INSTITUTE OF ETHNOLOGY AND FOLKLORE STUDIES
WITH ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM
BULGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

BETWEEN THE WORLDS



CONTESTING (IM)POSSIBLE IDENTITIES

Vol. 6
2025

Between the Worlds

CONTESTING (IM)POSSIBLE IDENTITIES

Vol. 6

Slavkova, M., Y. Erolova, V. Ivanova and J. Popcheva (eds) (2025) Between the Worlds: Contesting (Im)Possible Identities. Vol. 6. Sofia: IEFSEM – BAS & Paradigma

To cite this collection: Slavkova, M., Y. Erolova, V. Ivanova and J. Popcheva (eds) (2025) Between the Worlds: Contesting (Im)Possible Identities. Vol. 6. Sofia: IEFSEM – BAS & Paradigma, https://conferenceworlds.wordpress.com/publications/

Copyright © 2025 by Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. All rights reserved.
e-ISSN: 2683-0213

Designed by Paradigma Publishing House, http://www.paradigma.bg

This collection is Conference proceedings number 6 in the publication series 'Between the Worlds'.
First edition, 2024
Second edition, 2025

This collection is open-access and cannot be sold in any form.





Requests for information should be addressed to:
IEFSEM – BAS, 6A Moskovska Street, 1000 Sofia, Bulgaria, e-mail:
balkan_ethnobg@yahoo.co.uk

The publication of this collection is funded by the Bulgarian Science Fund, the Ministry of Education and Science (КП-06-Н50/6 – 30.11.2020).

All authors have provided written agreement for their texts to be included in this collection. We encouraged the authors to consult with native speakers of English during the preparation of their texts. Each author bears responsibility for the authenticity of their own text. This collection reflects the views of the individual authors only. The Bulgarian Science Fund, Ministry of Education and Science, bears no responsibility for any use that may be made of the information contained herein.

All papers are double-blind peer-reviewed. We thank all reviewers who kindly advised us during the volume preparation.

INSTITUTE OF ETHNOLOGY AND FOLKLORE STUDIES
WITH ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM
BULGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

Collection of Conference Proceedings

BETWEEN THE WORLDS

CONTESTING (IM)POSSIBLE IDENTITIES

Vol. 6

Edited by:
Magdalena Slavkova, Yelis Erolova, Vanya Ivanova and Julia Popcheva

Paradigma
Sofia • 2025

INTERNATIONAL BOARD OF REVIEWERS:

Assoc. Prof. Anelia Kassabova, PhD, Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Bulgaria; Assist. Prof. Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković, PhD, Institute for Balkan Studies, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Serbia; Prof. Bogdana Todorova, PhD, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Bulgaria; Prof. Emeritus Carol Silverman, PhD, University of Oregon, USA; Assoc. Prof. Elya Tzaneva, PhD, Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Bulgaria; Eugenia Markova, PhD, University of Brighton, United Kingdom; Prof. DSc. Huseyin Kyuchuk (Hristo Kyuchukov), University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland & Academy of Sciences, Almaty, Kazakhstan; Assoc. Prof. Iveta Todorova-Pirgova, PhD, Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center, Millville, New Jersey, USA; Assist. Prof. Ivo Strahilov, PhD, Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski', Bulgaria; Dr. hab. Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology at the Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland; Assoc. Prof. Kapitolina Fedorova, PhD, Tallinn University, Estonia; Kieu Thanh Nga, PhD, Institute for South Asian, West Asian and African Studies, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, Vietnam; Assist. Prof. Kinga Povedák, PhD, University of Szeged, Hungary; Assoc. Prof. Mihaela Misheva, PhD, University of National and World Economy, Bulgaria; Prof. Dr. Mirjana Mirchevska, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, 'St. Cyril and Methodius' University in Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia; Assoc. Prof. Petar Petrov, PhD, Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Bulgaria; Assist. Prof. Sanja Zlatanović, PhD, Institute of Political Science, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Slovakia; Assist. Prof. Slavka Karakusheva, PhD, Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski', Bulgaria; Sofiya Zahova, PhD, University of Iceland, Iceland; Assist. Prof. Svetlana Ćirković, PhD, Institute for Balkan Studies, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Serbia; Prof. Tomasz Kamusella, PhD, University of St. Andrews, United Kingdom.

Contents

PREFACE 7

PART I ♦ WE, EUROPE AND BEYOND 12

Albena Nakova
Hybridisation of Identity – The Bulgarian Case 13

Vanya Ivanova
The Supranational Dimension of Self-Identification Processes
of Bulgarian Citizens Fifteen Years after EU Accession 33

Julia Popcheva
Bulgarian National Flag in Everyday Life and Festivities –
Usage, Perception, Attitudes 49

Zlatina Bogdanova
Case Studies of Urban Regeneration: The Uses of Culture and
Heritage in Identity Construction 73

Tanya Matanova
Bulgaria as a Homeland and as a Part of Europe from the Perspective
of Bulgarian Returnees 96

**PART II ♦ PERCEPTIONS OF THE SELF
AND OTHERS IN A VARIETY OF CONTEXTS** 112

Isabelle Gobatto
Being a Doctor in West Africa: A Transnational Professional Identity
Versus the Imagination of Oneself 113

Petko Hristov
Serbs and Bulgarians – Closest Brothers or Most Treacherous Enemies?
The Bulgarian Version 123

Mare Kõiva
The Origins of Peripheral Identity in Setomaa and on Kihnu Island 134

Stoyan Nikov
Eating, Drinking and Drawing Ethnic Boundaries in the Elena
Micro-Region (Northern Bulgaria): A Micro-Sociological View
of Identity Politics through the 'Gift Exchange' Theory 151

Ilham Mammadzada
Collective Memory, Identity, and Ethics of a Scientist
in the Context of Epistemology 162

PART III ♦ IDENTITY FORMATION
AND CONTESTING IDENTIFICATIONS 174

Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov
Roma Civic Emancipation Before the Second World War:
National and Transnational Dimensions 175

Tamás Attila Hajnáczky
Gypsy/Roma Identities, Voices and Agency (From the End
of the 19th Century Until the Second World War) 212

Magdalena Slavkova
Evangelical Activism in Bulgaria in the 1920s and 1930s:
The Minkov Family and Their Missionary Project among the Roma 236

Behrin Shopova
Documentary Evidence for the Haskovo State Turkish Theatre
in Bulgaria in the 1950s 256

Plamena Stoyanova
'The Revival Process' and the Reinstatement of Birth Names
of Muslims in Bulgaria 273

Preface

The concepts of identity and identification are frequently challenged by lived experiences, revealing the dynamic and often contradictory nature of how individuals and communities understand themselves and how they are perceived by *Others*. The processes of social interaction are intertwined by cultural perceptions of *Us* and *Them*, as well as cultural expectations, and the persistent tension between personal expressions and the desire for group belonging. Social scholars have long analysed the dynamics of identity construction, demonstrating and concluding that identity as a construct is shaped through a complex interplay of historical developments, social environment, cultural, religious, and ethnic affiliations, personal agency, and external viewpoints.

In this volume, we draw on a range of theoretical models, which we interpret in the light of our own empirical material, adapting, developing, or challenging them as necessary. One key framework is Erving Goffman's concept of the 'presentation of self' (1956), which explores how individuals use 'frames' to organise everyday experiences, interpret social situations, and construct their identities. We employ the term 'identity' to capture the depth and complexity of both individual and collective selves, acknowledging that identity is inherently multifaceted, dynamic, and shaped by ongoing social interaction. Collective identities may encompass political, social, local, ethnic, or religious affiliations, while individual identities involve unique self-perceptions formed in relation to others. The extent to which social boundaries between groups are perceived as permeable influences whether individuals pursue status advancement through personal effort or collective mobilisation (Barth, 1969). The works of Benedict Anderson (1983), Ernest Gellner (1983), and Eric Hobsbawm (1983, with Terence Ranger) lay the foundation for debates on identity as a product of historical development, viewing identity, particularly national identity, as a historically specific construct. These scholars emphasise the role of historical, political, and cultural processes in shaping collective belonging. Stuart Hall conceptualises identity as a constantly redefining, shifting, and contesting incomplete process of identification through representation and dialogue between us and them in different histories, cultures, and political contexts (1990). Thomas Hylland Eriksen further contributes to this discourse by defining ethnicity as the social reproduction of difference between

groups, emphasising the dynamics of gain and loss in social interaction (1991: 264). In this regard, Rogers Brubaker (2002) conceptualises identity as a dynamic and contested category, continuously shaped by social, political, and media discourses. He argues that such discourses do not merely reflect identity but actively construct its meaning, thereby endowing identity and identification with significant social and political power. Importantly, Brubaker challenges traditional notions of ethnicity by advocating for an understanding that does not rely on the imagery of fixed, bounded groups, but instead considers ethnicity as a flexible construct shaped by context and discourse. Similarly, Richard Jenkins (2008) contends that identification with the 'self' or 'others' is a process of meaning-making, shaped through interaction involving agreement and disagreement, convention and innovation, as well as communication and negotiation.

Key propositions on the construction and contestation of identities continue to be analysed through diverse paradigms. These interpretations explore their development and advancement, identify inherent limitations and conditions, and engage with emerging thematic fields, often drawing on case studies from different regions around the world (Berger and Lorenz, 2008; Eriksen and Jakoubek, 2019; SinghaRoy, 2018; Tzaneva, 2018: 29–40).

While traditional theoretical approaches to social and cultural phenomena often focus on the nation-state as a central framework, interdisciplinary studies now emphasise the complex and evolving features of social, cultural, religious, political, and economic experiences. These are increasingly understood as products of overlapping local, regional, ethnic, institutional, and supranational identities. Far from being static or confined by national borders, cultural, social, and political processes today operate across global spaces. The history of European Union enlargements further contributes new dynamics to these processes, leading to the transformation of both countries and the identities of their citizens (Kosseva, Zhelyazkova and Hajdinjak, 2011: 85–109; Krzyżanowski, 2010; Marushiakova, 2008; Воскресенски, Христова и Матанова, 2021; Накова, 2024).

The studies in this volume aim to describe, analyse, and confront these changing dynamics to rethink prevailing assumptions about identity and identifications. Bringing together texts by scholars from various fields such as history, ethnology, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and cultural studies, this volume enables readers to understand how

various practices and processes, across different spheres of public life and levels of social interaction, intersect and inform one another. These interactions shape the contestation of identities at multiple levels: local, regional, national, supranational, social, ethnic, religious, and personal. Additionally, the collection sheds light on the spatial organisation of social life across historical periods. Central themes include the interaction and opposition of identities, the presentation of self and other, the illusions and instrumentalisations of identity, and the use of national, supranational, ethnic, religious, and other symbols to manifest belonging or difference.

The collection is structured into three sections, each presenting nuanced perspectives on identity by the contributing authors. The first part critically examines multifaceted constructions of local, national, and European identity, as well as the civic affiliations of Bulgarians. Lived experiences often precipitate identity dilemmas, profoundly impacting individuals' perceptions of belonging and interconnectedness. Concurrently, the processes of citizenship and integration into the European Union engender novel expectations and necessitate adaptive modalities that further complicate the dynamics of identity formation and affiliation.

The second part of the collection delves into the complex interpretations of identity, encompassing cultural, ethnic, social, professional, and relational dimensions. These interpretations are further viewed by the dichotomies of construction and contestation, which shape concepts and images of identity. Grounded in their own research, the authors in this section present global perspectives on identity that underscore its dynamic nature, highlighting that identity is not only constructed but also continually negotiated and reconfigured through the emergence and adoption of new identities and practices.

The third part of the collection examines identity from the perspective of minority communities with diverse religious affiliations, including several texts devoted specifically to the Roma. Their ongoing struggles for acceptance and recognition not only underscore the complexities of identity but also enrich scholarly interpretations by providing insights into the processes of identity formation and negotiation. The tensions between possible and impossible identities highlight the dialectical dynamics experienced by minority groups as they navigate cultural boundaries, traversing local, national, and transnational spaces. The authors demonstrate that the various dimensions of identity are not

mutually exclusive, but rather intersect and interact in complex, meaningful ways, reflecting the multidimensional nature of identity formation among majority and minority groups.

We hope that this volume will contribute to ongoing identity discussions and will inspire further inquiry and reflection! We wish readers a fruitful engagement with the ideas presented herein.

The Editors

References:

Anderson, B. (1983) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* London: Verso.

Barth, F. (ed) (1969) *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference.* Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Berger, St. and Lorenz, C. (eds) (2008) *The Contested Nation: Ethnicity, Class and Gender in National Identities.* Houdmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Brubaker, R. (2002) Ethnicity without Groups. *Archives de Sociologie* XLIII(2): 163–189.

Eriksen, Th. H. (1991) Ethnicity versus Nationalism. *Journal of Peace Research* 28(3): 263–278.

Eriksen, Th. H. and Jakoubek, M. (eds) (2019) *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries Today: A Legacy of Fifty Year.* Abingdon, New York: Routledge.

Gellner, E. (1983) *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell.

Goffman, E. (1956) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.

Hall, S. (1990) Cultural Identity and Diaspora. In: J. Rutherford (ed). *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference.* London: Lawrence & Wi, pp. 222-237.

Hobsbawm, E. and Ranger, T. (eds) (1983) *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jenkins, R. (2008) *Rethinking Ethnicity*. London: SAGE.

Kosseva, M., Zhelyazkova, A. and Hajdinjak, M. (2011) European Dilemmas and Identity Construction on the Bulgarian Path to Modernity. In: A. Ichijo (ed). *Europe, Nations and Modernity*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.85-109.

Krzyżanowski, M. (2010) *The Discursive Construction of European Identities: A Multi-level Approach to Discourse and Identity in the Transforming European Union.* Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

Marushiakova, M. (ed) (2008) *Dynamics of National Identity and Transnational Identities in the Process of European Integration.* Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

SinghaRoy, D. (2018) *Identity, Society and Transformative Social Categories: Dynamics of Construction, Configuration and Contestation.* New Delhi: SAGE.

Tzaneva, E. (2018) Ethnocultural Symbolism as a Research Tool for Identity Issues in a "Global Village". *Papers of BAS. Humanities and Social Sciences* 5 (1): 29–40.

Воскресенски, В., Христова, М. и Матанова, Т. (съст) (2021) *Български общности в чужбина. Аспекти на културата, идентичността и миграцията.* София: Издателство на БАН 'Проф. Марин Дринов'.

Накова, А. (2024) *Хибридните идентичности (съвременно състояние и етнически модели в България).* София: Издателство на БАН 'Проф. Марин Дринов'.

Part I

We, Europe and Beyond



Pic. 1. City of Plovdiv, Bulgaria, 2017. Photo: Yelis Erolova.

HYBRIDISATION OF IDENTITY – THE BULGARIAN CASE

Albena Nakova

Abstract: This article discusses the problem of the contemporary identity of Bulgarian citizens, considered in the aspect: national–supranational (European and global) – ethnic – local. The thesis of the hybrid nature of the contemporary identity of Bulgarian citizens is justified, combining elements of national, supranational (European and global), ethnic and local identity, which coexist as the leading at this stage is the national identity (represented with a share of 84.7%), followed by the supranational (65.0%), in third place as a share is the local identity (52.5%) and the least represented is the ethnic identity (13.4%). In this case, the sum of the shares exceeds 100%, as the respondents indicated three answers each, i.e. they were asked to identify themselves by the three identities most important to them out of a total of nine proposed options among which: national, local, European, global, regional (the Balkans), ethnic, religious, professional and friendship circle. Different indicators of national and European identity were also derived.

The data on which the analysis is based are from a national representative sociological survey conducted in 2021 with 1014 respondents aged 18+ years, Bulgarian citizens, and implemented through a two-stage cluster sample, formed by simple random sampling, stratified by place of residence. The structure of the sample fully corresponds to the composition of the country's population according to the data of the last census of 2021 in terms of gender, age, education, ethnicity, and religion. A semi-standardised face-to-face interview method was used to collect the statistical information.
Keywords: hybrid identity, national identity, European identity, ethnic identity, local identity

Collective identity

The focus of this article is the collective identity of contemporary Bulgarian citizens, unfolding along the axis of national–supranational (European and global) – ethnic–local.

Identities can be individual and collective, which are group identities and reflect the specifics of group identification as opposed to individual identification. Our identity is part of the world that surrounds us, and as such, it is defined by it. In principle, to understand identity, it is necessary to take as a reference point the real social frameworks of the existence of individuals and communities. If we use M. Halbwachs' (1997) notion of 'social frame' (*cadres sociaux*), which reflects Halbwachs' fundamental conception of society as a reservoir of resources of meaning for the individual, and the notion developed by E. Goffman's (1956), the notion of

'frames' as organising the everyday experience of individuals and groups, we can argue that there are 'collective identities' that reflect the dependence of identity on the 'social frame', i.e. that there are social frames of identity and collective identities, such that each individual identity unfolds within these social frames and each forms his or her identity together with others in the respective group/community to which he or she belongs. The use of the concept of collective identity expresses the fact that in every individual identity, there is a collective origin or, more precisely, contents whose origin is not from the individually perceived and assimilated. This distinction has its roots in the distinction that E. Durkheim makes between individual and collective representations. According to E. Durkheim, 'collective conceptions' are supra-individual phenomena having their content and are irreducible to the sum of individual conceptions (1937). They reflect the sharedness of social cognition and express what is called 'common sense'. In this sense, too, collective identity refers to the shared notion of experience lived together by a community, a group. It expresses a set of semantic structures that are social structures of meaning insofar as their acquisition and possession are based on participation in the social practices and overall life of the group/community.

The concept of 'collective identity' was first introduced in psychology by Z. Freud (1985) and subsequently developed by representatives of the psychoanalytic school of psychology (K. Jung, E. Fromm, etc.) to bring out the specifics of group identification as opposed to individual identification.

A person at every moment of his life is in a socially determined situation, i.e. in a certain socio-cultural environment. The world always exists for him/her as intersubjective, i.e. as a meaning universe, a set of meanings that he/she must interpret to be able to interact with others. Prior experience in the form of available knowledge exists as a schema with which man relates all his perceptions, notions, beliefs, and values. In other words, everyone lives in a common 'symbolic meaning space' (Assmann, 2011) with others. This shared meaning space is the precondition for the emergence of both individual and collective identity. It makes the processes of interaction and communication possible by delineating the boundaries of a single 'meaning horizon' (Assmann, 2011), which through its totality defines the intersubjective meaningfulness of identity. In this regard, P. Burger and Th. Luckman note that, regardless of differences, there is always a correspondence between 'my meanings and their meanings in this world ... precisely because it refers to a world common to many people' (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 37).

Collective identity is a social construct, it is a form of socially created and shared knowledge, as it is the result of both lived experience and the knowledge and patterns of thinking that are acquired through tradition, education, and social communication. One learns not only to identify and characterise oneself or the other but also to create typical constructs according to a system of relevance corresponding to the unified viewpoint of the group to which one belongs. Therefore, collective identities live and are preserved in communication. If it is interrupted, respectively, if the frames of reference of the communicated reality disappear or change, the consequence is a change of identities. This is why all major changes in human society are always accompanied by changes in the identification of communities – in the understanding of their own identity and the identity of others. Critical social situations stimulate the redefinition of identities not only of individuals but also of entire groups, which is why they are capable of leading, for example, to acute inter-ethnic confrontations and even to armed clashes and conflicts, examples of which abound in history and the contemporary world in recent years.

Everything said so far determines the extreme actuality of the topic of identity in the contemporary world of global social changes and poly-crises, which more and more often call into question identities built and affirmed for centuries and necessitate the study of its contemporary dimensions and specificities. One of the important moments in the development of scientific knowledge is the derivation of certain stages of one or other key issues. The problem of identity and its transformations has become just such a key problem in recent decades.

Hybridisation of identity

Identity, as a complex, dynamic and constantly changing category in time and space, and depending on the context in which it is considered, is one of the most debated research issues in the social sciences and humanities. The successive deployment of different theoretical approaches to the study of identity reflects the gradual evolution in the understanding of this phenomenon, expressed in its successive relativisation and subjectivisation. Within the primordial paradigm (Geertz, 1963; Van Berghe, 1981), identity was seen as a primordial, primary given that served as a constant determinant of relations between communities and peoples (Smith, 1996). The first breakthrough in the canons of primordialism was the theories of Ernest Renan (1882) and Max Weber (1985), which took a step towards establishing an understanding of identity as a subjective construct of the social imagination and therefore as a stretchable, elastic category rather than

an unchanging and static structure. The ideas of the instrumentalists (Bell, 1996) continue the trend of affirming the relationality of identity, insofar as identity is seen not as an original phenomenon but as a strategic choice that individuals make, as a tool for protecting group interests, as a dynamic, changing phenomenon that combines stability and historical fluidity. Constructivists, in turn, reinforce the tendency to conceive of identity as a social construct that is formed based on constructed notions and feelings in a particular cultural environment and that performs instrumental functions by allowing the individual to include/exclude him/herself in different communities, thus creating a dynamic identity (Armstrong, 1982). According to the representatives of this approach, communities (nations, ethnicities, etc.) are the result of conscious social engineering (Eller, 1999; Kedourie, 1960) and 'invented traditions' (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983), therefore, not the community itself, but its image, consciously constructed and reconstructed, becomes the basis of collective identification, as a consequence of which identity is not essential, preset and unproblematic. Modernists (Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1991) continue the established trend of viewing identity as a historical product whose existence is historically determined.

Since the 1990s, in the context of globalisation, when the boundaries between different nations and ethnicities began to become increasingly thin and permeable, and cultural interactions more intense, research interest has turned to defining identity as multiple and hybrid within the concepts of cultural pluralism or multiculturalism (Caglar, 1997; Taylor et al., 1994; Weinreich, 1991; Weinreich, Luk and Bond, 1996; Weinreich, 1998; etc.). Increased migratory movements are leading to new phenomena and processes and consequently to the development of new theoretical frameworks for their study such as *transnationalism*, *methodological nationalism*, and *transculturalism* (Hepp, 2008; Hepp, 2009; Schiller, 2010; Schiller, Wimmer, Levitt and Kumar, 2007; Vertovec and Cohen, 1999; Vertovec, 2007). While multiculturalism is about reviving interest in previously neglected identities such as ethnic or religious, for example, transculturalism affirms transcultural communities and identities that are considered to lack the attribute of territoriality, i.e. are not bound to a specific territory as national or local communities are, but due to globalisation transcend its borders and thus become transcultural communities, and transcultural identity becomes a new form of identity based on the idea of weakening the influence of the nation-state in the face of globalisation (Hepp, 2009). As D. Petkova (Петкова, 2013) says, regardless of whether one speaks of hybridisation or transculturation we are talking about the same process – the 'diversification

and pluralisation' of communities, which in postmodernity is opposed to the homogenisation tendencies in the earlier modern state and is undoubtedly due to the processes of globalisation, implying intensive intercultural exchange and dialogue.

The methodological framework

This paper aims to present an up-to-date picture of the contemporary identity situation of Bulgarian citizens in terms of the relation: national – supranational (European and global) – ethnic – local identity.

The data on which the analyses are based are the results of a nationally representative survey on 'Contemporary Bulgarian Identity: National and European Dimensions' conducted in 2021.

The national representative survey was conducted among Bulgarian citizens aged 18+ years with a two-stage cluster sample of 1014 people, formed by simple random sampling, stratified by place of residence. The structure of the sample fully corresponds to the composition of the country's population according to the data of the last census of 2021 in terms of gender, age, education, ethnicity, and religion. The selection of respondents in households was carried out by a modified Leslie Kish method (nearest date of birth) (1965). Respondents were interviewed at their homes, and only Bulgarian citizens with a permanent address of residence in the locality were interviewed. The basic ethical principles of voluntariness, anonymity, and protection of personal data were respected during the survey. The semi-standardised face-to-face interview method was used to collect statistical information. The questionnaire was developed specifically for the project by the project team, consisting of ethnologists and sociologists.

The national representative survey was implemented with a sample that, as a size and methodology of selection of respondents, allows obtaining reliable and representative for the Bulgarian population data, which means that the results obtained can be considered typical for the population of the country.

The contemporary state of the collective identity of Bulgarian citizens

To derive the current state of the collective identity of Bulgarian citizens, a question was used to ask the interviewees to identify themselves by choosing from nine proposed identities, including national/Bulgarian citizen, ethnic, European/EU citizen, global/world citizen, regional/region of the Balkans, local/settlement, religious, professional, belonging to a certain circle of friends, and rank them in order of importance to interviewees and indicate the three

most important identities for their self-definition. The results are presented in Table 1, summing the total first, second, and third-place indications for each of the derived identity types.

Table 1: Types of Identifications

Identity - first, second, and third place total	Share of references in %
I am a Bulgarian citizen	84.7%
I feel connected to my locality (where I live, study, work)	52.5%
I feel connected to my circle of friends	39.2%
I am an EU citizen	30.8%
I feel like a citizen of the world	20.6%
I feel connected to my professional community	15.3%
I feel connected to my religious community	13.7%
I feel connected to the Balkan region	13.6%
I feel connected to my ethnic community	13.4%

As can be seen, the highest share of identification with the national community (I am a Bulgarian citizen) is with an impressive 84.7%, i.e. 84.7% of the interviewed persons identify themselves as Bulgarian citizens. Moreover, the highest share of them – 68.8% – put their national identity in the first place; 10.5% – in the second place, and only 5.4% – in the third place. Second in terms of share, according to the presented results, appears the identification with supranational structures with a total share of 65.0% represented by the identifications: 'citizen of the EU' (30.8%), 'citizen of the world' (20.6%) and the regional identification 'connected with the Balkan region' (as far as supranational structure is concerned) with a share of 13.6%. Significant in terms of share, although in third place, according to the survey data, turns out to be the local identity, i.e. the identification with the locality where the respondents live, study, or work. More than half of the respondents – 52.5% – identify with their locality. Although the local identification shows lower values compared to the identification with supranational structures (EU, the world as a whole, and the Balkan region), the difference between the shares of respondents sharing one and the other identity is not so great, which reflects the parallel processes in the world today – of globalisation and the opposite process of localisation, regionalisation, and emphasis on cultural identity and specificities. Ethnic identity appears to be the least represented in the structure of the contemporary identity of Bulgarian citizens today, with a share of only 13.4%.

It can be said that despite all the changes that national identity is undergoing today in connection with the processes of globalisation and European integration, it continues to be the leading identity of Bulgarian citizens at this stage of the development of society. However, there are serious indications of the formation of a supranational identity ('citizen of Europe', 'citizen of the world', 'connected to the Balkan region'), and this is accompanied by parallel processes of formation of local identities. The resurgence of interest in roots and cultural identity, which runs parallel to the processes of globalisation, seems to have more of an emphasis on local specificities than on ethnic diversity.

These results are a confirmation that the contemporary identity of Bulgarian citizens is characterised by a hybrid nature, combining elements of national, supranational, ethnic, and local identity, which occupy different places and are represented by different shares in the overall identity structure. National identity takes the lead with the largest share, followed by supranational, local, and ethnic identities, ranked in that order according to the decreasing shares of individuals claiming them.

Table 2: Identity Structure of Contemporary Bulgarian Citizens

Identity - first, second, and third place total	Share of references in %
National identity (Bulgarian citizen)	84.7%
Supranational identity (EU citizen, world citizen, representative of the Balkan region)	65.0%
Local identity	52.5%
Ethnic identity	13.4%

To the extent that the length of the article does not allow going into greater detail, I present here only some schematic differences in the identity structure depending on the ethnicity and age profile of the respondents.

Table 3: Identity Structure According to Ethnicity

Identity - first, second, and third place total	Bulgarians	Turks	Roma	Bulgarian citizens total
National identity (Bulgarian citizen)	91.3%	74.4%	86.9%	84.7%
EU citizen	32.0%	31.4%	37.7%	30.8%
Citizen of the world	20.9%	24.8%	19.6%	20.6%
Connected to the Balkan region	16.0%	4.1%	13.1%	13.6%
Local identity	54.0%	58.7%	31.1%	52.5%
Ethnic identity	9.6%	30.0%	42.6%	13.4%

Table 4: Identity Structure by Age

Identity - first, second, and third place total	18-30	31-50	51-65	Above 65	Bulgarian citizens total
National identity (Bulgarian citizen)	84.3%	86.6%	91.2%	92.0%	84.7%
EU citizen	39.8%	33.4%	27.2%	30.7%	30.8%
Citizen of the world	29.2%	25.9%	18.4%	9.5%	20.6%
Connected to the Balkan region	10.6%	16.1%	16.0%	13.1%	13.6%
Local identity	40.3%	47.9%	62.6%	60.8%	52.5%
Ethnic identity	15.7%	13.1%	15.6%	13.6%	13.4%

As can be seen from the presented data, the national identity is represented with the largest share in the identity structure of the representatives of the Bulgarian ethnic group, while the supranational (European and local) identity shows relatively similar shares in all three ethnic groups. The local identity is the least mentioned characteristic for the representatives of the Roma ethnic group, while the ethnic identity is represented with the smallest share in the overall identity structure of the Bulgarian ethnic group. This does not at all mean that the representatives of the Bulgarian ethnicity do not attach importance to their ethnic identity, on the contrary. The reason for these results is that they identify to a large extent the national identity with the identity of the leading ethnic group in the country and therefore consider the national identity as ethno-national. This determines the highest share of national identity in the identity structure of the representatives of the Bulgarian ethnic group.

Regarding the age profile of the respondents, national identity occupies the largest share in the identity structure of people over 50. Higher shares of local identity are also typical for them. While supranational identity (European and global) is represented by the highest share in the identity structure of the youngest Bulgarian citizens, those under 30.

I will concentrate a bit more on the two main types of identity that were the focus of our project and which turn out to occupy the largest shares in the overall identity structure of Bulgarian citizens – the national and the European (as part of the supranational) identity.

The national identity of Bulgarian citizens

The answers to the question 'What shapes your sense of belonging to the Bulgarian nation?' provide a peculiar insight into the main indicators of national identity.

Table 5: What Forms a Sense of Belonging to the Bulgarian Nation

What shapes your sense of belonging to the Bulgarian nation?	Share of references in %
Bulgarian language	67.5%
National cultural traditions and customs	65.2%
Historical past and collective memory	59.2%
Orthodox religion	29.7%
State symbols (flag, anthem)	27.9%
State institutions and the rule of law	8.4%
Not answered	3.3%
I have no sense of belonging to the Bulgarian nation	1.4%
Other – birthplace (I was born here); Bulgarian name	0.9%
I have a sense of belonging to another nation	0.4%[1]

The data presented in the table outline a structure of indicators of national identity, in which 'the Bulgarian language', 'national cultural traditions and customs', and 'historical past and collective memory', are mentioned with the greatest consensus by respondents as forming a sense of national belonging, occupy a leading place. These indicators illustrate the relationship of national identity to the basic attributes of the nation-state such as official language, history and historical past, national traditions, and culture. This is supported by the fact that 'state symbols' (flag, anthem) also occupy an important place among the indicators of national belonging and are identified by slightly more than a quarter of the surveyed persons as forming a sense of national belonging. Approximately one-third are respondents for whom 'the Eastern Orthodox religion' as part of the national cultural specificity is also an indicator of national identity. However, the lower degree of significance attributed to it compared to the first group of indicators is most likely because it is perceived by some of the surveyed persons as an indicator of ethnic rather than national belonging. The fact that 'state institutions' and 'the rule of law' occupy the last place in the structure of indicators of national identity of the surveyed individuals testifies to the changing role of the state as a constitutive identity. Its identification coordinates are changing, which is a consequence of the imposed change in the understanding of the national community today – from a value defined as territory, state borders, institutions, and legal order to a value defined primarily as cultural specificity and identity. For this reason, we can say that national identity, understood as identification with a particular nation-state in the sense of state borders, institutions, and legal order, is beginning to lose ground in the

[1] Here the sum of the percentages exceeds 100 as respondents indicated more than one answer.

identification of Bulgarian citizens, but the importance of national identity, understood as culture, history, memory, language, i.e. as filled with cultural rather than institutional content and as symbolised by the national flag and anthem, is being preserved. But overall, the fact that Bulgarian citizens who declare that they have no sense of belonging to the Bulgarian nation, as well as those who declare that they have a sense of belonging to another nation, are below the level of statistical error, shows that national identity is still significant for their self-determination at this stage of the development of Bulgarian society. However, the growing processes of globalisation and at the same time the Bulgaria's integration into the European structures, leading to the increase of permeability of borders and even their abolition, predetermine the shrinking of the institutional content of national identity and the minimisation of the importance of indicators such as state institutions and the rule of law for the formation of national identity consciousness. Of the institutional indicators, only the importance of state symbols (flag and anthem) is preserved, but rather as a sign, an emblem of national specificity. On the other hand, globalisation processes are pushing to the fore the issues of cultural specificity and uniqueness of different national communities, which determines the gradual filling of national identity with more cultural content and its increasing definition today through indicators such as culture, history, memory, language, traditions, etc.

Another opportunity to derive indicators of national identity and at the same time to verify and confirm those already derived are the answers to the question 'What are you personally proud of as a citizen of the Republic of Bulgaria?', insofar as the occasions for pride outline different aspects of the respondents' perception of the most valuable achievements of the nation, or in other words of what is most valuable for national identification.

Table 6: What are You Proud of as a Citizen of the Republic of Bulgaria

What are you proud of as a citizen of the Republic of Bulgaria?	Share of references in %
With Bulgarian national history	60.1%
With Bulgarian national traditions and customs	44.7%
With Bulgarian national culture and art	44.4%
Being able to travel and work around the world as a citizen of an EU member state	17.4%
With Bulgarian national sport	16.7%
With Bulgarian national science	16.7%
With the traditions and customs of my ethnic community	7.8%
I am proud of nothing	5.7%
The historical past of my ethnic community	3.9%
Not answered	3.5%

As can be seen in this case, the leading importance given to the indicators of 'national history', 'culture', and 'traditions' as the core of indicators that form the specificity of the Bulgarian nation and create reasons for pride is confirmed. It is noteworthy, however, the emergence of a specific indicator of national identity, not mentioned so far – the fact of 'Being able to travel and work around the world as a citizen of an EU member state', which reflects and accentuates the active processes of European integration taking place at the current stage and represents an expression of the processes of formation of a supranational European identity. In this way, an interesting phenomenon is realised – the beginning of the formation of European identity becomes a reason for national pride, i.e. the awareness of the forming European identity becomes one of the indicators of national identity. On the other hand, it turns out that 'Bulgarian national sport' and 'Bulgarian national science' are not among the most frequent occasions of pride of the surveyed persons, i.e. they are indicators of low significance for the formation of national identity. Ethnic specifics – traditions, customs, and the past of ethnic communities – are of even lower importance for the formation of national identity, which is fully in line with the last place (in terms of importance and share) of ethnic identity in the identity structure of contemporary Bulgarian citizens.

Another, cognitive-emotional aspect of understanding of national identity expresses the strength of the sense of national belonging.

Table 7: Strength of the Sense of Belonging to Bulgaria

How strong is your sense of belonging to Bulgaria?	**Share of references in %**
Very strong	42.9%
Strong	41.9%
Weak	4.9%
Very weak	1.3%
I do not know	9%

As can be seen from the table, a total of 84.8% of the interviewees stated a strong sense of belonging to Bulgaria (the sum of the answers 'very strong' and 'strong').

This fully corresponds to the established leading role of national identity in the identity structure of Bulgarian citizens.

Among the indicators of national identity, the perception of the homeland can also be derived.

Table 8: Do You Consider Bulgaria Your Homeland

Do you consider Bulgaria your homeland?	Share of references in %
Yes, because I was born here	60.3%
Yes, because I feel 'at home' here	30.6%
Yes, because I live here	7.4%
Yes, because this is where my family is	0.5%
I do not feel Bulgaria as my homeland	0.7%
I consider another country as my homeland	0%
I do not know	0.6%

Indicative of the strong identification with Bulgaria is the extremely low share of those who stated that they do not feel Bulgaria as their homeland (0.7%), which is actually below the statistical error and is not typical, and the complete lack of people perceiving another country as their homeland. It is also significant that the homeland for the surveyed persons is the 'birthplace' – the place where they were born, the place where they live, and where they feel 'at home'. For them homeland is also the place where their families and friends live. But none of the interviewees understands the homeland as state territory and institutions.

The European identity of Bulgarian citizens

The analysis of the Bulgarian citizens' perception of European identity will start with how they see our country's place on the world geopolitical map and to what extent they see it as tied to Europe, the EU, and the rest of the world. The results of the survey show that the largest share – almost half (47.8%) of Bulgarian citizens perceive Bulgaria primarily as an EU member state. The share of those who consider it a Balkan country is significantly lower – 29.8%. Even lower are the shares of people who see Bulgaria as a country oriented towards cooperation with the Russian Federation (7.3%). Quite minimal are the shares of those who perceive it as a country oriented towards active cooperation with the USA (2%), which are statistically insignificant. In other words, although the European identity remains of secondary importance for the Bulgarian citizens and the national one is the leading one, the fact is that in foreign policy terms, they see Bulgaria's place on the world geopolitical map primarily as a member of the EU, oriented towards active cooperation with it.

Table 9: How do You See Bulgaria's Place on the World Geopolitical Map?

How do you see Bulgaria's place on the world geopolitical map?	Share of references in %
EU member country	47.8%
Balkan country	29.8%
Country oriented towards active cooperation with the Russian Federation	7.3%
Country oriented towards active cooperation with the USA	2.0%
Other	1.8%
I do not know	11.3%

After this clear overall predominance of people who see Bulgaria's place on the world geopolitical map as an EU member state, it is interesting to see how Bulgarian citizens define the most important factors linking our country to Europe.

Table 10: Factors Connecting Bulgaria with Europe

Factors Connecting Bulgaria with Europe	Share of references in %
Geographical location	62.2%
Historical past	33.2%
Cultural heritage	27.5%
General economic development	23.3%
General policy and legislation	22.1%
Common values	20.8%
Nothing binds us to Europe	2.2%
I do not know	7.1%[2]

It is noteworthy that the largest share, almost two-thirds of all interviewees (62.2%), see the 'geographical location' as the main factor connecting Bulgaria with Europe. At first glance, this is a factor that has a purely territorial-spatial dimension and carries no emotional or cognitive charge of proximity. However, there is something more behind it that requires a deeper look and going beyond the first assessment. Territoriality is one of the most important prerequisites for the existence of nation-states and hence for national identification. The modern era views territorial boundaries as inherited and predetermined. In the post-modern era, however, it becomes

[2] The sum of the percentages exceeds 100 as respondents indicated more than one answer.

evident that borders are not inherently predetermined and unproblematic. And nation and national identity came to be seen as a relational geopolitical and social construct subject to interpretation. Similar processes are at stake here. Obviously, the formation of the notion of European identity follows the model of national identity, and this is precisely why the characteristic of 'geographical location', i.e. territory, occupies the largest share in the perceptions of Bulgarian citizens. In this case, this characteristic performs identity-constructing functions.

As for the other factors mentioned by the Bulgarian citizens that express Bulgaria's relationship with Europe, they can be divided into two groups. The first group includes the factors 'historical past' and 'cultural heritage', which gather a larger share of the answers and which can be defined as factors expressing Bulgaria's relationship with Europe as a type of civilisation, a union of countries that share a common past and cultural heritage. The second group includes the factors 'common economic development', 'common policy and legislation', and 'common values', which can rather be defined as factors expressing Bulgaria's relationship with the EU as a politico-economic union of European countries. Such a distinction and the fact that the first group of factors is mentioned by a larger share of respondents are indicative of the specificity of the identification of Bulgarian citizens with Europe, which is an identification to a greater extent with Europe as a continent and civilisation than with the EU as a political and economic organisation of European countries. This conclusion was repeatedly confirmed during the focus group discussions held in the framework of the project, where the participants shared their opinion that Bulgaria has been an original part of Europe, historically and culturally, for centuries, long before the creation of the EU:

> It was very strange for me when we were admitted to the EU, how we were constantly flooded with information from the media that we were already in Europe. But we've been in Europe ever since... (female, 36, secondary education).
> I feel a European citizen even before Bulgaria joined the European Union ... We have all kinds of differences with these countries - historical, economic, etc., but I don't feel less European (female, 32, higher education).

So, if we have to summarise, the Bulgarian citizens justify their European identity, based on the most important factors that connect Bulgaria with Europe, on the one hand, the common geographical position, cultural heritage, and historical past, which define the cultural-civilisational and territorial aspect of the European identity and, on the other hand, with the sharing of common values, politics, legislation and economic development

with the European nations, which express the political-economic aspect of the European identity.

Concerning the mentioned difference that Bulgarian citizens make between Europe as a continent and a type of civilisation and the EU as a political-economic organisation of European countries, let us see what the perceptions that Bulgarian citizens share separately about Europe and the European Union.

Table 11: Perceptions of Europe

Perceptions of Europe	Share of references in %
Geographical location (continent)	39.3%
High standard of living	26.0%
Cultural heritage	23.9%
Civilisation	21.9%
Economic union	20.4%
History	18.5%
Place where I want to live	16.0%
Ethnic, cultural and religious diversity	14.4%
Political union	13,4%
Asylum for migrants and refugees	7.5%
Christian religion	6.9%
Place where I don't want to live	6.2%
I do not know	5.7%

As the table shows, the idea of Europe as primarily a 'geographical place', a 'cultural heritage', and a 'civilisation' is once again confirmed. While characteristics such as 'economic union' and 'political union' gather smaller shares, probably because, as I have already noted, they are associated with the European Union and not so much with Europe. But even if less represented, it is still a fact that they are present in the notion of Europe.

The idea of Europe also includes characteristics such as 'ethnic, cultural and religious diversity', 'Christian religion', and 'asylum for refugees and migrants' (which, however, is used in a mostly negative sense), which also refer to the civilisational and ethnocultural specificities of Europe in the perceptions of the persons surveyed and are a way of identification through references to 'otherness' and ethnocultural diversity.

It is telling, however, that for a quarter of the Bulgarian citizens (26.0%) Europe is a symbol of 'high living standards', and even more telling is the fact that this is a characteristic that ranks second in the share of mentions among

the characteristics with which Bulgarian citizens express their idea of Europe. Here there is a hint and a reference to a characteristic of the EU, which will be discussed later when the main characteristics of the EU are brought up – I mean the utilitarian side, the benefit of EU membership, which is perceived by Bulgarian citizens as one of the most important characteristics of the EU. In this case, I am talking about the high standard of living of European countries, which Bulgaria, by becoming part of the European community, aspires to achieve and which Bulgarian citizens strongly desire. However, the presence of the characteristic 'high standard of living' in the Bulgarian citizens' perception of Europe, moreover in second place as a share, shows that although in declaring their European identity they emphasise their identification with Europe as a type of civilisational and cultural community, rather than their identification with the EU as a politico-economic union, this is more to justify the primordial 'right' of Bulgarian citizens to a European identity, due to the territorial and cultural proximity and the common historical development, not so much because the two interpretations of European identity – belonging to Europe as a continent and civilisation and belonging to Europe as the European Union are opposed.

The following table presents the main characteristics with which Bulgarian citizens describe their perception of the European Union.

Table 12: Perceptions about the EU

Perceptions about the EU	Share of references in %
Freedom of movement	50.2%
Common civil rights	34.0%
Common democratic values	28.3%
Access to European education	22.0%
Access to European funding	15.8%
Protection against discrimination	11.3%
Common legislation	10.7%
Common policy	8.9%
Common cultural heritage	7.2%
Common European institutions	7.2%
Common symbols - flag, anthem	3.1%
I do not know[3]	10.9%

It is undeniable that the idea of the European Union differs from the idea of Europe. But there are also common, let us figuratively call them, 'places of meaning'. To begin with, in the notion of the EU, the characteristics of 'common

[3] Again, the sum of the percentages exceeds 100 as respondents indicated more than one answer.

policy', 'common legislation', and 'common democratic values' are again present, which we have already found as present in the notion of the factors that link Bulgaria to Europe and express the political-economic aspect of the European identity of Bulgarian citizens. The characteristic 'common cultural heritage' is also present here, albeit with one of the lowest shares, which is present among the factors expressing Bulgaria's relationship with Europe, as well as among the characteristics revealing Bulgarian citizens' perception of Europe and referring to the cultural-civilisational aspect of European identity. At the same time, however, it should be noted that several new EU characteristics also emerge, such as 'freedom of movement', 'common civil rights', 'access to European education', and 'access to European funding', which, moreover, gather the largest shares of the interviewees' answers and which seem to mark precisely the utilitarian aspect of Bulgaria's EU membership already mentioned, i.e. the practical benefits that Bulgarian citizens feel from Bulgaria's EU membership. In contrast to the awareness of the benefits of Bulgaria's membership in the EU, such EU features as 'common European institutions', and 'common symbols (flag, anthem)', which mark the institutional nature of the EU as a political-economic union, are to a much lesser extent perceived by Bulgarian citizens. This means that the processes of forming a European identity in Bulgarian citizens are based first of all on the awareness of the practical side and the benefits of EU membership as an opportunity for free movement, access to European education, to European funding, all things that directly concern a large part of people, especially the younger ones and those who actively travel or work in other European countries and from which they benefit to the maximum.

Therefore, it is not at all coincidental that when asked 'What are you personally proud of as a citizen of the Republic of Bulgaria', along with such reasons for pride as 'Bulgarian national history', 'Bulgarian national culture, and art', 'Bulgarian national traditions and customs', 'Bulgarian national sports', etc., nearly one-sixth of Bulgarian citizens (17.4%) mention 'being able to travel and work around the world as a citizen of an EU member state'. Here we can see how, although starting from the utilitarian, the emerging European identity is becoming an occasion for national pride as well, insofar as our country is a member of the European community, and how the link with Europe is also present as a dimension of contemporary national identity.

In this way, the utilitarian, the benefit of a given belonging (in this case the European one) can become the surest motive and path for strengthening this newly forming identity and turning it into an interiorised and conscious identification, into an integral part of the contemporary identity of Bulgarian citizens, precisely as a hybrid identity combining elements of the national, the European and the global.

By the way, these utilitarian attitudes and motives of Bulgarian citizens as part of the process of forming a European identity are not at all a precedent or a Bulgarian specificity. As early as 1986, M. Hewstone's research on attitudes towards the European Union in some of the then-member states showed that support for the EU was associated with expected utilitarian benefits (Hewstone, 1986). Years later, this conclusion was confirmed by T. Eriksen, who described identity formation and a sense of belonging to the EU as individual or collective perceptions of utility (Eriksen, 2002).

At the same time, the specificity of the Bulgarian 'path' for the formation of a European identity, led to the incorporation of the European identity as a dimension of the national one and the formation of a hybrid identity in which the different components tolerantly coexist, is real evidence in support of the theories according to which national and European identities exist as compatible and complementary and in opposition to some earlier theories according to which national and European identities conflict.

Conclusion

The conclusion we can draw is that despite the obvious processes of increasing identification with supranational structures, the identification with the national state continues to be the leading one for contemporary Bulgarian citizens and prevails over both the identification with supranational communities and the identification with ethnic and local communities. And as a consequence of all this, the identity of contemporary Bulgarian citizens is formed as a hybrid construct, which combines several types of identification: national, supranational, local and ethnic, with a clear predominance and leading role of national identification. Given this, we can say that for us the words of J. Attali are particularly appropriate, that we are only in the 'antechamber of European identity' rather as a 'huge ideal' than as a reality (2000). The pursuit of this ideal, as well as the accompanying transformation of identity, is sustained by the attractiveness of European values, the European way of life and European standards, which Bulgarian citizens aspire to reach as soon as possible. But the short terms in societal transformations usually last several generations.

Acknowledgements: The study was carried out in the framework of the research project *Contemporary Bulgarian Identity – National and European Dimensions*, funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund of the Ministry of Education and Science (contract agreement No. КП-06-Н50/6 from 30.11.2020). It reflects the author's views alone.

References:

Anderson, B. (1983) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso.

Armstrong, J. A. (1982) *Nations before Nationalism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Assmann, J. (2011) *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Attali, J. (2000) *Fraternidades. Una Nueva Utopia*. Barcelona: Ediciones Paidos Iberica.

Bell, D. (1996) *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. New York: Basic Books.

Berger, P. and Luckmann, T. (1966) *The Social Construction of Reality.* Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.

Caglar, A. S. (1997) Hyphenated Identities and the Limits of 'Culture'. In: T. Modood and P. Werbner (eds). *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe*. London: Zed, pp.169-185.

Durkheim, E. (1937) *Les regles de la methode sociologique*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.

Eller, J. D. (1999) *From Culture to Ethnicity to Conflict. An Anthropological Perspective on International Ethnic Conflict*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

Eriksen, T. (2002) *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*. London: Pluto Press.

Freud, S. (1985) Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego. In: *Civilization, Society and Religion*. Penguin Books.

Geertz, C. (1963) The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States. In: C. Geertz (ed). *Old Societies and New States*. New York: The Free Press.

Gellner, E. (1983) *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell.

Goffman, E. (1956) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday.

Halbwachs, M. (1997) *La memoire collective*. Paris: Albin Michel.

Hepp, A. (2008) Translocal Media Cultures: Networks of the Media and Globalisation. In: A. Hepp, F. Krotz, S. Moores and C. Winter (eds). *Connectivity, Networks and Flows. Conceptualizing Contemporary Communications*. New York: Hampton Press, pp. 33-58.

Hepp, A. (2009) Transculturality as a Perspective: Researching Media Cultures Comparatively. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 10 (1). Available at: http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0901267 (accessed 19 June 2024).

Hewstone, M. (1986) *Understanding Attitudes to the European Community: A Social-Psychological Study in Four Member States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hobsbawm, E. and Ranger, T. (eds) (1983) *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hobsbawm, E. (1991) *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kedourie, E. (1960) *Nationalism*. Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell.

Kish, L. (1965) *Survey Sampling*. New York and London: Wiley.
Renan, E. (1882) *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation ?* Calmann Lévy.
Schiller, N. G. (2010) A Global Perspective on Transnational Migration: Theorizing Migration without Methodological Nationalism. In: R. Baubock and T. Faist (eds). *Transnationalism and Diaspora: Concepts, Theories and Methods*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP/IMISCOE, pp. 109-129.
Schiller, N. G., Wimmer, A., Levitt, P. and Kumar, S. (2007) Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences. In: P. Levitt and S. Khagram (eds). *The Transnational Studies Reader: Intersections and Innovations*. London: Routledge.
Smith, A. (1996) Culture, Community and Territory: The Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 72 (3): 445–458.
Taylor, C., Appiah, K.A., Habermas, J., Rockefeller, S., Walzer, F. and Wolf, S. (1994) *Multiculturalism. Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Van Berghe, P. (1981) *The Ethnic Phenomenon*. New York: Elsevier.
Vertovec, S. (2007) *Transnationalism*. London & New York: Routledge.
Vertovec, S. and Cohen, R. (eds) (1999) *Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism*. Cheltenham, UK and Northampton MA: Edward Elgar, Aldershot.
Weber, M. (1985) *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. Fünfte, revidierte Auflage, Besorgt von Johannes Winckelmann. J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck): Tübingen.
Weinreich, P. (1991) Ethnic Identities and Indigenous Psychologies in Pluralist Societies. *Psychology and Developing Societies* 3 (1): 73–92.
Weinreich, P., Luk, C. L. and Bond, M. (1996) Ethnic Stereotyping and Identification in a Multicultural Context: 'Acculturation', Self-Esteem and Identity Diffusion in Hong Kong Chinese University Students. *Psychology and Developing Societies* 8 (1): 107–169.
Weinreich, P. (1998) Social Exclusion and Multiple Identities. *Soundings: A Journal of Politics and Culture* 9: 139–144.

Петкова, Д. (2013) *Културни идентичности в интеркултурен диалог*. Велико Търново: Фабер.

Albena Nakova is an Associate Professor, PhD in Sociology, Doctor of Sociological Sciences, Deputy Director of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Her main research interests are in the field of ethnosociology and ethnopsychology - national and ethnic identity, interethnic relations and communication in cognitive terms, ethnic tolerance, interethnic distances. Over the last years, her research has focused more on issues related to demographic policy, migration and refugees, and in particular on issues related to cultural differences in the age of mobility, interactions between peoples and cultures, pluralism and cultural distances, migrations and changes in identity, supranational and European identity.
E-mail: albena_nakova.manolova@abv.bg

THE SUPRANATIONAL DIMENSION OF SELF-IDENTIFICATION PROCESSES OF BULGARIAN CITIZENS FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER EU ACCESSION

Vanya Ivanova

Abstract: The article examines the evolving sense of self-identification with Europe and the European Union, fifteen years after Bulgaria's accession. It explores key questions regarding Bulgarian citizens' perceptions of Europe and the EU and their contemporary understanding of Europe in various dimensions – geographical, political, cultural, social, and economic. Additionally, the study assesses the extent to which Bulgarians see themselves as European citizens and the strength of their identification with Europe and the EU. It presents results from a mixed-methods study conducted under the project 'Contemporary Bulgarian Identity: National and European Dimensions'.
Keywords: European identity, supranational identity, Bulgaria, Europe, European Union

Introduction

The Republic of Bulgaria (together with Romania) joined the European Union on January 1st, 2007. That date is an important landmark in the recent history of the country and its citizens. In the pre-accession period, Bulgaria implemented various reforms to synchronise its democratic governance and economic systems with European legislation and practice. Both the Bulgarian political elite and Bulgarian citizens shared a positive perception of the European integration process. According to a poll conducted by the Market Links Agency and the Open Society Institute (OSI) in Sofia, one year before accession, 72% of Bulgarian citizens approved of the country's becoming part of the EU (Dimitrova, 2012). Thus, the pre-accession period and the years immediately following accession were viewed very positively and optimistically. In this context, the text will focus on self-identification processes with Europe and the European Union, fifteen years after Bulgaria joined the Union.

The article uses the terms 'identity' and 'identification' following Zygmunt Baumann, who suggests that 'perhaps instead of talking about identities, inherited or acquired, it would be more in keeping with the realities of the globalizing world to speak of identification, a never-ending, always incomplete, unfinished and open-ended activity in which we all, by necessity or by choice, are engaged' (2001: 129). This understanding goes in line with the work of

Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, who emphasise the 'identification' as being a processual and active verb that 'invites us to specify the agents that do the identifying' (2000: 14).

Another theoretical frame applied in the article is that of constructivist integration theory, which distinguishes between ethnic and civic identities. Dirk Leuffen, Berthold Rittberger and Frank Schimmelfennig (2022) propose an ethnic conceptualisation of the European identity, described as a 'sense of belonging and allegiance to the imagined community of Europeans as defined by a common culture or history'. The other line of interpretation suggests that the 'civic conception of a European identity is based on the values and norms of European integration'. Thus, D. Leuffen et al. explicate 'Europeanness' as defined by adherence to such principles as liberal democracy, national diversity, multilateralism, and supranational integration. We can also distinguish these two conceptions of 'Europe' as 'thick' and 'thin' European identities. Whereas a thick European identity resembles national identities in being based on group identification, a thin European identity consists of abstract transnational values and norms (Leuffen et al., 2022: 126).

Another theoretical foundation of the article is put in a nutshell by Ivanka Mavrodieva as follows:

> The term 'European identity' (…) is a part of the long and oversized political project; it is a social construct, etc. From a geographic point of view, 'Europe' is a continent, from a political point of view the EU is an alliance, and political association and the integration is an open process. Therefore, the concept of 'European identity' is a complex construct including social and psychological elements, and it demands the process of building the collective identity and the sense of affiliation of the EU in parallel with the national identity. Simultaneously, the 'European identity' insists on unification, association, and communication around the basic idea, universal values, and acceptable causes, and it is reasonable to conclude that the process is uneven in the countries that are members of the EU (Mavrodieva, 2014: 2).

Thus, based on the case of Bulgaria, the article will dwell on comprehending to what extent the complex process of building a collective supranational identity is taking place in Bulgaria, and whether a sense of affiliation with the political union is evident fifteen years after accession to the EU.

Another analytical lens in looking into the construction of the European identity is by distinguishing two key aspects: the symbolic and the pragmatic/utilitarian; here, this distinction is illustrated with examples from the research results under consideration. A way to legitimate the European project from below is through the perceptions of European citizens; this is one of the optics the current article explores. The analysis leans on the idea that 'individuals

hold multiple social identities' (Risse, 2010: 39) and that the supranational structure of the European Union could serve to empower EU citizens who are foremost citizens of their national state:

> As Europe is meant to be a political community, identifying with it should entail some ways of considering oneself as a citizen, as a politically empowered member of the European Union. People are already citizens of their own country. Identification with Europe follows, albeit in different ways, from national identification (Duchesne, 2008: 403).

As for identity and identification processes, this article does not aim to present an extensive overview of the growing literature on European identity. Many Bulgarian scholars – Mavrodieva (2014), Mitev (Митев, 2005), Nakova (2023), Fotev (Фотев, 2009; 2019), to name but a few – have worked on general or specific aspects or groups in connection with the European dimension of identity construction. The article will focus mainly on the results from seven focus group discussions (FGDs) and some trends revealed by the national representative survey conducted in 2021. More extensively, the results of the national representative survey are discussed in the first article of the current volume by Albena Nakova (2025).

Methodology

The study presents results collected under the project 'Contemporary Bulgarian Identity – National and European Dimensions', the research design of which includes both quantitative (a national representative survey and a smaller topical online survey) and qualitative (seven focus group discussions in seven regions in Bulgaria and semi-structured interviews) methods. The analysis that follows will focus on the national survey results related to the European dimension of Bulgarian citizens' identity today; I will also illustrate certain tendencies with opinions expressed by focus group participants regarding aspects of European identification in response to the following questions: what does Europe/the European Union represent for you; does the idea of being a European citizen hold a place in your self-perception; how do you perceive yourself – mostly as a Bulgarian citizen or mostly as a European citizen; why; what do you associate your idea of European citizenship with; do you feel at home or a foreigner in Europe; what is most important to you in the idea of belonging to Europe; how strong is your feeling of belonging to Europe/EU.

The national representative survey and the focus group discussions were conducted during the first stage of the project in 2021. The FGDs were conducted in seven regions of Bulgaria, in seven cities of different sizes,

including the Capital. The cities in question were Veliko Tarnovo[1] (Central Bulgaria), Haskovo[2] (South-East Bulgaria), Varna[3] (North-East), Burgas[4] (South-East), Vratsa[5] (North-West Bulgaria), Blagoevgrad[6] (South-West Bulgaria), and Sofia[7] (capital of Bulgaria). The chosen approach was expert focus group discussions (FGD) in which were invited specialists in different fields of science and business, representatives of the public administration, and students. The first FGD brought together the perspectives of historians, ethnologists, and archaeologists from Veliko Tarnovo University and the Regional History Museum in Veliko Tarnovo. The second FGD was held in Haskovo with representatives from the Regional Library, including philologists, librarians, and specialists in cultural heritage. The third was held in Varna with representatives of the tourism services in the city. The fourth, held in Burgas, probed the views of experts with extensive international experience in different areas of business. The fifth FGD, held in Vratsa, was attended by representatives of the local administration. The sixth was held in Sofia and was attended by lecturers in academic disciplines such as European Studies, Political Science, Sociology, etc. The seventh was held at South-West University in Blagoevgrad and was attended by undergraduate students and two PhD students. The age span of all FGD participants was between 19 and 76 years. Two of the focus groups included representatives of ethnic minorities. The duration of each FGD was around two hours; the moderators encouraged participants to voice their various and complementary opinions.

Research results

The national representative survey results show that Europe is perceived by the largest percentages of participants as a 'geographical place' (39.3%), a 'cultural heritage' (23.9%), and a 'civilisation' (21.9%), while 'economic union' (20.4%)

[1] Conducted on 19 July 2021, by Albena Nakova and Vanya Ivanova with 7 participants: 4 women and 3 men, all with higher education.

[2] Conducted on 21 October 2021 by Albena Nakova and Vanya Ivanova, with 5 women aged 32 to 53 years.

[3] Conducted on 19 August 2021 by Albena Nakova with 6 females with 3 males and 6 women, a total of 9 people, aged 19 to 76.

[4] Conducted on 26 August 2021 by Albena Nakova and Vanya Ivanova, with 5 participants, 1 man and 4 women, aged 20 to 67 years.

[5] Conducted on 22 April 2022 by Albena Nakova with 7 participants, with 2 men and 5 women, between the ages of 24 and 47 years.

[6] Conducted on 23 May 2021 by Albena Nakova and Vanya Ivanova, with 5 participants, 2 men and 3 women, aged between 19 and 40 years.

[7] Conducted on 20 May 2021 by Albena Nakova and Vanya Ivanova with 8 participants – 2 men and 6 women, aged between 30 and 56 years.

and 'political union' (13.4%) – the characteristics associated with the EU – gather smaller shares. Significantly, however, a quarter of the Bulgarian citizens (26%) see Europe as emblematic of a high standard of living, which hints at a characteristic of the EU that Bulgarian citizens also emphasised in the focus group discussions – the pragmatic benefits of EU membership, an advantage that Bulgarian citizens strongly desire.

The features of the EU are listed in the following order: 'freedom of movement', indicated by 50.2%, followed by 'common civic rights' (34.0%), 'common democratic values' (28.3%), 'access to European education' (22.0%), and 'access to European funding' (15.8%). Lower shares of answers went to 'protection against discrimination' (11.3%), 'common legislation' (10.7%), 'common policy' (8.9%), 'common cultural heritage' (7.2%), 'common European institutions' (7.2%), common symbols – flag, anthem' (3.1%), and 'I do not know/no answer' (10.9%). Thus, Bulgarian citizens again emphasised mainly the pragmatic benefits of Bulgaria's EU membership. Not surprisingly, respondents associated the European Union mainly with possible benefits rather than symbols, as evidenced by the fact that only 3.1% chose common symbols as an important characteristic of the EU. Thus, the national survey showed that the construction of a European identity among Bulgarian citizens is based mostly on consideration of the practical aspect and benefits of EU membership, which provides the opportunity for free movement, access to European education, and European funding. The conclusion that the processes of formation of a sense of European identity have already begun was confirmed by the fact that 30.8% of the people in Bulgaria identify themselves as EU citizens, although this share is much smaller than that of citizens who indicated national identity (84.7%)[8] (Накова и Иванова, 2023: 406–407).

The focus group discussions also yielded the finding that the European identity is complementary for Bulgarian citizens. It does not exclude the national identity; on the contrary, the national identity is a foundation for the supranational/European identity. Thus, in Risse's classification, Bulgarian citizens are closer to the so-called 'inclusive nationalists', described by the author as follows:

> A majority of Europeans identify with Europe as well as with their nation-state. The main cleavage in mass public opinion is between those who exclusively identify with their nation-state ('exclusive nationalists') and those who identify with Europe as their secondary identity ('inclusive nationalists'). 'The Europeans' who strongly identify with Europe are the younger, the better educated, the wealthier, and the more politically informed parts of the population. Moreover, European identity is strongly correlated with cosmopolitan and other liberal values (Risse, 2010: 61).

[8] The sum of the percentages exceeds 100% as respondents indicated more than one answer.

The trend evidenced by the national representative survey was confirmed by the finding that the possibility of free movement was assessed as positive in all seven focus group discussions.

The neutral understanding and perception of Europe as a set of territories acquired certain nuances when the focus group discussions touched on history, cultural heritage, and civilisations. Being part of the same continent in the past and today was seen by the participants as an inclusive marker of belonging, but a marker that is more abstract than tangible.

Concerning experiencing Europe and the European Union in pragmatic terms, I distinguish three dimensions, which overlap and overflow into each other: the real, positive experience; the wishful imaginary experience; and the disappointing experience that refers to 'obligations rather than benefits'. In the following part, I will list key findings from all seven focus group discussions to highlight specific arguments without repeating them.

The focus group discussion in Veliko Tarnovo consisted of 7 representatives, 4 women, and 3 men, who are historians, ethnologists, and archaeologists by profession. An important statement made by one of the participants positioned Bulgarians thus: 'It is the EU that makes us commensurable', although 'we have been both culturally, and historically more connected to the East than to the West'. Thus, we understand that the political union makes the Bulgarian citizens comparable with the other citizens of the member states, although in cultural terms, the relation to the East is felt to be stronger. The youngest participant in this FGD exemplified the construction of supranational identity beyond the scope of the EU:

> I feel like a citizen of the world. Maybe it is because I am of this generation, of the 90s, and now my ID card makes me a citizen of Europe and my passport makes me a citizen of the world. I have the absolute freedom to go wherever I want and do whatever I want. I grab my purse and I go wherever I want. … I have the absolute self-confidence that with my personal qualities and what I earn here, I am commensurate with young people in Austria and with my peers in Italy, for example (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1221-III, 2022: 8).

In contrast with this statement, another participant explained that free movement was good, but there was a difference between Bulgarians and people from other EU countries:

> I'm saying that, yes, we can travel more freely, that is wonderful, but in reality, what opportunities do we have, going abroad we were all younger, and some of us have gone in different groups, student groups, we meet people, our peers from abroad, from Europe, well the difference is huge, [between] their opportunities, our opportunities. They're full of educational programs, they go all over the world, and

> we didn't have money for a laptop, right, and that is a huge difference, you can't go pounding your chest and saying, I'm European. We're not there yet (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1221-III, 2022: 9).

However, FGD participants assessed free travel within the EU in two aspects: as indicating they belonged to a community ('We may not realise it, but having this Bulgarian ID card available, I travel all over Europe, I know that I am at home, I am not talking about the financial part, I am talking about the freedom to move, the freedom of movement. That you belong to a community' (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1221-III, 2022: 11) and as the possibility to find a job ('As a European citizen, you can travel freely, it is easier to find a job' (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1221-III, 2022: 11). Another resident of Veliko Tarnovo explained that it was not necessary to move to another European country to feel European, because the connection with Europe is through the European values:

> However, being in Bulgaria, I feel European because, being part of the EU, over time, I have somehow become aware of and believe in European values. And these European values are somehow very important to me because they are part of our politics and we are part of them (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1221-III, 2022: 9).

As the participants were professional ethnologists, historians, and archaeologists, one of their shared assertions in this FGD was connected with the history and the past: Europe was seen as the cradle of civilisation, and Bulgarians were said to belong to it historically. Concerning the EU, one of the participants concluded: 'Certainly, after 2007 Bulgarians are living much better and more freely, whether they realise it or not' (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1221-III, 2022: 9).

The focus group discussion in Haskovo consisted of five women aged 32 to 53. Four of them firmly asserted they felt they were Bulgarians more than Europeans. Only one of them, the youngest in this focus group, said both the identifications, Bulgarian and European, were equally important to her; she explained:

> I feel like a European citizen. When Bulgaria entered the European Union, I had just enrolled in university, my first year, I still remember that time, and I was happy. In this way, anyone who wants to travel can travel easily, whether to study, to work or just to visit. We have all sorts of differences compared with these countries [the other member states], historically, and economically, however, I don't feel any less European. I would call myself an Eastern European (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1220-III, 2022: 18).

The emphasis in this statement is the possibility to travel and to have the same opportunities beyond the differences; this participant is specifying an identification with the geographical part of Europe she comes from: Eastern Europe.

Another perspective on European identity is whether Bulgarians are perceived as Europeans by other European citizens:

> In the beginning, a worse opinion was formed about us as a nation and we were placed on a different level because, at first, other people invaded there [the participant is referring to the Roma emigrants who moved to various European countries], who were not the brains of the nation, those were drained later, but they gave a different image of, so to say, the Bulgarian. And they [the Europeans] acquired a different notion. But that does not mean that we should equate ourselves [with this first image], we know how much each one of us is worth, and each one of us can judge well who has what strengths and what weaknesses, and it doesn't mean that every other European is better, it may turn out that we are much more European than some other person, so we have reason enough to feel we are good Europeans (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1220-III, 2022: 19).

This statement refers to the personal and professional qualities that define a European, which are connected with a high quality of professional skills. All the women in that FGD confirmed that they had no reason to feel less European in that regard. However, the fact that the question as to 'how they see us' was raised reveals some inner tension and the need to prove oneself:

> I will add that you and I, and most of my colleagues, have been to forums that include Europeans, what they do, and what we do, professionally I mean, we see that we work just as hard as they do, and we have the same achievements, so we should not feel worthless (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1220-III, 2022: 19).

Being perceived as different and not European enough, and the fact that Bulgaria is at the bottom of various European rankings of member states, also calls into question the Europeanness of Bulgarians, a quality they must prove to have based on a common history:

> I think we are always at the bottom of Europe, and we are always the last-born of the family, we are always kind of an embarrassment to the Europeans: 'they [the Bulgarians] are from Eastern Europe, so don't pay attention to them', that kind of thing… We are indeed part [of Europe], history shows that we are part of the European culture, we are one of the most ancient countries, all that is a fact, but the very attitude, the very way of life, the politics even, somehow pushes us to the last place, we are always in the background, and that somehow cannot give us the self-confidence to identify ourselves with the real Europeans, so to speak (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1220-III, 2022: 18).

Thus, an important finding from this FGD is that Bulgaria's success as a country among the other member states is judged by its position on various scales, which influences European identification, especially in the eyes of other member states, particularly the Western ones. Thus, while the political union provides the possibility to be an equal member in terms of freedoms and rights, the extent of feeling European also depends on how successful the country and its citizens are and how they are viewed by other member states.

The focus group discussion in Varna consisted of 9 participants, 6 females and 3 males, aged 19 to 76 years, most of whom are employed in hotel services; this was the FGD with less educated participants. All participants here stated they felt to be European but were foremost Bulgarian citizens. As in all the focus groups, they associated European citizenship with free travel, but most of them could not say, and did not know what the European Union exactly signified for them. Those who had travelled to other countries associated the EU with 'a big city', where 'everything is similar'. One of the most interesting answers obtained from this FGD was that the EU was 'something temporary because the European Union is going to break up'. Various responses were given regarding how strong the sense of belonging to Europe was for them, which varied between strong and weak.

The focus group discussion in Burgas consisted of 5 people, 1 male and 4 female, aged from 20 to 67 years; the youngest participant, currently in Bulgaria, was a student abroad (in the United Kingdom).

People in this FGD stated an argument that was also mentioned in the Haskovo FGD: 'In the EU, the Roma people were those who mainly migrated at first, and hence, in the eyes of Europeans, the Bulgarians are Roma'. Thus, although all the participants from Burgas had travelled much in Europe and declared that 'there, with the least effort, one feels adequate', they had the feeling that Bulgarians were not perceived as equals by other European citizens. The participant studying in the UK explained the benefits of being a young Bulgarian citizen there before Brexit as follows:

> I don't know how it will be in the future. But for now, I think national identity will be preserved. It is very nice to be a European citizen and to know that you have the same rights as any European citizen. I felt that very strongly with Brexit. For example, I have the right to receive a state loan for my studies because I am a European. I am applying with the same documents as any other European. That is very good. And, if we were outside the EU, it wouldn't be like that, it would be much more complicated (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1249-III, 2023: 13).

Of all seven focus groups, the respondents in Burgas had the strongest sense of belonging to Europe in general; because they had travelled extensively in

Europe and beyond for their business activities or educational or professional reasons. Based on this experience, they could claim a strong European identity connected to culture, and history; they saw the European continent as the 'cradle of modern civilisation':

> Europe is the cradle of modern civilisation. I am happy to be born on this continent, to belong to this continent, and to have access to the whole continent. This is a wonderful place. Unfortunately, it is starting to lose ground a little bit. Unfortunately, economic processes are determining [factors]. But Europe is beginning to lag in this respect, and Asia is gaining strength (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1249-III, 2023: 14).

Additionally, one of the respondents expressed her concern that the leadership of Europe was, on the whole, aging:

> The gene [of leadership] is wearing out, so, in my opinion, Europe is a tired, gasping-for-breath old woman who, unless she does something, unless she changes, can no longer be the bosom of civilisation and show the way to the future. I think that Europe is now aging, but at the same time, it is so full of pride that it does not even notice it [the fact]. It is stuck in bureaucracy, and if Europe does not realise this, the future will go to the other genes – India, China, and Asia, in general (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1249-III, 2023: 15).

Besides the indicated aging of population and leadership, another rather negative aspect that the focus group participants found important was the bureaucracy they associated with the European Union; the notion was that, due to its cumbersome administration, the EU is losing its innovative focus and is wearing out.

The focus group discussion in Vratsa was conducted predominantly with experts working in different departments of Vratsa Municipality. They, too, associated the positive experience of Europe and the European Union foremost with the freedom to travel, study, and work abroad without restrictions, adding to that, for example, easy access to services in other EU countries:

> Services offered by embassies abroad are now at a completely different quality level. My mother and father lived in Spain for many years and now had to change their identity cards. This is now very easy to do at the embassy in Madrid. You just fill in a form electronically, print it out, sign it, and they prepare your identity card and hand it to you. I would not be surprised if they couriered it to your home. And years ago, when we were not in the EU, it was not so easy (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1247-III, 2023: 23).

However, the positive experience of working, studying, and living in other EU member states, reveals the sad fact that people go there because of a lack

of employment opportunities and poor social security in Bulgaria, especially in smaller towns like Vratsa; the participants pointed out this was a problem for the whole north-western region of Bulgaria, wherefore people had to seek employment abroad:

> How can you feel you are a citizen of Europe when you have studied here, studied, studied, obtained your diplomas, skills, and knowledge, and you go to work abroad, for example, in a home for the elderly, as unqualified staff; so to speak, generally, what kind of self-esteem can you have when you are working under people who do not have a fifth of your education? How can you have the feeling you are a citizen of Europe and that you are equal to the rest? (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1247-III, 2023: 21).

People who do either seasonal work or migrate for longer periods to earn their living in other EU member states particularly look upon Europe as a place of opportunity, but the poor conditions in Bulgaria become all the more evident, which again affirms the feeling of Bulgarian citizens that they are 'European but not quite' (Hristova, 2023: 110) in terms of standard of living and financial opportunities.

Another rather negative aspect is connected with the obligations that come with EU membership. Similar to the focus groups in Haskovo and Burgas, participants in Vratsa talked about how Bulgarians are perceived and treated by the European Union. An important observation here is that the participants referred to how they were perceived in this particular case not by other EU citizens but by the Union as a political and economic structure, expressed by one participant:

> Here we work in the Programmes and Projects Department of Vratsa Municipality and we are obliged to do projects for Roma integration; even if we do not want to, we are obliged to, so that Roma people will not go abroad. They allow us to do everything possible – to give them benefits and housing, to find jobs for them, to 'pamper' them. That is what spoils them. Europe simply obliges us to keep them here. Well, aren't they treating us differently, isn't the EU itself treating us differently? (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1247-III, 2023: 21-22).

In the Vratsa FGD, the sense of Bulgarian identity strongly prevailed, and even the youngest participant said she was not interested in either studying or living in other European member states, and she does not watch any Television as well. On the contrary, another participant responded to this statement that he teaches his children to study and leave Bulgaria, concluding 'which is not right, but it is necessary' (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1247-III, 2023: 24).

The focus group discussion in Blagoevgrad was conducted with students from the South-West University 'Neofit Rilski' in Blagoevgrad (Bachelor and

post-graduate level). One participant was a student from North Macedonia, two were from smaller towns near Blagoevgrad (Dupnitsa and Bansko), and two were from the city of Blagoevgrad.

When asked whether they felt like European citizens, the predominant answer was that they felt Bulgarian foremost (the citizen of North Macedonia, respectively, felt Macedonian), and only in second place European citizens. One of the participants felt the Bulgarian and European identities as equally strong, but all the others indicated their Bulgarian identity as stronger. Two polarities can be distinguished. On one hand, the issue of the difference in material prosperity between Bulgaria and the other member states was explicitly voiced: 'I don't feel European because neither our prices nor our salaries are European' (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1250-III, 2023: 9). On the other hand, besides visa-free travel and the possibility to work and study in other EU member states, 'in terms of transposition of legislation, there are positive aspects' (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1250-III, 2023: 9).

The European identity was seen by focus group participants as the result of working together with people of various nationalities, which adds the supranational dimension of identity construction. However, a negative consequence of the multicultural exchange was thought to be an eventual impact on the Bulgarian language, which might lose its identity due to the use of too many foreign words. The following is another negative aspect connected to the perception of the EU in Bulgaria:

> Unfortunately, we in Bulgaria misunderstand European funding and the creation of NGOs simply to win projects and then leave nothing afterward. Many NGOs misuse EU funds. This also leads to confusion among Bulgarian citizens as concerns the general perceptions of Europe and the EU (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1250-III, 2023: 14).

The fact that all the participants from this FGD felt like foreigners when travelling in other EU countries due to the different standards of living once again indicates their rather distant identification with the European Union. However, working in other EU countries is experienced as a hardship that, however, given the better wages earned in the foreign countries and the better social welfare systems there, permits saving money and sending it home; this is perceived as a positive aspect. Another argument, which adds to those expressed in the other FGDs, is that the EU is a place where rules are followed, unlike in Bulgaria; this opinion is significant as it puts into question the rule of law in Bulgaria. When participants were asked about their sense of belonging to Europe, one of the answers suggests how the national context (political, economic, social) correlates with feeling part of Europe:

> It [the sense of belonging] is changing because it is closely linked to the situation in Bulgaria. Maybe when something improves thanks to the EU, then we feel more European. On the contrary, when we have negative consequences from our EU membership, then we do not want to be a member of the EU. I would define my sense of belonging to Europe as medium, neither strong nor weak (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1250-III, 2023: 16).

