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Violence, Affect, Empathy: The Topos of Immurement in Bulgarian School Textbooks

Since 2020, there has been an ongoing dispute in the Bulgarian public space over whether the folk song *Three Brothers Built a Fortress* (Троица братя града градяха), which is about the immuration of a woman, should continue to be present in the core curriculum of Bulgarian language and literature classes for pre-gymnasium school fifth graders. The debate was initiated by a group of parents who felt that the song, which contains drastic scenes, had caused a mental crisis in their children. Yonka Marinova, the mother of a fifth grader who was shocked when studying the song for their homework, wrote a public letter on the matter. In a letter to the editors of the Sega.bg portal, Georgi Velichkov, a father from Sofia, also asked why children in the fifth grade must learn the story of a husband who entombs his wife alive (Величков, 2020). Parents are not only wondering whether their children should be learning this immurement song so early on in their lives, but there

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are also some who believe that the song should not be present at any stage of education at all, due to its brutal and cruel content. After all, it tells the story of a collective murder that no one opposes, putting the goal of completing the titular fortress above all else.

The topic was picked up by the media and on 15 February 2022, when the host of a popular programme *Вечерта на Иван Кулеков*[1] (Ivan Kulekov's Evening) noticed a paradox: it is compulsory for the media to warn against content unsuitable for persons under 12 years of age, meanwhile a violent song about immuration is part of the curriculum for children aged 11 and 12 years old. Kulekov, who perceives the ballad of the immured woman as an archetype of domestic violence, goes further: For years, domestic violence has been the most common form of violence against women in Bulgaria. A psychiatrist and an official from the Ministry of Education and Science were also included in the discussion on the show (Кулеков, 2022). Psychiatrist Vladimir Simov described the song as a brutal intrusion into a child's soul. Meanwhile, Evgenia Kostandinova from the Ministry of Education and Science defended the song's presence in textbooks, claiming that the song had "always" been in the curricula and reflects an extremely important feature of Bulgarian mentality, adding – for balance – that children in the fifth grade play very violent computer games, while at school they have a teacher to guide and offer them the necessary interpretive anchors. Kulekov was not persuaded, concluding the programme by stating that the immurement song expresses a collective Bulgarian archetype that is characterised by brutal, primordial logic. The host believed that the strength of this archetype lies in the pre-1989 period, when it was promoted and reinforced: the figure of Pavlik Morozov is a symbol of a world that cultivates a servile attitude and encourages thoughtless violence. The boy embeds his father into the foundations of communism; meanwhile, in the local culture a husband immures his own wife to enable the construction of a fortress (Кулеков, 2022).

Other opinions were also expressed in this media discussion. In his article published on the nationalist bogari.bg portal, which claims to be devoted

[1] Ivan Kulekov is a journalist, satirist, and scriptwriter on the popular talk show "Slavi's Show" (Bulgarian: Шоуто на Слави), which aired on Bulgarian National Television from 2000 to 2019. This program, the most popular on Bulgarian television after 1989, was hosted by journalist Slavi Trifonov. Especially in its later years, the show's creators promoted populist content and nationalism, and the symbolic capital gained from the television program was used to establish Trifonov's populist party "There Is Such a People".

to "uncovering the hidden truth", Plamen Ivanov defended the presence of the immurement song in textbooks. He admitted that it might be too early for 11-year-olds to discuss the song, yet misunderstandings of the song should be blamed on its misinterpretation due to the spiritual condition of modern man entangled in the materialist paradigm. For Ivanov, the immurement song is a story about man's fall into sin, but it is also about his striving for goodness and his hope for salvation – a process in which a teacher guide is necessary to bring out the message of the song, especially the tragedy of the man who walls his wife in (*Иванов*, 2023). Highlighting the main male protagonist's suffering concurrent with a reduction of the female protagonist's tragedy shows that women are treated instrumentally in male imagery in that female suffering is important insofar as it feeds into the male story.

