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Being Nationalist: Identity within a Post-Ottoman state

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or part to another University for the award of any other degree.

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Abstract

The thesis defines and explores three different modalities of nationalism – diagnosis, activism and redemption – in the context of contemporary Bulgaria. Nationalists see a significant divergence between 'who we should be' and 'who we are'. This is accentuated by Bulgarian citizens' experiences of socio-political chaos and uncertainty. The thesis looks at the political rituals which aim to redeem the 'ill' Bulgarian nation, conceived as both post-Ottoman and post-Soviet. It focuses the importance of affect for understanding the relevance of the nation for citizens' sense of self.

I begin by examining the apparatus of production through which the Bulgarian national subject is imbued with a particular character. I consider how it has been constituted historically and how it continues to be moulded by contemporary discourses. I demonstrate that 'being Bulgarian' is nowadays a primarily negative state of being, defined through the discourse of the ill nation.

As far as nationalists are concerned, this illness can be cured only through attempting, out of the debris of historical contingency, to renew social structures so that they more closely resemble the ideal. My research focussed on one nationalist organisation in Bulgaria which attempted to fulfil this task: VMRO (or IMRO- the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Movement). I explore how the organisation creates and renews itself as a descendant of the national revival movements of the 19th and early 20th century, and thus as a valid form of contemporary nationalism, while at the same time it fills the role of a modern political party.

To heal the nation, VMRO declares a need to be vigilant against further catastrophes and to address the consequences of previous ones. It thus interprets existing social grievances according to specific narratives about the nation's problems and prescribes redemptive action. VMRO addresses a public which has internalised a sense of being judged by 'the international' (often imagined as 'a dictate'). This is not the 'real'

international, but an imagined, power-laden domain. Nationalists engage with this domain by constructing illicit discourses which challenge this nexus of power. In the thesis, I explore how the traditional imperatives of a nationalist organisation – making claims for territories, populations and minority issues – are hybridized by the organisation's dialogic engagement with both 'the international', with citizens' daily concerns and their affective states.

Contents

Chapter 1 An Introduction: contested certainties

Stemming from the state's turbulent history and its under-privileged socio-economic position, nationalism in Bulgaria is characterised by a strong discourse of the 'ill' nation needing to be healed. Nationalists see the nation as something important yet fragile, which can become ill or degraded. In this stream of logic the nation needs citizens to heal and maintain it. The illness can bring abjection to national subjects – persons who identify with the collective to varying degrees. At the heart of this thesis is a story typical of what has become known as 'being Balkan' – about the emotive power of nationalism in South East Europe and the power dynamics in which the region is enmeshed. Here I will argue that this particular form of nationalism derives from a concern about measuring up to an Enlightenment-derived European ideal. This concern stems from the circumstances of the region's post-Ottoman transformation.

Historical precedents within the construction of a Bulgarian national subject have led to a particularly strong fixation with cleansing 'the Oriental taint'. By illustrating how some citizens of contemporary Bulgaria re-create and bring to life the category of the nation in order to perform that task, I will reflect on the micro and macro dynamics of 'being Bulgarian' in parallel. This entails looking at the relationship between cultural forces structuring the collective psyche through the frameworks of affect and their relationship to the wider polis. The themes of this thesis are filtered through a case study of a contemporary nationalist organisation- VMRO, which will illuminate how public affects are acted upon by nationalist political actors.

I will thus argue in line with Berezin (Berezin 2009; Berezin 2001) that to understand a nationalism, we need to understand the consolidation regime from which it was born, in this case Bulgaria's Ottoman history. More than simply an explanatory factor for Bulgarian nationalism, 'being Balkan' is a further element to be analysed. I will show how this label is intrinsically connected to the two "post-"'s (post-Socialism and the post-Ottoman), leading to the common understanding that Bulgarians have been in an

unending cycle of transition for some time. In this analysis nationalism not only reveals the power dynamics of the region but also serves as a prism to aid an examination of contentious politics and publics in the Balkans; it considers in particular, underlying power relations and emotive power.

