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IVAN HADJIYSKI'S ANTI-COLONIAL MARXISM

A View from Europe's Semi-Periphery

Nikolay Karkov*

ABSTRACT

This text seeks to make a contribution to a more expansive conversation between decolonial and critical theory, by exploring the work of one of Eastern Europe's least known yet most creative radical intellectuals, Bulgarian anti-colonial Marxist Ivan Hadjiyski. Killed by Nazis on the Eastern front in 1944, Hadjiyski was a major interlocutor in intellectual and political debates around racism, capitalist accumulation, and the *differentia specifica* of Bulgaria/the Balkans in the 1930s and early 1940s. After situating Hadjiyski's life and work in its context of the interwar and World War II periods, the article explores in some detail his early and arguably most popular text titled "Optimistichna teoriya za nashia narod" ("An Optimistic Theory about Our People"), first published in 1938. More specifically, the text zones in on two prongs of Hadjiyski's critical argument. The first one examines Hadjiyski's effort to resignify the meaning of the "Bulgarian people", in the context of rising nationalism and fascism. The second places Western capitalist modernity under critical scrutiny, in light of its "underside" of colonial violence and predation, and sets it apart from Eastern European modes of primitive accumulation. The article argues that

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Hadjiyski's piece represents a genuine contribution to both critical and decolonial thought *from the perspective of Eastern Europe*, and continues to have important lessons for us in our present moment.

KEYWORDS

Ivan Hadjiyski — Bulgaria — Resignification — Western capitalist modernity — Colonial plunder

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O MARXISMO ANTI-COLONIAL DE IVAN HADJIYSKI

Uma visão a partir da semi-periferia da Europa

RESUMO

Este texto procura contribuir para um diálogo mais amplo entre teoria decolonial e teoria crítica, explorando o trabalho de um dos intelectuais radicais menos conhecidos porém mais criativos do Leste Europeu, o marxista anticolonial búlgaro Ivan Hadjiyski. Morto pelos nazistas no fronte oriental em 1944, Hadjiyski foi um importante interlocutor nos debates intelectuais e políticos acerca do racismo, da acumulação capitalista e da *differentia specifica* da Bulgária/dos Balcãs na década de 1930 e início da década de 1940. Após situar a vida e o trabalho de Hadjiyski no contexto dos períodos entreguerras e da Segunda Guerra Mundial, o artigo explora com algum detalhe seu texto inicial e presumivelmente mais popular intitulado "Optimistichna teoriya za nashia narod" ("Uma teoria otimista sobre o nosso povo"), publicado pela primeira vez em 1938. Mais especificamente, o texto foca em duas frentes do argumento crítico de Hadjiyski. A primeira examina o esforço de Hadjiyski para resignificar o significado do "povo búlgaro" no contexto do nacionalismo e fascismo crescentes. A segunda coloca a modernidade capitalista ocidental sob escrutínio crítico à luz de seu "reverso" da violência e pilhagem colonial, e a distingue dos modos de acumulação primitiva do Leste Europeu. O artigo argumenta que o texto de Hadjiyski representa

uma contribuição genuína tanto para o pensamento crítico como decolonial *da perspectiva do Leste Europeu*, e continua a guardar lições importantes para nosso momento atual.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Ivan Hadjiyski — Bulgária — Ressignificação — Modernidade capitalista ocidental — Pilhagem colonial

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Since its early articulations in the 1930s, critical theory has been preoccupied, as per Detlev Claussen's apt formulation, "with an interest in emancipation and, to put it crudely, human happiness"; along with committed "reflections on the contradictions that hinder" both the emancipatory project and the pursuit of happiness (Claussen and Maiso 2019: 77). Decolonial theory, closer to our own present, has both built on these insights and challenged the normative Eurocentrism of much of the critical theorizing, as it traces the deep imbrications of Western modernity and global coloniality and also seeks to *delink* from their lethal symbiosis (e.g., Moraña, Dussel, and Jáuregui 2008; Mignolo 2010). While this intervention continues to be indispensable and profoundly germinative, one inadvertent consequence of the decolonial project's deployment of a "North-South optic" (Lazarus 2012) has been that it lumps together Eastern and Western Europe, de facto confining European theoretical production to the Westernmost geographical parts of the continent. Over against the best intention of its practitioners, such a move runs the risk of erasing and/or neutralizing radical thought from Europe's own internal periphery, its own "internal

South", positioned on the imperial difference of the modern/colonial world-system (Boatcă 2013).[1]

Accordingly, this text seeks to make a contribution to a more expansive conversation between decolonial and critical theory, by exploring the work of one of Eastern Europe's least known yet most creative radical intellectuals, Bulgarian heterodox Marxist Ivan Hadjiyski. Killed by Nazis on the Eastern front in 1944 at the age of 36 (same age that Fanon died less than two decades later), Hadjiyski was a major interlocutor in intellectual and political debates around racism, capitalist accumulation, and the *differentia specifica* of Bulgaria/the Balkans in the 1930s and early 1940s. His prolific writing, spanning dozens of academic articles, journalistic pieces for the popular press, and the equivalent of four published and one lost monograph, helped set him up as one of the most powerful critical voices of his time. After situating Hadjiyski's life and work in its context of the interwar

[1] The immediate target of the decolonial critique of critical theory are the more familiar iterations of the critical theory project which tacitly identify both the "dialectic of the Enlightenment" and the Habermasian (unfinished project of) modernity as intra-European/Western phenomena to be explored via the resources of Western critical thought (German idealism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, etc.). It is with respect to this literature that Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007: 263) would argue that decolonization, rather than modernity, is the project in need of completion. Important exceptions to such Eurocentric predilections exist, of course, including the direct genealogy connecting Herbert Marcuse to Angela Davis and Lucius Outlaw, for instance; or Claussen's own exploration of the "American roots" of critical theory itself (see e.g. Claussen 2004; Davis 2004; Outlaw 2013). Among the seminal contributions of Eastern European scholars such as Manuela Boatcă, Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, József Böröcz, Piro Rexhepi, Marina Gržinić, and others, is the insight that there are "multiple Europes" separated by an "imperial" (rather than a "colonial") difference, racializing not only the peoples of different European regions in different ways, but also their epistemic practices and resources. For a genealogy and discussion of postcolonial and decolonial theory in the region, see Karkov (2019).

and World War II periods, I explore in some detail his early and arguably most popular (yet also most misunderstood) text titled "An Optimistic Theory about Our People" ("*Optimistichna teoriya za nashia narod*"), first published in 1938. I argue that Hadjiyski's piece represents a genuine contribution to both critical and decolonial thought *from the perspective of Eastern Europe*, and continues to have important lessons for us in our present moment.