In the abovementioned very emotional discussions (with up to 200 comments per post), two positions become apparent. The first group of commentators draws attention to the problematic message of the song, also (but not always) highlighting the need to remove it from the curriculum because of the negative role models it promotes. This group strongly emphasises parallels with Bulgarian communism, which – also in the curriculum – placed the abstract community-nation above the individual, who could be sacrificed for the common good (Величков, 2020). These commentators advocate a transition from 'barbaric' practices towards modernity in order to place Bulgaria in Europe, as well as a radical break from symbols and attitudes considered characteristic of the pre-1989 period. The second group of commentators are of the opinion that the ballad is an integral part of Bulgarian tradition, and its removal would saw off the already fragile branch of native culture. They claim that their native culture is weakened in the globalised world. In their view, parents who challenge the teaching of the ballad are the result of inappropriate upbringing: if a child (especially a boy) cries after reading the text of this song, how can he interact with bloody folklore describing Ottoman rule, the Batak massacre, or the April Uprising? "Simple people – weak authority", sums up one anonymous commenter in a discussion under the text. Another argument in favour of keeping the song in textbooks is the brutality of the contemporary culture in which children grow up nowadays. According to the song's defenders, modern computer games, cartoons, but also Greek myths studied by children in the fifth grade are no less brutal than the immurement song, and song misinterpretations should be prevented by teachers.

In fifth graders' textbooks, the ballad *Three Brothers Built a Fortress* is discussed in a module entitled *Image of the World in Folklore*. Pupils are introduced to this subject after having covered the first chapter, *Mythological World Model*, in which they learn about cosmogony as presented in Greek myths and the creation of the world in the Bible. The part on folklore is extensive, with students discussing as many as four texts: *God and Devil Arrange the World*, *Three Brothers and the Golden Apple*, *The Golden Girl* and, finally, *Three Brothers Built a Fortress* (The White Fortress, as it is referred to in the song), which is a variant of an immurement song from Smolyan Province in the Rhodope Mountains[2]. Why have textbook authors consistently chosen this particular variant for years, when there are 180 others available? (Моллов, 2011). This variant originates from southern Bulgaria, not far from the present border with Greece, and contains basic narrative elements present in other Bulgarian songs: first, there is a crisis among builders over their inability to complete a building (The White Fortress); then, they recognise the need to make a foundation sacrifice of the first woman who enters the construction site with food the following morning. All the brothers, in spite of having agreed not to do so, reveal the cruel idea to their wives except for the youngest, whose wife (named Struma/Struna in this variant) brings a meal the next day and is thus singled out for sacrifice. The woman is walled in. Before she dies, she asks the builders to leave an opening for her breast so that she can feed her newborn child.

Since the 1970s, the immurement song has invariably been included in the core curriculum for fifth and sixth graders, with textbook authors consistently choosing the Smolyan Province's variant. Meanwhile the song's interpretative modes, contexts and legitimisations vary and are reflected in student tasks, authors' discussions of the song, and intertextual references in the form of supplementary texts or lesson plans[3]. By tracking these modes, contexts and legitimisations, one may be able to grasp the place occupied by

[2] The song *Three Brothers Built a Fortress* is not the only one that the textbook authors could choose. The motif of the creation of the world from a woman's body appears in other Bulgarian folk songs: for example, the eyes of a dead Samodiva become lakes, a tree grows from her body and grass grows from her hair. An orthodox church was built where the innocent sister had been killed by her brother (Parpulova-Gribble, 1996).

[3] A visual presentation of a lesson on immurement may be found online. The materials are amateurish, error-ridden, and accompanied by incoherent and inadequate music (especially in the first part of the presentation). In addition to the descriptive part, the presentation also includes an interpretation of the main characters, with Struna and her husband being protagonists, and the other brothers antagonists. Cf. Учим онлайн (2021).

the song *Three Brothers Built a Fortress* in Bulgarian cultural imagery in both diachronic and synchronic perspectives[4].

