the liberal-romantic "Young Europe" movement ("Young Italy", "Young Czechs", "United Serbian Youth"). The international nature of neither European nationalism nor European liberalism or socialism could be fully understood without considering the huge role of such 'diasporic' webs. Originally based

8 Veliko Jordanov, *Laipzig i bulgarite* [Leipzig and the Bulgarians] (Sofia, 1938), pp. 64-65, 75.

9 Out of 100 Bulgarian students who had attended or graduated from the University of Leipzig between 1879 and 1899, 6 became ministers, 20 university professors, 35-40 high school teachers, directors of secondary schools, or heads of departments and chief inspectors in the Ministry of Education (see Veliko Jordanov, "Znachenieto na Laipzig za stopanskoto i kulturno vuzrazhdane na bulgarite" *[The Importance of Leipzig for the Economic and Cultural Revival of the Bulgarians], Училищен преглед* XL, 1941, p. 306.

on personal contacts and common intellectual socialization, their symbolic magnetism and afterlife, as indicated by the much later "Young Turk" or "Young Bosnia" movements for example, far surpassed the historical moment of their first appearance on the political and ideological scene.

The record of (at least some) professional networks was no less impressive. Paradoxically at first sight, ethnographers and folklorists – those whose 'scientific' findings, and often personal political involvement played a major role in the new states' validation of their national causes – sustained an unusually wide international scholarly network and unusually intensive communication between themselves, especially in the 1890s-1910s. Thus in collecting materials for his ethnographic studies, Ivan D. Shishmanov (1862-1928), a founder of and professor in Sofia University who had also served as a minister of education, relied on and received the support of the leading regional scholars working in this field – Nikolaos Politis (University of Athens), Bogdan P. Hasdeu and Ioan Bianu (University of Bucharest), Milan Milicević (Serbian Academy of Sciences) – even if his interpretation did not necessarily agree with theirs.

The non-territorial and trans-national character of such networks needs to be stressed especially as national historiographic canons, predictably, tend to downplay it. More importantly still, taking full stock of such territorially floating networks will make it possible to reveal the multi-layered scholarly, disciplinary and intellectual interactions but also transfers of 'modernity agendas' across national or even regional academic communities in their historical dynamism. It would allow us to highlight the competition and interaction of different universalist philosophies and modernities 'exported' from the West to the European periphery. The intellectual and academic connections to France or Germany, for example, often entailed rival political models and institutional arrangements – e.g. republicanism vs. monarchism, social revolution vs. organic evolution, liberalism vs. socialism – as well as competing alternative modernities. Such a perspective, in other words, could help us re-conceptualise the shifting divisions in Europe in the modern era by way of focusing on the historically emerging networks of intellectual and political interaction and on the conditions (institutional, structural, cultural-political) enabling cultural transfer.