Writer, Archivist, and Activist: Ivan Hadjiyski's Life and Work

Ivan Minkov Hadjiyski is born in 1907 in the Balkan city of Troyan, in the family of a small proprietor (*esnaf*): a biographical fact arguably relevant for both his intense work regimen (in line with the *esnaf* ethos of working "from dark till dark") and the subject matter of his academic investigations (as Hadjiyski identifies the small proprietor mentality of his time as both essential to Bulgarian social dynamics and prohibitive of large-scale social transformation). After completing his primary education in his city of birth, he enrolls in the Svishtov trade *gymnasium* (high school), where, in the words of a contemporary, more than two-thirds of all high school students are left-leaning or communists and among whom Hadjiyski stands out easily for his academic accomplishments and rebellious nature (Ignatievski 1989). It is also at this stage that he gets involved with political activism and has his first run-ins with and beatings by the police, in the context of severe state repression on the heels of a

military coup and an abortive anti-capitalist uprising.[2] His university studies commence as he moves to the capital Sofia in 1927. Over the course of the next five years, he would pursue and obtain two diplomas from Sofia University, in philosophy and law, respectively: the first one a genuine passion, the second a way to procure a living, all the while working various odd jobs, such as waiting at restaurants in the evenings and stenographically copying university lecture notes for his fellow students, much to the chagrin of the academic faculty (Bandov 1989: 425). He also gets married and welcomes his first daughter Mariya into the world in 1937 (his second daughter Nina is born in 1943).

While his earliest writing dates back to his high school days, Hadjiyski's serious interventions as a public intellectual begin during his time in Sofia and continue up until his death in 1944. Starting in the early 1930s, he establishes himself as a perceptive and wide-ranging publicist, especially in the left-wing press, where he publishes a number of feuilletons, reviews, interviews, and "historical reportages" on the political and social problems of the day (Hadjiyski 2003a: 257–375; Vassilev 1988: 81–105). In more academically oriented venues, Hadjiyski also

[2] In June 1923, a military coup takes place, against the highly popular Agrarian Front's government in the country. With direct orders from Moscow, the Bulgarian Communist Party organizes an armed uprising in September 1923, which is brutally suppressed by the new fascist-leaning government. The cost of human life is in the tens of thousands (20,000 to 30,000, by most estimates). Aged 16, Hadjiyski is among those arrested and tortured in prison by the police, and in fact his escorting to a neighboring city's jail is accompanied by bicycled onlookers, to make sure that he does not get accidentally "disappeared" along the way. He would be under police surveillance for much of his adult life, and would even spend some time in prison for political agitation.

authors a series of texts on topics as diverse as military discipline and prison life, treasure-hunting expeditions and the psychology of the maniacal individuals, the 1876 anti-Ottoman uprising in Bulgaria and the latest trends in European philosophy, and many others.[3] Among his earlier publications are two books, titled *Authority, Dignity, and Mask* (*Avtoritet, dostoynstvo i maska*, 1933) and *Love and Marriage* (*Lyubov i brak*, 1936), which are met with significant critical acclaim. Around 1940 he starts working on what would become his magnum opus: a three-volume monograph titled *Daily Life and Spirituality of Our People* (a loose translation of the original *Bit i dushevnost na nashia narod*) and dedicated to a highly complex ("transdisciplinary") investigation of Bulgarian history and society from the Ottoman times to the present. While still alive, Hadjiyski oversees the publication of the first volume in 1940 and has the second approved and prepared for official launch in 1944, entrusting the third to his immediate army commander as he volunteers for the military expedition in Serbia which would

[3] See, accordingly, his texts titled "Psychology of Military Discipline" ("Psihologiya na voenna disciplina"), "From the Psychology of the Contemporary Prison" ("Iz filosofiyata na syvremenniya zatvor"), "Psychology of Treasure-Hunting" ("Psiholigya na nasheto imanyarstvo"), "Psychology of Maniacal Individuals" ("Psihologiya na maniaka"), "Psychology of the April Uprising" ("Psihologiya na Aprilskoto vyzstanie"), and "Philosophical Thought in Our Country" ("Filosofskata misyl u nas"). Apart from "An Optimistic Theory about Our People" (referred to as "Optimistic Theory" from here on), of particular note are also the following texts, among others: "The Moral Philosophy of Bulgarians" ("Moralnata filosofiya na bylgarina"), "The Emergence of Individualism in Our Country" ("Poyavata na individualizmyt u nas") and "Historical Roots of Our Democratic Traditions" ("Istoricheskite koreni na nashite demokratichni traditsii"). While Hadjiyski's work has been republished numerous times over the years, the edited volume titled *Bulgaria's Moral Map* (*Moralnata karta na Bylgariya*) offers a very good sample of some of his most insightful writings from the mid-1930s on (Hadjiyski 2008c).

lead to his untimely death in October of the same year. In the ensuing chaos of the transition to state socialism in the country, the hand-written sole final draft of the third manuscript seems to have been irrevocably lost, most likely destroyed in the purging of "bourgeois literature" by the new regime. Decades later, as his daughter Mariya Hadjiyska stumbles upon and successfully reconstructs about 90 pages of an earlier draft of the text, it is hard to miss the uncanny resemblance of Hadjiyski writing to that of Antonio Gramsci's "spatialized" Marxism (Said 1993: 12–13), making the loss of the full manuscript even more regrettable.[4]

Hadjiyski defines his life's work as an effort to develop a "concrete mass psychology", a new science that occupies "a middle ground between sociology and psychology and encompass[es] all of ethics" (Hadjiyski 2003c: 341).[5] At the heart of this project is a repurposed base-superstructure topography in which the economic sphere may have been the "determinant in the last instance" yet (to deploy some more recent nomenclature) it is not necessarily always *dominant*. As he sees it, the subject matter of concrete mass psychology is the sphere of social mores ("*bit*", daily living), which tends to change slower than and also works with delayed action on the economic base,

[4] For Said, Gramsci's attentiveness to space and spatial differences (rather than to time, as is the case with for instance Lukács) makes him far more important for postcolonial theorizing than the Hungarian Marxist philosopher. Spatial metaphors abound in Hadjiyski's analysis as well, as he talks about the "theory of the political reserve", "national corporations (blocs)", and generally the "atypical features of our social development" (Hadjiyski 1989: 186–269).