In this thesis the domain of the nation is the side of the polis which is most emotive. It is personal and intimate, diverging from the neo-liberal and bureaucratic incarnations that I would say are the domain of the state. I start off by examining how the idea of an ill nation is part of *doxa* in Bulgaria, a pervasive "sense of reality" (Bourdieu 1977: 164). Following (Holmes 2000), I view nationalists as diagnosticians of what they present as an 'ill nation'. 'Being nationalist' is a way in which a citizen can keep their personhood tethered to the collective. As I describe this connection between the personal and the collective in my thesis, I consider how people are implicated in common-sense notions of belonging to a collective 'us' through affective apparatuses which are moulded by the region's historical processes. Especially in the latter parts of my thesis, I pay particular attention to the presence of the abject – those or that which must be cleansed in order to leave a 'healthy' and 'clean' national self.

Since Barth (1970) there has been a shift in theoretical understanding of social groups, a move away from studying group particularity (often termed as its culture) towards studying the power relations and border-maintenance between groups. This is accompanied by a paradigm shift in theorists' understanding of the nature of group formation. It is now commonplace to state that neighbouring groups have few *real* differences; perceived differences are more likely to be invented (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992). Authors (such as Danforth:1995; Roudomentof: 2002) reviewing the history of Macedonia[1] have paid close attention to discussion with Greek and Bulgarian historians, often highlighting their contested and misguided creation of a heroic national self. They have also explored the accompanying commemorative practices

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[1]In this thesis, in the interest of brevity and in-keeping with Bulgarian usage, I will call the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Macedonia.

that project glorious public images (McCrone and McPherson: 2009; Gillis 1996; Connerton 1986).

Here I propose a need to reframe these arguments in order to look into unexamined dimensions of nationalist belief. A focus on whether representations are *real* or not is in fact misplaced. If we take Bourdieu to heart we must realise that reality is just *doxa*. The arena of the symbolic needs not be examined or denigrated for factual inconsistencies. The symbols of 'who we are', whether they are true or not, form what I will refer to as national subjectivities. National subjectivities become 'real' through symbolic practices. Symbols emerge and are concretised from a plyvocal, fluid daily semiotic arena. To de-mythologise this process, as I will argue in the ethical section further on in this chapter, is to ignore the complexities of power relations involved in the practice of deconstructing national myths. It is also, in a number of ways, an act which inadvertently discards analytically useful insights.

This thesis thus embodies a duality in addressing nationalism. It is about the continuing existence of nationalism, about the form it takes in the contemporary world, but it is also about personhood and subjectivity *vis-à-vis* political engagement. It considers how people address 'the problem' of origins – the incident of birth which is a common trope in personal identification. How should a person conceive the polity and community that surrounds her? How does it impact her subjectivity? I have layered this discussion with my research on one nationalist organisation, VMRO.

What emerges is the multi-faceted nature of 'being nationalist' and the continuity between the dictums of activism and daily life. I have drawn upon semiotic theory, particularly through the work of Julia Kristeva and David Kertzer, to consider how this transfer occurs within the politics of symbol and subject in parallel. In the critique of culture in anthropology's interpretive turn, the symbolic was replaced by the subjective. This is particularly lucid in Handler's reaction to a Schneider-derived symbolic anthropology (Handler in Gillis 1996). In this thesis I have tried to combine

both by looking at the relationship between the internal milieu of a nationalist organisation (the matching frames between its activists) and how it attempts to connect to the affects of the wider polis.

Methodology

Finding Nationalists

When I started fieldwork in Bulgaria, I found nationalism 'let loose', rather than as an aspect of the state. This was interesting. I drifted further away from the common definitions of nationalism in anthropological theory. I had planned to overview the arena of banal nationalism through a study on the teaching of history, inspired by Kaplan's work (2006) on the pedagogical state. On learning of an already existing project on these lines by Bulgarian intellectuals[2], I shifted my focus. It became clear that there was no need for further research on the topic. Furthermore, the domains of state-controlled productions of nationalism (such as public commemorations and history books) were in themselves contested by nationalist actors. That contestation started to define the domain of my research much more than state-nationalist ideology.