Another respondent explained: 'I think 70% of Bulgarians go to Europe to earn some money, to build a house, to buy a car. You cannot have that here if you do not acquire some inheritance from your family' (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1250-III, 2023: 16). Thus, identification with Europe and the European Union grows when a gap is filled in the person's present condition but also depends on how the home country (Bulgaria) is positioned in the point of view of the Other (EU).

The *focus group discussion in Sofia* included 9 participants, 7 female and 2 male. This was the most highly educated group, as most of the participants were university lecturers, professors, and associate professors in Sociology, European studies, Political sciences, etc. All of them declared that they felt to be Bulgarian more than European, however, they explained that the two identifications did not oppose but complemented each other: 'Our identity cards say Republic of Bulgaria, European Union, the two are inseparable: 'We, as Bulgarians, are Europeans, I do not see why we should see the two as opposites'; 'We, too, are Europeans in terms of history' (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1251-III, 2023: 29). The strongest benefit of being a member of the EU, as stated in the other FGDs, was the possibility it provided of 'landing at the airports and passing quickly', defined as 'a privilege'. The EU was associated with examples such as guaranteeing the four freedoms, the equality of Bulgaria as a member state to the other European countries, the high-quality food (GMO-free food) within the European Union (a rule that does not apply outside the EU), among others. However, the participants did not perceive Bulgaria as 100 percent equal in various spheres, for instance, for European funding and agriculture:

> We did not get the subsidies that we should have gotten at an earlier stage, we got them later. For me, the EU should have a non-discriminatory attitude to all members. When you sign this treaty, the EU must respect this policy. You have more obligations than rights, but ultimately it should be bilateral. In my opinion, that is what being a European citizen means (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1251-III, 2023: 30).

Conclusions

The process of forming a supranational European identity has begun in Bulgaria, but this identity is still rather weakly felt fifteen years after the country acceded to the EU. The feeling of closeness to Europe and the EU is

steadily growing, especially because of the possibility of free travel and equal access to quality education (Ivanova, 2022). Bulgarians see themselves as Europeans in addition to their national identity. Judging by the results of the focus group discussions, Bulgarians' association and affiliation with the EU has not even reached the stage of 'thin transnational civic identity' (Leuffen et al., 2022: 28); personal association with the political union is mainly based on the transposition of legislation and, to a certain extent, the rule of law, but this is felt as something imposed and obligatory rather than empowering for European citizens. The freedom to travel and the possibility to work in other member states is seen as a good opportunity; however, the context of not having such opportunities in Bulgaria affirms the feeling that Bulgaria is not European enough, as discussed by M. Hristova (2023: 110) in a study on the new Russian-speaking migration to Bulgaria perceiving the country as 'European but not quite'.

The presented study confirms, as Latcheva, Datler, and Rossbacher (2012: 246) argue, that 'the identification with Europe is, as opposed to that with a nation, based on rationale, utility, and content rather than on emotion'. Bulgaria remains closer to the heart of most Bulgarians; however, as discussed in other studies (Risse, 2010: 57), Europe and the EU are constructed not in opposition but as complementary to the national identity. Identifying with the European Union is contextual; it depends on the political and economic situation in Bulgaria, but also on how the country and the Bulgarians are perceived and treated by the European Union and other European citizens. Bulgarian citizens are aware that the Bulgarian ID card gives them additional rights (with the highest share of mentions of free travel, work, and study) as EU citizens. However, based on their experience and feelings, Bulgarians consciously or subconsciously know that these rights do not have the same meaning for the citizens of the different member states. Thus, 15 years after Bulgaria's accession to the EU, Bulgarians are not certain of their self-identification with the European Union; their answers in this respect vary from 'we have always been part of Europe' to 'we are never going to be like them'.

Acknowledgements: The study was carried out in the framework of the research project *Contemporary Bulgarian Identity – National and European Dimensions*, funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund of the Ministry of Education and Science (contract agreement No. КП-06-Н50/6 from 30.11.2020). It reflects the author's views alone.

References:

Baumann, Z. (2001) Identity in a Globalizing World. *Social Anthropology* 9(2): 121–129.

Brubaker, R., and Cooper, F. (2000) Beyond "Identity." *Theory and Society* 29: 1–47. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1007068714468.

Dimitrova, A. (2012) Public Opinion in Bulgaria with Regard to the EU Membership in the Context of the Economic Crisis. Towards a ?Bulgarian Exception'?. *L'Europe en Formation* 2: 289–304. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3917/eufor.364.0289.

Duchesne, S. (2008) Waiting for a European Identity… Reflections on the Process of Identification with Europe. *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 9 (4): 397–410.

Hristova, M. (2023) New Russian-Speaking Immigration in Bulgaria: Lifestyle Migration, Between a New and an Old Home. In: P. Hristov et al. (eds). *Coming to, and Staying in, the Poorest Country in the EU. Immigration to Bulgaria.* Cambridge: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, pp. 85-119.

Ivanova, V. (2022) Bulgarian, European and Global Identities Interplay and Socio-cultural Adaptation of Bulgarian Returnees. Research Result. *Sociology and Management* 8 (1): 9–19. DOI: 10.18413/2408-9338-2022-8-1-0-2.

Latcheva, R., Datler, G. and Rossbacher, E. (2012) The Concept of European Identity: Overused and Underspecified? In: S. Salzborn, E. Davidov and J. Reinecke (eds). *Methods, Theories, and Empirical Applications in the Social Sciences*. Festschrift for Peter Schmidt. Wiesbaden: Springer, pp. 235-248.

Leuffen, D., Rittberger, B. and Schimmelfennig, F. (2022) *Integration and Differentiation in the European Union. Theory and Policies*. Second Edition. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mavrodieva, I. (2014) The Concept of the Bulgarian "European Identity" Across the Bulgarian Language and Political Rhetoric in Bulgaria. *US-China Foreign Language* 12 (1): 1–16.

Nakova, A. (2023) European Dimensions of the Modern Identity of Young People in Bulgaria. In: R. Jeleva (ed). *The Young Generation and the Next Europe*. Sofia: Prof. Marin Drinov Publishing House, pp. 174-185.

Nakova, A. (2025) Hybridisation of Identity – the Bulgarian Case. In: M. Slavkova, Y., Erolova, V. Ivanova and J. Popcheva (eds). *Between the Worlds – Contesting (Im) Possible Identities.* Vol. 6. Sofia: IEFSEM-BAS & Paradigma, pp. 17-36.

Risse, T. (2010) *A Community of Europeans?: Transnational Identities and Public Spheres*. Ithaka, New York: Cornell University Press.

АИЕФЕМ – БАН (Архив на Института за етнология и фолклористика с Етнографски музей – Българска академия на науките), а.е. 1247-III. Теренни материали на тема: „Национални и европейски измерения на съвременната идентичност на българите. Фокус групова дискусия – гр. Враца", Албена Накова, 2023.

АИЕФЕМ – БАН (Архив на Института за етнология и фолклористика с Етнографски музей – Българска академия на науките), а.е. 1248-III. Теренни материали на тема: „Национални и европейски измерения на съвременната идентичност на българите. Фокус групова дискусия – гр. Варна", Албена Накова, 2023.

АИЕФЕМ – БАН (Архив на Института за етнология и фолклористика с Етнографски музей – Българска академия на науките), а.е. 1249-III. Теренни материали на тема: „Национални и европейски измерения на съвременната идентичност на българите. Фокус групова дискусия – гр. Бургас“, Албена Накова, 2023.

АИЕФЕМ – БАН (Архив на Института за етнология и фолклористика с Етнографски музей – Българска академия на науките), а.е. 1250-III. Теренни материали на тема: „Национални и европейски измерения на съвременната идентичност на българите. Фокус групова дискусия – гр. Благоевград“, Албена Накова, 2023.

АИЕФЕМ – БАН (Архив на Института за етнология и фолклористика с Етнографски музей – Българска академия на науките), а.е. 1251-III. Теренни материали на тема: „Национални и европейски измерения на съвременната идентичност на българите. Фокус групова дискусия – гр. София“, Ваня Иванова, 2023.

АИЕФЕМ – БАН (Архив на Института за етнология и фолклористика с Етнографски музей – Българска академия на науките), а.е. 1220-III. Теренни материали на тема: „Национални и европейски измерения на съвременната идентичност на българите. Фокус групова дискусия – гр. Хасково“, Ваня Иванова, 2022.

АИЕФЕМ – БАН (Архив на Института за етнология и фолклористика с Етнографски музей – Българска академия на науките), а.е. 1221-III. Теренни материали на тема: „Национални и европейски измерения на съвременната идентичност на българите. Фокус групова дискусия – гр. Велико Търново“, Ваня Иванова, 2022.

Митев, П.-Е. (2005) *Новите млади. Българската младеж и европейската перспектива.* София: Изток-Запад.

Накова, А. и Иванова, В. (2023) Европейски измерения на съвременната идентичност на българските граждани. *Български фолклор* 2023 (3): 391–411.

Фотев, Г. (съст.) (2009) *Европейски ценности в днешното българско общество*. София: УИ ‘Св. Климент Охридски’.

Фотев, Г. (съст.) (2019) *Европейски ценности: Новата констелация*. София: Нов български университет.

Vanya Ivanova, PhD, is an Assistant Professor at the Balkan Ethnology Department at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Her research interests are in the spheres of international migrations, mobilities, return migration, highly qualified migration, forced migration, refugee adaptation and integration, dealing with the recent past, and others.

E-mail: vanya.ivanova@iefem.bas.bg

BULGARIAN NATIONAL FLAG IN EVERYDAY LIFE AND FESTIVITIES – USAGE, PERCEPTION, ATTITUDES

Julia Popcheva

Abstract: The Bulgarian national flag is one of the State symbols and its official usage is strictly regulated both in the Bulgarian Constitution and in a specific 'Law on the State Seal and the National Flag of the Republic of Bulgaria' with clearly stated institutional obligations, size, ratio between the different colours, the exact type of the colours and other specificities. Besides its legislatively determined use, the Bulgarian flag and its tricolour combination can be seen on and at many public and private places, occasions and events. The paper reveals the types of everyday and festive usage of the flag, its presence in people's daily routines, and the messages its promotion sends to society and communities. Different perceptions of flag presence are also discussed as public debates about its usage appear not only in media but also during informal conversations. What are the pros and cons concerning the flag usage, how important is the flag in expressing a number of identities and what symbolic meanings it has, are among the main questions answered in the research. A survey, observations and conversations concerning the topic have been conducted as part of the scientific project 'Contemporary Bulgarian Identity – National and European Dimensions', funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund.
Keywords: national flag, banal nationalism, informal nationalism, everyday flagging

A popular and highly recognisable symbol, the Bulgarian national flag can be seen waving or hanging not only over official state buildings but also in cars, on the top of high hills or even upon a piece of boiled corn on the beach. Its colours are used when painting or illuminating facades, fences, benches, and other public places. In Bulgaria, the national flag and flag colours can be found in multiple spaces and occasions, full of symbolic meaning or perceived as an inseparable part of somebody's daily life and routine.

This research is inspired by and is based on an online exhibition[1], part of the scientific project 'Contemporary Bulgarian identity – National and European Dimensions'. The main goal was to find and document the national flag and its colours placed at unexpected venues or objects around the country. It was my responsibility to analyse, categorise, comment and curate the exhibition. This task provoked the project team's observation skills. We became dedicated 'flag hunters' and, after almost 16 months of monitoring

[1] The online exhibition is available in Bulgarian at https://nie-bg.com/?page_id=21 (accessed 25 May 2024).

and photographing daily routines and festivities, in the Spring of 2022, we released our initial online exhibition version (updated in 2023 and 2024). It was the feedback on it that triggered my desire to expand, what was so far a visual ethnographic observation, into a research project on flag usage and flagging Bulgarians' daily life.

The following paper reveals *when* and *where* people use the Bulgarian flag and its colours, *what* their perceptions of it as a symbol are and *how* they feel when expressing opinions and attitudes over flag-related topics. Its main goal is descriptive – to provide an overview of the types of flag usage, but also to discuss its role in constructing and maintaining national identity in an informal way. It is important to point out that the explored types of use do not include flag appearance in the online environment and presence in the emigrant context, as both require different and dedicated research.

Used to promote someone's identity, the national flag expresses a sense of belonging to a State, a place of origin, and, from an institutional perspective, a dominion. According to Katharine Gelber, it is also perceived as a natural medium to express personal perception of a nation (2012). As a symbol, the national flag is strongly related to nation-building and nationalism (Elgenius, 2011; Jaskulowski, 2015; Roy, 2006). Furthermore, in contemporary societies, it is present in everyday life – in many formal and informal ways.

This daily usage is often referred to as the so-called 'banal nationalism' or 'the ideological habits which enable an established nation to be reproduced' and through which citizens are reminded daily of their 'national place in the world of nations' (Billig, 1995: 6–8). In addition Michael Billig points out that in '[t]he metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building' (1995: 8) and refers it to a mindless flagging (1995: 38). In its concept, the author uses examples mainly (but not only) from USA daily flagging as a banality exploring instrument, which in turn leads to a discussion whether 'banal' is the proper term to use in daily flagging routine cases of other nations (cf. Antonsich, 2015; Jenkins, 2007; Spasic, 2017). In the following pages, I will also argue the term in the Bulgarian context, debating the rationality of daily flagging.

From a methodological perspective, my research combines the methods of visual ethnography, semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and an anonymous online survey to create a thick description of flag use. Observation and gathering of visual data focus on the variety of symbolic appearances, which is why a number of statements require support with

specific visuals. The results of the online survey are filed in the Archive of the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (АИЕФЕМ, a.e. 111).

Brief history and official usage of the Bulgarian national flag

The Bulgarian national flag has been part of the State's official symbolism since its reestablishment in 1878. Its colours are white, green and red, arranged horizontally. Its origins are traced back towards the year 1877 when the first flag prototype with horizontal colours white – green – red has been made in the town Braila (nowadays Romania, former Wallachia) by Stitliana Paraskevova and funded by her father – Ivan Paraskevov, both emigrants in Wallachia at the time (Стойчев, 1941: 425–426; Стоянов, 2015: 40–41). The same colour scheme is to become the official Bulgarian national flag of equal horizontal stripes of white, green and red, has been legitimised in all Bulgarian Constitutions since 1879 to this day[2].

The same three colours, but not in this order, are used by Bulgarians even earlier. It is recorded that in 1862, by George S. Rakovski (Дойнов, 1976: 41; Паунов, 2016: 4), who established the so-called First Bulgarian Legion, a paramilitary organisation dedicated to the idea of the Bulgarian nation and state (re)establishment.[3] Although it is not exactly clear why these specific colours were chosen, it is believed that the idea of the tricoloured flag is influenced by the French Revolution, as it has influenced several modern European nation states (cf. Дойнов, 1976: 41; Elgenius, 2007). Another version states that the certain order of upper - white, middle - green and bottom - red is supposed to be inspired by the Russian one, which is white-blue-red (Стоянов, 2015: 41).

As for the symbolic meaning of the colours, there are several opinions. According to Petar Parashkevov, the tricolour in its symbolic meaning is additionally influenced by Italian and Hungarian flags. He also points out that there are different layers of colour symbolism – mythical, socio-political and specifically state one (Парашкевов, 1998)[4], meaning it is

[2] See Constitution of the Principality of Bulgaria, art. 23 (Конституция на Българското Княжество, 1879); Constitution of People's Republic of Bulgaria, art. 97 (Конституция на Народна Република България, 1947); Constitution of People's Republic of Bulgaria, art. 141 (Конституция на Народна Република България, 1971); Constitution of Republic of Bulgaria, art. 166 (Конституция на Република България, 1991).

[3] The lands of nowadays Bulgaria were part of the Ottoman Empire during the period - end of the 14th century till 1878.

[4] More about the symbolic and esoteric meaning of the tricolour see: Bankov, 2021; Парашкевов, 1998.

a complex socio-cultural construct. Still, for the needs of nationhood education, there are simplified myths and narratives created, one used as an example by Kristian Bankov 'the white, which is on top, represents the sky, hope, the future; the green in the middle represents the natural beauty of Bulgaria, with its forests on mountainous hills and valleys; the red represents the blood of known and unknown heroes, who gave their lives for Bulgarian freedom' (2021: 175–176). Doyno Doynov, citing a primary source, suggests that Rakovski probably chose green, as this is the favourite colour of Bulgarian rebels – *hayduti*, while white and red are among the colours of other Slavic nations' flags. Thus, it is demonstrated both the belonging to the Slavic world, but the Bulgarian uniqueness too (Дойнов, 1976: 42).

The current version of the Bulgarian national flag was reaffirmed in 1991 and is regulated in several legal documents. The current Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria defines the flag, its colours and refers to specific legislation concerning its official usage:

> Art. 166. The flag of the Republic of Bulgaria is tricolour: white, green and red, placed horizontally from top to bottom.
> Art. 167. The order in which the state seal is applied and the national flag is raised shall be determined by law (Конституция на Република България, 1991).

Furthermore the Law on the State Seal and the National Flag of the Republic of Bulgaria defines the three colours to be equal in size and its Appendix 2 – their certain Panton number (meaning the exact green and red) and percentage of white (more than 80%), but also official measurements, ratio of the flag 3x5 and the materials it should be produced by – paper and textile ones. It also constitutes the size of the flag as 18 cm x 30 cm, 24 cm x 40 cm, 90 cm x 150 cm, 129 cm x 215 cm or, as an exception, other sizes but considering the 3x5 ratio (Държавен вестник, 1998, изм. 2006). The same law defines where the flag should be present:

> Art. 16. (1) The national flag of the Republic of Bulgaria is permanently raised on:
> 1. the buildings where the main activities of the National Assembly, the Presidency, the ministries and other state institutions, the regional structures of the ministries and regional administrations, the Constitutional Court, the judicial authorities, the Bulgarian National Bank, the Bulgarian National television, the Bulgarian National Radio, municipalities, regions and town halls, as well as state and municipal schools;
> 2. entry and exit checkpoints and customs points;
> 3. ports, railway stations and airports;

4. (new - SG No. 108 of 2018, in force from 01.01.2019) the buildings of the religious denominations or in front of them.
(2) (Amended - SG No. 69 of 1999) The national flag of the Republic of Bulgaria is temporarily hoisted on the buildings where sessions of the National Assembly or meetings of municipal councils, international conferences or meetings, national or international sports are held and other competitions of national importance - during their duration.
Art. 17. The national flag of the Republic of Bulgaria is placed on the front right of vehicles and on the front mast of vessels when the President of the Republic, the Vice President, the Speaker of the National Assembly or the Prime Minister are there.
Art. 18. (Amended - SG No. 92 of 2011) The national flag of the Republic of Bulgaria is raised on:
1. sea and river vessels and other vessels registered in the ship registers of the Bulgarian ports;
2. (amended - SG No. 92 of 2011) the ships purchased by the Republic of Bulgaria from abroad - with the permission of the executive director of the Executive Agency "Maritime Administration", until they are entered in the ship registers of the Bulgarian ports.
Art. 19. The national flag of the Republic of Bulgaria is raised at the Bulgarian diplomatic and consular missions and is placed on the vehicles of the Bulgarian diplomatic and consular representatives under the conditions determined by international treaties and customs.
Art. 20. The national flag of the Republic of Bulgaria is raised in the units of the Bulgarian Army and on the ships of the Navy according to the military statutes (Държавен вестник, 1998).

As seen, the Law strictly regulates the official use of the Bulgarian flag in a number of cases, both permanent and occasional. Thus, the national symbol appears on many state and municipal buildings, ensuring that wherever there is a local authority, there should be a flag raised and declaring that it is the Bulgarian country to be responsible for political governance or education. The study, on the other hand, shows that beyond the official use, there is a lot more to be seen as flag appearances in public and private spaces, festivities, protests, etc.

Flags, flag colours and public spaces

Although not listed in the Law on the State Seal and the National Flag of the Republic of Bulgaria, other public institutions also put the national flag on or in front of their buildings. Among them are a huge number, but of course not all, local cultural centres (famous with their Bulgarian term *chitalishte*), non-municipal schools, kindergartens, historical and army-related museums, and many more.



Pic. 1. 'Videlina – 1865' Community Centre – Panagyurishte, Bulgaria, 2022.
Photo: Julia Popcheva.



Pic. 2. Post office – village of Skrebatno, Blagoevgrad region, Bulgaria, 2021.
Photo: Magdalena Slavkova.

An interesting example (pic. 2) for hanging a flag on a public building is the post office in Skrebatno village in Southwestern Bulgaria. Despite the condition of the building itself and the need for restoration, reconstruction, and maintenance, a flag is placed on the top of the roof. The flag is the first thing to be seen from afar and, referring back to Billig's banal nationalism, it is not a mindless decision to be put in this particular spot. The Bulgarian Post service is a state institution and in its offices in small villages it provides not only postal services, but it is also responsible for distributing monthly pensions to retired people. With the flag – relatively new, not ragged – it is actually demonstrated that the place is not abandoned, and regardless of the lack of funding for repairs, the institution continues fulfilling the expected duties.

Flagging a public building can also be done in creative ways. For example, the Drama-Puppet Theatre 'Vasil Drumev' in the town of Shumen uses light to represent the national flag colours. At night, the windows are lit with the tricolour lights – white (although on photos appearing bluish), red and green.



Pic. 3. Drama-Puppet Theatre 'Vasil Drumev' by night – Shumen, Bulgaria, 2022.
Photo: Julia Popcheva.

Besides public buildings, flags can also be seen waving in front of or upon many historical or archaeological sites, especially on the remains of defence facilities and fortresses. During the observation, flags of big dimensions have been registered to hang inside or in front of such locations like – the restored Tsarevets hill in the city of Veliko Tarnovo (the Capital city of Medieval Bulgarian), Shumen fortress – near the town of Shumen, Kaleto ruins at the entrance of the town of Mezdra, the Baba Vida fortress in the town of Vidin, etc. It should be noted that all these places are tourist destinations, some of which are visited by a large number of foreign tourists.



Pic. 4. Kaleto Fortress – Mezdra, Bulgaria, 2022. Photo: Julia Popcheva.

Open-air urban spaces are also flagged with enormous national flags. They can be seen from afar on busy boulevards, crossroads, ring roads, etc. In most cases, they are arranged in an ensemble together with the EU flag or with the flags of all other EU member states. The illustrated case in pic. 5 shows a large roundabout in the third most populated Bulgarian city – Varna. It is on a major road connecting a few of the most popular seaside resorts with both Varna Airport (an international one) and the highway coming from the Capital city – Sofia. During the Summer, a huge number of tourists from the country and abroad pass by these flags, which demonstrate national and supranational belonging.



Pic. 5. Roundabout – Varna, Bulgaria, 2023. Photo: Julia Popcheva.

An interesting case in this matter is the flagging of the town of Yambol, located in Southeastern Bulgaria, close to the Black Sea resorts and the busiest highway in the country. In March 2022, Yambol Municipality began a fundraising campaign for building a 55-meter-tall pylon with the Bulgarian flag on the nearest and highest point around the town – the Borovets hill, as a remembrance and honour to the already mentioned creators of the flag prototype – Steliana and Ivan Paraskevovi, who originate from the town (Община Ямбол, 2022). The campaign is released after a survey on the Municipality's official Facebook page, which states that out of 3537 participants, 3404 approved the idea (Община Ямбол – официална страница, 2021). As mentioned on the same page on March 17, 2021, for the first 10 days of the campaign, BGN 18,000 (app. EUR 9,000) have been raised for the project (Община Ямбол – официална страница, 2022). In September 2023, a flag with dimensions of 18x11 meters was officially hung on the pylon in the presence of the President of Bulgaria (БНТ, 2023), and since then it has been waving. When visiting the town in March 2024, the flag was clearly visible from a long distance while approaching Yambol from the highway and greeting the town's visitors. At the same time, the area around the pylon is easy to reach and maintain.



Pic. 6. Yambol Flag – Yambol, Bulgaria. YambolPress, 10 July 2023.

Last, but not least, the flagging of open public spaces can also be accomplished only through the flag colours. Such a case of demonstrating belonging has been recorded, for example, at the entrance of Pirin village in Southwestern Bulgaria. As seen in the photo, the ınformatıon board announcing the village name is painted in the tricolours. In addition, an EU flag is placed on it to show that the village is not only in Bulgarian territory, but is also part of the European Union. Another board of similar design nearby points out the way towards the St. Nikola church in the same village.





Pic. 7 & 8. Information boards at the entrance of Pirin village – Blagoevgrad region, Bulgaria, 2022. Photo: Yelis Erolova.

Bulgarian flag colours are also used for decorating public spaces. Combined with other elements, they might receive a deeper meaning. Cyrillic alphabet letters with the tricolour merge two significant Bulgarian national identity symbols[5] in one object with a daily public use – a bench in the park in the town of Razgrad (pic. 9), presenting both national and cultural belonging. Another interpretation of this symbolic mixture approach might be the authors' desire to point out the Bulgarian-related origin of the Cyrillic alphabet. The other case (pic. 10), coming from Svishtov – a town on the Danube River (the border between Bulgaria and Romania), shows a mix of national and local identity as the letters form the name of a settlement, but with the colour design forms the national flag tricolour. The letters form the name of the town, but their colours reflect the national flag tricolour.



Pic. 9. Bench in the park – Razgrad, Bulgaria, 2022. Photo: Yelis Erolova.



Pic. 10. Letters forming the name of the town of Svishtov – Svishtov, Bulgaria, 2021. Photo: Yelis Erolova.

Besides their decorative functions, the choice of flag colour usage might have a deeper meaning, revealed through conversations with the initiators of certain flagging. Such a case is registered in the village of Zdravets, Varna Region. The only bus stop in the settlement has been painted white, green, and red. When asking the mayor why they made this decision, the answer appeared to be prevention-related. The mayor hoped that by respecting the flag colours, people would also respect the site and would keep it clean without scratching and putting posters on it. This last example shows that sometimes it is not ideology or identity that stands behind flagging of public

[5] For more about the symbolic meanings of the Cyrillic alphabet, see Norman, 2019; Slavova, 2024.

places, but simple, practical and even banal reasons. Local authorities rely on the flag-colour-triggered emotions to provoke personal responsibility towards a public space.



Pic. 11. Bus stop – Zdravets village, Varna Region, Bulgaria, 2023.
Photo: Julia Popcheva.

All the above-discussed types of public space flagging are due to institutional decisions, primarily made by local authorities or the managerial teams of certain institutions. They aim to point out important venues or to flag the settlements themselves. As Thomas Hylland Eriksen states in 'Some Questions about Flags', the flag as a symbol has an emotional pole that 'attaches the individual to an abstract collective entity' (2007: 10). In the cases presented it is the flagging of public spaces that aims to promote such entities, whether on a national and local level or through connecting contemporary people with significant historical periods and sites, or performing a cultural belonging. It is not a surprise that people follow similar patterns in their private spaces and personal lives.

Private possession of a national flag and identity formation

Before commenting Bulgarian flag and colours' appearance in private spaces, it is important to mention that owning a flag in Bulgaria is free of regulations, affordable and accessible. Flags of all sizes can be bought

online, in shops, on the street at events, etc. According to the online survey, 71.6% of participants declare to possess a national flag. They list a variety of usages of their own flags as it is to be discussed below (АИЕФЕМ, a.e. 111).

In addition, participants have been asked 'How important do you think the national flag is for the formation of Bulgarian identity?'. The answers 'very important' (column 4 - green) and 'extremely important' (column 5 - purple) dominate together with the answer 'important, but without any specific significance' (column 3 - orange), thus showing the direct relation between the Bulgarian flag and national identity (АИЕФЕМ, a.e. 111).

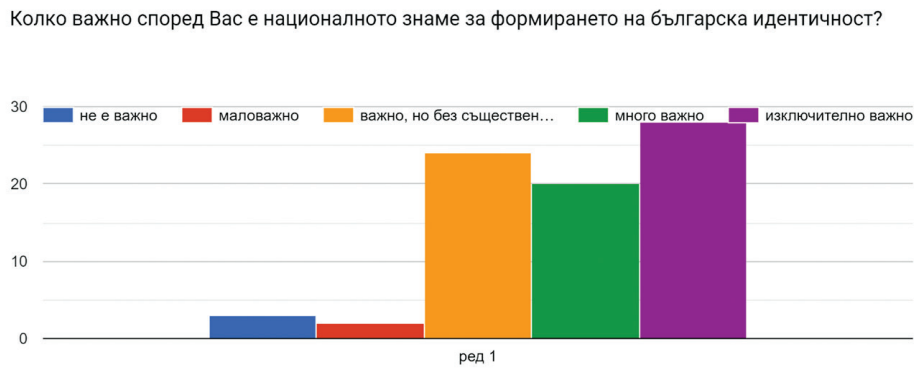


Fig. 1. Online Survey, АИЕФЕМ, a.e. 111.

Taking into consideration the results of these two questions, here are the answers to *where* and *how* the Bulgarian flag is used daily and during festivities.

Everyday usage in private spaces

During the entire research period, the national flag and its colours have often been seen on apartment balconies in cities and towns, as well as on houses or in private yards in villages. Such examples have been registered in every settlement visited and monitored during the project period, regardless of its size, population or location. The phenomenon is spread nationwide.



Pic. 12. Balcony painted in flag colours – Sofia, Bulgaria 2022. Photo: Mila Maeva.



Pic. 13. Balcony with a flag – Sofia, Bulgaria, 2022. Photo: Julia Popcheva.



Pic. 14. Village yard with a flag – Brashlyan village, Malko Tarnovo Municipality, Bulgaria, 2022. Photo: Yelis Erolova.

Although seen everywhere, this type of flag usage should not be treated as a mass movement. According to the online questionnaire, appr. 17% of flag owners declare that they have permanently set a national flag on their balcony, facade, or house roof, 24% declare they wave a flag on their property on national holidays and special occasions, and another 24% declare they hang a flag for national holidays without specifying how they use it or where they put it. One answer shows intention for permanent usage: 'in my house there is no waved flag outside, but I would like to have one'. These figures reveal that on private properties, flag usage is directly related to celebration or respect towards national holidays (АИЕФЕМ, a.e. 111).

Another aspect of permanent flag usage on facades, roofs, or yards concerns the attitude people have towards this practice. A wide spectrum of answers has been received when asking: 'Do you approve of placing the national flag on private balconies and homes?'. Some declare a high level of approval:

> Placing the national flag on private balconies and homes is a great way for people to show their pride and appreciation for their country. However, it is important to follow established protocols and standards for the use of the national flag in order to maintain its significance and dignity.
> In most countries, it is customary for national flags to adorn homes; this is now becoming a tradition in our country, and besides being normally inclusive, it creates a sense of national belonging and identity (АИЕФЕМ, a.e. 111).

Others, on the contrary, declare disapproval:

> I have specified what the national flag symbolises for me, so putting it in the pot on a terrace is, to say the least, stupid
> Kitch (something that appeals to popular or lowbrow taste and is often of poor quality – note J.P.) (АИЕФЕМ, a.e. 111).

In addition to these opposing opinions, I would like to add an observation. In an occasional conversation with a friend, he mentioned that he wishes to install a flagpole in his yard with a large flag flying from it. To my question of why he would do so, he answered simply, 'why not,' and couldn't provide a specific reason, except for his emotional state and attitude towards the idea itself.

All these comments show that the perception of the national flag as a symbol is more emotional than rational. In some cases, the emotionality is indefinable but obvious and perceptible.

Flag, colours of the flag and festivities

As already mentioned, survey participants who declare possessing a flag display it on national holidays. They also declare waving the flag at concerts, sports events, special school events, and even during some personal occasions. During the observation, it became clear that not only participants but also organisers use flags and flag colours to decorate stages or separate areas of cultural and folklore events. Such an example is the balloon decoration recorded on the stage of the local folklore festival, organised by the community centre in Zdravetz village, Varna Region, thus revealing a mixture of national and cultural symbols.



Pic. 15. Tricolour decorated stage during a folklore festival – Zdravetz village, Bulgaria, September, 2019. Photo: Julia Popcheva.

An interesting phenomenon, I would like to point out in more detail, is the flag usage as a recent trend at the two most popular annual masquerade-games festivals – *Surva* and *Kukerlandia,* both famous not only in Bulgaria, but also abroad. The events gather hundreds of people, organised in masked groups and coming from around the country (with some international guests who do not participate in the contest programme). These groups present their local masquerade tradition/ custom related to either a certain Winter holiday or a Spring-related one. Some of them use tricolour decorations in their costumes and almost all of them – the national flag to complete their overall image. Thus, they combine local and

national identity at an event where nationality is predefined as part of its basic characteristics. Several groups even declare their European identity, waving the EU flag too. In addition, a group that presents itself as 'Roma Survakari Group from Radormir'[6] use in the mix a third flag – the one of Roma people, thus stating their ethnic, national, and supranational (EU) identities.



Pic. 16 – Bulgarian national flag and Roma flag waved together on Surva festival – Pernik. Bulgaria, January 2024. Photo: Julia Popcheva.

The combination of national, cultural, and even ethnic symbols shows once more that the identity of contemporary Bulgarian citizens is 'a hybrid construct which combines several types of identification: national, supranational, local and ethnic, with a clear predominance and leading role of national identification' (Nakova, 2025). This is one of the main conclusions provided through conducting the nationally representative survey on 'Contemporary Bulgarian Identity: National and European Dimensions', part of the same project that inspired and supported the current study.

Another example, registered during the above-mentioned festivals, has been a group with their sticks (part of the masquerade costume) wrapped in threads of white, green, and red – in the tricolour order. I asked their leader why, as in accordance with Bulgarian folklore tradition, the threads should be either only red or red and white. The answer was that this had been a way for the group to show its Bulgarian identity when representing their village and country at international events abroad. The group members liked that new

[6] 'Roma Survakari Group from Radomir' – survakari means the type of masquarade personages and Radomir is the town where the group originates from.

image and decided to stick to it permanently. This case shows that the need to identify national belonging in an international context might influence the symbolic presentation itself. It also confirms another conclusion of the already mentioned nationally representative survey – that contemporary Bulgarians' national identity is 'understood as culture, history, memory, language, i.e. as filled with cultural rather than institutional content' (Nakova, 2025).

In addition, the examples discussed reveal that national flag and tricolour usage during festivities might have far deeper, but also diverse meanings, depending not only on situational or cultural contexts, but also on the users' perception of the flag as a symbolic, declarative, self-determining, image-making, or trendy attribute.

National flag and protests

Although not being festive, the protests are also gatherings where the flag is commonly used. The national symbol, together with the messaging, plays a unifying role for all participants. As Susanne Reichl states, 'a crowd of people flying the same flag generates a sense of belonging among themselves: The flag becomes an expression of a collective experience' (2004: 207). During the observations, Bulgarian national flags were registered to be used at anti-government, syndicate, and other politically related protests. They are an integral part of such events. A survey participant even declares that they use their own flag only when being part of protests (АИЕФЕМ, a.e. 111).



Pic. 17. Anti-government protest – Sofia, Bulgaria, 2020. Photo: Plamena Stoyanova.

Based on the conclusion that Bulgarian national identity consists of more cultural and ethnic based elements, rather than institutional ones (cf. Nakova, 2025), the flag usage during protests might be discussed as opposing nationality to the governmental/political body or opposing people and the State itself. For protesters, it is the people who form the nation, not the institutions.

Branding goods and decoration with flag colours

As discussed above, the flag usage in private spaces triggers opposing attitudes and opinions in the anonymous survey. The same distinction is also registered when survey participants answer the question 'Do you approve the use of the national flag for marketing purposes'. Flag-branded products have become a wider range of goods, from caps and balls, to clothes, bed sheets, and more. Different packages of Bulgarian producers also contain flag visuals on them. The survey offered an example to be discussed – chocolate bars with a Bulgarian flag on the bottom part of the package. The question asked: 'Do you approve of the use of the national flag for marketing purposes? Please comment!'



Pic. 18. Chocolate bars' wrapping – Sofia, Bulgaria, 2022. Photo: Julia Popcheva.

Predominantly, the approvals of marketing purpose branding received included some type of conditioning:

I approve of the use of the national flag for marketing purposes if it is done with respect and sensitivity to its symbol;
I approve if they are used to promote Bulgaria;
Only when it is for cultural attractions and events (АИЕФЕМ, a.e. 111).

On the other hand, disapprovals are short and clear:

no – this is profanation;
It's cheap. I don't approve of bans, but I don't support the practice (АИЕФЕМ, a.e. 111).

Another survey question with illustrative material, 'Do you approve of the national flag colours being used for decoration', also gathers opposite opinions. From:

I approve, it is interesting, it shows the Bulgarian flag, it shows that these people are proud to be Bulgarians;
I approve if it does not humiliate the country in any way…

… through 'Only on public buildings' to the high negative 'That disgusts me' (АИЕФЕМ, a.e. 111).



Pic 19. Zoo in Hadjidimovo town, Bulgaria – October 2022. Photo: Magdalena Slavkova.

Such a gap among attitudes and opinions shows that there is an argument or debate in society about where the boundary of respect and disrespect of national symbols should be placed. There is a lack of overall public criteria for flag perception and acceptable use. The answers again show more emotion than reason, but also reveal a huge diversity in perception of flag-related messaging.

Changes in perception

The wide range of flag use, especially in times of crisis, which is almost a constant political situation in Bulgaria during the last years, leads to changes in people's attitudes towards the national flag. Opinions expressed in the online survey reflect these changes:

> In principle, I am not against it. In recent years, however, I associate it with rising nationalist tendencies … It also worries me that the sense of nationality and national belonging formed at school remains purely Bulgarian to the exclusion of all others. Thus, national holidays, on which the flag is usually waved, are thought of as ethnically Bulgarian, not national.
> Unfortunately, in recent years I have come to associate the Bulgarian flag with nationalist parties and pseudo-patriotism. That's why I wouldn't put it on my balcony.
> This recent phenomenon accompanies the rise of nationalism and xenophobia (АИЕФЕМ, a.e. 111).

As seen, the change in perception of flag use has a more negative connotation. The rise of new political parties with strong nationalist stance reflects on how citizens relate themselves to national symbols. The thin line between national and nationalist as a meaning and how it reflects upon national symbols is yet to be studied, revealed, and thoroughly discussed in dedicated research.

Some conclusions

The cases of the Bulgarian national flag and its colours usage in everyday life and festivities discussed cover some but not all types of use observed during the research. As seen, the wide range of flag usage is equally impacted by personal and institutional determination of integrating the symbol in public and individual environments.

Concerning identities, the Bulgarian flag usage shows more than banality. As Billing states, 'it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building' that expresses the banal nationalism (1995: 8). In the Bulgarian case, there is more than just hanging the flag. As already discussed, many public buildings are flag-branded, not because it is mandatory, but because it is somebody – an authority or a person that puts a meaning to this flagging. It has its own significance and messaging. That is why, in the case of Bulgaria, I would refer to another term, offered by Thomas Eriksen: *informal nationalism* or the nationalism of and provoked by civil society, which appears in informal contexts (1993), like the above-mentioned ones. It originates from citizens'

face-to-face interaction or improvisation and is very non-abstract but concrete (Eriksen, 1993: 19). This informality, combined with flag daily usage in private areas, leads to the so-called 'flag domestication' (cf. Löfgren, 2007), whereby the national flag becomes integrated into personal life and space, and people develop a certain attachment to it, not as a national/formal/official symbol, but as an item of personal significance.

At the same time, the attitude and perception of the national flag and its colours is highly emotional and socially conflicting. While one thinks that the everyday use of national symbols is not strong and declarative enough, others state that there is an overexposure of them. As Anthony Cohen discusses, symbols 'do not so much express meaning as give us the capacity to make meaning' leading to different meanings for different people (1985: 11–15). Thus, the opposing attitudes show significant social division both in perception and expression. Due to certain political processes, the gap is becoming even bigger as a change of attitude towards flag rejection has been observed.

In addition, the daily and festivity usage shows that national, local, cultural and ethnic identity markers are mixed in a way to create innovative types of urban environmental experiences and establish new patterns of representing cultural/national heritage. The last raises the question of how hybridity in identity, shown by mixing cultural with national symbols, reflects on personal self-esteem, self-evaluation, and self-determination.

Last, but important, the research reveals that the use of flag colours is equal to or even exceeds the use of the flag itself. It shows that the colour combination is the main factor to define the national flag as a symbol and is its strongest and most recognisable feature.

Acknowledgements: The study was carried out in the framework of the research project *Contemporary Bulgarian Identity – National and European Dimensions*, funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund of the Ministry of Education and Science (contract agreement No. КП-06-Н50/6 from 30.11.2020). It reflects the author's views alone.

References:

Antonsich, M. (2016) The "Everyday" of Banal Nationalism—Ordinary People's Views on Italy and Italian. *Political Geography* 54: 32–42. DOI: 10.1016/j.polgeo.2015.07.006.

Bankov, K. (2021) Flags, Identity, Memory: From Nationalisms to the Post-truth Uses of Collective Symbols. In: A. Wagner and S. Marusek (eds). *Flags, Color, and the Legal Narrative*. Cham: Springer, pp. 173-189.

Billig, M. (1995) *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage Publications.

Cohen, A. (1985) *Symbolic Construction of Community.* New York: Tavistock Publications

Elgenius, G. (2007) The Origin of European National Flags. In: Th.H. Eriksen and R. Jenkins (eds). *Flag, Nation and Symbolism in Europe and America*. New York: Routledge, pp. 14-30.

Elgenius, G. (2011) *Symbols of Nations and Nationalism*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Eriksen, T.H. (1993) Formal and Informal Nationalism. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 16(1): 1–25. DOI: 10.1080/01419870.1993.9993770.

Eriksen, T.H. (2007) Some Questions about Flags. In: T.H. Eriksen and R. Jenkins (eds). *Flag, Nation and Symbolism in Europe and America*. New York: Routledge, pp. 1-13.

Gelber, K. (2012) Political Culture, Flag Use and Freedom of Speech. *Political Studies* 60(1): 163–179. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9248.2011.00893.x.

Jaskulowski, K. (2015) The Magic of the National Flag. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39(4): 557–573. DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2015.1078482.

Jenkins, R. (2007) Inarticulate Speech of the Heart: Nation, Flag and Emotion in Denmark. In: T.H. Eriksen and R. Jenkins (eds). *Flag, Nation and Symbolism in Europe and America*. New York: Routledge, pp. 115-135.

Löfgren, O. (2007) A Flag for All Occasions? The Swedish Experience. In: T.H. Eriksen and R. Jenkins (eds). *Flag, Nation and Symbolism in Europe and America*. New York: Routledge, pp. 136-145.

Nakova, A. (2025) Hybridisation of Identity – the Bulgarian Case. In: M. Slavkova, Y. Erolova, V. Ivanova and J. Popheva (eds). *Between the Worlds: Contesting (Im) Possible Identities*. Sofia: IEFSEM-BAS & Paradigma, pp. 17-36.

Norman, Ch. (2019) Linguistic Ideologies in the Performance of Bulgarian Identity. In: *Purdue Linguistics, Literature and Second Language Studies Conference,* Purdue, USA, 4-5 March 2017. Available at: https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/plcc/2019/papers/4/ (accessed 27 March 2024).

Reichl, S. (2004) Flying the Flag: The Intricate Semiotics of National Identity. *European Journal of English Studies* 8(2): 205–217. DOI:10.1080/1382557042000294738.

Roy, S. (2006) "A Symbol of Freedom": The Indian Flag and the Transformations of Nationalism, 1906-2002. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 65(3): 495–527. Available at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/25076079 (accessed 27 March 2024).

Slavova, E. (2024) Translanguaging in Bulgarian Street Signs. In: K. Pfadenhauer, S. Rüdiger and V. Serreli (eds). *Global and Local Perspectives on Language Contact (Contact and Multilingualism 7)*. Berlin: Language Science Press, pp. 3-35. Available at: https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/90224/1/external_content.pdf (accessed 27 March 2024).

Spasic, I. (2017) The Universality of Banal Nationalism, or Can the Flag Hang Unobtrusively Outside a Serbian Post Office?. In: M. Skey and M. Antonsich (eds). *Everyday Nationhood*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 31-51. DOI: 10.1057/978-1-137-57098-7_3.

АИЕФЕМ – БАН (Архив на Института за етнология и фолклористика с Етнографски музей – Българска академия на науките), а.е. 111. Национални символи и идентичност - онлайн анонимна анкета, Юлия Попчева, 2024.

БНТ – *Българска национална телевизия* (2023). Издигнаха националния флаг на България на 55-метров пилон в Ямбол, 13 септември. Достъпно на: https://bntnews.bg/news/izdignaha-nacionalniya-flag-na-balgariya-na-55-metrov-pilon-v-yambol-1247703news.html (accessed 27 March 2024).

Дойнов, Д. (1976) Знамената на Априлци — продължение на възрожденската знаменна традиция. *Българска етнология* 3-4: 38–50.

Държавен вестник (1998). Закон за държавния печат и националното знаме, 24 април, бр. 47.

Конституция на Българското княжество (1879) Достъпно на: https://www.parliament.bg/bg/17 (accessed 27 March 2024).

Конституция на Народна република България (1947) Достъпно на: https://www.parliament.bg/bg/18 (accessed 27 March 2024).

Конституция на Народна република България (1971) Достъпно на: https://www.parliament.bg/bg/19 (accessed 27 March 2024).

Конституция на Република България (1991) Достъпно на: https://www.parliament.bg/bg/const (accessed 27 March 2024).

Община Ямбол – официална страница (2021) Достъпно на: https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=452806462851807&set=a.110817297050727 (accessed 27 March 2024).

Община Ямбол (2022) Дарителска кампания за поставянето на 55-метров пилон с българското знаме на хълм «Боровец». Достъпно на: https://yambol.bg/zname (accessed 27 March 2024).

Община Ямбол – официална страница (2022) Достъпно на: https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=526458215486631&set=a.110817297050727 (accessed 27 March 2024).

Парашкевов, П. (1998) Езотериката и цветовете на българското знаме. *Балканистичен форум* 1-3: 110–120.

Паунов, Хр. (2016) Нормативна уредба на националното знаме като държавен символ. *Правна мисъл* 1: 3–16.

Стойчев, Ив. (1941) *За първообраза на българското знаме според чл. 23 от Конституцията*. София.

Стоянов, Ив. (2015) Българското национално знаме. *Път* 22: 18-43.

YambolPress (2023) В Ямбол издигнаха българското знаме на 55-метров пилон, 10 юли. Достъпно на: https://shorturl.at/TzDw7 (accessed 27 March 2024).

Julia Popcheva, PhD, is a researcher in the Balkan Ethnology Department in the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Her interests in ethnology, dancing folklore studies and migration studies are combined in a PhD thesis focused upon Bulgarian micro communities as modern social and cultural phenomena both in the country and abroad. She has specialised in universities in Spain and France, where she has conducted part of her fieldwork research. Julia also works in the field of urban ethnology. In 2024, she defended her PhD thesis on the topic: Construction of Micro-communities at the Beginning of the 21st Century (examples by Bulgarian Folklore Groups from Bulgaria and Abroad).

E-mail: julia.popcheva@iefem.bas.bg

CASE STUDIES OF URBAN REGENERATION: THE USES OF CULTURE AND HERITAGE IN IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Zlatina Bogdanova

Abstract: This paper presents case studies from cities in Bulgaria where culture and heritage (urban assets) are used in constructing and promoting the identities of places (creative districts and hubs). These uses correspond to modern approaches of urban cultural planning for supporting the development and proliferation of venues for art and culture. The concept of 'creative industries' was initially applied to the establishment of *Kapana* in Plovdiv as the first 'creative district' in Bulgaria during the 'European Capital of Culture – Plovdiv 2019' campaign. As a result, the previously neglected district *Kapana* became a centre of attraction for cultural operators and visitors. Soon after, more cities in Bulgaria have used and expanded the accumulated expertise in the established networks of activists to develop projects of their own aiming at urban renovation based on local history and cultural heritage. This study is focused on the role of civic associations and municipalities that have given impetus for the manifestation and promotion of local identity markers such as urban festivals, places of memory, cultural institutions, etc. The research draws on participant observation, digital ethnography, multi-sited ethnography, and anthropology at home.
Keywords: urban regeneration, culture, heritage, identity

The formation of creative districts/hubs in Bulgaria is a result of cultural urban planning related to the valorisation of urban assets (mostly culture and heritage) in historical city centres. Municipalities and civil associations cooperate in a common effort to preserve and renew these historic cores by developing and promoting *Kapana* in Plovdiv, *Talyana* in Varna, *Shesti Uchastak* (sixth precinct section) – Gabrovo, *KvARTala* in Sofia, and *Varusha Yug* (south) in the old part of Veliko Tarnovo. Without a single art district, Stara Zagora also presents a good case of a city with recognisable cultural urban trajectory. So far these are the best known examples of initiatives engaged with the idea of creating cultural and art hubs in Bulgaria. They are set up in very big (Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna), big (Stara Zagora) and medium (Gabrovo, Veliko Tarnovo) sized cities. Sofia is the state capital where much of the industry and commerce takes place, and it also hosts most of the cultural activity in Bulgaria. As the second-largest city in Bulgaria, Plovdiv is located in the fertile region of south-central Bulgaria on the two banks of the Maritsa River. Plovdiv is best known for being the 'European Capital

of Culture' (ECC) in 1999 and 2019, a title that has greatly contributed to its international visibility. It is also famous for its Roman heritage, bustling artistic life and preserved Old Town. Varna is located on the Black Sea coastline. Known as the 'sea capital' of Bulgaria, since the socialist years Varna has always been associated with international tourism. Located in the Upper Thracian Plain, Stara Zagora is internationally famous with its Puppet Theatre and Festival. The city is also identified with *Zagorka* beer brand produced there since 1958. Veliko Tarnovo is a city in north-central Bulgaria that is famously branded as the medieval (historical) capital of the Second Bulgarian Tsarstvo (Kingdom). Veliko Tarnovo, similar to Plovdiv, is a major touristic destination since socialism. Gabrovo, the smallest town in this selection, is situated at the foot of the central Balkan Mountains, in the valley of the Yantra River, near Veliko Tarnovo. The city is internationally known as the 'capital of humour and satire'– recognition solidified in the period of socialism after the establishment of the museum institution 'The House of Humor and Satire' that organises the International Biennial of Humour and Satire during the carnival week. The Gabrovo Carnival of Humour takes place every year around the city holiday on 17 May.

From these short characteristics, it becomes clear that the cities have well established urban identities and high international profiles often associated with institutions, industrial and cultural traditions, tourism routes dating back to the years of socialism. In this text I argue that these cities have recently made efforts at constructing new urban identities of places, this time associated with culture, the arts, and heritage (urban assets) rediscovered in their historical centres. This process of asset revaluation and valorisation takes place in the so called creative districts. The purpose of this paper is to present a general picture of these districts in Bulgaria, as well as to answer the questions of who are the main agents of change and what drives their ideas and activities. The recent (postsocialist) turn in cultural urban development, involving heritage preservation, engages an ever-expanding community of architects, activists, urban planners, cultural managers, local government representatives, entrepreneurs and artists. The framework of the study emphasises not so much on buildings and building ensembles, but more on the social connections and networks that unite the art districts in Bulgaria.

Introduction to creative districts and related concepts

Creative districts, also known as creative quarters, arts districts or cultural districts, are specific areas within a city or a town that are purposefully designed to attract artists and entrepreneurs in arts and culture. Such areas

are usually characterised by a concentration of creative industries, cultural institutions and entertainment venues. Their main function is to encourage artistic performances, innovative endeavors and the preservation of cultural heritage. In this way, the overall cultural and economic vitality of the community is stimulated.

The idea of forming creative districts stems from local policies for regeneration of (abandoned) urban spaces by stimulating cultural activities. Franco Bianchini and Michael Parkinson established in the early 1990s that

> …the mobilisation of culture to the cause of city marketing is one of the most recent ways in which cultural policies have become an established and legitimate part of urban regeneration strategies in western Europe. Cultural facilities and resources are not regarded by local decision-makers as more important in determining a city's appeal to investors than local educational and skills levels, the quality of local schooling and of the local environment. They have, however, become increasingly important complementary factors in the competition between cities possessing similar advantages (1993: 18).

The emphasis on 'cultural facilities and resources' is increasingly used in city marketing throughout Europe.[1] The main argument this paper makes is that cities in Bulgaria began relying more purposefully on their assets and resources for constructing a positive image, thus initiating a process of urban revitalisation and branding.

A renowned author and consultant on the future of cities, best known for popularising the *creative city* concept, Charles Landry gives the following clarification:

> Good city-making is about maximizing assets and what is considered an urban asset has broadened dramatically. Urban assets and resources can be: hard, material and tangible, or soft, immaterial and intangible; real and visible, or symbolic and invisible; countable, quantifiable and calculable, or to do with perceptions and images (2008: xxxiii).

In relation to urban assets, he defines 15 main elements divided into four groups: 'material things, activities, matters of attitude, and perception and organizational concerns' (Landry, 2008: xxxiv). The material things are described as 'the natural setting and location; natural resources; history, heritage and the built fabric; infrastructures.' The second category includes 'traditions, both tangible and intangible; the presence of industries and

[1] One of the best examples for this trend is the ongoing EU Initiative 'European Capitals of Culture': https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/culture-in-cities-and-regions/european-capitals-of-culture (accessed 24 June 2024).

services; levels of skills and talent; and the range of activities, from trade fairs to sporting, artistic and community-based festivals and events'. The third category is about 'attitudes and attributes, such as levels of openness, tolerance, joined-up thinking, a "can do" approach and entrepreneurship; the perceptions of the city internally and externally; and the presence of a culture of curiosity, creativity and competence'. The fourth and last category, according to Landry, involves 'organization, management and delivery, such as empowering individuals and companies; traditions of "walking the talk"; and strong partnership working' (Landry, 2008: xxxiv-xxxv).

In 1978, Charles Landry founded *Comedia*, a think tank, publisher and consultancy firm. Its early work highlighted the importance of cultural resources as well as pioneered a methodological framework for the *creative city* and the *creative economy*[2] (*cultural industries*). In 1994, *Comedia* developed another way to view urban assets

> which includes the critical mass of activities; the identity and distinctiveness or the innovative capacity of a place; its diversity and accessibility; levels of security and safety; linkage and synergy; competitiveness; organizational capacity and leadership (Landry, 2008: xxxv).

As a way of analysing urban assets Charles Landry also proposes considering city 'capitals':

> This framework assesses on the basis of a variety of indicators: identity capital; intelligence capital; financial capital; relationship capital; human individual capital; human collective capital; instrumental material capital; and instrumental knowledge capital (2008: xxxvi).

Other forms of capital also taken into consideration by Landry include the following:

> *human capital*: the talents, skills and special knowledge of their people; *social capital*: the complex web of relationships between organizations, communities and interest groups which makes up civil society and more; *cultural capital*: the sense of belonging to and understanding the unique identity and distinctiveness of a place expressed tangibly and invisibly from heritage and memories, to the capacity to dream and aspire; *intellectual capital*: the ideas and innovative potential of a community; *scientific and technical capital*: marrying the ability to discover possibilities and solve problems with the technology to turn these into practical applications; *creativity capital*: harnessing the capacity to be curious, to imagine, to stand back, to connect the seemingly disconnected, to relax into ambiguity, to be original and inventive; *democratic capital*: the ability of

[2] See UN Creative Economy Report 2008: The Challenge of Assessing the Creative Economy: Towards Informed Policy-making.

communities to foster a culture of discussion and choice within a framework of public accountability and transparency; *environmental capital*: the built and natural landscape and ecological diversity of an area; *leadership capital*: the motivation, will, energy and capacity to take responsibility and lead; *financial capital*: how resources are garnered to pay for services and infrastructure (2008: xlviii-xlix).

Besides Charles Landry, other authors have also contributed to the theory and application of related concepts: *creative economy* (Hawkins, 2001); *creative class* (Florida, 2002); *cultural industries* (Pratt, 2008); *cultural entrepreneurship* (Добрева, 2018; Драганова, 2022); *cultural infrastructure* (Ang et al., 2016); *placemaking* (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010).

The reviewed above framework of identifying urban assets and related forms of capital (social, cultural, creative, etc.) is applied to the study of cultural urban planning and development in Bulgaria where municipalities, independent experts and civic associations have joined forces to promote the distinctive identities of their cities. In this regard, the research puts emphasis on the use of urban assets (cultural and historical heritage; urban traditions and landscape; 'artistic and community-based festivals and events') and their valorisation in the process of city branding. Of particular interest are the initiatives for familiarisation and socialisation of the architectural heritage of cities. Civic activism and local community involvement are also viewed as forms of human, social, intellectual capital as well as being a valuable urban asset.

Basic research questions

An interesting question is what unites these neighbourhoods in Bulgaria. One of the possible answers is that they are united by their location in historical cores of their respective cities. Over time, with the change of political regimes, the new urban development plans have largely neglected these areas, and once they were sidelined by new urban centres, they lost their appeal. Recently, through locally driven civic initiatives and municipal policies of creating cultural spaces and attracting audiences, attempts have been made to revive these (abandoned) quarters under the form of creative districts and hubs. A typical example of this new trend is the revitalisation of *Kapana* in Plovdiv. A previously neglected area, it was renewed thanks to the targeted efforts of the 'Plovdiv – European Capital of Culture 2019' campaign. The main research questions are set out as follows:

1. How is the concept of 'creative districts' applied in Bulgaria for the purposes of urban transformation and revitalisation of (abandoned) urban spaces that have significant potential for development?

2. What are the cultural (and heritage conservation) initiatives carried out within the so-called creative districts of Bulgaria?
3. Who are the main agents of change: organisations, specialists, local authorities and institutions (museums, galleries, libraries, etc.) involved in these processes, and how do they cooperate?

Methods and purpose of the study

Based on case studies from Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Stara Zagora, Gabrovo and Veliko Tarnovo, this research draws on multi-sited ethnography understood as 'the practice of pursuing ethnographic fieldwork in more than one geographical location' (Candea, 2009: 485). Since George Marcus' coinage of the phrase in 1995, there has been an elaborate and continuing methodological discussion (see, Hannertz, 2003; Hannertz, 2010; Falzon, 2009). In his review of this academic debate Matei Candea makes the following statement:

> The multi-sited ethnographer should identify "systemic" realities in "local" places, studying the world system directly on the ground; this requires a willingness to leave behind the bounded fieldsite and follow people, stories, metaphors, or objects, as they themselves travel from place to place, and move between different media (2009: 488).

He further claims that

> by opening up the term "site" to a range of meanings beyond that of a mere geographical location (a "site" could be an archive, "the media", or a geographically dispersed population of practitioners), multi-sitedness also allowed those who engaged fully with the experimental potential of the method to craft self-consciously innovative and unconventional anthropological projects (2009: 489).

Therefore, multi-sited ethnography allows for tracing and describing the connections and networks between places and people in order to answer the question of how ideas and practices in urban cultural planning are carried out, transmitted and transformed as they move between different locations. Moreover, the approach offers a flexible research design – it becomes adaptive and responsive to the changes and interactions of the cultural phenomena it studies. And this adaptability helps to shift the focus between different situations or track individuals or objects as they pass through different contexts. It is a useful research framework since it enables me to follow the activities of this 'geographically dispersed population of practitioners', engaged with the creative districts, who visit or host events in

the above mentioned cities. In other words, there is a visible community of experts, administrators and activists who are very flexible and active in more than one location. I also claim to have been a participating observer in these creative networks since I often took part on a voluntary basis in educational workshops, trainings and discussions.

Since the beginning of research on creative districts in 2018, it has been carried out exclusively only within the territory of Bulgaria, and for this reason it can be assumed that it falls within the framework of 'anthropology at home'. The study also entails collecting audiovisual and text data via websites, forums and social media (mainly Facebook), where current events, festival programmes, workshops, working groups and related discussions are publicised (digital ethnography).

The main goal of this study is to outline the state and prospects for the development of the creative districts in Bulgaria in the context of urban planning policies.

'*Kapana* – the district of creative industries' as a cultural mission of 'Plovdiv 2019'

The inclusion of *Kapana* (a Turkish word meaning 'a trap') in the official candidacy of 'Plovdiv - European Capital of Culture 2019' was the result of municipal strategy and cultural policies assessing the economic potential of the neighbourhood for developing tourism. In this way, the symbolic capital of *Kapana*, including its architectural heritage, cultural infrastructure, and artifacts ('graffiti', 'street art') was transformed economically and socially. This project was part of the 'Transform' platform from the Application[3] ('Urban Dreams' cluster) prepared by the Municipal Foundation 'Plovdiv 2019' established on September 27, 2011, by a decision of the Municipal Council. In the official narrative, *Kapana* is presented as a place of memory and transformation through the creative industries (Bogdanova, 2019). The status of the district in the registers of the Ministry of Culture is defined as 'Group immovable cultural value "Kapana District", Plovdiv' and it was announced by Protocol No. 13 of 11.12.1998 of the National Council for the Preservation of Cultural Monuments.[4]

The officially stated brand 'Kapana – the first creative district' is a new conceptual framework that emphasises the urban dimensions of European integration through festivalisation and culturalisation of urban space.

[3] See the Application for European Capital of Culture Plovdiv – 2019.

[4] Municipal Foundation 'Plovdiv 2019' (2017), https://visitkapana.bg/en/2017/05/16/nastoyashteto-na-kapana/ (accessed 24 June 2024).

The concept of developing *creative industries* is one of the key strategies associated with *Kapana*. The structural characteristics of these industries are conceptualised in different models. For example, the UK DCMS[5] model has the following structure: Advertising, Architecture, Art and Antiques, Crafts, Design, Fashion, Film and Video, Music, Performing Arts, Publishing, Software, Television and Radio, Video and Computer Games (more on the concept of creative industries and districts, see Bogdanova, 2019). It is not officially reported whether *Kapana* followed any of these models. Moreover, no strict criteria were applied for representing all or any of the mentioned creative industries in this district.

The first phase of the project – financing the 'resident program' with the aim of attracting creative industries to *Kapana* – began in 2014, when the Foundation announced the first open call for artists and cultural managers. Ten start-up projects were supported by providing free accommodation for one year. The result was the establishment of various 'cultural entrepreneurs' who created their studios and ateliers in *Kapana*. After Phase I of the project, the Foundation initiated the next Phase II in 2015–2016. During this period, a second call was announced to attract more creative ideas and audiences to *Kapana.* As a result of this phase, six more 'industries' were getting rent subsidised for one year. In addition, thirteen more projects and events were supported.

Another creative focus in *Kapana* was related to the promotion of youth cultures and subcultures; the last open call for 2019 was announced as 'Kapana Creative District. Focus: Youth's Core'.[6] The proposed creative ideas were centered on and around *Yadroto* (the core) – a stage built in the heart of *Kapana*, surrounded by bars, small cafes and creative studios. According to the framework set for this cultural initiative, 'artistic interventions in public spaces' should be developed by youth organisations and should include campaigns and performances, street art, contemporary circuses, as well as other creative forms: dance, theater, music literature and cinema.

The following 'creative industries' and their products[7] are represented in *Kapana:* visual identity and promotional products for *Kapana* and *Kapana Fest* (branding[8]), design and architecture, art and antiques, media

[5] DCMS stands for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in the United Kingdom.

[6] Municipal Foundation 'Plovdiv 2019' (2017), https://visitkapana.bg/en/2019/03/27/2019/ (accessed 24 June 2024).

[7] See in the visual identity of *Kapana* as an overall concept for making new symbols, logo and graphic style of the neighbourhood: https://visitkapana.bg/en/visual-identity/ (accessed 24 June 2024).

[8] More about the brands in *Kapana*, see the website Kapana Brands (2017), https://www.kapanabrands.bg/ (accessed 24 June 2024).

and performing arts (film screenings, music concerts, exhibitions), craft subcultures and their artifacts. The list also includes graffiti, paintings, photographs, cosmetics, handmade gifts and souvenirs, boutique products (see Bogdanova, 2019; Богданова, 2023).

One of the cultural benefits of Plovdiv related to the ECC was the opening of the 'Kapana' Art Gallery in 2019 as an exhibition space for the City Art Gallery – Plovdiv. Located on a busy pedestrian street (the 'small central'), an extension of the pedestrian centre in close proximity to the artistic *Kapana* district in the heart of the city, the exhibition hall offers all the necessary conditions to present both traditional and contemporary art on its two floors with total area of nearly 500 sq. m. This institution is part of the newly created cultural infrastructure of Plovdiv. Commercial and corporate activities predominate on the territory of *Kapana* - creative businesses, studios, shops, cafes and restaurants.

Valorisation of the architectural heritage in *Talyana*

Very soon, *Kapana* in Plovdiv served as an example for other big cities in Bulgaria. Varna and Sofia soon came up with their own projects for the renewal of the historic city cores. In 2020, Varna began to promote the concept for the development of *Talyana* district. The name of the neighbourhood is semantically related to *Kapana* – 'talyan' or 'dalyan' derives from a Turkish word which is a facility for catching fish, i.e. fish trap. *Talyana* is not an administrative unit, but a historical centre, which was the economic heart of Varna at the beginning of the 20th century. With the construction of Varna's new city centre, the older neighbourhood lost its popularity and economic importance and stayed away from the flow of tourists.

Unlike *Kapana* in Plovdiv, where the project started with the announcement of open calls for proposals and funding within the ECC campaign, no financial support was offered in *Talyana.* Rather, the idea of 'Talyana' Association was to encourage independent business initiatives that set a good example of 'economic accessibility to cultural heritage' as they developed in buildings with certified cultural value. And since this district has the largest concentration of buildings with such a status, the 'Talyana' Association was committed to mediating and supporting entrepreneurs and all interested parties, as well as educating the general public regarding the value of its architectural heritage. The Association based its educational activity on the concept of the English historian Simon Thurley (2005) about the heritage cycle: 'Enjoying-Understanding-Valuing-Caring'. A series of creative workshops, exhibitions and information events were developed

to share know-how and local/international experience, in addition to increasing cultural awareness and competence.

The online learning platform, 'aDOORable Academy', was a project of the Association. Educational lectures available to the general public were uploaded with the intention to raise interest in the architectural heritage of Varna with an emphasis on the need to protect buildings declared as culturally valuable. In addition to online trainings, on June 27, 2020, the 'Talyana' Association organised a 'walking workshop', announced on Facebook as an 'Adoorable day in Talyana' (Bogdanova, 2021: 320–321).

In 2020 and 2021, I observed the development of *Talyana* and found that, similar to the situation in *Kapana,* commercial and corporate activities prevail there - creative businesses, studios, hotels, shops, cafes and restaurants. In the cultural infrastructure of *Talyana* there are a few exhibition halls: the Art Marconi gallery and the gallery in the Architect's House. 'The Bookstore' is a multifunctional space that also has an exhibition area. The Ethnographic Museum - Varna and the Renaissance Museum are also located in *Talyana*. In addition, there are several art studios, a School of Music and Music Production and a Choir School for boys, young men, and women of Varna.

From 2019 to 2021, 'Talyana' Association organised a 'plein air' painting competition for high school students entitled 'The architectural heritage of Talyana', led by architect and artist Belin Mollov. The students are usually divided into several groups and stationed on the street at different locations in the district. The young artists are provided with painting materials and supervised by mentors. They are instructed how to draw the built environment. The exhibition organised afterwards shows to the public the students' drawings of buildings important to the architectural heritage of *Talyana.* A selection of the best artworks is presented in a printed catalogue each year. 'Plein airs' with students in *Talyana* district is still an ongoing project, but since 2022 it has been organised by 'Crea' Association. The idea behind the drawing competitions is to direct public attention and promote the conservation of valuable buildings in the district. Following the same line of reasoning, in January 2021, 'Talyana' Association initiated a 'Petition for the rescue of buildings - cultural values, with funds under the EU Recovery and Sustainability Plan'. The idea of this petition was to address current governments and persuade them to allocate part of the money intended for the rehabilitation of single- and multi-family residential buildings to buildings with the status of immovable cultural values that have prescriptions for restoration. Some of these buildings were already in critical condition and postponing their restoration puts them at risk of being irretrievably lost (Тодоров, 2021). Among the organisations that signed the

petition were KvARTala in Sofia, 'Sofiaplan', 'Gredored' from Ruse, TaM from Veliko Tarnovo, 'Bulgarian Architectural Modernism' Foundation, and Bulgarian National Committee of the International Council for Cultural Monuments and Landmarks.

KvARTala of Sofia

Sofia's art district is located in the square known as the old Jewish quarter or old Sofia, located between the boulevards 'Dondukov', 'Maria Luiza', 'Slivnitsa' and 'Vasil Levski'. The space was designated as a creative zone at the same time as *Kapana* in Plovdiv – around 2015. 'Kvartal Collective' is the name of all active people, organisations, specialists and volunteers who work for the initiative in the long term and for the promotion of the good image of old Sofia. The initiators are the following organisations: DOMA Art Foundation, Cinema House, French 75, art co-working space SOHO, Sito Studio, T E Z G Y H, Atelier Plastelin, CUSH. BE, etc. The Organisation of the Jews in Bulgaria 'Shalom', the Goethe Institute, the Polish Institute, are among the main partners of this creative association.

The most famous event in *KvARTala* is the annual Festival, held most recently on September 13-15, 2024 under the motto 'The Spirit of Old Sofia'. In this year, the Sofia Covered Marketplace (Halle), known as 'Halite', became part of the festival programme. It followed several years of renewal during which the building was renovated by Kaufland Bulgaria. The ninth consecutive edition, like every other year, relied on the participation of small businesses and cultural operators to attract an audience to the event.[9]

During the festival, streets are closed to cars to make way for cultural events – open-air theatre, recitals, concerts, exhibitions, walking tours, etc. In 2021, the program of the festival included 'Kvartala Forum' - a discussion on two important topics: preservation of the architectural heritage and pedestrian accessibility in the creative districts of Bulgaria. The event took place under the domes of Largoto, in the space in front of the galleries, which are managed by the Regional History Museum - Sofia. The host and moderator was Martina Stefanova, visual artist, cultural manager and co-organiser of *KvARTal* Festival. Urban planner, Vasil Madzhirski and architect Maria Badeva from the Union of Urban Planners in Bulgaria, architect Alexandra Babunska from 'Talyana' Association, Parvan Simeonov, a political scientist, who represented the 'Art Collective On the Street' from Stara Zagora, and Ognyan Georgiev contributed to the discussion. The Museum of Sofia is

[9] KvARTal Festival 2024: The Spirit of Old Sofia. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/events/1173378663780327(accessed 24 June 2024).

part of the cultural infrastructure of *Kvartala*, in which commercial and corporate activities predominate – creative businesses, studios, shops, cafes and restaurants.

The network of cultural spaces in Stara Zagora

A positive trend in the development of creative districts and related cultural spaces is the development of new, non-traditional cultural niches and the support of already established arts and crafts. In Stara Zagora, this is the art of puppetry, developed and shown in the State Puppet Theatre since 1957. This institution hosts the International Puppet Theatre for Adults Festival 'Pierrot'[10], which takes place every two years.

As the main driver of informal cultural life in Stara Zagora, the Association 'Art Collective On The Street' (NGO) is particularly active in popularising the network of art venues in the city. It defines itself on Facebook as 'a community for the development of a network of art locations and creative industries in Stara Zagora'[11]. One famous cultural hub is the Architect's House – previously the private home of architect Hristo Dimov. The secession-style building is located in close proximity to the State Puppet Theatre. It has been managed by the Association for Contemporary Art and Culture since 2012. As part of the cultural infrastructure of Stara Zagora, the House is a favourable venue for the development of community practices and shared participation in artistic activities and cultural events for children, youth, and fans of contemporary art.

The 'Art Collective On the Street' Association organised annual discussions dedicated to the urban environment, called 'Urban meetings' at the Architect's House. Representatives from the creative districts from Varna, Gabrovo, Veliko Tarnovo, architects, urban planners, artists, journalists and civil activists were present and participating. The first such event took place in September 2020, and every year the thematic focus of the meetings was on current problems of urban development. 'Urbanistic meetings *na zeleno* (on green)' were held on June 15, 2023. The topics[12] on the discussion panel included: festivals, art districts and possible benefits for urban development. The list of participants included architect Petar Dikov, chairman of the Union of Architects in Bulgaria, Prof. Todor Bulev,

[10] State Puppet Theatre Stara Zagora (2024) International Puppet Theater for Adults Festival 'Pierrot', https://en.pierrot-bg.com/festival (accessed 24 June 2024).

[11] See Facebook page of the Association, https://www.facebook.com/ArtCollectiveStZ (accessed 24 June 2024).

[12] The topics and participants in the four editions of 'Urban Meetings' can be found on the Facebook page of the Association.

chairman of the Bulgarian jury for the Venice Biennale, Ognyan Georgiev, a journalist from Capital 'Cities', architect Veselin Alexiev from the Society of Freelance Architects at the Union of Architects in Bulgaria, and Momchil Tsonev, organiser of the '6 Fest Street Arts Festival'. The moderators of the meeting were Maria Slavcheva and Parvan Simeonov from 'Art Collective On The Street'/'Save *Bedechka*'. The discussion held in the courtyard of the Architect's House marked the beginning of the first festival in *Bedechka* Park, which has been transformed into a new site in the cultural infrastructure. Until June 18, residents and guests of Stara Zagora had the opportunity to listen to concerts, watch cinema under the open night sky, visit stalls with handicraft products and take part in educational games and workshops for children. Separately, the organisers have planned walking routes and visits to interesting sites such as the Observatory, part of the branch of the Institute for Space Research and Technology – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The beer museum in the 'Zagorka' factory opened its doors especially for the guests of the festival, and the visitors were given the opportunity to see some of the production site.

Creative industries for new urban economies: *Shesti Uchastak* (sixth precinct section) district of Gabrovo

Gabrovo's *Shesti Uchastak* district has the status of a group immovable cultural value, included in the 'Zone with a concentration of cultural and historical heritage'.[13] The neighbourhood is located on two streets east from the pedestrian center and features a mix of Renaissance and contemporary architecture. It is popular as the oldest district of Gabrovo, which was once a centre for trade, crafts and active social life. Similar to *Talyana* in Varna, *Shesti Uchastak* is not an administrative unit; its name derives from the increased police supervision in the past when the district was a popular hotspot with many pubs and hostels.

The project 'Creative industries for new urban economies in the Danube region' with the acronym CINEMA with duration of 30 months (July 1, 2020 – December 31, 2022) included 22 regional and municipal administrations and institutions from eight European countries. The municipality of Gabrovo participated in the thematic direction 'revitalizing retail trade and small businesses in city centres' with *Shesti Uchastak* district as a pilot location for the project. In order to enliven and enrich the area

[13] The zone was declared by the Protocol of the Architectural Commission of the Expert Council of NIPC/NINKN dated 18.11.1986 in accordance with the Law on Cultural Heritage in force at the time.

with new commercial activities and creative initiatives, the help of creative industries was also envisioned.[14]

Within the framework of the CINEMA project, a 10-day cultural programme was organised centered around the district from June 17 to 26, 2022. It was implemented in partnership between the Municipality of Gabrovo and 'Studio Komplekt' Sofia. It included visual interventions in parts of the neighbourhood, a photo exhibition of the Hungarian Cultural Institute in Sofia, art training, a documentary theater by 'Vox Populi' Documentary Theater Studio presented jointly with the 'Racho Stoyanov' Drama Theater in Gabrovo, literary city routes, and a creative workshop of 'Know How/Show How' Design Platform.[15] The initiatives also included a visit to the Museum 'The House of Humour and Satire'. The open air museum 'Etara' organised the applied workshop for making 'flowers from *belenitsa* (corn foliage)' along with the photo exhibition 'Ethnolens: Midsummer's Day', located in front of '*Dechkova* House' in *Shesti Uchastak*.

The local community centre 'Buditelite 2017' (the enlighteners) had also become a centre for creative participation. In the former classrooms and the courtyard of the community centre, the creative workshop of the educational platform for art and design 'Know-How-Show-How' took place.[16] Eight participants (I was also among the participants and personally attended all the events within the workshop), volunteers from within Bulgaria and abroad, joined together from June 18 to 26, 2022 in the innovative format, aiming to stimulate the creative imagination. The workshop included an active exploration of the district, discussions about its state and prospects for development. Participants were instructed to walk around the neighbourhood and then share their initial impressions in a group led by three mentors. This is an experimental and artistic approach, known as psychogeography, applied for the study of urban environment and the psychological effects it creates on individuals. It originated in the 1950s as a concept within the Situationist International movement, a group of avant-garde artists and intellectuals (Coverley, 2018).

Within the framework of the workshop, the participants toured Gabrovo and visited local companies that operated in various trades: a firm importing 'second-hand' goods, a textile factory, a production site of leather bags and

[14] Gabrovo Municipality (2023) 'Creative Industries for New Urban Economies in the Danube Region', https://gabrovo.bg/bg/article/17295 (accessed 24 June 2024).

[15] European Structural and Investment Funds Information Portal (2018), https://www.eufunds.bg/en/node/9702 (accessed 24 June 2024).

[16] Know How Show How. Educational Program for Creative Thinking and Design, https://www.knowhowshowhow.org/en (accessed 24 June 2024).

belts, a printing enterprise, a manufacturer of metal/iron products and a municipal centre for waste management. With their help, the participants acquired a variety of residual production materials, from which they created design prototypes for objects - furniture and decorations - the result of the teamwork of volunteers and mentors. The waste prototypes were produced and displayed in the community centre, where on the last day of the workshop, June 26, they were presented to the general public (Въгленова, 2022).