[5] All translations from texts in the Bulgarian original below are mine, unless otherwise noted.

with the political sphere positioned as an intermediary layer between the two and also enjoying its own "relative autonomy".[6] It is this complex "dialectical cocktail" that would often yield unpredictable historical and political developments for which a merely economistic explanation would be grossly inadequate (with say the 1876 April Uprising against the Ottoman Empire as a case in point). Notably, Hadjiyski's observations are more than just abstract speculations of a detached academic: from 1936 to 1943 he embarks on four consecutive tours of different parts of the country, on foot and on his German "Hercules" bike, gathering a pile of ethnographic, historical, and sociological material which would inform both his *Daily Life and Spirituality* monographs and his academic and journalistic texts. Travelling with the bare minimum and often through prohibitively inclement weather (sleeping in barns and even on the ground, biking through torrential rain and snow storms, feeding himself on nearly rotten food, and falling sick along the way), Hadjiyski is fully aware that he is watching history in the making, as the country transitions rapidly to a modern capitalist society. Little escapes his keenly observant eye, as he admits it in a letter to his wife: "For history there is no important-not important, everything is important, even the smallest ritual" (Hadjiyski 2003e:

[6] According to Hadjiyski, the economic base is the sphere of collective life that gets established first, followed up by the political sphere. The new forms of morality ("subjectivity") appear (and also disappear) last, possibly accelerating or decelerating political processes and economic relations. As he puts it, "The task of the general theory of concrete mass psychology is to explain this conservatism of ideology, which we call customs, tradition, inertia of upbringing" (2008c: 211). Importantly, while this is the methodological point of departure of his work, in most of his writings the analysis constantly challenges the "primacy of the economic" and is acutely attentive to both the political and the moral superstructures.

408). His own death on the Eastern front seems to have been motivated at least in part by a desire to observe ordinary men in combat from up close (Karanfilov 1989: 490).

Hadjiyski emerges as a public intellectual in the interwar years in Bulgaria, a period overdetermined by many conflicting but also intersecting intellectual projects.[7] Along with a handful of liberal and communist intellectuals, Hadjiyski is one of very few to refuse this deadly convergence and the trappings of the increasing fascisization of the intellectual debates of his time (while also being realistic about the complex social dynamics of his country of origin). His interest in developing a concrete mass psychology of the "Bulgarian people" is not a search for hidden roots and spiritual essences, but an activist-oriented investigation of the role that history and politics play in the construction of collective senses of self. His exploration of the brutality of colonial plunder in the construction of "the West" is a challenge against both middle-class mimic men and leftist class-reductivists, from the perspective of the historical specificity of East-

[7] Apart from a small but influential liberal minority, in figures such as German-educated philosopher Dimitar Mikhalchev, these intellectual projects include a convergence of "native" and "right-wing" anti-modernist critique (with authors such as Spiridon Kazandzhiev, Yanko Yanev, and Nayden Sheytanov; e. g. Elenkov 1998), on the one hand, and a group of leftist intellectuals (such as Hadjiyski, Todor Pavlov, and others) schooled in the legacies of both Marxism and Russian populism, on the other (Dimou 2009). Many of especially the right-leaning intellectuals of the time operate within the framework of so-called "psychology of the people" (*narodopsihologia*), as they seek to uncover both the "spiritual essence" of the people and to make sense of the state's military defeats during the two preceding wars (Elenkov and Daskalov 1994: 35–36). It is on this terrain that Ivan Hadjiyski would produce some of his most subversive ideas, by changing the terms of the conversation. For a regional discussion of the growth and impact of right-wing and leftist thought, see respectively Hitchins (2010) and Dimou (2009).

ern Europe. While these themes run like a red thread through virtually all of his work, they are perhaps nowhere as clearly articulated as in his 1938 text, "An Optimistic Theory about Our People." To this day Hadjiyski's most frequently quoted yet also most misunderstood text, "Optimistic Theory" offers the ingredients of an anti-colonial heterodox Marxism well ahead of its time, and in many ways of ours too.[8]

Against National Pessimism, or, Resignifying "the People"

Published in 1938 in the highly prestigious academic journal *Filosofski pregled* (*Philosophical Review*), Hadjiyski's "Optimistic Theory" was certainly not a stand-alone text with no intellectual precedents but rather an intervention in a widely mined discursive field. The text's very point of departure is an effort to challenge "pessimistic" normative assumptions about Bulgarians (and by extension the Balkans) from the first half of the twentieth century, whose immediate context is a succession of military defeats in the Balkan Wars of 1912–13 and in the First World War widely perceived at the time (and in fact to this day) as "national catastrophes." More broadly, the ensuing patterns of collective self-inferiorization are further compounded by Western European discourses of "balkanization" and "balkanism" as signifiers for not only political fragmentation but also a

[8] I use "anti-colonial" here both in the sense that Hadjiyski is deeply critical of Western colonialism and that he also anticipates some of the arguments that anti-colonial movements and intellectuals would develop decades after his own demise.

"reversion to the tribal, the backward, the primitive, the barbarian" (Todorova 2009 [1994]: 3). The local intelligentsia registers these seismic shifts in popular perception in strange and often revealing ways. Hadjiyski's contemporary Nayden Sheytanov, for instance, wonders in a 1933 article in the same journal whether the infamous "spirit of negation" (*duh na otritsanieto*) of Bulgarians was not rooted in the "racial Babylonia of the Balkan peninsula" and whether even the very word "Bulgarian" was not just a "collective name for different nationalities which came and settled around the Balkan [mountain] and which now instinctively keep up their old national and racial antagonism" (Sheytanov 2006: 445–446). For Sheytanov, one of the interwar period's most important intellectuals, this spirit of negation is a likely by-product of, among others, the presence or Roma and Jewish minorities and also of a past of "Asiatic despotism", in the shape of the successive Byzantine and Ottoman empires (446–449).