An extra in a social drama

In the 1970s, school textbooks reflected Bulgaria's historical and cultural policy, which also influenced the establishment of the cultural canon. The 1970s saw a resurgence of state paternalism promoting visions of femininity petrified within traditional roles: a woman excelling in fulfilling her duties, entrusting herself to a man and her family, fulfilling herself as a mother and wife (Воденичаров, 2004). In the 1950s, even in the "Работническо дело" daily newspaper, one can find numerous texts about women fulfilling themselves in politics, business, and science. The first decades after the war also saw the liberalisation of family roles and the emergence of an image of the emancipated woman with presence in the public sphere and professional environments. Petyr Vodenicharov refers to these phenomena collectively as communism replacing the figure of God-man with the figure of Party-mother: feminine nouns such as motherland, mass, and party are an expression of the new order, while 'masculine' institutions become a relic of the old order. Memoirs and autobiographies of communists published at the time contain a reoccurring theme: humble origins, a strong mother raising a future communist leader (and, at the same time, an absent, insignificant or marginalised father within the family arrangement – a part-time worker, itinerant musician, alcoholic, etc.). Vodenicharov sees this as a male fantasy about the rebellion of the Mother rejecting the Father's rules and condoning revolutionary terror. This fantasy also makes the Mother a public icon: desexualised and active, inspiring participation in science, sport, and economic life. In the 1970s, women ceased to be the protagonists of modernisation narratives. The media and the public sphere highlighted the figure of

[4] The article is part of a research project "The Topos of an Immured Woman in the Cultures of Southeastern Europe and Hungary", led by prof. Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa. Within the project, the Bulgarian studies team (Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa, Sylwia Siedlecka) analyzes various cultural texts related to the topos of immurement in the Bulgarian area. For the topos of immurement in Bulgarian culture, see, among others: Arnaudov (Арнаудов, 1972, pp. 221–460); Szwat-Gyłybowa (2016, pp. 73–84, 2017); Agoston-Nikolova (1994); Milkova (2005); Parpulova-Gribble (1996, pp. 169–184).

the mother fulfilling herself in the domestic and family spheres, and a new role is added: that of the caring wife (Воденичаров, 2004). This decade brought economic stabilisation and, at the same time, a wave of retro-utopias and new remembrance policies. In political terms, the key initiative was the nationwide 'Memory of the Nation Speaks' campaign (Народна памет разказва) that was launched in the early 1980s (Ангелова, 2010). Its aim was to create a new historical memory erasing echoes of the Bolshevik terror and relics of the bourgeois mentality in one fell swoop. Children and adolescents had a specific role to play in the patriarchal system: they were collectors and interpreters of older generations' stories. In addition, in 1971, the Institute of Folklore Studies was established with local branches throughout Bulgaria. Research conducted by this Institute became a part of state policy, as reflected in the promotion of folklore in school education.

Textbooks from the 1970s and 1980s portrayed the character of Strunka/Strumka (the heroine in the Smolyan variant) as an exemplary Bulgarian woman: a mother and a wife (Котова, 1975, 1977; Котова & Матеева, 1978, 1981, 1984). The song was originally entitled *Struna the Woman* (Струна невяста), while in contemporary textbooks, which are based on the same variant, the title is *Three Brothers Built a Fortress* (Троица братя града градяха). Struna is not only hard-working, she also zealously fulfils her duties, which is, incidentally, in line with the concept of 'positive discipline' as promoted by the communists. According to this concept, one should discipline oneself to act for the good of society, especially at work (Nowicki, 2016). The protagonist is the most hard-working of wives, performing her duties conscientiously and efficiently: in the course of a single morning, she manages to prepare a meal for her husband and other builders, do the laundry, and look after her baby. The woman is shown in the role of an ideal wife (although to a limited degree) – an empowered person, as very clearly evidenced by the instruction for students which reads "Show the spiritual beauty and strength of the Bulgarian woman extolled in this song! What did the people perceive as the biggest virtue and source of greatness of a woman?" (Котова, 1975). This attachment to a static image of women may also be seen in the accompanying tasks: students are to prepare a recital of songs about women and mothers to mark Women's Day on 8 March. Authors must encourage students to write down family songs that feature images of the traditional family, women and mothers. The textbook engages especially with the emotions (*We do not condone immurement! And yet the song still moves us. Why?*), and with the imagination (*Which moment of the song would you illustrate? Why?*). However, empathy