As part of the cultural program, on June 24, 2022, a 'Meeting of Ideas' for the *Shesti Uchastak* district was held in Gabrovo – a discussion forum to which representatives of cultural institutions, administration, branch organisations and creative organisations were invited. The participants were divided into focus groups which aimed to exchange ideas and new visions for the development of the area. The municipality of Gabrovo had the ambition to initiate the creation of a network of creative districts in the country with the idea 'to preserve the collected experience of various art organisations, cultural managers, architects and urban planners who work for the preservation and revitalisation of historic city centres'[17].

Varusha Yug (south) in Veliko Tarnovo

A good example of *festivalisation of the city* (Cundy, 2016) presents the *Varusha Yug* district in Veliko Tarnovo. In August 2023, for the second time *Varusha Yug 48 Hours* Festival was organised by the team of TaM – association and club space for cultural and social events, which is the ideological driving force and promoter of the festival. The program included over 80 cultural events – exhibitions, concerts, workshops, architectural presentations, etc. From 16 to 18 August, 2024, the third edition of the '48 hours Varusha South' Festival offered 108 events spread over 47 locations in the Old Town of Veliko Tarnovo. More than 120 participants – artists, creators, craftsmen, local people, businesses and institutions presented exhibitions, concerts, workshops, lectures on architectural, landscape and urban development topics. For the first time the festival had a thematic focus and it was the *Yantra* River as a feature of the distinctive landscape of Tarnovo. The *Yantra* Beach was redeveloped by the team of 'The Collective/ The Rivers of the City' and used as a cultural infrastructure, equipped with a stage, lounge area and mobile bars for drinks and snacks. In the days of the festival, the Beach was a preferred location for cooking classes, art therapy

[17] European Structural and Investment Funds Information Portal (2018), https://www.eufunds.bg/en/node/9702 (accessed 20 September 2024).

and creative workshops, concerts and exhibitions, educational talks and walks. The events of the festival were divided into five categories - visual arts, creativity and relaxation, architecture, music and family[18]. Among the new participants in the festival was the recently opened cultural space called '*Tyrsach* Creative House' that offered creative writing workshops 'Seek for a poem' and a class in painting on silk. The word '*tyrsach*' is translated as a 'seeker'. This logo is used as a metaphor for the creative and constantly seeking individual. I also took part in the mentioned activities organised by the team of this Creative House.

The highlight of the festival in 2023 was the open discussion on the 'formation of architectural sensibility and ethics' with the participation of Martin Yankov from the 'The Collective/Rivers of the City', architect Radomir Dankov from Veliko Tarnovo, Margarita Dorovska from the Centre for Contemporary Art 'Christo and Jean-Claude' in Gabrovo, urban planner Emilia Popova from Germany, and Stefan Prokhorov from the Creative Europe Bureau. Back in 2022, within the framework of the first festival *48 hours Varusha Yug*, the first public discussion on the topic 'instruments for neighbourhood renewal' was held with the participation of architects and urban planners at the Museum of Architecture in Veliko Tarnovo. On August 21, 2022, I had the opportunity to visit the festival and attend the discussion.[19]

The nucleus of many cultural initiatives in *Varusha Yug* is bar-club TaM, defined as a hub for culture and social initiatives in Veliko Tarnovo, founded in 2012, by Galin Popov and associates. Contemporary art forms are displayed on its stage, new and established artists from all over the world are welcome. In addition to creative performances, TaM provides space for discussions to stimulate civic participation in solving community problems. TaM club is located at the building of the former Cultural Workers' Club since 2021 (Драганова, 2022). The team and the community in *Varusha* are committed to restoring the cultural functions of the once abandoned building, a monument of architecture.[20]

The cultural infrastructure of *Varusha* includes the Community centre '*Nadezhda* 1869' (hope), the Museum of Architecture, several craft studios, 'Narrativa' Art Gallery and more.

[18] The description of the program is available at: <https://varushasouth.art/en/za-programata/> (accessed 20 September 2024).

[19] The video of the discussion was uploaded on the Facebook page of Varusha Yug, https://www.facebook.com/varushasouth.

[20] TaM Veliko Tarnovo, https://tamvt.com (accessed 20 September 2024).

The creation of creative districts as a consequence of the modern urban development

As the examples from the creative districts illustrate, in the modern urban development one can observe trends related to the 'liberalisation' of culture from its institutional framework. This entails the independent and voluntary creation of cultural products and services, a shared culture 'on the street', discovering and even identifying new, non-traditional cultural spaces. For instance, river beaches, landings, streets and parking lots could function as sites of cultural action and civic activism. During socialism the state and its policies determined the cultural content and places for carrying out cultural activities - galleries, museums, theatres, etc. Presently there are practices in the cultural sphere that are generated and carried out by informal organisations, associations, artists and activists. The cultural content (concerts, exhibitions, and film screenings) is offered and consumed directly in open spaces – in parks or on the streets during festivals and craft markets. These activities correspond to locally led initiatives for preservation and renewal of the urban areas and renovation of buildings - cultural values in the historic city cores. The causes of promoting and protecting cultural and historical heritage have a social content: civic participation and inclusive action are encouraged, and in this process the residents of neighbourhoods and audiences could become accomplices in changing their urban environment.

Community festivals are often playgrounds of educational initiatives: for example, the *Varusha Yug 48 Hours Festival* offered architectural workshops for children, thus emphasising inclusive, collaborative action. By encouraging participatory activity during festive events (e.g. participating in creative workshops, walking tours, competitions, discussions, yoga practice, etc.) the alienation between the people who inhabit a given place could be overcome. The idea behind the festivals and related cultural districts is to show how people can bond through personal involvement with the environment they share. The goal is for people to consciously change. When they get to know and protect their neighbourhoods, these spaces will receive new functions - apart from being sites of residences and consumption. In the ideal case, they are transformed into shared spaces, brought to life through art and culture. At their best, architects and planners could work together with residents to create new projects for the improvement of urban zones through the *placemaking* approach that refers to a collaborative and participatory design and transformation of public spaces. By giving priority to the needs and desires of people, this approach entails creating

vibrant, inclusive and engaging places that stimulate a sense of community and social interaction, improving the overall quality of life for residents and visitors. Outdoor cultural events (bazaars, art installations) and the festivalisation of public spaces in the big cities of Bulgaria are realised by teams of young, educated people who often have cultural capital in the form of education and/or professional activity abroad. The audiences that come to these events are also young people and families. An opposite example is observed in Asenovgrad (Plovdiv district), where the aging population and the emigration of young and educated people to big cities have changed the focus of the city, turning nostalgically to the past through the memories of elderly residents (Богданова, 2022).

Conclusion

The presented case studies from cities in Bulgaria point to the ways in which urban assets (mainly associated with culture, the arts and heritage, but also nature, environment and urban landscape) are purposefully employed in city-making and constructing positive urban identities of places marked as creative districts and hubs. A valuable urban asset is the civic activism and community involvement observed in all cases, including the human, social, creative and intellectual capital and leadership potential of informal organisations such as 'Talyana' Association (Varna), the 'Art Collective On the Street' (Stara Zagora), the team of TaM (Veliko Tarnovo), 'Kvartal Collective' (Sofia). In this list, I should also mention the association 'The Collective/ Rivers of the City'. Based in Sofia, it 'unites citizens, experts, businesses and institutions in projects that improve the urban environment'[21]. Their best known project 'The Rivers of the City' Festival was expanded from the water channels of Sofia to the river banks of Gabrovo, Veliko Tarnovo (Yantra River) and Stara Zagora (Bedechka River) – the river fests are organised annually in the respective cities - during *Varusha Yug 48 Hours* Festival and in the framework of *Bedechka Park* Festival.

By blurring the boundaries between economy, governance and culture, the practice and theory of creative districts epitomise the advances of urban cultural planning. The reviewed examples put emphasis on the recent attempts at forging new urban identities of districts (re-branding), this time based on the valorisation of culture and heritage (urban assets) concentrated at the historical city cores. In contrast to Plovdiv, where *Kapana* was started with financing project proposals with a focus on 'creative industries', the

[21] See Facebook page of the organisation, https://www.facebook.com/kolektiv.bg (accessed 24 June 2024).

concept of 'Talyana' Association in Varna was to endorse small businesses in the so-called *Talyana* district. They are developed in buildings – 'cultural values', and thus provide a good example of 'economic accessibility to cultural heritage'. *Shesti Uchastak* district in Gabrovo was being promoted within a municipal project, and this is one similarity it shares with *Kapana,* where the Municipality also took the leading role. On the other hand, the emphasis placed on the development of small businesses in Gabrovo is also relevant for *Talyana* in Varna. Of all reviewed case studies, only *Kapana* and *Shesti Uchastak* district have the officially recognised status of 'group immovable cultural value'.

Through its network of cultural spaces (without a single art district), Stara Zagora is an outstanding example of a city that has successfully integrated its urban parks (green infrastructure) into its cultural framework. Gabrovo and Veliko Tarnovo, as well as Sofia and Stara Zagora, have also made visible efforts to include the urban landscape (river banks) into their cultural planning agenda. Like Gabrovo, Sofia and Veliko Tarnovo provided good cases of festivalisation of urban spaces. In Veliko Tarnovo, similar to the urban discussions carried out in Stara Zagora, a tradition was born of giving presentations and hosting debates about the role of festivals, creative districts, residents and institutions in preserving the architectural heritage of cities. In Sofia, Stara Zagora, Veliko Tarnovo and Varna, the lead initiators are the mentioned civil organisations which actively seek the support of the municipal authorities. In Plovdiv and Gabrovo, the Municipalities were the active parties in the implementation of European projects for revitalisation of *Kapana* and *Shesti Uchastak.* Beyond these visible results, the creative districts / cultural industries are not supported by a national cultural policy. Their activation and sustainability are a function of locally based initiatives – municipal, civic, and public-private partnerships.

At the core of all urban undertakings stand the issues of preserving architectural heritage and dealing with urban insecurity and decay. In the context of my research, the most pertinent question is related to the inclusive action of urban initiatives against the background of intensive emigration and depopulation. Last but not least, creative neighbourhoods and their development are directly dependent on complimentary state policies addressing the problems of urban ecology - heavy traffic, air pollution, overpopulation and excessive urbanisation.

Acknowledgements: The study was carried out in the framework of the research project *Games – players – cultural practices in leisure time*, supported by the Bulgarian Science Fund (КП-06-Н90/7).

References:

Ang et al. (2016) *Mapping Culture: Venues & Infrastructure in the City of Sydney.* Final Report, Western Sydney University, Australia.

Bianchini, F. and Parkinson, M. (eds) (1993) *Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration. The West European Experience.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Bogdanova, Z. (2019) Kapana in Plovdiv as the First 'Creative Industries District': Reality or Illusion. *Антропология/Anthropology. Journal for Sociocultural Anthropology* (6): 5–27.

Bogdanova, Z. (2021) Valorization of the Heritage in the Creative districts 'Kapana' (Plovdiv) and 'Talyana' (Varna). In: *International Research Conference 'Local Communities, Cultural Heritage and Museums*' (V. Ganeva-Raicheva, I. Bokova and N. Nenov, eds.), Sofia, Bulgaria, 25-26 February 2021, pp. 311-325. Sofia: IEFSEM–BAS.

Candea, M. (2009) Multi-sited Ethnography. In: A. Barnard and J. Spencer (eds). *Routledge Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology* (2nd ed.). London, New York: Routledge, pp. 485-486.

Coverley, M. (2018) *Psychogeography*. (2nd ed.). Oldcastle Books.

Cudny, W. (2016) *Festivalisation of Urban Spaces: Factors, Processes and Effects*. New York: Springer International Publishing.

Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2001) 'Foreword' to Creative Industries Mapping Document 2001, London: Department for Culture, Media and Sport, UK Government. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creative-industries-mapping-documents-2001 (accessed 25 November 2024).

Falzon, M.-A. (ed) (2009) *Multi-Sited Ethnography: Theory, Praxis and Locality in Contemporary Research.* Aldershot, Hants, Burlington VT: Ashgate.

Florida, R. (2002) *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life.* New York: Basic Books.

Hannerz, U. (2003) Being There. . . and There. . . and There! Reflections on Multi-site Ethnography. *Ethnography* 4 (2): 201-216.

Hannerz, U. (2010) *Anthropology's World: Life in a Twenty-First-Century Discipline*. New York: Pluto Press.

Hawkins, J. (2001) *The Creative Economy: How People Make Money from Ideas.* London: Penguin.

Kapana Brands (2017) Available at: https://www.kapanabrands.bg/ (accessed 24 June 2024).

KvARTal Festival (2024): The Spirit of Old Sofia. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/events/1173378663780327 (accessed 26 November 2024).

Know How Show How. Educational Program for Creative Thinking and Design. (2022) 9-day creative workshop 'Wanted… in Shesty Uchastak'. Available at: https://www.knowhowshowhow.org/en/home/summer%20programme/%E2%80%9Cwanted%E2%80%A6-in-shesty-uchastak%E2%80%9D--gabrovo (accessed 24 June 2024).

Landry, C. (2008) *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators*. London: Earthscan Publicaitons.

Marcus, G. (1995) Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology* (24): 95–117.

Markusen, A. and Gadwa, A. (2010) *Creative Placemaking*. National Endowment for the Arts. Available at: https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/CreativePlacemaking-Paper.pdf (accessed 27 July 2023).

Municipal Foundation 'Plovdiv 2019' (2017) May 16 2017 Present. Available at: https://visitkapana.bg/en/2017/05/16/nastoyashteto-na-kapana/ (accessed 24 June 2024).

Pratt, A. (2008) Creative Cities: The Cultural Industries and the Creative Class. *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography* 90(2): 107–117.

State Puppet Theatre Stara Zagora (2024) International Puppet Theater for Adults Festival 'Pierrot'. Available at: https://en.pierrot-bg.com/festival (accessed 24 June 2024).

TaM Veliko Tarnovo. About TaM. Available at: https://tamvt.com/about/ (accessed 24 June 2024).

Thurley, S. (2005) Into the Future. Our Strategy for 2005–2010. *Conservation Bulletin* (49): 26–27.

United Nations (2008) *Creative Economy Report. The Challenge of Assessing the Creative Economy: Towards Informed Policy-making*. Available at: https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ditc20082cer_en.pdf (accessed 27 July 2023).

Богданова, З. (2022) Краеведските инициативи и социалните мрежи като терен в етнологията. *Антропология/Anthropology. Journal for Sociocultural Anthropology* 9 (2): 58–78.

Богданова, З. (2023) От занаят към модерен дизайн – наблюдения върху съвременното развитие на Капана като квартал на творческите индустрии в Пловдив. В: В. Шарланова (съст). *Сборник в памет на проф. Георги Георгиев.* София: Академично издателство 'Проф. Марин Дринов', 239-253.

Варуша Юг/Varusha South. Достъпно на: https://www.facebook.com/varushasouth (accessed 25 June 2024).

Въгленова, М. (2022) Творческа работилница представи идеи за промяна и дизайн на обекти в 'Шести участък'. Достъпно на: https://gabrovo.bg/bg/news-article/11310 (accessed 25 June 2024).

Добрева, Н. (2018) *Културното предприемачество. Актуални концепции и техните приложения в България.* София: УИ 'Св. Климент Охридски'.

Драганова, З. (2022) Картография на капани и пътеки в културното предприемачество – изследване на случаи в Пловдив, Велико Търново, Варна и София. В: Б. Петкова и В. Караджов (съст). *Капаните на града*. Пловдив: Пловдивско Университетско Издателство, 50-71.

Колективът. Достъпно на: https://www.facebook.com/kolektiv.bg 99 (accessed 27 November 2024).

Община Габрово (2023) Креативни индустрии за нови градски икономики в Дунавския регион" (CINEMA). Достъпно на: https://gabrovo.bg/bg/article/17295 (accessed 24 June 2024).

Общинска фондация 'Пловдив 2019' (2014) *Апликационна форма за конкурса Европейска столица на културата 2019 г. на град Пловдив*. Достъпно на: https://plovdiv2019.eu/data/fms/Documents%20General%20Plovdiv%202019/Bid%20Book/BG%20Bid%20Book.pdf (accessed 27 July 2023).

Представители на творчески квартали в страната споделиха идеи за 'Шести участък' в Габрово, 18 април 2022. European Structural and Investment Funds Information Portal. Достъпно на: https://www.eufunds.bg/en/node/9702 (accessed 24 June 2024).

Творчески колектив "На улицата"/Art Collective On The Street. Достъпно на: https://www.facebook.com/ArtCollectiveStZ (accessed 24 June 2024).

Тодоров, С. (2021) Архитектурна Варна. *Капитал градове: Варна, Шумен*. Достъпно на: https://www.capital.bg/light/neshta/2021/08/08/4225347_arhitekturna_varna/ (accessed 29 August 2023).

Фестивал 48 часа Варуша юг/48 Hours Varusha South Festival V.2. Достъпно на: https://www.facebook.com/events/6342498099144623 (accessed 24 June 2024).

Illustrations:



Pic. 1. Drum circle on 'Yadroto' stage in Kapana, Plovdiv, Bulgaria, 2019. Photo: Zlatina Bogdanova.



Pic. 2. 'Rivers of the city' ('The Collective') installation during 'Bedechka' Park Festival, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria, 2023. Photo: Zlatina Bogdanova.



Pic. 3. Documentary Theatre Studio VOX POPULI performance at community centre *'Buditelite* 2017' in *Shesti Uchastak,* Gabrovo, Bulgaria, 2022. Photo: Zlatina Bogdanova.

Zlatina Bogdanova, PhD, is senior assistant professor at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Her research interests are related to urban anthropology, cultural policies and heritage. She is the author of the doctoral thesis 'Studying the Processes of Exclusion and Inclusion in Rural Bulgaria: the Significance of Kinship and Social Networks' (2012). In addition, her recent papers cover topics within environmental anthropology in relation to rural communities in Bulgaria.

E-mail: zlatina_bogdanova@abv.bg

BULGARIA AS A HOMELAND AND AS A PART OF EUROPE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF BULGARIAN RETURNEES

Tanya Matanova

Abstract: Based on the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data collected between 2021 and 2024, this paper focuses on Bulgarian returnees who emigrated to Europe (Germany, France, Cyprus, Italy, and Spain) at the end of the 20th century in search of higher income and a better life. After spending some time abroad, some decided to return to their home country. This paper presents some elements and the gradual transformation of their perceptions of the homeland, as well as some ideas for improving the native society. Furthermore, the paper discusses how returnees associate themselves and their homeland with Europe to examine their notions of Bulgaria as a European country.
Keywords: Bulgarian returnees, homeland, conceptions of Bulgaria, perceptions of Europe, identity

Theoretical and methodological approaches

Quoting Ina-Maria Greverus, the 'homeland' is a space 'filled with the historical dominance of tradition and the social dominance of community' (1972: 39). The sociologist Willi Streitz defines homeland as a socially created reality that is part of the individual personal identity construction process. According to Streitz, homeland is created and symbolised in social circumstances when a person feels accepted and belongs to a particular social group based on the behaviour of its members (1983).

According to Costadura, Ries, and Wiesenfeld (2019), for some people, homeland is the desire to return to an idealised past, for others, it is the expression of the existence of a familiar, safe, and cosy place that withstands the global hypermobility and multi-variability of world events. For cosmopolitans, it is the possibility of expressing their connection to anywhere in the world, shaped according to their existential situation and the formed collective belonging (cf. Costadura et al., 2019) and personal identification.

Although the term 'homeland' is usually associated with a specific place (i.e., it has a territorial manifestation), the construction of its image very often involves memories or present relations with family, relatives, friends, traditional culture, and symbolic attachment – all of which are elements of a person's social, cultural, and national identity.

The self-perception and homeland concepts are interdependent, and therefore, according to Hermann Bausinger (2002: 24), the concept of a homeland can be seen as an 'identity instrument' that contributes to the cultural, social, and physical attachment to a particular place (see also Proshansky et al., 1983). This spatial identity is created through elements that remind people of their homeland: home, family, festivities, social circles, etc. (Magat, 1999; Moosmueller, 2002; Schoenhuth, 2006).

The discourses of homeland and migration also have intersections, as both address questions of identity and belonging, as well as integration (Cagle et al., 2023). To integrate into the host society, migrants preserve their cultural identity (which involves learning and accepting the tradition, heritage, language, religion, origin, aesthetics, patterns of thinking, and social structure of a culture (Lustig and Koester, 2010) and identification with their homeland while (to a certain extent) perceiving the cultural elements of the host society in parallel, using the language, learning behavioural models and consuming local cuisine, leading to the construction of an additional socio-cultural identity. Upon their return, having already acquired this identity capital, they have to readjust to reintegrate themselves into their home country (Ho and Bauder, 2012) and to identify their homeland space as their own. The longer their stay abroad, the stronger the reverse culture shock that returnees experience (Gaw, 2000), and the more time is needed for readjustment and reterritorialisation in the supposedly familiar but different space (Gupta and Ferguson, 2002). The same applies to the reconstruction of identities, since even if the homeland and birthplace have not changed significantly, the migrants themselves have changed due to their accumulated life experiences abroad (Bin and Wang, 2017).

Considering the limited empirical research on the topic of homeland among people living in Bulgaria in the Bulgarian Humanities (cf. Erolova, 2010; Karakusheva, 2012; Бочков, 2002; Косева, 2019; Маева, 2006; Маева, 2021; Матанова, 2016; Матанова, 2023; Матанова, 2024; Накова, 2011; Парла, 2009, Славкова, 2022), this pilot study aims to fill some of the gaps in homeland research and to provide an initial insight into the issue of Bulgarian returnees' attachments to and identification with Bulgaria as their homeland and a European country. This unexplored aspect will broaden the understanding of the national and/or supranational orientation of Bulgarian citizens in today's rapidly changing globalised world.

Bulgarian returnees – notions of homeland and European identities

Beginning with the definition of key terms, this paper presents applied methodological approaches and potential perspectives for studying notions

of homeland. This includes the construction of national and European identity, as well as the motivation for possible societal change in the home country. Homeland is defined here as the spatial identification with a territory (possessing a distinct history, tradition, community, etc.) based on various memories, feelings, and habits. These elements form a concrete image in an individual's present life and allow them to 'express their emotional attachment to a certain socio-cultural space that provides security, the possibility of identification, and the active organisation of life' (Greverus, 1979 in Маганова, 2016: 190). It is not determined by national citizenship alone, but rather by one's birthplace, childhood home, place of residence, and the social relationships one maintains. Each of these contributes to the emergence of a sense of belonging and of 'feeling at home'. These characteristics also greatly influence individual national identifications, in the sense of self-confidence in belonging to a people inhabiting a specific territory and sharing a certain cultural system (Живков, 2001). At a supranational level, European identification and consciousness are possible, based on Bulgaria's location and commitment to Europe and the EU (Накова, 2022).

The results (Неделчева, Пехливанова и Накова, 2011) of a national representative sociological research 'National identity and social times: differentiation of ethnocultural models' conducted by the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in 2009 (within the framework of the project 'National Identity and Social Times: Differentiation of Ethnocultural Models', financed by the National Science Fund), show that regarding their national identity Bulgarian see themselves as 'patriots' (7.2%) but also as 'national traitors who left their homeland' (4.6%). Given that patriotism is perceived as a strong sense of belonging to a people and its native land, it can be assumed that this kind of spatial (and socio-cultural) attachment also influences Bulgarians' notions of their homeland, as well as their ethnic, social, and national identification (Накова, 2011). Additional information on homeland perceptions comes from data collected in the 2021 national survey, 'National and European dimensions of the contemporary identity of Bulgarians'[1] (mainly among Bulgarian non-migrants but also among Bulgarian returnees). The results show the importance of the place of origin for Bulgarians, as 60.3 % of interviewees define their homeland as their 'birthplace,' 30.6 % mention 'feeling at home', and fewer perceive it as the land or the place where they currently live (7.4%). Therefore, it can be assumed that the homeland and attachment to it hold a significant place in Bulgarian folk psychology.

[1] The survey was conducted within the framework of the project 'Contemporary Bulgarian Identity – National and European Dimensions'.

According to 2020 information, more than 1.5 million Bulgarians have emigrated (Nonchev et al., 2020; Маева, 2021; Нончев и др., 2020), with the number fluctuating over the years depending on the economic situation and political changes at national and supranational levels. Since the beginning of the 21st century, there has been a clear trend of Bulgarian citizens returning to Bulgaria, with tens of thousands having already done so (Bakalova and Misheva, 2018)[2]. These are mostly first-generation migrants (less often first-and-a-half-generation Bulgarian migrants) who, driven by the desire to return to their home country, persuaded by relatives, or by nostalgia for the Bulgarian environment (society, language, culture, nature), decide spontaneously (or not) to resume their lives in Bulgaria after a stay in another country for up to 30 years, and achieving (or not achieving) their goals. In addition to homesickness and lack of professional fulfilment, negative experiences in the emigrant environment, such as divorce, death of a loved one, disaster, or a hostile attitude from the host society, may be other factors that lead to return (Ankobrey, 2022; Mazzucato, 2008; Misheva and Getova, 2023). Common pull factors are family ties and obligations to elderly parents who remain in Bulgaria. In cases where ties with the homeland have been continuously maintained through investment of foreign remittances in its development, by maintaining a home, or through strong awareness at the political level (van Houte and Davids, 2014), the return process proceeds with fewer financial difficulties but is often accompanied by cognitive-emotional experiences at the personal level that take time to rationalise (Cassarino, 2004; de Haas and Fokkema, 2011; Holmes and Burrows, 2012; King, 2000).

The text is based on processed empirical material collected between 2021 and 2024. Quantitative and some qualitative[3] data were used from the 'National and European dimensions of the contemporary identity of the Bulgarians' national survey. This survey, conducted in 2021, was part of the project 'Contemporary Bulgarian Identity – National and European Dimensions'. The respondents are predominantly of Bulgarian ethnic origin, with other ethnic groups included in the survey being Bulgarian citizens of Turkish or Roma origin, with or without emigration experience. Semi-structured interviews were conducted between 2023 and 2024 with 14 Bulgarian returnees (five men and nine women) aged 31–65 who had lived

[2] According to the Bulgarian National Statistics Institute, in the period 2012–2022, over 150,000 Bulgarians returned from abroad and resettled in Bulgaria (see www.nsi.bg, accessed 1 February 2024).

[3] The qualitative data are the information written down by the interviewers during the interviews as additional information shared by the interviewees.

in European countries (France, Germany, Spain, Cyprus, and others) for 3 to 20 years. All interviewees are first-generation Bulgarian emigrants,[4] except for one representative of the first-and-a-half generation.[5] Additional information was gathered online through content analysis of interviews with Bulgarian returnees who participated in the TV series 'The Returnees'.[6] These video sources were used to explore the ideas and associations with the homeland of another 20 Bulgarians (15 men and five women) who had lived abroad as migrants from 4 to 50 years (in Austria, the Netherlands, the UK, Germany, Switzerland, and others).

Perceptions of homeland and motives for change

As already mentioned, 'homeland' evokes feelings and identifications with territory, space, home, and family, but also with an established national entity and its social, economic, and political characteristics. In the case of emigration, this could evoke homesickness and longing for the homeland, and even lead to a return.

An analytical review of the definitions of homeland among the interviewed Bulgarians who have returned to Bulgaria shows that, in addition to nostalgic feelings, they also refer to spatial dimensions in their definitions:

> I belong to the generation that went through the chavdarcheta[7] and the komsomolcheta[8], and the homeland was in the textbooks and the songs. And then all my life I have tried to formulate it. I think it starts at the doorstep of your house, as far as you decide. (…) When I went out in the evening and saw fireflies – and I hadn't seen fireflies for 15-16 years – I cried. This is the motherland for me. (НЦНКН-ИЕФЕМ АИФ I 649, 2025: 4);
>
> I've always wanted to live in Bulgaria. I've always wanted to be at my place. I always knew I couldn't live abroad. Nostalgia is an incurable disease. When I listened to beautiful Bulgarian songs, whether it was Bashtinata kashta (The Father's House) or Oblache le byalo (White Cloud), I listened to them with tears and I felt so homesick that I knew I couldn't live abroad. It is very difficult for me and people like me.[9]

[4] Even though this methodology looks very similar to the one chosen by Bakalova and Misheva (2018), both studies are conducted separately and the methodology of the present study is not taken as a sample from the first one.

[5] First-and-a-half generation are people who were born in one country and emigrated with their parents and grew up in another country.

[6] https://www.bgonair.bg/c/184-zavarnalite-se (accessed 1 February 2024).

[7] *Chavdarcheta* are the youngest children of the socialist pioneer movement in Bulgaria who later became *pioneri* (pioneers).

[8] *Komsomoci* or *pioneri* are youth participants of the socialist pioneer movement in Bulgaria.

[9] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KtxRjbcv-p8, 11.04.2019 (accessed 1 February 2024).

Some interviewees describe their sense of belonging to the homeland in terms of their social ties:

> It is the native place, the closest people, familiar places. I can say that I like Sofia, I like Blagoevgrad (…). I love my friends, my family, my closest people (НЦНКН-ИЕФЕМ АИФ I 649, 2025: 5);
> Perhaps I feel my homeland the most as [a system of] kinship relationships. More than the purely geographical place where you grew up, there's this family, this home, not the physical one, but the feeling of home. The place where these people are (НЦНКН-ИЕФЕМ АИФ I 645, 2023: 2).

This quote confirms Willi Streitz's statement (1983) that a person feels that a place is their homeland when they feel accepted and recognised by the members of a given community in which they live.

The homeland and the connection with it are also expressed by the family home, the hometown, and nature:

> Maybe it's the native home, the garden, our native house. Sliven is the homeland. (…) Not that it is my favourite place. I am ready to run away, but this is my homeland. I know the streets, the houses, the peace, the quiet. I can walk anywhere without public transport. It is the mountain, so familiar to me, that becomes even more boring (НЦНКН-ИЕФЕМ АИФ I 649, 2025: 1);
> I am one of those people who are attached to Bulgaria and especially to their hometown. Being from Plovdiv, I have a special liking for my city. I think I am connected to it both energetically and biologically.[10]

Similarly, the mystical ties to the homeland, described by Maeva (2020), are also mentioned by interviewed Bulgarian returnees:

> We've always thought that we are inhabitants of the earth and that nothing connects us to Bulgaria. Not that we are not Bulgarians or that we hate Bulgaria. (…) But, (...) we were away for 7–8 years in total and when we came back and saw the customs officers – fat ones with mustaches – we were happy to see them. And then when we entered, coming from Turkey – geographically it is Thrace – we felt Bulgaria in such a strong way, and what is the strangest thing, we realised that we are what we are because we were born in Bulgaria. (…) This experience of feeling the homeland was like, in India, there is a word "darshan". It is something that you understand with a superpower and it is not something rational, like knowledge and experience, but it is like insight. It is like the kind of connection that the patriots describe, as a connection with the earth, with the forest. Even from Western Europe, when we come and when we enter Bulgaria, we breathe a sigh of relief. After all these tidy fields, to see some forest, abandoned fields, weeds and you feel very good. A very primal, strong bond that makes a person human (НЦНКН-ИЕФЕМ АИФ I 645, 2023: 2).

[10] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u1b47o16a5A, 15.04.2019 (accessed 1 February 2024).

Regardless of their probable transformations, such remembered picturesque descriptions of native places and experienced emotions evoke an emigration homeland-longing which at a given moment can become a 'driving force' for return to the changed hometown and native place:

> I see a positive trend in the image of the city [Plovdiv] at the moment. We are not yet a rich country, the city is not rich, but everyone is trying to do something. I see a light at the end of the tunnel.[11];
> Bulgaria has changed a lot in the last few years.[12]

These quotes concern the temporal aspect that manifests itself in the transformation of notions of homeland. On the one hand, over time, the individual and collective experience that a person has accumulated in childhood and before leaving their homeland fades over time during the life of emigration (Dietzel-Papakyriakou, 2004: 30). On the other hand, the spatial structures and the natural elements (villages, natural landscapes, etc.), and socio-economic settings in the home country change as a result of social and environmental developments:

> I remember Bulgaria as a place where there were no jobs, but now it is not like that at all. Now Bulgaria is a super platform for starting innovative businesses, for example. I don't know a Bulgarian who came back from Germany or Switzerland and then with tears in his eyes went back to Frankfurt, Munich, or Geneva.[13]

In recent years, the developing and dynamic start-up scene in Sofia has attracted many Bulgarian returnees with entrepreneurial interests. These highly skilled returnees see their native country as open to innovation and the global economy, capable of economic and social change, which contributes to the increasingly positive attitudes of the population, a narrative about Bulgarian society that is often characterised by negativity (cf. Maeva, 2020; Sotirova, 2018). It is common, at least in the first months and years after returning, for Bulgarians who have been changed by their migrant experience and driven by post-return conditions, to try to change the current situation in their home country. They possess the awareness, enthusiasm, motivation, and strength to start something innovative or transformative. By creating innovative and adequate structures and foundations, and by organising events and seminars to exchange experiences, they are actively trying to contribute to improving the situation in their home country, not only for themselves but also for others:

[11] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u1b47o16a5A, 25.10.2018 (accessed 1 February 2024).
[12] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ayh8P6h1fhM, 25.10.2018 (accessed 1 February 2024).
[13] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ayh8P6h1fhM, 25.10.2018 (accessed 1 February 2024).

> Bulgaria has the potential to do many things. It's just up to us to work, to put our ideas into practice here, not somewhere else. [14]
> I help a lot of people to return to their hometown and their native country. I think that Bulgaria needs people who have been to the West, achieved something, and then tried to implement something from their experience in these other countries.[15]
> The more people who bring their experience, knowledge, and expertise acquired (abroad) outside Bulgaria and import it here, the more power we have to change things for the better, to have the prerequisites, and not just to say that things here cannot be changed.[16]

Regardless of the area in which they are trying to change society, these returnees believe in the snowball effect: that one person's actions to improve things cause others to act the same way:

> I wish more people could see what it's like outside so that they can make a proper assessment of the situation here. Because if we just sit in our bubble in Bulgaria, it is very difficult for us to appreciate what we have. We need to lose it for a little to appreciate it more. (…) In my opinion, Bulgaria needs more people who think about it and feel it. For me, it is a very strong feeling because I have been separated from Bulgaria for quite a long time.[17]

In this sense, the absence, the separation, and accumulated behavioural habits, knowledge, and identity formed during emigration could have positive consequences for a better image and development of the homeland, as well as for personal identification with it during emigration and after return.

Bulgaria and European identity

In some cases, first-and-a-half-generation people combine (consciously or unconsciously) their experiences with their idea of their homeland and their sense of belonging to both Bulgaria and Europe. They take advantage of this, enriching (instead of dividing) their perspective of homeland and identity:

> For me, it's all about friendship. First of all, with my family. My father... invested everything in Bulgaria, in the Elena Balkan. I'm just copying; my father's habitus is also in me. The second thing is that I do have friends whom I can call even at 2 a.m. and tell them to come over. I have such friends in Lille too. In that sense, from this point of view, I have two homelands. Maybe that's where the European

[14] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_q_S0Ztfvk, 28.03.2019 (accessed 1 February 2024).
[15] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u1b47o16a5A.
[16] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_q_S0Ztfvk, 28.03.2019 (accessed 1 February 2024).
[17] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptvQxNaOe3Q, 11.04.2018 (accessed 1 February 2024).

> thing comes from, when you can't define one of the two countries and you say the third – the European one, which covers both (НЦНКН-ИЕФЕМ АИФ I 649, 2025: 3).

The notions of Bulgarian returnees about their belonging to Bulgaria as a European country and their conception of Europeans show how they view their homeland through an international lens and how important their European belonging and identification with Europe is to them. For some of the first-generation returning Bulgarians, the centuries-long existence of the Bulgarian nation and the country's location on the European continent are sufficient to form their European identity, to define Bulgaria's place in Europe,[18] and for their sense of being European. Their European identification goes through their Bulgarian categorisation:

> I'm European, of course. As far as I know the history of Bulgaria, I think every Bulgarian should feel European. I don't like what's happening in Bulgaria now, but that's a topic for another conversation (НЦНКН-ИЕФЕМ АИФ I 649, 2025: 5);
> Maybe I consider myself a European despite the Europeans. Considering that we're told we're not Europeans, all that Balkanism, all that history, "you're savages"... I've always said I am as European as you are, I feel like one. I feel European because I feel Bulgarian. I am Bulgarian, Bulgaria is in Europe, and anyone who says it is not, I will take them in a debate (НЦНКН-ИЕФЕМ АИФ I 649, 2025: 3).

This is also reflected in the results of the analysis of the data collected in the national survey on the contemporary identification of Bulgarian citizens. According to them, we 'are an original part of Europe, historically and culturally, for centuries, long before the creation of the EU' (Накова и Иванова, 2023). Although some interviewees and respondents describe Bulgaria's position in Europe as a 'country without a voice', for others it is a part of the European continent, a 'small country dependent on Europe' (АИЕФЕМ ФДА 110, 2024: 2359006). A strong sense of belonging to their home country also determines their decision to live in Bulgaria:

> My sense of belonging to Bulgaria is very strong. If it was weaker, I would be abroad (АИЕФЕМ ФДА 110, 2024: 1951014);
> I was an emigrant, so I know what it's like, and that's why I define my sense of belonging to Bulgaria as very strong (АИЕФЕМ ФДА 110, 2024: 1335010);
> Very strong. Now that I'm here, after traveling abroad so much (АИЕФЕМ ФДА 110, 2024: 2258102).

[18] It is also the answer of the 62.2% interviewed in the frames of the national sociological survey carried out in 2021 (Накова и Иванова, 2023).

Bulgarians with a migrant experience who participated in the aforementioned national survey conducted in 2021 and who describe their relationship with Bulgaria as weak expressed the following opinions:

> My mother is the only thing that connects me to Bulgaria. If it wasn't for her, I wouldn't be back (…) Everyone wants to live in their homeland, but in this situation, I see no future for the next generations of Bulgarians. (…) I don't like it when Europeans think only of themselves and don't care about Bulgaria at all (АИЕФЕМ ФДА 110, 2024: 1951015);
> If I was younger, I would not live here. I like Bulgaria, but if I could, I wouldn't live here (АИЕФЕМ ФДА 110, 2024: 1232008).

Among the interviewees, there are also those who only identify as Bulgarian and who prefer not to be perceived as Europeans:

> I got rid of my Bulgarian complexes a long time ago. I don't feel European, I feel cosmic, like a cosmic being. What does it mean to be European? You don't have to define yourself as a particular person. Being Bulgarian is enough for us (НЦНКН-ИЕФЕМ АИФ I 649, 2025: 4);
> I consider Bulgaria my homeland because I live here. Europe is a place where only a consumer mentality is formed, where values are changed, and from which we must stay away (АИЕФЕМ ФДА 110, 2024: 1850001).

Others put the Bulgarian before the European:

> I consider myself Bulgarian, and my European identity comes later because we were not officially considered Europeans until 2007, and I have experienced what that was like. We Bulgarians know how to live in different dimensions: we can be both Europeans and Oriental, which is not a bad thing. We are freer, more unconventional, and more outspoken (НЦНКН-ИЕФЕМ АИФ I 649, 2025: 6).

One interviewee, who lived in France for several years, recalls the difference in living standards, which influenced her sense of European belonging:

> When I was there, I realised that I didn't have the typical Western habit of shopping. Maybe it was because there weren't many shops in Bulgaria, or maybe because we didn't have much money. When I went there, I started buying European clothes and feeling like a European. Now it sounds strange to me because we have these big store chains. But back then, in 2006–2007, we hadn't heard of these stores in Bulgaria (НЦНКН-ИЕФЕМ АИФ I 649, 2025: 1).

Talking about her European identification, she adds:

> I don't wholeheartedly feel that I am in Europe just because I am in Bulgaria. I still feel that Bulgaria is a little behind compared to other things in Europe.

> I see how difficult it is for me to travel because I can't afford it financially. Maybe the quality of life is different. It is well known that the French can also be rude, and they stand up for their rights, but I know that if I feel sick, people will come immediately with a sincere desire to help. They make room for you to enter, hold the door for you, smile, and say "Hello!" In Bulgaria, we have the opposite: In general, it's a question of not giving in, of pushing yourself, of protecting your space so that someone else, someone more impertinent, doesn't get in. The worse you behave, the more you are respected. It's survival of the fittest (НЦНКН-ИЕФЕМ АИФ I 649, 2025: 1).

By comparison, the results of the national survey mentioned above show that 26% of respondents perceive Europe, or more precisely European countries, as a symbol of high standards (also seen as a characteristic feature of the EU), which for others is a goal to be achieved. For a third group, a high standard of living is something they are entitled to, given that Bulgarians are citizens of a country that originally belongs to Europe (Накова и Иванова, 2023).

Another interviewee, who also emigrated to France, mentions this difference in folk psychology, but emphasises the cultural specificity of each nation:

> Yes, territorially we are part of Europe, but as far as the way of thinking and the feeling of belonging to Europe is concerned, I think that all these countries, which are many and sometimes very different, cannot be classified under a common denominator called "Europe." This is also true of the African continent. In spirit and culture, each nation has its own identity, and it cannot be categorised under a common denominator (НЦНКН-ИЕФЕМ АИФ I 649, 2025: 2).

There is another group of Bulgarians who, when asked to define Bulgaria as a European country and therefore themselves as Europeans, compare their homeland with other countries located in Western Europe:

> No, I don't feel European because I don't live in a European country. Documentarily, we are in Europe, but we are very far from Europe in reality. Our self-awareness is more Asian or African. I've been to those places, and our way of thinking is much closer to Africa than to Europe (НЦНКН-ИЕФЕМ АИФ I 649, 2025: 8);
> I can't say that I am an EU citizen because we are far from Europe (АИЕФЕМ ФДА 110, 2024: 2258101).

Similar statements were made by other Bulgarians interviewed about their identification with Europe and the EU:

> Nothing connects us with Europe because there are big differences between Bulgaria and Europe (АИЕФЕМ ФДА 110, 2024: 1951012);
> We are in Europe in name only (АИЕФЕМ ФДА 110, 2024: 1951013);
> Nothing connects us. I haven't felt any difference since we joined the EU 15 years ago (АИЕФЕМ ФДА 110, 2024: 1028004).

In summary, the identification of Bulgarian returnees with Europe and Bulgaria is strongly influenced by the period of migration and individual ideas about the home country, Europe, and the EU.

Conclusion

The text discussed the notions of homeland and national and supranational (European) identification of Bulgarian returnees. Although Bulgarians feel more enriched by the life experiences, skills, and knowledge they gained abroad, this does not affect the core elements of their concepts of homeland upon their return. Their descriptions of homeland include social ties (parents, relatives, friends) and spatial elements (hometown, home, native house, nature). In the interviewees' responses, the homeland is associated with warmth, a certain aroma, the feeling of 'being in one's place', 'among people of the same spirit of life'. In emigration, depending on the location, the homeland is associated with nostalgia for the Bulgarian environment, Bulgarian festivities, and family comfort. In addition, upon their return, they have the desire, willingness, and ability to use their skills and knowledge to change society from an economic, social, and political perspective, at least at the local and regional level, based on the experience they have gained abroad. They share their professional experience, initiate support events and such aimed at improving public structures, and create platforms and events for communication between returnees, people planning to return, and those planning to emigrate.

The European identity of Bulgarian citizens (with or without emigrant experience) living in Bulgaria is part of their lives, even if it is not as strongly expressed as their national identity. Sometimes it is completely denied, and in other cases, the Bulgarian identity, or more precisely Bulgaria's belonging to the European continent, the Bulgarian cultural heritage, and, since 2007, the EU membership, is also perceived as a factor of national pride. Among those who grew up in two or more European countries, their European identity allows them to integrate their diverse life experiences. With further studies on Bulgarian returnees, as well as other (cultural, economic, emotional) research focusing on the notions of homeland among Bulgarians with or without emigrant experience, the results of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of the perceptions of and the relationships with the homeland among people of Bulgarian ethnic origin and/or Bulgarian nationality. In addition, the analysis of their national identifications provides opportunities for further discussions on the national and supranational consciousness of contemporary Bulgarians.

Acknowledgements: The study was carried out in the framework of the research project *Contemporary Bulgarian Identity – National and European Dimensions*, funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund of the Ministry of Education and Science (contract agreement No. КП-06-Н50/6 from 30.11.2020).

References:

Ankobrey, G. A. (2022) Following the 'Hype': The Role of Leisure Practices During 'Homeland' Visits in Transnational Youth's Way of Relating to Ghana. *Global Networks* 23: 262–276.

Bakalova, M. and Misheva, M. (2018) Explanations of Economic Rationality Challenged: Contemporary Return Migration to Bulgaria. *Economic Studies journal, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences – Economic Research Institute* 2: 80–101.

Barth, F. (ed) (1969) *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Bausinger, H. (2002) Heimat und Globalisierung. In: H. Bausinger (ed). *Fremde Nähe. Heimat und Globalisierung*. Tübingen, pp. 11-33.

Bin, A. and Wang, L. (2017) Homeland Integration: An Academic Returnee's Experiences in Chinese Universities. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 16: 1–9. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917696741.

Brubaker, R. (2002) Ethnicity without Groups. *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 2: 163–189.

Cagle, J. S. L., Herold, Th. and Maier, G. (2023) Introduction. In: J. S. L. Cagle, Th. Herold and G. Maier (eds). *Heimat and Migration. Reimagining the Regional and the Global in the Twenty-First Century*. Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 1-20.

Cassarino, J.-P. (2004) Theorising Return Migration: The Conceptual Approach to Return Migrants Revisited. *International Journal on Multicultural Societies, UNESCO* 6 (2): 253–279.

Costadura, E., Ries, Kl. and Wiesenfeldt, Ch. (eds). (2019) *Heimat global. Modelle, Praxen und Medien der Heimatkonstruktion*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.

de Haas, H. and Fokkema T. (2011) The Effects of Integration and Transnational Ties on International Return Migration Intentions. *Demographic Research* 25: 755–782. https://www.demographic-research.org/volumes/vol25/24/25-24.pdf (accessed 1 July 2024).

Dietzel-Papakyriakou, M. (2004) Heimweh bei alten Migranten: Die Sehnsucht nach der Heimat ist auch eine Sehnsucht nach dem Raum. In: Y. Karakaşoğlu and J. Lüddecke (eds). *Migrationsforschung und interkulturelle Pädagogik. Aktuelle Entwicklungen in Theorie, Empirie und Praxis.* Münster: Waxmann, pp. 29-44.

Erolova, Y. (2010) The Crimea and/or Turkey in the Self-Identification of Crimean Tatars from Dobrudzha. In: M. Karamihova (ed). *European Dimensions of the Balkan Culture and History*. Sofia: Paradigma, pp. 213-230.

Gaw, K. F. (2000) Reverse Culture Shock in Students Returning from Overseas. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 24: 83–104.

Greverus, I.-M. (1972) *Der territoriale Mensch. Ein literaturanthropologischer Versuch zum Heimatphaenomen*. Frankfurt am Main: Athenaeum.

Greverus, I.-M. (1979) *Auf der Suche nach Heimat.* München: Beck Verlag.

Gupta, A. and Ferguson, J. (2002) Beyond "Culture": Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference. In: J. X. Inda and R. Rosaldo (eds). *The Anthropology of Globalization*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 65-80.

Ho, M. and Bauder, H. (2012) 'We Are Chameleons': Identity Capital in a Multicultural Workplace. *Social Identities* 18: 281–297.

Holmes, M. and Burrows, R. (2012) Ping-Pong Poms: Emotional Reflexivity in Contemporary Return Migration from Australia to the United Kingdom. *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 47 (1): 105–123.

Karakusheva, Sl. (2012) Projections of Motherland in the Perceptions of the Turk Migrants from Bulgaria to Bursa. *Adam Akademi* 1: 61–80.

Keupp, H., Ahbe, Th., Gmuer, W., Hoefe, R., Mitzscherlich, B., Kraus, W. and Straus, Fl. (1999) *Identitaetskonstruktionen*. Reinbek: Rowohlt.

King, R. (2000) Generalizations from the History of Return Migration. In: G. Bimal (ed). *Return Migration: Journey of Hope or Despair?* Geneva: International Organization for Migration, pp. 7-55.

Kuschminder, K. (2017) *Reintegration Strategies: Conceptualizing How Return Migrants Reintegrate*. London: Palgrave Macmillian.

Lustig, M. W. and Koester, J. V. (2010) *Intercultural Competence: Inter-personal Communication across Cultures.* 6th edition. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Maeva, M. (2020) Mystic Relations to the Homeland. In: M. Maeva, Y. Erolova, P. Stoyanova, M. Hristova and V. Ivanova (eds). *Between the Worlds: Magic, Miracles, and Mysticism,* vol. 2. Sofia: IEFSEM – BAS & Paradigma, pp. 234-247. Available at: https://conferenceworlds.wordpress.com/publications/ (accessed 1 February 2024).

Magat, I. N. (1999) Israeli and Japanese Immigrants to Canada: Home, Belonging, and the Territorialization of Identity. *Ethos* 27 (2): 119–144.

Mazzucato, V. (2008) The Double Engagement: Transnationalism and Integration. Ghanaian Migrants' Lives between Ghana and the Netherlands. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34 (2): 199–216.

Misheva, M. and Getova, A. (2023) Young Returnees' Sustainability of Return: The Case of Bulgaria. *AIMS Geosciences* 9 (3): 426–440. DOI: 10.3934/geosci.2023023.

Moosmueller, A. (2002) Einleitung: Diaspora – zwischen Produktion von „Heimat", Assimilation und Transnationaler Identitaet. In: A. Moosmueller (ed). *Interkulturelle Kommunikation in der Diaspora. Die kulturelle Gestaltung von Lebens- und Arbeitswelten in der Fremde*. Muenster: Waxmann Verlag, pp. 11-28.

Nonchev, A., Mintchev, V., Zareva, I., Boshnakov, V., Bakalova, M., Misheva, M. and Hristova, M. (2020) *Returning Migrants.* Sofia: UNWE – Publishing Complex.

Proshansky, H., Fabian, A. and Kaminoff, R. (1983) Place Identity: Physical World Socialization of the Self. *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 3: 57–83.

Schoenhuth, M. (2006) Heimat? Ethnische identitaet und Beheimatungsstrategien einer entbetteten ‚Volksgrupe' im translokalen Raum. In: S. Ipsen-Peitzmeier and M. Kaiser (eds). *Zuhause fremd – Ruslanddeutsche zwischen Rusland und Deutschland*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, pp. 365-380.

Sotirova, N. (2018) The 'Bulgarian Situation': Constructing the Myth of a 'National Mentality' in Bulgarian Discourse and Its Effect on Agency. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 20 (6): 564–577. DOI: 10.1080/19448953.2018.1493857.

Streitz, W. (1983) Theoretische und methodische Implikationen des Symbolischen Interaktionismus. *Jahrbuch für ostdeutsche Volkskunde* 26: 289–310.

van Houte, M. and Davids, T. (2014) Moving Back or Moving Forward? Return Migration, Development and Peace-Building. *New Diversities* 16 (2): 71–86.

Бочков, П. (2002) „Родината" в дискурса на сравнението. *Антропологични изследвания* 3: 57–76.

Живков, Т. (2001) *Етничният синдром.* София: Аля.

ИЕФЕМ-АЕИМ ФДА, а. е. 110. Теренни материали на тема: Национално представително изследване „Национални и европейски измерения на съвременната идентичност на българите" – анкетни карти. Архивирали: Юлия Попчева, Албена Накова, Бехрин Шопова, Ваня Иванова, Магдалена Славкова, Таня Матанова, Пламена Стоянова, 2024.

Косева, М. (2019) Чувството за принадлежност към Родината като аспект от националната идентичност на учениците от началното училище. *Педагогика* 9: 1288–1304.

Маева, М. (2006) *Българските турци-преселници в Република Турция: култура и идентичност*. София: МЦПМКВ.

Маева, М. (2021) Митът за завръщане. В: В. Воскресенски, Т. Матанова и М. Христова (съст). *Български общности в чужбина: аспекти на културата, идентичността и миграцията.* София: Академично издателство 'Проф. М. Дринов', 189-210.

Матанова, Т. (2016) *„С две родини, два езика, две култури..." Поколението от смесен брак – етнокултурни характеристики*. София: Парадигма.

Матанова, Т. (2023) Форми на идентификация сред българо-арменци (По примери от град Хасково). *Български фолклор* 3: 412–427.

Матанова, Т. (2024) Концептът *родина* при завърнали се българи. *Български фолклор* 2: 197–214.

Накова, А. (2011) Представите за родината у трите най-големи етнически общности в България – българи, турци и роми. *Дни на науката'2011:* 25–35.

Накова, А. (2022) Современные миграционные процессы и новые европейские измерения болгарской идентичности. *Научнный результат. Социология и управление* 8(1): 20–32. DOI: 10.18413/2408-9338-2022-8-1-0-3.

Накова, А. и Иванова, В. (2023) Европейски измерения на съвременната идентичност на българските граждани. *Български фолклор* 3: 391–411.

Неделчева, Т., Пехливанова, Н. и Накова, А. (2011) *Национална идентичност и социални времена*. София: Аскони-издат.

Нончев, А., Минчев, В., Зарева, И., Бошнаков, В., Бакалова, М., Мишева, М. и Христова, М. (2020) *Завръщащите се мигранти. Европейски и български перспективи. Сборник с доклади от научна конференция, УНСС, 28.02.2020 г.* София: Издателски комплекс – УНСС.

НЦНКН-ИЕФЕМ, а. е. АИФ I 645. Теренни материали на тема „Национални и европейски измерения на съвременната идентичност на българите. Интервюта с мултилокални българи". Дешифрирала: Таня Матанова, 2023.

НЦНКН-ИЕФЕМ, а. е. АИФ I 649. Теренни материали на тема „Национални и европейски измерения на съвременната идентичност на българите. Интервюта със завърнали се българи“, Таня Матанова, 2025.

Парла, А. (2009) Копнеж, принадлежност и местонахождения на родината при българските изселници от турски произход. В: Ал. Кьосев (съст). *Подвижните Балкани. Изследвания на проекта NEXUS (2000-2003)*. София: Просвета, 315-332.

Славкова, М. (2022) *Busco trabajo. Работа и социални отношения на българите в Испания*. София: ИЕФЕМ-БАН & Парадигма.

Tanya Matanova, PhD, is an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. She is a specialist in the field of descendants of interethnic marriages, homeland research. Her further interests are in the field of pilgrimage studies, migrant cultural heritage, ethnic entrepreneurship, etc. Tanya Matanova is the author of the book 'Germans in Bulgaria. Institutions, Social Networks, Everyday Culture' (in Bulgarian and German, 2019) and 'With Two Homelands, Two Languages, Two Cultures… Descendants of Mixed Marriages – Identity and Ethno-cultural Characteristics' (in Bulgarian, 2016; in Russian, Russian Academic Union in Bulgaria, 2015).
E-mail: tanya.matanova@iefem.bas.bg

Part II

Perceptions of the Self and Others in a Variety of Contexts



Pic. 2. Art Gallery 'Vladimir Dimitrov – Maystora', Kyustendil, Bulgaria, 2024.
Photo of a Painting by Stoyan Venev: Plamena Stoyanova.

Being a doctor in West Africa: a transnational professional identity versus the imagination of oneself

Isabelle Gobatto

Abstract: Professional identities are one aspect of personal identities. Some are linked to very local and rare skills. Others are part of today's globalised spaces. The medical profession is a good example of such a phenomenon. Wherever they practise, doctors are trained on the basis of programmes that include scientifically validated knowledge, without any assumed cultural nature. This knowledge, acquired by doctors, refers to common ways of thinking about the body, illness and healing. Their general nature makes it possible to shape professional cultures that lead doctors to invest their profession in ways that are intended to be widely shared. At the same time, a transnational medical identity is being established, reflecting the ambition to highlight a common professional identity based on a set of knowledge, know-how and a shared role, which puts doctors in a horizontal continuity with their colleagues, wherever they practice. In the West African countries where I studied medical practice, this 'shared transnational identity' is not called into question when it is addressed in rhetorical form. However, in the day-to-day practice of medicine, doctors face a range of challenges in their personal experience of work. Based on ethnographies carried out in healthcare centres in Burkina Faso, completed by the life story of a paediatrician practising in a hospital, this article analyses the intricate experiences of doctors within their cultural context of work. The goal is to underline tensions and conflicts between assigned identities and identities relevant to the workplace, following the dichotomy between professional identity and identity at work.
Keywords: professional identity, doctor, West-Africa, self-imagination, local context

Being a doctor: a professional identity

Identity is a major but recent concept, particularly in French anthropology (Baudry and Juchs, 2007; Lévi-Strauss, 2010). The major contemporary issues about identity are related to the notion of cultural belonging. Considered from a more focused point of view, one aspect of identity, whether individual or collective, is grounded in the working world: we speak of professional identity (Becker, 1970), sometimes of identity at work (Perrenoud and Sainsaulieu, 2018). This identity aspect leads to a collective experience of a corporate identity, through professional socialisation processes designed to transmit a set of skills, know-how and interpersonal skills. Once training has been completed, these tools and skills are implemented in the everyday work context, more specifically in the common and collective forms of everyday work, which then become manifestations of the

collective. The term 'identity at work' is particularly interesting as it underlines the central role played by ordinary, everyday work in identity-building processes. In addition, this temporal aspect of the individual experience of work leads to the development of a feeling of community of practice-based identity. Identity cannot be understood merely in terms of static, defined characteristics.

Some of these professional identities relate to highly localised situations including few people (e.g., stone carvers, wood gilders), or a specific kind of work (e.g., glassblowers based on the island of Murano, Italy, where the world's finest handmade glass is produced). Other fields of knowledge and work are more globalised. Such is the case of the medical profession, given the history it integrates: that of biomedical knowledge embedded in a history of science shared by many countries. Whether practising in European countries or on the African continent, doctors are trained on the basis of the same teaching programs and models of learning, including scientifically validated knowledge and ways of thinking about the body, illness and healing. Their general nature gives them a hierarchical position superior to other local vernacular knowledge (Delvecchio-Good, 1995; Dussault, 2008; Mol, 2002). This nature of knowledge involved in medical work contributes to the construction of a corporate identity that transcends borders, on the basis of this commonly shared knowledge. Medical students experience care work in much the same way. Sociology, particularly American sociology, has long studied this central period of formal academic learning that medical students undergo, as well as the professional socialisation that extends it during their first periods of training. Their structuring dimension shapes a community of culture, called professional culture (Freidson, 1984 [1970]; Hughes, 1958; Merton, 1957), leading to the acquisition of shared conceptions of the nature of work, at the center of which is the body (Bucher and Strauss, 1992; Chapoulie, 1973; Good, 1998). The expected role and functions are also internalised, leading to the creation of a group identity. As a result, subjective identification frameworks emerge, shaped by the learning of shared behaviours and values, leading doctors to commit themselves to their profession in largely common ways, without ignoring certain trajectories that, if not deviant, are at least disparate.

What sociology and anthropology have documented is that learning content is shaped by theory and abstract models without taking into account, at this stage, the conditions for applying the acquired knowledge in practice. In a previous paper (Gobatto, 1999), I referred to the notion of 'deculturised knowledge' and, at the same time, to a 'deculturised professional identity', because the biomedical model is presented in terms of scientific objectivity. Today, biomedicine is largely characterised by a set of features that Margaret Lock and Vinh-Kim Nguyen (2010) describe as a socio-technical and historical system consolidated since

the end of the nineteenth century. On the one hand, it puts forward scientific knowledge derived from the biological sciences, based on a uniform conception of the human body as functioning and dysfunctioning in much the same way (Evetts, 2006), whatever the cultural area. This deculturalised knowledge can be reproduced in any context. On the other hand, it contains ways of knowing, understanding and objectifying these bodies and diseases, which are not exempt from a cultural history. Learning is therefore based on the acquisition of a medical culture that is not only made up of scientific and technical knowledge but also of shared representations, conceptions and beliefs. It is also a biographical and identity-related process (Hughes, 1958), based on an institutional framework (Strauss et al., 1986) structured around dedicated practice institutions. On the basis of these general configurations, biomedicine is a shared entity for doctors (Gobatto, 2023a). Hence, doctors develop both an administrative and a category-based identification, linked to an assigned, stable, almost naturalised identity, creating an imaginary 'us' that fits the model proposed and shared by the profession (Baszanger, 1981). From this point of view, it could be said that the medical profession, like others, leads its members to acquire an identity that goes beyond the differences between members (Champy, 2012). The collective dimension of doctors' professional identity is therefore established above all around knowledge, skills and anticipated roles, expected to produce relatively similar behaviours (Lenclud, 2008).

In the West African countries where I have been studying the practice of medicine for the last twenty years (Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali), this transnational identity is not called into question. Indeed, it is rooted in West African universities. As a former French colony, Burkina Faso, in point here, inherits this history of biomedicine; correlatively, the courses offered to students use teaching methods inspired by the French model. It is worth noting that the majority of courses provided in West African universities are similar to those in European countries, in line with a standardisation process aimed at harmonising the quality of courses between countries in the North and South according to an international standard. The aim is to deliver knowledge disconnected from any culture, and so are the professional identities that come with it. Doctors are trained to be 'universal practitioners', to use an often-heard category.

Burkinabè doctors inherit this deculturalised professional identity that they have to incorporate during their training. However, their working contexts are very different from those in countries where the biomedical model has been developed and structured. This article examines the ways in which a collective professional identity, that of the doctor, inherited and jointly assigned globally, is appropriated, experienced and recomposed 'for oneself' in the course of action when doctors develop their practice within healthcare institutions and in relation

to others. By focusing on the personal experience, the aim is to examine the ways in which global professional identities are appropriated, taking into account the active role played by those who appropriate these identities, and the contexts of action in which identification processes take place and identities are recomposed. The aim is to discuss tensions and mismatches between professional identity and identity at work, the latter being the product of a social image and, jointly, of the individual's empirical experience of work. Following the hypothesis that the dispositions acquired during professional socialisation, at the very core of the development of collective professional identities, are activated or thwarted according to the contexts in which each person carries out his or her work, I will demonstrate that some characteristics of the Burkinabè doctors' work contexts disrupt their sense of continuity with a collective professional identity.

My fieldwork material includes ethnographies carried out in healthcare centres in rural and urban Burkina Faso, completed by the life history of a paediatrician practising in a public hospital, Dr K., from 2021 to 2022 (Gobatto, 2023b). Life history is a particularly interesting tool for understanding the intricate experiences of individuals within their social, cultural context, and for gathering detailed, rich personal narratives (Linde, 1993).

From assigning a 'we' to producing an 'I'

The 'us' that characterises the sense of shared identity, while based on classifying professional categories (doctor, lawyer, etc.), is also grounded in a 'sense of belonging' (Dubar, Tripier and Boussard, 1998), which needs to be constantly implemented and renewed. In this way, professional identity cannot be fixed and essentialised (but this applies more broadly to any identity reference point); it can only be understood through a diachronic analysis of its ongoing constructions and reconstructions, carried out at the level of individual practices – and studied at this level – to develop this collective 'we' and move from an identity assigned to a group to an identity felt by an individual member of this collective. In Burkina Faso, an African country ranked in 2023 among the poorest in the world[1], where the context of practice is characterised by a lack of resources, precarious living conditions and the cohabitation of multiple cultural traditions of care, the use of the model learned by doctors in the ordinary course of practical care work reveals a number of conflicts which appear in the temporality of the practice. When I question doctors about their learning of the profession during their academic training, their response is always identical to that given by Dr K.:

[1] The 2023-2024 Human Development Index (HDI) report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) ranks Burkina Faso 185th out of 193 countries.

> We learn to be doctors as if we were going to work without any material contingencies. But then, almost every day at work, we ask ourselves: "But what if it were somewhere else? Could we have gone beyond what we've done here ?"

These comments underline the extent to which the context of medical practice operates like a cut-throat, so difficult is it to find an equivalency between what is theoretically possible in the context of care and treatment, and the very limited reality in the care institutions where Burkinabè doctors work. In some so-called southern countries, such as Burkina Faso, doctors are regularly unable to fulfil their expected role: making diagnoses and offering care. Everything is lacking to make a diagnosis: the investigations that are often necessary (blood tests, radiology examinations, etc.) can rarely be financed by patients with no social security cover. Diagnoses then take a long time, are often uncertain because they cannot be confirmed, and are based, above all, on clinical skills. Patients come late to a medical centre, hoping to find a solution with traditional practitioners who are often not paid in money, as opposed to doctors. Drug prescriptions must systematically take into account patients' financial difficulties: the prescriptions list drugs that patients or their families will select according to their price. This reduces the effectiveness of treatment, symptoms are prolonged and patients sometimes question the diagnosis, moving towards cultural representations involving witchcraft or other interpretations. What perceptions do these doctors have of their membership of a professional group to which they belong but which, in practice, hardly expresses itself positively? How can they continue to find common ground when failure is more common than success in care relationships?

The collective professional identity must be able to resist subjectivised self-identification. The identification with a professional group to which we are supposed to belong depends on the contexts in which we carry out our work in the course of our daily lives. Our identity is updated in the course of this daily work. If this context differs in fundamental ways from the one in which – and from which – a global professional identity was developed, and even if this identity is not static, a too wide gap fractures the sense of belonging. So we can define ourselves as part of a large collective (through horizontal identification), but feel different. This is what Renaud Sainsaulieu (1977) calls the 'cultural effects of the organisation' of work on the construction of identities in the work environment. This process is rooted in day-to-day work, during which reality as a group is expressed on an individual level.

This can lead to the emergence of a hybrid professional self, which incorporates the tension between individual and collective identities. It is shaped by the personal experience of work and interactions in the social context of work. This

point of view is in line with Claude Dubar, Pierre Tripier and Valérie Broussard research (1998), which emphasised the importance of the diachronic dimension of 'work identities', which evolve over time in the course of an individual's social and professional life, producing various forms of 'identity transactions'.

Concerning the medical profession as practised in public health institutions in low-resource countries like Burkina Faso, two major factors make it difficult to fully identify with a collective professional identity: the economic conditions that constrain the supply of care, and the cultural references that have irrigated the care traditions coexisting with biomedical knowledge.

First of all, economic conditions are one of the most salient and structuring issues in this West African country. As Dr K. explains:

> It's difficult for us because there are things that remain totally abstract because of technologies that we don't have, technical procedures that we learn to do in theory, but we never manage to do them in practice because we don't have the right equipment. [...] There's always this tension between what should be done and what we do afterwards, and it's up to us to deal with that on a daily basis. [...] When we start our training courses, we realise that what's said in the lecture theatre applies in the lecture theatre, not in the field. [...] There's what you need to know, like all doctors, and then there's reality. We have to make constant adjustments in our heads.

This interview extract illustrates the gaps between the role learned, the knowledge acquired to fulfil it and what can be put into practice when the action is taken, to perform this role in a country with limited resources and no generalised health insurance system. A large number of socianthropological studies have been carried out on these work contexts, where everything is lacking in practice, except for certain private structures, and on their effects on the quality of care (Livingston, 2012). The treatment costs are very high for families, and many cannot afford the financial expenses involved in supporting doctors in their treatment, by paying for X-rays or biological tests, for example. As a result, failure is routine, as Dr K. explains:

> When you have so little to work with, obviously failure is often at the end of the road. For us, it's when we succeed that it's extraordinary and not ordinary like elsewhere. Failure is part of our daily lives. So when you succeed in curing a patient, especially a child, as I'm a paediatrician, it's great. That's what we fight for every day.

This is a working environment in which the violence of care interactions becomes structural (Dussault, 2008; Gobatto, 2018; Gobatto, 2022; Vasseur, Kane and Le Grand Fosso, 2022), in the face of this inability to provide care due to a lack of resources. This problem is fundamental to the gaps experienced between learning and practice (Gobatto, 2022, 2023a). The economic and

technical parameters mentioned above, however, and the lack of financial resources available to doctors to apply the skills they have acquired in their medical work, do not sum up the complexity of the discontinuity between professional identity and identity at work.

A second salient element relates to the cultural identities of the patients with whom doctors build the healthcare relationship. As a result of their professional socialisation, the doctors we met fully accepted the authority of the biomedical knowledge they had learned, even though they were sometimes confronted with situations and local know-hows that challenged them as studied by Arthur Kleinman (1981), such as those relating to sorcery (Gobatto, 1999, 2023b). Biomedicine and its knowledge coexist on a daily basis with other traditions of caring for the body and its disorders and for diseases in African societies. But in their day-to-day practice, doctors give priority to medical rationality, which operates as an embodied mental routine. So when they reach the limits of their diagnostic or therapeutic opportunities, the lack of technical and financial resources is systematically put forward as an explanation for their failure. The consequence is a 'naturally' critical attitude towards other kinds of knowledge (vernacular or traditional) when these interfere with the care process. If other contexts are concerned, notably in Europe, one specific aspect relates to the conflict between biomedical knowledge, the traditional healers' knowledge and the patients' and their families' personal knowledge, all of which may be called into question, or even opposed, within the health care institution itself, during the treatment. For example, families can have a traditional practitioner brought into a healthcare centre, who will practice at night when the doctors are away, administering his medicine. Dr K. explains:

> I often start a cure for a hospitalised child and when I come back the next morning, he's throwing up a black liquid, for example. Nothing I've given looks like that. This means that during the night, the family had a traditional treatment administered at the same time. All I can do now is just cry! Because I've lost all my reference points for keeping track of the child's state of health. It happens to me several times a month.

It's not unusual for traditional healers to work alongside medical and paramedical staff in healthcare institutions to deliver treatments involving rituals and potions based on plants and animal substances, or for patients and their families to administer traditional medicines alongside biomedical treatment. As many doctors explain, the use of so-called traditional medicines can also delay biomedical treatment; by the time patients arrive at a healthcare centre, they are already showing signs of complications that often make recovery impossible. This part of the care process has been the subject of anthropological analysis – in

African contexts – since the late 1990s (Gobatto, 1999; Mulemi, 2010; Wendland, 2010, 2012; Worthington, 2015).

In other words, the way in which care work is carried out on a daily basis in these contexts characterised by precariousness of life, limited resources for caring and being cared for, and multiple representations of illness and healing, provides the basis on which the continuity and permanence of a professional identity can be confirmed or refuted, giving rise to a feeling of isolation and creating communities within communities (Goode, 1957). It is therefore the temporality through which doctors sometimes experience a kind of illusion of belonging to a community and, consequently, an illusion of an identity, because the perceived identity, grounded in the real work, differs from the assigned identity, grounded in the theoretical work. We then note the expression of suffering identities, resulting from repeated failures to find meaning in one's work. These analyses reveal some of the concrete ways in which what Goffman (2013 [1961]) has theorised as role distance arises, i.e. the interaction between prescribed and actual behaviour, approaching the role not as a set of rights and obligations but as a local representation (performance) in a given context. The same applies to identity, between the assigned identity and the experienced one, resulting from the dynamics of the contexts.

To conclude

As experienced in a West African context, Burkina Faso being a typical example, the medical profession is a highly heuristic case for the study of professional identities. Difficulties linked to the context of action and institutional constraints in which these professional identities and the associated interactions have to operate make certain identifications either complicated or impossible, as these contexts do not allow for a sense of self-identification at the individual level. As a corollary, some of the doctors I met were in great suffering; others were trying to break away from clinical practice, in order to distance themselves from these disruptions in their capacity to think like others, by practicing abroad, in better-equipped countries, in international institutions or even NGOs, in search of positions in health management. These situations highlight the dynamic and situational nature of identities. These are not given once and for all; they only exist through the individual's ability to make them a reality for themselves. It should also be noted that they do not necessarily lead to forms of identity contestation, but rather generate processes of stigmatisation towards patients considered to be responsible for these situations. This point echoes Bernard Lahire's view, quoted by Baudry and Juchs (2007: 166): '(...) that social identities have no nature, only uses'.

References:

Baszanger, I. (1981) Socialisation professionnelle et contrôle social. Le cas des étudiants en médecine futurs généralistes. *Revue française de sociologie* 22: 223–245. Available at: https://www.persee.fr/doc/rfsoc_0035-2969_1981_num_22_2_3411 (accessed 4 April 2024).

Baudry, R. and Juchs, J.P. (2007) Définir l'identité. *Hypothèses* 1 (10): 155–167.

Becker, H. S. (1970) The Nature of a Profession. In: H. S. Becker. *Sociological Work, Method and Substance*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing, pp. 87-102.

Bucher, R. and Strauss, A. (1992) [1961] La dynamique des professions. In: A. Strauss. *La Trame de la négociation. Sociologie qualitative et interactionnisme*. Paris: L'Harmattan, pp. 67-86.

Champy, F. (2012) *La sociologie des professions*. Paris: PUF.

Chapoulie, J. M. (1973) Sur l'analyse sociologique des groupes professionnels. *Revue française de sociologie* 14: 86–114. Available at: https://www.persee.fr/doc/rfsoc_0035-2969_1973_num_14_1_2179 (accessed 4 April 2024).

Delvecchio-Good, M. J. (1995) Cultural Studies of Biomedicine: an Agenda for Research. *Social Science and Medicine* 41 (4): 461–473.

Dubar, C., Tripier, P. and Boussard, V. (1998) *Sociologie des professions*. Paris: Armand Colin.

Dussault, G. (2008) The Health Professions and the Performance of Future Health Systems in Low-Income Countries: Support or Obstacle? *Social Science and Medicine* 66 (10): 2088–2095.

Evetts, J. (2006) Trust and Professionalism: Challenges and Occupational Changes. C*urrent Sociology* 4: 515–531.

Freidson, E. 1984 (1970). *La profession médicale*. Paris: Payot.

Gobatto, I. (1999) *Être médecin au Burkina Faso. Dissection sociologique d'une transplantation professionnelle*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Gobatto, I. (2018) Les maladies chroniques dans les Suds. Conclusion. *Émulations* 27: 113–121. DOI: https://doi.org/10.14428/emulations.27.

Gobatto, I. (2022) Perceptions and Management of Vulnerabilities in Daily Medical Work. West-African Situations, Global Perspective. *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* 14 (1). DOI: https://doi.org/10.5897/IJSA2021.0912.

Gobatto, I. (2023a) Apprendre la biomédecine et construire le travail de soin aux marges des savoirs locaux. Réflexions à partir du Burkina Faso. *Ethnographiques.org* 45. Available at: https://www.ethnographiques.org/2023/Gobatto (accessed 4 April 2024).

Gobatto, I. (2023b) *Des vulnérabilités en partage. Récit d'une pédiatre au Burkina Faso*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Goffman, E. (1961) *Encounters. Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.

Good, B. (1998) *Comment faire de l'anthropologie médicale ? Médecine, rationalité et vécu*. Paris: Institut Synthélabo (Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond).

Goode, W. J. (1957) Community within Community: the Professions. *American Sociological Review* XXII (2): 195–200.

Hughes, E. (1958) *Men and Their Work*. Glencoe: The Free Press.

Kleinman, A. (1981) *Patients and Healers in the Context of Culture. An Exploration of the Borderland between Anthropology, Medicine, and Psychiatry*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lenclud, G. (2008) Identité et identité. *L'Homme* 187-188: 447–462.

Lévi-Strauss, C. (dir.) (2010) *L'Identité.* Paris : PUF.

Linde, C. (1993) *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Livingston, J. (2012) *Improvising Medicine: An African Oncology Ward in an Emerging Cancer Epidemic*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Lock, M. and Nguyen, V.K. (2010) *An Anthropology of Biomedicine*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell.

Merton, R. (1957) *The Student Physician, Introductory Studies in the Sociology of Medical Education.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Mol, A. (2002) *The Body Multiple. Ontology in Medical Practice*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Mulemi, B. (2010) *Coping with Cancer and Adversity. Hospital Ethnography in Kenya*. Leiden: African Studies Centre. Available at : http://hdl.handle.net/1887/15029 (accessed 4 April 2024).

Perrenoud, M. and Sainsaulieu, I. (2018) Pour *ne pas* en finir avec l'identité au travail. *SociologieS*. Available at: http://journals.openedition.org/sociologies/8750 (accessed 4 April 2024).

Sainsaulieu, R. (1977) *L'Identité au travail*. Paris: Presses de la FNSP.

Strauss, A., Fagerhaugh, S., Suczeck, B. and Wiener, C. (1986) *Social Organization of Medical Work*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Vasseur, P., Kane, H. and Le Grand Fosso, A. (2022) Des soins différenciés aux violences en salle de naissance : études en Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre. *Anthropologie & Santé* 24. Available at: http://journals.openedition.org/anthropologiesante/11399 (accessed 4 April 2024).

Wendland, C. (2010) *A Heart for the Work. Journeys through an African Medical School*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wendland, C. (2012) Animating Biomedicine's Moral Order: The Crisis of Practice in Malawian Medical Training, *Current anthropology* 53 (6): 755–788.

Worthington, N. (2015) *Where There Is a Doctor: An Ethnography of Paediatric Heart Surgery Missions in Honduras*. PhD Thesis, Columbia University, USA.