Hadjiyski chooses to take a different path in his text, by refusing from the outset this gesture of self-inferiorization underlying (at least implicitly) most theories about Bulgaria and Bulgarianness (2008a: 91). Recognizing the wide popularity of self-deprecating comments about a "Bulgarian job" (*bylgarska rabota*),[9] his response is a multi-pronged strategy of countering

[9] Hadjiyski (2008a: 92) sums up the pejorative definition of a "Bulgarian job" as a "job that is inadequately thought out and even conceived, without guidance or poorly moved forward, and which as if by necessity ends in scandal, to only serve as a shameful registration of its sorry protagonists." He reminds his readers that words such as "Bulgarian" and "Bulgarian job" are "often used as most humiliating signifiers" (id.: 91). Admittedly, not much has changed since the 1930s, as far as the deployment of these terms is concerned.

this deep-seated pessimism both methodologically and historically. Two prongs of this counter-strategy are of particular interest for this text. The first one is Hadjiyski's effort to resignify or revalorize what it means to be/say "Bulgarian", in a manner that foregrounds class antagonisms and moments of political mobilization as central to the construction of a collective self. The second prong places under critical scrutiny the logic and historical development of Western capitalist modernity, from a perspective resonating with positions articulated by Hadjiyski's contemporaries from the global South and also anticipating later arguments in Cedric Robinson's "racial capitalism" framework, among others (e.g. Du Bois 1998 [1935]; Williams 1994 [1944]; Robinson 2000 [1983]). Notably, Hadjiyski's effort at resignifying Bulgarianness is not a mere reversal of the terms, in which the previously "inferior" Bulgarian would now come on top: a compensatory move of little theoretical or political value.[10] Rather, Hadjiyski seeks to locate the character of the "people" within the complex dialectic of history, disputing the relevance of claims to any "permanent national substance" or eternal collective destiny.

Hadjiyski, of course, was fully aware of the troubled social realities of interwar Bulgaria. He does not dispute in his text the shortcomings of Bulgarian industrial development for instance, and he also admits to the existence of confusing conceptions of public and private property and a complicated relationship of

[10] Hadjiyski (2008a: 95) makes fun of, for instance, efforts to trace secret affinities between Sanskrit and Bulgarian and of claims that Bulgarians were the first nation in Europe.

citizens to their state. In the rapidly transforming Bulgaria of his day, as he sees it, "everyone is a crook until proven otherwise", with moral virtues such as honor, integrity, and dignity having lost most of their purchase (Hadjiyski 2008a: 96). Bulgarian social life, for Hadjiyski, unfolds against the backdrop of "*united fronts of mediocrity* [...] [which] kill by the most inexcusable means every head which has pushed them into the shadows or has exposed them for no other reason but the simple fact of its own existence" (id.: 97). This life's emotional tonality is dominated by the "famous mass disease in our country – envy; this disease [...] of the failing small proprietor of moral and material goods, which has turned almost every single mouth into a limb press [*stiskalo*] chewing up gall and spitting it out" (id.: 99).[11]

Yet these social phenomena have little to do with the "national character" of Bulgarians, and even less with what others have called their "slave-like [post-Ottoman] mentality" (quoted in Dimitrova 2019: 39), but rather with the transformation of Bulgarian economy and politics from especially the late nineteenth century on. This transformation, according to Hadjiyski, has at least two roots. To begin with, in the newly market-dominated society, it is only to be expected that egoism (rather than solidarity), greed (rather than generosity), and social fragmentation (rather than a sense of community) become the norm. As the superstructures of politics and social morality begin to register the turbulent processes of the economic base,

[11] It is worth noting that most present-day references to these passages in Hadjiyski reify their original meaning by interpreting them to suggest, over against his own intentions, that envy and mediocrity are permanent a-historical features of the "average Bulgarian."

old patterns of behavior and sociality are rapidly dissolving and new forms of subjectivity and intersubjectivity make their appearance. As Hadjiyski states in an important (and also purposefully un-referenced) footnote to this section, "the dominant morality of a given epoch is the morality of the dominant social group, which bears historical responsibility for it" (2008a: 99).[12]

Yet, secondly, Hadjiyski ties these developments to the new nation's complicated relationship to Western Europe as well. Cognizant of the country's rapid integration into the global capitalist circuits of production and circulation, Hadjiyski warns against the trappings of Western European mimicry, especially among the middle class and its intellectuals. As they import uncritically Western European tastes, luxury items, fashion, and consumption patterns, the middle-class intelligentsia soon face up to the very limited means of maintaining such high living standards on the basis of a "miserable clerk's salary." The resulting attitude of a "career-at-any-cost" cynicism and opportunism becomes the backbone for "corruption, venality, [and] phenomena of spinelessness and predatory behavior by the semi-intelligentsia" (id.: 114). No less significantly, the gulf between one's own humble origins and these newly triggered (Western) phantasmatic projections leads to obsessive patterns of self-hatred and self-denial, as "the energy of our intelligentsia [...] [remains]

[12] In the Nazi-friendly regime of Boris III, Bulgarian monarch of the period, any explicit reference to the Marxist classics would often result in immediate censorship, which is why, while he draws on their methodology quite extensively, notably *The German Ideology*, it is very rare to see direct citations of Marx and Engels's work in Hadjiyski's texts.

enclosed within its narrow husk [and] turns into self-consumption, maliciousness, envy, and rancor" (id.: 115).

Perhaps even more importantly, Hadjiyski points to an alternative valuation of "Bulgarianness" during the period of the Bulgarian national revival of the nineteenth century. Crucially for him, the roots of that *other* valuation are both economic and political. In a proto-capitalist context still dominated by local (Ottoman and ecumenically Christian Orthodox rather than Western-centric) social imaginaries, local merchants and traders make a name for themselves even beyond the confines of the empire, as "the spear and the mace yield to the needle and the cubit" (Hadjiyski 2008a: 100). The possibility of travel and the accumulation of merchant capital facilitates the emergence of new modes of subjectivity as well, of a sense of individualism (but not yet egoism) still coupled with the old village commune (*zadruga*) morality. As Bulgarian-made goods are to be found from the smallest Romanian hamlet all the way to the city of Vienna, the new Bulgarian merchants and traders who "thought with the parallels and meridians could not help but feel *necessary, independent, and proud* [*of themselves*]" (id.: 100–101), their "Bulgaria" a "land of boundless opportunities" where "every career was made through personal qualities" and "riches were created, not inherited, and everyone occupied the position he himself had forged" (id.: 101).