primarily extends to Struna's husband, while the woman (the main character in the recital and of Women's Day) is an object of not empathy but worship. She is situated outside the world, not in it. In line with the concept of mental hygiene developed in communist Bulgaria but which originated with Ivan Pavlov, no space is given to the tragedy of the woman or her experiences. According to the concept of mental hygiene, women's mental crises resulted from being overloaded with the many social roles they performed, and from permanent exhaustion. It was generally the case that women's mental crises and neuroses were explained by the notion of hysteria, which was perceived to most particularly affect women who combined occupational and domestic roles, especially mothers. The key factor was that by attributing to women's work high intensity, lower compared to men's vital resources, and weaker nervous systems, it was acknowledged that the female nervous system was more susceptible to overload. One of the signs of these overloads was supposed to be female hysteria. The collective image of a hysterical woman in mental health prevention programmes consisted of images of over-ambitious women, nervous daughters-in-law, and mothers overburdened with housework. They could be cured of hysteria by proper hygiene in their daily lives and by the avoidance of mental overload. This approach to women's crises assumed that crisis prevention should be automated and reduced to ensuring proper proportionality between work and social life, or between occupational and domestic environments (Христов, 2016).

In the 1990s, the nationalist overtones of the story were also blurred to an extent by interpretations carrying a universal ahistorical message devoid of local references. Instead of love for her motherland or family, Struna expresses love as an abstract concept. Students inspired by the song were asked to describe an event revolving around strong love, but the authors did not dictate who or what the object of this love should be (Котова & Матеева, 1995).

The character of the husband (Manol) is by far the most developed (both psychologically and socially) character in textbooks from the 1970s and 1980s. The textbook 'male' narrative transcended family imagery and became national imagery. Since 1978, secondary school literature textbooks (and their subsequent editions) have included an excerpt from the poem *Master Manol* by Assen Raztsvetnikov, with illustrations depicting winged *Manol* ascending into the sky, leaving behind a protruding minaret tower, among other things (Струмски et al., 1978). Textbook authors included a three-page excerpt from the 1949 poem *Master Manol*. Assen Raztsvetnikov, already a committed leftist in the interwar period, became a co-author of the myth of the Bulgarian September Uprising

of 1923, which served the communist narrative after the war. Raztsvetnikov's poem about Manol, the great mosque builder, was considered a canonical text in post-war Bulgaria. In the textbook from 1978, the content is interpreted along the lines of nineteenth-century ethnocentrism, which reinforced the polarizations between Bulgarians and Turks, between Orthodoxy and Islam, but also between the people and the elites. Master Manol became an expression of 'love for the land of Bulgaria', with students being tasked with reading aloud passages from the Raztsvetnikov's poem in such a way that listeners would believe in this love. The textbook from 1978 also includes an extra task for volunteers: a comparison between Manol and Sultan Selim the Grim, with a closing rhetorical question: which character is closer to you? (Струмски et al., 1978). Raztsvetnikov's Manol is an unmarried bachelor (but thanks to this, there is no immurement either; in this sense, the alternative version is encouraging, because even if Manol's metal wings become hot in the sun, the reader is not informed of the hero's death in the skies). Manol's only potential partner is the Sultan's daughter, but this is a one-sided relationship. The woman in love remains on the ground, while Manol soars high, choosing to commit all his energy to the cause – the community. The presence of the Sultan's daughter is meant to show that Manol is an object of desire, transcending social and political constraints. However, the key female character is the protagonist's absent mother. She is the most empowered person capable of regulating her son's conscience. In accordance with Vodenicharov's concept, this can be read as the vision of a woman encouraging participation in public life and challenging the current order through revolution. However, textbook authors were not interested in female characters. Instead, they focused on the clash between Manol and Selim, with the former symbolising the new order (technology, modernisation) and the latter a helpless, anachronistic and violent vision of the past.

Topos and affect

Fifth grade Bulgarian literature textbooks published since 2015 and incorporated into the core curriculum by the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Bulgaria include the song *Three Brothers Built a Fortress* in a module entitled *Image of the World in Folklore*. As many as three lesson units are devoted to the motif of immurement: an introduction to the topic, and two exercise units. Contemporary textbooks include the song variant from the Smolyan Province. Authors of con-