Isabelle Gobatto is Professor in the Social Anthropology Department at Bordeaux University (France). She conducts her research within the interdisciplinary Passages laboratory (UMR 5319 CNRS). Her research focuses on biomedicine, health systems, care and medical knowledge in West African societies (Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali). She is the author of over 50 scientific articles and 4 books: 'Des vulnérabilités en partage. Récit d'une pédiatre au Burkina Faso' (2024); 'Maux d'amour, Vies de femmes. Sexualité et prévention du sida en milieu urbain africain' (with I. Bardem, 1995); 'Etre médecin au Burkina Faso' (1999); 'La prévention des risques infectieux auprès des personnes toxicomanes' (2001).
E-mail: isabelle.gobatto@u-bordeaux.fr

SERBS AND BULGARIANS – CLOSEST BROTHERS OR MOST TREACHEROUS ENEMIES? THE BULGARIAN VERSION

Petko Hristov

Abstract: The article addresses the question of how Bulgarians have constructed the image of the Serbs in the modern era, after the birth and establishment of the modern Bulgarian state in the second half of the 19th century. The ambivalent attitude of Bulgarian intellectuals, writers, historians, and scientists in the last 150 years is presented. The construction of this image and the attitude towards the neighbouring people, close in language, culture, and mentality, often follows the curves of Slavophilic politics in the Balkans, vacillating between complete neglect and unconditional sympathy. Periods of warming political relations and of cruel fratricidal wars alternate, accumulating a number of clichés in Bulgarian journalism, often used for propaganda purposes. The 1990s, a decade associated with the bloody breakup of former Yugoslavia, resurrected a number of these clichés. I will present some of them in my paper, based on publications in the mass media during this period.
Keywords: Bulgarians, Serbs, image of the Other, stereotypes, the Balkans

At the end of the 19th century, the renowned Bulgarian writer Aleko Konstantinov's most famous character Bay Ganyo exclaimed: 'Serbs? I know their tricks!' (Константинов, 1989: 36). This clearly indicated the popular attitude of distrust and neglect in the young Bulgarian state, too busy finding its new modern identity and affirming its national ideals. However, in his travelogue *To Chicago and Back*, that same Aleko Konstantinov was capable of affectionately retelling his warm encounter with the Serbian citizen Nedeljković at the Columbian Fair in Chicago in 1893. The two sang 'Hristos Voskrese' in Old Slavic at an American bar, 'much to the amusement of the bar's American visitors' (Константинов, 1981: 45–46).

The article is dedicated to the question of how Bulgarians construct the image of the *Other* in the modern era after the birth and establishment of modern states in the Balkans in the 19th century, in the specific case of their closest neighbour, the Serbs. Following Maria Todorova's research (2009) on how the image of the Balkans outside the peninsula is constructed, the goal is to reflect on how Balkan peoples see their neighbours and what the stereotypes of these images are. A modest task is set, just to start the debate.

Bulgarians and Serbs have been connected for centuries by culture-historical universalism, almost unprecedented in the world (cf. Пантев, 1999b: 9). Since Khan Pressian's campaigns during the 9th century, the two

peoples have waged seven wars against each other, four during the Middle Ages and three during modern times, which became engraved in their respective historic memories. In both cases, though, this memory is strangely selective: Bulgarians exhibited aggressive pride in their 1885 victory against 'Serbian deceitfulness', even though they had a common enemy in the face of the Ottoman Turkey. Even today, however, nobody in Bulgaria makes the effort to understand how unpopular this war actually was in Serbia itself. Later on in Serbia, it was difficult to understand the true motives behind the Bulgarian army's attack in 1913, that began the Second Balkan War, also known as the 'War among allies': an act of insanity for which Bulgarians were punished severely enough by the failure of their attempts at national unification. Lady Durham[1] was shocked when Serbians rejoiced after the defeat of the 1903 *Ilinden* uprising in Macedonia[2], organised by revolutionaries who identified themselves as Bulgarians or Macedonian Bulgarians; decades later, Ilya Ehrenburg[3] was in turn disgusted by Sofia's joyful reaction after German aerial bombardment destroyed a large part of Belgrade in the Second World War (Пантев, 1999b: 9).

On the eve of the Second World War, the renowned Bulgarian historian Petar Mutafchiev summarised Bulgaria's 'national catastrophe' after the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, comparing it to Serbian history thus:

> ...in the darkness of their insignificant lives, among countless difficulties, they [the Serbs] were getting ready for the great moment when the fate of all peoples would be decided. At this moment, they, the weak and neglected, whom we [the Bulgarians] used to see as despicable, turned out to be not only livelier but also much wiser than us who lived with the illusion of power and supremacy (Мутафчиев, 1987: 154).

Here, however, is the 'reply' about disregard from the Serbian side, seen in an article by the Serbian journalist Radoslav Petkovich in the Belgrade newspaper 'Blic'; the year is 2011:

> We know nothing about Bulgarian history, but we have the impression that they [Bulgarians] are stupid, primitive, and savage. Neither of us must be deceived about the other. Tell some Serb that the Bulgarian state had a more important role in the Balkans during the Middle Ages than Serbia, and this would be automatically considered high treason, despite being an (un)pleasant fact (Petković, 2011).

[1] Mary Edith Durham (8 December 1863 – 15 November 1944) was a British artist, anthropologist and writer who is best known for her anthropological accounts of life in Albania in the early 20th century.

[2] In this text *Macedonia* is used as the name of a geographical and ethnographic area, not to be confused with the contemporary state of North Macedonia, formed after the split of former Yugoslavia in 1990s.

[3] Ilya Ehrenburg was a Soviet writer, revolutionary, journalist and historian.

Geographically, Serbia and Bulgaria are today's Balkan states, forming the 'backbone' of our much-suffering peninsula. It is natural to raise the question: Can there be stability given the abnormal relationship between them? As a historian and ethnologist, I can reply: As long as historical emotions prevail over reason, Balkan destinies will be settled outside the Balkans.

The image of the Serb is not present in classical Bulgarian folklore. Groups recognised as 'foreign' include Turks (even in the 'Bosnian Turks' variation), Greeks, Wallachians, Jews, and even 'Latins' (meaning Catholics), but not Serbs. The hero's classical *enemy* in Bulgarian hero epics was a Turk, the cheater was a Greek and sometimes a Jew, but there were no Serbs. They began appearing in urban Bulgarian songs, performed at fairs and markets by travelling musicians and recorded in popular songbooks, only after the Serbo-Bulgarian War of 1885. Until then, even in the age of the Bulgarian Renaissance, the ideologists of the Bulgarian liberation movement viewed Serbia as a helper, closely related by descent, language, and religion, on which they could rely for assistance in organising a revolution against the Ottoman rule. It was Belgrade that acted as a temporary residence for some of the most famous Bulgarian revolutionaries; it was there where Georgi Rakovski's First Bulgarian Legion was founded in 1862 with the intention of liberating Bulgaria, following Garibaldi's example; it was the Serbian Army in which thousands of Bulgarian volunteers enlisted during the numerous Serbo-Turkish independence wars. Later, however, when it became clear that Serbian politicians were following Ilija Garashanin's *Načertanije* and were actually using the Bulgarian liberation movement to expand Serbia's territory to the South and the East, thus annexing Bulgarian lands, these 'brotherly' ties were cut and the Bulgarian Legion, as well as most Bulgarian revolutionaries, moved to Wallachia (today part of Romanian State). The *Načertanije* (1844) is considered to be the ideological basis of Pan-Serbism and the Greater Serbian programme to unify the lands that were inhabited by Bulgarians, Macedonians, Albanians, Montenegrins, Bosnians, Hungarians and Croats as part of Greater Serbia. Garašanin's plan also included methods for spreading Serbian influence in the claimed lands. It proposed ways to influence the Croats and Slavic Muslims, whom Garašanin considered 'Serbs of the Catholic faith' and 'Serbs of the Islamic faith'. The document also emphasised the need for cooperation between the Balkan nations and advocated that the Balkans be governed by the nations of the Balkans.

Despite this, most Bulgarians view the Serbs as 'brotherly Slavic and Orthodox people', closest among all other Balkan peoples. It was not a coincidence that Serbia was the first to establish an embassy in Sofia after the Liberation of 1878, even though Bulgaria was still a vassal to the Sultan

(Христов, 2003: 113). This was followed by a sudden turn in relations after King Milan attacked the young Bulgarian state in 1885, following the unification of the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia. As Konstantin Irechek concluded about Midwestern Bulgaria:

> ...Even if certain pro-Serbian sentiments were established after the period of Serbian occupation [1878-1879, when Serbian administration was present in the region], they were completely gone after the Serbo-Bulgarian War of 1885 (Иречек, 1899: 501).

The declared war on Bulgaria by the Serbian king was not popular even among the soldiers in the Serbian army – at first, many of them perceived the declared mobilisation as a joint march of the Orthodox Serbs and Bulgarians against the Sultan's army, 'as the tradition of Christian and Slavic solidarity dictates' (*Илчев*, 2019: 574). Very soon, however, fleeing on the heights around Slivnitsa, they understood the true intentions of their king, who cowardly hid before the battle in the quarters of the General Staff in Pirot (*Илчев*, 2019: 579).

After the Serbian Army's defeat at Slivnitsa in 1885, the Serbian King Milan entered Bulgarian folklore as the *deceitful brother* who *stabs in the back* of the Bulgarian army that was stationed in Thrace, expecting an attack by the Turks. *Judas Iscariot*, *the envious Cain*, *fratricidal king* – King Milan *murdered two brotherly peoples* and *spilt brotherly blood*, *made two brothers fight, made Serbs and Bulgarians wage war*. For the first time, the figure of the 'Shumadian swine' related to the fratricidal king ('King Milan, you Shumadian swine') entered Bulgarian mentality, followed by a generalised view of the Serbs: 'These Serbs, these swine, they started fighting us and didn't know they sinned'! Another example of Serbian deceitfulness was the lack of appreciation for Bulgarian volunteers in the Serbo-Turkish wars of liberation and independence: 'They didn't see on our chests their own medals that they gave us for our heroism!' (Анчев, 1995: 137).

This image of Serbia and Serbians would later persist in mainstream caricatures created by the famous Bulgarian artists in the so-called *Balkan parrot*[4] group during and after the Balkan Wars and the First World War. And, whereas in 1915-1916 the dead 'Shumadian swine' was hung on the Christmas tree as decoration or was served on a skewer at the European circus (Gehl and Petrov, 2005: 152–189). According to the same authors, Serbia was later depicted as an executioner dressed as a Shumadian soldier (pic. 1) or as a lion tearing Bulgaria and Macedonia apart after the Neuilly Treaty of 1919

[4] The journal *Balkan Parrot* is a satirical edition with political content, published in Sofia between 1915 and 1927. The editor-in-chief is Sava Zlachkin.

that transferred most of Macedonia and the Bulgarian-inhabited 'Western Outlands'[5] to the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Gehl and Petrov, 2005: 149–240).



Pic. 1. Balkan Parrot caricature (Петров и Гел, 2011: 149–240, Fig. 4, without page numbering).

In Bulgaria, the 1919 joining of Bulgarian-inhabited border territories to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes turned the Bosilegrad region and the area between Tsaribrod and Tran into a collective image of the lamented 'Western Outlands'. Until then, it was common to refer to this area of Bulgaria as lagging, primitively simple and archaic; this, however, was replaced by the heroisation of the 'Western Bulgarian children, separated from Mother Bulgaria' (Hristov, 2002: 75). Here, Bulgarian propaganda spared no epithets and metaphors. The similarities in dialect and customs between the local Bulgarian population and that of the Pirot region, and Eastern Serbia as a whole, became more of an issue than an advantage; they were presented as a threat that was supposed to keep the national conscience even more 'awake'. Here are some 'guidelines' given by the *Western Echo* newspaper, printed in Sofia for refugees from the Western Outlands (Западно Ехо, 1923, 7: 1; cf. Hristov, 2002: 76):

[5] According to Neuilly Treaty of 1919, Bulgaria, as the defeated country, had to cede in addition to most of the newly liberated Macedonia, an additional area of 1,555 km^2 on its western border with the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia), including a population of 64,509 people, mostly Bulgarians.

> Your conquerors [i.e. the Serbs] have the capability and the cunning mastery to use cajoling and convincing while shooting their arrows against the pillars of a nation, against its spirit, so take care and stay extremely cautious. The closeness of our language and the similarity of our faith and customs help them, so you'll need to stay alert.

The headline of the same newspaper's issue from April 17, 1923 (Западно Exo, 1923, 11: 1) stated: 'Don't attempt to speak Serbian!' The newspaper's pages elaborated on different ways of opposing Serbian assimilation strategies, such as the imposed school celebration (*slava*) on the day of St. Sava instead of the already-popular celebration of St. St. Cyril and Methodius as an official celebration in Bulgarian schools (Hristov, 2002: 76).

The most sinister image was given to the *Serbian occupiers* of Macedonia. The revolutionary organisation VMRO, was established to fight for the liberation of Macedonia from Ottoman rule. It began a relentless campaign of terror and guerrilla activity against Serbian authorities in the newly created Vardar Banovina. The slogan 'Srbe – na vrbe!', coined by the Slovenian Dr Marko Natlacen and published in his poem 'String up the Serbs', was adopted not only by the Croatian fascist and ultranationalist organisation 'Ustashe' in the 1940s but also by VMRO revolutionaries in its Bulgarian form: *Sărbite – na vurbite*! [meaning is the same]. The attacks by VMRO on the new Serbian administration provoked brutal repressions by the authorities against the Bulgarian population in the occupied part of Macedonia. This resonated in the Bulgarian society, whose main goal became the revision of the Bucharest (1913) and Neuilly (1919) treaties.

The Bulgarian society repeatedly discussed the incident in Macedonia from 1912, widely covered in the press, of the king slapping the seven-year-old Vaska Zoycheva (1905– uncertain) from Prilep. During the First Balkan War, King Alexander of Yugoslavia stopped the little girl on the Stone Bridge in Skopje and, leaning over her, asked her: 'Šta si ti?' [What are you? – in the sense of ethnic origin]. The little girl replied, 'Bulgarian,' and Alexander, later called 'The Unifier', slapped her across the face with his royal palm (Jezernik, 2006: 185). He then took out a silver coin and explained that it would be hers if she said she was Serbian. Little Vaska kept repeating that she was Bulgarian and received two more slaps from His Majesty.

As a result of cooperation between Bulgarian and Yugoslavian anti-Fascist resistance movements, an agreement for friendship, collaboration and mutual help was signed in 1947 in Bled (today's Slovenia), attempting to pave the way for a federation between Bulgaria and Tito's Yugoslavia. Warm relations between Tito and Georgi Dimitrov (pic. 2), however, lasted only until the Cominform Bureau's 1948 resolution and Yugoslavia's transformation into a

'revisionist country', an enemy of the Soviet Union and the other countries in the socialist bloc (pic. 3).



Pic. 2. Georgi Dimitrov greets Tito at the railway station[6].



Pic. 3. Cartoon of G. Valka, part of the poster exhibition 'Tito and His Clique' (1953) with authors from the Ideological Department of the Bulgarian Communist Party (cf. Hristov, 2017: 285).

[6] Newspaper 24 часа, 12.12.2020 (https://www.24chasa.bg/bulgaria/article/9310411, accessed 24 March 2025).

It was not a coincidence that people living under Todor Zhivkov's regime in Bulgaria spoke of 'brotherly Algiers and neighbour Yugoslavia' (Пантев, 1999b: 9). And, whereas in Tito's Yugoslavia the ideological apparatus inflated the fear of external enemies and *neighbourphobia was used as glue for a country that would sooner or later have to be unglued* (Стефанов, 1999: 11, 14), Todor Zhivkov's regime in Bulgaria imposed a complete information blackout about events happening beyond the state's western border. Thus, in the conditions of official information taboos, Yugoslavia became a symbol of the West to Bulgarians, an object of *envy for their chalga, pub culture and amusements* (Александров, 1999: 8).

During the early 1990s, the initial years of democratic changes in Bulgaria coincided with former Yugoslavia's violent break-up. This put all Bulgarian imagery towards Serbia and the Serbs to a serious test (Тодоров, 2000), and many of the stereotypes from the past were replicated. This period cannot be considered particularly appropriate for building a 'normal' image of the Serbs. The main factor in forming this image was armed conflicts, which brought out from the depths of history the old views of Serbs as arrogant ultra-nationalists, a brave and stubborn 'nation at war', but not in the victim's role. Isolated attempts to differentiate between Serbs and the Serbian state proved futile, and Serbs are still being described 'conveniently', i.e. collectively.

The negative image of Serbian nationalism was verbally framed by two public declarations: the 'Address' by 89 Bulgarian writers 'to the governments of member countries in the United Nations, to politicians and intellectuals from all over the world', signed in November 1991 'regarding Yugoslavia's aggression against the Republic of Croatia', and the 'Declaration by Bulgarian intellectuals regarding the war in Yugoslavia', signed in April 1999. The latter declaration about the military operation in Kosovo stated the following, previously mentioned in the 'Address':

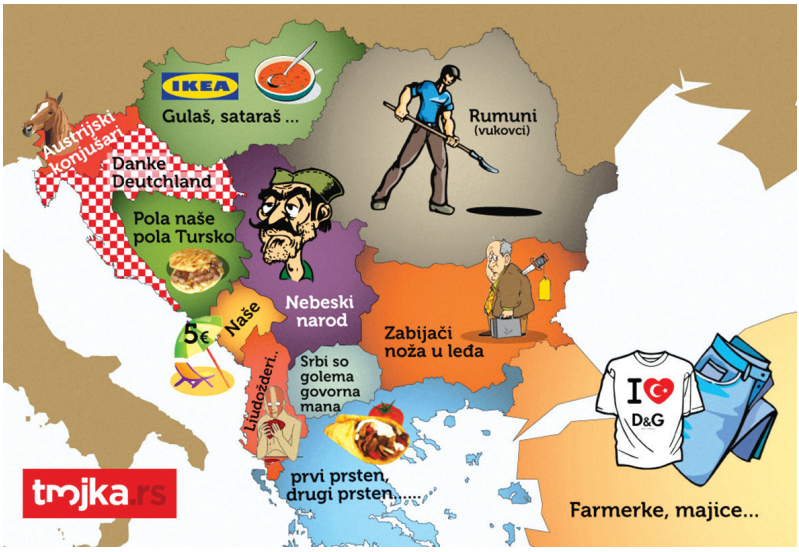
> The ruling Serbian socialists' warring totalitarianism remains unsurpassed because it fully combines the aggressiveness of communist fanaticism and the atrocities of nationalist demagogy... It is necessary for the world community to condemn as soon as possible the genocide that Serbian chauvinists are waging... Red fascism must be stopped! (Култура, 07.05.1999).[7]

The attempt by another group of 100 left-oriented intellectuals to support the call from Athens, 'For peace on the Balkans!' and for an end to NATO's bombardment of Yugoslavia's remnants in 1999 remained isolated by the media. The renowned Bulgarian poet and academician Valeri Petrov sadly remarked:

[7] https://newspaper.kultura.bg/media/my_html/2078/c_mih.htm (accessed 24 March 2025).

> If we let ourselves get involved in the aggression against Yugoslavia, this would become the second time we stabbed our neighbours in the back, and new abysses would appear in the Balkans... much deeper than the ones from the past that only brought us suffering.[8]

Thus, as early as the mid-19th century and as late as the 1999 NATO bombing campaign, relations between Bulgaria and Serbia/Yugoslavia changed often, varying between 'philia' and 'phobia', between 'warmed' relations and sharp confrontations, between friendship and rivalry. The frequent waves of proclamations of brotherly love between politicians on both sides, often blessed by Slavophilic Russia, crashed in the battle cries of the Serbo-Bulgarian War in 1885, the Balkan Wars and the First World War, as well as during Bulgaria's occupation of Eastern Serbia during the Second World War. The presence of Bulgarian occupation forces in Serbia also cemented the Serbian stereotype that Bulgarians are the neighbours who 'always stab Serbia in the back'.



Pic. 4. Serbian perceptions of their neighbours[9].

Finally, we can summarise that Bulgarian society has formed the opinion that Serbs are perpetually in conflict against somebody: Muslims, Croats, Montenegrins, the EU, USA, NATO, Albania, Bulgaria and so on. If one can speak of a trend, it could mostly be seen in preserving the paradoxical fact that

[8] https://www.omda.bg/public/bulg/news/kosovo/peace_2.htm (accessed 24 March 2025).

[9] https://www.moddb.com/groups/european-union/images/balkans-according-to-serbia1 (accessed 24 March 2025).

Serbs still have no neutral image: they are either good or bad, depending on the two global geopolitical, ideological and social-psychological understandings. Oppositions were preserved when building this image: Islam–Slavdom (cf. Todorova, 2009: 177), politically Left – Right as Good – Bad, as 'brothers that stab us in the back'. The researcher is baffled by this image's remarkable stability over the years. As the historian Andrey Pantev remarked: 'There are no sister countries in the Balkans. Differences between states in the Balkans are savagely manifested, even when they are comically minimal and insignificant.' (Пантев, 1999а: 12).

I would like to conclude by quoting the late Prof. Milcho Lalkov, who taught me a lot about the history of the Balkans:

> We have a bad present and an uncertain future, so we seek comfort in the past. There, we clashed with our neighbours because they were great too. In the Balkans, we, in an Aesopian style, recreate the Fable in which the wolf meets the lamb and says: "You haven't insulted me, but your father did, and I will therefore seek revenge from you." None of us wants to accept the other as equal, so we use history as a revanche for past defeats and old wounds. When our neighbours outrun us, we look at them with envy and hatred. When we outrun them, we look at them with disdain. Each of us thinks that he has much to take from history at the expense of his neighbours, and nothing to give back (Лалков, 2000: 9).

It is my sincere hope that this will change in the future! So, we do not repeat Bay Ganyo's contemptuous remark: 'Serbs? We know their tricks!'.

References:

Gehl, K. and Petrov, P. (2005) Die Nachbarn Bulgariens im Spiegel der Karikaturen "Balkanski papagal" (1915-1927). *Zeitschrift für Balkanologie* 41: 152–189.

Hristov, P. (2002) Use of the Holiday for Propaganda Purposes (The "Serbian" *slava* and/or the "Bulgarian" *sabor*). *Ethnologia Balkanica* 6: 69–80.

Hristov, P. (2017) 'Tito's Gang – an Instrument of the Imperialists": Images of the Yugoslav's "Revisionism" in the Bulgarian Newspapers of the Early 1950s. In: D. Demski et al. (eds). *The Multi-Mediatized Other. The Construction of Reality in East-Central Europe*, 1945 – 1980. Budapest: l'Harmattan, pp. 264-285.

Jezernik, B. (2006) *Wild Europe. The Balkans in the Gaze of Western Travelers*. Saqi Books.

Petković, R. (2011). Mi, Bugari, ostali. *Blic*, 9 January.

Todorova, M. (2009) *Imagining the Balkans.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Александров, Х. (1999) Коментари. *Сега*, 25 май, с. 8.

Анчев, А. (1995) *Песни за Сръбско-българската война от 1885 г.* София: Май.

Волф, Г. и кол. (съст) (2011) *Нашата Европа. Български представи за своето и чуждото 1870-1945*. София: Сиела.

Западно ехо, бр. 7, 15 февруари 1923; бр. 11, 17 април 1923.
Илчев, Ив. (2019) *Розата на Балканите. Т. 1. България до края на XIX век.* София: Колибри.
Иречек, К. (1899) *Пътувания из България.* Пловдив: изд. 'Христо Г. Данов'.
Константинов, Ал. (1989) Бай Ганьо. В: Ал. Константинов. *Съчинения*. Том I, София: изд. 'Български писател'.
Култура, бр. 18, 7 май, 1999.
Лалков, М. (2000) Размисли. *168 часа*, 3–9 март, с. 9.
Мутафчиев, П. (1987) *Книга за българите*. София: БАН.
Пантев, А. (1999a) Македонците са последните югославяни. *Сега*, 17 април, с. 12.
Пантев, А. (1999b) Мразим се като братя. *24 часа*, 1 април, с. 9.
Петров, П. и Гел, К. (2011) Оперението на българските „папагали". Образи на Запада в политическата стенна карикатура (1915-1945). В: Волф, Г. и кол. (съст). *Нашата Европа. Български представи за своето и чуждото 1870-1945*. София: Сиела, 149-240.
Стефанов, П. (1999) Защото Живков забрани да научаваме какво пишат за нас съседите. *24 часа*, 2 октомври, с. 11, 14.
Тодоров, В. (2000) *„Знам ги аз тях!" Сърбия и сърбите в българската литература*. София: Liter Net.
Христов, П. (2003) Никола Пашић и његово деловање у емиграцији у Бугарској. *Развитак* 213-214: 113–120.

Petko Hristov is a PhD in Ethnology, and Associate Professor at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research with Ethnographic Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Over the past few years, his main scholarly interests involve studying labour migrations in the Balkans; female mobility; the construction of social networks among trans-border migrants; family and kinship; the construction of identity with the help of culture and traditional religiousness; border studies; political anthropology. He is a member of several international scholarly networks and research projects. He has published over 150 articles in a number of international and national peer-reviewed journals and collections in renowned scholarly series.
E-mail: hristov_p@yahoo.com

THE ORIGINS OF PERIPHERAL IDENTITY IN SETOMAA AND ON KIHNU ISLAND

Mare Kõiva

Abstract: The populations of Setomaa in the south-eastern part of Estonia, at the Russian boarder, and on the Estonian island Kihnu in the Baltic Sea, possess distinct ethnic identities that connect today's communities to local history and to specific cultural markers (local language, literacy, costume, customs, cuisine, celebrations, religiosity). This sense of a peripheral, local, ethnic identity was created, and changed, several times during the 20th century, as exemplified by the cultural features listed as heritage with UNESCO. This paper explores elements from older cultural layers that have been adapted and used as markers, and how these markers are used by the tourist industry to give exotic value to both places as destinations. Personal initiatives as well as national and regional programmes (for example the Seto Regional Programme and the Islands Programme) play important roles in assisting particular cultural development, such as literary creation, at the same time as supporting existing local traditions.
Keywords: peripheral identity, local language, traditions, Seto identity, Kihnu identity

Introduction

Certain new tendencies indicate that the periphery is not a valuable area for researchers of historical folklore or ethnography, or for linguists and observers of cultural transfer, despite this being an interesting area where new identities are being established.

People's identities are linked to where they live and how they live there. The value and meaning of a place change in history along with socio-cultural processes, changes in settlement, economic circumstances and language (Tuan, 1991). Through the media, metaphors, and symbols that transcend time and space, collective identity is reconstructed, while within this framework individual perspectives and identities exist (Halbwachs, 1980: 43; Lowenthal, 1998: 121; Nora, 1996: 5–23). Prioritising heritage gives people the opportunity to construct an identity that helps to view and value their memories, offers excitement, balance and finds new ways to construct an environment that suits them in new circumstances (Bauman, 2013: 1–6). There are various ways in which people ritualise their practices (Grimes, 2013; Lukken, 2005), including by traditionalising, repeating, and situating them in specific places and times. Doing so helps them channel feelings and emotions, express ideas and ideals, cope with contingency, and create identity on individual and community levels.

This article discusses the components of the identity of two peripheral regions. The first components are history, local language, and phenomena of heritage and tradition (special features of folklore); the second, folk costumes, innovative cultural phenomena and religious features, along with the consideration of whether and how they contribute to the repossession and reconsideration of local identity. The two regions are important and distinct, both with strong identity (Tiit, 2024): Kihnu is a small island in the Baltic Sea; the Seto are an ethnic group in south-eastern Estonia, on the border with Russia. In total, there were almost 12,000 Setos in 2011 (Kommel, 2013), although in 2021 there were 25,800 people who declared they were Seto. There are 700 residents on Kihnu (apx. 300 during winter) with more than 1,800 who can speak Kihnu dialect.

Both areas are distinguished by their languages (strictly speaking dialects of Estonian). In Estonia, dialects have been systematically studied since the middle of the 19th century. However, the first observations concerning Estonian dialects originate from as early as the 16th century. Current local dialects generally do not have a literary traditions, with some exceptions such as Kihnu, Mulgi and Võru dialects which are now also developing a literary language. Both areas are distinguish by their religions: Kihnu was converted to Orthodoxy with the 19th century conversion movement; the area of the Seto is indigenous Orthodox, with other churches added later, over time. These differences gave rise to changes in calendar holidays, among others. Consequently, different religious landscapes have appeared, as well as different food cultures, attitudes, divisions of labour. On Kihnu further changes came under the influence of the insularity of the island. For example, on Kihnu, for a combination of reasons, folk costume was still worn every day at the beginning of the 21st century. Archaic folkloric features and singing styles, as well as several other features relating to contemporary culture, are among the local symbols that distinguish these two regions from the rest of Estonia.

The 2017 Seto Congress (Seto Congress, 2017) and the 2023 first Võro Congress declared publicly that both groups identify themselves as indigenous. The decision of the Võro Congress gave public visibility to the hopes and activities of several communities who were establishing their identities and promoting the idea of self-determination as indigenous groups. In addition, this identification raised the potential need to reformulate the term indigenous and to think about the training of indigenous scientists and the transmission of research results to indigenous and peripheral peoples.

The article has been compiled using published research, data from media outlets and interviews. With the help of various selected concepts, the following are characterised: 1) The role that history and cultural heritage play in creating

local identity; 2) the adaptation of traditional knowledge to contemporary society; 3) state support in the processes of legacy empowerment.

Setomaa: population and affiliation

There has been human settlement in Setomaa for 8,400 years, with changes in the settlement of the region easily traced through rich archaeological evidence. With the emergence of the first Russian state the area became part of the Russian Empire, so contact with Estonians living in the administrative area of Livonia and Estonia was limited, while religion and economy became similar to the rest the Orthodox region of Pechory (Lõuna, 2024). During the 1922–1945 period the indigenous settlement area of the Seto was part of the Republic of Estonia based on the Tartu Peace Treaty. After the Second World War, Pechory remained under the jurisdiction of the Soviet Union with a narrow strip of the former territory of Setomaa officially remaining in the Estonian SSR. In Russia, rural residents did not receive passports and so Seto moved across the border to Estonia, by purchasing a residence permit and a new passport for the Estonian SSR (Baiburin, 2022).

Until 1990, the town of Pechory was the spiritual centre of the Seto and a town, together with the Pskov-Pechersk Monastery, founded in the 16th century. After the closure of the border between Estonia and Russia, the centre shifted to the small town of Värska. The Seto Congress, the representative body of Setomaa and the Seto people was convened for the first time on 9–10 October 1921 in Pechory. The Congress is represented and headed by the executive representation, a 13-member Assembly of Elders that acts until the next Congress. The Assembly elects a head, an assistant elder and a secretary from among their number. Both the Congress and the chief representative (*sootska*) have the possibility and duty to speak for the Seto. The continuation of the Seto Congress means that people can be actively involved in discussing issues and making decisions concerning the cultural, economic and political development of Setomaa.

Language

Seto is a southern Estonian dialect, but it is included in the UNESCO atlas of endangered languages (UNESCO Atlas, 2001). A remarkable number of Seto words are ancient and often have equivalents in Finnish and in other more distant linguistic relatives (Saar et al., 2020). It was this fact that led to the creation of four new separate written language in 1995 (Karja, 2018).

The prognosis for the dialects is not optimistic: 'It can be said that there are hardly any children of Võro and Seto speakers today, and they are few who

have spoken Võro/Seto since childhood and are bilingual. Since the 1960s, there has been a gradual process of language change, in which children began to speak Estonian' (Plado, Lindström and Pilvik, 2023).

The preservation of the language is supported by the newspaper, published in Seto. Other similar efforts include the weekly Seto news programme on Vikerraadio and Seto-language publications ranging from children's books to study guides (Rebane, 2023). The culture of the home place is also taught to school children. Aare Hõrn, a custodian of Seto culture, highlights several achievements, but also warns of areas of concern. In his opinion, the Seto school in Tallinn as a Sunday School, and the Seto school in Tartu, along with progress creating a Seto-language kindergarten group in Värska, are good achievements. On the other hand, he is worried that the percentage of people who speak Seto daily, especially young people, is too small. Although the older generation can still speak Seto, they have not started to speak it with their children or grandchildren. When talking to each other they often switch to Estonian or, in Russia, to Russian (EFITA-Multilocality, 2024).

Dialect literature and especially poetry is a central trend that has become more pronounced during the 20th century, although few Estonian dialects have been able to ensure a permanent literary activity alongside the primer and textbook. Thus, the wider introduction of folklore and literature in the 1920s and 1930s and the subsequent rise in the 1960s, 1970s and early 1990s helped some dialect groups create a more permanent literature. In this respect, Võru and Seto literature have proven themselves. The reading book for schools – primers of 1922 and 1924 (Voolainen, 1922; 1924) – was followed in 2009 and 2011 by a Seto primer (Hõrn et al., 2011) and a translation of the Bible (Voolaine, 1926). The number of writers (using dialect) is considerable, including contemporary literary innovators, for example, poet and playwright Kauksi Ülle and several writers and translators such as Aapo Ilves, Lauri Sommer and Olavi Rüitlane.

Literary reviews and criticism are not only an interpreting tool, but, together with literary events and other media coverage, they keep public attention focused on carriers of the minority language. In this regard, it is worth noting the consistent contribution of linguists who jointly created dictionaries (trilingual Julius Mägiste's 2007 Seto Dictionary), Inge Käsi's online dictionary (2016) and The Seto Dictionary of Distinctive Words (SESS, 2020).

Religious landscapes

Many Orthodox saints are also represented in Seto Orthodox lore, some of whom have clear and fascinating commonalities with wider Orthodox religion. More than 50 holy and saints' days have been celebrated, twelve of which are more important, in addition to the celebration of the days of the

patron saints of chapels and churches (Hagu, 2022; Loorits, 1959; Valk, 2011). The most important place in the sacred tradition is occupied by Nicholas the Wonderworker of Myra, followed by St George the Victorious and the Prophet Elijah. Saint Nikolaus (Estonian Nikolay; Mikul, Migul in Seto variants) was a saint of nine Seto villages, in whose honour a feast was held, church was visited, and thanksgiving offerings were brought.

The Pskovo-Pechersky monastery, founded in the 16th century, was the Orthodox heart of this region and was visited by pilgrims from all over northern Russia and nearby areas. The ties between the Orthodox ethno-confessional cultural space and the contact zone extended through eastern Estonia to the northern coast, then to northern Russia and Karelia, while older ties connected the region with the religious communities of Belarus, Ukraine and Latvia. There are several reports of events where icons were ordered and brought far from the north of Estonia. During the great holidays, beggars, people with physical and mental distress, and the poor came and were brought to the local churches and chapels, especially to Pechersky monastery.

Who had no hands, who had crooked legs. All were brought on carts to the side of the road, to the *tsässonas* and to the churches. One of them was behind the village of Lyava every year, he had no arms, no legs, all like a corpse. They donated a lot of money and stuff to him. Everyone received donations, on the cross procession the poor were very loved (Manuscripts ERA II 286, 105/6 (77h), Setomaa, 1940).

Some of the texts describe material associations with the saints, for example *tsässonas*, icons that give us important information and make the whole more nuanced, and the connections with a particular landscape clear (Plaat and Maasik, 2011; Raudoja et al., 2011).

The church holiday includes setting a table beside the graves of relatives in the cemetery and eating and drinking together, followed by *kirmas*, a village (church) celebration holiday. The Setos living elsewhere keep in touch with their parents' and grandparents' home area through church holidays: *Pasa* day in Obinitsa, old midsummer day in Miikse, St. George's day in Värska, Paraskeva in Saatse, St. Mary's day in Pechory, Mõla Day (St. Onufri's Day) in Mõla. Easter customs have also largely been recovered, including egg rolling as a constituent of ethnic identity (Kõiva, 2005).

A separate issue is the icons that were previously kept in the sacred corner of every house and are rarely encountered today. Previously, these icons belonged to the everyday customs of the farm: washing one eyes, prayers, taking the icon to the animals when they fell ill. Seto national cuisine, which includes *sõir* (a kind of cottage cheese), fish dishes, pies, beer, handsa (bootleg alcohol) are also part of the holiday culture.

Folk clothes

An important part of Seto material culture is the national costume. This consists of white with red detailing as the main elements, with white predominating in older versions. Women's clothing includes a large breast pin called a *kuhiksõlg* and silver necklaces, as well as pearls. While folk costumes were worn daily in villages until the 1930s, from 1940 onwards women wore folk costumes only at weddings and when performing in choirs. Use of men's national dress began to decline at the beginning of the 20th century.

At the same time, it is noteworthy that in the late 1980s and 1990s, national clothing, along with the growth of ethnic self-awareness, returned to fashion. Folk costumes began to be made based on samples in museums, that is, according to older templates. However, many components, such as winter clothing, have remained out of use.

There were several innovations at the end of the 19th century with the use of factory goods for home handywork (Sarv and Sarv, 2020), significantly some of these changes related to red, traditionally a hallmark of Seto clothing. From the 19th century, deep red fine wool yarn from the city of Riga came into use. This led to the replacement of cotton yarn with wool and the use of plant ornamentation instead of geometric patterns. In the 20th century, deep red evolved into cherry red and eventually into dark red, which is used in folk costume today (Tamjärv, 2023).

Today, the wearing of Seto folk costume and silver jewellery is now worn on festive occasions and celebrations by many who consider themselves Seto.

Folklore

Seto *leelo* (the only polyphonic singing tradition in Estonia) is listed on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list. One of its important features is the presence of male singing choirs as part of the tradition, which have been present almost uninterrupted since time immemorial. Seto (men's) choirs are also one of the activities common among the Seto residing in cities.

Seto *leelo* is performed by choirs. A lead singer (*eestlaulja*) delivers each line followed by the choir which joins in for the final syllables and then repeats the whole line in two or three voices. The choir consists of two parts, the *torrõ* and the *killõ*. Most of the singers, including the lead singer, perform the *torrõ* part, varying the melody according to established rules. The essential component of the *leelo*, however, is the *killõ*, a higher pitched accompanying part performed by one singer with a strong, shrill timbre. Seto song is characterised by improvisation, which depends on the singer's ability to create

verses in the right meter and to adapt established motifs to new circumstances (Kalkun et al., 2022).

Setos preserved traditional lamentation culture (for the deceased, at weddings and when seeing recruits off for military service), among which lamentations for the deceased were preserved in use for the longest time (Pino and Sarv, 1981; 1982; Sarv, 2000).

Contemporary developments

The elements of Seto national costume are based in part on haute couture production, and in general the manufacture of folk costumes and jewellery, provide employment for local people. *Kostipäevad* days (when farms are open for guests and visitors) are proving successful, and within the framework of which temporary cafes and restaurants, as well as several handicraft festivals, etc., provide public exposure to Seto culture.

The restoration of successful and identity-relevant events from the 1920s, as we have seen in the previous sections, has played an important role, for example, Leelo Day (founded in 1922; Taro, 2008), which has taken place every three years in Värska since 1977. Each Leelo Day has a specific theme that links different performances (Sarv and Sarv, 2020).

A new celebration in Setomaa is Seto Kingdom Day on the first Saturday of August, which was proposed by folklorist Paul Hagu and follows the example of the forest Finns in Sweden and Norway. The first Kingdom Day was held on August 20, 1994. This is a cultural event for everybody. At noon on Kingdom Day, the laws of the Seto Kingdom are declared paramount for that day and the 'state border' can be crossed for a small fee; competitions related to Seto traditional culture are held. Kingdom Day also sees the election of the chief representative (*sootska*) of the Setos. Juries select the best lead singer (*sõnolinõ*), dancers (*kargusekargaja* for women, *kasatskilüüjä* for men), musicians, strongmen (*vägümiis*), food and drink makers (beer, wine, Handsa, pie, bread), artisans, etc. All masters carry the title until the next Kingdom Day. The election of the *sootska* is followed by a military parade. Politicians, including the Estonian president, also consider it necessary to visit the event and there are always foreign guests.

Kihnu: population and affiliation

Kihnu, the sixth largest Estonian island, was first mentioned at the end of the 14th century as Kyne, although there are only reports of settlement since 1518. Kihnu first belonged to the Saare Western Diocese, and later

to Denmark; for a short period it belonged to Rzeczpospolita (Poland), for about a hundred years to the Kingdom of Sweden, and for over three hundred years to Russia. This history brought with it differing economic opportunities, for example in better periods in the 19th and early 20th centuries shipbuilding and the transport of construction stone to Tallinn, Riga and Libava for roads.

Fish and seal fishing were both subsistence activities that also gave rise to local communities (Kalits, 1997: 26). Seal hunting was officially banned in the late 1970s to save seals from extinction. Going to sea necessitated a way of life in which many male jobs were in the hands of women, including farming, although women also went to sea with the men, or, if necessary, fished in coastal water alone and repaired fishing nets.

There are fascinating aspects of the island's history that have not yet been fully interpreted. For example, during the first Republic of Estonia, after 1921, the island was used as a place of expulsion, where, among others, people with different political views stayed.

Local economic life has moved up and down. Ingrid Rüütel (2013: 121 et seq.) points out that a greater change occurred during the Soviet period. In the spring of 1949, a Soviet Partisan collective farm was formed on the island, which was engaged in fishing in local waters and trawling throughout the Baltic Sea. The kolkhoz employed 120 fishermen and had a pig farm, a cattle barn, a grain dryer, an apiary, an orchard and *kakuam* boats. This meant employment, but also that there was enough produce for the inhabitants of the island and so excess was sold on the mainland. Although the men earned well, they typically lacked the ability to do something sensible with the money within the Soviet system: they could not invest it or build something substantial as building size was restricted.

Apparently, the Kihnu kolkhoz was one of the first to be successful in bringing a lot of money to the people, although it was ultimately wound up due to environmental pollution and economic loss from overfishing. The kolkhoz ceased operation in 1973, with part of it being merged with the mainland Pärnu Kalur kolkhoz. As a result, many fishermen became unemployed, and alcoholism worsened.

After re-independence, people regained their former land, but at the same time the previous economic activity had disappeared from the island, which is why men work on ships or in Scandinavia and the money invested in real estate developments on Kihnu. Approximately 300 people reside on the island during the winter. On Kihnu a kindergarten, a school, a shop, a bar and a couple of museums operate, and the island hosts numerous music, craft and art camps as well as sea days. Farms have their own patches of

land, some locals have small herds of animals or fish to supplement their diets; one of the main areas of production is handicrafts. The Kihnu cultural space was registered among the UNESCO Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2003 and was added to the representative list of Intangible Heritage in 2008, both of which entail a responsibility to preserve a certain way of life in its entirety (UNESCO Masterpieces, 2008). The reception of tourists, which began in the 20th century, is today a more important source of livelihood.

Kihnu language

There are far more Kihnu language speakers than the population on the island: according to the 2021 census, there are 1,870 speakers of Kihnu's language. Language learning lasts from first to eighth grade at school. Despite the daily language of communication between students being Estonian, half of the parents communicate with children at home in Kihnu language. The upper secondary school education that students receive on the mainland is in Estonian.

Kihnu vocabulary began to be recorded at the end of the 19th century. Theodor Saar (1906–1984) contributed a great deal to this work, collecting language and cultural material for the Mother Tongue Society and for folklore archives from 1930 until the end of his life. His manuscripts are the main basis for the study of Kihnu religion, folklore, as well as for the Kihnu language. The idea of a Kihnu dictionary was repeatedly encouraged by Kihnu patriots, including well-known filmmaker Mark Soosaar who, with Reene Leas, started to compile the dictionary in 2009. The dictionary was completed in 2016 within the framework of a tripartite cooperation agreement between the Kihnu Cultural Institute, the Estonian Language Institute and the University of Tartu.

Kihnu's language has common features with western and island dialects although with a peculiar singing intonation; interrogative phrases also have a rising inflection. There is also consistent vowel harmony and long vowel change into diphthongs (*suabas* Est. *saabas*, 'boot') and triphthongs (*kuõel* Est. *kool*, 'school') (Kihnu Dictionary, 2016). Recently, efforts have been made to develop the language and replace foreign words with native ones.

Culturally, institutions established at the beginning of the 21st century, such as Kihnu Kultuuriruum (Kihnu Cultural Space) and the Kihnu Cultural Institute, have begun publishing activities, with releases such as song and school books appearing in Kihnu language, along with radio programmes now also broadcasts in Kihnu language (Rüütel, 2013: 165).

Religious landscape

The first wooden chapel, which had a straw roof, was completed in the 17th century. Magdalene Thurn zu Walsasina built a church in 1642, which was replaced with a stone church in the middle of the 18th century. Between 1846 and 1847, the majority of the people on Kihnu converted from Lutheranism to Russian Orthodoxy, and the Lutheran church was taken into use by the newly formed Orthodox church on the island.

The majority of the islanders converted in the hope of obtaining farmland from the tsar. During the Soviet period there was no priest on the island and so a priest from the mainland visited occasionally, a situation that persists to the present day. For many years an old woman, Marina Rooslaid, acted as the priest. She performed church services, buried the deceased and even baptised children. It is noteworthy that men do not habitually attend church services, coming to church only for certain family rites (baptisms, weddings, funerals).

Russian Orthodoxy is still practiced today. Kihnu baptisms are held at the godparents' home or in church. During the celebration, the godparents and relatives give monetary gifts to the child and the mother pours baptismal water on a planted apple tree. Following this ritual, a large meal is enjoyed by all. During weddings visiting the church is an important part of tradition (Rüütel, 1995). Church singers are actually the members of folk singing ensemble.

Kihnu folk costume

Kihnu island is one of the few places in Estonia where the national costume of the second half of the 19th century is still widely worn today (Kaarma and Voolma, 1981). This is partly due to the influence of having it included in the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage, although the national costume has been somewhat modernised today with jeans for men and cotton T-shirts for women being common additions. Women and girls wear national costume skirts (*kört*), cotton jackets and shawls. Men and boys wear sweaters (*troi*) and socks (*kapõtat*). Women on Kihnu have an average of 20 homemade *körts* in their wardrobes. They are almost always striped, with folk tradition determining exactly when to wear what kind of *kört* (Aav, 2020).

The striped skirt of women's national costume has either red, with many red stripes, blue, or black (mourning skirt), according to her age. Depending on age, and how recent death was, after about half a year a blue *kört*, then a

partly blue *kört* with some red stripes, is worn. Widows must never wear a red skirt again. At weddings the bride-to-be also does not wear a red skirt because she is said to be mourning her unmarried past.

The apron can only be worn by a married woman, the common-law mother of a child, for example, does not have the right to wear an apron. The colour of the skirt determines the colour of the apron and cotton shawl. Instead of a married woman's headdress (*tanu*), a shawl is worn. Bast shoes are worn only on particularly festive occasions. The festive outfit includes an embroidered national blouse (*käused*), on which a floral shawl, pearls and silver breast pin are set. The men's *troi*, or patterned knitted sweater, is also a festive garment that can be presented to honorary citizens (Tomberg, 2007). With multiple meanings and purposes, the belt (*üe*) is dominated by dark blue and madder. The belt was wrapped around a shirt and was believed to provide support to the body in both literal and magical terms. According to custom, there is an oily spot on the belt. A woman giving a rolled up belt to a suitor signifies that he has been accepted. The belt also ties the bride's gifts, to be distributed to the most important people at the wedding (Rüütel, 1995). Seal hunters were given belts to strengthen their wrists.

Folklore

Folklore and folklorists play an important role in Kihnu's past and present. Old *regilaul* is sung together (i.e. by the women in the choir), and the archaic so-called Wheel Singing (with singers moving in circles holding each other) has also been preserved. Many songs were used in newer styles (rhymed songs in strophic form) with newer styles of dancing being introduced at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century.

A significant Kihnu event, which brings together various genres and forms of traditional culture, enabling them to be preserved, is the wedding ceremony (the traditional Kihnu wedding was reinvented in the 1950s, but the last held in 2008).

The more recent folk song style – rhymed songs of strophic form from the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries – was mainly male songs (sailors' songs, humorous village songs, etc.); later Kihnu female songwriters and singers became famous. Kihnu Virve started as a singer at the age of 60 (Rüütel, 2013). Up to the middle on the 20th century, instrumental music was only performed by men, but again today girls and women play all the instruments.

Modern developments

The church is no longer divided into men's and women's areas; today mixed groups and groups of young girls move around the villages and spend their time having parties on the farms, while in olden times this was the privilege of only the men.

Tourism has become an essential means of income on Kihnu, including selling traditional handicraft items to tourists. A new enterprise is the online shop. One of the most famous craftswomen is Rosaali Karjam (Härma Roosi, b. 1935). Her handicrafts have been introduced in many publications (Summatavet, 2005, 2007, 2010). She is also an expert in traditions, dances and local legends.

Sometimes women were accepted by the community in extraordinary positions (Marina Rooslaid was the keeper and manager of church traditions, Sinaida Saar, Veera Leas and others were cultural leaders), but in some cases they were much more appreciated off the island than at home.

For a long time weddings helped generate solidarity and strengthen identity. They intensified co-operation, and encouraged work on traditional handicrafts and the wearing of traditional costume, as well as preserving traditional songs and dances.

Summary

We saw from the examples of our two peripheral sites, one located in the south-east of the country and the other a small island in the Baltic Sea, that the identity and value of both in the eyes of people have increased over time. This value has grown not only among the diaspora who have left these areas, but also among young people who grew up elsewhere, not to mention people who visit area or have moved from outside to live there. A particularly large increase in reputation is noticeable for the Seto, i.e. this area has changed from being a marginalised place to being valued. We should emphasise that the appearance of Seto villages has also undergone major changes: country houses have a fresh and modern look, the gardens and nature are beautiful, old farm buildings no longer dominate.

Strikingly, the Seto in particular, have valued their previous cultural associations and activities and have restored them since the 1970s on their own initiative, in search of opportunities. Behind all this are particular individuals and their contributions, as well as the contribution more widely of the community. Since the Seto have a long tradition of Orthodoxy, although the connection with the church is now weak, cemetery culture and Seto holidays are still important to this day.

There is another noteworthy fact: people need confirmation that they belong somewhere. In addition, the tendency that the American scientist Yi-Fu Tuan (1991) noted in his writings is that along with material forces, intangible values and language have great power to play decisive roles in formulating ideas, and discussing and mediating actions relating to place. Tuan also highlights that a person's actions and words make visible previously invisible objects, translating them for others. John M. MacKenzie (2008) noted that that the continuing presence of large numbers of people who continue to identify themselves as Irish, Scottish or Welsh continues to influence the shape and content of those ethnicities, and that this tendency is apparently increasingly. A more global need for local identity and belonging is also evident in the areas we are looking at.

While the creative approach and the search for one's own approach, including the development of small-scale production, are also trending in other parts of the world (see for example the numerous studies on the rise of small-scale beer production, Schnell and Reese, 2009), the restoration of events belonging to traditional culture and the support of this process, creating legitimacy for official discourse, ideological and policy changes (see Tao et al., 2024), has also become significant elsewhere.

At the same time, the changes in both our places are similar, though inevitably disparate in timing, for example, periods of material prosperity do not coincide. Local, including vernacular, initiatives have played an important role. From the 1990s the support of regional development programmes have contributed significantly to the expansion of the use of language, the creation of literary fiction, school education, the media and other aspects of cultural life. National regional programmes support the Seto through the Seto Regional Programme and Kihnu Island through the Islands Programme, which have assisted in particular with cultural development, literary creation, media and other aspects of culture.

In their interviews, people worried about the language. The 2021 data are that a total of 131,239 persons, or 15.4% of the persons speaking the Estonian language as a mother tongue, claimed to know a dialect. 44% of them were men and 56% were women. In total 3% of the respondents reported speaking Northern Estonian dialects, 11.5% Southern Estonian dialects, 0.1% the Northeastern coastal dialect, but over 85% of native Estonian speakers did not speak any dialects. It means that the loss of local language skills is central. Current decisions of government have great influence, especially in the closure of schools in rural areas, whereas local authorities seeking to introduce local language lessons in kindergartens and schools by funding regional programmes aim to continue media activities in their own language. There is

also the question of how long a small community can bear the responsibility for education and culture, for example when it is at the level of UNESCO heritage.

Currently the roles of distant history and older cultural heritage (singing, using local ethnic costume, cuisine, celebration of traditional holidays) are important in local identity. Language, traditional folklore and customs are mainly learned from celebration practices, although these can also be promoted at school.

The UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage values the past and preserving heritage, using tourism as a method of promoting certain phenomena. We saw in previous sections extensive natural changes, for example, in clothing, colours, food culture, etc., which were dependent on economic developments. At the same time, several innovations such as the Seto Kingdom Day, are a feature of a living and developing cultural space, while in both regions there are several traditional phenomena that can be adapted to modern society.

The Võru and Seto indication that they are an independent indigenous people with their own language and culture naturally raises the question of the need to reconsider the definition of indigenous people. Clearly, groups that have lived in the same settlement area for thousands of years (or half a thousand years) are entitled to raise such questions.

Acknowledgements: The research is supported by the research grant of the Estonian Literary Museum (EKM 8-2/20/3).

References:

Aav, M. (2020) *Kihnu mehe rahvarõivad – Kihnu mehe rõivastuse kirjeldus. Eesti rahvarõivad*". Viljandi: Eesti Rahvakultuuri Keskus.

Baiburin, A. (2022) *The Soviet Passport: The History, Nature and Uses of the Internal Passport in the USSR.* Cambridge, Medford, MA: Polity.

Bauman, Z. (2013[2001]) *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World.* Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons.

EFITA – Multilocality (2024) (Estonian Literary Museum, Department of Folkloristics). Interviews and Data.

Grimes, R.L. (2014) *The Craft of Ritual Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hagu, P. (2022) Seto kalendripühad. *Maailmade vahel I. Ello Kirsi Setomaalt kogutud lood 1938–1940*. Monumenta VIII: 1. Tartu: EKM Teaduskirjastus.

Halbwachs, M. (1980) *The Collective Memory.* New York: Harper Colophon Books.

Hõrn, A., Kauksi, Ü- Lillmaa, T., Reimann, N., Riitsaar, E. (2011) *Seto aabits.* Värska: Setomaa Valdade Liit.

Kaarma, M. and Voolma, A. (1981) *Eesti rahvarõivad.* Tallinn: Eesti Raamat.

Kalits, V. (1997) Kihnu ajaloost, majandusest ja kultuurist. In: O. Kõiva and I. Rüütel (comp). *Vana kannel* VII: 1. *Kihnu regilaulud.* Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, Eesti Rahvaluule Arhiiv & Eesti Keele Instituut, folkloristika osakond, pp. 12–34.

Kalkun, A., Oras, J., Pärtlas, Ž., Valk, M., Kaisel, M., Vissel, T. (2022) *Seto laulupärimus*. Tallinn: Eesti Rahvakultuuri Keskus.

Karja, S. (2018) Võro–seto ühtne kirjapaneku viis kujuneb pikkamisi. *Võrumaa Teataja* 28, 10 märts. Available at: https://dea.digar.ee/article/vorumaateataja/2018/03/10/8.1 (accessed 17 July 2025).

Kihnu Dictionary (2016). Available at: https://arhiiv.eki.ee/dict/kihnu/ (accessed 17 July 2025).

Kõiva, M. (2005) Easter in Estonia. In: G. Mifsud-Chircop (ed). *First International Conference of the SIEF Working Group on the Ritual Year in Association with the Department of Maltese, University of Malta Junoir College, Msida, Malta Proceedings,* Malta, 20–24 March 2005, pp. 340–361. Malta: Publishers Enterprises Group.

Kommel, K. (2013) *Eesti murded rahvaloenduse andmetel. Pilte rahvaloendusest*. Tallinn: *Eesti Statistika.*

Käsi, I. (2016) *Seto sõnastik*. Tallinn: EKI.

Loorits, O. (1959) About the Religious Concretism of the Setukesians. *Suomalais-ugrilaisen Seuran Aikakauskirja* 61 (5): 1–49.

Lõuna, K. (2024) Petserimaa ja setod muutuste tuules 1920–1940. *Maailmade vahel II. Ello Kirsi Setomaalt kogutud lood 1938–1940*. Monumenta VIII: 2. Tartu: EKM Teaduskirjastus.

Lowenthal, D. (1998) *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lukken, G. (2005). *Rituals in Abundance: Critical Reflections on the Place, Form, and Identity of Christian Ritual in Our Culture*. Leuven: Peeters.

MacKenzie, J. M. (2008) Irish, Scottish, Welsh and English Worlds? A Four-Nation Approach to the History of the British Empire. *History Compass* 6 (5): 1244-1263. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2008.00543.x.

Mägiste, J. (2007) *Seto sõnastik*. Võru: Võru Instituut.

Manuscripts ERA II 286, 105/6 (77h), Setomaa, 1940 (Estonian Folklore Archives). Manuscripts ERA (1927-1945).

Nora, P. (1996) *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past.* Volume 1: Conflicts and Divisions, New York: Columbia University Press.

Pino, V. and Sarv, V. (1981) *Setu Surnuitkud.* Tallinn: Eesti NSV Teaduste Akadeemia.

Pino, V. and Sarv, V. (1982) *Setu Surnuitkud II.* Tallinn: Eesti NSV Teaduste Akadeemia.

Plaat, J. and Maasik, A. (2011) *Õigeusu kirikud, kloostrid ja kabelid Eestis.* Tallinn: Eesti Kunstiakadeemia.

Plado, H., Lindström, L. and Pilvik, M.-L. (2023) Võro ja seto keele olukorrast 20.–21. sajandil. *Oma Keel* 2: 3–10.

Raudoja, A., Mäkeläinen, T. and Külvik, H. (2011) *Setomaa tsässonad*. Värska: Seto Kultuuri Fond.

Rebane, K. (2023) *Eesti ainsa murdekeelse lasteaiarühma kasvandikud õpivad seto keelt metsas mütates. ERR. ELU,* 16 May. Available at: https://eeter.err.ee/1608979820/

eesti-ainsa-murdekeelse-lasteaiaruhma-kasvandikud-opivad-seto-keelt-metsas-mutates (accessed 17 July 2025).

Rüütel, I. (1995) Kihnu pulmakombed – juured ja suundumused. In: M. Hiiemäe and M. Kõiva (eds). *Folk Belief Today.* Tartu: Eesti TA Eesti Keele Instituut, pp. 328–353.

Rüütel, I. (2013) Naised Kihnu kultuuris. *SATOR 11*. Tartu: EKM Teaduskirjastus.

Sarv, V. (2000) Setu itkukultuur. *Ars Musicae Populari*s 14. Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, etnomusikoloogia osakond & Tampere: Tampereen yliopiston kansanperinteen laitos.

Sarv, M. and Sarv, Õ. (2020) Seto rahvarõivad. *Eesti Rahvakultuuri Keskus.* Available at: https://rahvakultuur.ee/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Rahvarivad.pdf (accessed 17 July 2025).

Schnell, S. M. and Reese, J. F. (2009) Microbreweries as Tools of Local Identity. *Journal of Cultural Geography* 21(1): 45–69. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/08873630309478266.

SES (2016) Saar, E., Hagu, P., Käsi, I., Leivo, M., Mets, M., Pook, H. and Pajusalu, K. (2016) *Seto-eesti sõnaraamat.* Tartu-Tallinn: EKI, TÜ.

SESS (2020) Saar, E., Hagu, P., Käsi, I., Leivo, M., Pook, H. and Pajusalu, K. (2020) *Seto eripäraste sõnade sõnaraamat.* Tallinn: Emakeele Sihtasutus.

Seto Congress (2017) *Seto Kongressi otsus*. Available at: https://www.setomaa.ee/kogukond/docs/file/skvk/XIISeto-Kongressi-otsus7_polisrahvana-maaratlemis-est.pdf (accessed 17 July 2025).

Summatavet, K. (2005) *Folk Tradition and Artistic Inspiration. A Woman's Life in Traditional Estonian Jewellery and Crafts as Told by Anne and Roosi.* Helsinki: The University of Art and Design Helsinki.

Summatavet, K. (2007) *Käsitööga tööle. Handicraft for Job.* ESF RAK Meede 1.3 „Võrdsed võimalused tööturul", projekt 1.0301-0144. Tallinn: Eesti Kunstiakadeemia, pp. 37–40.

Summatavet, K. (2010) *Minu ajalugu. Kihnu Roosi käsitöökogu.* Viljandi: Tartu Ülikooli Viljandi Kultuuriakadeemia & Tallinn: Varrak & Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseumi Teaduskirjastus.

Tamjärv, M. (ed) (2023) *Seto rahvarõivad*. Värska: Seto Käsitüü Kogo MTÜ.

Tao, R.; Aoki, N. and Chen, P. (2024) Reappropriating the Communal Past: Lineage Tradition Revival as a Way of Constructing Collective Identity in Huizhou, China. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 11 (881). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03399-2.

Taro, I. (2008) *Setomaa leelopäevad: Petseri 1922. aasta rahvalaulikute peost Värska 2004.* aasta leelopäevani. Tallinn: Printall.

Tiit, E.-M. (2024) *Eesti rahvastik. Loendamata loendatud*. Tallinn: Statistika.

Tomberg, R. (2007) *Vatid, troid, vamsad: silmkoelisi kampsuneid Lääne-Eesti saartelt.* Tallinn: Eesti Kunstiakadeemia.

Tuan, Y.-F. (1991) Language and the Making of Place: A Narrative-Descriptive Approach. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 81 (4): 684–696.

UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger of Disappearing (2001). Available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000123609 (accessed 17 July 2025).

UNESCO Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity (since 2003) and to the Representative List of the Intangible Heritage (2008). Available at: https://ich.unesco.org/en/lists (accessed 17 July 2025).

Valk, H. (2011) Setomaa tsässonad: pärimus, rahvausk, kombed. In: A. Raudoja, T. Mäkeläinen and H. Külvik (eds). *Setomaa tsässonad*. Värska: Seto Kultuuri Fond, pp. 61-197.

Voolaine, P. (1922) *Seto lugemik. I osa.* Tartu: Ed. Bergmann.

Voolaine, P. (1924) *Kodotulõ. Seto lugemik.* Tartu: Postimees.

Voolaine, P. (ed) (1926) *Mii' Issändä Jeesusõ Kristusõ pühä Evangeelium: Matteusõ, Markusõ, Luukasõ ja Johannõsõ kirotõt*. Seto kiilde ümbre pannu' Ernst Puusepp, keele poolõst õiõnduisi tennü' P. Voolaine. Tartoh: Akadeemiline Emakeele Selts.

Mare Kõiva, **PhD** is the Research Professor and head of the Department of Folkloristics at the Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu, Estonia. From 2016-2023, she is the head of the Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies, and editor-in-chief of the journals Folklore: EJF, Mäetagused (1996–) and Incantatio (2011–). Her main research area is religiosity, new religious movements and belief narratives; mythology, charms and sages, ritual year, ethnoastronomy and IT in humanities. Currently she is working with the human-environmental relations and zoofolkloristics. She is author of 20 books, hundreds of articles, and the series of popular radio and TV shows. Her recent monograph 'Estonian Water Spirits I' (2023) is about mythical water dwellers.
E-mail: mare@folklore.ee

EATING, DRINKING AND DRAWING ETHNIC BOUNDARIES IN THE ELENA MICRO-REGION (NORTHERN BULGARIA): A MICRO-SOCIOLOGICAL VIEW OF IDENTITY POLITICS THROUGH THE 'GIFT EXCHANGE' THEORY

Stoyan Nikov

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to examine ethnic identity politics through Marcel Mauss's classic theory of 'gift exchange', i.e. the obligation to give, receive and reciprocate gifts, as it potentially exists in contemporary societies. Specifically, through the limited example of gift exchange of food and alcohol in the Elena micro-region (Northern Bulgaria), I seek to understand whether giving/counter-giving may be a social technology for reinforcing or softening the symbolic boundaries that separate ethnic groups – here the Bulgarian majority from the Roma and (self-identified) Turkish minorities. In order to shed some light on this question, I focus on two types of gift exchange that I was primarily, but not exclusively, involved in during my PhD fieldwork between 2015 and 2018. First, several meals and banquets with friends and acquaintances. Second, several kurbans – the traditional sacrificial ritual for good health – to which I was invited. Through informal conversations about everyday ethnicity and direct observations of the social organisation of cultural difference at these events, I collected data on the correlation between local identity politics and the gift exchange of food and alcohol. In what follows, I explore this correlation using the anthropological transactional approach coined by Fredrik Barth.
Keywords: ethnicity, gift exchange, identity politics, symbolic boundaries, Elena (Bulgaria)

Introduction

The central idea of Marcel Mauss (1925) is that, before and after the monetarisation of economic activity, the whole of humanity has, at one time or another in its global history, lived through periods in which this activity was governed by systems of 'total prestations'. These are systems in which the obligation to give, receive and reciprocate gifts is at the heart not only of economic exchange but also of all social organisation, and consequently of hierarchical relations of power, symbolic prestige, domination and resistance. This theoretical model should logically apply to the social organisation of identity politics, especially ethnic identities, which I treat here as dynamic processes rather than static states. I thus seek to observe and interpret the dynamics of

the symbolic boundaries that separate ethnic groups. Since the late 1960s and the decisive intervention of Fredrik Barth and his collaborators (Barth, 1969a), these dynamics have gradually come to the fore in ethnic studies, be it the instrumentalist school (Cohen, 1969; Glazer and Moynihan, 1975), the neo-Marxist school (Bonacich, 1972; Szymanski, 1976), the 'internal colonialism' school (Blauner, 1969; Hechter, 1974) or the 'interest group' school (Gellner, 1983; Gordon, 1964). Despite some contemporary theoretical controversies, the desire to explore the variables that modify or potentially solidify ethnic boundaries remains widespread (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Brubaker et al., 2008; Eriksen and Jakoubek, 2019). My research moves forward in this sense by interrogating ethnicity through the theory of gift exchange.

Indeed, starting from Marcel Mauss's postulate that people's social coordinates and gifts have long circulated in 'social space' – in Pierre Bourdieu's sense (1984) – indexed to each other, I ended up asking whether the same logic could be applied to the 'circulation' of ethnic identities. If giving a gift secures a position of dominance for the giver over the person who does not reciprocate with a gift of at least equal, if not greater value – such is the tacit contract that Mauss's theory prescribes – shouldn't there be a link between the trajectory of gifts exchanged and the trajectory of dominant and dominated ethnic identities? Doesn't the exchange of gifts within a given ethnic group, and possibly between several such entities, have consequences for the situational identities of group members and their coordinates in social space?

In formulating these research questions, my modest aim in this paper is to partially understand, through the limited example of gift exchange of food and alcohol in the Elena micro-region (Northern Bulgaria), whether giving/counter-giving may be a technology for reinforcing the symbolic boundaries that separate ethnic groups – here the Bulgarian majority from the Roma and (self-identified) Turkish minorities – or for softening them through everyday identity transactions. In line with the transactional approach coined by Fredrik Barth (1969b) and developed in French sociology by Jean Remy (Remy, Voyé and Servais, 1991), I use the concept of 'identity transaction' to refer to the 'social organisation and joint circulation of symbolic resources, social coordinates and cultural identities that individuals can play with' (Nikov, 2022a: 2).

In order to shed light on the research questions, after presenting the research methodology, I will focus on two types of gift exchange in which I was involved in the Elena micro-region. First, several meals and banquets with friends and acquaintances during the holidays. Second, several *kurbans* – i.e. the traditional 'sacrificial offering for good health' (Karamihova, 2007) – to which I was invited. These are relevant examples of the gift of food and drink

and the prestige that the 'giver' of the feast can acquire in the eyes of those to whom he or she 'gives'.

Research methodology

Mauss believed that fragments of the system of total prestations could be found in modern capitalist societies. Contemporary Bulgarian cosmopolitan cities are therefore places where it may be possible to observe fragments of this system. But such fragments are all the more likely to be found in the remote countryside, which is more inclined to maintain an order of social relations in which demonetised, or at least less monetised – though not disinterested – exchange remains of primary importance. The town of Elena and its surrounding villages, a traditionally rural micro-region of 10,000 people in the Balkan Mountains of Northern Bulgaria, represent a terrain where the obligation to give, receive and reciprocate is still very much alive. It should be noted that my family has a house in Miykovtsi and one in Buynovtsi, two small villages of 50 and 70 ethnic Bulgarians respectively, about 13 and 10 km from Elena. I have spent a lot of time there since my childhood, which gives me a certain emic knowledge of local realities.

The Elena micro-region is made up of Bulgarians, Roma and (self-identified) Turks. The latter self-identify as Turkish, but are usually categorised as Roma/Gypsies by the Bulgarian majority, thus juggling two ethnic identities. All are Bulgarian and European citizens. This composition of intertwined and interacting identities made the Elena micro-region a suitable terrain for my PhD research in sociology, which explored the social interactions and transactions between ethnic, national and European identities. I therefore carried out empirical fieldwork there from 2015 to 2018, conducting 50 semi-structured interviews with men and women with Roma, Turkish and Bulgarian ethnic self-identifications. Through the interviews I conducted, I identified the most frequently mobilised discourses in the perceptions of ethnic, national and European belonging of the dominant group of Bulgarians and the dominated groups of Roma and those who self-identify as Turkish. I also used participant observation, working for two months with a dozen construction workers, Roma, (self-identified) Turks and Bulgarians, on the renovation of our family houses in Miykovtsi and Buynovtsi. This allowed me to reduce social distance and thus observe several shifting identities, especially among the workers categorised as Roma but claiming Turkish identity. I will not dwell on the methodology of my PhD research here; rather, I will focus on the observations I made as a matter of course during several meals, banquets and kurbans to which I was invited, not as a researcher, but as a friend or

acquaintance. This did not stop me from using an inductive approach, based on informal conversations about everyday ethnicity and observations of the social organisation of cultural difference (Barth, 1969b) at the meals, banquets and kurbans in question, to gather some data on the correlation between local identity politics and the gift exchange of food and drink.

Meals, banquets and the social organisation of cultural difference

Ethnic identities are the product of both a 'public transcript' (Scott, 1990) of cultural stereotyping, essentially identifiable at the macrosocial level, and an infra-political transcript at the microsocial level, where the public transcript is socially recycled. This is where cultural codes are re-appropriated through daily 'weak interactions' (Lévi-Strauss, 1971), i.e. through the routine of social activity. The act of eating is one such interaction (and transaction) par excellence. But more than the act itself, it is the way in which food is shared that interests me: the logic and manner in which it is given, received and possibly later reciprocated; the way people sit around the table at everyday meals or at certain popular and religious festivals.

Through direct observation of everyday life in the markets and various catering establishments in Elena, I realised that, although there was no pronounced ethnic segregation in the town, the ethno-racial marker nevertheless seemed to determine the social composition at the meals. This was true in the upscale restaurants as well as in the modest cafes and pastry shops where I was invited to lunch by local friends, who are ethnic Bulgarians, on several occasions during the summers between 2015 and 2018. In the monetised exchanges (money for food) that I observed there, when people categorised as belonging to ethnic minorities were present, they almost always ate at separate tables from ethnic Bulgarians. This, prima vista, has crystallised a socially acceptable standard of behaviour: that of ethnic separation in eating habits, which, by extension, is synonymous with a drastic restriction of common identity transactions. Aside from these monetised exchanges, one of the banquets I attended with friends in the village of Miykovtsi further illustrates my initial reflection.

The table at this banquet was initially made up entirely of ethnic Bulgarians, a significant number of whom were holidaymakers who had come to camp by the river near the village in the summer of 2018. The banquet took place in their campsite by the river. After half an hour, a young man called Yanko arrived and asked for some coffee to take home. This young Roma, a part-nomad and seasonal woodcutter, was camping with his mother, wife and their two children in a tent one hundred metres from the campsite, in the

woods. When the holidaymakers – who obviously knew him – invited him to join us, he was embarrassed. He finally accepted and sat down at the table, but his embarrassment remained evident. Yanko refused to eat or drink, except from his own bottle of rakia, which he had brought with him and which he kept offering us to taste. This man of about 25 gave the impression that he felt he was breaking a social rule: that of ethnic separation in matters of physical nourishment. His table manners and those of the others betrayed this a priori tacit rule, as ethnic Bulgarians asked him invasive and recurring questions about his life as a partial nomad,[1] in a way that seemed to socially sanction the perceived cultural abnormality of this multiethnic banquet.

However, such a clear-cut analysis seems exaggerated in the sense that, as has been shown elsewhere (Nikov, 2022a), there is a correlation between socio-professional and ethnic identities. Just as the gifts of goods/services and the social coordinates of people have long circulated hand in hand, without being cognitively dissociated, in systems of 'total prestations', so today socio-professional and ethnic identities in the Elena micro-region do so to some extent. Both often circulate together in the social space, and the symbolic prestige of a given socio-professional identity could – if the ethnic boundary is permeable, as in the case of Roma and Turkish identities – generate a transfer to an ethnic group indexed to that socio-professional identity, and thus to an ethnic group that is itself more highly valued. But while the proximity of socio-professional and ethnic identities can generate transfers from Roma to Turkish identity in the Elena micro-region (Nikov, 2022b), it can also contribute to maintaining the boundary between the ethnic minorities (Roma and (self-identified) Turks) and the ethnic majority (Bulgarians). This boundary is defined by the subordinate position of the minorities in relation to the majority. It is in the light of the social mechanism of reinforcing this symbolic boundary that one can interpret Yanko's table manners, in particular his embarrassment and his refusal to eat. Not only is he Roma, but he is also a woodcutter with few qualifications, in stark contrast to the couple of doctors who hosted the banquet, the entrepreneur and owner of a used car sales agency, or even the PhD student I was. In fact, it was as much the young man's socio-professional status as his ethnic identity – the former being largely indicative of the latter, and vice versa – that drew a symbolic boundary so thick that it rendered the banquet 'abnormal' in the representations of all concerned. All this also highlights the fact that this young man's socio-professional status

[1] Questions about his parenting practices, such as 'Do you take your children to the woods when you work? Do they go to school? What does their mother do?' These questions reinforce the symbolic boundary that separates him from ethnic Bulgarians, while at the same time placing him in the position of an 'exotic foreigner' in relation to them.

necessarily led him to rub shoulders with more people whose coordinates in the social space revolved around socio-professional statuses close to his own. In other words, he frequents more woodcutters than doctors, and thus more ethnic Roma and (self-identified) Turks than ethnic Bulgarians, since woodcutters in Elena – like all other professions with low symbolic capital – are more likely to be Roma or (self-identified) Turks, and vice versa.

It can therefore be stressed that the existence of such an intense parallelism between socio-professional and ethnic identities means that certain endogenous interactions and transactions, visible to the naked eye and a priori ethnic, appear all the more intense. I am referring to Elena's Roma and (self-identified) Turks and their daily meals in the city, which are both ethnically and socio-professionally endogenous. The example of Yanko, the young woodcutter from Miykovtsi, is also relevant in this respect: it is likely that the meals he eats with other woodcutters, probably ethnic Roma or (self-identified) Turks, do not bother him in the same way as the meals and banquets he shares with ethnic Bulgarians which, if not exceptional, are at least infrequent. The former, on the other hand, are a daily occurrence, and thus simply represent the norm in this respect. It can therefore be said that when social class and ethnic group merge, when relationships of proximity in one's socio-professional sphere and ethnic self-understanding complement each other in a kind of symbiotic fusion, this leads to relationships of proximity in the field of gift exchange of food and alcohol. Such exchange appears to be a highly effective tool for maintaining the symbolic boundaries of collective identities and limiting inter-identity transactions. This applies both in the most 'banal' everyday situations and at a level of social activity whose symbolic frequency is much more occasional, though not exceptional. I am referring not only to secular banquets, but also to religious festivals such as the kurban, which I will treat as an ideal-typical case.

Kurban: a traditional sacrificial ritual – give food, give drink

Kurban is an ancient ritual, although I will not enter into a debate about its historical origins, which some authors identify in the sacrificial rite of ancient Greece (Georgoudi, 1979: 272). It is a ritual with eminently religious connotations, historically rooted in Bulgarian folklore and more broadly in Southeast Europe (Sikimić and Hristov, 2007), in a way that testifies to the 'impossibility of drawing clear distinctions between religious traditions' (Givre, 2006: 5–6) on the peninsula. In other words, kurban was long part of the popular religion of Muslims in the Ottoman Empire, but also of many Christians who, like their Muslim neighbours, continued

to practice it after national emancipation. This ritual is still celebrated in Bulgaria today, where it is widely regarded as traditionally legitimate (Бокова, 2004), and 'takes place in all registers of the ritual system, often at the highest level: seasonal agricultural and pastoral rites, guild rites, building/foundation rites, healing practices, family rites' (Popova, 1995: 147). I will focus my reflections here on the levels of healing practices and family rites through my observations of several kurbans in the Elena micro-region. As elsewhere in Bulgaria, the term kurban here 'refers to the sacrifice of an animal offering, but also to the sacrificial meal, the offering itself and finally the celebration surrounding the ritual' (Givre, 2006: 4). Kurbans there are usually performed with the sacrifice of a lamb and are intended to attract blessings for the health of a specific person or people by dedicating the ritual slaughter of the animal offering to a supernatural recipient (Givre, 2006: 5). Although the emanations of this ritual have been culturally recycled in the Elena micro-region over the centuries, all this has happened without the significant meaning of the ritual – in itself a ritual of gift exchange as well as sacrifice – losing its scope. This is a religious ritual that has maintained its place as a generative instrument of social cohesion in the sense of Émile Durkheim (1968).