Yet as they ascend on the ladder of social hierarchy, these "self-made" merchants and traders feel also deeply rooted in their communities and local contexts. It is from among their circles that the strongest political and financial support for the

national liberation struggles would emerge, in the context of the long nineteenth century. As they spearhead the mobilizations for religious, educational, and political autonomy, for the small proprietor class words such as "Bulgarian" and "Bulgarian production" become a badge of honor, rather than the stigma they would only a few decades later begin to bear. The *esnaf*'s growing political consciousness, coupled with an increasing economic independence, produces a rupture with dominant modes of self-perception and identity. For Hadjiyski, such alternative valuations are crucial, as they not only expose the transitory nature of the "national pessimism" of his time, but also point to the possibility of resignifying the people again, in the future. In fact, they pose the pressing need for such resignifications for the present moment as well, a task to which his own analysis seeks to contribute as well.[13]

I should stress here that I am less interested in the (admittedly deficient) historical accuracy of Hadjiyski's argument than I am in his methodological contributions. To be sure, even as he inhabits them so subversively, Hadjiyski does not manage to free himself from the ideological limits of his own era. As he argues for a positive re-evaluation of the concept "Bulgarian" for instance, Hadjiyski also ethnicizes identitarian categories which

[13] Importantly and over against the deep "orientalism" of not only his own contemporaries, Hadjiyski reads the political emancipation of Bulgaria from the Ottoman Empire at the end of the nineteenth century as an economic step backwards, as the newly independent country lost its access to the vast Ottoman imperial market. Additionally, the Ottomans, as he sees it, prevented the development of feudal stratifications on Bulgarian territory, established lasting peace, and also improved materially the life of the population (e.g. Hadjiyski 2008a: 170–1). Notably, his views on the subject continue to be far more progressive than those of many of the country's present-day intellectual and political elites as well.

operate much more fluidly in the context of especially the early nineteenth century. It makes little sense to speak, for instance, of (presumably ethnic) Bulgarians at a time when prayer books are written in Church Slavonic, modern Bulgarian, and Greek at the same time (Todorova 1990: 439) and when inter-ethnic marriages are considered so typical that the ethnic membership of the partners is not even entered into the field of documentation (Davidkova 2012: 164). Similarly, Hadjiyski's disposition in this text to reproduce the standard tropes of the national "master narrative" pitting the "good" *esnaf* against the triad of oppressors (the Ottoman Empire, Greek orthodoxy, and the Bulgarian *chorbadjii*, or rich merchants), has both been challenged by professional historians and deployed by (an admittedly far more reductive) state-sponsored historiography to dubious ends (e.g Lyberatos 2010; Vezenkov 2011).[14] Furthermore, Hadjiyski's inhabitation of the very language of nationalism leaves him insufficiently attentive to what the process of constructing that nation has meant for people identified as "internal minorities", from Macedonia to the Rhodope region in particular. In these spaces, since the late nineteenth century but especially during the interwar period, practices of school indoctrination, language "purification", and at times outright ethnic cleansing have persistently sought to produce what the nation was already claimed to be (Brunnbauer 2001; Todorova 1990; Roudometof 2001; Lory 2011; Neuburger 2000).

[14] Notably, Hadjiyski himself will nuance his position on the subject, as he deepens his research in the next few years. Much of this later writing zones in on the "law of hesitation" endemic to the *esnaf* class, and he would also be far less sympathetic to this group in his analysis on the accomplishments and ultimate failure of the April Uprising.

Yet despite these historical shortcomings (widely shared well beyond his time), Hadjiyski's genuine contribution lies elsewhere. His text, along with the remainder of his work, serves as a precious antidote both to the compulsive Eurocentrism of much of the middle-class intelligentsia, with its pervasive "national pessimism", and to substantivist conceptions of "the people" often pitted against a "weak" and "overcultured" Europe that had lost its way. Acutely aware of "double mirroring" between these two positions, Hadjiyski chooses instead to consider national and ethnic identities as the outcome of a long historical sedimentation naturalizing such categories as falsely homogeneous, and also, occasionally but very importantly, as the product of political mobilizations with the unique power to redefine such identities in new and unprecedented ways. While he is far more attentive to the dynamics of class struggle and class recomposition than he is to the production of race and ethnicity, some of Hadjiyski's more nuanced arguments in especially his late work demonstrate his willingness and ability to nuance his position even on this complicated terrain. This is certainly the case when, in his final surviving text and as he revisits the immediate post-Ottoman period, he chastises the dispossession and even "ethnic cleansing" of the Ottoman minority in the newly independent Bulgarian nation-state. As he spares no punches against practices of "cleaning from the ground up the abandoned Turkish villages and houses" and "scaring [people] at night and purchasing [their lands] during the day", Hadjiyski hints toward the possibility of expanding the scope of his analy-

sis to consider race and ethnicity and not just class, had he survived his untimely death in 1944 (Hadjiyski 1989: 189).

Primitive Accumulation, Colonial Plunder, and the Eastern European Path

The second prong of Hadjiyski's analysis is a critical discussion, in fact a demystification, of Western modernity and Western capitalism as supposedly internally consistent and "civilizationally" superior socio-political phenomena. This discussion constitutes the bulk of Hadjiyski's critical engagement, with an eye to warning against an uncritical (i.e., naïve and dangerous) mimicry of Western European paths of development by Eastern European intellectuals and political activists. As he sees it, such imitative efforts not only contribute to the devaluation of the native(ly Bulgarian) and the further sedimentation of "national pessimism", but also project as regional futures political and economic goals that are neither accessible nor desirable. It is worth noting in passing here that Hadjiyski's comments have lost none of their relevance for a post-socialist Eastern Europe, where fantasies of "catching up with the West" (Bulgaria becoming "Switzerland of the Balkans" for instance) marked much of the transition to market capitalism in the region. In fact, as I demonstrate below, some of Hadjiyski's remarks in his text prove to be far more far-sighted and subversive than much of the anti-capitalist critique of the present moment.