temporary textbooks juxtapose this song with literary interpretations of the motif of immurement: the epic poem *The Spring of the White-Legged Woman* (Изворът на Белоногата) by Petko Slaveykov (1873) and the short story *The Church Council* (Църковното настоятелство) by Yordan Radichkov (1985), showing the vitality and continuity of the motif of foundation sacrifice in Bulgarian literature since the national revival. Slaveykov's text is extensively covered as compulsory reading for the ninth grade as one of the key works of Bulgarian revival literature; so, in the fifth grade, textbook authors focus only on the theme of love between Gergana and Nikola, and study tasks revolve around the theme of 'love stronger than death'. Authors ask why, even after Gergana's death, she and Nikola meet in the spring (Божилов & Бунева, 2020). Meanwhile, Radichkov builds an intertextual dialogue using satire and humour. The foundation sacrifice of an animal's shadow is shown as an anachronistic superstition, and the motif of immurement is used as a springboard for the story of a community in crisis, which, driven by egoism, is unable to generate the common good (Божилов & Бунева, 2020).

Textbooks also cite scholarly sources (notably the work of Mikhail Arnaudov, 1920) and provide information on the occurrence of the immurement motif in folklore around the world. However, authors say, while strangers (slaves, enemies, abandoned children) are immured in texts from other parts of the world, in the folklore of the Balkan Peninsula (songs from Greece and Albania are referred to, with the latter featuring a heroine named Rozafa, being quite close to the Bulgarian variant) it is the closest, the most beautiful person with the best character, who falls victim to the practice (Божилов & Бунева, 2020). The category of mythological thinking is invoked and the latest textbook's authors note that the song *Three Brothers Built a Fortress* is an expression of mythological thinking. A significant shift is evident in the new textbooks: whereas those from the 1970s and 1980s used the category of "us" ("our ancestors believed that when a person was walled in…"), new approaches emphasise the presence of the immurement motif as part of (Balkan, global) cultural heritage.

Contemporary textbooks on Bulgarian literature and language contain three essential interpretations of the song:

1) apotheosis of (self-)sacrifice
2) seeking alternatives to immurement (attempts to avoid the need for a foundation sacrifice)
3) impersonation-affective interpretation (stimulation of the mechanism of identification, students' emotional engagement in the plot)

The first of the proposed readings replicates narratives from the period of the People's Republic of Bulgaria: it fits into a nationalist frame and links the ballad's *Three Brothers Built a Fortress* foundation sacrifice motif with the motif of (self-)sacrifice in Bulgarian history. The motto of the series of lessons on immurement is a quote from the late 19th- and early 20th-century Bulgarian poet, Stoyan Mihaylovski: "Man does not choose his duty – just as he does not choose his origins". This is a reconstruction of the 19th-century model of patriotism. Students are asked, "how do we relate today to Bulgarians who gave their lives for the freedom of their motherland or saved someone from death, and what important thing would students be willing to sacrifice for their loved ones?" (Герджикова et al., 2016). The husband is the main protagonist: he pays his builder's debt to the community, believes in the redemptive power of love (his wife does not really die – she is saved) and mourns his wife's death. Struna appears here as a model mother and a wife put to the test; she is explicitly described as the ideal Bulgarian woman: "Strength of spirit makes a petite woman stronger than men. Even when she sees what awaits her, she does not show weakness, she does not blame, she does not complain, she only thinks of her child – her last words represent her sacrifice as a mother" (Протохристова et al., 2019). The two brothers are negative examples: they lie, they do not keep their word and they disrespect their work. Students are asked to select what they believe is the cruellest (!) passage and copy it into their notebooks, and then to use five sentences to describe what makes this passage cruel. They are given interpretive anchors in the form of the words fidelity, suffering, separation, maternal love, sacrifice, crying and request (Герджикова et al., 2016).

It is rare to find in textbooks interpretations for plit of the song in which methods other than immurement are used to solve the community crisis. However, students are asked to change the storyline so that justice prevails, or to solve the problem of the fortress that is built by day and falls apart at night. Possible versions use persuasion and are accompanied by questions about the details, such as "How do you feel when someone does not keep a promise he makes? Why do you feel this way? What responsibilities do you have? And what are the responsibilities of adults?". These questions suggest the importance of the individual's responsibility to the community (Протохристова et al., 2019, p. 81).