The observations I am going to share are based on three kurbans held during the summer in the villages of Buynovtsi and Miykovtsi, where my family is a traditional guest: those of Stephan (a 60-year-old university professor), Gueorgui (a 50-year-old administrative court judge) and Nikolai (a 65-year-old metal worker). All three kurbans represent a 'sacrificial offering for good health' (Karamihova, 2007), i.e. for the good health of the above-mentioned hosts. The celebrations take place every year and are therefore cyclical rituals – although Gueorgui recently decided to stop celebrating his kurban because a priest (an orthodox *pop*) told him that he had the right to stop after five consecutive years. These kurbans, at least the ones I have attended in the last decade – and not only during my PhD fieldwork from 2015 to 2018 – have always been sumptuous, but in proportion to the social status of the hosts and their financial resources. This is another way of saying that there was never a shortage of food and drink, from the traditional and obligatory wood-fired lamb to other typical local dishes – starting with Elena's speciality: cured ham, rightly called 'Elena's ham' in Bulgaria – not to mention wine, homemade rakia, whisky and even occasionally champagne during Guerogui's kurbans. It is important to note that Stephan, Gueorgui and Nikolai are ethnic Bulgarians and have friendly relations with ethnic Roma and (self-identified) Turks in the micro-region. Nevertheless, the ethnic composition of the guests at these kurbans – when I attended them – was always homogeneous.

It made no difference whether the guests were low or medium-skilled workers, ordinary employees, top civil servants (such as the judge of the Veliko Tarnovo Administrative Court), entrepreneurs or intellectuals (such as two university professors). Provided they were categorised as ethnic Bulgarians and, of course, had affinities with the hosts, they were all involved in these kurbans. The guests were more or less involved in what appeared to be rituals of gift exchange, sometimes even real 'potlatches' (Mauss, 1925). These crystallised around the obligation to give in order to provide oneself with every chance of upward social mobility at the endogenous level of the Bulgarian ethnic group; or the obligation to give in order to maintain one's current position there. But there is also the obligation to accept the gift, i.e. the kurban and the lamb and alcohol that form part of the celebration, and to return it at a later date, ideally during the current year, through another ritualised event.

Thus, while social class as an isolated variable, if it can be isolated at all, was not decisive in the selection of guests at the kurbans observed within the Bulgarian ethnic group, ethnic identity was. In other words, the amount of social, economic and cultural capital was not so important in structuring the physiognomy of the festive group, as long as the guests were considered to be ethnic Bulgarians. Goods/services and ethnic identities thus seem to circulate hand in hand in social space. But can we really speak of parallel circulation when, in the present examples, the goods and services embodied in the gift exchange of food and alcohol circulate only within the boundaries of the Bulgarian ethnic group? These boundaries, in turn, seem to be reinforced by the social selection of participants in the kurbans. Movement across them is thus restricted: neither can ethnic Bulgarians cross them through identity transactions parallel to the food/alcohol gift exchange that takes place during the kurbans, nor can ethnic Roma or (self-identified) Turks cross them to symbolically join ethnic Bulgarian identity.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed some contemporary examples of 'gift exchange' (Mauss, 1925) of food and alcohol among the Bulgarian ethnic group in the Elena micro-region. In these examples, the obligation to give, i.e. one of the main segments of the 'social organisation of cultural difference' (Barth, 1969b) and hierarchisation, seems ultimately to be synonymous with the obligation to give to those who are already considered to be part of the ethnic group to which one belongs. Thus, the game of 'who will be higher up' in the pyramid of 'social space' (Bourdieu, 1984) applies a priori only to those who are considered to belong to one's own ethnic group. This can be seen in the

fact that the dominant ethnic group – the Bulgarians – did not feel obliged to make an honourable gift of food and alcohol to the dominated ethnic groups, the Roma and the (self-identified) Turks, in the sense of an obligation to give in order to be better classified – or rather to remain well classified – in the social space. In doing so, they demonstrated one of the most effective mechanisms for reinforcing the symbolic boundary between themselves and subaltern ethnic minorities. This mechanism hinders inter-ethnic 'social transactions' (Remy, Voyé and Servais, 1991) and prevents potential identity 'flux' (Hannerz, 2019).

However, as I have only examined the Bulgarian ethnic group here, the question logically arises as to the possible exchange of gifts between local Roma and (self-identified) Turks and its impact on their identity politics. Elsewhere (Nikov, 2022a) it has been shown how upward social mobility can lead to joint upward ethnic identity shifts. More precisely, how the symbolic prestige of a valued socio-professional status acquired by Roma can generate an ethnic transfer from the stigmatised Roma identity to the Turkish identity – or at least self-identification – that is much more highly valued in the Bulgarian social space. This kind of identity, and therefore social transaction, is possible because the symbolic boundary between the Roma ethnic group and the Turkish ethnic group – as they are locally imagined, i.e. as locally 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983) – is sufficiently permeable in the Elena micro-region. Starting from this point, and based on several works that have examined relations between and among Roma and Turks in Bulgaria (Еролова, 2019; Здравков, 2009; Марушиакова и Попов, 2000), we can formulate the hypothesis that just as socio-professional and ethnic identities may circulate in parallel in some micro-social situations, gift exchanges of food/alcohol and ethnic identities may do the same. These gift exchanges may circulate across regions of the local social space in such a way as to generate common identity transactions and a parallel identity flux between Roma and Turks. Such a hypothesis in relation to the Elena micro-region will, of course, have to be confirmed or refuted by further empirical fieldwork.

References:

Anderson, B. (1983) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London, New York: Verso.

Barth, F. (ed) (1969a) *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Bergen: Universitetsforlaget.

Barth, F. (1969b) Introduction. In: F. Barth (ed). *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, pp. 9-38.

Blauner, R. (1969) Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt. *Social Problems* 16 (4): 393–408.

Bonacich, E. (1972) A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labor Market. *American Sociological Review* 37 (5): 547–559.

Bourdieu, P. (1984) Espace social et genèse des « classes ». *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* 52 (1): 3–14. Available at: https://www.persee.fr/doc/arss_0335-5322_1984_num_52_1_3327 (accessed 30 March 2024).

Brubaker, R. and Cooper, F. (2000) Beyond "Identity". *Theory and Society* 29 (1): 1–47.

Brubaker, R., et al. (eds) (2008) *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Cohen, A. (1969) *Custom and Politics in Urban Africa: A Study of Hausa Migrants in Yoruba Towns*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Durkheim, É. (1968) *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse. Le système totémique en Australie*. Paris: PUF.

Eriksen, T. H. and Jakoubek, M. (eds) (2019) *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries Today: A Legacy of Fifty Years*. London: Routledge.

Gellner, E. (1983) *Nations and Nationalism*. New York: Cornell University Press.

Georgoudi, S. (1979) L'égorgement sanctifié en Grèce moderne : les « Kourbània » des saints. In: M. Détienne and J.-P. Vernant (eds). *La cuisine du sacrifice en pays grec*. Paris: Gallimard, pp. 271-307.

Givre, O. (2006) *Un rituel « balkanique » ou un rituel dans les Balkans ? Approche anthropologique du kourban en Bulgarie et en Grèce du nord*. PhD Thesis, University Lumière Lyon 2, France. Available at: http://theses.univ-lyon2.fr/documents/lyon2/2006/givre_o#p=0&a=top (accessed 30 March 2024).

Glazer, N. and Moynihan, D. P. (eds) (1975) *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Gordon, M. (1964) *Assimilation in American life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hannerz, U. (2019) Winners, Losers and Ethnic Flux. In: T. H. Eriksen and M. Jakoubek (eds). *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries Today: A Legacy of Fifty Years*. London: Routledge, pp. 43-52.

Hechter, M. (1974) The Political Economy of Ethnic Change. *American Journal of Sociology* (79) 5: 1151–1178.

Karamihova, M. (2007) Kurban Sacrificial Offering for Good Health at a 'Strange' Place. In: B. Sikimić and P. Hristov (eds). *Kurban in the Balkans*. Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies of SASA, pp. 231-244.

Lévi-Strauss, C. (1971) Le temps du mythe. *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 26 (3-4): 533–540. Available at: https://www.persee.fr/doc/ahess_0395-2649_1971_num_26_3_422428 (accessed 30 March 2024).

Mauss, M. (1925) *Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques. L'année sociologique (1923-1924)* 1: 30–186. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/27883721 (accessed 30 March 2024).

Nikov, S. (2022a) L'ethnicité à l'épreuve des catégories socioprofessionnelles : interactions et transactions identitaires à Bruxelles et à Elena (Bulgarie). *Condition humaine / Conditions politiques* (4). Article 954. Available at: https://hal.science/hal-04172923 (accessed 30 March 2024).

Nikov, S. (2022b) *Les transformations identitaires en Europe : interactions et transactions entre identifications ethniques, nationales et européennes. Le cas bulgare*. PhD Thesis, University of Lille, France. Available at: https://theses.hal.science/tel-04088088/ (accessed 30 March 2024).

Popova, A. (1995) *Le kourban,* ou le *sacrifice sanglant dans les traditions balkaniques. Europea, Journal des Européanistes* 1 (1): 145–170.

Remy, J., Voyé, L. and Servais, É. (1991) *Produire ou reproduire ? Une sociologie de la vie quotidienne*. Bruxelles: De Boeck.

Scott, J. C. (1990) *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. Yale: Yale University Press.

Sikimić, B. and Hristov, P. (eds) (2007) *Kurban in the Balkans*. Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies of SASA. Available at: https://www.balkaninstitut.com/pdf/izdanja/posebno/Kurban_in_the_Balkans.pdf (accessed 30 March 2024).

Szymanski, A. (1976) Racial Discrimination and White Gain. *American Sociological Review* 41 (3): 403–414.

Бокова, И. (2004) Курбанът – културна специфика и наследство. *Български фолклор* 30 (1-2): 22–37.

Еролова, Й. (2019) Етническа идентичност и брачен избор при „турчеещите се“ цигани/ роми в България. В: *Годишник на Историческия Факултет на Великотърновския университет „Св. Св. Кирил и Методий“. Изследвания в чест на професор доктор Мария Иванова*, год. III. Велико Търново: Университетско издателство, 73-89.

Здравков, З. (2009) *Семейно-родствени отношения у циганите в България*. Докторска дисертация, Великотърновския университет „Св. Св. Кирил и Методий“, България.

Марушиакова, Е. и Попов, В. (2000) *Циганите в Османската империя*. София: Литавра.

Stoyan Nikov holds a PhD in Sociology from the University of Lille (ED Sésam). He is currently a postdoctoral researcher at NEOMA Business School (Rouen campus). His research in recent years has focused on social interactions and transactions between ethnic, national and European identities, and on the political participation of ethnic minorities. He is currently working on the socio-anthropology and psychology of misinformation in France and on the socio-anthropology of volunteerism in Bulgaria. The main empirical fields he has explored so far are the microregion of Elena (Bulgaria) and the cities of Brussels, Lille and Cologne.
E-mail: nikov.stoyan@gmail.com

COLLECTIVE MEMORY, IDENTITY, AND ETHICS OF A SCIENTIST IN THE CONTEXT OF EPISTEMOLOGY

Ilham Mammadzada

Abstract: This paper explores the epistemological foundations of the ethics of a scientist, focusing on the interplay between collective memory, individual memory, and their implications for scientific practice. It argues that memory, as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing biological, historical, political, philosophical, and cultural dimensions, requires an interdisciplinary approach to be fully understood. The reduction of memory to isolated historical facts or political interests limits its broader cultural and epistemological significance, complicating efforts to address the ethical responsibilities of scientists. The study highlights the necessity of rethinking scientific ethics in light of evolving paradigms and methodologies. It emphasises the importance of integrating diverse fields — ranging from fuzzy logic to historical analysis — to develop comprehensive frameworks for understanding memory and its role in collective identity and societal consciousness. The paper also critiques the tendency to view the ethics of a scientist narrowly, focusing solely on professional conduct, and advocates for a more expansive ethical approach that includes interdisciplinary awareness and accountability. By situating memory at the intersection of science, philosophy, and culture, the paper underscores its potential to influence identity, thought, and practice. It calls for a shift from a reductionist view of memory and history to a holistic perspective that acknowledges their dynamic and transformative nature, enabling scientists to engage more effectively with societal challenges and collective memory in the modern era.
Keywords: memory, collective memory, identity, epistemology, ethics of scientists

Introduction

The concept of collective memory and the ethical considerations of scientists remain enduringly significant within historical and cultural epistemology. Far from diminishing interest, advancements in artificial intelligence and digital memory technologies have revitalised scholarly engagement with this topic. The relevance of collective memory was first articulated in the 20th century by philosophers such as M. Heidegger, A. Bergson, M. Halbwachs, and M. Foucault, whose contributions continue to inspire contemporary research. Seminal works like P. Hutton's *History as the Art of Memory* (2003) and A. Megill's *Historical Epistemology* (2007) exemplify this sustained interest.

This focus stems in part from the enduring impact of totalitarian ideologies, the manipulation of collective consciousness, and the pivotal

role of memory in shaping cultural identities in Europe and beyond. At the same time, the study of collective memory transcends these historical contexts, illuminating its nuanced interplay with individual memory, the ethics of scientific inquiry, and methodological approaches to understanding memory. These dimensions underscore the intricate relationships between ethical responsibility, scholarly practices, and the formalisation of memory as an academic subject, particularly in a world increasingly shaped by digital and technological influences.

Our study on collective memory as the initial part of the method and approach to memory itself is based on the mentioned work of A. Megill, and from the newest, for example, on the article by O. Golovashina, *How Did Memory Become Social*, in which the author writes about the relevance of social memory and research method in the context of 'memory studies' (Головашина, 2023: 29). One should also recall the materials of the round table *The Phenomenon of Collective Memory at the Intersection of Philosophical and Methodological Settings*, in which B. Pruzhinin and T. Shchedrina noted that 'collective memory performs a function that consolidates the community', as well as the fact that it is important for it that its content is effectively broadcast in the communications system (Пружинин и Щедрина, 2020: 17). In other words, we will clarify, despite the fact that we penetrate into the spheres of the brain and consciousness with the help of cognitive sciences, our historical and cultural collective memory does not lose its significance for us, not only in research settings, but also in making management decisions, in understanding the national idea, in how and with whom to communicate and in understanding how the community is changing, what role social and human sciences, epistemology, etc. play in this.

In our opinion, such an analysis and approach involve thinking about how significant the question of the ethics of a scientist turns out to be, in conditions where it is possible and necessary to check the content of historical memory to determine how well it can withstand the test of objectivity and rationality (the philosophical and epistemological context), on how historical memory is, and whether it interferes with the development of community in the modern world. Several of our books and articles are devoted to these issues, among which we note our monograph *Philosophy of Modernity, History and Culture (On the Contours of Historical and Cultural Epistemology)* (Мамедзаде, 2020).

In this context, we would like to recall the resolved Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict, in which one side tried to implement by force and aggression the myths of a thousand years past, which still excite its collective consciousness.

Politicians, apparently, for certain reasons, forget that myths are only a metaphor that requires philosophical, logical, and any other scientific, literary and aesthetic analysis, and not an attitude towards action, revenge, restoration of justice, etc. The conflict between Ukraine and Russia also carries all the shades of a clash of different memories, although, of course, not everything, as in our case, is connected with it. It was possible to connect these conflicts with the post-Soviet space, the catching-up type of development, the late introduction to sovereignty, and the reaction to globalisation. However, if we pay attention to what is happening in the USA and the EU, and recall the works of F. Fukuyama and S. Huntington, we will have to admit that the matter is not only in our space. In the current wars waged by the United States, memory also takes its special or important place, one civilization, one historical memory is imposed on everyone since a unipolar world claims one history and memory.

It is clear that turning to the collective memory of a particular community, first of all, it should be noted that it differs from individual memory, although it is perceived or can be perceived by the majority, which is why it is collective. Then it should be noted that collective memory is changing and these changes, on the one hand, are associated with collective experience, consciousness, traditions, myths, but, on the other hand, it has relationships with science and not only history, as one might think, and also with those who study memory, with their approach, ethics, with the extent to which they are willing to test and defend their conclusions, and also with the extent to which the collective consciousness is ready to listen to the scientist. What is also significant here is how knowledge or narratives about the past become a part of historical memory. This means that history can be science and knowledge or a story. Many things distinguish these two types of history, but, first of all, the methodology of approach to what is being studied, including the attitude to collective memory. These relationships also determine the ethics of the scientist. In addition, there are societies that accept myths about their past as collective consciousness and memory and proceed from the fact that social science and history, including this, are not accurate knowledge and can be neglected. D. Nikolaev, in his article *Psychological Concept of Types of Scientific Rationality. Ideal Objects and Types of Rationality,* argues that 'mathematics makes it possible to surprisingly accurately describe and predict phenomena that arise in inanimate nature' and highlights 'the measurability and reproducibility of research results' as criteria for scientific validity (Николаев, 2022: 124).

However, this does not imply the fundamental ineffectiveness of mathematics in the socio-humanitarian sciences. Rather, it necessitates

a different application of mathematics in conjunction with philosophy, epistemology, and related disciplines. Philosophy, as a theory of knowledge, must adapt and evolve to integrate these tools effectively. While significant differences exist between the exact and inexact sciences, this does not preclude the social sciences, particularly philosophy, from striving for objectivity and truth within their criteria, which may involve relative or non-binary logics. These ideas have been discussed extensively in our collaborative work with A. Bunyatov, *Epistemological Features of Nationality and National Identity in the Context of Fuzzy Logic* (Məmmədzadə and Bunyatov, 2023).

Historical-cultural epistemology and collective memory

Interest in collective memory has a long history in philosophy. Heidegger (1962) believed that the interest in memory is connected with ontology, with the question of being. In the period of globalisation and post-modernity, memory is replaced by modernity, and many people cease to be interested in the past. Now, on the contrary, one is interested in what was, what is, and what will be. In other words, how to study the past, present, and future, what should be the scientist's attitude towards the object, and how similar and different the attitude towards the object should be. Explaining these questions means finding the logic of the study but also an understanding of the moment of its change, its relativity.

What is important here is not only the object of research, but also the scientist's approach and his understanding of the limitations of his approach, method, and logic. For example, Rozin, exploring issues of methodology and logic, starting from the logic and method of Plato and Aristotle, Descartes and F. Bacon, to our contemporaries, also considers it necessary to note how methods, thinking, and logic differ, distinguishing among them, thinking and attitude are 'creative' and conceptual, applied to both the past and the present (Розин, 2023: 103).

Reflecting on memory, we naturally remember history and the fact that there are many understandings of it but one of them is science as philosophy and epistemology, which deals with revealing the meanings and significance of a given concept, uses in this context the concept of collective memory and identity. In principle, like historical science, but denoting it as something that is often accepted more on faith and less on knowledge. In other words, philosophy and epistemology, first of all, proceed from the fact that memory consists of myths, traditions, and ideas about the past shared by the community, and therefore identity should not be reduced only to memory.

Memory is selective; it often remembers the most important things, forgetting particulars, and sometimes it remembers particulars and ignores what is significant. Philosophers also use the concept of collective mentality, so we can talk about the interconnectedness of these concepts. The main question here is whether it is necessary to check for scientific strength what is accepted by the community and why and whether it is necessary to work out a verification mechanism that is formed at the intersection between the methodology, logic, and ethics of a scientist. A role here is also played by the recognition that interdisciplinary research is needed at the intersection of history, cultural studies, anthropology, and psychology, which is also possible by understanding the role of methodology and epistemology, the theory of historical knowledge, etc.

History uses the concept of 'big history' or world history, which asks questions about what happened in the world in the past, what the prospects are for what the past is turning into, and what awaits the world in the future. This is the sphere of what F. Fukuyama called the 'end of history'. The whole world accepts one version of it, which is now broadcasted from the USA. Let's not go into the fact that the world was once ruled by Europe, during the era of Enlightenment, etc. The end of history, however, did not mean that there would be no history; it only assumed the existence of the same values of a unipolar world, the same interpretations and memory, although it was not against the memory of the region, city, and village, etc.

We need to emphasise something else, culture, history, and memory are interconnected but they are also connected with the epistemological theory of knowledge, which checks how they are interrelated, whether something important from the past has been forgotten by memory or history. Collective memory must be accessible since it penetrates personal memory. Let us note that in the history, memory, and culture of large states, the same thing happens with neighbours, as a rule, they do not notice the stories and memories of those who surround them, with whom they live together, which often causes wars, the collapse of world systems, empires, and alliances.

The final remark is particularly significant as it underscores the necessity of a philosophical and epistemological framework for a comprehensive scientific understanding of collective memory. This framework must balance accessibility for the general public with the complexity required for scholarly inquiry. Upon closer examination, it becomes evident that this dual requirement is essential for many disciplines within the social sciences and humanities, as memory is shaped not only by poets and scientists but also by individual experiences and governmental policies.

Consequently, the study of collective memory must consider both the specific characteristics of human societies and political regimes, as well as the methodological rigor demanded by scientific inquiry.

Collective memory constitutes a shared experience, a form of common consciousness or mentality. It encompasses the lived experiences of peaceful and conflictual coexistence within a community and about neighbouring groups. As such, it necessitates an interdisciplinary approach that integrates historical, sociopolitical, and cultural perspectives.

In other words, this is an established idea of what happened and how it happened. It is subject to doubt, but it may not be questioned. And here the theme of national idea and ideology arises, which has its relationship with memory, history, and culture. We addressed this issue in the 1990s and later, let us recall at least our work *On Philosophy: Modern Approaches, Trends and Prospects* (Мамедзаде, 2011), and in the context of this article, we believe that special attention should be paid to connections between epistemology, memory, history, and culture. A very complex interweaving of issues, but it requires research. It should be noted that here we encounter the fact that many of our philosophers, and not only ours, under pressure from Western states and F. Fukuyama, for example, have long argued that the era of ideologies and ideas is over and supplemented these conclusions with criticism of totalitarianism. However, ideas can be totalitarian, but they may not be so, and the consolidation of society at all times, in a certain sense of the word, is necessary, especially in the period of modernity. In this context, we note the work of F. Fukuyama *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*, in which he develops the ideas of his previous works, including *The End of History and The Last Man*. In other words, history for him is a linear process with the superiority of the ideas of liberalism, and identity for him in all other cases is fragmentation. He does not want to see other stories, other memory, and consolidation. Reflecting on the politics of dignity, he writes that 'we need a better theory of the human soul' (Фукуяма, 2019: 35). Agreeing with this, we note that we are not only the United States, and everyone, just like them, also needs a better philosophy of collective identity and the same attitude towards collective memory so that it does not turn into dogma.

Based on the fact that the question of the national idea is relevant in Azerbaijan, we note that its analysis cannot be conceptual if we do not take into account the role of memory, historical and cultural epistemology in everything that is called the formation of identity, consolidation of the community, formation of various forms national and ethnic solidarity. Epistemology and its relationship to memory, to what is remembered

and forgotten by one or another community, is a philosophical question that has its task, expressed in the formation of a philosophy of history and culture, and not just in the formation of identity. The formation of a historical and cultural tradition of a community and familiarisation with it takes place through training, and various forms of communication, but it is also created by scientists, first of all, with a certain epistemological approach and ethics of attitude towards how historical memory and collective identity are worked out, verified and clarified. It is clear that the typology of cultures and collective identities is extensive, but they all strive for stability, sustainability, and some closure (security), as well as development.

On the epistemological basis of the ethics of a scientist

The question of interaction between collective memory and individual memory is important in understanding how collective memory, mentality, and consciousness of the community change. If we turn to the analysis of how science, history, and philosophy influence memory, then we will need to turn not only to issues of historical and cultural epistemology but also to the ethics of a scientist. Many scientists still regard the ethics of a scientist as moral principles for conducting a certain type of activity, professional ethics, etc. As if we are talking about what is associated with violations of the scientist's work activity. Some write about plagiarism, proper formatting of articles and books, and the use of modern communications. Undoubtedly, these issues have acquired special significance in the current era. But with all this, the sphere of ethics of a scientist also includes the presence of a certain modern in the full sense of the word, that is, corresponding to the modern level of knowledge attitude to the truth, to the way a scientist checks not only the knowledge of another but his attitude to the topic, approach, methodology. M. Foucault once wrote in his article *What is Enlightenment* about the subject of historical epistemology, which allows for a revision of its scientific position. This is a completely different ethics of a scientist. Although here, naturally, serious reasons are needed for redefinition, a radical change in one's approach. But these foundations are in epistemology. Moreover, the later followers of M. Foucault, L. Daston, P. Galison considered it necessary to clarify that, firstly, we are talking not only about social issues but about science in general. And, secondly, about the transformation of the paradigmatic foundations of the theory of knowledge (Daston and Galison, 2010).

Memory itself exemplifies a complex epistemological problem,

extending far beyond heritage and communication. It exists in biological, historical, political, scientific, and philosophical contexts, making it inherently multidimensional. For historians, memory is often treated as historical memory – an object of historical inquiry. However, this perspective is insufficient as memory is also a cultural phenomenon, a politically charged construct, and a philosophical reality. Its study requires an integrated and objective approach that transcends disciplinary boundaries.

Cultural-historical epistemology offers a robust framework for addressing these challenges. It examines the relationship between the past and memory, evaluates the objectivity and effectiveness of scientific approaches to these subjects, and considers how knowledge about memory and the past is accumulated, tested, and applied in shaping both consciousness and practice. This epistemological approach is essential to avoid reductive interpretations of memory that might lead to conflict rather than resolution. For instance, if memory is based solely on myths of the past, it risks perpetuating divisions and misunderstandings rather than fostering reconciliation or mutual understanding.

In the context of cultural-historical epistemology, the ethics of a scientist demands an acknowledgment of the limitations and biases inherent in any methodological approach. Scientists must critically evaluate their frameworks, ensuring they are not only rigorous but also inclusive of the multidimensional realities of phenomena like memory. This involves a commitment to interdisciplinarity, as memory cannot be effectively studied in isolation from its biological, cultural, political, and philosophical dimensions.

The epistemological basis of this ethical commitment lies in the recognition that knowledge is inherently partial and contingent. Scientists must approach their subjects with humility, acknowledging that their methodologies and conclusions are shaped by cultural, historical, and intellectual contexts. This humility extends to a willingness to revise one's approach in light of new evidence or perspectives, as Foucault and others have argued.

The application of ethical principles is particularly relevant to the study of collective memory and identity. Memory, as a shared cultural and historical construct, plays a critical role in shaping community identity and consciousness. Its study must, therefore be approached with sensitivity to its potential implications for social cohesion and conflict. For example, when analysing collective memory, scientists should be cautious about uncritically accepting dominant narratives or myths.

Instead, they should strive to uncover the underlying dynamics of memory formation, including how power relations, cultural traditions, and historical contingencies shape what is remembered and what is forgotten. This approach requires not only epistemological rigor but also ethical responsibility, as the outcomes of such research can influence public discourse and policy.

Ultimately, the ethics of a scientist, when grounded in a robust epistemological framework, involves more than adherence to professional norms. It requires a commitment to truth, critical self-reflection, and the pursuit of knowledge that is both rigorous and socially responsible. As noted in works such as the collective monograph *Philosophy and Fuzzy Logic of Lotfi Zadeh During Pandemic Period* (Pandemiya dövründə fəlsəfə və Lütfi Zadənin qeyri-səlis məntiqi, 2021), these principles are essential for advancing cultural-historical epistemology and its application to pressing issues such as collective memory and identity.

Scientists must recognise that their ethical responsibilities extend beyond their immediate professional contexts to include the epistemological foundations of their work. By integrating ethical considerations into their methodological and epistemological practices, they can contribute to a deeper, more nuanced understanding of complex phenomena like memory, ultimately fostering both intellectual progress and social harmony.

Conclusion

Memory is a topic and a problem that is connected with collective identity, and our thoughts about it will be limited if we do not reveal and investigate the contexts and aspects of it. Knowledge of cognitive sciences additionally involves philosophy and epistemology new knowledge about memory, directions that reveal the specifics of the manifestation in public understanding, and research of what is connected with the peculiarities of knowledge about the connections of the brain, intellect, consciousness, and memory. It is necessary to take into account the fact that the simplified treatment of the memory complicates the analysis of what the ethics of the scientist is, how it works, and why it should change not only the principles but also the approach to the type of activity. The ethics of a scientist, particularly in the social sciences, cannot be confined to the boundaries of those disciplines alone. Similarly, scientists in the exact sciences cannot disregard the relevance of history, philosophy, and cultural studies. Modern science transcends the boundaries of research;

it also involves influence and management, reinforcing the necessity for a broader ethical framework (Пирожкова, 2022: 87).

Epistemology, investigating the problems of memory, collisions of different knowledge and ideas about the past, and the role of the past in the collective consciousness to get more complete knowledge, is obliged to apply interdisciplinary research, which, in turn, presupposes the use of mathematical, fuzzy logic. In other words, it is necessary to apply logic to history and historical knowledge. However, there is a problem here that we encountered in the Azerbaijani philosophy when we applied the clear-fuzzy logic of our compatriot American scientist Lotfi Zadeh to the analysis of public processes. Our specialists are interested in logic itself, not its application. In current conditions, the applied nature of memory research turns out to be more important than any other approach.

Understanding the past and history must be perceived and studied as part of culture, and as an object of philosophy, since culture without philosophy is usually perceived as a set of religions, languages, and traditions, but not knowledge about culture, types of consciousness, and thinking that can be complete and incomplete, tolerant and not, etc. Identity and ideas about it may diverge, just as the identity and past of others, for example, our neighbours near and far, may be based not on knowledge but on misconceptions and myths. Many problems arise here that lead or can lead to what is called 'memory wars', or even real wars and aggression.

History, the past, and memory are often perceived by many only as a sphere related to politics. In this case, it is reduced and simplified to what is called a clash of interests, wills, and further – a clash of civilisations and cultures. Of course, the entire history of cultures cannot be reduced to clashes, ignoring the fact that every living civilisation is also a culture and a history of mutual influence. We think that cultural-historical epistemology allows us to understand the reasons for the reduction of memory to individual events, historical facts, the replacement of the scientific explanation of the past, and simplified approaches to historical and cultural memory. In our opinion, with all the importance of memory, the past of documents, archives, materials, and libraries, no less important is epistemology as an integral approach to history and culture, a statement of understanding that there is a relativity of truth and a change in paradigms, types of thinking, which determines the possibility of the scientist's conceptual approach to the collective memory.

While the documentation of the past through archives, materials, and libraries remains vital, epistemology provides an integral approach to history and culture. It emphasises the relativity of truth, the evolution of paradigms, and the shifting modes of thought that shape how collective memory is

conceptualised. This epistemological perspective equips scientists with the tools to adopt a more comprehensive and critical approach to memory. By acknowledging the dynamic interplay of history, culture, and identity, scientists can foster a deeper understanding of collective memory, its implications, and its potential to influence societal consciousness and cohesion.

References:

Bergson, H. (1911) *Matter and Memory*. Translated by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer. London: George Allen and Unwin. Original work published in 1896.

Daston, L. and Galison, P. (2010) *Objectivity*. Princeton University Press.

Foucault, M. (1997) What is Enlightenment? In: P. Rabinow (ed). *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954–1984: Vol. 1. Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. New York: The New Press, pp. 303-319.

Halbwachs, M. (1992) *On Collective Memory*. L. A. Coser, Ed. and Translation. University of Chicago Press. Original work published in 1950.

Heidegger, M. (1962) *Being and Time*. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, Translation. Harper and Row. Original work published in 1927.

Hutton, P. H. (2003) *History as an Art of Memory*. Lebanon: University Press of New England.

Megill, A. (2007) *Historical Epistemology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Məmmədzadə, İ. and Bunyatov, A. (2023) *Milliliyin, milli özunodərkin qeyri-səlis məntiq kontekstində epistemoloji xüsusiyyətləri*. Baku: Elm və Təhsil.

Pandemiya dövründə fəlsəfə və Lütfi Zadənin qeyri-səlis məntiqi (2021). Collective Monograph. Baku: Bilgi.

Pyrozhkova, S. (2022) Ethical Principles and Social Change. *Philosophical Journal* 12(4): 87.

Zadeh, L. A. (1965) Fuzzy Sets. *Information and Control* 8(3): 338–353.

Головашина, О. (2023) Как память стала социальной? *Вопросы философии* (1): 29–39.

Мамедзаде, И. (2011) *О философии: современные подходы, направления и перспективы*, Баку: Текнур.

Мамедзаде, И. (2020) *Философия о современности, истории и культуре: О контурах историко-культурной эпистемологии*. Баку: Эльм ве Техсил.

Николаев, Д. (2022) Психологическая концепция типов научной рациональности. Часть 1. Идеальные объекты и типы рациональности. *Вопросы философии* (10): 121–131.

Пирожкова, С. (2022) Образ будущего и сценарии развития науки как культурного феномена. *Вопросы философии* (6): 87–97.

Пружинин, Б. и Щедрина, Т. (2020) Феномен коллективной памяти на пересечении философско-методологических установок. *Вопросы философии* (7): 15–19.

Розин, В. (2023) Методология: историческое понимание и новый старт. *Вопросы философии* (12): 103–113.

Фукуяма, Ф. (2019) *Идентичность. Стремление к признанию и политика неприятия*, Москва: Альпина паблишер.

Ilham Mammadzada, Doctor of Sciences in Philosophy, professor, the director of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences. His research interests are related to epistemology, in particular cultural and historical epistemology, philosophy, and ethics of artificial intelligence. He is the author of 6 monographs and more than 300 scientific papers dedicated to philosophy, ethics, and politics and participated in numerous national and international conferences and symposiums.

E-mail: ilham_mamedzade@mail.ru

Part III

Identity Formation and Contesting Identifications



Pic. 3. Near the Bistrița Monastery, Costești Commune, Romania, 2018.
Photo: Magdalena Slavkova.

Roma civic emancipation before the Second World War: national and transnational dimensions

Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov

Abstract: The processes of Roma civic emancipation are an integral part of the shared history of Central, Southeastern and Eastern European peoples during the modern era. They originated in the middle of the 19th century in the conditions of the region's three large, multinational empires – the Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman and Russian – and were encapsulated within their frameworks. The situation changed radically after the end of the First World War. In the new realities of the ethnonational states, the processes of Roma civic emancipation acquired new dimensions. The multinational Soviet Union offered its model, too. The article presents the processes of Roma civic emancipation in the individual countries of Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe in their national and transnational dimensions. It includes a fact-based overview of the goals and objectives of Roma civic organisations in countries across the region and their activities in terms of national, transnational and international dimensions of Roma civic emancipation. We pay special attention to the modern reading of Roma history before the Second World War and the attempts to construct it from the point of view of the development of the contemporary Roma movement and today's realities.
Keywords: Roma, civic emancipation, interwar period, Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe

Introduction

When talking about Roma history, the central issue is constituted by the two major predetermined discourses in which Roma history has been (and continues to be) articulated by researchers: namely, by approaching the Roma (known as 'Gypsies' in the past) as a problem and/or as a victim. In the past, beginning with the appearance of academic interest in the subject of the so-called 'Gypsies' from Grellmann (1787), in the second half of the 18th century, the Roma have been researched mainly from the point of view of solving the problems they were seen to pose to the modern state. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the paradigm gradually shifted and has often set the focus primarily on Roma's grim historical experience, as well as on the various repressive state policies that fostered them. However, though radically opposite, both these discourses are united in their attitude toward the Roma themselves. They are viewed as passive objects of these policies rather than active creators of their history. In this way, the Roma point of view is de facto

absent, and the reaction of the Roma themselves (or lack thereof) to the policies implemented towards them, as well as their visions about the future of their communities, are neglected. Therefore, it's necessary to propose a new research paradigm through which the Roma, in their longue durée history, became political subjects as creators of their own destiny. We think the time has come for Roma voices in history to be heard. In our attempts to introduce and popularise this new approach to the history of the Roma, in which they are perceived and presented as architects of their own lives and history, we have often encountered many long-standing academic prejudices (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b: XVIII; 2022: 1).

One often hears complaints about the lack of written sources written by the Roma themselves and declarations that the true history of the Roma is only oral (Majtényi and Majtényi, 2016: 3; The Untold Story, 2019). However, the opposite is true. The preserved sources are numerous but, at the same time, under-researched. Just one example: Until the beginning of World War II in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Roma published a total of 19 Roma newspapers and journals. In Romania, 6 Roma newspapers were published, 3 newspapers in Bulgaria, 4 journals and newspapers in Hungary, 2 journals and 2 newspapers in the USSR, one newspaper in the Ottoman Empire and one in Yugoslavia (Roman et al., 2021). At the same time, numerous Roma books and collections of diverse types began to be published during this period. Such publications were in Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Latvia, and Finland. Particularly striking is the case of the early USSR, where, as a result of the then affirmative action policy towards Gypsies, a total of 257 books were published in the Romani language (Roman et al., 2021). The number of books, 257, is not final; these are only the books traced until now, and indeed, we believe more publications will be discovered in the future.

This issue – the need for a new, comprehensive critical reading of the original primary sources for Roma history, culture, and literature – is fundamental to us because, in some cases, the situation borders on the absurd. In all previous generalizing studies of Roma in the USSR, one significant segment of historical sources, which is particularly important (the publications of Roma authors in the Romani language), has not been used at all (Crowe, 1994; Dunajeva, 2021a; Lemon, 2000; O'Keefe, 2013; Деметер et al., 2000; Друц и Гесслер, 1990). Here, we come to a striking curiosity, which reflects the contemporary state of Romani studies and has no analogue (or at least no that we know of) in the social sciences and humanities field. Nowadays (unlike in the past), knowledge and use of the Romani language are not considered necessary in Romani studies. We cannot imagine that there

can be a specialist in the field, for example, of Arabic studies who does not speak Arabic or in German studies who does not know the German language, etc. In Romani studies, however, this is accepted as something completely normal, even among researchers of Romani literature (sic! – author's note). Against this background, we allow ourselves a pun: Why is it necessary to search for the authentic 'Roma voices' in history if they cannot be heard and understood above all?

Sometimes, one can also read that history is irrelevant to Roma themselves (Mróz and Mirga, 1994: 27–32; Okely, 1983: 1–27), or 'for them, identity is constructed and constantly remade in the present in relations with significant others, not something inherited from the past' (Stewart, 1997: 28). Leaving aside the vast array of folklore legends about the origins of the Roma in the past (many of them still in existence today), the best answer to such categorical (and ultimately unfounded) claims about the lack of records of Roma history, written by the Roma themselves, are the available historical materials written by the Roma themselves. This text is developed based on precisely such materials, presenting the development of the processes of the Roma civic emancipation, beginning from the second half of the 19th century and constantly developing until the beginning of the Second World War, when another historical period in the life of the Roma began.

Roma civic emancipation is a part of the most general processes of development of modern nationalism in the region of Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe. To understand the essence of the processes of Roma civil emancipation, the most significant thing is to reveal the perspective of the Roma themselves and their responses to existing social and political realities. For all our analysis of the historical sources and source-based conclusions made, such a starting point is in our firm belief that Roma exist concomitantly in different dimensions. For us, it is undoubted that they are not an outcast social phenomenon, a hermetically isolated and self-sufficient social and cultural system. Still, they have always existed at one and the same time in at least two main dimensions (Marushiakova and Popov, 2016b: 15). This fundamental principle is based on the juxtaposition between 'community' and 'society' and, in our understanding, it concerns the relations between two simultaneously existing typological phenomena intertwined in one inseparable unity. In this case, 'community' refers to the Roma as an ethnic formation and 'society' refers to the Roma as ethnically based integral parts of the respective nation-states of which they are citizens. These two main dimensions may, in short, be called 'ethnicity' and 'civic nationality' (Marushiakova and Popov, 2016b).

It is on the very basis of this distinction between the two main dimensions of Roma identity that the fundamental concept that defines the basic notion

used in the preparation of this text was derived. This notion is Roma civic emancipation, which can be synthesised as a movement to achieve a harmonious balance between the two main dimensions of the existence of Roma (community and society), which finds its expression in their respective identities and which is acceptable both for the Roma themselves and for the macrosociety. The Roma movement for civic emancipation is a constant struggle to achieve the equal civic status of the Roma as an ethnic community and as individual citizens with their rights in all social fields (political, religious, educational, economic, cultural, etc.).

One of the key issues related to this movement for Roma civic emancipation before WWII is whether it remains closed in frames of individual countries in the countries of their living or has its own international dimensions, i.e. whether it is possible to trace the historical beginning of the modern Roma international movement.

Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, and Russian Empires

The nation-building processes in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe constitute some of the main characteristics of the modern era in the three great empires in the region – Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, and Russian Empires. The civic emancipation of Roma de facto replicates in its form, albeit more slowly and to a much lesser extent, the general processes in the region and outline, albeit fragmentarily, some of the basic directions of their development, which are yet to be advanced throughout the region in the coming historical eras (a process that continues to the present day).

The first public manifestation of Roma's aspirations for civic emancipation in the Habsburg Empire dates back to 1850. According to a local press, the Roma in Neudörfl (then within Hungary, today in Burgenland, Austria) decided to send a deputation to the Kaiser to deliver *Petition for National Equality*, which asks Gypsies to receive rights equal to other nationalities in the Empire (Schwicker, 1883: 72). This significant event occurred in the aftermath of the Revolutions of 1848, a pivotal moment in European history that marked the beginning of modern nationalism and saw a powerful wave of individual nationalities demanding various changes in their political status, with the Roma community actively participating in this movement.

The next step in this direction is reflected in a short notice in the Hungarian and Austrian press from 1865. Janos Kaldaras, from Bihar (today Bihor county in Romania), located in the vicinity of Szunyogd (today Șuiug), a Gypsy 'Vajda', and his companion Sava Mihaly from the same city, applied to the Hungarian Royal Office for a separate territorial-administrative unit

('Cigány-Vajdasag' in Hungarian, 'Zigeuner-Wojwodina' in German) to be established (Fővárosi Lapok, 1865: 622; Klagenfurter Zeitung, 1865: 719). The request to create 'Gypsy Voivodina' expresses the desire to gain public and political recognition of the Gypsy community as equal to all nationalities in the Empire. The processes of national revival in the Habsburg Empire reached their pinnacle in 1867 when the Empire was forced to 'ethnicise' and transform into a dual Austro-Hungarian Empire.

In 1888, in the European press (Le Temps, Daily News) appeared information that 'an old Gypsy named Raphael' from Hungary had addressed a request to the Emperor Francis-Joseph, in which he begged to proclaim him King of the Gypsies because he could prove his direct descent from 'King Pharaoh'; he promises on his part to put an end to 'the vagrant habits of the Gypsies, and so enable them to furnish good soldiers to the Austrian army' (P. B., 1889: 305–306).

Along with the attempts of the old, traditional Roma elite to find their place in the new social realities, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and more precisely in then Hungary, a new, completely different Roma civic elite, whose representatives already may be considered 'intellectual Roma', gradually began to form. Interest in own language and history is one of the main characteristics of this new Roma elite. The main drive in the process for the creation and the publication of the Dictionary and Grammar of the Romani language (Joseph, 1888) was Archduke Joseph Carl Ludwig von Habsburg (1833–1905), Palatine of Hungary, who was also one of the founding members of the Gypsy Lore Society (Zaloaga, 2014). In his work on the preparation of the Dictionary and Grammar, Archduke Joseph attracted to his team several educated Roma, among whom should be noted in particular János Ipolysági Balogh (1802–1876), József Boldizsár (1825–1878), and Ferenc Nagyidai Sztojka (1855–1929), who, besides their work as native speakers and language editors, produced also the translations in Romani language and original author's literature (Orsós, 2015).

The emergence of the movement for Roma civic emancipation was indeed initiated by a relatively small circle of Roma's new civic elite, as is the case described in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This is similar to a model for creating other new modern nations in the region, where the elite (despite being relatively small in number) could create national concepts that were subsequently adopted by the masses at the next stage (Hroch, 1985; 2005).

An interesting aspect of this process of development of Roma civic emancipation here is the clear connection with the development of the Hungarian national idea at that time. In this context, it became clear why the Association of Hungarian Gypsy Musicians, created in 1908 and led by

Béla Radics, received public support. It was because of the special place that Hungarian Gypsy music held as an integral part of the Hungarian national culture (Hajnáczky, 2019; 2020; Sárosi, 1971). What is essential here are the national dimensions of the association, in which the Gypsy identity is incorporated as an integral, albeit ethnically distinct, part of the Hungarian civic national identity. In this way, a line of development of the Roma civic emancipation movement was formed, and it became the leading one throughout the region during the next interwar period.

In the second half of the 19th century, another phenomenon appeared, which had yet to develop. It is about the appearance in the public space through the fake news media, which are trying to give the nascent movement for Roma civic emancipation international dimensions. The first demystified case was from 1871 when the *Stuttgartner Zeitung* played a trick announcing that a Gypsy parliament would be held in Bad Cannstatt, in Germany; in January 1872, *The Times* in London, which, according to public opinion, is the most renowned newspaper in the world at the time, published a notice about this parliament, as did the *Evening Standard* a month later (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b: 5). These notices have been used as a basis for the construction of the new Roma national historical narrative, according to which 'International Congress in Darmstadt' was proclaimed to mark 'the birth of the modern pan-Romani movement', underlining that it was attended by delegates from Germany, Spain, Italy and Russia (Puxon, 1975; quoted in Klímová-Alexander, 2005: 159). Later, however, the origin of this notice in a joke in the context of the annual Würtemburg Festival has been revealed (Hancock, 2002: 114; Kenrick, 2007: 38; Klímová-Alexander, 2002: 108; 2005: 158–159).

Another, also non-existent, International Gypsy Congress, supposedly convened in 1879 in Austro-Hungarian Empire, in Kisfalu (today Malá vieska, part of village Družstevná pri Hornáde in Slovakia), gained popularity too. This case is a typical example of media mystification, perpetuated from one newspaper to another. Verification of the sources has shown that chronologically, the first announcement of such a congress is from *Epoche* (1879), published in Prague, referring to the newspaper *Kaschauer Zeitung* published in Košice. Still, there is no such article in that newspaper. The subsequent notice of the Gypsy congress at Kisfalu was in the humorous newspaper *Kikeriki* (1879), printed in Vienna. From there, it probably reached *The Times* (1879), which refers to as its source the newspaper *Pester Lloyd*, printed in Budapest (where though is nothing published on this subject), and a piece of news published in a renowned newspaper automatically ceased to be a joke but became real. Thus, the so-called 'Gypsy Congress' in Kisfalu begins to present itself as an

event that actually happened, and academic literature presents it as such. What is strange is that many authors continue to repeat this mystification till the present day.

It is legitimate to ask about the reasons for such mystifications, and the answer is straightforward. 'The Gypsy Theme' itself was a curious one for readers at the time because of the stereotypical public images of the Gypsies and, therefore, the messages for a forthcoming unification of all Gypsies of the world (which was the aim of the represented imaginary events) guarantees the attraction of a significant readership. These manipulations have an impact not only on the general public but, in combination with the specifics of the region's historical development, also on the Roma themselves.

The beginnings and the first steps of the movement for Roma civic emancipation during the modern era in the Ottoman Empire carry an interesting specificity. This movement takes different forms and directions, conditioned by the specific situation in different regions of this multinational empire. In some cases, the processes of Roma civic emancipation were closely linked to the national liberation struggles of the Balkan Orthodox peoples (among Christian Roma), and, in other cases, it is part of the general development of Ottoman society (among Muslim Roma).

At the beginning of the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire entered a long and severe period of crisis, which ended with its disappearance from the historical scene (formally in 1923). During this period, national ideologies were born among the conquered peoples of the Balkans, and accordingly, the struggles for liberation and the creation of their own nation-states began. Part of these processes are the struggles for church independence (a phenomenon characteristic of all Eastern Orthodox peoples in the region) and the creation of the Bulgarian national church in the 1860s. In this context, in 1867, a *Letter to the Editor*, signed by *One Egyptian*, was published in the Bulgarian newspaper *Macedonia* (Македонія, 1867: 3), published in Istanbul. The author of this *Letter*, Iliya Naumchev, a Rom from Prilep (nowadays in the Republic of North Macedonia), pleads for public recognition of the Roma (at that time they were called Egyptians) as equal to other Balkan nations and for the creation of their 'own church', 'own education', and in a longer perspective of their 'own society', i.e. a separate Roma state. However, this was an individual action of Iliya Naumchev, which did not receive a public response or achieve any actual results. Ironically, he himself ended his life as a priest in the Bulgarian Exarchate (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b: 19–25).

In South-Eastern Europe, in the context of the Ottoman Empire, where the local Roma fitted seamlessly into the Ottoman *esnaf* (guild) system, the existence of ethnically distinct Gypsy guilds in the Ottoman Empire has

been known since the first half of the 17th century. The ethnicisation of the guilds in the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century was already different and was directly related to general processes of ethnicisation in the Empire. It was also part of the national movements of the Balkan peoples during this period, which also encompassed the Roma. The Gypsy esnaf's organisations did not disappear with the end of the Ottoman Empire and were preserved in the newly independent states in the Balkans (Marushiakova and Popov, 2016a). In the new condition, the esnafs transformed and modernised but continued to occupy an essential place in the life of the community and its position in the society, and acquired new and broader social dimensions and functions, becoming part of the processes of development of Roma civic emancipation (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b).

Unlike Christian Roma, Muslim Roma remained in the general discourse of the social development of the Muslim population of the Ottoman Empire. The development of the processes of civic emancipation among Muslim Roma in the Ottoman Empire is closely connected with the name of Emin Resa, who published the newspaper *Laço* ('Good' in Romani language) in Edirne (today in Turkey) in 1910 (Bourgeois, 1910: 326–329; Marushiakova and Popov, 2021a: 28–33). The newspaper publicly demonstrated the first steps in the emergence of civic national consciousness among Roma. This process has yet to develop in the next historical period in a new, modern Turkey.

The first steps of the Roma civic emancipation movement in the Russian Empire were severely limited and virtually absent. The only known exception so far is Ignatiy Antonenko. Ignatiy Antonenko is a Rom who was actively involved in the so-called Sorochinsk uprising (December 1905 – January 1906), being an integral part of the First Russian Revolution (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021a: 21–24; Нэво дром, 1931a: 12–15; Пыжов, 1929; 1930). This case reveals the emergence of a new, hitherto unseen, direction in the development of this movement, which is yet to manifest itself during the interwar period. In particular, before reaching a certain degree of social integration of the Roma community (or at least parts of it) in the Russian Empire, it found its expression in including some of its representatives in the social and political struggles.

Early USSR

In the course of the First World War, in the fall of 1917, as a result of the so-called Great October Socialist Revolution, the new Soviet state emerges. Although the USSR arose and developed as a total negation of the old Russian Empire, in practice, in its national policy, the Soviet power continued to

use some of the models of the old imperial policy, at least as formal marks. However, they were radically changed, filled with new content and loaded with new, completely different features.

The creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (formally in 1922, with the first Constitution of the new state adopted in 1924) marked the beginning of a new historical era in which the ultimate goal of the communist policy was to create a new type of society, free from all previous problems of humanity – social, cultural, national, etc. (Slezkine, 2017). In this general historical context, the nationality policy of the new Soviet state pursued the fulfilment of this great task. A fundamental principle of the USSR's national policy in the 1920s and 1930s was the support for the development of all nationalities which inhabited the former Russian Empire, and the leading line in the national politics of the early USSR was its ideology of 'affirmative action' concerning individual nationalities (Hirsch et al., 2005; Martin, 2001), including the Roma (at the time known as 'Gypsies').

Against this general background, the situation with Roma in the early USSR (1920s and 1930s) was quite different both in comparison with the old multinational empires and with the new ethno-national states in Central and South-Eastern Europe and the established norms for national minorities through the so-called Versailles system. In the USSR, 'Gypsies' (in this category included not only Roma but other communities as well) are not a national minority as some authors wrongly suggest (Dunajeva, 2021a; Lemon, 2000; Stewart, 2001) but a 'nationality' (as well as all other peoples living in the multinational Soviet state). Like every other nationality in the USSR, Gypsies have the right (and in practice receive powerful state support) to create and develop their national institutions (schools, theatre), their national literature, their economic structures - collective farms (kolkhozes) and producers' cooperatives (artels) – including even their national territorial-administrative units (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b; 2022; 2024).

During the interwar period, the case of Roma civic activism in the USSR and its relations with the state apparatus regarding the policy towards the Gypsies was far from neglected. It is generally believed that Roma civic activism in the USSR was a political construct created by the Soviet state and that it was a direct function of state policy and an active instrument in its realisation. In fact, the situation was more complex and ambiguous. Gypsy policy in the early Soviet Union was, on one side, organically embedded in the general paradigm of the Soviet national policy of this time as its inseparable part and integral component. This common national policy has been referred by the well-known definition introduced by Terry Martin (2001), 'affirmative action', and in this sense, the emerging new elite community of Roma activists is the

very product of this policy, if not as its direct creation, at least as an offspring of the appropriate socio-political context allowing this elite to emerge and to develop with the active support of Soviet party and state structures.

On the other side, the analysis of collected historical sources shows that, to a very high degree, the policy of the Soviet state towards Roma had arisen and was developed as a result of ideas and concrete proposals coming from Roma activists themselves. Thus, Roma activists do not appear as merely passive performers of party and state directives but as active subjects in the process of their conception and implementation; they are positioned as individuals who offer and participate in the implementation of the state Gypsy policy. Of course, here we cannot but note that the initiatives of Roma activists often remarkably coincided with the general direction of the minority policy of the early USSR. However, the cooperation of Roma activists with the Party and State was far from equal. They were a subordinate part of this process, and the decisive word on what would or would not be accepted (and how it would be implemented) belonged to the Soviet state. Nevertheless, Roma activists were the ones who set out and defined (or at least tried to determine) the future of their community in the new Soviet realities (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b; 2022; 2024).

The first Gypsy *Komsomol* Group (Komsomol is the abbreviation for the 'Young Communist League') was established in Moscow in 1923 and was led by Ivan Rom-Lebedev. In January 1924, a meeting of the 'Initiative Proletarian Group of Gypsies' was held, and they decided to set up a 'Union of Gypsies living on the territory of the Moscow governorate'. This was followed by a lengthy process lasting more than two years, in which, according to the legal requirements, the Statute of the new organisation, now called the 'Gypsy All-Russian Union', was coordinated with the Department of Nationalities at the All-Union Central Executive Committee and was submitted for endorsement by the People Commissioner for Home Affairs. The Chairperson of the Union was Andrey Taranov, a member of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), a Red Army volunteer during the Civil War and a graduate of the Communist University of the Working People of the East (Marushiakova and Popov, 2022: 427–449).

The All-Russian Union of Gypsies set itself various goals, drawing fully on the dominant language of the Soviet ideology, but in general, these aims reflected the aspirations of the Roma towards their social and cultural development along the path of their civic emancipation. Accordingly, the Soviet state has taken several steps toward realising ideas proposed by the Roma elite. The All-Russian Union of Gypsies existed only for a relatively short period. It was dissolved by a Decree of the People's Commissariat for

Internal Affairs on February 15, 1928, and after the dissolution of the Union, its members, including the bulk of its leadership, continued their involvement in Soviet policy in different ways. In the general historical context of national policy in the early USSR, the specific dimensions of Soviet policy towards the Gypsies during this period became clear. Six leading priorities can be distinguished, namely: 1. Encouragement and assistance to nomadic Gypsies to pass to a sedentary lifestyle and to create national Gypsy kolkhozes; 2. Establishment and development of national Gypsy artels; 3. Creation and development of national Gypsy education; 4. Creation and development of national Gypsy literature and art; 5. Creation of a national Gypsy elite; 6. Creation of an autonomous territorial-administrative unit (Marushiakova and Popov, 2024: 26–27).

To achieve these tasks, in October 1925, the 'First Gypsy School on Earth' (Kisch, 1992: 119) was opened in Moscow, in the Rogozhsko-Simonovsky (Proletarian) Rayon, and Nina Dudarova started working as a teacher there. We are noting this explicitly because in recent years, the mantra of 'the first Roma school in the world' opened in Uzhhorod (at that time in Czechoslovakia) has been actively imposed in the public space (unfortunately, also in the academy), although this school was established in the fall of 1926 (see Baloun, 2022; Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b: 558–564).

In 1926, a Roma alphabet (using the Russian alphabet as a basis) and Roma literary language were created, and this was followed by impressive publication activity in the Roma language. In this period, two journals were published: *Romani Zorya* (Gypsy Down) and *Nevo Drom* (New Way). In the 1930s, local newspapers such as *Palo Bolshevistsko Kolkhozo* (About Bolshevik Kolkhoz) and *Stalintso* (the title could be translated as 'Stalin's comrade-in-arms') were published in the city of Mineralnye Vody, located in Northern Caucasus. In the Romani language, Roma authors also published school books, political pamphlets, propaganda materials, poetry, and prose, and works of Russian and world classics were translated into the Romani language. Special attention was paid to developing educational activities, establishing Romani language schools and classes, and preparing Roma teachers in a specially created Gypsy Pedagogical College in Moscow. In 1931, the famous State Gypsy Theatre 'Romen' was established in Moscow, which still exists today (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b: 558–564).

It is crucial to note that the specific goals set by Soviet state policy towards the Gypsies in the 1920s and 1930s, which continue to hold relevance today, have a significant historical significance.

Such is the case with the concept of anti-Gypsyism, which in its new, modified form (Hancock, 1987; 1996; Holler, 2014: 82–92), has become not

only one of the leading concepts in the field of Romani studies but also a basic premise, shaping European policies towards the Roma. Already in 1903, the famous ethnographer Lev Sternberg elaborated the following definition: 'The Gypsies, to a large extent and perhaps even completely, are victims of the historical injustice imposed on them by the surrounding nationalities' (Штернберг, 1903: 304–308). Alexander German first formulated the concept of anti-Gypsyism in the early USSR in his article *The Gypsies* (Безбожник, 1928: 11-13). It was further developed in the article *What to Do with the Gypsies?* in which the authors, Georgy Lebedev and Alexander German, devoted a separate section on the *Roots of anti-Gypsyism* (Комсомольская правда, 1929: 4). Andrey Taranov's programmatic article *War against anti-Gypsyism*, published in Romani in the Gypsy journal *Nevo Drom*, defined one of the main directions of the movement for Roma civil emancipation in the USSR (Нэво дром, 1931c: 1–3).

In the USSR, the Roma activists (men and women) brought to the forefront the specific problem of Roma women and the goal of achieving gender equality within the wider society and the community. In modern terms, we find this issue in present-day discussions about the double discrimination faced by Roma women. As one Rom activist in the early Soviet Union wrote, the Gypsy woman was a 'slave', and she must earn a living for the whole family, including her husband (Звезда, 1926: 2). In this spirit, the Work Plan of the All-Russian Union of the Gypsies for 1926 had as one of its goals the liberation of women 'from the yoke of the family and the male supremacy' so that they could have more time for socially useful work (ГАРФ, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27: 94). In this way, the activities for equality of the Roma woman became one of the essential aims in the work of the All-Russian Union of the Gypsies in the 1920s and 1930s. In this way, the activities towards equality of Roma women became one of the important aims of the Union. The Roma women themselves were included in these activities of the Soviet state as leading personalities and role models (Marushiakova and Popov, 2023b).

Some examples of Roma women's participation in 'building the new life' appeared in the press at that time for propaganda reasons with their photographs, such as V. Yarysheva from the Gypsy kolkhoz 'Nevo Drom', whose picture driving a tractor was published in 1936 (РГАКФД, d. 99274, photo 4-99274), the Gypsy teacher N. P. Pedanova, who, in 1938, in the Stalingrad Oblast, introduced under open air to the Gypsy kolkhoz workers the rules for holding elections to the Supreme Soviet, as well as a photograph of Z. I. Lebedeva, a Komsomol member from the kolkhoz 'Trud Romen' (Gypsy Labour), who originated from a Roma nomadic community, graduated from law school and worked as a judge in Rostov-on-Don in 1937 (Иващенко, 2011:

66; Известия, 1937: 4). It should be specially emphasised also that these two photographs of Roma women are the only ones among the mass of preserved photographs from that time in which these women have their hair cut. The tradition of wearing long hair by the Roma woman is exceptionally durable. In many places worldwide, this tradition continues to be observed (including in today's Russia and the post-Soviet space), even in modernised forms. Thus, the shortcut is the symbol of the new Soviet Roma women-activist.

In these conditions, the Roma activists have come to the idea of creating a separate Gypsy national autonomous region, where the Gypsy kolkhozes will be concentrated and will attract new nomadic communities to a sedentary lifestyle, which in the future will grow into a Gypsy Autonomous Soviet Republic. Roma expressed this idea in several letters to the highest Soviet authorities, including Stalin (Marushiakova and Popov, 2020). Roma activists found supporters for this idea at the highest level of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, and relevant state decisions have been adopted. It was followed by several years of exploration of the territories and the existing possibilities for establishing and functioning a Gypsy autonomous region from the perspective of the Gypsy Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b; 2022; 2024). In this regard, various options for the territorial location of this Gypsy autonomous unit were discussed. Roma activists have been pushing for the North Caucasus region, centred in the village of Kangly near the town of Mineralnye Vody, where the first (and only remaining) Gypsy village council (village council - the lowest national territorial-administrative unit) and the Gypsy kolkhoz 'Trud Romen'. However, Soviet authorities have been more in favour of Western Siberia or the Volga region, as many different options have been discussed (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b, 2022; 2024). They have even started preparatory activities in the *Nevi Baxt* (New Happiness) collective farm in the region of the city of Kuibyshev (today Samara) (РГАЭ, f. 5675, op. 1, d. 146). Under the auspices of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) for the resettlement of Roma to new territories, in the GULAG camps echelons of timber for the construction of housing and outbuildings were composed and sent to the Gypsy collective farms, where the future Gypsy ASSR was to be established (Marushiakova and Popov, 2022; 2024; Марушиакова и Попов, 2022).

Sometimes, it can be read that in 1937, an unsuccessful attempt was made to create a Gypsy Autonomous Soviet Republic with the Romanestan kolkhoz as its centre in Taiga station, in Siberia (Klímová-Alexander, 2005: 164; Lemon, 2000: 133; Калинин, 2005: 45–47). However, there is no documentary historical evidence for this, and there is a hoax based on second-hand oral history (Marushiakova and Popov, 2024; Марушиакова и Попов, 2022).

The Government policy on Gypsies in the USSR changed radically in 1938. The changes in the Gypsy policy in the second half of the 1930s were not a manifestation of anti-Gypsyism on the part of the state. Still, they were a corollary of the overall turn in the Soviet nationality policy at the time. Up to 1938, the policy towards them was based on their treatment as a separate people who should develop above all as an ethnic community by creating separate Gypsy kolkhozes, artels, schools, etc. After 1938, the element of the 'special affirmative policy' towards Roma gave way to the 'mainstream, general approach', and Roma were seen above all as an integral part of Soviet society, without any particular separation in the main social spheres; as a community, their development was supported only in an ethno-cultural plan (above all in the field of Theatre 'Romen' and Gypsy music, songs, and dancing). In this historical context, the beginning of the Second World War ended the activities to create the future Gypsy ASSR (Marushiakova and Popov, 2022; 2024; Марушиакова и Попов, 2022).

In general, all these activities in the field of Roma civil emancipation are limited within the USSR, i.e. one cannot speak of the presence of their international dimensions. Indeed, the first public action of the Roma Komsomol members in 1924 was to organize a Gypsy group to participate in the '1st of May' Parade on Red Square in the same year, raising the slogan 'Gypsies of All World, Unite!' (ГАРФ, f. А 259, op. 9 Б, d. 4233: 21; f. 3316, op. 17, d. 188: 1). This paraphrases the famous slogan 'Proletarians of the All World, Unite!' from *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. On the membership cards of the All-Russian Union of the Gypsies, on the cover page, the slogan 'Proletarians of All Countries and Oppressed Peoples of the World, Unite!' is written in Russian. Nevertheless, on the inside page of the card, the same slogan is written in Romani language, but with quite different content: 'Рома сарэ свэтостыр скэндэнтипэ кхэтане' (Gypsies of All World, Unite!). All this, however, remains only public slogans, without any concrete implementation of the ideas for the development of an international Roma movement.

To the extent that the Soviet media (including Gypsy journals) published materials about Gypsies in other countries of the world, they were propaganda-oriented. They revealed the policies of anti-Gypsyism in capitalist countries (pointed as a contrast to the USSR, where Roma civil emancipation developed rapidly with the support of the Soviet state). An outspoken example is the article *Lynch Law in Czechoslovakia* by Alexander German, which describes the anti-Gypsy law in Czechoslovakia against nomadism and the anti-Gypsy pogrom in Slovakia (the case in Pobedim village in 1928), in which a bunch of villagers headed from a tavern to a Roma settlement and practically levelled

it with the ground, and the victims were more than twenty Roma people, six of whom were dead, and among them was a six-year-old girl (Baloun, 2017). The article summarises: 'The life of the Gypsies in Czechoslovakia is the same as the life of Negroes in America and Jews in Tsarist Russia' (Нэво дром, 1931b: 22-23). This is not just a propaganda cliché because at the heart of the pogrom were local villagers who lived in the USA and 'brought the practices of the Ku-Klux-Klan from there' (Arbeiterwille, 1929: 3). The coverage of this case in Europe was part of the general anti-Gypsy discourse prevailing at the time and was linked to another case which occurred one year earlier in 1927, again in Czechoslovakia, in the village Moldova nad Bodvou, in the region of Košice (Baloun, 1922: 145–149). It was the case of a group of 19 Roma, a false accusation of committing numerous murders. They were sentenced, some of them died, and only two years later, it was proved that they were innocent. This case was also widely covered by the press worldwide and was mainly presented as unequivocal proof of the inferiority and savagery of the Gypsies. Even a French illustrated journal published on its cover page a colour lithograph with the title 'There are still cannibals. A troop of Bohemians in Czecho-Slovakia is convinced of having eaten human beings' (Le Petit Journal Illustré, 1927). Such descriptions were widely circulated all over the world around, and in them, the existence of 'Gypsy cannibals' was taken as something natural, beyond any doubt. Some media articles even explained it with 'Gypsy culture', which has led to the events: 'Reportedly Gypsies believe that to eat the beating and bleeding heart of a red-haired person, also referred to as sunny, brings good luck. The members of the band have also drunk the blood of their victim, and in order not to be caught, they believe they should not change their shirts all night long' (Die Rote Fahne, 1927: 3). Thus, all world media except the USSR mainly reflected on the accusation, and the innocence of the accused escaped their attention, and all this news only strengthened the prejudices against Roma and the anti-Gypsyism.

Often, in academic publications, one can find opposing positions of the Gypsies in the USSR as an ethnicity/nationality on the one hand and their position as a social and civic category on the other. It has naturally led to the conclusion (direct or implicit) that the Soviet government tried to assimilate the Gypsies to make them 'Soviet citizens', 'Proletariat', 'Socialist Workers', etc. (Dunajeva, 2021a; 2021b; Lemon, 2000; O'Keeffe, 2013). Such conclusions, however, are not relevant in the field of identity because the opposition of the two leading identity dimensions (society and community) of the Gypsies in the USSR is entirely unjustified. From the point of view of the dominant ideology and the existing political practice in the early USSR (as well as in the whole history of the USSR), there was no problem for the Gypsies as

well as for all Soviet citizens to be proletariat as a social-class category, and at the same time to be also a separate nationality. The two categories did not contradict each other; on the contrary, this two-dimensional position was widely welcomed (and encouraged in various ways) in the early USSR, e.g., the creation of the Gypsy national Schools, Literature, Theatre, etc. The approach that takes for granted that the two dimensions of the identity of the Gypsies are mutually exclusive is incorrect and even manipulative because it pushes the Gypsies back into the stigmatised role of the eternal outcast and disregards the role of the affirmative action policy in the early USSR for the formation of the new Gypsy civic elite.

Academic publications often oppose the position of the Gypsies in the USSR as an ethnicity/nationality on the one hand and their position as a social and civic category on the other, which has naturally led to the conclusion (direct or implicit) that the Soviet government tried to assimilate the Gypsies to make them 'Soviet citizens', 'Proletariat', 'Socialist Workers', etc. (Dunajeva, 2021a; Lemon, 2000; O'Keeffe, 2013). Such conclusions, however, are not relevant in the field of identity because the opposition of the two leading identity dimensions (society and community) of the Roma in the USSR is entirely unjustified. From the point of view of the dominant ideology and the existing political practice in the early USSR (as well as in the whole history of the USSR), there was no problem for the Gypsies as well as for all Soviet citizens to be proletariat as a social-class category, and at the same time to be also a separate nationality. The two categories did not contradict each other; on the contrary, this two-dimensional position was widely welcomed (and encouraged in various ways) in the early USSR, e.g., the creation of the Gypsy National Schools, Gypsy National Literature, Gypsy National Theatre, etc. The approach that takes for granted that the two dimensions of the identity of the Gypsies are mutually exclusive (i.e. Gypsies are perceived only as a social, but not as an ethnic category) is incorrect and even manipulative because it pushes the Gypsies back into the stigmatised role of the eternal outcast and disregards the role of the affirmative action policy in the early USSR for the formation of the new Roma civic elite.

It should be noted that during the interwar period, the Soviet state made efforts not only to create a new Roma elite in the USSR but also in other countries. Among graduates of the Communist University of the Working People of the East at Komintern (i.e. Communist International) in Moscow are four Roma – one from USSR (Andrey Taranov), and three from Turkey (Remzi Mustafa, Mustafa Mehmet and Zehra Kosova – Roma women) (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b; Yılgür, 2015). The presence of Roma from Turkey in this list is understandable because large numbers of Roma in the Balkans have been

sedentary for centuries since the time of the Ottoman Empire. They were a large and significant segment of the first proletariat created in the 19th and early 20th centuries textile and tobacco factories (including the first textile factory in Bulgarian lands, founded in 1834 in Sliven). In the case of Roma from Turkey, however, their social position and political beliefs come to the fore, which, however, does not mean erasing their ethnic identity - one of them (Remzi Mustafa) worked for a while in the 1930s as an artist at the State Gypsy Theater 'Romen' in Moscow (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b; Yılgür, 2015).

Central and South-Eastern Europe

The situation in the Central and South-Eastern Europe region changed radically after the end of the First World War. In place of three multinational empires (the Austro-Hungarian, the Ottoman Empire, and the Russian), new (or not so new, but significantly expanding their territories) ethnonational states emerged. However, the Roma failed to create their nation-state. Moreover, they were not part of the national minorities defined by the so-called Versailles system of international relations, the foundations of which set the Paris Peace Conference, which treated only the minorities of the existing nation-states (as well as the Jews). Unlike many other people inhabiting the three multinational empires, the Roma were among the nations that failed to realise their national project, which turned out to be a pivotal moment in developing the ideas of Roma civic emancipation.

In the new post-war realities between the two world wars, the Roma civic emancipation movement encountered a radically different situation. The new Roma civic activists' visions of the goals and objectives of this movement radically changed its leading paradigm. During this period, the foremost aim of the movement for Roma civic emancipation was no longer the development of the community in the direction of its construction as a separate nation (as was the leading line in the previous period, under the conditions of the three multinational empires). In conditions of nation-states, this goal changed to achieving the civic equality of the community within the country to which Roma they belong, and all activities of the newly created civil organisations and the published Roma newspapers and journals were oriented nationally (within the respective countries). A comprehensive and systematic overview of the development processes of the Roma civil emancipation movement in the region of Central and South-Eastern Europe (country by country) will provide a deeper understanding of this transition.

In Bulgaria, the emergence of an organised Roma civic movement is directly provoked by the deprivation of large parts of the Roma of their

legitimate civil rights in the early twentieth century. In 1901, a new Electoral Law was passed. With this law, Muslim Roma (at that time, the majority of Roma in Bulgaria), as well as nomadic Roma, were deprived of voting rights. As a reaction on the part of the Roma, a Gypsy Congress was organised in Sofia in 1906, which accepted declarations of protest to Prince Ferdinand and the National Assembly (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b: 40–69).

At the beginning of the 20th century, a new phenomenon was ushered in – the creation of officially registered public organisations that should defend the social positions of Roma in Bulgarian society as an ethnic community. The first historical source in this direction is the *Statute of the Egyptian Nation in the Town of Vidin* (Устав, 1910; see also Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b: 69–76). This historical document designates Roma as *Egiptyani* (Egyptians in Bulgarian), which directly correlates with *Kıptı* (i.e., Copts) as in the Ottoman Empire (Marushiakova and Popov, 2001).

The Roma movement for civic emancipation, which appeared in the interwar period, is linked to the name of Shakir Pashov. In 1919, Shakir Pashov was the principal founder of a Roma association named Sofia's Common Moslem Educational and Cultural Mutual Aid Organisation 'Istikbal - Future'. The organisation ceased to exist after the pro-fascist coup in 1923, was revived in 1929, and successively transformed into the Mohammedan National Educational and Cultural Organisation and Common Mohammedan-Gypsy National Cultural-Educational and Mutual Aid Union in Bulgaria. After the coup of 1934, the authorities did not allow her new registration, but de facto, the organisation continued to function actively without official registration until the Second World War (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b: 79–162; 2023a: 200–221).

The new phenomenon in the Roma movement – of penetration and the establishment of 'Gypsy Churches' – is also known from Bulgaria in this period. The penetration of the 'new' churches (i.e. those beyond Eastern Orthodoxy and Islam) among Roma had begun in the 1920s. The first successful mission was in the village of Golintsi (today Mladenovo neighbourhood in the town of Lom), where gradually a separate, independent from 1921, the only Gypsy Baptist Church took shape (Циганска, 1926). It created a Gypsy women's Christian society 'Romni' (Roma Woman). In 1927, the evangelical newspaper *Svetilnik* (candlestick) was published, with a supplement in the Romani language *Romano alav* (Roma Word). The evangelical propaganda among Roma in Bulgaria actively continued and included new regions, as is evidenced also in numerous publications in the Romani language – two Gospels, as well as an entire cycle of evangelical literature (Славкова, 2007).

In Serbia, the First Serbian Gypsy *Zadruga* (Mutual Aid Society) was established in Belgrade in 1890. After the First World War in Yugoslavia,

the 'First Serbian Gypsy Association for Mutual Assistance in Sickness and Death', headed by Svetozar Simić, was inaugurated in 1927 (Zahova, 2022: 115–166). It is, in fact, a continuation of the old association that has existed since World War I. In 1930, the *Romano lil/Ciganske novine* (Roma Newspaper/Gypsy Newspaper) was published. The 'Educational Club of Yugoslavian Gypsy Youth', which grew into 'Yugoslavian-Gypsy Youth', also took shape. In 1935, the 'Association of Belgrade Gypsies for the Celebration of Aunt Bibia' was established (*Bibija* is a Gypsy Saint) (Acković, 2004). All these organisations have mutual aid within the community as their primary purpose, literacy of children and adults and preserving and developing Roma culture (Acković, 2001; 2004; Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b: 180–250).

In Greece, in Athens, the 'Panhellenic Cultural Association of the Greek Gypsies' was founded in 1939, headed by N. Sideris (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b: 251–263).

In Romania, 'The Assembly of Gypsies from Transylvania' is known for gathering in Dumrăveni on 27th April 1919, at which they expressed their support for the decision of Great National Assembly in Alba Julia from 1st December 1918, for uniting of Transylvania with Romania and declared their commitment and loyalty to the new fatherland (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b: 306-318; Matei, 2010; 2011). The first Roma organisation in Romania was a local one and was created on a professional basis. In 1926, in Transylvania, in Făgăraş county, Naftanailă Lazăr established another local organisation, the 'Neorustic Brotherhood', intending to improve the economic and cultural level of Roma. The Gypsy musician society 'Junimea Musicală' (The Musical Youths) was founded in Bucharest in 1927 (Achim, 2004; 2010; Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b: 318–327, 392–404; Matei, 2020).

A few years later, the idea of a single ethnic Roma organisation for the whole of Romania appeared, and in 1933 was established the 'General Association of the Gypsies in Romania' headed by a priest, Ion Pop-Şerboianu (Archimandrite Calinik). What quickly followed was a split off and the establishment of an alternative organisation called 'The General Union of the Roma in Romania', headed by Gheorghe A. Lăzăreanu-Lăzurică, a journalist, who was elected Executive President and proclaimed himself as *Voivode* (chieftain) of the Roma in Romania. In 1934, Gheorghe Niculescu, a Bucharest Flower Dealer, headed the Union. In 1939, the Union, according to the data of the Union itself, counted 40 branches, 454 local offices and circa 790,000 members. This number is exaggerated as in the whole of Romania at that time, the Roma population was considerably smaller (Achim, 2004; 2010; Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b: 328–382; Matei, 2020).

Many other Roma organisations were also set up in this period, such

as 'Oltenia Circle of the General Association of Gypsies' was established in Craiova in 1934 and led by Marin I. Simion; 'Civic Organisation of the Roma in Romania' appeared in 1935, with President Gheorghe A. Lăzăreanu-Lăzurică; the association 'Revival of the Roma Men and Women in Romania', was founded in 1936, etc.

In the 1930s were also founded numerous Roma professional associations as well as newspapers – till now, six newspapers have been discovered, preserved in various archives: *Neamul Țiganesc* (Gypsy People), *O Rom* (The Roma), *Glasul Romilor* (Voice of the Roma), Foaia Poporului Romesc (The Roma People's Sheet), Țara Noastra (Our Land) and *Timpul* (Time) were published (Achim, 2004; 2010; Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b: 382–404; Matei, 2020).

All these organisations are in a complicated relationship with each other, and among their leaders in the 1930s, public debates were constantly held on various issues, including about the name of their own community – 'Roma' or 'Tigani / Gypsies' (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b: 404–416).