Hadjiyski's first line of attack is a challenge to the fantasy/utopia/projection of an inherently superior (Western)

civilization, as embodied in the "heroic Europe" of Germany, France, and England since the nineteenth century (Boatcă 2013).[15] His argument here is both sociological and historical. For instance, he sheds a critical light on the social reality of the Western European states of his day, "none of which has managed or will manage under current conditions to free itself from either illiteracy, poverty, police, or prisons" (Hadjiyski 2008a: 108). He also reminds his readers of the national pessimism of Western Europe's "enlightened monarchs", who all distrusted and despised their royal subjects (with Frederick the Great as a prime example), and spares no blushes to British parliamentarianism, philosophy, and the famous "British integrity", in light of their shared feudal past of incessant civil war, backstabbing, and intrigue and the continued role of colonial plunder and violence (id.: 108–109; I return to the question of colonialism below). Anticipating analyses such as Enrique Dussel's (2000), among others, that the very concept of Europe is a retroactive projection performed through a violently selective editing of the

[15] Romanian sociologist Manuela Boatcă makes a distinction between what she calls "decadent", "heroic", and "epigonal" Europe, on the territory of the continent. While "decadent Europe" refers to Portugal and Spain as early participants in the colonial project, and "heroic Europe" refers to Western modernity's core producing nation-states (Germany, France, and England), Boatcă understands "epigonal Europe" (the Balkans) to be have been positioned as a reproducer of (colonial) modernity and hence marked by an attitude of aspirational Europeanness/whiteness (Boatcă 2012: 136–137). For Boatcă, the European continent is crisscrossed by various "invisible borders" resulting from the "rise of the West" to global dominance, notably an *internal imperial difference* (between decadent and heroic Europe, from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), and an *external imperial difference* (between East and West, sometime after the eighteenth century). More recently Boatcă (2018) has also added a fourth "forgotten Europe", that of Western Europe's former colonies, or "the unacknowledged borders in the Atlantic and the Caribbean Sea."

historical record, Hadjiyski ridicules claims of Aryan racial superiority tracing its roots all the way back to ancient Greece.[16] In the conceptual geography of the ancients, he insists, there were "only two groups of people: Hellenes and barbarians. The Teutonic race par excellence belonged to the barbarians" (Hadjiyski 2008a: 110).

Notably, Hadjiyski's article appears in the context of momentous debates around eugenics and "racial hygiene" in the country. In 1926 and inspired by German "racial science", Bulgarian zoologist Stefan Konsulov helps found the first eugenics society in Eastern Europe called "Circle for the Study of Racial Hygiene", renamed "Bulgarian Society for Racial Hygiene" two years later, recommending family certificates listing hereditary diseases and also the sterilization of disabled people, criminals, and "incurable alcoholics" (Promitzer 2007: 229). While the eugenicist project does not really take off at this early stage, Konsulov and his fellow travelers successfully revive the old eugenics society in 1934, on the heels of a rapidly growing international and national fascist movement. Starting in 1937, an intense dispute around racial characteristics and "biological sociology" dominates the intellectual headlines as well, implicating right-wing, liberal, and leftist intellectuals in acrimonious exchanges that sometimes spill over outside the walls of the

[16] As Dussel reminds us, the ancient Greeks had no relevant concept of Europe and considered Asia and Africa to be "developed" rather than "barbarian", while the projected continuity between ancient Greece, Rome, and the West is an ideological construct of eighteenth-century German Romanticism. What is more, for most of the Middle Ages, the classical Greek world was as much Muslim and Arab as it was Byzantine Christian, with philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato having been studied in Baghdad way before they arrived in Madrid and Paris (Dussel 2000).

academy (Promitzer 2007: 241; Dimitrova 2019: 110–116).[17] The fact that the Nazi racial science defined Slavic nations as only "culture-bearing" (rather than "culture creating" like the Aryan race) appears to have somehow been lost on the right-of-center participants in the debate (Girginov and Bankov 1999: 84). But it was is not lost on Hadjiyski, for whom "in a broad historical projection there are in fact no inferior or superior races, great or small peoples, because the greatness or backwardness of a people [...] unfolds in broad strokes according to the same laws and because no individual people is an exception to this rule" (Hadjiyski 2008a: 95).

Yet the heart of Hadjiyski's analysis is his critique of Western colonial ("racial") capitalism and its systemic logic. As he probes both the early history of capitalism (Marx's primitive accumulation) and its more recent practices, Hadjiyski zones in on the real sources of the wealth that continue to finance Western industrial development, just as they helped launch the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Western societies, as he sees it, kickstarted their industrial progress by looting and pillaging the rest of the world, so that "Not only then, but also today they constitute national cooperatives for colonial plunder, which is why even among their work-

[17] On the right-wing side, the main interlocutors are Konsulov himself, to a lesser extent Metodiy Popov, the country's most influential biologist, and Ivan Kinkel, Chair of the Association of Bulgarian Sociologists. Their challengers include Dimityr Mikhalchev, Bulgaria's most influential liberal philosopher and editor-in-chief of *Filosofski pregled*, and Todor Pavlov, an influential orthodox Marxist thinker and theorist of the infamous "theory of reflection." Hadjiyski's "Optimistic Theory" is at least in part motivated by an effort to shift the terms of this conversation, by placing the debate of "superior and inferior races" within a broader historical framework.

ers the idea of emancipation is not very popular" (Hadjiyski 2008a: 111). As he insists that colonized peoples can often not even tell "the difference between merchants and pirates" (id.: 109), Hadjiyski thus complicates more familiar accounts of the origins of capitalism, by in fact introducing a crucial spatial ("imperial", as per Manuela Boatcă's analysis) difference between Western Europe and the rest of the continent. On the one hand, Hadjiyski's origin story of Western capitalism shifts the emphasis away from the more familiar story of the enclosure of the commons, toward an arguably more important reality of colonial theft and extraction of resources, from "internal" to "external" colonialism as it were; placing him in the company of contemporaries such as C.L.R. James, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Eric Williams, as they all insist on the centrality of slavery and Western colonialism for capitalist development (James 1989 [1938]; Du Bois 1998 [1935]; Williams 1994 [1944]). Hadjiyski would certainly not be surprised to read, in a statement more or less contemporaneous with his own writing, that "several of the principal streets of Liverpool had been marked by the chains, and the walls of the houses cemented by the blood of African slaves" (Williams 1994 [1944]: 63). Fully aware that the "colonial difference" allows for both higher worker salaries and the investment of resources in cutting-edge industries further fueling "uneven development" (Hadjiyski 2008a: 111), Hadjiyski demonstrates that, figuratively speaking, Western workers have much more to lose than their chains (Roediger 2003 [1991]; Du Bois 1998 [1935]).