"Impersonation" scenarios in textbooks take the form of tasks such as role-playing and designing the settings for individual episodes, as well as word-

less stagings of the poem with hand-drawn stage designs (Петрова & Василева, 2017). Instructions in textbooks direct students to adopt the perspectives of individual characters in the text and to "sympathise" with them. To this end, strategies are used to build up the effect of surprise: the text is accompanied by 'speech balloons' asking students questions during the first reading. For example, when the youngest brother sees his wife approaching the construction site and he starts crying, the question in the margin is *What were your expectations of the story? Why?* When the husband says that his ring has fallen into the foundations, the authors ask *Does this passage come as a surprise to you? How would you act at that moment if you were in the position of Struna's husband? What advice would you give him? Why?* And, at the end of the text, *Does the ending coincide with your expectations? What is good about the text? What is bad? Why?* (Протохристова et al., 2019, p. 82). 'Surprise' questions generate a unique situation: students are thrown into a different world and acquire spontaneous knowledge based on what is presented during the reading. At the end, students are asked to put themselves in the place of not Struna but her husband, which makes his the only empowered character.

A survey of social media posts on primary schools' and local community centres' websites showed that the immurement song is often performed by students in school theatres. These performances mostly feature actors, while puppets and marionettes are much less common. The plays are staged during lessons about Struma and the three brothers and feature primary school first graders as actors. Performances are also staged by higher primary school grades, e.g., the puppet play prepared during poetry week in March 2022 by class 7B students in the village of Bolyartsi. Photographers covering such plays like to focus on the actual event of the walling-in, when builders slowly and methodically arrange the bricks around Struna's body. Photo captions do not elaborate on the topic – they are purely factual. From these photo galleries, one may gather not only that the immurement song is a frequent theme of school plays (directed by literature teachers), but also that the photos mostly come from small towns and villages, where performances are sometimes staged outdoors. Nature itself (a mountainside, a forest) becomes the setting. The song becomes naturalised, melded with the real local space as it is experienced every day. Sometimes, the staging is directly linked to the place where the song variant originated (e.g., the village of Gyovren in Smolyan Province, where the variant quoted in textbooks comes from), with child actors performing in black, white and red folk costumes from the Rhodope

Mountains. Such initiatives have an additional local significance, thus feeding into the collective memory.

The popularity of the theatricalization of the song *Three Brothers Built a Fortress* in the Bulgarian school curriculum may be explained by the vitality of folklore in the life of Bulgarian schools, with musical ensembles, folk dance groups and other initiatives promoting the functioning of local culture in schools. However, the fact that most visual representations found online come from rural areas warrants the conclusion that such initiatives are a particularly important part of the educational path in the countryside, and, to some extent, also an element that integrates school and parent communities. The song's characters are played by children re-enacting words of the song and the immuration scene, but audiences consist of adults: the parents and the school community. This intense presence of grassroots school initiatives in small towns and villages is a parallel reality to the aforementioned media discussions between journalists, psychiatrists and parents, who mainly come from major urban centres with social and cultural capital. While teachers from small towns and other local animators reanimate the song through ever newer performative practices, the journalists, residents of large cities with high cultural capital portray the presence of the immurement song in the core curriculum as socially harmful.

Conclusions

Analysis of the presence of the *Three Brothers Built a Fortress* song in school textbooks has shown that local culture has been a consistently important part of the Bulgarian primary school education system since the 1970s, and textbook interpretations of the song have been ever-present in parts of the curriculum devoted to folklore. Textual and visual interpretations of the song *Three Brothers Built a Fortress* illustrate the key ways in which the understanding of the topos of the foundation sacrifice has evolved and how it has resonated with ideological demands over the last half-century. Although the song itself has consistently remained in textbooks over the decades, its interpretation since 1989 has changed in some of the publications studied, albeit usually in a conservative manner and without unequivocal disapproval for the validity of the foundation sacrifice. The ways of interpreting the ballad *Three Brothers*

Built a Fortress, as presented in textbooks, normalize gender inequalities and open the perspective for the application of symbolic violence against women. Women are supporting characters embedded in men's stories, stabilising the male world but lacking empowerment or a voice of their own. The sacrifice of a woman is, in many cases, described as equitable and noble, and an acquiescent, obedient death is obvious or even desirable.