In Hungary, the development of Roma emancipation processes takes place mainly through the establishment of professional associations of Roma musicians who assert the positions of Gypsy music within the framework of the Hungarian national culture, thus uniting their ethnic with their professional interests. In 1923, the 'National Association of Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' was established with President Gábor Kozák. However, the new association sets broader goals (outside the narrowly professional), striving to achieve a much more significant public impact and support its community. Under the leadership of the successive presidents Károly Bura and Imre Magyari, the association renewed the publishing of the *Journal of Hungarian Gypsy Musicians* (1924-1931) and established 'János Bihari' Music School in 1929. In 1935, the association was transformed into the 'Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' National Federation' with President Béla Berkes, succeeded in 1937 by Sándor Bura, and in 1938 began publishing the *Hungarian Gypsy Music* journal (Hajnáczky, 2019; 2020; Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b: 467-548; Sárosi, 1971).

In the Czechoslovak Republic, in 1927, in Košice, Eastern Slovakia, an attempt was made to establish the 'Union of Czechoslovak Gypsy Musicians' to demonstrate loyalty to the new Republic. It was unsuccessful until the intervention of the representatives of Czech intelligentsia working in Slovakia. In 1929, they created a non-Roma civic organisation. Still, with a significant Roma presence among creators and constituency, the 'League for Cultural Uplift of Gypsies' transformed in 1930 into the 'Society for the Study and Solving Gypsy Question'. It is an example of a new phenomenon – the appearance of Pro-Roma NGOs. The Society developed numerous activities aimed at Roma social integration. It supported the establishment of new Roma organisations, such as the 'Lavutarisz'

Cultural and Social Society of Gypsies in Slovakia, which was established in 1936 and headed by Aladar Dani. They also supported an initiative by Moravian Rom Ján Daniel, who wrote to President Masaryk insisting on opening a school for Roma children in Uzhgorod (today in Ukraine). The school was opened in 1926, inspiring attempts to establish similar schools or separate Roma classes in other places in Eastern Slovakia. Uzhgorod and Košice also established Roma theatre groups, similar were also created in Moravia (Baloun, 2022; Horváthová, 1964; Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b: 549–598).

In 1930, in Latvia, a 'Society of Gypsy Friends' by Jānis Leimanis was established. In 1932, he founded the Gypsy Choir. The organisation has developed a range of cultural and sporting activities. Its existence turned out to be relatively short-lived, and in 1937, the authorities closed it with the statement: 'There is no need for its existence' (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b: 651–673).

There was a specific development of the processes of Roma civic emancipation in Poland, where the idea of a separate 'Gypsy State' occurred for the first time in the 1920s and 1930s and is related to the so-called 'Gypsy Kings'. The first Rom publicly declared himself 'Gypsy King' was Jan Michałak-Michałescu in 1928. The successive Gypsy Kings were from the 'Kwiek Dynasty' – Michal I Kwiek, Michal II Kwiek, Jozef Kwiek, Bazil Kwiek, Janusz Kwiek, Rudolf Kwiek, Matejas Kwiek, etc. Polish and world media present many of their initiatives in search of territory for the creation of an independent 'Gypsy State' worldwide, e.g., in India, Egypt, Abyssinia, Uganda, Namibia, South America, etc. (Ficowski, 1985; Gontarek, 2017; 2020; Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b: 599–646).

Said in passing, the fate of the Gypsy Kings in Poland after the start of World War II is fascinating. Rudolf Kwiek remained in the German-occupied part of Poland and tried to collaborate with the occupation authorities, and after the war in independent Poland, he was sentenced (Ficowski, 1985: 103–106). Michal II Kwiek, Bazil Kwiek and Janusz Kwiek fled to the USSR-annexed territories in western Ukraine, where NKVD arrested them. Bazil Kwiek and Janusz Kwiek were sentenced to death for espionage for Poland and shot, and Michal II Kwiek died in the camps of the Gulag in present-day Kazakhstan (Marushiakova and Popov, 2024; Жив'юк, 2021: 36–75).

This turbulent activity of the so-called 'Gypsy Kings' is primarily a media phenomenon. Particularly vivid and impressive is the performance at the stadium in Warsaw at the coronation of Janusz Kwiek in 1937, when a group of Roma, recruited as extras in preparing a film, put on their own show. They hire tailcoats and top hats from the Warsaw Opera for the men, hire a senior Orthodox priest to perform the coronation, shoot the entire

ceremony on a short film, and invite many journalists, and pictures and reports of this coronation are circulating in the media worldwide. As later admitted during interrogations by the NKVD in the USSR, the organisers of this show themselves, the election of the new 'Gypsy Tsar' was fictitious, and this whole performance was intended for the media and the stadium audience (Marushiakova and Popov, 2024). Nevertheless, the very idea of the 'Gypsy State' and its public proclamation shows a new Roma vision of the community's future (a separate question is whether she had at least some chance of realising it). The very emergence of the idea of an independent 'Gypsy State' is not surprising in the context of the widely discussed plans in the public space of international Zionism to create a Jewish state in Palestine and especially the colonial aspiration of Poland and intense propaganda in Polish media during the interwar period (Białas, 1983; Kowalski, 2010).

Various Gypsy Kings in interwar Poland have repeatedly emphasised in their public statements that their influence, as well as their plans, are not limited only within the country but have an international dimension, e.g. it was announced that representatives of the Romanian, Hungarian, Portuguese and Spanish Gypsies had participated in the election of a new Gypsy King in 1937 and that there was a representative from France among the candidates for the throne (whether this is really the case, however, remains questionable). Historical evidence shows that some of the Gypsy Kings have unsuccessfully attempted to expand their activities in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Romania. These activities, however, were mostly confined in the frames of the *Kelderari* group members and followed a pattern known from Poland – to organise public events to attract the press's interest.

The Gypsy Kings continuously made efforts to attract public attention to raising their authority before the state authorities in Poland; Matejasz Kwiek founded the Association of Gypsies in Poland in 1933 and tried to convince the authorities that it united all the Gypsies in the country. All this indicates that this approach was considered to be a way to achieve a position in the state power structures as representatives of the Gypsies, i.e. mass advertising in the press of the plans of the Gypsy Kings in the local and world media was in practice used as a tool in their quest to establish their positions in Poland itself. To put it aphoristically, the main purpose of the Gypsy Kings phenomenon's international dimensions was to serve its national dimensions within interwar Poland (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b: 646–650).

From the point of view of the movement for Roma civil emancipation supposed international dimensions, the situation in Romania during the interwar period is fascinating. A significant place in the creation of a Roma historical narrative is the attempts to trace the beginning of international

Roma activism in the manifestations of Gypsy/Roma activism in Romania during that time. A typical example in this regard is the allegations, which are not supported by any quotation of historical sources, that delegates from nine countries must have gathered in Bucharest at an international congress with the motto 'The United Gypsies of Europe' where they allegedly decided to set up Roma organisations in each country; and 'in order to achieve an efficient coordination of the Roma from different states, they decided to set up a permanent commission composed of 30 members to prepare a second congress in Paris or elsewhere' (Puxon, 1979: 291–292). There is no historical evidence of an international Roma congress. There is no reason to believe that the Congress of the General Union of Roma in Romania, held on October 8, 1933, in Bucharest, was an international one (Matei, 2020: 305–315; see also Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b: 646–650). That is why references to an 'international congress' in academic text sound confusing: for example, 'the Bucharest Congress, if [sic! – author's note] proven to be taken place, would be the first of its [international] kind' (Klímová-Alexander, 2005: 195). History deals with real facts confirmed by respective historical sources; alternative history is an attractive approach but can hardly be perceived as an academic discipline – instead, it is an entirely different genre.

In the 1930s several leading Roma activists in Romania (and especially Gheorghe A. Lazărescu-Lăzurică) have repeatedly made public statements in the press that they maintain a permanent relationship with Roma from other countries, that Roma representatives from abroad are coming, that their newspapers will publish materials on the Roma in Poland, Russia, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Switzerland, and even that they will participate in the International Roma Congress to be held in France (Paris, Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer) and Hungary (Ţara Noastră, 1937). In 1935, it was announced in the press that an international Roma congress would be held in the city of Cernăuţi (today Chernivtsi in Ukraine), which would be attended by representatives from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Germany, Hungary, Austria, France, Italy, Spain and America, as well as by a delegation of Roma leaders from Romania itself (Universul, 1935). In 1936, the press announced a World Roma Congress, which was to be held in the city of Rowno in Poland (today Rivne in Ukraine), at which Roma all over the world would discuss the general emigration of Gypsies from Europe to Latin America where they would establish an independent state would under Polish Gypsy King Michael Kwiek (Evening Standard, 1936). The Romanian press, however, reported that this Congress would take place in Kowno (meaning Kaunas, which at that time was the capital of independent Lithuania), and a delegation from Romania would attend it. Gheorghe A. Lazărescu-Lăzurică

and Ion Popp Șerboianu would head the Romanian delegation (Universul, 1936). Both are leaders of the two largest national organisations, the General Union of the Roma in Romania and the General Association of the Gypsies in Romania, which were in a state of constant combativeness. All these press releases have one common and invariable characteristic – they always speak in the future tense. Still, never in the past tense, and there is no other evidence that the presented events occurred.

Upon closer examination, it becomes clear that these were merely public statements, lacking any tangible evidence to support their occurrence. Upon closer examination, it becomes clear that these were merely public statements, lacking any tangible evidence to support their occurrence. The events and acts they proclaimed seemed confined to the realm of rhetoric and anticipation rather than actual historical events.

The primary and most important goal of the whole Roma civic emancipation movement in Romania is, above all, equal integration within the Romanian civic nation, and using the imaginary international dimensions of this process is only one of the methods to achieve success in this regard. That is why it is so often repeated in the materials of existing organisations that Roma are Romanian citizens, that they are loyal to the Romanian state, serve in the Romanian army, etc. Something more, when the press announced that Gypsies from many European countries would be present at the elections of a Gypsy King in Poland in 1937, the General Secretariat of the General Union of Roma in Romania adopted a formal, unambiguous decision at a special meeting, underlying that the Union will have no part in the Gypsy Polish King elections as they had nothing to do with Gypsies in other countries. Romanian Roma's sole devotion and loyalty was only to the Romanian Crown (Glasul Romilor, 1937: 4), i.e. in cases where a choice was required, civic national identity proved to be paramount, and community ethnic identity remained in the background.

The case of Romania is not unique. In 1937, in Bulgaria, an article in the yellow press, entitled *The Gypsies Will Organise Themselves*, reported that two young Gypsies, Ahmed Seizov and Petar Ivanov, were touring the country and trying (without much success) to organise the Gypsies into a union to become a member of the International Gypsy Union based in Hungary (Празднични вести, 19372). The Bulgarian police investigated the case but failed to find persons with such names; the leadership of the organisation *Istikbal* also confirmed that such persons were not known in the Gypsy community (ЦДА, ф. 370, оп. 6, а.е. 745: 1-3; Pashov, 2023: 220). Nor was there any information about the existence of any International Gypsy Union (neither in Hungary nor anywhere else in the world). Apparently, the article was a journalistic sensation that had nothing to do with reality.

All these examples show that the plays of the Roma activists in Central and South-Eastern Europe, who demonstrated imaginary international support for their activities in their own countries, were intended primarily for 'internal use'. In other words, in this case, there is an attempt to extract social capital from the inferiority complexes towards Europe that remain dominant in the countries of the whole region and which seek internal public legitimacy by obtaining some appreciation from abroad.

Said in passing, this syndrome continues to dominate today, and this is valid not only for Roma activists but also in much wider dimensions. That is why one can see English language slogans at the forefront of many public events, and the biggest success is when the event is broadcast on CNN.

The undoubted priority of national dimensions in the identities of Roma (or at least large parts of them) throughout the region over their international dimensions determines their inclusion in the political life of the countries in which they live. From this point of view, the attachment of many Roma to the communist ideology and their active involvement in the political struggles during the interwar period, not only in the USSR but also in other countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe, should not cause surprise. It also explains the participation of many Roma in the Resistance during World War II throughout the region (see, e.g. the photograph in Illustrations of a group of political prisoners in Sliven, convicted for participating in the so-called anti-fascist resistance in Bulgaria; four are Roma). We should note that the participation of Roma in the Resistance during World War II was not only and not so much as a defensive reaction of a community persecuted and destroyed by Nazi Germany and its allies (Mirga-Kruszelnicka and Dunajeva, 2020) but before all and above all as part of the respective civil nations in the countries where they live (Marushiakova and Popov, 2017).

Conclusion

As is apparent from everything above, the absolute priority of the Roma civic emancipation movement during the interwar period in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe was the situation in the countries where the Roma lived and the attempts to change this situation in the desired direction. Individual cases of public presentation of supposed international dimensions of these movements are entirely subordinated to this priority and serve its purposes. Attempts from today's point of view to 'discover' the international dimension of this movement are, in fact, devoid of any real historical grounds and are speculation and an attempt to falsify the past from today's perspective.

The situation with the so-called national Romani flag is analogical. Many

believe the flag was adopted at the First Romani Congress in London in 1971 (see Marushiakova and Popov, 2005; 2018). The lack of historical evidence does not prevent the widely circulated claims that the blue and green flag, which is the basis of the Roma national flag and is a symbol of the international Roma movement, was adopted at the Congress in Bucharest in 1933. The Statute of the General Union of Roma in Romania, adopted at this Congress, however, expressly states that 'the Union flag is made up of the [Romanian] national colours with the coat of arms of the country, bearing in each corner a distinctive sign, representing: a violin, an anvil, a compass and a trowel with a hammer, signs of the art and professions of Roma in Romania', and this Statute has already been published (Haley, 1934: 185). As seen from a photograph (Realitatea Ilustrată, 1935: 10), the flag in front of which the new president of the General Union of Roma from Romania takes a solemn oath is as described in the Statute. There are no other than nation-building grounds to claim that the colours of the modern International Roma flag (blue and green) were adopted by Congress in 1933 (Hancock, 2002: 120). The only 'evidence' we could find for this claim was Grattan Puxon's description of the First Romani Congress that was conducted in London in 1971. Here, he quotes a statement made almost half a century after the event itself by a famous Roma leader who originated from Slovakia: 'Dr. [Jan] Cibula adds his authority. It was, he says, such a flag that had been recognised by the pre-war Bucharest congress' (Puxon, 2019). Thus, without any historical evidence, this contention also became one of the fundamental pillars in the modern Roma national historical narrative and continues to appear in many academic publications to this day. In fact, for the first time, the 'Gypsy flag' in a combination of two colours (blue and green) was publicly presented at the ceremony in Enghien-les-Bains, held in 1959, at which by Ionel Rotaru, a refugee from Romania in France proclaimed supreme chief of the Gypsies under the name Vaida Voevod (Cavaillé, 2023: 274). With a flag in two colours (blue and green, divided diagonally) is the delegation of the Comité International Tsigane at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in 1969 (Puxon, 2000: 102). Since the Comité International Tsigane organised the First Romani Congress in London in 1971, the flag's colours were preserved (with two horizontal colours, adding a red chakra in the middle), becoming the Romani national flag.

Nowadays, the results of these blatant manipulations in attempts to create a new Roma historical narrative are supported in some circles of contemporary Roma activism, as well as among some academics, mainly those who believe that their public commitment to supporting Roma should be at the expense of the historical truth and also includes support in the creation of the Roma national historical mythology. This approach explains why some authors have

tried vainly to discover the international dimension of the movement for Roma civic emancipation before the Second World War. Because they could not find support in the historical sources, they have described supposed international connections with the added stipulation 'whether mythical or real' (Klímová-Alexander, 2005: 195). Such verbal equilibristic is not only unfounded but also completely unnecessary.

The actual international dimensions of the Roma civic emancipation movement emerged only in the 1950s and 1960s in Western Europe (the activities of Ionel Rotaru and the 'Comité International Tsigane', which was founded in 1962). They developed in the 1970s when the movement began to break the boundaries of nation-states and to grow in the context of modern processes of globalisation and pan-European unity. The emergence of the Roma movement on the international stage and its real (i.e. not just on the level of ideas) transformation from national into an international movement began de facto (notwithstanding all public declarations in this regard before and after the Second World War) barely with the First Romani Congress in London in 1971, and this is, in fact, the most crucial feature of this historic event, regardless of all the mythology that has been created around it nowadays (Marushiakova and Popov, 2018). Only then did the 'community – society' relations become further complicated and started to take on a new, international dimension, which substantially (but not fundamentally) changed the content and purpose of the whole movement for Roma civic emancipation, and which, accordingly, made the achievement of a balance in these relationships even more difficult.

Acknowledgements: The article results from VEGA project No. 2/0057/24 *Identity of Roma in Transcarpathia: Past and Present*, carried out by the Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. The text uses data collected and reconsidered during this project. It also uses the rich data gathered in frames of the ERC research project *RomaInterbellum: Roma Civic Emancipation between the Two World Wars,* which has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme (Grant Agreement No. 694656), hosted by the University of St Andrews, UK. It reflects only the authors' view, and no agency is responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains. The authors also acknowledge the invaluable support of their present academic home, the Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology at the Slovak Academy of Sciences, which enables them to continue researching ethnic, local, national and transnational Roma identities and national building processes.

References:

Achim, V. (2004) *The Roma in Romanian History.* Budapest, New York: CEU Press.

Achim, V. (2010) The Roma Organisations and their Relations with the Romanian Politics in the 1930s. In D. Berindei (ed) *Nouvelles Études d'Histoire*, Vol. 12 (Publiées à l'occasion du XXIe Congrés International des Sciences Historiques, Amsterdam), pp. 85-102.

Acković, D. (2001) *Nacija smo a ne cigani. Pregled aktivnosti romskih i neromskih društvenih i političkih organizacija i pojedinaca o romskoj problematici u nekadašnjoj Jugoslaviji.* Beograd: Rrominterpress.

Acković, D. (2004) *"Tetkica Bibija". Proslava Bibije u ogledalu dnevne i periodične štampe u poslednjih sto godina.* Beograd: Rrominterpress.

Arbeiterwille (1929, March 4) (No Author). Die Blutkirchweih von Pobedim.

Baloun, P. (2017) "Let s Slaughter the Gypsies!" Anti-Roma Pogrom in Pobedim in 1928. *Střed. Časopis pro mezioborová studia Střední Evropy 19. a 20. století* 1: 55–88.

Baloun, P. (2022) *Metla našeho venkova! Kriminalizace Romů od první republiky až po prvotní fázi protektorátu (1918–1941).* Dolní Břežany: Scriptorium.

Białas, T. (1983) *Liga Morska i Kolonialna 1930–1939.* Gdańsk: Morskie.

Bourgeois, H. (1910) Un journale pseudo-tchingiané. *Revue du Monde Musulman* 11 (6): 326–329.

Cavaillé, J.-P. (2023) Le drapeau rom/tsigane: invention, diffusion, perception, usages. *Ethnologie française* 54 (2): 271–287.

Crowe, D. (1994) *A History of the Gypsies in Eastern Europe and Russia*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.

Die Rote Fahne (1927, March 8) (No Author). Menschenfressende Zigeuner. Kannibalismus im zivilisierten Europa – Wann wird man die Zigeuner ansiedeln?

Dunajeva, J. (2021a) *Constructing Identities over Time: "Bad Gypsies" and "Good Roma" in Russia and Hungary.* Budapest, Vienna & New York: Central European University Press.

Dunajeva, J. (2021b) From "Unsettled Fortune-Tellers" to Socialist Workers: Education Policies and Roma in Early Soviet Union. In M. M. Mendes, O. Magano and S. Toma (eds). *Social and Economic Vulnerability of Roma People: Key Factors for the Success and Continuity of Schooling Levels*. Lisboa: Springer, pp. 65-78.

Epoche (1879, September 13) (No Author). (No Title).

Evening Standard (February 21, 1936) (n. a.). Plan for All World's Gipsies to Emigrate.

Ficowski, J. (1985) *Cyganie na polskich drogach.* Kraków & Wroclaw: Literackie (2nd ed.).

Fővárosi Lapok (1865, July 19) (No Author). (No Title).

Glasul Romilor (1937, May 1) (No Author). Informațiuni.

Gontarek, A. (2017) Klan Kwiek w jako przedstawicielstwo cygańskie a ob z sanacyjny w latach 1926–1935 w świetle sanacyjnych i prorządowych dziennik w informacyjnych. *Sprawy Narodowościowe* 49: 1–21.

Gontarek, A. (2020) Political Activity of Kwiek 'Dynasty' in the Second Polish Republic in the Years 1935–1939. *Social Inclusion* 8 (2): 1–10.

Grellmann, H. M. G. (1783) *Die Zigeuner. Ein historischer Versuch über die Lebensart und Verfassung, Sitten und Schicksale dieses Volks in Europa, nebst ihrem Ursprunge.* Dessau & Leipzig.

Hajnáczky, T. (ed) (2019) *Magyar Cigányzenészek Országos Egyesülete. Cigányzenészek harca a két világháború kőzőtti Magyarországon.* Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó.

Hajnáczky, T. (ed) (2020) *Magyar Czigányzenészek Egyesülete. Cigányzenészek mozgalma a boldog békeidők Magyarországán.* Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó.

Haley, W. J. (1934) The Gypsy Conference at Bucharest. *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, Third Series, 13 (4): 182–190.

Hancock, I. (1987) *The Pariah Syndrome: An Account of Gypsy Slavery and Persecution.* Ann Arbor: Karoma.

Hancock, I. (1996) The Roots of Antigypsyism. *Roma* 44-45: 4–24.

Hancock, I. (2002) *We Are the Romani people. Ame sam e Rromane džene.* Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.

Hirsch, F., Grant, B. and Ries, N. (2005) *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Holler, M. (2014) Historical Predecessors of the Term "Anti-Gypsyism". In J. Selling, H. Kyuchukov, P. Laskar and B. Templer (eds). *Antiziganism: What's in a Word?*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 82-99.

Horváthová, E. (1964) *Cigáni na Slovensku. Historicko-etnografický náčrt*. Bratislava: SAV.

Hroch, M. (1985) *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hroch, M. (2005) *Das Europa der Nationen: Die moderne Nationsbildung im europäischen Vergleich.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Joseph (Archduke of Austria) (1888). *Czigány nyelvtan. Románo csibákero sziklaribe.* Budapest: A Magyar tudományos akadémia.

Kenrick, D. (2007) *The Romani World: A Historical Dictionary of the Gypsies (Romanies).* Hatfield: The Scarecrow Press (2nd ed.).

Kikeriki. Humoristisches Volksblatt (1879, September 18) (No Author). (No Title).

Kisch, E. E. (1992) Zaren, Popen, Bolschewiken. In: E. E. Kisch. *Gesammelte Werke in Einzelausgaben*. Vol. III. Berlin & Weimar: Aufbau.

Klagenfurter Zeitung (1865, August 8) (No Author). (No Title).

Klímová-Alexander, I. (2002) Romani Political Representation in Central Europe: An Historical survey. *Romani Studies* 12 (2): 103–147.

Klímová-Alexander, I. (2005) The Development and Institutionalization of Romani Representation and Administration. Part 2: Beginnings of Modern Institutionalization (Nineteenth Century – World War II). *Nationalities Papers* 33 (2): 155–210.

Kowalski, M. (2010) *Dyskurs kolonialny w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej.* Warszawa: DIG.

Le Petit Journal Illustré (1927, No. 1898) (Cover).

Lemon, A. (2000) *Between Two Fires: Gypsy Performance and Romani Memory from Pushkin to Postsocialism*. London: Duke University Press.

Majtényi, B. and Majtényi, G. (2016) *A Contemporary History of Exclusion: The Roma Issue in Hungary from 1945 to 2015.* Budapest: CEU Press.

Martin, T. (2001) *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalisms in the Soviet Union. 1923-1939*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Marushiakova, E. and Popov, V. (2001) *Gypsies in the Ottoman Empire.* Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press.

Marushiakova, E. and Popov, V (2005) The Roma – a Nation without a State? Historical Background and Contemporary Tendencies. In: W. Burszta, T. Kamusella and S. Wojciechowski (eds). *Nationalismus Across the Globe: An Overview of the Nationalism of State-endowed and Stateless Nations*. Poznan: School of Humanities and Journalism, pp. 433-455.

Marushiakova, E. and Popov, V. (2016a) Gypsy Guilds (Esnafs) on the Balkans. In: H. Kyuchukov, E. Marushiakova and V. Popov (eds). *Roma: Past, Present, Future*. München: Lincom Academic Publishers, pp. 76-89.

Marushiakova, E. and Popov, V. (2016b) Who are Roma? In: E. Marushiakova and V. Popov (eds). *Roma Culture: Myths and Realities.* München: Lincom Academic Publishers, pp. 7-34.

Marushiakova, E. and Popov, V. (2017) Rethinking Roma Holocaust: Victims or/and Victors. In: T. M. Buchsbaum and S. Kapralski (eds). *Beyond the Roma Holocaust: From Resistance to Mobilisation*. Krakow: UNIVERSITAS, pp. 73-93.

Marushiakova, E. and Popov, V. (2018) Roma Labelling: Policy and Academia. *Slovenský národopis* 66 (4): 385–418.

Marushiakova, E. and Popov, V. (2020) 'Letter to Stalin': Roma Activism vs. Gypsy Nomadism in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe before WWII. *Social Inclusion* 8 (2): 265–276.

Marushiakova, E. and Popov, V. (2021a) Ottoman Empire. In: R. B. Roman, S. Zahova and A. Marinov (eds). *Roma Literature and Press in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe from 19th Century until the Second World War.* Paderborn: Brill & Ferdinand Schöningh, pp. 23-33.

Marushiakova, E. and Popov, V. (eds) (2021b) *Roma Voices in History: A Source Book. Roma Civic Emancipation in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe from the 19th Century until World War II*. Paderborn: Brill & Ferdinand Schöningh.

Marushiakova, E. and Popov, V. (eds) (2022) *Roma Portraits in History: Roma Civic Emancipation Elite in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe from the 19th Century until World War II*. Paderborn: Brill & Ferdinand Schöningh.

Marushiakova, E. and Popov, V. (2023a) Instead of Conclusion: Shakir Pashov – Life and Work. In: E. Marushiakova, V. Popov and L. Kovacheva (eds). *Shakir M. Pashov. History of the Gypsies in Bulgaria and Europe: Roma.* Paderborn: Brill & Ferdinand Schöningh, pp. 191-241.

Marushiakova, E. and Popov, V. (2023b) Roma Women Activism under Communist Rule: The Cases of the USSR (1920s and 1930s) and Bulgaria (1960s and 1970s). *Romani Studies* 33 (1): 107–140.

Matei, P. (2010) Adunările țiganilor din Transilvania din anul 1919 (I). *Revista istorică* 21 (5-6): 467–487.

Matei, P. (2011) Adunările țiganilor din Transilvania din anul 1919 (II). *Revista istorică* 22 (1-2): 135–152.

Matei, P. (2020) Between Nationalism and Pragmatism: The Roma Movement in Interwar Romania. *Social Inclusion* 8 (2): 305–315.

Mirga-Kruszelnicka A. and Dunajeva, J. (eds) (2020) *Re-thinking Roma Resistance throughout History: Recounting Stories of Strength and Bravery*. Berlin: ERIAC.

Mróz, L. and Mirga, A. (1994) *Cyganie: Odmiennosc i nietolerancja.* Warszawa: PWN.

O'Keefe, B. (2013) *New Soviet Gypsies: Nationality, Performance, and Selfhood in the Early Soviet Union*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Okely, J. (1983) *The Traveller-Gypsies.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Orsós, J. (2015) Precedents to Roma Written Culture and Literature in Hungary. *Romedia Foundation.* Available at: https://romediafoundation.wordpress.com/2015/09/15/precedents-to-roma-written-culture-and-literature-in-hungary/ (accessed 10 March 2024).
P. B. (Paul Bataillard) (1889) Hungarian Gypsy Offering to Prove that He Descends from "King Pharaoh". *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 1 (5): 305–306.
Pashov, Sh. (2023) History of the Gypsies in Bulgaria and Europe: Roma. In: E. Marushiakova, V. Popov and L. Kovacheva (eds). *Shakir M. Pashov. History of the Gypsies in Bulgaria and Europe: Roma.* Paderborn: Brill & Ferdinand Schöningh.
Puxon, G. (1975) *Road of the Roma.* Manuscript. Skopje: Shuto Orizari.
Puxon, G. (2019) An Account of the First World Roma Congress Held in London in 1971. Available at: https://fxb.harvard.edu/2019/04/25/london-1971-the-first-world-roma-congress/ (accessed 10 March 2024).
Realitatea Ilustrată (1935, November 13) (No Author). Congresul Uniunea Romilor.
Roman, R. B., Zahova S. and Marinov, A. (eds) (2021) *Roma Literature and Press in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe from 19th Century until the Second World War.* Paderborn: Brill & Ferdinand Schöningh.
Sárosi, B. (1971) *Gypsy Music.* Budapest: Corvina.
Schwicker, J. H. (1883) *Die Zigeuner in Ungarn und Siebenbuergen.* Wien und Teschen: Karl Prochaska.
Slezkine, Y. (2017) *The House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Stewart, M. (1997) *Time of the Gypsies.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
Stewart, M. (2001) Communist Roma Policy 1945–1989 as Seen through the Hungarian Case. In W. Guy (ed). *Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe.* Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, pp. 71-92.
Universul (1935, January 21) (No Author). Un congres internațional al romilor la Cernăuți. Vor participa delegați din toată Europa și America.
Universul (1936, April 21) (No Author). Congresul Mondial al romilor.
Țara Noastră (1937, July 18) (No Author). Să scriem în limba Romă.
(No Author) (2019) *The Untold Story. An Oral History of the Roma People in Romania.* Available at: https://eeagrants.org/archive/2009-2014/projects/RO14-0021 (accessed 10 June 2023).
Yılgür, E. (2015) Ethnicity, Class and Politicisation: Immigrant Roma Tobacco Workers in Turkey. *Romani Studies* 25 (2): 167–196.
Zahova, S. (2022) Yugoslavia. In: E. Marushiakova and V. Popov (eds). *Roma Portraits in History: Roma Civic Emancipation Elite in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe from the 19th Century until World War II*. Paderborn: Brill & Ferdinand Schöningh, pp. 115-166.
Zaloaga, M. (2014) Consensus and Disparities in Reception of Archduke Joseph's Involvement with the Gypsy Studies/Question. Voices from Academic Literature and Daily Press. In C. Andras and C. Sigmirean (eds). *Discourse and Counter-Discourse in Cultural and Intellectual History.* Sibiu: Astra Museum, pp. 95-147.

Безбожник (1928, 6, 1) Герман, А. Цыгане.

ГАРФ (Государственный архив Российской Федерации), ф. Р 1235, оп. 120, д. 27; ф. А 259, оп. 9 Б, д. 4233; ф. 3316, оп. 17, д. 188.

Деметер, Н. Г., Бессонов, Н. В. и Кутенков, В. К. (2000) *История цыган. Новый взгляд.* Воронеж: Институт этнологии и антропологии РАН.

Друц, Е. и Гесслер, А. (1990) *Цыгане. Очерки.* Москва: Советский писатель.

Жив'юк, А. А. (2021) Румунія – наша батьківщина, а в Польщі – наш Квек. В: А. А. Жив'юк et al. (съст). *Реабілітовані історією. Рівненська область.* Кн. 10. Київ – Рівне & Житомир: Полліся, 36-75.

Звезда. (1926, 14 август) Граховский, А. Работа среди цыган Белоруссии.

Иващенко, В. И. (2011) *Цыганские судьбы. История, труд, этнография.* Ростов-на-Дону: Дониздат.

Известия. *ЦИК СССР и ВЦИК* (1937, 27 март) (без автор). (без заглавие).

Калинин, В. (2005) *Загадка балтийских цыган. Очерки истории, культуры и социального развития балтийских цыган.* Минск: Логвинов.

Комсомольская правд (1929, 11 септември) Лебедев, Г. и Герман, А. Что делать с цыганами?

Македонія (1867, 8 юли) Един Егюптиянин. (Писмо до редактора).

Марушиакова, Е. и Попов, В. (2022) К вопросу об устной истории: На примере несостоявшейся цыганской автономной республики в СССР. В: А. В. Черных, Е. А. Марушиакова и Н. Г. Деметер (съст) *Цыганские сообщества в социуме: Адаптация, интеграция, взаимодействия.* Санкт-Петербург: Мамонтов, 98-121.

Нэво дром (1931а, 2, 3) Антоненко, И. Н. Ракирибэн ваш 1905 бэрш.

Нэво дром (1931б, 2) Замэк (А. Герман). Сэндо линчя дрэ Чехословакия.

Нэво дром (1931с, 9-10) Таранов, А. Марибэ антицыганизмоса.

Пыжов, Н. (1929) *Сорочинское крестьянское восстание 1905 г. Воспоминания руководителя восстания.* Москва: Издательство Всесоюзного общества политкаторжан и сс.-поселенцев.

Пыжов, Н. (1930) *Крестьянская республика. Воспоминания руководителя крестьянского восстания 1905 года в Сорочинцах.* Москва: Издательство Всесоюзного общества политкаторжан и сс.-поселенцев.

Празднични вести (1937, 11 януари) (без автор). Циганите ще се организират. Подетата инициатива. Изникналите пречки.

РГАКФД (Российский государственный архив кинофотодокументов), д. 99274, фото 4-99274.

РГАЭ (Российский государственный архив экономики), ф. 5675, оп. 1, д. 146.

Славкова, М. (2007) *Циганите евангелисти в България.* София: Парадигма.

(без автор) (1910) *Устав на Египтянската народност в гр. Видин.* Видин: Божинов и Конев.

(без автор) (1926) *Циганска Евангелска Баптийска Църква, с. Голинци.* Лом: Алфа.

ЦДА (Централен държавен архив), ф. 370, оп. 6, а.е. 745.

Штернберг, Л. Я. (1903) Цыгане. В: *Энциклопедический словарь Брокгауза и Ефрона*. 1890 –1907. Т. 38. Санкт-Петербург: Акционерное издательское общество Ф. А. Брокгауз – И. А. Ефрон, 304-308.

Illustrations:



Pic. 1. The First Troupe of the Gypsy State Theatre 'Romen', Moscow, USSR, 1930.



Pic. 2. V. Yarysheva from the Gypsy kolkhoz Nevo drom (New Way), USSR, 1936.



Pic. 3. N. P. Pedanova conducts a course on political education, Stalingrad oblast, USSR, 1938.



Pic. 4. Society of Gypsy Friends Choir, Riga, Latvia, 1933.



Pic. 5. Political prisoners in Sliven, Bulgaria, 1942.



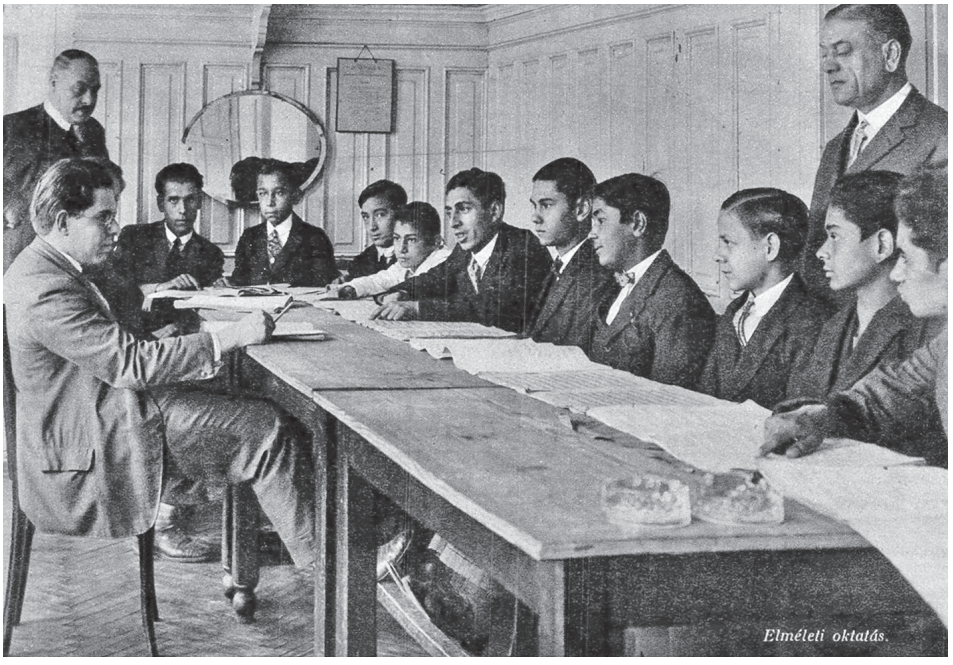
Pic. 6. First Serbian Gypsy Zadruga, Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 1929.



Pic. 7. Congress of General Union of the Roma in Romania, 1935.



Pic. 8. Le Petit Journal Illustré. Paris, 1927.



Pic. 9. János Bihari Music School. Budapest, Hungary, 1929.



Pic. 10. Coronation of Janusz Kwiek in Warsaw. Poland, 1937.

Prof. Dr. Elena Marushiakova and **Prof. Dr. Vesselin Popov** work at the Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology at the Slovak Academy of Sciences from 2023. For the past eight years, they worked at St Andrews University (UK). Elena Marushiakova was a Principal Investigator and Senior researcher in frames of the ERC Advanced Grant 2015, No. 694656 *Roma Civic Emancipation Between the Two World Wars*. Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov had worked in the field of Romani Studies for more than 4 decades and published widely on Roma in Bulgaria, Balkans and Central and Eastern Europe. They major publications include the first-ever monograph on Roma history and ethnography of the Roma in Bulgaria (1997), on the Gypsies in the Ottoman Empire (2000), on Gypsies in Central Asia and Caucasus (2016), source-book 'Roma Voices in History' (2021), 'Roma Portraits' (2022) and 'Stalin vs Gypsies' (2024). They are editors and authors of 6 volumes with Roma Folklore and Oral History, as well as many other books, articles and book chapters, assessment studies and catalogues for museum exhibitions. Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov together with Sofiya Zahova they are co-founders and co-editors of Brill Series 'Roma History and Culture'.
Email: studiiromani@yahoo.com

Gypsy/Roma identities, voices and agency (from the end of the 19th century until the Second World War)

Tamás Attila Hajnáczky

Abstract: In the period from the end of the 19th century until the outbreak of the Second World War, there were three main linguistic groups of Gypsies/Roma in Hungary: *Romungros* (Hungarian-speaking Gypsies), *Boyash* (Romanian-speaking Gypsies) and *Vlach Roma* (Romani-speaking Gypsies). The Hungarian Roma population did not live in isolation among the non-Roma population, and the processes of integration and linguistic and ethnic assimilation were extremely broad, creating a variety of identity patterns. For cultural, structural and economic reasons, historical sources have been preserved mainly from Gypsy musicians belonging to the Romungro group. In their case, it is possible to articulate 'Roma voices', to study their agency and to explore their identities in greater depth. The identity of Gypsy musicians was shaped along the coordinates of their Roma identity, their occupation and their attachment to the Hungarian majority. In the period under study, the identity of Gypsy musicians was not static; it changed dynamically, in dialectic relation to both major political events and social changes.
Keywords: identity, Roma voices, historical sources, Romungros, Gypsy musicians

Introduction

Today, finding Roma voices in Hungarian historiographical research during the period from the end of the 19th century until the outbreak of the Second World War, poses a number of methodological challenges. We cannot gain insights from the Gypsies/Roma[1] who lived through the period in question through various interview techniques, we can only rely on historical sources. Getting

[1] In this study, I use both the word 'Gypsy' (in Hungarian cigány) and 'Roma' to distinguish between different Roma groups. I use the word 'Roma' for Vlach Roma and when I write about the Roma population in Hungary as a whole. I use the word 'Boyash' when I write about Romanian-speaking Gypsies. I use the word 'Gypsy' for Hungarian Gypsies (in Hungarian magyar cigányok) and Gypsy musicians (in Hungarian cigányzenészek), because in their circles the term 'Gypsy' became dominantly 'endonymic' over the centuries. Furthermore, I use the word 'Gypsy' for Gypsy music (in Hungarian cigányzene) also for the sake of clear distinction, since Gypsy musicians played Hungarian folk-like music, so-called magyar nótát, which was very distinct from the folk music of the Vlach Roma. Finally, in the context of the 1893 'Gypsy census' (in Hungarian 'cigányösszeírás'), I also use the word 'Gypsy' of the survey methodology, because the research was based on the classification of the external, non-Gypsy environment to determine 'Who is a Gypsy?'. In other words, the focus of the survey was predominantly on those who are perceived as 'Gypsy' by the non-Gypsy environment, for example, in many large cities, civilised Gypsy musicians were not included in the survey.

the 'Roma voices' to speak depends not only on the intentions of historians, but also on the existence or absence of historical sources. The bureaucratic sources far surpass those from the Roma themselves. In brief, they are the documentary remains of a paper-based, assiduously documenting nationwide institutional system, which stand in contrast with those surviving from a mostly illiterate minority. Social, economic and structural causes lay at the root of the phenomenon just mentioned. Consequently, the documentary records of contemporary policies targeting Gypsies, in addition to law enforcement and public health measures have dominated academic publications.

From the years of persecution and genocide during the Second World War (Bársony and Daróczi, 2008; Bernáth, 2000; Harmat, 2015), and then from the socialist era, a relatively large number of sources, interviews and memoirs from Roma have survived, which historians today can refer to and allow the 'Roma voices' to express themselves. This was partly due to the transformation and expansion of the Roma movement (Daróczi, 2023; Hajnáczky, 2020a; 2020b; 2021a; Kóczé, Neményi and Szalai, 2019), as well as the institutionalisation of sociology in Hungary, with several iconic representatives of the field studying the Roma population (Dupcsik, 2009; Huszár, 2015). Furthermore, the degree of literacy and the number of Roma intellectuals among the Hungarian Roma population increased steadily throughout the 20th century (Kemény, Janky and Lengyel, 2004: 77–95). The study of Roma identity in the above-mentioned period also poses a significant challenge to researchers who wish to look behind the results of earlier censuses of Roma initiated by non-Gypsies and the ethnographic and linguistic studies based on participant observation (Bódi, 1999; Váradi, 2009; Wlisloczki, 2009). In Hungary, prior to the *Roma Interbellum* project, hardly any historical sources from Roma themselves or ones communicating their perspective from this period had surfaced. Nevertheless, the official and personal sources found range relatively widely by type (Borsodi, 2006: 169–186; Kövér, 2014: 99–123).

Most noteworthy are the ego documents, the private correspondence, between writers of Roma origin and researchers of Romani language and culture. This private correspondence can be linked to the ethnographer Antal Hermann, who conducted the 1893 'Gypsies census' for the Royal Hungarian Statistical Office (Hála, 2017), and to Archduke Charles Joseph of Habsburg-Lorraine, who extensively studied Romani language and culture (Soós, 2000). The other type of ego documents are diaries, of which one has been discovered; the First World War front diary of Gypsy musician Béla Munczy (Dominkovitsné Szakács, 2009; 2020). In the case of official letters, the majority of the documents are a few letters of request written or dictated by Roma individuals and communities and addressed to the authorities (Bana,

1993; 1998; Kereskényiné Cseh, 2008; Nagy, 2011). Open letters from Roma have also been preserved for posterity in the pages of the contemporary press (Scholtz, 2018). And finally, interviews with Roma conducted by journalists in the press of the time are also available (Landauer, 2016; Sárosi, 2012). In most of these sources, expression of Roma identity appeared only indirectly, contributing mosaic-like knowledge to the question of identity, as they did not seek to present or express it. In the classical sense, they are not historical sources, but as linguistic works can also be the subject of historiography (Kristó, 2006). Several philological works by Roma from the period under study have survived, which allow us to infer Roma identity through their existence, since the need to record their language and to create their written form was expressed among a small number of educated Roma (Zahova, 2021).

Roma Interbellum project

The international research project *Roma Interbellum – Roma Civic Emancipation Between the Two World Wars*[2], led by Prof. Elena Marushiakova, has sought to capture the 'Roma voices' from more than ten countries, starting from the end of the 19th century and stretching until the outbreak of the Second World War. Moving away from a historical picture based on the documentary records related to Gypsy policy, it also drew attention to new research directions and new types of sources. *Roma Voices in History* is the international project's sourcebook and has become the emblematic work of this field of study. It is more than one thousand and one hundred pages, compiled with the collaboration of nearly thirty researchers, containing the most important historical sources of Roma civic emancipation (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021a). The journal *Social Inclusion* published a thematic issue on Roma self-organisation (Marushiakova and Popov, 2020b). A collective monograph on Roma literature and newspapers, *Roma Writings* (Roman et al., 2021), and *Roma Portraits in History,* a volume of studies on iconic figures of the Roma movement, are also been published (Marushiakova and Popov, 2022). Through this international project, the Roma are portrayed not as helplessly drifting victims of law enforcement and public health measures, but as a people capable of self-organisation, who stand up for their causes and want to take action (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021a: xviii–xix). The project has made it possible not only to examine their agency (Szijártó, 2021: 227–229), but also to explore the identity of the Roma through sources that originated from them or reflected their perceptions, positions and visions.

[2] See more details at the following link: https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/romainterbellum/ (accessed 20 February 2025).

Research in Hungary has focused on associations and newspapers founded by Gypsy musicians (Hajnáczky, 2019; 2020a; 2020b; 2021a; 2022a). In the exploration of 'Roma voices', the focus has been on Gypsy musicians because the surviving sources are predominantly related to them, as they were the ones who were able to 'give voice' to issues and be involved in the discourse of the various groups of Roma. These other groups were the Vlach Roma, the Boyash and the Hungarian Gypsies. With a few exceptions, the Boyash or the Vlach Roma were not in this position in Hungary and were almost completely excluded from the discourse on Roma. The background to this was that the Hungarian Roma elite were the Gypsy musicians, who had undergone a large-scale linguistic assimilation, and in their case the existence of a dual identity is also confirmed by numerous contemporary sources and surveys. They were the most educated of the Roma groups, and their financial situation was also considered the most favourable within the Roma community, despite the fact that many of them were not considered wealthy at all in the society of the time (Hajnáczky, 2023). Gypsy musicians had a centuries-old tradition in the country and were regularly involved in state identity politics or Hungarian national aspirations. This was partly due to the fact that Gypsy musicians did not play Roma folk music, but Hungarian contemporary folk-like music, so-called 'Hungarian song' (Hajnáczky, 2020c; Sárosi, 1971). Gypsy music was an integral part of Hungarian culture; it appeared in Hungarian literature (Magyari, 2023), in the satirical press (Dupcsik, 2023), on the operetta stage (Lengyel, 2023), and the life and art of famous Gypsy first violinists were regularly followed by the non-Gypsy population on the pages of newspapers or subjects of restaurant table conversations (Riskó, 2023; Sárosi, 2004; 2012). Moreover, in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and after its dissolution in Hungary, prominent Gypsy first violinists had direct contact with the non-Gypsy elite, the nobility, leading officials, statesmen, and key players in economic and cultural life. Some Gypsy first violinists reached very high levels in this respect, being in close contact with members of the Habsburg dynasty or with Miklós Horthy, the regent of Hungary (Hajnáczky, 2022a).

In summary, a small section of Hungarian Roma, the elite, in this case the Gypsy musicians, were in a position to participate and shape the discourse about them, leaving a significant number of resources for posterity (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021a: xxvi). Not only did the economic and social situation of Gypsy musicians allow them to have a 'voice', but there was also a receptiveness from the authorities, as the aspirations of Gypsy musicians were integrated with their own goals. It should be stressed that this elite was considered the Gypsy elite in the context of power, within the context of non-Roma society. Presumably, from the point of view of the Boyash and the Vlach Roma, they

were not considered to be the elite of the Roma community, nor were they considered by the latter to be 'true Roma' (in Romani, *chacho Rom*), because they had become 'servile members of white man's society' (Erdős, 1989: 49). In the sources that have been explored, Gypsy musicians never once advocated for the Boyash or the Vlach Roma, or even for the non-musical Romungros living in Gypsy settlements. In many Eastern European countries, however, the Gypsy elites regularly addressed the plight and resettlement of, for example, travelling Gypsies (Marushiakova and Popov, 2020a). Consequently, the Gypsy identity that emerges from historical sources is only valid for Gypsy music, and the phenomenon of mimicry must be taken into account for some of them when it comes to their participation in state identity politics (Williams, 2000).

'Gypsy' languages and identities in the light of the 1893 'Gypsy census'

Censuses were conducted in Hungary as early as the 18th century, on the orders of Maria Theresa and later Joseph II, and included a count of the Gypsy population (Dominkovits, 2005; Hudi, 1998; Zsupos, 1996). The censuses that became regular from the mid-19th century onwards also collected data on the Gypsy population, but they used different methodologies to measure 'Who is a Gypsy?', which to this day has provoked considerable debate not only in sociology but also in many disciplines (Marushiakova and Popov, 2016). The censuses sometimes used language as the decisive factor and sometimes relied on self-identification to determine ethnicity. Both methodological approaches were distorted to a greater or lesser extent, and the census enumerators often underestimated the number of Gypsy (Cserti Csapó, 2015; Váradi, 2009). In the period from the end of the 19th century until the outbreak of the Second World War, the 1893 'Gypsy census' of the Hungarian Royal Statistical Office, ordered by the Minister of the Interior, proved to be the only survey that provided the most realistic data on the number and language groups of the Hungarian Gypsy population at that time. The Royal Hungarian Statistical Office left the completion of the questionnaires to local officials and enumerating agents. The definition of the Gypsy population was based on the classification of the non-Gypsy environment rather than on mother tongue and self-identification:

> Ascertaining the origin and provenance of a Gypsy is usually not too difficult. Public opinion, the common knowledge, correctly considers very definitely evident those of Gypsy origin, which is quite definitely anthropological, rather than linguistic, and is the only criterion of Gypsy origin in the data of the general censuses (Czigány összeírás, 1895: 11).

There was no question on the enumeration form asking whether the respondent was of Gypsy origin. However, they were asked about mother tongue and other languages spoken, for which the following instructions were given for completing the enumeration form:

> As pertains to mother tongue, one does not have to record Gypsy if a Gypsy declares himself to be Hungarian, Slovak, German, etc., then he must be registered as having Hungarian, Slovak or German as the mother tongue. However, it must be taken into account that the wandering Gypsies are also colloquially called Vlach Gypsies, from which it does not follow that their mother tongue is Vlach (Romanian): they mostly have Gypsy as their mother tongue, but may also have other native languages (Czigány összeírás, 1895: 6).

Because of the methodology described above, the survey provided an insight into the situation of the Gypsy population as a whole, as well as the number and proportion of different Gypsy groups and even the extent of linguistic assimilation through language data. And by measuring multilingualism, we can also indirectly infer the existence and extent of dual identity, as well as the ethnicity of the non-Gypsy environment.

The main linguistic data of the 1893 'Gypsy census' of the Hungarian Royal Statistical Office

(Czigány összeírás, 1895: 34–35)

Mother tongue	Distribution of the Roma population by mother tongue		Among them speak Hungarian	Among them speaks Romani
	Number	%	%	%
Hungarian	104750	38.10	100	27.92
Czigány/Gypsy*	82405	29.97	25.17	100
German	2396	0.87	17.24	45.56
Tót**	9857	3.59	6.82	69.28
Oláh***	67046	24.39	9.54	15.8
Rutén****	2008	0.73	16.63	44.92
Croatia	306	0.11	19.61	35.95
Serbian	5861	2.13	7.64	18.43
Other	311	0.11	10.61	69.13

Notes: * Romani, ** Slovak, *** Romanian, **** Carpatho-Rusin

According to the survey, there were 274,940 Gypsies living in the country, of whom 90 % were classified as 'permanently settled', 7% as 'having settled for a longer time' and 3 % as 'wandering Gypsies'. More than 38% of Gypsies in

Hungary had Hungarian as their mother tongue, of whom almost 28% also spoke Romani. The proportion of those with Romani as their mother tongue was almost 30%, of whom a quarter could also speak Hungarian. The proportion of those with Romanian as their mother tongue was around 25%, of whom less than 10% spoke Hungarian and nearly 16% spoke Romani. In other words, native Romanian speakers were the most linguistically homogeneous group. The data show a large degree of linguistic assimilation over the centuries had taken place in Hungary, and that even a small proportion of the Romani and Romanian speaking Roma population spoke Hungarian. It can be assumed that during this period, a part of the Hungarian-speaking Roma population may have developed a Roma-Hungarian dual identity, just as a part of the Romanian-speaking population may have developed a Roma-Romanian dual identity. This is not a unique but rather typical process for Roma identity is at least two-dimensional: they belong to their community but also to the macro-society. The linguistic data clearly show that the Gypsy population in Hungary did not live in isolation from the non-Gypsy population. Roma communities were part of society, to which they were linked by many strands. Historically, Roma identity was not static and changed over the centuries (Marushiakova and Popov, 2013; Wolf, 1995: 15–37).

The linguistic data also revealed which groups of Roma lived in larger numbers in the Carpathian Basin, which indirectly suggests identity as the various Gypsy/Roma groups were also linguistically separated from each other. It should be stressed that the language groups shown in the table cannot be matched one-to-one with the different groups of Roma, due to methodological and sampling inaccuracies in the survey, as the above quotation shows that mother tongue and identity were sometimes interchanged. On the other hand, identity may have been retained even in the case of language loss, and it is not always possible to draw clear conclusions about a particular group from the mother tongue recorded in the survey.

The Romani-speaking Vlach Roma, who were classified in the Gypsy mother tongue category, started to settle in the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary from the 18th century onward (Nagy, 2019: 108–113). They arrived in significant waves from the mid-19th century, passing through Romanian-speaking areas (Achim, 2001: 147–156; Matras, 2003). The Vlach Roma of Hungary predominantly spoke the Lovari dialect, a subgroup of North-Central Vlach within the Vlax Romani dialect group (Szalai, 2007). They were divided into several groups (e.g. Lovari, Kherari, Colari, Cerhari) and within them into clans (e.g. Stojka, Rafael, Ruva, Neneka). Within each group, the Vlach Roma often specialised in a particular occupation (e.g. carpet merchant, pot repair) and were hierarchically related to each other (Erdős, 1989).

Romanian-speaking Gypsies are mostly Boyash who migrated from Moldavia and Wallachia to many countries in Europe, appearing in Transylvania and in present-day Hungary from the 18th century onwards (Nagy, 2019; Rotaru and Gaunt, 2023). And from the mid-19th century onwards, their immigration greatly increased with the abolition of Moldavian and Wallachian Roma slavery, which dated back to the Middle Ages (Duminica, 2021; Marushiakova and Popov, 2021b). The Boyash spoke dialects of the Romanian language before its linguistic reform, of which several dialects have developed in the territory of present-day Hungary: Argyelan, Tichan, Munchan (Orsós, 2015). At the same time, there were also Romanian speaking Roma of non-Boyash origin living in Hungary, presumably linguistically assimilated Vlach Roma (Erdős, 1989).

The Hungarian Gypsies, also known as the Gypsy musicians and called Romungro (Rom: Gypsy, Ungro: Hungarian) by the Vlach Roma, were immigrants to Hungary as early as the 15th century (Nagy, 1998). In terms of language, the 1893 survey also classified them into two mother tongue groups; although the majority of them spoke Hungarian, a smaller proportion spoke Carpathian Romani. The Carpathian Romani language, also known as Romungro, belonged to the south-eastern central subgroup within the Romani central dialect group (Szalai, 2007). It should be noted that only a fraction of the Hungarian Gypsies were musicians, despite the fact that they were also called Gypsy musicians. The majority of them worked as mudbrick makers, blacksmiths, day labourers, and traditionally the profession of nail smiths was attributed to Carpathian Romani-speaking communities (Erdős, 1989). At the same time, it was not at all uncommon in villages for Gypsy musicians to work as mudbrick makers, day labourers, and sometimes as village blacksmiths (Sárosi, 1971: 209–237).

During this period, the different groups of the Hungarian Roma population rigidly segregated themselves from each other. They were characterised by endogamy, and separated from each other in terms of housing, even in the case of a small village, Hungarian Gypsies and Vlach Roma created separate Gypsy settlements (Cserti Csapó, 2011: 36–41). At the same time, numerous historical records and descriptions have surfaced of so-called mixed settlements where non-Gypsies and Gypsies – mostly Romungros – lived together, sometimes also reporting on the 'Gypsyisation of Hungarians'. The more prosperous urban and Gypsy musicians, and those living in the capital city, were scattered among the non-Gypsy bourgeoisie, and mixed marriages were not uncommon, and Roma intellectuals assimilated among the Hungarians (Nagy, 2020; Hajnáczky, 2017; Sárosi, 1971: 197–208). This suggests that the interchangeability between Hungarian Gypsies and non-Gypsies was greater than between Romungros and Boyash or Vlach Roma.

Are Roma becoming Hungarianised or Romanianised?

In the Kingdom of Hungary, some of the Roma population were not only integrated into the Hungarian population and linguistically assimilated, possibly absorbed, but also into the Romanian population. This was mostly due to the fact that the Roma lived on the outskirts of settlements inhabited by Romanians or Hungarians, a phenomenon that was most typical of Transylvania, where a large number of Romanians lived. Similar processes occurred in the case of other national minorities in Hungary, but they were far from being on the same scale (Nagy, 2023; Cigány összeírás, 1895: 32–41).

The 1893 'Gypsy census' also revealed that the leadership of many cities, including the capital city Budapest, no longer classified Gypsy musicians as Gypsies, but on the basis of their way of life, classifying them as 'citizens', and therefore did not fill in the census forms:

> [W]here in these towns there are a large number of citizens of undoubted Gypsy origin, generally known as such and for the most part who are themselves Gypsies and know the Gypsy language, most of them are musicians, some of them members of notable Gypsy bands, who have furthered the reputation of Gypsy music not only locally but also abroad. [...] [The] ministerial exemption revealed that the "Gypsies residing in the capital are permanently settled, have a normal home, family life and civil occupation, so that in all respects they are subject to the same treatment and registration as other residents, and some of them are so much part of the citizenry that they cannot be counted as Gypsies" (Czigány összeírás, 1895: 9).

The survey's final report itself was by far the most favourable to Gypsy musicians, summarising: 'Musicians are the most noble, intelligent and nationally significant class of Gypsy people in Hungary' (Czigány összeírás, 1895: 59). The so-called 'national perspective' was not only raised in relation to Gypsy musicians but was analysed for long pages by the compilers of the 'Gypsy census' concerning Gypsies with Romanian as their native tongue in Transylvania, who lived mainly on the outskirts of Romanian settlements. At the time, ethnicity was considered a critical question for Hungarians and the nation, as the proportion of Hungarians in Hungary was barely over 50 percent, with the largest ethnic group being the Romanians, with over 15 percent. The fear of the nation's leadership, echoed in the final study, was confirmed a few decades later. As part of the peace treaties around Paris that ended the Great War, the Trianon Peace Treaty gave two-thirds of the country away (Gyáni and Kövér, 2006: 146; Romsics, 2005: 145–147). The Romanian speaking Roma were feared to be siding with the Romanian nationalist aspirations or to be increasing the number of Romanian speakers in relation to Hungarians as related to mother tongue. From the point of view of strengthening Hungarianness – or

linguistic assimilation – Roma were also defined along a Hungarian-Romanian axis, with Romanians as the negative endpoint: Hungarian – Hungarian native language Gypsy musician – Hungarian native language Gypsy – Romani native language Roma – Romanian native language Roma – Romanian. It should be emphasised that the authors of the 1893 'Gypsy census' were just as dismissive of Romanians as they were of Roma, with descriptions that almost tended towards 'Orientalism' (Said, 2000) in the final study of the survey:

> Of all the peoples of our homeland, the Wallachians are the closest to the Gypsies in some characteristic racial features. The Wallachians are also an infiltrating nomadic people; of little and recent sedentary inclination; not much inclined to agriculture and preferring to deal with animals; external circumstances, mode of life and occupation find some points of contact between the two peoples, otherwise quite different in temperament. The Wallachian, too, is fatalistic, frugal, able to go without, undemanding, unthinking of the future, and only active enough to meet the most primitive needs of daily life. [...] The Gypsies are found in the greatest masses in the areas inhabited by the Wallachians. Here the Wallachians live on the margins, so to speak, of society, of civilisation, of economic life, but still within its periphery; the Gypsies are partly outside it. Thus, firstly, they come into contact with the Wallachian element, which is closer to them and not alienated from them, and finally blend into it. [...] And it is a clear loss to the Hungarian nation if the tens of thousands of Gypsies increase the mass of that element of the Hungarian population which seems to be most alienated from the community of this nation (Czigány összeírás, 1895: 38).

The 1893 survey was not entirely unfounded in its fear of the Romanian-speaking Roma backing Romanian nationalist aspirations. In 1918, the Romanian army invaded Transylvania and the Gyulafehérvár National Assembly proclaimed its annexation to Romania. In 1919, the Transylvanian Roma gathering in Dicsőszentmárton welcomed Transylvania's annexation and the participants swore allegiance to Romania. In the period between the two world wars, the process of the Romanianisation and, in some places, the assimilation of the Roma of Greater Romania continued (Achim, 2001: 169–187). Or in the late 1930s, in the *Glasul Romilor* (Voice of the Roma), the newspaper of the General Association of Roma, one of the authors argued for the Romanianisation of the Hungarian-speaking Transylvanian Roma (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021a: 403–404).

Romungros, Boyash and Vlach Roma or 'Gypsy nation'?

The 1893 'Gypsy census' and the integration and assimilation processes described above have provided examples of the separation of different Roma groups and their linguistic or ethnic assimilation into the non-Gypsy population. From these data and descriptions, the idea of a 'Gypsy nation'

bridging the linguistic groups did not emerge, nonetheless according to the 'Roma voices' that can be read in private correspondence, it already existed in this period.

Most of the letters from Roma were written in Carpathian Romani, while a smaller number were written in Balkan or Vlax Romani dialects. Archduke Joseph responded mainly in these letters in the Carpathian Romani dialect, which he knew and used. The above-mentioned indirectly provide important information in several respects; firstly, the Archduke corresponded mainly with Hungarian Gypsy (Romungro) Gypsy musicians. On the other hand, linguistic assimilation among Gypsy musicians was not yet considered complete. Some of the letters were written by educated Roma individuals, while others were dictated, mostly to people who were not proficient in any of the Romani dialects (Soós, 2000: 91–93). Overall, it was the most integrated group of the Hungarian Roma population with whom Archduke Joseph came into contact. However, it was among the Gypsy musicians that linguistic and cultural integration was most pronounced. The letters can be classified according to their subject matter into the following types: letters of greeting, letters requesting help, letters of invitation, and academic letters.

In the above-mentioned types of letters, Roma identity appeared sometimes indirectly, sometimes directly. There are many letters that have been handed down to posterity, which at first reading, without knowing the context, would have little connection with our subject. However, the fact that Archduke Joseph was approached because he was a scholar of Romani dialects, spoke the Carpathian Romani language and was in contact with several people of Roma origin and local Roma communities, is clear. Furthermore, Archduke Joseph was far from being the only influential person to whom Roma wrote or sent dictated letters during that period. It was customary for prominent Gypsy first violinists of the period to write letters of greeting to rulers and high-ranking statesmen, accompanied by a song, in the hope of receiving honorary recognition or a generous reward (Hajnáczky, 2022a; Sárosi, 2012: 8–9). Among these, the lines in which Archduke Joseph appeared from the perspective of the Roma are noteworthy: 'May the Good Lord keep you for doing so much for the Gypsie' (Soós, 2000: 43); 'I heard about you and I was very happy that you love us and are our patron…' (Soós, 2000: 45); 'Because we have never had such a great lord, and we never will. Only you are the only one left to us by the sweet God, to us poor Gypsies…' (Soós, 2000: 59); 'You alone are our spokesman and our God-sent advocate…' (Soós, 2000: 64); 'Because there is no one on the face of the earth except my Great Lord who will help us, poor wretches' (Soós, 2000: 71). From the quoted lines it is obvious that the letter writers wrote to

Archduke Joseph, in general, concerning 'Gypsies'. They were not writing about a particular Romani language or community of particular dialect-speaking Roma or any Roma group, but in general terms as a Roma nationality or people. In other words, around the turn of the century, in parallel with the fact that the different Roma groups were defined by differentiation and distinctions between themselves, the idea of a 'Gypsy nation' and its identity began to take shape in their circles. That the Roma were a separate 'people' was not a question, what was unique was their image of themselves as a 'nation'. It should be stressed that the most integrated, educated members of the Roma community came into contact with Archduke Joseph, i. e. the above ideas were formulated in the upper strata of the Roma community, in the 'elite', so to speak. The letter excerpt quoted below is an excellent example of one of the letter writers clearly expressing the ideas just mentioned:

Ipolységh, March 10, 1889. Hont county.

> I kiss your hands and your feet, Your Highness, I beg a thousand pardons for having the courage to address my words to Your Highness, but since I had the pleasure of that Gypsy grammar' book from Your Highness and poor dearly departed Sweet brother Jancsi Balogh of Selmec, Highness having mercifully taken the dejected poor Gypsy nation, into his care and favour, for which this poor dejected Gypsy nation cannot repay, if we were a wealthy people, it would be the duty of the entire Gypsy nation in Hungary to unite and join thousands of thousands of people and to fly a triumphal flag to my lord Highness rushing to kneel at his feet to say grateful thanks and to say this in gold letters on the triumphal flag of the Gypsies,
>
> Our Lord Highness and our Patron we shall die with joy and we shall descend to our graves, dead and buried, and we shall be obliged to pray for the great generosity of our Lord Highness, because since the world has existed no man has ever been who has taken this abandoned Gypsy nation into his consideration and patronage as my Lord Highness has, whereupon the Gypsy nation can proudly and emphatically say that we have our Patron and our King, Long may he live and many years in the greatest satisfaction and good fortune in happiness in good strength, the God of the Hungarians preserve our Lord Archduke Joseph with her Highness his wife and his Highness' family. [...]
>
> Ferko Balogh senior
> former musician and former orchestra director
> (Soós, 2000: 61-62).

Ipolységh, Márczijus hó 10. 1889. Hont megye.

> Kezejit és lábajit csókolom Fenséges uram ezer bocsánatot kérek hogy azon bátorságot vetem magamnak hogy sorajimat Fénséges uramhoz mertem intézni de mióta volt szerencsém azon Cigány gramatikát' Fénséges uramtol és szegény

megboldogult Édes testvér bátyámtol a selmeczi Balogh jancsitol ösze álitva' arola elhagyatot és mindenkitül meg vetve szegény Cigány nemzetet kegyeskedet Fénséges uram igénybe és pártolásába venni a mijért ezen szegényelhagyatot Cigány nemzet nemtugya megszolgálni, Fénséges uramnak mért mert szegény tehetetlen nemzet mertha vagyonos emberek lennénk ez volna az öszes magyarországbéli Cigány nemzetnek a kötelssége ezer és ezerfőből ősze csuportozni és csatlakozni és egy diadal zászlóval Fénységes uramhoz sijetni és lábajiná térgyelve mondani hálás köszönetet és a Cigányok diadal zászlóján aranyas betűvel ezen fölirat, lenne,
Fénséges urunk és Pártolónk örömle halunkmeg és a sírba szálunk nyugotan fekszünk halva és holtan is kötelesigünk lesz Fénséges urunk nagy lelkőségért imátkozni, azért mert még mióta a világ fennál nem találkozot ember aki ezen elhagyatot Cigány nemzetet, figyelembe és Pártolásába vette volna rnint Fénséges uram, a mire a Cigány nemzet büszkén és hangsúlyozva elmondhatya hogyvan Pártfogónk és királyunk Éljen sok de igensok évekennát a legnagyobb megelégedésbe és jó szerencsébe boldogságba jó erőbe a magyarok istene nékínk őrőműnkre tarcsameg József fő Herezeg urunkat a Fénséges aszonyal és a Fénséges csalágyával. […]

öregeb Balogh Ferko
volt egykori Zenész és zenekar igazgató
(Soós, 2000: 61–62).[3]

Self-organisation and the search for identity among Gypsy musicians in the light of Roma voices

In the Kingdom of Hungary, prominent Gypsy first violinists in Budapest suggested in the 1880s that Gypsy musicians should set up a self-help association for themselves, modelled on the self-help organisations of the time (Tomka, 2003: 33–67). The initiative eventually failed, but after two decades it was put back on the agenda when, together with non-Gypsy journalists, they launched the *Hungarian Musicians' Journal – Gypsy musicians bulletin (Magyar Zenészek Lapja – Cigányzenészek Közlönye)* in 1900, with the subtitle: 'A professional journal representing the interests of Gypsy musicians in Hungary and abroad'. It was the first Gypsy-related media in Hungary, in which Gypsies themselves participated in its founding. The articles found among its columns regularly called for the foundation of a Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' National Association, which eventually failed due to division within the Gypsy musicians' community (Hajnáczky, 2020b: 15–19).

Gypsy musicians in Hungary wanted to form organisations and start their own newspaper as early as the turn of the century. In both cases, they thought

[3] The Hungarian is included in this study as the English translation, for sake of comprehension, does not include the spelling and grammatical errors the original does, though it does reflect the style.

exclusively of their own, more narrowly defined Gypsy group, the Gypsy musicians. Cooperation with other Roma groups, the Boyash and the Vlach Roma, was out of the question. Nor did they even seek to involve non-musician Romungros. At the same time, they distanced themselves from non-Gypsy musicians too, but they published their newspaper in Hungarian and did not even consider publishing articles in Carpathian Romani, even though a small number of them spoke the language. They also did not seek cooperation with foreign Gypsy musicians, though having a similar profession, but living in other countries (Piotrowska, 2013; 2022). The term 'Gypsy musicians abroad' in the subtitle of the paper was used to refer to their compatriots who had undertaken extended performances abroad, which was a mass phenomenon in that period (Sárosi, 2012; Szíjjártó, 2002). The identity of Gypsy musicians was organised along these efforts to separate themselves, with professional identity becoming a defining element, as well as their varying degrees of dual identity.

Less than a decade later, the Gypsy first violinists of the capital once again set out to create a Gypsy musicians' organisation, and this time they succeeded. In 1908, they founded the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' Association of Budapest (1908-1910), whose statutes were approved by the Ministry of the Interior, and thus it operated as an officially registered association. From the year of its foundation, the *Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' Journal* (*Magyar Cigányzenészek Lapja*) was published regularly, with the subtitle 'The Official Journal of the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' Association. A social periodical representing the interests of Hungarian Gypsy musicians. It informed the readers about the activities of the association of Gypsy musicians, its plans, and job opportunities at home and abroad. The magazine also published articles on the lives of once famous Gypsy musicians, as well as poems about Gypsy musicians, literary articles and novel excerpts. The *Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' Journal* regularly spoke up for aging Gypsy musicians and presented the association's ideas for pensions. It also spoke out against the unsustainable financial situation of Gypsy musicians' society, reported on their problems in earning a living, and the decrease in opportunities at home and abroad. In 1909, the Gypsy musicians organised a charity concert, the proceeds of which were to be used to erect a statue of the late Archduke Joseph, who had taken a great interest in the Roma. The series of events were attended several times by the Archduke's son, Archduke Joseph Augustus (Hajnáczky, 2020b: 19–40).

Once again, Gypsy musicians were only concerned with issues that affected them, and there was no question of involving non-musician Roma in the association's social and welfare issues. The *Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' Journal* did not publish a single short article on the situation of the Hungarian Roma community in general. Neither were Hungarian public affairs and major

political events affecting the country on the agenda. It should be stressed that the desire to learn about the past was present, but it was limited to the lives of former Gypsy first violinists. Only the memory and cult of the non-Gypsy Archduke Joseph represented some common ground with the rest of the Roma community, as revealed in the private correspondence in the chapter above.

The Treaty of Trianon at the end of the First World War called for drastic measures against the defeated countries in order to establish a new world order. The Trianon Peace Treaty with Hungary meant a massive mutilation of the country, which lost nearly two-thirds of its territory and population (Romsics, 2005: 145–147). The annexed territories also reduced the Roma population to a fraction of its former size. The majority of those who lived in the post-Trianon country were those who spoke Hungarian (Czgány összeírás, 1895: 32–41; Kocsis and Kovács, 1991: 80–82). The fate of the Gypsy musicians was intertwined with that of Hungarians in a country shaken by the Trianon Peace Treaty. Some Gypsy musicians, like Hungarians, were forced to move from the annexed territories to the motherland. Furthermore, the sources indicate that some Gypsy musicians were also adherents of irredentist ideology and revisionist aspirations (Hajnáczky, 2022a).

The Hungarian Gypsy Musician's National Association (1918-1933), founded by Gypsy musicians, and its media, the *Hungarian Gypsy Musician's Journal* (*Magyar Cigányzenészek Lapja*), during the interwar years regularly raised their voices against the punishment of Hungary (Hajnáczky, 2020c). The statutes approved by the Ministry of the Interior specified Hungarian as the official language of the Gypsy musicians' organisation, and that it would conduct its activities on the basis of 'patriotic and Christian principles'. Furthermore, in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior, they were to limit the spread of foreign musicians in Hungary and promote Hungarian Gypsy music (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021a: 467–479). It should be noted that the state power in the period between the two world wars had different attitudes towards different Roma groups, ranging from armed authoritative measures to support. For example, the notorious law enforcement and public health decrees of the Horthy era (1920-1944) were issued by the Ministry of the Interior, as were regulations protecting the interests of Gypsy musicians, and allowing the establishment of officially registered associations. This differences in attitudes were characteristic of non-Gypsy society, which discriminated against the impoverished inhabitants of Gypsy slums all the while being adoring fans of famous Gypsy first violinists (Bársony and Daróczi, 2008; Hajnáczky, 2021b; 2022b; Karsai, 1992; Kunt, 2023). Presumably, the identity of Roma groups and their development interacted with the attitudes of the prevailing non-Gypsy environment and the current Gypsy policy of the state

authority. In part, this also contributed to the identification of some Gypsy musicians with Hungarian national aspirations during this period.

As part of the irredentist ideology and revisionist aspirations, Gypsy musicians became the defenders of the 'Hungarian song' against 'anti-national' jazz music. Gypsy musicians often described jazz music as an 'infectious germ', an 'epidemic', a 'disease', a 'foreign spiritual plague', an 'Egyptian plague', a 'plague of locusts' (Hajnáczky, 2020c). The outcries against jazz were often intertwined with the fact that Hungary had been cut down to a third as a result of the Trianon Peace Treaty. For example, one of the association's presidents remarked: 'Oh, there is nothing more beautiful than the Hungarian song. It is the most powerful weapon of the irredentist. The greatest propaganda. It touches the heart! The truest patriot is the good Gypsy' (Hajnáczky, 2019: 93). Or the leader of the local group in Budapest said, 'The Hungarian people of the occupied territories are not waiting for the saxophone and the ear-splitting noise of the drums, but for the Hungarian Gypsies, so that they can cry their heart's sorrow with them at the time of the Hungarian resurrection' (Hajnáczky, 2019: 236). And in an editorial of the *Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' Journal,* one could read the following, 'In the truncated country, which was reduced to thirteen counties, cheerfulness and joy have been silenced, prosperity ceased, the Gypsy musician was left without earnings, and what would have remained for him on this burnt-out land was reaped and eaten before him by the new locusts of Africa, the foreign jazz invasion' (Hajnáczky, 2019: 115).

The National Association of Hungarian Gypsy Musicians sought contact and cooperated with various irredentist newspapers and organisations, such as the paper *Magyarság*, the Turul Association, the Werbőczy Comradery Association and the Csaba Comradery Association. The aforementioned organisations clearly advocated revisionism and were sometimes notorious for anti-Semitism and abuse of university students of Jewish origin (Hajnáczky, 2022a; Marushiakova and Popov, 2021a: 497–511). The Gypsy musicians' association joined the Hungarian Revisionist League in 1929, and the president of the association wrote letters of thanks to Mussolini and Lord Rothermere, which were published in the press along with the letters of reply:

> To the Esteemed Leadership of the Revisionist League!
> Budapest
>
> On the ninth anniversary of the disgraceful peace treaty of Trianon the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' National Association feels compelled to announce its joining, that is to say, to respectfully request it admission to the Revisionist League. We acknowledge with great sincerity the enormous work that the Revisionist League does and feel its ever growing necessity. We would ensure the Leadership that the

> Revisionist League's meritorious efforts and noble work for us all are received with great understanding by every member of our association. We would once again express our great esteem and in closing respectfully again ask our admission, as we remain with patriotic respect,
>
> Bura Károly, president
> Lilin, secretary
> (Hajnáczky, 2020c: 135).

> Right Honourable Lord,
>
> On behalf of the newly formed Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' National Association and all Hungarian Gypsy musicians, we thank and greet your Lordship with deep admiration for your tireless work to help Hungarian justice towards victory. May Divine Providence give your Lordship unwavering strength of spirit so that your struggle maybe successful and our national hope will become a reality as soon as possible! We have been looted and downtrodden! Since then, the song on our violins has wept more sadly, and all the pain of our nation quivers on our strings. But we also know our duty. We are present in the territories torn from us and we remind our brothers with Hungarian songs that there will once again come another Hungarian feast day throughout the world! And we announce everywhere Hungarian Gypsy musician goes, that Hungarian justice must conquer, as the Divine justice is with us! Because our banner is held by Lord Rothermere!
>
> In the name of the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' National Association:
> President Károly Bura
> (Hajnáczky, 2020c: 136).