In Eastern Europe of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, on the other hand, since the "world and the markets had already been divided and because this original accumulation of wealth could not take place via colonial plunder, [it could only happen] at one's own expense" (Hadjiyski 2008a: 111). In the absence of colonial possessions for the newly capitalist Eastern European societies, large amounts of capital could only be made available by way of "new enclosures" and "accumulation by [local] dispossession", as the political and economic elites turn on their own fellow citizens and bleed them dry. This, in short, is Hadjiyski's conception of capitalism: a global system that differentiates and not only homogenizes, that feeds off the proliferation of social hierarchies, and that operates on a logic that is "never not racial", in Ruth Wilson Gilmore's felicitous formulation (Robinson 2000 [1983]; Gilmore 2017: 225).[18] In the resulting conditions of chronic poverty in the region global crises such as the Great Depression of 1929 make themselves felt even more (Hadjiyski 2008a: 111).

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[18] In his magisterial *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Cedric Robinson argues that the racialization of the proletariat began within Europe, just as capitalism itself grew out of the structures (and strictures) of feudalism. Within the system of the ensuing "racial capitalism", the function of the race/racialization is to create not so much abstractions (such as value for instance) but rather distinctions and internal hierarchies; or, as Robinson (2000 [1983]: 59) puts it: "The tendency of European civilization through capitalism was thus not to homogenize but to differentiate – to exaggerate regional, subcultural, and dialectical differences into 'racial' ones." Hadjiyski's argument is also in agreement with Anibal Quijano's articulation of a coloniality of power, as a central pillar of the modern world-capitalist system. For Quijano (2000: 533), the advent of coloniality in the long sixteenth century marks the start of both the racial classification of the global population and the constitution of new structures of control of labor. The differences between Quijano and Robinson's frameworks extend beyond the scope of this paper.

Lastly, even Western ethical theories are interpreted to have their origins in this reality of colonial plunder and capitalist predation. While immense riches can only be accumulated through the violence of extraction and dispossession (Marx's "blood and fire"), once they reach a certain level, then the very methods deployed in their accumulation risk turning against their owners who now seek to protect their newly acquired wealth. This is when the newly rich (states and corporations, and not just individuals) start preaching a morality of honesty and hard work and may even practice it on a local level, as they seek to naturalize the already entrenched social and economic inequalities. In effect, this newly discovered "humanitarian ethic" helps sustain inter-regional hierarchies within the global capitalist system as well, by further proscribing to latecomers the only possible path to economic and political power, that of colonialism and capitalist dispossession. This is the real reason why, as Hadjiyski puts it, "the English move on from the piracy of the East India Company, from corruption during the mutiny on the 'Bounty', to present-day English integrity" (id.: 112).

Stated more broadly, one of the main goals of Hadjiyski's text is to demonstrate unequivocally, for his fellow citizens, both the inaccessibility and undesirability of a reality of colonial plunder and predation and of a state enclosing on the commons of its people. His proposed alternative, toward the end of his text, entails a wide practice of redistribution of resources, so that "Bulgaria [may] become rich, abundant, and happy – but for everyone" (id.: 116). With the "British road" radically and permanently foreclosed, the only path forward points to a

"[re]arrangement of internal economic relations" in the direction of a greater socio-economic egalitarianism and human flourishing for all (id.: ibid.); and, in an increasingly global and interconnected world, to a resolution of those questions at the international level as well.[19] But his vision presupposes what we may also call, riffing off of Jacques Rancière, a "*decolonial* redistribution of the sensible", by way of an unconditional dismantling of Western-centric social imaginaries and epistemologies, the promotion of pluri-versal and pluri-logical systems of sense and value, and a resignification of local, native, even "traditional" practices and ways of being.[20] Faced with the tsunami that is Western colonial/modern capitalism, Hadjiyski enjoins his readers to stop looking elsewhere and mine the "waste[d]

[19] Elsewhere Hadjiyski (2003d: 239–240) proposes that the international cooperation will need to be regional as well, calling for "Balkan unity" in the region.

[20] Rancière (2004: 13) defines the "distribution of the sensible" as "the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to experience"; or, stated differently, who and what counts in the "distribution of spaces, times, and forms of activity" which a community recognizes as self-evident (id.: 12). For Rancière, the distribution of the sensible constitutes an aesthetics at the very heart of politics (id.. 13). An important anti-capitalist social theorist, Rancière still operates within a Eurocentric imaginary and its set of references. Ivan Hadjiyski, as I see it, departs at least partially from this imaginary, as he considers the *differentia specifica* of Eastern Europe and uses it as a launching pad of his own critique. In later texts, he will also be very attentive to local practices very much under the threat of extinction, under the onslaught of modern capitalism. He will discuss, among others, a traditional custom such as *proshki* ("forgiveness"), in which two sworn enemies sit down to "chat it up" on a given day of the year, in an effort to mend their relationship; and also a phenomenon such as *komshulyk*, an Ottoman Turkish word signifying not only neighborliness, but also the little side door connecting the yards of neighboring houses and allowing their inhabitants (mostly women) to move in between without having to venture onto the (male-dominated and heavily policed) street (Hadjiyski 1974: 125; 1974: 110–111; 2008b: 198). Both his written work and preparatory notes testify to an obsessive mania for archiving the nearly extinct or rapidly disappearing, and an acute awareness of the price to be paid for the advent of capitalist modernity in the region.

social experience" (Santos 2006: 15) of their own past and present. As he puts it, only half-jokingly, in a different text: "A horse may be preferable to a donkey, but when you don't have one, how should you be treating your [other] long-eared friend?" (Hadjiyski 2003b: 250).