The male-centric narrative comes particularly to the forefront in the 1970s/80s and is embedded in nationalist state politics that aggravate antagonisms along ethnic lines and have paternalistic overtones in the design of gender roles. In textbooks from the communist period, Manol is the role model of a Bulgarian man, and Struna is the role model of a Bulgarian woman – a mother and a wife. Textbooks seldom challenge the meaningfulness of the foundation sacrifice; even if they do, it is a marginal motif, usually also containing a persuasive element. By interpreting the heroine using an ethnic key, authors of the textbook contaminate the figure of the mother and Bulgarian female role model, thereby placing the work in the national imaginary. The ethnic nationalism thus promoted differs from civic nationalism in that it defines national culture which determines the identity of a nation and is the criterion for inclusion in or exclusion from the nation. It is a dense culture encompassing almost all spheres of social life. In a community defined in this way, nation becomes an insurmountable barrier, for "outsiders" in particular (Burszta et al., 2019). The walled-in woman is an outsider – a daughter-in-law and a wife from outside the clan who is sacrificed. Struna represents the weak link of the community precisely because she is from outside the family, and in a moment of crisis she becomes the person singled out for sacrifice. In textbook interpretations from the 1970s, the victim – circumstantially – becomes Manol, and the character of Struna does not appear at all. However, it is Manol who makes the decision to save himself through death, thus becoming a myth, while in the case of the walled-in woman we are dealing with entrapment and a collective murdering of Struna. Textbook interpretations of the ballad about walling in very rarely question the validity of the sacrifice and too seldom seek to convince the reader that any community might exist whose integrity can be maintained without making sacrifices. In today's school textbooks, the nationalist overtones of the previous era's interpretation of the legend are softened and transformed into the idea of love for one's motherland and of the necessity to sacrifice oneself for it (in the characters of Manol and Struma). However, with more publications endorsed by the Ministry of Education and Science, the nationalist line

of interpretation is supplemented by other ones, notably underlining the itinerant nature of the immuration topos and embedding it in the framework of global cultural heritage. According to this narrative, the Bulgarian variant of the song is one of many found around the world. Textbook authors focus on Albanian and Greek examples, essentially isolating the Balkan framework of the topos and making it a part of a closed regional tradition.

For half a century, the immurement song has invariably inspired numerous performances, especially plays involving primary school children. Stage practices from the PRB period employed the formula of recitals, festivals and tribute events (e.g., Women's Day on 8 March, with recitals in honour of the mother, the wife, and the Bulgarian woman). Meanwhile contemporary interpretations are often focussed on the song itself, re-enacting it on stage using folk costumes and proper settings. The fact that *Three Brothers Built a Fortress* is frequently chosen for school productions shows that this song is a living tradition sustained in a grassroots manner by local communities. Contemporary performances are initiated by schools outside of the core curriculum and are therefore (in contrast to the PRB period, when such initiatives were imposed top-down as instructions in textbooks) the free-willed activity of amateur class groups, theatre clubs, teachers and parents.

Social phenomena and practices related to the presence of the *Three Brothers Built a Fortress* song in the primary school curriculum may be viewed through the category of affect. Relating to Charles Altieri's concept of affect, Mieke Bal defines affect as a range of mental states in which activity on the part of the agent cannot be adequately captured either in the form of a sensory impression or a belief; instead, it requires attention as to what the person will propose as the expression of these states (Bal, 2015). Emotions are distinguished within affects: they relate to the construction of attitudes, usually establishing a unitary cause and thus situating the agent within the narrative (Bal, 2015). In this sense, the media discussion on the justification of including the song *Three Brothers Built a Fortress* in school textbooks will primarily be an emotional one. On the one hand, there are some who claim the ballad to be harmful as a shameful anachronism and as a relic of the pre-1989 ideological heritage that promotes, according to them, collective violence. On the other hand, defenders of the song express their emotions in media discussions advocating for the need to preserve it as part of a tradition in a globalised world. This emotional story is also compounded by instructions in textbooks which focus on specific characters and their roles

in social performance, thus defining in detail the themes of guilt, responsibility, sacrifice etc.