The association was finally dissolved in 1933, but within a few years the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' National Federation (1935-1940) was founded, whose most iconic event was the organisation of the five hundredth anniversary celebration of the settlement of Roma in Hungary in 1937. As part of the event, Gypsy musicians performed music in the main squares of many towns; they played Hungarian song, the Hungarian National Anthem, the Hungarian Creed and the Rákóczi March. The regent Miklós Horthy, members of the government, ministers, diplomats and the mayors of several cities were invited to the main venue of the jubilee celebrations, the City Theatre in Budapest. The Gypsy musicians did not involve other Roma groups, or even non-musician Hungarian Gypsies, in the organisation of the jubilee celebrations. The musical repertoire was clearly linked to Hungarianness and Hungarian national identity. However, the original idea was that the series of programmes in the capital would not only include Gypsy musicians. In addition to the concert, they also wanted to present a traditional Roma baptism

and wedding to the audience, and to organise a 'Gypsyology world congress' (Hajnáczky, 2019: 48–54). The international conference, which was eventually cancelled, was to invite speakers from nearly fifty countries, and the president of the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians National Federation informed the press about the motives behind the event:

> The Budapest Congress is important from a patriotic point of view as it will be confirmed here that the Gypsies, who have lived among the Hungarians for 500 years, did not live here as an oppressed minority. 500 years ago, in some countries, anyone could lynch a Gypsy, murder a Gypsy, mutilate him, as there was no punishment for this. At the same time, in Hungary, the Hungarian not only tolerated the Gypsy, but also valued and loved him. The World Congress of Gypsies will also be a celebration of the patience of the Hungarians and their understanding of minorities (Hajnáczky, 2020c: 137–138).

On the one hand, the five-hundred-year anniversary celebrations highlighted the fact that the identity of Gypsy musicians – at least as presented to public opinion – was not defined by victimhood resulting from persecution and oppression by Hungarians, and on the other hand, the identification with other groups of Roma was also revealed, both in Hungary and across its borders. Settlement in the country and centuries of coexistence with Hungarians was not narrowly understood to be by Romungros or Gypsy musicians, though the Boyash and the Vlach Roma did arrive in Hungary later. And the very idea of a 'world Gypsyology congress' suggests that they perceived themselves as one community with Gypsies from other, even distant countries.

Conclusion

In the period from the end of the 19th century until the outbreak of the Second World War, the main groups of the Hungarian Roma, Romungros, Boyash and Vlach Roma were characterised by distinction and separation from each other. Instead of a single Roma identity, we can speak of Roma identities on the basis of contemporary surveys and historical research. At the same time, Roma did not live in isolation from the non-Gypsy population, which led to a high degree of linguistic assimilation or multilingualism and sometimes, to varying degrees, dual identity. Not only linguistic but also ethnic assimilation was observed during this period. On the one hand, some Roma assimilated with the non-Gypsy population, while on the other hand, some non-Gypsies also assimilated with Roma. In the case of Roma, two main trends of integration and assimilation occurred in the Kingdom of Hungary. On the one hand, towards the ruling Hungarian majority, and on the other hand,

especially in Transylvania, towards the Romanians. The aforementioned social processes created even more identity patterns. At the same time, according to the surviving private letters, the idea of a 'Gypsy nation', a Roma identity bridging linguistic groups, had already emerged among the Roma elite. For cultural, structural and economic reasons, the historical sources that have survived are from Gypsy musicians belonging to the Romungro group, so that a more in-depth study of identity has become possible in their case. The organisations set up by Gypsy musicians distanced themselves or ignored other Roma groups. Just as the newspapers published by their organisations did not deal with the Boyash or the Vlach Roma, or even with non-musician Romungros and foreign Roma musicians. Their identities were shaped by the coordinates of their Roma identity, their occupation and their attachment to Hungarianness. During the period under examination, the identity of Gypsy musicians was not static; it was dynamic, changing in a dialectic relationship with both major political events and social changes. Gypsy musicians became part of Hungarian national aspirations and state identity politics. At the same time, the idea of a 'Gypsy nation' also appeared in their circles, albeit to a much lesser extent, and initiatives referring to a transnational Roma identity across borders also emerged. Victimhood was part of the Gypsy musicians' identity, but this was not attributed to persecution and oppression by Hungarians, but to the Trianon Peace Treaty and the new musical movement that was invading from abroad, jazz.

References:

Achim, V. (2001) *Cigányok a román történelemben.* Budapest: Orisis Kiadó.

Bana, J. (1993) A vándorcigányok letelepítése, építkezése a 18. század közepétől a 20. század közepéig. In: M. Cseri (eds). *A Kisalföld nép építészete.* Szentendre – Győr: Szentendrei Szabadtéri Néprajzi Múzeum – Győri Xantus János Múzeum, pp. 309-328.

Bana, J. (1998) Győr cigánypolitikája a második világháborúig. In: B. Gémes (ed). *Pillanatképek a romák múltjából. Romológiai Kutatóintézet közleményei 1.* Szekszárd: Romológiai Kutatóintzet, pp. 123-135.

Bársony, J. and Daróczi, Á. (eds) (2008) *Pharrajimos. The Fate of the Roma During the Holocaust.* New York – Amsterdam – Brussels: International Debate Education Association.

Bernáth, G. (ed.) (2000) *Porrajmos. Recollections of Roma Holocaust Survivors.* Budapest: Roma Sajtóközpont.

Borsodi, Cs. (2006) Irattan. In: I. Berényi (eds). *A történelem segédtudományai.* Budapest: Osiris, pp. 169-186.

Bódi, Zs. (1999) *Tanulmányok Hermann Antal emlékére. Cigány néprajzi tanulmányok 8.* Budapest: Magyar Néprajzi Társaság.

Czigány összeírás (1895) A Magyarországban 1893. január 31-én végrehajtott czigányösszeírás eredményei. *Magyar Statisztikai Közlemények* Új folyam (9): 1–145.

Cserti Csapó, T. (2011) *A cigány népesség a társadalmi-gazdasági térszerkezetben.* Pécs: PTE BTK Oktatáskutató Központ – Virágmandula Kft.

Cserti Csapó, T. (2015) A magyarországi cigány közösségek demográfiai megközelítése. In: T. Cserti Csapó (ed). *Alapirodalmak a hazai cigány, roma népességre vonatkozó társadalomtörténet, társadalomismeret oktatásához.* Pécs: Pécsi Tudományegyetem BTK NTI Romológia és Nevelésszociológia Tanszék, pp. 401-462.

Dominkovitsné Szakács, A. (2009) Munczy Béla cigányprímás első világháborús frontnaplói. In: A. Márfi and I. Kosztics (eds). Cigánysors. *A cigányság történeti múltja és jelene II.* Pécs: Cigány Kulturális és Közművelődési Egyesület, pp. 91-95.

Dominkovitsné Szakács, A. (2020) *Ifj. Munczy Béla I. világháborús frontnaplói.* Sopron Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Győr-Moson-Sopron Megye Soproni Levéltára.

Daróczi, Á. (2023) *Hosszú az út előttem.* Budapest: Magvető.

D. Magyari, I. (2023) „A cigány a vonójával…" Cigányzenészek a 20. század első felének irodalmában. In: T. Hajnáczky (ed). *A cigányzene és a zenész cigány alakváltozásai. Történelmi, társadalmi és kulturális metszetek a 19–20. századból.* Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, pp. 261-311.

Dominkovits, P. (2005) Cigányösszeírások Sopron vármegyében a 18. század második felében. In: A. Márfi (ed). *Cigánysors. A cigányság történeti múltja és jelene I.* Pécs: Emberháza Alapítvány – Erdős Kamill Cigánymúzeum – Cigány kulturális és Közművelődési Egyesület, pp. 51-69.

Duminica, I. (2021) Gypsy Slavery in the Medieval Moldovian Historical Documentary. In: H. Kyuchukov, S. Zahova and I. Duminica (eds). *Romani History and Culture. Festchrisft in Honor of Prof. Dr. Vesselin Popov.* München: Lincom Gmbh, pp. 36-74.

Dupcsik, Cs. (2009) *A magyarországi cigányság története. Történelem a cigánykutatások tükrében 1890–2008.* Budapest: Osiris Kiadó.

Dupcsik, Cs. (2023) A cigányzenész karaktere az élclapokban. In: T. Hajnáczky (ed). *A cigányzene és a zenész cigány alakváltozásai. Történelmi, társadalmi és kulturális metszetek a 19–20. századból.* Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, pp. 225-260.

Erdős, K. (1989) A magyarországi cigányság. In: J. Vekerdi (ed). *Erdős Kamill cigánytanulmányai.* Békéscsaba: Békés Megyei Tanács V. B. Cigányügyi Koordinációs Bizottsága – Erkel Ferenc Múzeum, pp. 42-56.

Gyáni, G. and Kövér, Gy. (2006) *Magyarország társadalomtörténete. A reformkortól a második világháborúig.* Budapest: Osiris Kiadó.

Hajnáczky, T. (2017) CS-lakás program. „Szociális követelményeknek meg nem felelő telepek" felszámolása a Kádár-korszakban. *Romológia* 5 (14): 8–60.

Hajnáczky, T. (ed) (2019) *Magyar Cigányzenészek Országos Egyesülete. Cigányzenészek harca a két világháború közötti Magyarországon.* Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó.

Hajnáczky, T (2020a) Hungarian Gypsy Musician's National Association: Battles Faced by Gypsy Musician in Hungary During the Interwar Years. *Social Incusion* 8 (2): 327–335.

Hajnáczky, T. (eds) (2020b) *Magyar Cigányzenészek Egyesülete. Cigányzenészek mozgalma a boldog békeidők Magyarországán.* Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó.

Hajnáczky, T. (2020c) Trianon and Revisionist Gypsy Musicians. *Central European Political Science Review* 21 (81): 129–141.

Hajnáczky, T. (2021a) Hungarian Gypsy Musician's National Federation 1935–1940. In: H. Kyuchukov, S. Zahova and I. Dumunica (eds). *Romani History and Culture. Festschrift in Honor of Prof. Dr. Vesselin Popov.* München: LINCOM GmbH, pp. 180-193.

Hajnáczky, T. (2021b) "The Gypsy Issue" in Hungary During the Interwar Years I. *Revista de Etnologie și Culturologie* 30(2): 60–68.

Hajnáczky, T. (2022a) Hungary. In: E. Marushiakova and V. Popov (eds). *Roma Portraits in History. Roma Civic Emancipation Elite in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe from the 19th Century until World War II.* Paderborn: Brill – Ferdinand Schöningh, pp. 253-281.

Hajnáczky, T. (2022b) "The Gypsy Issue" in Hungary During the Interwar Years II. *Revista de Etnologie și Culturologie* 31(1): 54–63.

Hajnáczky, T. (2023) Cigányzenész egyesületek önsegélyező tevékenysége a boldog békeidők végnapjaitól a második világháború kitöréséig. In: T. Hajnáczky (ed). *A cigányzene és a zenész cigány alakváltozásai. Történelmi, társadalmi és kulturális metszetek a 19–20. századból.* Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, pp. 73-111.

Hála, J. (2017) "Kedves Nagyságos Uram!" Eötvös Albert cigányprímás levelei Hermann Antalhoz. In: J. Bali (ed). *Cigány világok a Kárpát-medencében. Cigány néprajzi közlemények 17.* Budapest: Magyar Néprajzi Társaság – Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kar Néprajzi Intézet, pp. 9-22.

Harmat, J. (2015) *Roma holokauszt a Grábler-tónál. A székesfehérvári és várpalotai cigányok tömeges kivégzése Várpalotán 1945-ben.* Várpalota – Veszprém: Várpalota Város Önkormányzata – Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Veszprém Megyei Levéltára.

Hudi, J. (1998) Veszprém megyei cigányság a 18. században. In: B. Gémes (ed). *Pillanatképek a romák múltjából. Romológiai Kutatóintézet Közleményei 1.* Szekszárd: Romológiai Kutatóintézet, pp. 102-110.

Huszár, T. (2015) *A magyar szociológia története.* Budapest: ELTE Társadalomtudományi Kar.

Kemény, I., Janky, B. and Lengyel, G. (2004) *A magyarországi cigányság 1971-2003.* Budapest: Gondolat – MTA Etnikai-nemzeti Kisebbségkutató Intézet.

Kereskényiné Cseh, E. (ed) (2008) *Források a Békés megyei cigányság történetéhez. Dokumentumok a Békés Megyei Levéltárból (1768–1987).* Gyula: Békés Megyei Levéltár.

Kóczé, A., Neményi, M. and Szalai, J. (eds) (2019) *Egymás szemébe nézve. Az elmúlt fél évszázad roma politikai törekvései.* Budapest: Balassi Kiadó.

Kövér, Gy. (2014) *Biográfia és társadalomtörténet.* Budapest: Osiris.

Kristó, Gy. (2006) Nyelvtudomány. In. I. Bertényi (eds). *A történelem segédtudományai.* Budapest: Osiris, pp. 276-285.

Karsai, L. (1992) *A cigánykérdés Magyarországon 1919–1945. Út a cigány Holocausthoz.* Budapest: Cserépfalvi Könyvkiadó.

Kocsis, K. and Kovács, Z. (1991) A magyarországi cigánynépesség társadalomföldrajza. In: Á. Utasi and Á. Mészáros (eds). *Cigánylét.* Budapest: MTA PTI, pp. 78-105.

Kunt, G. (2023) Diverse Xenophobia? Anti-Romani Stereotypes in Private Discourse in Hungary in the First Half of the Twentieth Century. *S: I. M. O. N.* 10(3): 64–85.

Landauer, A. (2016) *A Kárpát-medencei cigányság és a kresztyén egyházak kapcsolatának forrásai (1567–1953).* Budapest: Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem – L'Harmattan Kiadó.

Lengyel, E. (2023) „Mert a dzsessz csak flört, a cigányzene az igazi szerelem." A cigányzene és a jazz-zene a magyar operettszínpadon. In: T. Hajnáczky (ed). *A cigányzene és a zenész cigány alakváltozásai. Történelmi, társadalmi és kulturális metszetek a 19–20. századból.* Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, pp. 147-185.

Marushaikova, E. and Popov, V. (2013) Roma Identities in Central, Southeastern and Eastern Europe. In: H. Kyuchukov and O. Rawashdeh (eds). *Roma Identity and Anti-Gypsism in Europe.* München: LINCOM, pp. 40-52.

Marushiakova, E. and Vesselin, P. (2016) Who are Roma? In: E. Marushiakova and V. Popov (eds). *Roma Culture: Myths and Realities. In Memoriam of Donald Kenrick (1929-2015).* München: Lincom Academic Publisher, pp. 7-34.

Marushiakova, E. and Popov, V. (2020a) 'Letter to Stalin': Roma Activism vs. Gypsy Nomadism in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe before WWII. *Social Inclusion* 8 (2): 265–276.

Marushiakova, E. and Popov, V. (2020b) Gypsy Policy and Roma Activism: From the Interwar Period to Current Policies and Challenges. *Social Inclusion* 8 (2): 260–264.

Marushiakova, E. and Popov, V. (2021a) (eds) *Roma Voices in History. A Sourcebook. Roma Civic Emancipation in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe from the 19th Century until World War II.* Paderborn: Brill – Ferdinand Schöningh.

Marushiakova, E. and Popov, V. (2021b) Who are 'oamenii nostri' (Our People): Rudari, Lingurari, Băieshi, etc., and Their Identities. In: A. Sorescu-Marinković, T. Kahl and B. Sikimić (eds). *Boyash Studies: Researching "Our People".* Forum: Romänien, vol. 40. Berlin: Frank & Timme, pp. 37-74.

Marushiakova, E. and Popov, V. (eds) (2022) *Roma Portraits in History. Roma Civic Emancipation Elite in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe from the 19th Century until WW II.* Paderborn: Brill – Ferdinand Schöningh.

Matras, Y. (2003) A Geographical Approach to the Classification of Romani. In: S. Halo and Cs. Prónai (eds). *Ethnic Identities in Dynamic Prospective.* Budapest: Roma Research Group Ethnic and National Minority Studies Institute Hungarian Academy of Sciences, pp. 193-199.

Nagy, P. (1998) *A magyarországi cigányok története a rendi társadalom korában.* Kaposvár: Csokonai Vitéz Mihály Tanítóképző Főiskola.

Nagy, P. (ed.) (2011) *Források a magyarországi cigányság történetéből (1758-1999).* Gödöllő: Emberi Erőforrások Fejlesztése Alapítvány.

Nagy, P. (2019) *Beás cigányok a Kárpát-medencében. Historikus metszetek a 18-19. századból.* Pécs: Pécsi Tudományegyetem NTK NTI Romológia és nevelésszociológia Tanszék.

Nagy, P. (2020) Parasztok, cigányok, proletárok. Az alsó kaszt és a cigány etnicitás történeti értelmezéséhez (19–20. század). *Aetas* 35 (1): 131–149.

Nagy, P. (2023) A temesvári németcigányok. Muzsikus cigányok identitáskeresése az 1930-as években. In: T. Hajnáczky (ed). *A cigányzene és a zenész cigány alakváltozásai. Történelmi, társadalmi és kulturális metszetek a 19–20. századból.* Budapest: Kiadó, pp. 112-143.

Orsós, A. (2015) A beás nyelv. In: A. Orsós (ed). *A romológia alapjai.* Pécs: Pécsi Tudományegyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kar Neveléstudományi Intézet Romológia és Nevelésszociológia Tanszék – Wlislocki Henrik Szakkollégium, pp. 151-180.

Piotrowska, A. G. (2013) *Gypsy Music in European Culture. From the Late Eighteenth tot he Early Twentieth Centuries*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Piotrowska, A. G. (2022) From the History of the Lăutari in Romania. In: E. Rosenhaft and M. Sierra (eds). *European Roma. Lives beyond Stereotypes.* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Riskó, K. (2023) Prímásegyéniségek a cigányzene ünnepén. In: T. Hajnáczky (ed). *A cigányzene és a zenész cigány alakváltozásai. Történelmi, társadalmi és kulturális metszetek a 19–20. századból.* Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, pp. 355-407.

Roman, R. B., Zahova, S., Marinov, A. G., Marushiakova, E., Popov, V., Hajnáczky, T., Shapoval, V. and Blomster, R. (2021) *Roma Writings. Romani Literature and Press in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe from the 19th Century until World War II.* Paderborn: Brill – Ferdinand Schöningh.

Romsics, I. (2005) *Magyarország története a XX. században.* Budapest: Osiris Kiadó.

Rotaru, J. and Gaunt, D. (2023) *The Wallachian Gold-Washers. Unlocking the Golden Past of the Rudari Woodworkers*. Paderborn: Brill – Ferdinand Schöningh.

Said, E. W. (2000) *Orientalizmus.* Budapest: Európa Könyvkiadó.

Sárosi, B. (1971) *Gypsy Music.* Budapest: Corvina Press.

Sárosi, B. (2004) *A cigányzenekar múltja az egykorú sajtó tükrében 1776–1903.* Budapest: Nap Kiadó.

Sárosi, B. (eds) (2012) *A cigányzenekar múltja az egykorú sajtó tükrében 1904–1944. II. kötet.* Budapest: Nap Kiadó.

Scholtz, R. G. (2018) *Hegedűvel és puskával. A Nagy Háború elfeledett cigány katonái (1914–1918).* Zsáka: Hangadó Egyesület.

Soós I. (2000) *József főherceg cigány levelezése. Romológiai Kutatóintézt Közleményei 3.* Szekszárd: Romológiai Kutatóintézet.

Szalai, A. (2007) Egységesség? Változatosság? A cigány kisebbség és a nyelvi sokféleség. In: Cs. Bartha (ed). *Cigány nyelvek és közösségek a Kárpát-medencében.* Budapest: Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, pp. 20-51.

Szijártó, M. (2021) *A történelem diskurzusa. Bevezetés a 20. századi történetírás történetébe és elméletébe.* Budapest: Ráció Kiadó.

Szíjjártó, Cs. (2002) *A cigány útra ment… Cigányzenekaraink, valamint népzenei és néptámctársaságok külföldjárása a kezdetektől a kiegyezésig (Korabeli sajtódokumentumok alapján).* Budapest: MAasszi Kiadó.

Tomka, B. (2003) *Szociálpolitika a 20. századi Magyarországon európai perspektívában. Budapest*: Századvég Kiadó.

Váradi, J. (2009) A magyarországi cigány népesség számának alakulása 1850–1910. *Regio* 20 (4): 60–81.

Williams, P. (2000) A párizsi kelderások láthatatlansága. In: Cs. Prónai (ed). *Nyugat-Európa. Válogatás Bernard Formoso, Patrick Williams, Leonardo Piasere tanulmányaiból.* Budapest: Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, pp. 183-205.

Wlisloczki, H. (2009) *Az erdélyi cigány népköltészet.* Budapest: Magyar Mercurius.

Wolf, E. R. (1995) *Európa és a történelem nélküli népek.* Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó – Osiris – Századvég Kiadó.

Zahova, S. (2021) Introduction. In: R. B. Roman, S. Zahova, A. G. Marinov, E. Marushiakova, V. Popov, T. Hajnáczky, V. Shapoval and R. Blomster. *Roma Writings. Romani Literature and Press in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe from the 19th Century until World War II*. Paderborn: Brill – Ferdinand Schöningh, pp. 3-22.

Zsupos, Z. (1996) *Az erdélyi sátoros taxás és aranymosó fiskális cigányok a 18. században. Cigány néprajzi tanulmányok 4-5.* Budapest: Magyar Néprajzi Tanulmányok.

Tamás Attila Hajnáczky, PhD, is a senior research fellow at the Archiepiscopal College of Veszprém and Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary. He holds degrees and diplomas in History, Sociology, Romology, Ethnic and Minority Policy and Equal Opportunity and Minority Protection Administration. In 2016, Hajnáczky won the Gypsy Lore Society's young scholar's prize. He participated in the *Roma Interbellum – Roma Civic Emancipation Between the Two World Wars* project. His latest books in English are: 'It's obvious that the Gypsies cannot be viewed as a nationality. Document concerning the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party's Gypsy policy 1956-1989' (2019); 'Károly Bura Gypsy First Violinist. Activist, Revisionist, Visionist' (2021).
ORCID: 0000-0001-5024-3789, Academia.edu: Tamás Hajnáczky.
E-mail: hajnaczkyt@gmail.com

EVANGELICAL ACTIVISM IN BULGARIA IN THE 1920s AND 1930s: THE MINKOV FAMILY AND THEIR MISSIONARY PROJECT AMONG THE ROMA

Magdalena Slavkova

Abstract: This article analyses the involvement of non-Roma missionaries in evangelical proselytisation in the 1920s–1930s in Bulgaria, focusing on what they wanted to achieve among the Roma and the problems they faced in their activities. The author shows how the successes or failures in Christian outreach affected the process of identity formation of the converted Roma, and to what extent the identities of the missionaries changed as a result of their work with Roma. The goal of these missionaries was foremost to modify the morality of the Roma in conformity with the preachers' notion of righteous Christian life and behaviour. The second goal of the Bible workers was to support the Roma in winning religious and cultural spaces of their own in society. Petar and Anka Minkov are an example of a Baptist non-Romani family that strove for the spiritual and cultural growth of the Roma. The couple endeavoured to understand the Roma and to change them. With regard to methodology, the arguments in this article are based on three key sources of information: open-ended interviews, archival sources, and periodicals from Bulgaria and foreign countries.
Keywords: evangelicalism, Roma, Baptist missionaries, Minkov family, identity

Introduction

The evangelical missions organised among the Roma in Bulgaria were part of a common endeavour in various European countries to convert these people to Protestantism. The call for religious reformation of the Gypsies (Roma) started in the 19th century in Great Britain and the Scandinavian countries and continued into the 20th century, involving missionaries from both traditional churches and revivalist groups. Bible workers emphasised sedentarisation and attempted to rectify the moral looseness of the Roma and turn them into 'useful citizens' – a task they believed should be achieved through religious education (Mayall, 2009: 100). Religious activists discussed enduring themes such as Romani lifestyle and identity, but were equally interested in the Roma's integration into Protestant societies, a step that would ensure their development in the direction envisioned for them. When the mass approach to the task of attracting Roma into the evangelical congregations proved ineffective, missionaries found a solution in the creation of special missions.

In many cases, the so-called 'Gypsy Missions' aimed to combine

spiritual work with cultural enlightenment and social activities so as to achieve a complete change in the behaviour of the Roma and their religious identification (Al Fakir, 2024: 202–222; Cressy, 2016: 63–77; Mayall, 2009; Roman, 2020: 367–376). Although the success was limited, it should be noted that this interest in the religious awakening of the Roma inspired later developments in their own countries and beyond.

The first Roma Baptist Church in the world was established on Bulgarian soil in the first half of the 20th century, and both the local Roma and the Minkov family played a role in its organisation and promotion, as well as in raising awareness of the spiritual and cultural growth of the Roma. It was created in the village of Golintsi in northwestern Bulgaria and Petar Punchev was among the first Roma to display interest in the evangelical faith at the very beginning of the 20th century (Славкова, 2007). His conversion to the evangelical faith and that of other Roma at that time seem to have been isolated cases, unlike later, when the situation changed.

The Romani evangelical movement developed as an ethno-religious and civil movement in the interwar period (Marinov, 2019: 360–385; Marushiakova and Popov, 2015: 258–293; Marushiakova and Popov, 2021; Slavkova, 2023: 79–105; Slavkova, 2025; Славкова, 2007). The number of new Christians grew among both the majority and minority populations, albeit at a limited rate, despite the rivalry between the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the evangelicals to attract 'lost souls'. Not only in Golintsi but in general, the Roma became an important target group for proselytisers from various denominations, including Methodists, Congregationalists, Baptists, and the newly arrived Pentecostals.

The evangelical movement wanted to address the challenges faced by the Roma: poverty, illiteracy, cultural barriers, lack of interest from the authorities about the future of the Roma, etc. The solution was to identify models and activists with innovative projects to serve to the cause; to raise awareness of the Roma and their way of life, including through articles in the evangelical press in Bulgaria and abroad; and to mobilise support for them along religious lines and through the creation of Roma religious societies. The evangelical activists were often accompanied by their wives on their trips and supported by them in their endeavours. A very important condition for their good perception by the locals was the fact that the woman, along with her evangelical duties, was taking good care of her family and children. Since a close-knit family is an example of the materialisation of God's grace on earth, this made a good impression among the Roma, which was an additional attractive factor. The Minkov family fit well into this ideal for the evangelical Christian family.

Although the Minkov family's motivation for working among the

Roma and the advantages of their model have been insufficiently studied in the academic context, their activity became an example of how to progress with the Roma and left a mark on the Romani movement in the interwar period. Petar and Anka Minkov initiated a variety of activities such as the creation of independent churches, special missions to work among the Roma, Christian societies, literacy courses and trainings in practical skills, publication of periodicals, translations of literature and hymnbooks into the Romani language, and support for young people studying abroad. Minkov extended his model of support for the spiritual and cultural development of the Bulgarian Roma to Romania, where his presence encouraged the creation of Romani religious societies in the 1930s. Recent research has focused on the early development of Baptist churches for the Roma in Romania during the interwar period and emphasises Minkov's positive impact on the development of the Romani religious mobilisation there (Ploscariu, 2020: 318).

The example of the Minkov family is not unique; there were many other families where both spouses indulged in evangelical activity at that time. However, their case is curious in what they wanted to achieve among the Roma and how they managed to overcome problems to pursue their cause. Researching the Minkov family and their contributions to the Romani evangelical movement is a difficult task, because the information is not found in one place. The author has applied a combined approach that uses the results of empirical research, archival materials, and information from the evangelical periodicals. The research strategy seems like searching for 'a needle in a haystack'. Therefore, this research currently has no claims to be exhaustive, because the author is convinced that there are still undiscovered archival materials and publications in periodicals concerning the Minkov family which will further enrich their history and contribute to answering the question: Why was their way of working among the Roma successful and innovative?

In the village of Golintsi (today the Mladenovo quarter of the city of Lom), the local pastors still know about this family, although the memories of the people fade. The same goes for Bulgarian Baptist preachers, because fewer and fewer of them can speak about Petar Minkov and his family from first-hand experience.

Some changes occurred regarding the organisation of evangelical work in Bulgaria during the interwar period. In the 1920s, the evangelical work of Baptists in Bulgaria was assigned by the Baptist World Alliance to the General Missionary Society of the German Baptists in the US. A newly established Danubian Gospel Mission Field, with headquarters in Vienna, sent missionaries to work in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, and

other countries among various ethnic groups such as Germans, Bulgarians, Turks, Gypsies, Jews, and Russians living in these countries (The Baptist Herald, 1935, March 1: 80).

The Danubian Mission worked among Roma of all confessions. Bulgarian Roma were either Orthodox Christians, like the Bulgarians, or Muslims, like the local Turkish population. Independent Baptist societies grew not only in the village of Golintsi, but also in the city of Ferdinand (present-day Montana), both in northwestern Bulgaria. For their part, Pentecostals attracted a local population of various ethnic origins–including Roma–in the region of Yambol, in southeastern Bulgaria. These missionaries offered them both salvation in the name of Jesus Christ and miracles. However, this was not the first time that interest in the Gypsies in Yambol had been aroused among evangelical workers. Various charity organisations and committees were interested in the local population during the difficult times of the Balkan wars (1912–1913) and tried to identify the specific needs of women and children, thus seeking success in their proselytism to expand their influence, and Roma were not neglected in these endeavours. For example, a Bulgarian member of the Christian Herald Relief Committee of the United States took a picture with Bulgarian and Gypsy children in Yambol during his tours in Bulgaria in 1912 which was published in the *Christian Herald* newspaper (1913, January 1: 11).

The prevailing approach was to civilise and patronise the Roma. The Roma were expected to become righteous Christians in the missionaries' understanding of the term. The missionary efforts did not follow a straight course but had their ups and downs: while some Roma were converted, others wavered and fell away. The problems that the preachers faced when devising their tactics for work were related to the Roma's nomadic way of life, illiteracy, and lack of moral commitment to church institutions. Unlike the situation in Western Europe, the initiative to establish a sedentary way of life did not come from the ministers. When the evangelicals began their missionary work among the Roma, many of these people were no longer nomads or were in the course of settling in one place. For example, the Orthodox Christian *Rešetari* (sieve-makers), who were members of the First Romani Baptist Church, were in the period of settling down when the religious society was created. It should be noted, however, that even the missionaries who worked among the Roma and presented themselves as their 'sympathisers' at first harboured stereotypes about the Romani way of life.

For their part, the Orthodox clergy often accused evangelicals of taking advantage of naive and ignorant followers in order to advance their competitive proselytisation. The Orthodox Church, through its clergy, sharply opposed local attempts at conversion of the population and the

opening of new evangelical churches. Campaigns against the evangelicals were not exceptional, because in that period, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was interested in the Muslim Roma as well as in the Turks and the Bulgarian Muslims (called 'Pomaks'). Occasional attempts were made to convert and rename these Roma; in fact, activities to attract Muslims to Christianity had already started in the first years after the Liberation of Bulgaria and continued into the time of the Second World War (Елдъров, 2001: 592–666).

In this context, two ideas took shape among the evangelicals. On the one hand, the Roma were encouraged to create independent religious societies of their own, which were often led by trained pastors from their community, while women were actively drawn into the churches. On the other hand, it was assumed that the Roma should be well-integrated into the Bulgarian evangelical movement. Although of a different ethnicity, they were seen by all, and not only by the Protestants, as part of the Bulgarian civic nation (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021: 33–179).

Inception of the Minkovs' missionary activity

Petar Minkov was born in 1898 in the city of Vidin. After completing his secondary education in the city of Ruse, he studied in Germany (Куличев, 1994: 264). Minkov was very active in temperance work (The Baptist Herald, 1923, May: 12) and while living in Ruse he was the secretary of one of the Temperance Societies (Български въздържател, 1921, 4–5: 40). Minkov points to the turning point in his life as reading the *God and War* book by Stoyan Vatralski, writer, public figure, an evangelist and the first Bulgarian to graduate from Harvard University, during Minkov's military service in Sofia in 1917 (Духовна обнова, 1930: 30).

There is no information about where Petar Minkov met Anka and which of the two was more enthusiastic to initially start working among the Roma. In the *Bible Society Record* journal from February 1940, the couple were announced as the 'only missionaries working exclusively to gypsies in the world' (1940, 85, 2: 26). They were resolved to work among this minority until the minds and conduct of these people changed and they accepted the Gospel, which would represent the fulfilment of the Minkovs' evangelical mission. They might also have had some special reason to choose this community as the target of their activities.

They probably started working with the Roma accidentally, but then became intrigued by them as a people of whom they knew a little and those people were untouched by the faith. Encouraged by the initial success of their

missionary work, they persisted in it. Another hypothesis is related to the possible Romani origin of the family. According to Hristo Kulichev, pastor of the First Evangelical Church in Sofia and long-time chairman of the Union of Evangelical Congregational Churches in Bulgaria, 'Minkov contributed considerably to the creation of evangelical literature in the Gypsy language with Bulgarian letters'. However, in his book, Kulichev has no doubts that Petar Minkov is Bulgarian and is convinced that his work among the Roma is his calling (Куличев, 1994: 265). I have so far found no written evidence of a Romani origin of Minkov, and all the informants I spoke to had no doubt as to Minkov's Bulgarian ethnicity, and that he supported the Romani converts purely for the sake of proselytisation.

Petar Minkov held a rather positive position concerning the support of the Roma's own cultural identity. This had an impact not only on his position and strategy for working among the Roma, but also on his identity. Since he and his wife understood that they would have limited success among the Roma preaching in Bulgarian, they decided to learn at least two dialects of the Romani language, as part of their strategy for expanding their work among the Roma (Bible Society Record, 1940, 85, 2). The desire of Petar and Anka Minkov to learn the Romani dialects and use them in religious activities does not mean that the couple began to publicly declare a Gypsy identity, or at least I have not found documents proving this so far, but it does mean that they changed. I try to understand their evolution from people with prejudices and alienated from the Roma into a kind of identity brand of the Romani evangelical movement in that period. They worked towards the development of a stronger Romani identity, as well as exhibiting a strong desire for a positive change in Romani living conditions, regardless of age and gender.

In the early 1920s, the Baptist periodical mentioned that Petar Minkov was a preacher in the city of Ferdinand, at the Bulgarian Baptist Church there. Minkov's interest in the Roma arose in the summer of 1924 during a professional trip to Sofia. He decided to visit the Romani neighbourhood there, which then numbered 7,000 people, to distribute copies of the New Testament. His visit ended with very little success, for he found the people were illiterate and could not read the Holy Scripture. That is why he attempted to engage them through oral testimony (Täufer-Bote, 1931, 5: 10). Fortunately, Minkov's interest in them proved lasting and he assumed the task of working among the Roma as the mission of his life.

Returning to Ferdinand, Minkov converted men and women and organised evening literacy courses there. He was aware that he could not make true Christians of the Roma without first educating them (Евангелист, 1925, 3: 23). The journal *Evangelist* relates various dramatic stories aimed to

impress the readers with the strong character of the people who had decided to follow the path of faith. One of the published articles talks about the baptism of three women from the *Kalajdži* group (tinsmiths) (Евангелист, 1927, 7: 7). Minkov, the author of the article, mentions a serious conflict that arose between a woman and her husband. On the day before the ritual, the latter forbade her to be baptised, threatening that he would chase her from their home. Minkov relates that he decided to postpone the baptism in order to preserve peace in the family. But she boldly insisted on being baptised, and the husband later conceded and stopped opposing her faith (Евангелист, 1927, 7: 9). The striking feature in this story is that Minkov applied his special tactic for working among the Roma. He organised his evangelical work intelligently, taking into account the relations between men and women in the Romani families, so that the intended conversion would not be the cause of great conflict and thus lead to irreversible consequences for the believer. He accepted that religious change cannot come about through a rigid approach to the Roma and that patience and understanding should be applied in missionary work.

After his successful work among the Muslims in Ferdinand, where he was hardened in work with the Roma, Petar Minkov went together with his wife as a missionary to the village of Golintsi, where the pastor of the Romani church, Petar Punchev, had died.

The missionary project: the way to the spiritual and cultural advancement of the Roma

The missionary activity of the Minkovs aimed at the religious and cultural uplifting of the Roma in general and of individual men and women, who would hopefully become emancipators of their people. The Roma in the village of Golintsi had gathered for religious services in their homes since the beginning of the century, and not only Baptists but also Methodist missionaries were active there and had achieved some success among the Roma (Slavkova, 2025). The Methodists had expressed their support for building a chapel for these people. This was confirmed in December 1911 on the pages of the journal *Hristiyanski svyat*, which published an appeal to its readers to donate money and aid the Roma of Golintsi because 'although they are very poor, they have undertaken to build a house of prayer' (Християнски свят, 1911, 12: 16). Due to the Methodists' financial difficulties in maintaining their mission among the Roma, some of the believers had left that church in the 1920s and joined the Baptists.

After Punchev's death in 1924, a period of controversy began among

the believers, who were divided as to whether the church should remain independent or become a branch of the Bulgarian Baptist church in Lom. The conflict ended when Petar Minkov was elected pastor in 1926, and under his leadership, the religious society developed as an independent church, which was registered in 1927. The representatives of the Danubian Mission played a positive role in this development. Before moving with his family to Golintsi, Minkov had probably already served as a missionary among the Roma for the Danubian Mission and agreed to become the salaried pastor of the church in Golintsi. However, he agreed with the leaders of the Mission that there would be many more benefits for the Roma in Golintsi beyond his specific official commitment (Slavkova, 2025).

The membership of the Golintsi congregation numbered 30 men and women during his pastorate. He served as pastor of the Romani church and as Secretary of the Bulgarian Baptist Union. He was also editor-in-chief of the journal *Evangelist*, the office of which during the time of his pastorate moved to the city of Lom, where he and his family settled. In the 1920s, the 'Evangelical Baptist Mission for work with Gypsies' was established in Lom. Headed by Petar Minkov, it published the monthly newspaper *Svetilnik* (Candlestick) (Светилник, 1927, 1), which had a Romani-language supplement entitled *Romano alav* – one of the first periodicals in this language in the world. However, its publication did not continue long.

In addition to the Young Christian Society, created at Minkov's initiative, a temperance group, a sister ministry, and courses in German were organised at the Sunday school. The teaching of German was connected with the plan of sending young people from the Romani church to study in German-language religious schools. One such institution was the Bible school *St. Andrä*, founded in the 1920s near the city of Villach (southern Austria) and specially created for students from Central and Eastern Europe. Likely, Anka Minkova had also studied abroad, as she and her husband both knew German well enough to teach the children and the young people in the Sunday school and to write reports on the progress of their evangelical work in Bulgaria for Baptist periodicals issued in German.

In addition to her duties as a pastor's wife and the mother of their child, Anka became very active among the women in Golintsi. At first, she had some prejudice against the Roma. In her reports to *Täufer-Bote* (Baptist Witness) (a periodical of the German-speaking Baptist congregations in the Danubian countries published in the 1930s and 1940s), she mentions she was at first reluctant to sit at their tables and eat with them when visiting their huts to read the Word of God to them (1931, 2: 7).

Over the years, she not only changed her behaviour and way of thinking

but also learned valuable lessons from the Roma. She aimed to train the women, reeducate them in evangelical morality, and help them develop as women of faith. Anka gathered women at religious assemblies and taught domestic skills; at that time, she believed that, in order to be a useful evangelical, a woman must undergo a complete change beyond learning to read and write and pray to God several times a day (Slavkova, 2023: 79–105).

Both she and her husband faced various problems in working with the Roma, such as the disparity between the Romani and Christian ways of life, the fickleness of the Roma who would join churches and then leave, and mostly their illiteracy. Without expecting to make any serious progress in her work with the Roma, she achieved quite a lot. Her activity did not bring about revolutionary changes, but she was in tune with the flourishing of cultural and civic activity among the Roma at that time, who created their organisations and made plans for the future development of their people. However, Anka Minkova possessed ambition and displayed special sensitivity in her work, which distinguished her from other Bulgarian pastors' wives.

The 'Gypsy Christian Women's Society Romni' ('romni' meaning 'woman' or 'wife' in the Romani language) was created (probably) in 1926. The choice of the name of the society headed by Mrs. Minkova indicates her intention to promote God among this minority community and to apply the approach of having Roma evangelicals serve among their people, which at that time was perceived as the only successful way to do missionary work (Slavkova, 2023: 94–95). By the end of 1927, the society had 19 female members.

She wrote articles on women's topics in the journal *Evangelist*. In 1927 she published an article there entitled 'About the Woman of the East', in which she shared her impressions of what she had read in the foreign press about the situation of women in India. She focused on the practice of early marriage, regarding which she noted there was no such problem in Bulgaria, and the cost of weddings, involving the payment of a dowry by the bride's father to the bridegroom, which she qualified as 'a little thorn in our flesh' (Евангелист 1927, 7: 9). She informed foreign missionaries, through letters and reports, about her progress in evangelical work among the women in Golintsi (Täufer-Bote, 1930, 4: 8).

Anka Minkova was mentioned in the Baptist press as playing yet another important role, that of a healer. For example, on one occasion, when holding a meeting with the other women, she was asked to visit a sick woman and pray for her recovery (Täufer-Bote, 1932, 3: 8). The press at that time mentioned a Romani girl who also had the power to heal through prayer, Keva Stefanova from Golintsi. She was (probably) the only Romani

girl sent to Berlin to acquire religious training. Anka certainly knew the child Keva and worked with her at the Sunday school. It is important to note that this is one of the first mentions of the possibility of women healing sick people through prayer, a narrative that later Pentecostal preachers would actively use to convince people to convert and that prevails to this day among those evangelicals who have not lost their faith in miracles.

Minkov began to prepare the first Romani-language collection of hymns, published in 1929 by the 'Evangelical Baptist Mission to the Gypsies in Bulgaria'. According to some researchers, Minkov's wife, helped by the Romani preacher Georgi Stefanov (Wardin, 1991: 153), did the main work for the publication of the first hymnbook, *Романе свято гили* (Romani holy songs).

An important event took place in 1930: the construction of the building of the Romani church was completed. Members of the Danubian Mission had provided funds for the purchase of a lot and the construction of the house of prayer. Anka Minkova and the women from the church prepared special gifts, which they presented to the representatives of the Mission.

The attitude of the Roma towards the Minkov family was respectful, as evidenced by the stories of the informants. The Bulgarian Baptist pastor Theodor Angelov testifies that Minkov was greatly loved by the Roma of Golintsi. According to Angelov's father, Ivan Angelov, Minkov was a tactful, learned and inventive man. From his father's narratives about Minkov's activity, Theodor Angelov recalls one event that took place in Golintsi. While preaching in the church, the doors of which were open, Minkov heard two women in the street quarrelling about a goose: they could not agree on its price. He interrupted the sermon, went out into the street, reconciled the two women, and then went back to the altar to continue preaching.

Minkov and his wife supported the training of Romani men and women for their spiritual and cultural growth. According to his testimony, after Punchev's death, the Roma chose Georgi Stefanov, Keva's father, as their leader, but he left the faith due to personal difficulties and gave himself up to a worldly life. After yet another serious illness, he promised to devote himself entirely to God (Täufer-Bote, 1931, 5: 8–9). At that time, Petar Minkov was already in Golintsi and supported Stefanov to acquire an education in a foreign country. In the 1920s and early 1930s, Stefanov trained for two years in the Bible school *St. Andrä* (Täufer-Bote, 1930, 1: 7).

Due to the growing importance of the mission to the Roma in Sofia, in the 1930s Petar Minkov and his wife left the Golintsi church (Евангелист, 1932, 7: 12). After their departure, Georgi Stefanov served as leader of the society. Although a rather controversial figure, with rises and falls in the practice of a righteous Christian life, he considerably increased the influence

of the Romani church. During his ministry, many of the local people attended his church and recognised it as their own. On the eve of the Second World War, it had approximately 100 regular members (Wardin, 1991: 153).

At Minkov's initiative, a 'Committee of the Gypsy Evangelical Mission' was created in Sofia. Its constituent assembly was held in his home (ЦДА, ф. 264К, оп. 2, а.е. 9385). During the meeting which took place on October 17, 1932, Petar Minkov and representatives of various evangelical churches exchanged ideas about creating an organisation for Christian work among the Roma in the Balkans, mentioning that in Bulgaria alone there were 135,000 Roma. At the assembly, which opened with a prayer, Minkov made a statement about the great need for 'Christian work among the Gypsies' (ЦДА, ф. 264К, оп. 2, а.е. 9385: 7). In the constituent documents, we read that the Committee was under the honorary patronage of the American minister plenipotentiary to Bulgaria, H. E. Henry W. Shumaker (ЦДА, ф. 264К, оп. 2, а.е. 9385: 7–8). Petar Minkov took an active part as secretary of the organisation (pic. 1).

Although the Committee did not include Roma in positions of leadership, it was oriented to their interests and their development as an ethnic community within the evangelical movement. The Committee set itself the task of conducting a wide range of activities, similar to those Minkov and his wife had already undertaken in Golintsi: the creation of independent religious groups, the publication of periodicals and religious literature, and the conducting of training courses for women. Specifically, it aimed to 'spread Christian morality and provide assistance for the spiritual, cultural and moral growth of the Gypsy nation' (ЦДА, ф. 264К, оп. 2, а.е. 9385: 11). The Committee set ambitious goals to establish a mission home with an outpatient clinic and a small hospital, an orphanage, to provide care for the extremely poor and sick, and to expand its work in the countryside. It attempted to develop evangelistic activities among the Roma in Vidin, Samokov, Plovdiv, and Karnobat, but the results were limited (Зорница, 1934, 11).

The Committee carried out vigorous publication activity, and *News of the Gypsy Evangelical Mission* was issued in 1933. An important part of this task was the publication of works in the Romani language, and Minkov was enthusiastic about this activity. However, the translations into Romani language seem to have been mostly a collective effort, and the sources give differing information as to who worked on the publications. Two of the Gospels were made available in the 1930s: *The Holy Gospel of Matthew* translated by Atanasakiev (Атанасакиев, 1932), and *The Holy Gospel of John*, by the same translator (Атанасакиев, 1937). According to another version, Minkov worked on the translation of *the Gospel of Matthew* together

with Atanasakiev, who was (probably) a Bulgarian with a good knowledge of the Romani dialects, and with two Roma, Georgi Stefanov and Baro Boev (Täufer-Bote, 1931, 5: 8). A new collection of songs was published in 1933 with the support of Petar Minkov (Романе святи гиля, 1933). According to information in the press, this publication was mainly due to Georgi Stefanov, who knew German and could translate into Bulgarian; he was helped with this publication by the deaconess Hanna Mein (Täufer-Bote, 1933, 1: 7).

After the Minkovs settled in Sofia, Anka continued her activity among women and organised courses in sewing and knitting for girls as part of the work of the 'Committee of the Gypsy Evangelical Mission' (pic. 2) (Зорница, 1933, 22: 6). Mrs. Minkova's efforts were not an isolated case at that time, because the same newspaper wrote about the successes of the missionary Mara Ivanova from the city of Karnobat, in southeast Bulgaria, who had begun work among the Roma, but there is no information on whether Mrs. Ivanova continued her efforts (Зорница, 1933, 22: 6).

In 1930, Petar Minkov visited Kishinev and spurred outreach to the Roma among Romanian Baptists as he had in Bulgaria. At the creation of the Committee in Sofia, Minkov's large-scale idea was to spread the Bible among the Roma not only in Bulgaria but also in the Balkans; that is why he began making trips to Romania. In the cities of Arad and Alba-Iulia some Romanian Roma converted to the Baptist denomination. The first Romani Baptist Church in Romania, called 'Faith Church', was founded in Arad city in 1931. The evangelical journal *Svetilinic* (Candlestick), published in Kishinev, a city in Bessarabia (present-day Moldova), was similar to the one published in Bulgaria in the 1920s, in which there had been a separate page devoted to the Roma (Светилник/Svetilinic, 1934, 6–7). In October 1930, Petar Minkov delivered a speech at a Baptist Conference in Arad. This speech, in which he talked about the Roma church in Golintsi, may have spurred Romani Baptists to form their church. In the following years, Faith Church had at least 30 members (Ploscariu, 2020: 318). The successful ways in which the evangelical movement developed in Bulgaria – including the creation of strong Romani churches – were applied in Romania as well.

In the 1930s–1940s, the Minkov family continued their activities in Bulgaria in the same direction and expanded their evangelical outreach towards other ethnic communities as well, but the available materials mention that they had problems with the authorities. In the 1930s, he was an assistant pastor at the First Evangelical Church in Sofia (Bulgaria) and head of the Young Christian Society. In a letter from the 1940s by Vasil Zyapkov, who was a preacher at the First Evangelical Church, editor of the newspaper *Zornitsa*, and in 1944 became a representative of the evangelical communities before

the Directorate of Religious Denominations, he wrote that Petar Minkov's pastoral rights were revoked before 1944, due to attempts at conversions among the Jews, but at the beginning of the Communist regime his rights to preach were restored (AMBP, оп. 2, ф. 2, а.е. 340, т. XIII). Minkov was unable to expand his religious activities among the Jews. This is because the context during this period was such that new political inspirations and ideologies under the influence of Nazi Germany had an impact on the lives of Jews and Roma. Although Jews were most affected by the Law for the Protection of the Nation, published during the reign of Tsar Boris III and in force since 1941, and although Roma were not specifically mentioned in it, the law also had a negative impact on the Romani community. The curious thing is that Minkov expected to make progress among the Jews, thanks to his experience among the Roma.

After 1944, the evangelical communities briefly led an active spiritual life and even had some of their rights that had been taken away restored, and this lasted until the beginning of the pastoral trials in the late 1940s, when the Communists' policy towards the evangelicals changed abruptly and remained adverse towards them throughout the entire Communist period. In the 1940s, Minkov still held meetings in his home in Sofia, where he gathered preachers and his associates from Sofia and the country (AMBP, оп. 2, ф. 2, а.е. 340, т. XIII). Regarding their personal life, it is clear from information published in the *Zornitsa* newspaper that their daughter Silvia married Minyu Minev in December 1944, with no further details provided (Зорница, 1945, 2: 2). After that, information about him, his wife, and their activities is limited, and it is not known to what extent they were able to continue their work, whether they experienced some kind of catharsis and changed their attitude towards the evangelisation of the Roma under the influence of the Communist rule, or how their life paths ended. Petar Minkov died in 1950.

The Minkov family found their followers in their time, but overall, to this day, there are not many examples of non-Roma evangelists working among the Roma with the same enthusiasm, energy, and desire to get to know the Roma that the Minkov family displayed. The Bulgarian Ivan Angelov was pastor of the Romani church in the village Golintsi in the second half of the 1940s. He was called the 'Gypsy pastor' because of the respect the Roma had for him and his Austrian wife, who also devoted herself to work among Roma women and children (Зорница, 1948, 29: 3). Ivan Angelov, along with other Bulgarian preachers, also became a victim of the Communist regime. He was tried and sentenced to prison in 1949, while the family remained in Lom; these were the hardest years of their lives.

The influence of the evangelical outreach of Petar and Anka Minkov on the identity formation of the Roma

A new stage in the identity formation of the Roma occurred in the 1920s and 1930s through engagement with evangelical groups that did not have the kind of stigmatising attitude towards this group as existed in the Orthodox Church. The competition between evangelicals and Orthodox Christians doubly affected this minority group. They were targeted in religious and cultural terms for being Roma and for being evangelicals. Keeping the Roma within the Orthodox Church was important for the nation-building project, but the involvement of Roma in the evangelical movement was an effective path towards their development as an ethnic community. In the case of the Romani evangelical movement in the 1920s and 1930s, the goal was the development of the Roma within Bulgarian Protestant organisations and unions through the methods and measures typical for the interwar period (e.g., creating organisations, societies, schools, periodicals in the Romani language, etc.), which were also characteristic of the non-religious civic movement among the Roma (Marushiakova and Popov, 2021).

Through their activities, the evangelical churches and societies were a key factor in the normalisation of relations between the Roma and the ethnic majority, and became a public voice of the Romani community. The evangelical movement in Bulgaria has its specificities, as in the case of Petar and Anka Minkov, who were Bulgarians but assumed the role of supporters of the Roma. They worked for cultural and social change within the evangelical organisations and for the formation of a specific religious (evangelical) identity of the Roma. Neither Minkov nor other missionaries worked outside these frameworks because they were aware that a positive image of the Roma could be achieved only within the evangelical movement. However, a relatively small circle of people in the Roma community was involved in the process of religious mobilisation. The Minkov family significantly contributed to this process by training men and women and supporting some of them to receive special education abroad and later become pastors and missionaries. Petar Minkov and his wife managed to preserve the ethnic nature of the church organisations in Golintsi and Sofia, orienting them to different groups: men, women, youths, and children. Anka Minkova played an active role among women, girls, and children, exemplifying the typical image of a pastor's wife. She, like other active women of that time, appeared as a collective character, as a member of a large evangelical community. She had more modest desires and did not want to achieve the impossible for the

Roma cause, but she wanted to achieve what was practically possible. Her activities and those of her husband appear to have been part of a conscious effort to accept and promote a Romani identity. They do seem to have been really interested in giving the Roma more space for manoeuvring within the frames of the Bulgarian Protestant movement. However, Petar and Anka Minkov were neither able to surpass the achievements of their time nor to overcome the limitations of the evangelical movement to achieve anything more beyond its framework for the Roma.

Although the Romani pastors supported by Minkov had limited opportunities to determine the direction in which the Roma should develop within the national Protestant unions, they were able to choose the means for pursuing their vision: publishing literature in the Romani language, promoting the abstinence movement, developing Romani gospel music, etc.

The Minkovs were committed to their evangelical identity in opposition to the dominant Orthodox identity in Bulgaria and viewed themselves very much as exemplary Christians fulfilling God's will. At that time, the Roma were not an organised community, and evangelicalism gave them the possibility to develop as individuals and as an ethnic community. They were set on preserving ethnic boundaries by upholding moral dichotomies and also searched for existential alternatives in maintaining the religious identity of the Roma. The Christian identity was the dominant one for Roma evangelicals, but it went together with their ethnic identity. The visibility of the Minkovs' activities in the interwar period, when interest in and inclusion of Roma was an important part of the agenda, shows that they managed to use all opportunities, when available, to support Roma to develop in their religious, ethnic, and social dimensions.

Conclusion

In the interwar period, the Roma were a neglected community to which evangelical missionaries turned their attention, striving to make righteous Christians of them. The missionaries' attitude towards the Roma depended on their ideology: they gave support to the group as a whole in baptising separate individuals, hoping that the convert's family would follow in the faith without breaking his or her ties to their relatives. The missionaries aimed to create communities united by the faith that would develop within the framework of the majority ethnic group, not outside it. The emergence of religious forms of organisation of the Roma was based on the need to obtain moral, social, and material support for the development of the Roma as an ethnic community. The aim was to use faith to resolve the everyday problems faced by the Roma,

including poverty, illiteracy, and social degradation. The Church at that time was the only social institution that assisted people from this community to acquire an education and that organised their daily life. For the most part, evangelical missionaries approached the Roma in Bulgaria as a new target for proselytisation; they sought to 'save the souls' of Roma, somewhat in compensation for their limited success in winning converts from the majority population.

However, the Romani evangelical movement itself had limited financial resources and the Romani pastors did not have the final say in decision-making to implement the project of cultural growth on a larger scale and to reach Romani groups in other places. The profile of spiritual leaders who took care of the Roma and endeavoured to resolve their problems in the 1920s and 1930s was far from that of traditional Romani leaders. They tended to be rather young, religious, and educated, even speaking foreign languages. Some of them (such as Petar and Anka Minkov) were quite probably not even Roma. This shows that people of different ethnic origins could be agents of change and represent the Romani community to which they did not necessarily belong by their ethnicity.

The article situates the activism of the Minkov family in the context of the Bulgarian evangelical movement, which applied an inclusive approach to the Roma. Their role and agency were important in preserving the Romani cultural specificity and supporting the independent character of the Roma church in Golintsi, named the First Romani Baptist Church, and the churches in the cities of Ferdinand and Sofia. There was a Romani spiritual leadership, which determined the specificity of the civic movement in this period. The continued existence of the First Romani Church, which still exists today, is a special legacy of interwar Romani mobilisation.

The 'Gypsy Mission' of Petar and Anka Minkov can be qualified as successful because the couple set the direction in which the Romani evangelical movement would develop by establishing independent churches and supporting the career development of some Roma as spiritual leaders and inspirers. The couple set the path of development of the Romani pastors as ethnicised figures who would promote the social change and cultural advancement of the Roma within the larger Bulgarian society; in fact, such pastors continue to play this role today. The Minkov family made progress among the Roma because they used the dialogical model; not only did they expect the Roma to change to become evangelical Christians, but they, as missionaries, realised that they must also change their thinking and actions.

The ethno-cultural approach the Minkovs proposed has several distinctive features, such as a particular sensitivity to the Romani culture in which missionary work was conducted; these specificities deserve scholarly

attention. The Minkovs became a kind of vehicle for the religious and ethnic mobilisation that marks Romani evangelicalism. The Minkov family's active religious activity appears to have been part of a conscious effort to embrace, develop through religious means, and promote a Romani identity. This seems to have influenced their own identity as well, as they accepted Romani culture and way of life, learned the language and supported Romani language publications, organised the social life of Roma in various forms such as religious societies and associations, and opened their eyes and souls to working with Roma, encouraging them to become more committed Christians. The Minkov family were unable to expand their activities and help establish more Romani religious communities in Bulgaria, and ultimately were unable to expand their activities outside Bulgaria on a larger scale, both due to their limited resources and finding more followers among non-Roma, and due to the dynamic political and social environment in which either policies in support of Romani identity or the exact opposite policy were on the agenda.

Conversion to evangelicalism did not eliminate the Roma's identity; the goal was to preserve their ethnic community within the Bulgarian civic nation. The development of Romani evangelicalism led to the natural convergence of religious and ethnic identity and ultimately to their transformation into a specific component of the development of the Roma as a community within the Bulgarian civic nation.

Acknowledgements: This article was written as part of the research project *Contemporary Bulgarian Identity – National and European Dimensions*, funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund of the Ministry of Education and Science (contract agreement No. КП-06-Н50/6 from 30.11.2020). It reflects the author's views alone.

References:

Al Fakir, I. (2024) Guarding the Boundaries of Belonging: the Church of Sweden, Gypsy Mission and Social Care in the 1910s-40s. *European Review of History* 31 (2): 202–222.

The Baptist Herald (May 1923, 5; 1 March 1935) Available at: https://nabconference.org/nab-heritage-commission/collections/periodicals/the-baptist-herald/ (accessed 10 April 2024).

Bible Society Record (February 1940) Available at: https://archive.org/details/american-bible-society-record_1940-02_85_2/page%2026 (accessed 10 April 2024).

Cressy, D. (2016) Evangelical Ethnographers and English Gypsies from the 1790s to the 1830s. *Romani Studies* 26 (1): 63–77.

Christian Herald (1 January 1913) Available at: https://archive.org/details/christianherald36unse/page/n13/mode/2up (accessed 10 March 2024).

Marinov, A. (2019) The Rise of Protestantism and Its Role within Roma Communities in Bulgaria between the World Wars. In: M. Slavkova, M. Maeva, Y. Erolova and R. Popov (eds). *Between the Worlds: People, Spaces and Rituals.* Sofia: IEFSEM – BAS & Paradigma, pp. 360-385.

Marushiakova, E. and Popov, V. (2015) The First Roma/Gypsy Organisations, Churches and Newspapers. In: M. Kominko (ed). *From Dust to Digital: Ten Years of the Endangered Archives Programme.* Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, pp. 258-293.

Marushiakova, E. and Popov, V. (eds) (2021) *Roma Voices in History. A Sourcebook. Roma Civic Emancipation in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe from the 19th Century until World War II*. Paderborn: Brill & Schöningh.

Mayall, D. (2009) *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth-Century Society.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ploscariu, I. (2020) Faith Church: Roma Baptists Challenging Religious Barriers in Interwar Romania. *Social Inclusion* 8 (2): 316–326.

Roman, R.-B. (2020) From Christian Mission to Transnational Connections: Religious and Social Mobilisation among Roma in Finland. *Social Inclusion* 8 (2): 367–376.

Slavkova, M. (2023) Women's Evangelical Activities and Church Growth in Romani Communities. *Romani Studies* 33 (1): 79–105.

Slavkova, M. (2025) *Conversion, Leadership and Identity of the Evangelical Roma in Bulgaria*. Paderborn: Brill & Schöningh.

Täufer-Bote (January 1930; April 1930; February 1931; May 1931; March 1932; January 1933) Available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20220217175859/https://www.befg.de/fileadmin/bgs_news_import/media/tauferbote-1930-1935-digital.pdf (accessed 15 June 2019).

Wardin, A. (1991) The Baptist in Bulgaria. *The Baptist Quarterly* 34 (4): 148–159.

АМВР (Архив на Министерство на вътрешните работи), оп. 2, ф. 2, а.е. 340, т. XIII.

Атанасакиев, А. (1932) *Сомнал евангелие (ил) Матеятар*. София: Американско Библейско дружество & Британско и чуждестранно Библейско дружество.

Атанасакиев, А. (1937) *Сомнал евангелие (кетапи) катаро Йоан.* София: Американско Библейско дружество & Британско и чуждестранно Библейско дружество.

Български въздържател (1921, 4-5).

Духовна Обнова (7 Април 1930, Юбилеен брой посветен на Стоян Ватралски).

Евангелист (1925, 3; 1927, 7; 1932, 7) Издава Съюз на евангелските баптистски църкви в България.

Елдъров, С. (2001) Българската православна църква и българите мюсюлмани 1878-1944. В: Р. Градева (съст). *История на мюсюлманската култура по българските земи. (Изследвания).* София: МЦИМКВ, 592-666.

Зорница (31 май 1933, 22; 14 март 1934, 11; 9 януари 1945, 2; 14 юли 1948, 29) Издава Българско евангелско дружество.

Куличев, Х. (ред) (1994) *Вестители на истината. История на евангелските църкви в България.* София: Българско библейско дружество.

Романе святи гиля (1933) Издание на Съюза на българските евангелски баптистки църкви.
Светилник (1927, 1) Издание на Евангелската баптистка мисия сред циганите в България. Лом.
Светилник/ Svetilinic (1934, 6-7) Chişinău-Basarabia: Editura 'Svetilinic'.
Славкова, М. (2007) *Циганите евангелисти в България*. София: Парадигма.
Християнски свят (1911, 12) Издание на Методистка епископална мисия.
ЦДА (Централен държавен архив), ф. 264К, оп. 2, а.е. 9385. Комитет 'Циганска евангелска мисия', 1932-1933.

Illustrations:



Pic. 1. Members of the 'Committee of the Gypsy Evangelical Mission', Sofia, 1930s.
Photo courtesy of Dr. Long Evangelical Methodist Church in Sofia.



Pic. 2. Anka Minkova and Romani girls at a training course in sewing and knitting, Sofia, 1930s. Photo courtesy of Dr. Long Evangelical Methodist Church in Sofia.

Magdalena Slavkova, PhD, is associate professor at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. She is the author of 'Evangelical Gypsies in Bulgaria' (in Bulgarian, 2007); 'Ethnicity, Religion and Migrations of the Gypsies in Bulgaria' (in Bulgarian, with Yelis Erolova, 2013); '*Busco Trabajo*. Work and Social Relations of Bulgarian Migrants in Spain' (in Bulgarian, 2022); and 'Conversion, Leadership and Identity of Evangelical Roma in Bulgaria' (2025). Academia.edu: Magdalena Slavkova. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3828-0274.
E-mail: magdalenaslavkova@yahoo.com

Documentary Evidence for the Haskovo State Turkish Theatre in Bulgaria in the 1950s

Behrin Shopova

Abstract: The socialist regime in Bulgaria is associated with a specific policy towards ethnic minorities, in which we can distinguish various approaches to resettlement, integration, and assimilation. In the 1950s, three Turkish state theatres were established to promote the cultural development of the Turkish community and influence its integration into the new system and ideology. This article presents the initial results of a study of the Haskovo Theatre (1952-1959) based on archival documents and media publications. Through their analysis, answers are sought to the following questions: How did the newly created theatre impact the culture and identity of the members of the local Turkish community? Did the socialist regime succeed in turning the newly created structure into a political tool, attracting them and influencing the orientation of their ethnocultural identity?
Keywords: Turkish theatres, Turkish population, Haskovo, Bulgarian Communist Party, archival sources

Introduction

The 1950s were marked by numerous processes unfolding in Bulgarian society. Post-war Bulgaria gradually joined the Eastern European socialist bloc, which completely changed the ideological constructs on which the ruling elite was based. At a meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party (CC of the BCP) on April 26, 1951, a Decision was adopted to improve the work of the BCP among the Turkish population, including various measures. One of them provided for the creation of state theatres in the towns of Haskovo, Ruse, and Shumen (in the period 1950–1965 named Kolarovgrad) (ЦДА-12, Ф. 1Б, оп. 6, а.е. 1298: 33–39). Part of the goals of these theatres were to ideologically support the modernisation and changes in the lifestyle of the Turkish population in the country. In studies of the Turkish population in Bulgaria, the issue of these theatres has attracted research interest but remains poorly studied. This text is my first elaboration on the subject and presents my work with archival sources and publications in the local press related to the Turkish state theatre in the town of Haskovo, or 'Estrada', as it was called at the time, established at 'Mustafa Subhi' Turkish community centre.

The archival materials used in the text include sources stored in the regional branches of the State Agency Archives in Haskovo, Shumen, and

Sofia. The documents found in the State Archives in Haskovo are mainly related to the activities of the ruling Bulgarian Communist Party. These are minutes and decisions from the meetings of the Primary Party Organisation (PPO), established in 1956 at the State Turkish Theatre in Haskovo. The period covered by these documents spans from the establishment of the PPO to the closure of the theatre in 1959, following its relocation to the town of Kardzhali. These documents contain information about the structure of the theatre, its repertoire, its composition, and, last but not least, they reveal the ideological context in which it operated. Another source used is 'Rodopa mücadelesi' (BTA, 1953; Koynof, 1952; Rodopa mücadelesi, 1954), a Turkish-language supplement to the 'Haskovska tribuna' newspaper, which was published between 1950 and 1959 under the 'Rodopska Borba' title.

There is conflicting information about when exactly the three state Turkish theatres were established. Almost all sources (Şukrieva and Kırcalı, 2022) mention the one in Shumen as the first. According to my research in the State Archives in Shumen, the state Turkish theatre in the town was founded on February 13, 1952 and the first performance was staged on May 24, 1952 (ДА-Шумен, Ф. 623, оп. 1, а.е. 5). This date is later than the information found in the periodical press about the Haskovo Musical Theatre. The Turkish supplement to the 'Rodopska borba' newspaper from January 26, 1952, states that the theatre performed in the hall of the National Theatre in front of an audience of 600 people. Under the direction of Mehmed Uncu[1], the plays 'Agent No. 205' (Ajan No. 205) and 'Horhor Aga the Chickpea Seller' ('Leblebeci hor hor ağa') comedy were prepared and performed. After the plays, the choir sang several folk songs, and after the performance of 'The Shepherd and the Shepherd's Daughter', the performers were called back for an encore (Koynof, 1952). The same issue of the newspaper contained an advertisement stating that the newly formed Regional Turkish People's Theatre was recruiting artists – men and women, singers, dancers, and instrumentalists, who would be hired permanently and could start work immediately. The availability of a cast and a ready-made repertoire at the beginning of the year suggests that the Haskovo state theatre was previously active or may have been formed earlier than the Shumen theatre.

Before presenting the information found in the archives and periodicals about the State Turkish theatre[2] in Haskovo, I will briefly discuss the historical conditions under which the state Turkish theatres appeared in Bulgaria.

[1] All Turkish names are written in Turkish language according to the Turkish naming system.

[2] In the documents reviewed, the name of the theater is found in various formulations – State Turkish Theatre, District Turkish Theatre, Turkish Folk Theatre, State Turkish Variety Theatre, or Turkish Musical Theatre.

Historical context

In the first years after September 9, 1944, minority policy in Bulgaria granted several rights to ethnic communities, such as freedom of religion, education in their mother tongue, periodicals, etc. The new government of the Fatherland Front and representatives of the Bulgarian Workers' Party distanced themselves from the previous 'fascist governments' and sought to attract both the Bulgarian population and representatives of ethnic minorities in the country, among them. The idea of equality for all people, regardless of race, origin, and religious affiliation, was promoted (Стоянова, 2017: 33). Thanks to this policy, the publication of Turkish newspapers was restored. In comparison with previous periods, from the Liberation to the First World War, about 40 Turkish newspapers and magazines were published in Bulgaria, and by 1934 their number had doubled. The political changes that followed the 1934 coup d'état of the government led by Kimon Georgiev[3], which ruled for a short time (May 19, 1934 – January 22, 1935), led to the closure of a large number of Turkish periodicals. In 1944, the last remaining Turkish-language newspaper, 'Medeniyet', ceased publication. By a decision of the Central Committee of February 12, 1945, a state programme was introduced in Turkish schools, which until then had been entirely private. Thus, their maintenance was taken over by the state, which significantly increased their number. In 1947, the first Turkish teacher training school was opened in Stara Zagora, and the following year, a special department for the training of Turkish secondary school teachers was established at the Teacher Training Institute in Shumen. Turkish kindergartens were opened, as well as community centres with separate Turkish reading rooms (Стоянов, 1998: 70–98).

At the same time, relations between Bulgaria and Turkey gradually began to deteriorate, which led to a number of consequences regarding the government's policy towards Bulgarian citizens of Turkish origin (Калинова, 2022: 180–189). Regardless of the right of national minorities 'to learn their mother tongue and develop their national culture', guaranteed by the new so-called 'Dimitrov Constitution' adopted in 1947, ideological pressure intensified. The nationalisation and collectivisation of land ownership, the nationalisation of schools, the transfer of the Mufti's Office, mosques, and religious schools under government control, and the atheisation of all spheres

[3] Kimon Georgiev (1882-1969) was a Bulgarian officer and politician. He took a leading role in three military coups. During the government he headed from May 19, 1934, to January 22, 1935, the Tarnovo Constitution was repealed, the National Assembly was dissolved, and political parties were banned. In addition, the freedoms of Bulgarian citizens were restricted, and the party, trade union, and free press were liquidated (Кръстева, 2021: 255–257).

of public life gradually began to be perceived as a threat and interference in the lifestyle established among the Turkish population (Баева и Калинова, 2006: 81–104; Стоянов, 1998: 99–102). At the same time, intensified propaganda from Turkey, stemming from the dominant concept of Pan-Turkism (Мерджанова, 2016 [2013]: 42), influenced the formation of emigration attitudes among Muslims in Bulgaria (Стоянов, 2021: 151–152). In May 1947, Ankara announced that it was ready to accept Balkan Turks based on previous agreements. The question of the situation of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria was also raised. A series of border incidents led to a sharpening of the tone and intensification of propaganda on the part of Turkey. In 1949, a decision was made to allow Turks from the border areas to emigrate. If Turkey refused to accept them, they would be resettled in the northern parts of the country (Стоянов, 1998: 104–110).

The culmination of the emigration policy was reached in August 1950, when the Bulgarian government allowed the mass expulsion of 150,000 Bulgarian Turks based on the 1925 Settlement Convention (Държавен вестник, 1926) – the first expulsion agreement between the two countries, specifying 'the conditions for the settlement of Bulgarian subjects in Turkey and Turkish subjects in Bulgaria' (Eminov, 2002: 584–591; Еролова, 2017: 208, 213). The loss of this population led to a labour shortage and created an urgent need to create incentives for Turks to remain in the country (Бюксеншютц, 2000: 130).

On April 26, 1951, the first government of Valko Chervenkov (1950–1954) adopted Decision No. A 103 of the Politburo of the Central Committee of April 26, 1951 (ЦДА-12, Ф. 1Б, оп. 6, а.е. 1298) on the 'integration of the Turkish minority' in Bulgaria, thus initiating a new course towards it. The Bulgarian communist authorities adopted the Soviet model, aiming to create a new secular cultural elite in the Turkish community to replace the religious one. To implement this new approach, which aimed to replace the leading role of religion with language, cooperation with the Soviet republic of Azerbaijan, with its Turkic-speaking population, was envisaged (Бюксеншютц, 2000: 125–126). As early as February 1951, an Azerbaijani delegation arrived in Bulgaria, which visited areas with a compact Turkish population between February 8 and March 8. The aim was to present Azerbaijan's achievements during the three decades under Soviet rule in contrast to the unemployment, misery, and poverty in Turkey. The mission of the Turkish communist poet Nazım Hikmet (1902–1963)[4] was similar. During a tour in the country in

[4] Turkish poet, writer, screenwriter and playwright, founder of Turkish revolutionary poetry. His oeuvre includes numerous works translated into over 30 languages (Göksu and Timms, 1999).

September, he called on the Turkish population to stay where they were, speaking of the terrible 'truth about life in Turkey' (Маринова, 2000: 98–99). According to Blaga Dimitrova, who accompanied the poet during his stay in Bulgaria, Nazım Hikmet attended 20 rallies with 150,000 participants, gave 10 speeches to the people, and visited 12 different places where he met with party activists (Димитрова, 1952). Meanwhile, in 1952, Turkey was drawn into the North Atlantic Treaty, which worsened bilateral relations between Bulgaria and Turkey and determined the implementation of multilateral and contradictory approaches to the integration and assimilation of the Turkish minority, in which it briefly received certain linguistic and cultural rights (Маринова, 2000: 98).

Policy of Turkish population integration – Protocol No. A 103 of April 26, 1951

The decision under Protocol No. A 103 of April 26, 1951, 'On Improving the Work of the Party Among the Turkish Population', includes twenty-two points on which to work to integrate the Turkish population into Bulgarian society. Their adoption marked the beginning of a new stage in the state's minority policy, which continued until 1958. Three main trends were defined. The first one covered ideological and political work related to strengthening the Party's positions among Bulgarian Turks. To this end, special departments for working with the Turkish population were to be set up in Haskovo, Kolarovgrad, and Ruse, with attention being paid to ensuring that these departments also included work with Turkish women (point 1). It was also envisaged that in settlements with a compact Turkish population, 'poor and middle-class peasants' of Turkish origin would be appointed to responsible positions in the administration, economic, and public organisations. For the training of personnel, three-month party schools were to be established in the towns of Haskovo and Kolarovgrad, where teaching was to be conducted in Turkish (point 2). Instructions were given to carry out checks among the members of party organisations to 'purge them of foreign and hostile elements' (point 3).

The Ministry of National Defence was tasked with recruiting young people from the Turkish population into the army, selecting some of them to be sent to military schools, and training the most promising ones to become officers (point 4). The Department for Work with the Turkish Population, together with the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party (CC of the BCP) and the Department for Propaganda and Agitation, had to assist in the organisation of new general education and political schools and reading groups in which the main ideological and political directives of the Party

would be discussed (point 13). The agitation groups were required to organise daily group readings in Turkish of the 'Nova svetlina' ('Yeni Işık') newspaper and various relevant materials, and at least once a month to give reports on the policies of the Party and the Government to the Turkish population (point 14). The reason for the mandatory reading of this newspaper was the decision to make it a publication of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party. In addition, local newspapers in Haskovo, Ruse, and Kolarovgrad were to include pages in Turkish (point 15). In addition to these publications, translations of Marxist-Leninist literature, including the biographies of Lenin and Stalin, the history of the Bulgarian Communist Party, etc., were also planned (point 16).

Thus, in the following years, propaganda groups and political training schools were established to bring the population into line with the ideological directives of the new regime. In addition, reading groups were organised to discuss books, publications, etc. From April 1951 to October 1953, 4,547 members of Turkish origin were admitted to the party, of whom over 1,000 were women. Personnel were also recruited to local government bodies. According to the Stenographic Journal of the Second National Assembly (Стенографски дневник, 1954), nine of the representatives were Turkish (Маринова, 2000: 99–100).

The second trend was related to the policy of promoting education and cultural development among the Turkish population. The decisions in this regard provided for teachers who know Turkish to be sent to Turkish settlements for two years. In addition, two more Turkish high schools were to be opened in the towns of Razgrad and Kardzhali (point 5). The next decision concerned the secondment of Turkish teachers for three years, as well as the sending of gifted young people who have completed secondary education to study in Azerbaijan (point 6). In order to train leaders for the Dimitrov Pioneer Organisation, it was planned to open a special department at the Teacher Training Institute in Stara Zagora, and to open kindergartens in residential districts where there were more than twenty Turkish children of preschool age (point 7). The Ministry of Education was required to propose, within three months, the locations where new schools should be opened (point 8). The next decision indicates that the number of scholarships for Turkish young men and women in higher and secondary educational institutions should be increased. Special places should be opened in theatre and music schools, as well as in agricultural high schools (point 9). The decisions concerning religious education were related to the removal of Islamic academic subjects from schools and the instruction that the training of clergy should be carried out only in Muslim religious schools (point 10). The measures for the

development of Turkish culture included several areas – radio, theatre, and cinematography. A decision was made for Radio Sofia and the radio stations in Stara Zagora and Stalin (the name of the town of Varna between December 20, 1949 – October 20, 1956) to organise special programmes in Turkish, including Turkish folk songs and songs of the Turkic peoples of the Soviet Union (item 17). In addition, films from Azerbaijan should be imported for monthly screenings in Turkish villages, and new Bulgarian short films about the life of the Turkish population in the country should be made (point 18). State Turkish theatres should be created in the towns of Kolarovgrad, Haskovo, and Ruse, attracting artists from amateur art groups (point 19).