Against the Politics of Forgetting

Ever since his untimely death in 1944, Ivan Hadjiyski's work has been subjected to a series of erasures and distortions. Erasure came first and in the immediate aftermath of his tragic end, in the form of Todor Pavlov's weighty assessment of not only Hadjiyski's accomplishments but also his limits. As Pavlov, Bulgaria's most influential Marxist thinker for the first twenty years of socialism, put it in a famous comment from 1945:

> I loved him, even though his 'ideas' and 'plans' were not always precise from a dialectical-materialist standpoint, as was the case for instance with his 'discovery' that our Bulgarian Renaissance constituted some type of exception from the 'Marxist scheme' because we did not have a formed bourgeois class which would play a role in our bourgeois-democratic and national revolution (Pavlov 1989: 497).

The end result of this unflattering evaluation by the Marxist heavyweight was a near complete absence of any serious engagement with Hadjiyski work until the "Thaw" of the mid-1960s (Vassilev 1988: 28–36). The pattern under post-socialist market capitalism, on the other hand, has been more of a mixed bag of omissions and neutralizations. The expanding secondary

literature on the interwar and Second World War periods tends to discuss extensively important scholars from the period, notably right-wing intellectuals such as Nayden Sheytanov, Spiridon Kazandjiev, and Nazi philosopher Yanko Yanev, yet with very few exceptions Hadjiyski continues to be conspicuously absent in these analyses. A 2007 Bulgarian National TV film dedicated to Hadjiyski's memory did little to remedy the situation (reading Hadjiyski as an anthropologist and ethnographer of "the small town"), while in my own visit to his home city of Troyan in 2017 I was told by the director of the local ethnographic museum, someone well-versed in Hadjiyski's work, that her fellow citizen's Marxism was completely irrelevant for understanding his project.[21] Select passages from his work continue to be quoted out of context and his name dropped on festive occasions, yet the politics of forgetting that is post-socialism has mercilessly descended on his intellectual legacy as well.

Ivan Hadjiyski thus poses major challenges both to a socialist and a post-socialist context: too heterodox of a Marxist for the former, the very Marxist roots of his thinking turn out to

[21] For instance, Ivan Elenkov's otherwise useful *Native and Right-Wing* (1998) offers an extensive discussion of right-wing intellectual projects of the time, along with a chapter on the liberalism of the first Bulgarian Constitution, yet it barely mentions the influential left-wing literature of the same period. Nina Dimitrova's recent monograph on the philosophical context of the interwar years, *Spaces of Identity: Reflections on Bulgarian Philosophical Culture* (*Prostranstva na identichnost: refleksii vyrhu bylgarskata filosofksa kultura*, 2019), does not contain a single reference to Hadjiyski's work either. Influential historian Rumen Daskalov engages briefly with Hadjiyski's work on the April Uprising, to very quickly dismiss (and in fact distort) his Marxist interpretation and accuse him of "little compassion for the 'human material of the uprising'" (Daskalov 2004: 201). The film about Ivan Hadjiyski, titled *Travel Notes with Elements of Optimism* (*Pytepis s elementi na optimizym*) was made specifically for the 100th anniversary of the author's birth in 1907.

be a "stain" in desperate need of "cleaning up" for the latter. In the meantime, his work is still awaiting its comprehensive philosophical treatment, in conversation with its international theoretical context, then as much as today.[22]

Yet Hadjiyski is far more than an ingenious and perceptive local thinker, but rather someone whose work and methodology projects a translocal and even global significance. Deeply rooted and thinking from location, and attentive to the *differentia specifica* of the Balkans, he implicitly challenges uprooted and abstract conceptions such as instrumental reason and communicative rationality as arguably inadequate for capturing the complexity of capitalism's semi-periphery. Even as he wrote prior to the establishment of state socialist regimes in the region, he also invites us to question, or at least qualify, suggestions such as Walter Mignolo's that there are no substantive differences between socialist and capitalist modernity, as they did not participate equally and in the same measure in Western coloniality (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2019).[23] Writing at a time when,

[22] Two among very few notable exceptions are Yordan Vassilev's 1988 monograph on Hadjiyski titled *Ivan Hadjiyski v bylgarskata kultura* (*Ivan Hadjiyski in Bulgarian Culture*) and Petyr-Emil Mitev's *Ivan Hadjiyski cheten dnes* (*Ivan Hadjiyski as He Is Read Today*) from 2007. The former is a detailed discussion of Hadjiyski's writings and their local context, yet its theoretical sections present mostly a literary analysis of different texts. Mitev's discussion, unfortunately, flirts with (neo)liberalism, reifies the small proprietor mentality (rather than historicize it), and even deploys some orientalist tropes in its analysis (2007: 13, 25–26, 44–45, 49).

[23] For a more extensive discussion on this subject, this time with respect to the state socialism of the latter half of the twentieth century, see Nikolay Karkov and Zhivka Valiavicharska (2018). While Hadjiyski lived and worked prior to the top-down imposition of state socialism in the country, he still writes as an Eastern European communist with a strong anti-colonial and anti-racist disposition: a by-product, no doubt, of not only his Marxism but also his Eastern-Europeanness. As I see it, it is precisely this combination of political commitments and a geographical embeddedness in

in Antonio Gramsci's astute observation, a series of "morbid symptoms" proliferated between an old world that was dying and a new one struggling to be born, his radical message thus continues to resonate in the present. The parallels with Gramsci are certainly not fortuitous: Hadjiyski's "spatialized" thinking is attractive for the same reasons that drew Edward Said, one of the founding figures of postcolonial theory, to the Italian thinker's "focus on the territorial, spatial, geographical foundations of social life" in the 1970s (Said 1993: 49). What Stuart Hall, another postcolonial great, says about the South European communist rings true of Hadjiyski also: both think at the level of mid-range categories, "operating at the lower levels of historical concreteness [...] [rather than] aiming 'higher' – and missing [their] theoretical target"; both are theorists of the conjuncture (Hall 1986: 7). Barring the absence of translations of his texts into more widely circulating languages, Ivan Hadjiyski, possibly the greatest social theorist of twentieth-century Bulgaria, certainly deserves to be in the pantheon of radical decolonial and anti-capitalist thinkers who continue to remind us that capitalism and global coloniality were born at the same time, and therefore need to be put to rest together as well.

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the region which accounts to a great extent for his critical distance from Western modernity/coloniality.

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