An affect that Bal believes to be very effective (especially compared to emotions) is mood. With mood, the sense of subjectivity is dissipated and the impression emerges in an indeterminate atmosphere that permeates the scene or situation. The neutrality of tone leaves room for the invasion of the body giving way to the affectively diffuse meaning of subjectivity, and the discrepancy between mood and events has the effect of invading the affective capacities of the viewer (Bal, 2015). It is not emotion but mood that is the affect that accompanies school performances based on the song *Three Brothers Built a Fortress*. The neutrality of the performances – in which the students' recitation is accompanied by bricks being laid around their classmate's body, all of which is watched by an adult audience (teachers and parents) – creates a mood of unease through juxtaposition of the content and its neutral tone.

Discourses and practices centred around the presence of the song *Three Brothers Built a Fortress* in textbooks do not intersect since people of different opinions often function in separated information bubbles. What they have in common, however, is a lack of indifference to the song from Smolyan: it engages them affectively, triggering associations, analogies, comparisons and metaphors, proving that the song is a living topos of Bulgarian culture.

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Przemoc, afekt, empatia. Topos zamurowania w bułgarskich podręcznikach szkolnych

W artykule zanalizowano obecność toposu ofiary zakładzinowej w bułgarskich podręcznikach szkolnych od lat 70. XX wieku do współczesności oraz dyskusje medialne na temat funkcji i znaczenia tego toposu w nauczaniu dzieci w szkołach podstawowych. Kultura lokalna jest istotną częścią bułgarskiego systemu edukacji, a podręcznikowe interpretacje pieśni o zamurowaniu pod tytułem *Trzej bracia budowali twierdzę* od półwiecza są stałym elementem podstawy programowej. Analizowane w artykule tekstowe i performatywne interpretacje pieśni o zamurowanej pozwalają prześledzić kluczowe sposoby rozumienia przez autorów podręczników toposu ofiary zakładzinowej w perspektywie ostatniego półwiecza. Analiza kluczowych sposobów interpretowania pieśni w podręcznikach oraz towarzyszące im strategie performatywne pokazują, że edukacja nadal pozostaje przestrzenią normalizacji przemocy wobec kobiet i utrwalania nierówności genderowych. Osadzone w męskich opowieściach kobiety są postaciami pomocniczymi, stabilizującymi męski świat, ale nieposiadającymi istotnego głosu ani sprawczości. Ofiara złożona z kobiety bywa oceniana jako słuszna i wzniosła, a pokorna, pozbawiona buntu śmierć jako pożądana w imię uzyskania wyższego celu. Legitymizacja aktu ofiarniczego w pieśni jest analogią dla definiowania narodu bułgarskiego jako wspólnoty potrzebującej ofiar oraz sposobem legitymizacji nacjonalizmu etnicznego.

Słowa kluczowe: ofiara zakładzinowa; edukacja; gender; nacjonalizm; Bułgaria; zamurowanie; folklor; przemoc symboliczna

Violence, affect, empathy: The topos of immurement in Bulgarian school textbooks

The article examines the presence of the topos of foundation sacrifice in Bulgarian school textbooks since the 1970s, as well as media discussions on the function and meaning of this topos in the teaching of primary school children. Local culture is an important part of the Bulgarian education system, and textbook interpretations of the song about immurement entitled *Three Brothers Built a Fortress* have been a regular part of the core curriculum for half a century. Textual and performative interpretations of the song *Three Brothers Built a Fortress* analysed in this article make it possible to track the key ways in which textbook authors have understood the topos of the foundation sacrifice over the last half-century. The analysis of key interpretations of the song *Three Brothers Built a Fortress* in textbooks and of accompanying performative strategies show that education remains a space for the normalisation of violence against women and the perpetuation of gender inequalities. Embedded in men's stories, women are supporting characters that stabilise the male world but lack a significant voice or empowerment. The sacrifice of a woman is sometimes judged as equitable and noble, and an acquiescent, obedient death is judged as desirable to achieve a higher goal. Legitimisation of the sacrificial act in the song *Three Brothers Built a Fortress* is an analogy for defining the Bulgarian nation as a community in need of sacrifice and a way of legitimising ethnic nationalism.

Keywords: foundation sacrifice; education; gender; nationalism; Bulgaria; immurement; folklore; symbolic violence

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