The adoption of these decisions in the following years led to intensive efforts to overcome illiteracy. Funds were invested in building the material base of community centres and libraries. Turkish schools were established, for which Turkish teacher training establishments for primary school teachers were opened in the towns of Kardzhali and Razgrad. Quotas were set for the admission of Bulgarian Turks to secondary vocational schools, theatre, and music schools. In 1952, a Department of Turkish Philology was opened at Sofia University, which became the main source for training teachers for Turkish teacher training schools. It also provided an opportunity to complete higher education – until then, graduates of Turkish secondary schools had not been eligible to apply to state universities (Зафер, 2020: 16). Radio broadcasts for the Turkish population gradually increased, and in 1952-1953, the aforementioned state Turkish theatres were established in the towns of Haskovo, Ruse, and Kolarovgrad.

In addition to state Turkish theatres, creative collectives were formed in other settlements, and amateur folk groups were established at the local level. These secular cultural institutions trained members of the local Turkish intelligentsia, who replaced traditional religious leaders in Turkish communities and contributed to the emergence of a secular Turkish identity among many Turks, especially among young people (Eminov, 2002: 584–591). For a short period, it seems that a true renaissance of Turkish culture was underway in Bulgaria. In 1954, there were 237 groups, of which 108 were theatre groups, 69 were choirs, and 60 were dance groups. The number of people involved in these groups was 3,746, of which 938 were women. With regard to cinema and film screenings among the Turkish population, in November 1951, the districts inhabited by Turks had 94 permanent and 13 mobile cinemas. Mass publication of books in Turkish began – poems by Nazım Hikmet and stories by Sabahattin Ali (1907-1948)[5], as well as stories

[5] Sabahattin Ali – Turkish realist writer, novelist, poet, translator and journalist.

about Stalin and Lenin. Newspapers were published in Turkish, and, as mentioned above, some of the regional newspapers included a supplement in Turkish (Маринова, 2000: 101).

In order to train personnel to work in state Turkish theatres and to lead artistic activities at the Higher Institute of Theatre Arts, a two-year Turkish studio was established in 1957, led by the prominent actor, professor, and member of the Bulgarian Communist Party Vladimir Trendafilov (1897-1972). Training at this studio was conducted in Turkish. Over the years, well-known representatives of the Turkish intelligentsia were attracted, such as Recep Sadık, who taught acting, Ali Derviş taught directing, Ibrahim Tatarlı – history of Turkish culture, etc. In addition to these academic subjects, students attended classes in Turkish language, Russian literature, history of Bulgarian theatre, speech technique, etc. (Татарлъ, 2009: 199). Azerbaijan also played a huge role during this period, sending Turkologists, artists, musicians, and painters to Bulgaria, while Turkish youth were sent to the Soviet republic to receive an education. Experienced Azerbaijani musicians from the Soviet Azerbaijani Music Theatre helped develop the newly opened state Turkish theatres. Experts such as Suleyman Aleskerov (1924-2000) had a major influence on the development of Turkish theatres in Bulgaria. One of his most famous works, 'Yıldız', which is performed in Bulgarian and Turkish, has been performed in various towns and even abroad in collaboration with the Shumen Symphony Orchestra (Altaç, 2024: 64). The role of cultural exchange with Azerbaijan was also linked to the provision of a dramatic and musical repertoire for the needs of Turkish theatres. This exchange continued until Stalin's death, after which Azerbaijani experts were returned to their country (Buttanrı, 2010: 141).

The third trend concerned improving the living conditions of the Turkish population. The Ministry of Public Health (MPH) was required to fill all vacant positions for doctors in districts with a Turkish population within three months, with the instruction that mainly female doctors should be appointed in villages. The Ministry had to also begin construction of new maternity centres in settlements with Turkish population where none currently existed (point 11). Special attention was given to sports as a means of maintaining good physical health. The leaders of Turkish physical education groups in the districts of Haskovo, Ruse, and Kolarovgrad were called upon to attract young men and women to all physical education events (point 12). The Ministry of Internal Trade was required to regularly supply Turkish-populated areas with flour, legumes, vegetables, and industrial goods (point 20). In order to create a 'healthy working class' among the Turkish population, a decision was made to improve agriculture and to establish industrial enterprises (points 21 and 22).

Thanks to these decisions, the construction of kindergartens, schools, hospitals, and maternity wards began. Courses on domestic culture were organised, and the population was educated in medical knowledge. Atheism and equality between men and women were preached, which in most cases was met with incomprehension among the conservative Turkish society. Nevertheless, all of these activities raised the standard of living of the Turkish population (Маринова, 2000: 105).

After Joseph Stalin's death in 1953, restrictions were placed on the cultural privileges of the Turkish minority. This policy was continued by the next long-time Soviet party leader, Nikita Khrushchov (1956-1964), who promoted the idea of bringing nationalities closer together until they gradually merged into a common 'Soviet nation' with Russian as its language. Thus, after the April Plenum of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party in 1956, a new trend was imposed in the state's minority policy, namely, a rejection of the course of cultural development of minorities to eliminate differences among ethnocultural communities. The new policy towards the integration of the Turkish population was expressed in the restriction of its linguistic and cultural rights and its assimilation into Bulgarian society. From 1958, Turkish and Bulgarian schools began to gradually merge, teaching was conducted in Bulgarian, and the study of the mother tongue became a separate subject. Pressure grew against cultural and lifestyle characteristics that functioned as ethno-religious markers, and atheistic propaganda intensified (Стоянов, 2021: 153).

Documentary evidence of the State Turkish Theatre – Haskovo

In the early 1950s, modernisation, mass literacy campaigns, electrification, infrastructure development, community centres, libraries, hospitals, and educational institutions affected all strata of Bulgarian society and were perceived as a positive step toward improving the standard of living of the Turkish population. In the context of these measures, the first state Turkish theatres were established in 1952-1953. However, their existence could also be seen as one of the mechanisms for creating a new secular elite in the largest minority community, which would be linked to the ruling party, whose goal was to promote the communist ideology and the cultural changes resulting from it among the densely populated Turkish local communities.

However, local implementation of these intentions encountered unforeseen factors. A careful reading of the archival materials from the meetings of the Primary Party Organisation at the theatre in Haskovo revealed several problems related to discipline and the inability of party activists to

break through among the cast and attract followers who would carry out the Party's orders. This assertion was supported by the fact that between 1956 and 1959, there were almost no new members joining the Primary Party Organisation, and only five people were enrolled in the Dimitrov Union of People's Youth. The numerous cases of aggressive behaviour described, as well as the failure of some actors to attend rehearsals and even performances, were also impressive. The minutes were full of criticism, reprimands, and decisions on punishments, which deserve further study, so I will not dwell on them in this text.

Given the lack of systematic information in the scientific community regarding the activities and functioning of state Turkish theatres, I consider it important to describe the data that can be extracted from archival sources and periodicals concerning the earliest period of their creation. The following lines are an attempt to reconstruct the activities of the Haskovo State Turkish Theatre, its cast and repertoire used, as well as the locations where the performances were staged. The detailed listing of names from the theatre's cast is dictated by my conviction that each participant is an important part of the history of these cultural institutions.

Ideological activities

The primary party organisation at the theatre was established in 1956 and consisted of six members at the time of its creation. These were: Habil Ademov Mümünov (party secretary), Ahmed Aydınov, Bogdan Bekyarov, Hazord Kevork, Lyatif Raşidov, and Kadriye Lyatifova. Every month, organisational meetings were held to discuss various issues related to the theatre's activities, quarterly plans were drawn up related to the organisation's activities, and propaganda groups whose task was to attract more members and to educate the artists in the principles of Marxist-Leninist ideology were formed. In the draft resolution of the annual reporting and election meeting of the Primary Party Organisation of November 17, 1956, we read:

> The PPO at the Turkish People's Theatre stands united and actively participates in the decisions of the Sixth Congress and the April Plenum of the Bulgarian Communist Party to raise the cultural level of the working people, eliminate religious remnants among the Turkish population, and eliminate the cult of personality.

Further on, in points 8 and 9 of the same document, activities for public discussion of the performances were set out, as well as the obligation of the communists from the PPO 'to actively participate and conduct explanatory work on the party's programme and tasks so that the party organisation could

select suitable candidates for admission as party members' (ДА-Хасково, Ф. 824, оп.1, а.е. 1: 1–2). Among the members of the PPO, responsibilities were distributed through so-called additional party assignments, which were divided as follows: Hazaros Kevorkyan was the chair of the trade union committee; Kadriye Lyatifova was an agitator and was responsible for the collective reading of newspapers and magazines among women; Bogdan Bekyarov assisted the trade union organisation; Lyatif Raşidov helped organise the Dimitrov Union of People's Youth (DUPY); Ahmed Aydınov was appointed assistant as a party secretary (ДА-Хасково, Ф. 12, оп.2, а.е. 244: 71–72). The members of the Dimitrov Union of People's Youth (DUPY) were: Hatice Yunuzova, Sali Mümünov, Nazmiye Üsrefova, Sevinç Aptulova, and Ulviye Ahmedova. Control over the work of the DUPY was exercised by Idiris Musov.

Lectures were organised for theatre employees. Once a week, they gathered to read books and articles, which they then discussed (ДА-Хасково, Ф. 12, оп. 2, а.е. 244: 77). The minutes of the organisation's meetings showed that in 1957, a study group was set up to study the party's constitution, with a total of 13 people participating. The party organisation held eight open meetings, at which reports were presented on the role of the masses in history, the cult of personality, the moral image of the people's artist, labour discipline, etc. Also, due to criticism from the population about the Turkish dialect in which the performances were staged, it became clear that the majority of the troupe had not even completed primary education, and only a small proportion of the actors had secondary education. Therefore, measures were taken to improve literacy and provide qualification courses for the artists (ДА-Хасково, Ф. 12, оп. 2, а.е. 244: 89–99). These courses were led by Mustafa Aliev.

Along with the performances, before the shows, a radio system was set up in the visited towns, through which the audience was informed about the latest news related to the achievements of the people's government (ДА-Хасково, Ф. 824, оп. 1, а.е. 1: 16).

Theatre composition and stage repertoire

The written sources studied so far lack data on the acting and stage cast of the Haskovo theatre. The names of the artists were mentioned in the context of the activities and issues discussed at the meetings. The theatre consisted of three departments: drama, dance, and music. The director of the institution from 1955 to 1957 was Ahmed Mehmedov Babişev, and from 1958 to 1959 it was Apturahman Ahmedov. The theatre's director was Mustafa Aliev, while Ibrahim Ahmedov, Selim Üseyinov, and Hazaros Kevork were responsible for the dance troupe. Ahmed Üsmenov was the head of the choir, and Habil

Ademov was the head of the drama troupe. The soloists were Kadriye Lyatifova, Mustafa Behov, and Ulviye Ahmedova, while Nezahat Alieva, Lyatif Raşidov, and Habil Ademov were members of the drama troupe. Ahmed Aydınov was a stage worker and was also responsible for lighting (ДА-Хасково, Ф. 12, оп. 2, а.е. 244: 89–99).

Regardless of their assigned roles, artists often participated in other activities as well. For example, Kadriye Lyatifova not only sang and danced but also took on roles in dramatic productions. Lyatif Raşidov, in addition to being an actor, was also a dancer. Undoubtedly, the most famous member of the theatre was Kadriye Lyatifova, who was awarded first prize at the First National Folk Song Review in 1955 for her performance of the song 'My Alish's Eyebrows Are Black' ('Aliş'imin kaşları kare'). According to Sevinç Aptulova's recollections, shared with the '24 Hours' newspaper, the arrangement of Kadriye's songs was done by her father, Aptula Musov, who was a well-known musician and, during the years when the theatre was founded, worked at the Turkish community centre in Haskovo, where the state Turkish theatre was located since 1952 (Станев и Грудев, 2010).

Various records mentioned other names, but it is unclear what role these people played in the theatre. They are: Mustafa Kerimov, Sali Mümünov, Enver Rizov, Selim Üseyinov, Mübera Mehmedova, Sabri Izzetov, Mustafa Yunuzov, Elmaz Alieva, Habil Ahmedov, Muhidin Hüseyinov, Delcho Panev, Mustafa Demirov, Muhidin Halilov, Ibrahim Behov, Vasviye Behova, Osman Osmanov, Hatice Dazdanova, and Fahriye Üseyinova.

Concerning the repertoire, a publication in the 'Rodopska Borba' newspaper on February 23, 1952, made it clear that the Turkish theatre team was having difficulty finding suitable plays in Turkish. According to the report of the theatre director Ahmed Mehmedov Babişev, presented to the theatre's party organisation on July 28, 1956, the issue of finding a repertoire was one of the main problems of the theatre. In addition to this problem, his words revealed other interesting information, namely that the theatre has been in existence for five years, that it was composed of different nationalities, that a meeting of the three theatres in Sofia was coming up soon, and that such a meeting was already held in 1955 in Kolarovgrad (ДА-Хасково, Ф. 824, оп. 1, а.е. 1: 14–15).

Plays were performed on stage in both Turkish and Bulgarian, with the repertoire being agreed in advance with the Turkish department of the District Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party. Accordingly, in settlements with a predominantly Turkish population, performances were held in Turkish, and in front of a Bulgarian audience, they were held in Bulgarian. To facilitate the work of dance leaders, they were sent to choreography courses in Sofia,

and to search for old Turkish folk dances, they were sent to areas with Turkish populations throughout the country (ДА-Хасково, Ф. 12, оп. 2, а.е. 244: 94–95). Various references also mention plays performed in Turkish. These are 'The White Bird', 'The Beggars of Samarkand', and 'The Tricks of Maysera'. These plays also included dances – 'Çifte telli' and 'Leblebeci' (defined as an ancient Turkish dance), Bulgarian Thracian horo, Russian gypsy dance, Indian dance, Azerbaijani dance, and the dance of the wax maker.

The list of solo songs sang during the performances not only showed the repertoire used but also provided information about the soloists in the troupe. These included Kadriye Lyatifova with the 'My Saz'[6] song ('Telli sazım'); Mustafa Bekov with the 'In Izmir' song ('İzmirin içinde') and Habil Ademov with the 'I Spread Hazelnuts on the Threshing Floor' song ('Fındık serdim harmana'). In addition to solo songs, choral songs were also performed at the State Theatre. It is impressive that the repertoire included a selection of songs in different genres, including Turkish, Bulgarian, and Russian songs. These were the songs 'I planted savoury and it branched out' ('Feslyan ektim dallandı'); 'I picked a bunch of grapes from the vine' ('Asmadan üzüm aldım'), 'Cheryomuha' (Russian folk song), the 'Give me, mother' Rhodope folk song, and the 'Köroğlu'[7] Turkish revolutionary song.

In addition to songs and dances, the repertoire of the Haskovo State Turkish Theatre also included humorous monologues: 'My Daughter-in-Law' (Nezahat Alieva), 'Instead of a Name, Better Let a Person's Soul Come Out' (Lyatif Raşidov), 'Murmur' (Habil Ademov).

The performances were often accompanied by film screenings, in which the audience learned about the international situation, the decisions of the Bulgarian Communist Party, or the lives of prominent party members.

The minutes also mentioned the towns where the theatre performed. In 1957, for example, 160 performances were staged, 133 of which were in the Haskovo region and the remaining 27 in the Plovdiv and Stara Zagora districts. 14 free performances were also staged at fairs and youth gatherings (ДА-Хасково, Ф. 12, оп. 2, а.е. 244: 89–99). In the reports describing how the performances went, it was striking that the troupe often helped the local population with harvesting agricultural produce, husking corn, planting, digging, and stringing tobacco, etc.

[6] Saz is a stringed musical instrument similar to the tambourine.

[7] Köroğlu – an epic hero who fights against violence and injustice. His life and exploits are celebrated in numerous songs in the culture of almost all Turkic-speaking peoples. It is assumed that he was a real person who lived in the 17th century (Sümer Albayrak, 2002: 268–270). There are a number of studies on his personality. Given the assumptions that he has Azerbaijani ancestry, it is likely that the song came as a result of cultural exchange between Bulgaria and Azerbaijan.

Probably in 1959, the theatre moved to Momchilgrad for a brief period. At this stage, no written sources have been found that provide information about this process. The last available record related to the state Turkish theatre in Haskovo was dated August 10, 1959. It described the 'inspection-audit of the former party organisation at the State Turkish Theatre' (ДА-Хасково, Ф. 824Б, оп. 1, а.е. 2). On August 1, 1960, the theatre moved to Kardzhali, where it was renamed the State Theatre.

Despite the incomplete information about the cast, the work on preparing the repertoire, the repertoire itself, and the activities related to the staging of performances, the information found provided a clearer picture and supplemented the knowledge about the processes and conditions in which the state Turkish theatres operated in the period 1952-1959.

Conclusion

The study of Turkish theatres in Bulgaria in the early 1950s is a poorly researched topic that could contribute to a deeper scientific understanding of both the history of the theatre institution and the policies pursued toward the Turkish minority. Still, not enough attention is paid to their activities, which are important for the cultural development of local communities. There are generations of actors, dancers, singers, instrumentalists, playwrights, directors, and composers about whom little or no information is available, as if they had never been part of Bulgaria's cultural landscape. This is also the main limitation of the present study, which makes it difficult to reconstruct comprehensive data on Turkish theatres and their role in the life of local communities.

In the case of the Haskovo State Turkish Theatre from the 1950s, written and oral data are also scarce. Being in the initial stage of research on the data analysed so far, several conclusions can be drawn. A well-structured organisation was created, including drama, dance, and music departments, with the corresponding party organisation. Some Turkish theatre performers and activists were recruited, and most likely people from the community who did not have the necessary qualifications, including education and a good command of the Turkish language, which caused discontent among the audience. Courses were organised to improve the training of the artists. The theatre in Haskovo is very active, with numerous performances in various towns in southern Bulgaria, which means that their purpose is to reach and influence the Turkish community not only locally but also regionally. Whether the communist regime succeeded in creating its 'own' ideological tool through which to form a new cultural elite and influence the integration of local Turkish communities is difficult to say with certainty due to the scarcity of

source material. It cannot be categorically stated whether the new secular 'leaders' displaced the religious ones, as their activities and influence most likely occurred in parallel. At this early stage of the research, I would conclude that the creation of this cultural and social institution directs the attention of local Turkish communities to language and culture, which leads to the affirmation of Turkish orientation in their self-awareness of ethnic belonging. In other words, the language does not replace, as planned, but is transformed by the community into another basic tool for affirming Turkish identity. This unexpected result also led to the short life of state Turkish theatres, as well as to the implementation of a new approach to the integration of the Turkish minority through total forced assimilation.

Acknowledgements: The research is conducted within the project *Contemporary Bulgarian Identity – National and European Dimensions* (КП-06-Н50/6 – 30.11.2020) financed by the Bulgarian National Science Fund of the Ministry of Education and Science.

References:

Altaç, E. (2024) Bulgaristan'da Dünden Bugüne Türk Teatrosu. *Türkoloji ve Sosyo-Kültürel Araştırmalar Dergisi* 1(1): 60–76.

BTA (1953) Türkiye göçmenlerin ağır durumu. *Rodopa mücadelesi* 51(126), 1 July.

Buttanrı, M. (2010) Bulgaristan Türkleri arasında tiyatro faaliyetleri. *Motif Akademi Halkbilimi Dergisi* 3(6): 136–162.

Eminov, A. (2002) The Turks. In: H. Cüzel, C. Oğuz, and O. Karatay (eds). *The Turkish World*. Vol. 6. Ankara: Yeni Türkiye, pp. 584-591.

Göksu, S. and Timms, Ed. (1999) *Romantic Communist: The Life and Work of Nazım Hikmet*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Koynof, N. (1952) Mustafa Subhi cemiyeti tiyatro grupunun temsili. *Rodopa mücadelesi* 390(26), 26 January.

Rodopa mücadelesi (1954) Türkiye „cennetinde". *Rodopa mücadelesi* 24(198), 27 March.

Sümer, F. and Albayrak N. (2002) Köroğlu. Balkanlar'dan Doğu Türkistan'a, Güneybatı Anadolu'dan Sibirya'ya kadar uzanan Türk dünyasında hikayeleri anlatılan ve okunan ta rihi şahsiyet. *TDV Islam Anseklopedisi* (26): 268–270.

Şukrieva M. and Kırcalı, B. (2022) Açılışından Kapanışına Kadar Bulgaristan Türklerinin Önemli Kültür Müesseselerinden Şumnu Devlet Türk Estrat Tiyatrosu. *XVIII. Türk Tarih Kongresi Bildiriler Kitabı* (XII): 321–348.

Баева, И. и Калинова, Е. (2006) *Българските преходи 1939–2005*. София: Парадигма.

Бюксеншютц, У. (2000) *Малцинствената политика в България. Политиката на БКП към евреи, роми, помаци и турци (1944–1989)*. София: Международен център за изследване на малцинствата и културните взаимодействия.

ДА-Хасково (Държавен архив – Хасково), Ф. 12, оп. 2, а.е. 244. Градски комитет на БКП Хасково. Отдел „Партийни профсъюзни и младежки организации". Протоколи от проведени заседания на бюрото и събранията на организациите, изпратени в комитета за сведение от ППО при театъра. Турски естраден театър.

ДА-Хасково (Държавен архив – Хасково), Ф. 824, оп. 1, а.е. 1. Окръжен партиен архив Хасково. Първична партийна организация при Държавен турски театър – Хасково, Първична партийна организация при Държавен турски театър Хасково.

ДА-Хасково (Държавен архив – Хасково), Ф. 824Б, оп. 1, а.е. 2:1. Протоколи от проведени общи събрания на организацията и материали от годишното отчетно събрание за 1959 г.

ДА-Шумен (Държавен архив – Шумен), Ф. 623, оп.1, а.е. 5. План за юбилейно честване на театъра за 10-годишнината му, справки на лица, които ще бъдат поканени на тържествения конгрес и доклад за 10-годишнината дейност на театъра.

Димитрова, Б. (1952) *Назъм Хикмет в България. Пътепис*. София: Български писател.

Държавен вестник (1926) *Конвенция за установяване между България и Турция*, XLVIII, бр. 110 от 17.08.1926 г.

Еролова, Й. (2017) Между писмената и устната история: преселването на турците от България към Турция през 1950 до 1951 г. *Българска етнология* (2): 204–227.

Зафер, З. (2020) Политически и научни репресии – случаят Хайрие Мемова-Сюлейманова. *Balkanistic forum* (3): 10–56.

Калинова, Е. (2022) България и Турция от двете страни на „Желязната завеса" – края на 40-те – края на 50-те години. В: *Дриновски сборник*. Том XV. София-Харков: Българска академия на науките – Харкивски национален университет „В. Н. Каразин", 180-189.

Кръстева, М. (2021) Участието на Кимон Георгиев в изграждането на първата българска пропагандна институция – Дирекция за обществена обнова. В: Парижкова, Л. (съст). *Обществото на знанието и хуманизмът на XXI век. Сборник с научни доклади от XIX национална научна конференция с международно участие, 1 ноември 2021 г.* София: Академично издателство „За буквите – О писменехъ" на УНИБИТ.

Маринова, М. (2000) Политика за приобщаване на турското население на България през управлението на първото правителство на Вълко Червенков (1950–1954 г.). *Епохи* 8 (3): 95–109.

Мерджанова, И. (2016) [2013]. *Мюсюлманските общности на Балканите. Посткомунистически трансформация.* София: Критика и Хуманизъм.

Попгеоргиев, К. (1952) Художествената самодейност в Кърджалийска околия. *Родопска борба,* 394, 23 февруари.

Станев, Н. и Грудев, Н. (2010) Кадрие Лятифова учела песни от грамофонни плочи. *24 часа,* 22 Януари. Достъпно на: https://www.24chasa.bg/spravochnik/article/352562 (accessed 2 June 2024).

Стенографски дневник (1954) *Стенографски дневник на Второ заседание на Второ народно събрание,* 15 януари. Достъпно на: https://web.archive.org/web/

20160304191028/http:/www.parliament.bg/pub/StenD/2013012401301615011954_2.pdf

Стоянов, В. (1998) *Турското население в България между полюсите на етническата политика.* София: Лик.

Стоянов, В. (2021) Ислямът при държавите-наследници на Османската империя в контекста на национално малцинствени проблеми и аспекти на сигурността. Пътят на Гърция, България и Босна в търсенето на подходящ модел. В: Стоянов, В. (съст). (2021) *Valeristica Polyhistorica Supplementa: Избрани приноси към гранични области на историята, т. 2. Miscellanea*. София: Институт за исторически изследвания при БАН, 109–216.

Стоянова, П. (2017) *Циганите в годините на социализма. Политика на българската държава към циганското малцинство (1944 – 1989).* София: Парадигма.

Татарлъ, И. (2009) *Проблеми на турската култура в България. Студии, статии, слова.* София: Евразия.

ЦДА (Централен Държавен Архив), Ф.12, 1Б, оп. 6, а.е. 1298: 33–39. Протокол № А 103 на Полютбюро на ЦК от 26.04.1951 г. за подобряване работата на Партията сред турското население.

Behrin Shopova, PhD, is an Assistant Professor at the Balkan Ethnology Department at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with the Ethnographic Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. She graduated with an MA in Music Pedagogy from the Academy of Music, Dance, and Fine Arts Plovdiv in 2006. In 2018, she obtained a PhD in Musicology, Music and Dance Art from IEFSEM – BAS. She explores the local functioning of the traditional music and folklore culture of Sunni Turks in Bulgaria – processes of decay and the contemporary processes of folk culture transformation. In addition to ethnomusicological specialisation, her research focuses on Muslim communities by examining religious and traditional rituals and interdisciplinary cognitive fields, such as anthropology, migrations, and music cultures, Islamic art, cultural identity, etc.

E-mail: behrin.shopova@iefem.bas.bg

'The Revival Process' and the Reinstatement of Birth Names of Muslims in Bulgaria

Plamena Stoyanova

Abstract: A person's name is a crucial aspect of their identity. It is like a specific symbol that guides each man and woman through life; it is intimate and irreplaceable. However, history shows that there have been instances where personal names have been forcibly changed. This paper will examine the consequences of the forcible renaming of Muslims in socialist Bulgaria. The Communist Party called this act the 'Revival process', and officially, it affected the biggest Muslim ethnicity in the country – the Turks, but also Bulgarian Muslims, Muslim Roma, and Tatars. After the collapse of the socialist system in 1989, individuals affected by this government policy were granted the right to reclaim their original names. Many quickly took advantage of this opportunity, while others decided not to. Some even emigrated to Turkey and reclaimed their birth names in their new Turkish passports while retaining their valid Bulgarian passports with their Bulgarian names. This paper will provide some details about the history of the renamings and examine the reasons behind the individual decisions to retain or reject the forcibly changed name, as well as explore how the renaming affected the fate of those involved.
Keywords: Muslims, renaming, names, 'Revival process', socialist Bulgaria

Introduction

It has been almost 40 years since the so-called 'Revival process' in the mid-1980s. This process involved the forced renaming of the Turkish population in Bulgaria, which occurred during the years of socialism (1944-1989). The renaming of the largest Muslim minority in the country, however, was preceded by the renaming of other smaller Muslim communities in Bulgaria, namely the Bulgarian Muslims known also as Pomaks, whose names were changed in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the Roma Muslims, who were renamed in both the early 1960s and early 1980s. Although the renaming of different Muslim communities took place in different periods and even in different decades, viewed in retrospect, the acts seem consistent and logical as a state policy affecting all Muslims in the country. In the beginning, this policy was pushed through to the smallest Muslim communities, the Pomaks, then it was the turn of the Muslim Roma, and finally the Turkish minority itself. The aim was to influence the identity of Muslims in Bulgaria by eliminating all visible signs of the Muslim religion, including the way they dress, their customs, names, and even explanations of origin. These

changes were drastic and were met with violence and protests. They had an impact not only on the fate of Muslims in Bulgaria but also on the broader political development of the socialist state, which faced significant international isolation and internal political instability. This will eventually be pointed to as one of the reasons for the collapse of the socialist system in Bulgaria in the autumn of 1989. Only a month after the regime change, on December 29, 1989, at an extraordinary plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Bulgaria, it was decided that the birth names of Muslims in Bulgaria should be restored. As expected, many affected individuals quickly took advantage of this decision. However, surprisingly, not everyone chose to do so, and many others postponed their decision. What could be the reasons for such behaviour? This is one of the questions explored in the present paper, in the context of the Bulgarian state's policy of assimilation, focusing on the consequences of both forced renaming and the later option for individuals to reclaim their original names. The text discusses as well the divisions and debates among Muslim communities in Bulgaria and within the victims' social and familial circles. It examines the considerations for returning to the original name or keeping the adopted one and addresses how this collective trauma has impacted the lives of the victims. The primary sources for this paper include published archival documents, accounts of the 'Revival process', archival materials, published studies on renaming and displacement, and policies of socialist Bulgaria. Additionally, interviews were conducted with men and women from Turkish Muslim, Turkish Christian, Bulgarian Muslim, Bulgarian Christian, Roma Muslim, and Roma Christian backgrounds. Most participants were in their 40s, 50s, and 60s, and they provided valuable insights based on their clear recollection of past events and their interpretation of past and present circumstances.

Why this topic?

In 2024, I attended an online presentation of the website 'Visual Achievement of Assimilation: Forced Assimilation among Pomaks and Turks in Bulgaria under Socialism (1945-1989)' (Визуален архив на Асимилацията, 1945-1989). This website contains an electronic archive of professional and family photographs taken during the forced renaming events and the subsequent exodus of nearly 360,000 Muslims from Bulgaria to Turkey in 1989. The presentation sparked a meaningful discussion featuring survivors, researchers, and descendants of Muslims from Bulgaria. It was striking to realise that even today, renaming remains a significant administrative challenge for many individuals, rather

than just a painful memory of the past. For instance, consider the challenges that arise when updating legal documents, ensuring that a person with two registered names is the same person, addressing administrative errors that could result in long-standing tax obligations being attributed to a person's former name, and other similar issues. These points in the discussion sparked my curiosity about the administrative aspect of the issue. That is how I decided to explore the origins of the frequently mentioned problems and to answer the question of why so many individuals are forced to revisit these emotionally challenging times. Conducting interviews and gathering information made evident the profound human aspect of the significant personal decisions made by some individuals, and this subsequently gained the focus of the research.

Publications on the policies of socialist Bulgaria towards minorities

In 2023, the conference titled 'The Name, This Is My Face: 50 Years of the Kornik Protests' took place in the town of Gotse Delchev. The conference featured papers discussing the resistance to the renaming of Bulgarian Muslims in the village of Kornitsa and the surrounding area, which were later compiled into a thematic collection (Зафер, 2023) and presented in 2024. Additionally, a biographical book on the Turkologist Mefkyure Mollova (Зафер и Муратова, 2022; Зафер, 2023) was officially introduced. This is just a glimpse of the numerous memoirs, documents, and studies published on the expulsion of Muslims from Bulgaria, as well as renaming and assimilation policies, which continue to be a subject of extensive research and are likely to remain relevant.

In historical science, it is believed that for historical analysis to be objective, at least 50 years must have passed since the events being studied. However, the change of names among Muslims in Bulgaria is significant and painful, which has led to relatively early publications on the topic. One of the first studies was by Iv. Georgieva, who is writing about the mass expulsion of Turks in 1989, named 'the great excursion' (Георгиева, 1993). A few years later, D. Dimitrova (Димитрова, 1998), examined the Turkish press's reaction to the issue of renaming and expulsions in Bulgaria. Another notable study was by V. Stoyanov (Стоянов, 1998), who discussed the policies towards the Turkish population during the socialist era. Publications on violence against Turks and its consequences in the country were written by E. Kalinova and I. Baeva (Baeva, 2010; Калинова, 2004; Калинова и Баева, 2010; Баева, 2011). M. Gruev made an in-depth study about the Bulgarian Muslims and the political regime in Bulgaria (Груев, 2003). In 2007, together with Al. Kalionski, they

expanded the topic by addressing all Muslim communities in the country involved in the 'Revival process' (Груев и Кальонски, 2008). A few years later, a more extensive research team conducted a major study on the violence of the communist regime in Pirin Macedonia (Груев, Тепавичаров и Василева-Груева, 2011). In a relatively short but valuable study, U. Büchsenschütz compiled the central policies towards various minorities during the socialist years (Бюксеншютц, 2000). Other authors, such as A. Pashova, have focused on the role of the Roma population in the ethnic policy of socialist Bulgaria (Пашова, 2008, 2012). These studies are extremely important for providing a complete picture of communist policies, as the Muslim Roma are a significant part of the country's Muslim community. Studies concerning the expulsions of the Muslim population from Bulgaria are also quite useful, as they are often related to the pressures exerted by the Bulgarian authorities. There are publications by Y. Erolova that examine the expulsions of Turks in the 1950s (Еролова, 2017), as well as a monograph by M. Maeva that deals with the following period and the identity of the migrants in Turkey (Маева, 2006). Additionally, there are articles and published documents on the period of protests against renaming and the events surrounding the political changes by M. Ivanov (Иванов, 2013), a former advisor to the first democratically elected president of Bulgaria, Zhelyo Zhelev. R. Avramov conducted detailed research on the economic reflection of the 'Revival process' (Аврамов, 2016). The published state archival documents and memoirs on the subject are essential. Some archives from this period were destroyed under mysterious circumstances in the early 1990s, but others have been successfully preserved, and many have been published today. Among them are the two volumes of the Archives of the State Security Files on the 'Revival Process' (КРДОПБГДСРСБНА Т. 1, 2013; Т. 2, 2013), State Security and Minorities (КРДОПБГДСРСБНА, 2015), and Veselin Angelov's volumes of documents (Ангелов, 2010; 2011).

This brief overview aims to convey the significance of the subject, research on which has thus far focused on the act of renaming itself, the ensuing resistance, the expulsions, and the subsequent collapse of the communist regime. Existing research lacks one aspect, namely, the fate of these changed names. Political power in Bulgaria has been carrying out violence that is confusing the lives of many people. However, what happens from here on with the dynamics between the victims and those individuals whose names have been retained, changed, or are still causing problems is unclear. One of the aims of this study is to shed light on this very point.

Background of the problem

It's essential to provide some background context to understand the current issue better. Therefore, I will now delve into the reasons behind the renaming of Muslims in Bulgaria. What are the government's motives for interfering with such a private aspect of a person's identity as their name? Is this an isolated incident or part of a more comprehensive state policy?

Historical records indicate that the idea of forcible renaming did not originate from the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP). Similar situations occurred before World War II. One of the most notable examples is the forced conversions into Christianity of Muslim Bulgarians during the Balkan Wars (1912-1913). At that time, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, with the official approval of the government and Prime Minister Iv. Geshev initiated the renaming of Bulgarian Muslims and their conversion to Christianity (Стоянова, 2006). This action was later revoked after Bulgaria's loss in the Inter-Union War (1913-1914), but the impact of the act persisted, and after the First World War, the patriotic organisation 'Rodina' influenced the renaming of some more Bulgarian Muslims (Груев и Кальонски, 2008).

In September 1944, a coalition government led by the Bulgarian Workers' Party (communist), BWP (c),[1] took power in Bulgaria. It granted several previously restricted freedoms, including the establishment of cultural, educational, and ethnic organisations. The new rulers attempted to attract new supporters by marking a contrast with previous 'fascist governments'. The BWP (c) was particularly keen on creating ethnic organisations, even among less homogeneous minorities such as the Roma.[2] They used dedicated party members of Gypsy origin, such as Shakir Pashov, to help set up Gypsy organisations in different parts of the country (Стоянова, 2017). This approach led to the election of the first deputy from a Gypsy background to the Bulgarian parliament in 1946. Additionally, a Gypsy theatre, a Gypsy organisation, and a Gypsy newspaper were established (Ковачева, Марушиакова и Попов, 2022: 295–299). Similar efforts were observed with other ethnic minorities such as Jews, Armenians, Turks, etc. However, by the end of the 1940s, the favourable period for ethnic minorities had ended as Bulgaria fell into the so-called Eastern bloc, heavily influenced by the Soviet Union. On the other side of the 'Iron Curtain', in the Western bloc, was neighbouring Turkey,

[1] In 1948, the party was named the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP).

[2] In the archive documents from the socialist times and among most of the Roma minority during the period 1844-1989, the name 'Gypsies' is more common. Roma became more popular after the political changes in 1989. That is why in the present paper both 'Roma' and 'Gypsies' will be used.

which traditionally had a strong influence on Bulgaria's nearly one million Muslim population. During the political bloc confrontation, Bulgaria's rulers perceived this influence from a neighbouring and, at that time, hostile state as a threat to national security. In this situation in 1948, Turkey requested that Bulgaria release 'our brothers enslaved by the communists' (Калинова, 2004: 56), which led to a massive psychosis for emigration among the Turks. Initially, Bulgarian authorities opposed their wish to leave the country. However, later, they not only allowed but also facilitated the process for Turks, as well as for other Muslims. The emigration to Turkey led to increased scrutiny of Muslims without Turkish origin, primarily due to their Turkification. Consequently, all independent cultural structures of the Gypsy and later of all other minorities were closed, as they were about to be fully integrated into the socialist way of life (Генов, Таиров и Маринов, 1968).

In 1962, Document A No. 101 was issued by the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the BCP (ЦДА, Ф.1Б, 15, a.e. 765: 3), which led to a significant shift in the state's policy towards Bulgarian Muslims. This document officially gave a negative assessment of the Turkification of Gypsy, Tatars, and Pomaks, highlighting key events of the decade and the implementation of the assimilation policies aimed at the country's Muslim minorities (Груев и Кальонски, 2008; Марушиакова и Попов, 2007: 89–90). Since the philosophy of communist propaganda favoured atheism, the authorities did not try to convert the Muslims to Christianity, but to the new socialist way of life. Due to the atheistic propaganda of communism, the authorities did not attempt to convert Muslims to Christianity but instead encouraged adherence to a new socialist way of life. This process included policies with both positive measures, such as providing accessible and compulsory education for all ethnic groups in the country, and coercive measures, including the banning of traditional customs and headscarves associated with the Muslim religion already started in the 1950s, and the replacement of Turkish-Arabic names with Bulgarian ones between 1960 and 1985.

The renaming process started in the early 1960s, when Roma and Muslim Bulgarians were so-called 'voluntarily' renamed (Колев, 2010: 153). However, due to resistance, the action was cancelled, and some of the victims were allowed to revert to their original names. Compulsory renaming occurred again from 1970 to 1974 for Muslim Bulgarians, from 1981 to 1984 for Muslim Roma, and in late 1984 and 1985 for ethnic Turks. The last renaming was carried out in complete secrecy, following the entry of military units into areas of the country where a more considerable Turkish minority was concentrated, such as the towns of Targovishte, Omurtag, Razgrad, and Kardzhali. Approximately 800,000 ethnic Muslims were given new Bulgarian names during this period.

The renaming was followed by resistance, which was harshly suppressed, leading to arrests, extraditions to Turkey, and even deaths. The situation remained under control until the May protests in 1989, which, along with ecological demonstrations in the city of Ruse, led to significant unrest against the socialist system. On May 29, 1989, in response to growing discontent, the head of state, Todor Zhivkov, made a televised and radio address. The main message was that Turkey should open its border to Bulgarian citizens wishing to emigrate. As a result, by August 21, 1989, nearly 360,000 Bulgarian citizens, mostly of Turkish origin, were displaced. On November 10, 1989, the communist regime fell. After further protests, on December 29, as already mentioned above, the extraordinary plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party decided to restore the birth names of all Muslims.

The renaming

My name is Nihal

In the mid-1960s, a respondent in my study was born in a family of a Bulgarian Muslim from Zlatograd and a Turkish woman from Kardzhali. Her story illustrates how changing one's name can significantly impact the individual's fate, leaving her traumatised by the multiple names she has been given. I have her permission to share her story without anonymity. Nihal Yozergan was born in 1966 during the period of the 'voluntary' renaming of Bulgarian Muslims. Her highly educated parents, both from devout Muslim families, faced disapproval due to their mixed marriage. The fact that they were of different ethnicities became a significant issue, leading both families to distance themselves from the relationship. Although the respondent's father's family was not affected by the renaming in the 1960s, her mother's Turkish family used the threat of such an eventuality as a dire warning to dissuade her from the marriage.

> "Did you know", they used to say to my mother, "that the Pomaks will be forced to convert sooner or later? They /the authorities/ have already done it. And you want your children to have Bulgarian names and to be baptised? You risk losing your Turkish and Muslim identity because of a man who, sooner or later, will be renamed by the Bulgarian Communist Party" (Female, 57, Turkish-Bulgarian, Sofia, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III).

This warning turned out to be an ominous prediction because only 10 years later, in the mid-1970s, Nihal's father, like all other Bulgarian Muslims, was indeed renamed. The concern that the child of this marriage would receive a Bulgarian name also became a reality, as after the father was renamed, there was ongoing pressure for him to rename his daughter.

> "But my daughter is also my wife's daughter", he tries to argue. "I can't make that decision instead of her" (Female, 57, Turkish-Bulgarian, Sofia, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III).

At one point, opposition proved impossible, and *Nihal* eventually took the name *Nihaela* – a name as close to her birth name as possible, referencing the Bulgarian name Michaela. That is how this name was born, as it did not previously exist, but that was not important. *Nihaela* was no longer an Arabic name, and that was the primary goal of the authorities. Born as *Nihal Fehmieva Chureneva*, following the renaming of her father, Nihal's family name has also been changed, and she became *Nihal Filipova Chureneva*. When she was renamed from Nihal to Nihaela, she became *Nihaela Filipova Chureneva,* marking the third variation of her names at the tender age of 10.

In 1985, however, what her Turkish relatives failed to foresee happened: the renaming of the Turks. Nihal was then renamed again, this time as a Turkish woman. The renaming occurred in her absence while studying journalism at Sofia University. One day in early January, she was summoned to the office of the journalism faculty, where she was informed that her name had been changed from Nihaela to Michaela and that she needed to report to the dean's office to sign the necessary papers. That is how she acquired her fourth name, *Michaela Filipova Chureneva*. Soon, she got married and adopted her husband's surname, becoming Michaela Filipova Yozergan – her fifth name. After the political changes in 1989, she seized the opportunity to revert to her birth name and became *Nihal Fakhmieva Yozergan* – her sixth name. Then, she followed her husband to Turkey and acquired a second citizenship, obtaining a Turkish passport that listed her father's Bulgarian name, *Nihal Filipova Yozergan* – her seventh name. The reason she had different names in her Turkish and Bulgarian passports, even after the political changes in 1989, is that she used her birth certificate for the new documents in Bulgaria, where the Turkish name of her father was the one given to him at birth. As for the Turkish documents, she had to use her father's new Bulgarian name, since he never reclaimed his original Muslim name.

As a well-known journalist, Nihal eventually used only her husband's surname, *Yozergan*, to avoid unnecessary confusion. However, due to an administrative error in Bulgaria, she was mistakenly recorded as Yzergan during a routine passport change.

> I am known as Nihal Yozergan everywhere, but my passport lists my name as Yzergan. This can be corrected, but I am tired and indifferent at that specific moment (Female, 57, Turkish-Bulgarian, Sofia, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III).

Due to the specific circumstances in her life, Nihal has had eight different combinations of personal and family names throughout her life. The last one is due to an administrative mistake.

When updating documents regularly, all name changes must be verified to ensure that the different names correspond to the same person. This process can be not only administratively burdensome but also emotionally taxing, as it often brings the person back to a painful time in the past. In cases like Nihal's, the administrative challenges can be substantial, and the emotional impact of multiple name changes can be overwhelming. Furthermore, by birth, Nihal is the child of a mixed marriage and is part of two distinct worlds: her Bulgarian Muslim father's community and her Turkish mother's. She grew up with a different identity compared to the ethnic Bulgarian children, not only because of her mixed ethnic background but also because of her Muslim religion. When she first changed her name from Nihal to Nihaela, she lived in the predominantly Turkish town of Kardzhali. Changing her name led to conflicts among the children, as some of her friends openly called her 'Melez'[3], rejecting her Bulgarian origin, prompting the name change. She ended up beating the boy who called her that, but the 'djinn had already escaped the lamp', and other children also started using this offensive nickname.

> And I'll never forget the moment my dad said something that became a motto in my life: "Look, my girl, you have two choices. You can either let this bring you down and crush your self-esteem, or strive to be the best among all. You must be ten times better than everyone else, Turks, Bulgarians, and Pomaks, to prove yourself, establish your worth, build your self-esteem, and be accepted. They will accept you only when you are better, and it won't matter if you are Turkish, Pomak, or Bulgarian."
> I asked him, "Dad, who am I?" He said, "You are a child born out of the love of your mother and father. You have always been loved, and you will always be loved. Just because someone decided to change your name forcibly doesn't change who you are."
> I took his words to heart. … That's why I applied for journalism and got accepted. I ranked fifth in the whole country with very high grades. I wrote the best essays in Bulgarian and was proficient in Turkish, English, Bulgarian, and the language of the Bulgarian Muslims. I was also involved in various activities, including reading, playing the piano, dancing, ballet, swimming, and painting (Female, 57, Turkish-Bulgarian, Sofia, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III).

'The Bulgarian Communist Party cannot do this!' and 'This will not happen to us!'

Renaming of ethnic groups such as Roma, Muslim Bulgarians, and Turks occurred amidst a complete information blackout. The mandatory renaming

[3] Offensive meaning half-breed, person of mixed race.

began with the smallest ethnic group, the Muslim Bulgarians, in the 1970s. The expectation was that these renamings would go smoothly for those who were integrated into socialist society, but in reality, many Muslim Bulgarians resisted vigorously. Those who resisted were punished with beatings, harassment, military blockades, and even death. A recently published collection on the dramatic events in Kornitsa sheds light on this dark period in Bulgarian history (Зафер, 2023). The renaming of Muslim Roma in the early 1980s had no record of violent events, leading to the misconception that the process was uneventful. However, in reality, there was resistance there too. It was reasonable for the Turks in Bulgaria, who understood what was happening, to be concerned about the prospect of being the next victims. In the early 1970s, the gradual erosion of their rights under their ethnicity began, with school children being taught only in Bulgarian and allowed to study their mother tongue for only two hours a week. After 1976, even this limited access to their language was taken away (Хаджъ, 2022):

> However, the APC[4] continued to organise events, including cultural festivals, arts and crafts, and Turkish folklore performances. Villages would prepare for these events throughout the year. These performances could also be presented in Turkish, but after 1984, this became impossible. Until then, the newspapers *New Light* and *New Life* were published in both Bulgarian and Turkish. Additionally, Bulgarian radio aired 30-minute programmes in the morning and evening, specifically for the Bulgarian Turks…
>
> During that time, Bulgarian Muslims were regarded as Bulgarians, so their prohibited religion did not have a significant impact. However, there were discussions among Turks about possibly changing their names, similar to what happened with the Pomaks and Gypsies (Female, 50s, Kazalbash, Sofia, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III).

One of the main questions I asked when interviewing ethnic Turks was, 'Didn't you think this would happen to you, too?' Surprisingly, most of the answers I have collected so far were negative. The respondents testified that rumours were circulating in the country, which they had heard from worried friends and relatives. When these rumours subsequently proved to be true, some people were dismayed, while others refused to believe in the prospect of such an outcome until the very last moment.

Here I would like to provide another example of my respondent from Razgrad. She and her parents were highly educated Kazalbash (Alians), or Shia Muslims, who number only a few thousand in Bulgaria. Although of ethnic Turkish origin, they have a reputation for being more tolerant of

[4] Agro-industrial complex.

other ethnicities and religions. During the years of socialism, they were also considered more committed to socialist culture and the Bulgarian way of life. Even when the possibility of renaming among Turks was discussed in friendly circles, many assumed it would not happen to them. They thought it was impossible and refused to believe it, even when the renaming of one of the largest cities with a Turkish population, Kardzhali, began in early January 1985. At that time, the city was blockaded by the army, and despite censorship and an information blackout, stories about what was happening in South Bulgaria reached Razgrad. The hope at that point was that the integrated and educated Turks, or at least the Alians, who were very few in number compared to the Sunni Muslims in the country, would not be harmed. By that time, my respondent's father was the head of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party for Organisational Activities in the Razgrad Region, and he was responsible directly for the Turkish minority in the area. A convinced Communist, Stalinist, and sincere believer in the idea of the Party, he did not assume until the last moment that this would be the course of events.

> "The party will never do such a thing!" – he replies to repeated queries from friends and relatives. "There are no such instructions. It's inconceivable!" (Female, 50s, Kazalbash, Sofia, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III).

But it happened. After the renaming of the Turks in Southern Bulgaria came the time of the settlements with the Turkish population in the north. The person responsible for this, the head of the BCP department in Razgrad – who, as I have already mentioned, was my respondent's father – did not receive instructions until the last moment. He was not informed until the very day of the act, and his family had to change their names as well. Everybody had been renamed. As a man in a leading position in the party at the local level, he was obliged to set a prompt and personal example in this regard, with the clear understanding that any resistance would send the wrong signal to the people and lead to bloodshed. His primary goal was to protect the people. So, he convinced his eldest daughter, who took the news negatively, to go along anyway.

> My father said, "The Party has decided, and we must accept this decision. And there is strong evidence anyway that we are, in fact, descendants of Bulgarians who were forced to accept Islam." But I reacted negatively. My mother, a strong, fully integrated figure in socialist society, wasn't pleased with my reaction. She had a particular attitude towards Turks, especially Sunnis, even though she worked with them. Eventually, she shouted at me, "Oh, you were a great nationalist!" (Female, 50s, Kazalbash, Sofia, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III).

So, the family was renamed, and after the political changes in 1989, only the respondent's father and her sister reverted to their birth names. Her mother did not do so, and the respondent herself, for various reasons, also retained her Bulgarian name. This is just an example of the division that arises from the forcible act within close relatives at that time.

> Many families argued with one another, each having different opinions. Some were favoured by the party, yet they opposed the renaming…Many people expressed one view, but behaved in a contradictory manner at that time (Female, 50s, Kazalbash, Sofia, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III).
>
> Only a few months before the fall of the regime, the division on this topic was evident throughout Bulgarian society as well. This is the time when Bulgarians turned against one another. The same happened with the Turks. At one point, you had to be careful what you said within your own family (Female, 50s, Kazalbash, Sofia, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III).

The road to the fall of the regime

The renaming of the Turks in 1984-1985 was done in conspiracy and under absolute military blockades in many localities. The several assassinations earlier in the period related to disagreement with the renaming of the Pomaks, as well as the consideration of the large Turkish population, nearly 800,000 people, were probably among the reasons for the harsh measures. The government claimed that the name changes were a way of 'returning' names to descendants of ethnic Bulgarians who were forcibly Islamised. Teams of scientists from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and Sofia University have been working to prove this claim (Female, 50s, Turkish, Sofia, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III) or to check the results and the attitude of the renamed (АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1307-III).

The act of renaming caused division within society, pitting not only Turks against Bulgarians but also Turks against Turks, and eventually Muslim Bulgarians against non-Muslim Bulgarians, as well as Christian Bulgarians against Christian Bulgarians. Some Turks did not resist the renaming and believed it would reduce discrimination against them, especially those integrated into the socialist society. On the other hand, many highly educated Turks strongly opposed the name change. These individuals were often arrested, subjected to violence, or deported to Turkey. The authorities feared them the most, as they were seen as potential leaders of the Turkish community, possibly advocating for autonomy within the state. Turkish newspapers were banned (Хаджъ, 2022). It was forbidden to use any name other than one's Bulgarian name, the Turkish language was prohibited, and

even elderly women were treated mercilessly by the authorities for violating these bans, such as when they wanted to buy bread speaking Turkish (Female, 49, Turkish, Plovdiv, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III). Similarly, everything about Roma/Gypsies was banned, and officially, in the 1980s, authorities insisted that there was no Gypsy ethnicity in the country nor a Turkish one. Since the renaming was a shock, a certain lull ensued for four years, and the illusion arose that the government had mastered the situation. In May 1989, however, spontaneous but massive protests by Turks nationwide, known as the 'May Protests', began. These protests were no less dramatic and coincided with a dissident movement of Bulgarian intellectuals, some of whom supported the return of the birth names to the Muslims.

In this heated atmosphere, Todor Zhivkov made a statement on national television, stating that Turks would be the first to receive their international passports, with which they could travel abroad. After that, a mass psychosis for emigration to Turkey began, with whole families abandoning their homes, loading as much luggage as they could onto their cars, and leaving for Turkey. Some researchers call this 'ethnic cleansing' (Kamusella, 2018). The government was taking advantage of the situation to force rebellious Turks out of the country, even though many did not want to leave. People who were not so rebellious were also fired in large numbers and given a deadline to leave the country. Some were being pressured to stay. The situation varied in different regions, but overall, people were fearful and uncertain about what would happen if they remained. They believed that at least in Turkey, people would not be persecuted just for being Turkish. As a result, approximately 360,000 Bulgarian citizens left the country, quickly causing significant economic chaos due to the loss of so many working-age individuals. Those leaving were given passports stamped with a tourist visa. That is why the media called it cynically 'the great excursion'. Despite the high number of departures, tensions were not easing, and eventually, both Turks and Bulgarians started protests for reforms. On November 10, 1989, Todor Zhivkov was removed from power.

Between two names

The forcible removal of this most intimate and personal possession, the birth name, was described as strong emotional trauma by almost all of the respondents I have interviewed so far. Most of the new Bulgarian names were chosen to sound similar to the original ones, but this did not spare confusion and subsequent repercussions on daily life. Here, I will quote again Nihal Yozergan on her experience as a child:

> I had to introduce myself multiple times using different names to people I had known for years, including friends and classmates, and to explain to all of them why I have a different name now (Female, 57, Turkish-Bulgarian, Sofia, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III).

Ten years later, in 1985, another girl of Turkish origin, not from the South, but from Northern Bulgaria, had to go through the same process:

> I had to get reacquainted with all my classmates. Most of them I have known since kindergarten. How should you be introduced to someone whom you already know? I got up and said my new name, as did all the other kids from the villages in the class. It was hard because many kids were getting confused and apologising to me when they used my old name by mistake … And I remember that as a child, I was pretty uncomfortable with all that (Female, 49, Turkish, Plovdiv, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III).

When it comes to renaming children, the situation is always delicate. Some parents tried to present this moment as a game. The same respondent, who was 10 years old at the time, says that after she had chosen a Bulgarian name she liked, it was her parents' turn to do the same. Her father jokingly said that he would take a royal name, Alexander, and then her mother replied that as the wife of a king, she had to take a queen's name, and it would be Victoria. The chosen royal names remain a family joke, used before bedtime when my respondent's parents announced they were 'retiring to their royal chambers' for the night. Despite this funny moment, the timing of the renaming holds heavy memories for the person in question, as her hometown of Omurtag had some of the most severe clashes over name changes. Despite the parents' efforts to shield their children from a challenging situation, they could not hide the drama around them. They also could not protect the children from the harsh realities of life within their childhood social circle. The respondent not only witnessed the blockade of the town but also saw an elderly woman being beaten because she dared to ask to buy bread in Turkish. The memory of her father, a teacher, burning his cherished Turkish books in the backyard of their house and crying leaves a deep impression on her ten-year-old mind:

> The first time I saw my father crying was when it became forbidden to speak Turkish. He decided to burn everything from his extensive library, keeping only the Turkish translations of the Bulgarian classics published by the national *Narodna Prosveta* publishing house. When I started at a new high school, I introduced myself with my new name, as was required. Coming from a highly educated family and my mother always urging me to excel in everything, I spoke very pure Bulgarian. No one even suspected that I was of Turkish descent. When we were finally allowed to reclaim our original names after 1989, many of my classmates were surprised to learn that I was Turkish (Female, 49, Turkish, Plovdiv, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III).

My respondent immediately lost her relationship with her closest friend at the time after regaining her birth name. The latter could neither forgive her for not being Bulgarian nor for hiding that fact from her:

> She told me that she was sorry, but she didn't like the Turks and that our friendly relations could not continue. After saying this, Alina left our desk, but another classmate, Eva, arrived shortly after. She dropped her bag at Alina's place and said, "If you don't mind. It's nice to meet you." And she stayed with me. I think she did it because Alina's act was heartbreaking, and I was shaken and crying. Eva somehow immediately filled that space. It was a great gesture on her part. To this day, she remains one of the closest people in my life, although we live far apart (Female, 49, Turkish, Plovdiv, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III).

Hiding ethnic origin and the previous Turkish name was compulsory by that time, since the authorities were denying the existence of any ethnicities other than Bulgarian in the country, and many people who disagreed with this policy were sent to jail in Belene or expelled from the country. This is just a small example of the confusion children faced after being renamed, and the outcome after being allowed to return to their birth names. At the same time, ethnic Bulgarian children were unaware of these events and often confused when informed about them. Here I would like to mention a memory from a respondent who participated in sports events in the Rhodope Mountains in the summer of 1989, when she was 10 years old:

> I participated in a mountain orienteering competition in the Rhodope Mountains, where I met a girl my age who introduced herself to me using her Bulgarian and Turkish names. She was 5 when her name was changed, and it seemed perfectly natural to her to introduce herself with both names. I recall how overwhelmed I felt at the time by this unusual situation in my eyes (Female, 44, Bulgarian, Sofia, Author's Archive).

The confusion, emotional difficulties, and personal struggles in different relationships are part of the whole picture after 1989. There is even more to consider when it comes to regaining the original names through the required administrative procedures at that time. To begin with, the process is not fast, especially when compared to the initial forced name change in 1985. To do so, one must prove in court that the person with the Bulgarian name is the same individual as the one with the Turkish name. This often requires a birth certificate, which for many people was destroyed by the authorities during the process of renaming. Another option for reverting was to present two witnesses, not relatives of Bulgarian origin, who should provide assurance and confirm the individual's claim. It is commonly believed that the process of reviving the birth name was easier within the first three years after 1990, with a

simplified procedure and without requiring court involvement. However, this information is not accurate. The process has always involved the court, but the procedure was more straightforward during the first three years. Nonetheless, it remains a complex and unpleasant process. The complicated procedures for name reversion have led some of those who were renamed to avoid dealing with the issue altogether. This is especially true for those who emigrated in 1989 and were issued Turkish passports with their original Turkish-Arabic names without any problem. Many of them retained their Bulgarian passports and names, which they used when travelling to Bulgaria and Europe. As one expatriate living in Tekirdag said:

> I didn't change my name in Bulgaria because I must go through a Bulgarian court! How could they change our names overnight back then, and now want us to prove that we are who we say we are? It should be easy, not complicated. And now I have to give money too! No way (Male, 56, Tekirdag, Turkish, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III).

My informant has two valid passports and two valid citizenships and successfully uses two different names. Holding a Bulgarian passport is not always inconvenient; it can be advantageous, especially for those who want to work and live in Western Europe. Another respondent added:

> In Western Europe, they are supposedly very tolerant, but there has been a bit of Islamophobia recently. When the name is Muslim, the attitude is different. The Bulgarian name gives more peace of mind (Female, 57, Turkish-Bulgarian, Sofia, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III).

Other immigrants keep their Bulgarian names simply because they do not want to mix and identify with local Muslim communities or interact with them, and do not want to be recognised as Muslim. The decision to move to Western European countries has led to multiple name changes in individual cases. For example, the name forcibly changed is initially regained, and after the decision to emigrate, the reverse procedure is initiated, allowing the Bulgarian name to be registered again. Interviews with Muslims living in Bulgaria also highlighted the convenience of retaining Bulgarian names. Many of them admitted that having a Muslim name in Bulgaria poses certain obstacles and leads to discrimination. One respondent, who worked in government structures, shared his thoughts that he would have been more successful if he had a Bulgarian name. The respondent in question is a Bulgarian Muslim who was born during the period of the 'Revival process'. His parents had no choice but to register him with a Bulgarian name. However, after 1990, they changed his name to a Muslim one, which led to some unpleasant incidents.

> When I went to study in Shumen in high school, because I was also small and had a Muslim name, one day, some boys came and were about to beat me because, as they said, I was not Bulgarian. And there were several; there was no point in fighting. And then I told them, "Well, people, I came to Shumen not to fight but to study." And they surprisingly left me alone. Years later, when I graduated, my father suggested that perhaps it would be better to reclaim my Bulgarian name for the sake of my career, but I think it's too late now. I would definitely be more successful today if I had a Bulgarian name (Male, 37, Sofia, Bulgarian Muslim, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III).

The Roma I have interviewed so far have also retained their names. Some explain this by their conversion to evangelicalism and the severing of the connection with the Muslim religion, while others attribute it to convenience and reluctance to change again. 'It can't always be both ways' (Male, 54, Roma Muslim, Targovishte, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1289-III).

Changing her religion and falling in love were significant factors for an ethnic Turkish woman who converted to Christianity in her youth. In the 1970s, she changed her name voluntarily, as she was starting a family with an ethnic Bulgarian man, after almost ten years of being together and struggling to be accepted as a couple.

> Well, I don't think it's such a big drama if the government changes your name. After all, everyone calls you by the old name anyway (Female, 80, Turkish-Christian, Yambol, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III).

It is a fact that despite the risk of using the original Turkish name in the 1980s, most people continued to do so, at least at home or via nicknames. Many Bulgarians also choose to use the birth names of their Muslim friends or colleagues. However, in times when authorities were erasing Turkish names from gravestones, being called by your original name took courage. The respondent confessed that over the years, she had become quite Bulgarian and had completely immersed herself in the Bulgarian customs and way of life. However, as the conversation progressed, it became clear that she was not feeling fully accepted by her husband's neighbourhood. Moreover, her son, of Turkish-Bulgarian descent, had a nickname, 'the Turk', despite being named traditional Bulgarian names, and he and his brothers did not speak any language other than Bulgarian. She was occasionally called a 'Kadin woman', which, in her words, led to the end of some of her friendships. The voluntary change of her name almost a decade before the renaming of the Turks in Bulgaria was not well accepted by her own family. However, this act did not ruin her relationship with her relatives. Due to the already mentioned events of 1949-1951, when nearly 150,000 Turks left for Turkey, the population of

Turks in the town of Yambol dropped drastically, which resulted in many mixed marriages, and hers was just one of the many.

> Few people remained after the displacement in the 1950s, and many were assimilated. Those who stayed either did not marry or entered mixed marriages. They respected their neighbours, who were mostly Bulgarians, so it was quite logical. My brother is also in a mixed marriage. My children were born in 1979 and 1980, and by then, I had already adopted a Bulgarian name, Fanny, which sounds similar to my Turkish name. That's what everyone called me anyway. My brother changed his name in 1985 and hasn't reverted since. My mother didn't regain her name either; she left this world with a new name (Female, 80, Turkish Christian, Yambol, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III).

Career considerations can also be a factor for some university professors, academics, famous public figures, artists, and journalists who choose to keep their Bulgarian names. However, even decades later, some of them may reconsider this decision. Such is the case of Prof. Hristo Kuychukov, who is a well-known Romani scholar not only in Bulgaria but also among international academic circles, particularly under his Bulgarian name. However, his last book was signed with both his Muslim name – Huseyin Kyuchuk and his Christian name (Акад. Хюсеин Кючук (Христо Кючуков), 2025). Other academics, though, remain with their new Bulgarian names until the end of their lives, as did the father of Nihal Yozergan:

> My father embraced his Bulgarian identity, feeling comfortable with it and at ease in academic circles, despite still facing challenges (Female, 57, Turkish-Bulgarian, Sofia, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e.1300-III).

At the beginning of her career, Nihal worked with Neri Terzieva, one of the most prominent figures in Bulgarian journalism, who was also the child of a mixed marriage between a Bulgarian Muslim mother and a Turkish father.

> Her real name was Neriman, but she also went by Neri, and didn't revert to her old name. That's what they call her, anyway, and that's how she has been known. It's a compromise again because that name wasn't on the government-approved lists… She's like my first TV journalism teacher. I was the second non-ethnic Bulgarian in the journalism major after her (Female, 57, Turkish-Bulgarian, Sofia, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III).

Interestingly, these decisions to retain Bulgarian names are often made individually and do not necessarily imply that other family members will follow the same steps. Interviews have revealed that family members may hold differing opinions on this issue. In some cases, conflicts may arise from these

differing personal decisions, while in others, the family members approach the situation with understanding and respect. This can lead to interesting situations, as one respondent shared:

> My brother-in-law did not revert to his birth name, but my sister did. As a result, on official documents, they appear to be in a mixed marriage (Female, 49, Turkish, Plovdiv, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III).

After 1990, many people hesitated to return to their old names immediately due to lingering fear. Even with changes in the system, the memories of the past were too painful for some families, and they were not eager to rush into such a decision.

> I wanted to reclaim my name, but my mother wouldn't allow me. She was afraid I would lose my job. Although the regime had fallen, initially, we didn't know how things would turn out. They were firing Turks, and my father had also lost his job. The question was also financial (Female, 50s, Kazalbash, Sofia, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III).

The fear of the 'eternal and powerful communist party' was expressed in various interviews. People feared consequences if they dared to reclaim their birth name. That is one of the main reasons for the mass emigration in the summer of 1989, when many people left for Turkey. Some were forced to do it, while others feared their future in Bulgaria.

> Back in the summer of 1989, many people couldn't have imagined that communism would come to an end and that they would reclaim their identities. At that time, it seemed that communism was here to stay, and no one anticipated that the system would crumble, despite hints that it might have (Female, 57, Turkish-Bulgarian, Sofia, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III).

Conclusion

It should be emphasised that not many individuals decided to maintain their Bulgarian names. For many victims, this was a violation of their personal space and a source of deep trauma. These individuals underwent the necessary procedures to regain their original names. However, we must say that others chose to keep their Bulgarian names. The reason for such a decision depends on individual circumstances, such as convenience, conformity, apprehension, or personal conviction. Unfortunately, there are no precise statistics available on the exact number of Muslims who were forcibly renamed during the 'Revival process', nor how many of them subsequently chose to regain their

original names. While this information might spark curiosity, the more significant aspect is how a changed or retained Bulgarian name impacts an individual's identity. Research suggests that, for most people, renaming does not significantly alter their identity. After the forcible renaming, they were still being called by their nicknames by friends and acquaintances, even though it was forbidden, and they risked being sent to jail. They continued identifying as Turks, Muslim Bulgarians, or Muslim Roma. In contrast, for some, the violence reinforced their sense of authentic ethnic identity, mostly among ethnic Turks. At the same time, another part of the forcibly renamed Muslims not only chose to keep their new names but also developed closer relations and integration with the Bulgarian ethnic majority, which is often observed among Bulgarian Muslims. Some even accepted Christianity and attempted to persuade other family members to adopt their new Bulgarian names (Female, 57, Turkish-Bulgarian, Sofia, АИЕФЕМ – БАН, a.e. 1300-III). As we have already mentioned, this is one of the consequences of the forcible act – the division among families on this subject. It seems that despite the failure of the whole renaming operation, the Bulgarian Communist Party has managed to divide not only Muslims in general but also to bring discord within their families, and in the end, even to displace 360,000 Muslims to Turkey. However, the price of these poor political decisions in Bulgaria included the country's international isolation, the end of the regime, and the loss of a significant number of well-educated and working parts of the Bulgarian population, which ultimately helped the economic development of neighbouring Turkey. Still, the most damaging effect remains with the victims of the so-called 'Revival process' who not only have to deal with their own traumatic experience, but many of them are destined to be reminded constantly of what happened. They must face various administrative obstacles due to errors in the country's registration system, where many people appear with one of their outdated names, often the Bulgarian one, despite officially returning to their Turkish name. These mistakes also lead to the constant need to prove their identity to the authorities in Bulgaria, even in routine administrative procedures such as changing one's passport or selling property. Many activists are calling for the forcibly changed names to be permanently removed from the national registry, so that every possible trace of their existence is erased. However, this is impossible, as not everyone who has been renamed regains their birth name; many others have already passed away. Ultimately, it's essential to acknowledge that forced renaming has profoundly impacted many lives and continues to affect people in various ways to this day. However, despite the recognition by the Bulgarian Parliament in 2012, when the forceful renaming of Muslims in Bulgaria was condemned via official declaration (Декларация,

2012), no further steps have been taken. Today, 40 years after the last phase of the 'Revival process', the main culprits for these events are long gone, and no one has been held accountable for this part of Bulgaria's state history.

Acknowledgement: The research is conducted within the project *Contemporary Bulgarian Identity – National and European Dimensions* (КП-06-Н50/6 - 30.11.2020) financed by the Bulgarian National Science Fund of the Ministry of Education and Science.

References:

Baeva, I. (2010) Bulgarian Turks during the Transition Period. In: S. Katsikas (ed). *Bulgaria and Europe. Shifting Identities*. London, New York, Delhi: Anthem Press, pp. 63-78.

Kamusella, T. (2018) *Ethnic Cleansing During the Cold War: The Forgotten 1989 Expulsion of Turks from Communist Bulgaria*. London: Routledge.

Аврамов, Р. (2016) *Икономика на „Възродителния процес"*. София: Център за академични изследвания.

АИЕФЕМ – БАН (Архив на Института за етнология и фолклористика с Етнографски музей – Българска академия на науките), а.е. 1289 – III. Теренни материали на тема: „Останалите роднини – Динамики на отношения между имигрантите и техните близки останали в България", Пламена Стоянова, 2024.

АИЕФЕМ – БАН (Архив на Института за етнология и фолклористика с Етнографски музей – Българска академия на науките), а.е. 1300-III. Теренни материали на тема: „Дълбочинни интервюта. Идентичности преименувания, патриотизъм", Пламена Стоянова, 2024.

АИЕФЕМ – БАН (Архив на Института за етнология и фолклористика с Етнографски музей – Българска академия на науките), а.е. 1307-III. Теренни материали на тема: „Духовен бит и култура на населението с възстановени имена", записал: Рачко Попов, предал: Йелис Еролова, 2024.

Ангелов, В. (2010) *Секретно! Протестните акции на турците в България (януари-май) 1989 г. Документи.* София: Гутенберг.

Ангелов, В. (2011) *Голямата екскурзия. Принудителното изселване на етнически турци от България, юни-август 1989 г.* Том 2. София: Гутенберг.

Баева, И. и Калинова, Е. (2009) *„Възродителният процес". Българската държава и българските турци (средата на 30-те – началото на 90-те години на XX век). (I) Архивите говорят (55).* София: Държавна Агенция 'Архиви'.

Баева, И. (2011) *Последиците от „възродителния процес" и „българският етнически модел" днес*. В: Мизов, М. (съст). *Българският етнически модел политическа митологема или проблемна реалност?* София: Авангард Прима, 65–80.

Бюксеншютц, У. (2000) *Малцинствената политика в България. Политиката на БКП към евреи, роми, помаци и турци 1944 – 1989*. София: Международен център за изследване на малцинствата и културните взаимодействия.

Визуален архив на Асимилацията (1945-1989). Насилствената асимилация срещу помаците и турците в България в годините на социализма. Достъпно на: https://assimilationarchive.com/bg/start%d0%b1%d1%8a%d0%bb%d0%b3%d0%b0%d1%80% d1%81%d0%ba%d0%b8/ (accessed 27 May 2024).

Генов, Д., Таиров, Т. и Маринов, В. (1968) *Циганското население в НР България по пътя на социализма*. София: НС на ОФ.

Георгиева, И. (1993) „Възродителният процес" и „Голямата екскурзия" (Опит за орална история). В: *Етническата картина в България* (Проучвания 1992 г.). София: Клуб'90, 105-109.

Груев, М. (2003) *Между петолъчката и полумесеца. Българите мюсюлмани и политическият режим (1944–1959)*. София: Кота.

Груев, М. и А. Кальонски (2008) *Възродителният процес. Мюсюлманските общности и комунистическият режим*. София: Сиела.

Груев, М., Тепавичаров, В., Василева-Груева, П., Коцева, В., Попова, К. и Костадинова, М. (2011) *Насилие, политика и памет. Комунистическият режим в Пиринска Македония– рефлекси на съвременника и изследователя*. София: Университетско издателство 'Св. Климент Охридски'.

Декларация осъждаща опита за насилствена асимилация на българските мюсюлмани (2012). София: Народно Събрание на република България. Достъпно на: www.parliament.bg/bg/declaration/ID/13813 (accessed 14 May 2024).

Димитрова, Д. (1998) Българските турци преселници в Република Турция през 1989 години (адаптация и промени в културния модел). В: А. Желязкова, (съст). *Между адаптацията и носталгията. Българските турци в Турция*, София: Международен център по проблемите на малцинствата и културните взаимодействия, 76-139.

Еролова, Й. (2017) Между писмената и устната история: Преселването на турците от България към Турция през 1950 г. и 1951 г. *Българска етнология* (2): 204–226.

Зафер, З. и Муратова, Н. (2022) *Тюркология в изгнание. Мефкюре Моллова. Биографично изследване.* Благоевград: УИ 'Неофит Рилски'.

Зафер, З. (2023) „Името, това ми е лицето". 50 години от Корнишките протести. Научна конференция *„Името, това ми е лицето". 50 години от Корнишките събития, 18 ноември 2023 г., гр. Гоце Делчев*. Благоевград: БОАКО.

Иванов, М. (2013) Архивна сбирка на Михаил Иванов. Достъпно на: <http://www.prehod.omda.bg/page. php?IDMenu=794&IDLang=1 (accessed 26 May 2024).

Калинова, Е. (2004) Насилието в политиката на българската държава към българските турци, 30-те – 80-те години на XX век. *История* (3): 12–26.

Калинова, Е. и Баева, И. (2010) Етнически и религиозни общности в следвоенна България. В: *Изследвания по история на социализма в България (1944–1989).* Т. II. София: Център за исторически и политологически изследвания.

Ковачева, Л., Марушиакова, Е. и Попов, В. (съст) (2022) *Шакир М. Пашов. История на циганите в България и Европа. Рома*. София: Парадигма.

Колев, Г (2010) *Българската комунистическа партия и циганите през периода 1944–1989 г.* София: Център за публични политики.

КРДОПБГДСРСБНА (2013) Държавна сигурност – Смяната на имената –

Възродителният процес (1945-1985) Достъпно на: https://comdos.bg/%D0%9D%D0%B0%D1%88%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5%20%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%8F/ds-smyana-ta-na-imenata-vazroditelniya-protses (accessed 26 May 2024).

КРДОПБГДСРСБНА (2013) Държавна сигурност – Смяната на имената – Възродителният процес (1986–1990) Достъпно на: https://comdos.bg/%D0%9D%D0%B0%D1%88%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5%20%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%8F/ds-smyana-ta-na-imenata-vazroditelniya-protses (accessed 26 May 2024).

КРДОПБГДСРСБНА (2015) Държавна сигурност и малцинствата. Документален сборник. Достъпно на: https://comdos.bg/%D0%9D%D0%B0%D1%88%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5%20%D%B8%D0%B7%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%B-D%D0%B8%D1%8F/ds-i-maltsinstvata (accessed 26 May 2024).

Кючук, Х. (Кючуков, Х.) (2025) *„Аз се казвах..“ Монолози на три мюсюлманки за насилствената смяна на имената в България*. Велико Търново: Фабер.

Маева, М. (2006) *Българските турци – преселници в република Турция. Култура и идентичност.* София: Международен център за изследване на малцинствата и културните взаимодействия.

Марушиакова, Е. и Попов, В. (2007) *Studii Romani*. Том VII. Избрано. София: Парадигма.

Пашова, А. (2008) Циганите – мюсюлмани – неудобното малцинство за историята на „Единната нация“ през комунистическия режим в България (1944-1989). *Andral* 53–54: 13–35.

Пашова, А. (2012) *Политики на тоталитарната власт към ромите в България.* Достъпно на: https://www.librev.com/index.php/discussion/politics/1785-1944-1989-#!/comment- comment=26298 (accessed 26 May 2024).

Стоянов, В. (1998) *Турското население в България между полюсите на етническата политика*. София: ЛИК.

Стоянова, П. (2017) *Циганите в годините на социализма*. София: Парадигма.

Стоянова, П. (2006) Покръстването на българите мюсюлмани. *Анамнеза* (3) Достъпно на: <http://anamnesis.info/fonts/versiq.1.3/journal/flash_journal/Plamena_Stoqnova/Plamena_Stoqnova.html (accessed 26 May 2024).

Хаджъ, С. (2022) *От вмешателство в турския книжовен език към пълна забрана (езиковата политика на комунистическа България*). Orbis Linguarum 20(2): 206–215.

ЦДА (Централен държавен архив), Ф.1Б, оп. 15, а.е. 765.

Plamena Stoyanova, PhD, is an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with the Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. She is the author of more than 30 scholarly publications, including the book 'Gypsies in the Years of Socialism. The Policy of the Bulgarian State towards the Gypsy Minority (1944-1989)' (in Bulgarian, 2017). Academia.edu: Plamena Stoyanova.
E-mail: flame1228@gmail.com

Between the Worlds:

CONTESTING (IM)POSSIBLE IDENTITIES

Authors: Albena Nakova, Behrin Shopova, Elena Marushiakova, Ilham Mammadzada, Isabelle Gobatto, Julia Popcheva, Magdalena Slavkova, Mare Kõiva, Petko Hristov, Plamena Stoyanova, Stoyan Nikov, Tamás Attila Hajnáczky, Tanya Matanova, Vanya Ivanova, Vesselin Popov, Zlatina Bogdanova

Editors: Magdalena Slavkova, Yelis Erolova, Vanya Ivanova, Julia Popcheva
Cover: Tsveti Pavlova

Publishing house: Paradigma
Printing house: Bulged

e-ISSN: 2683-0213