So, how does one find a nationalist – the ascription of this category to any one person is usually heavily contested? To arrive at a rigorous understanding of a nationalist, we have to first understand beliefs about the connection between the biological organism – a person – and the nation. The argument which follows will be presented in further detail in Chapter 2. Its aspects, discussed here, are the essentials for framing the discussion of methods and approaches taken in this research. People drift in and out of nationalist activism or mind-sets and switch between a collectivist and individual

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[2] It has been the topic of much research by Dr. Albena Hranova, as well as separately by Prof. Aleksandur Kiosev under the auspices of the South Eastern European Academic League (http://www.seal-sofia.org).

mode of thinking. This thesis considers what happens when the collective is considered diseased, and the sense of personal threat experienced by those who are invested in belonging to a problematic group identity. For some citizens, the solution is to retreat from national collective identity, a process of individualisation, or ascribing to other collective identities which are separate from the national. When it comes to rescuing the collective self, different kinds of nationalists can be identified by virtue of their divergent approaches to the nation's illness.

I will argue that a nationalist is fundamentally a person who rejects individualisation or alternate collectivist principles as a solution to the discomfort experienced through the nation's perceived ill health. 'Being nationalist' is not a unitary category. In the first instance we can differentiate between nationalists on the basis of their willingness to take part in organisational activity. A nationalist can be someone who is dedicated to his collective self and keeps it healthy through specific rites, such as veneration of heroes. This does not necessitate that he participates in a political organisation, although he might take part in collective rites which could be organised by either the state or a specific organisation. A nationalist is also someone who tries to create protest movements to affect the larger entity – the state – through coordination and concrete organizational work. Chapters 3 to 3.2 consider what that work entails and the problem of encasing a task such as this in specific form.

When I departed for fieldwork in February 2009, I had chosen two nationalist organization, *BNS* and *VMRO,* to be the focus of my ethnographic study. The study of two political and activist organisations, both individually and in parallel, posed a number of difficulties. Movements do not have rigid boundaries (Pratt 2003). Divides are constructed dynamically. As I will discuss in the later parts of this thesis, social (and political) movements involve active work on the production of solidarities, and on the socialisation and the mobilisation of constituencies. Political organisations involve organisation-building and the conversion of non-members into members (Tarrow 2008). At the time of my fieldwork, the two organizations I had hoped to study were

not on good terms. I started fieldwork attempting to follow Agar's (1996) advice and when possible, carefully chose valuable informants, slowly developing my field participation. Following others' advice (Smith & Kornblum 1989; de Vries 1992), I tried to establish connections. I hence entered into the Bulgarian right wing arena.

BNS (The Bulgarian National Union) was the first organisation I had identified as a focus of study. When I conceived of my research, it was a vocal presence in the Bulgarian political arena. BNS was not represented in parliament and seemed to have little electoral support yet it had a strong presence in the public domain through a number of activities: from their propensity to cover the capital's streets in graffiti to their leader's programme on television. Hence it both inspired public discussion about the nature of Bulgarian nationalism and structured some of the audience's nationalist predispositions. VMRO (The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation) were less politically prominent at the time, although they did have five representatives in parliament. I chose them mostly as a control group, hoping to balance a study of nationalism across different organisations. As my fieldwork progressed, so did my assessment of the organisations and their circumstances.

At the time of my fieldwork, the most politically prominent nationalist organisation in Bulgaria was Ataka[3]. It emerged in 2005 and gained 8.14% of the popular vote (Tzentralna Izbiratelna Komisia n.d.), meaning approximately 296,848 people had voted for an unashamedly nationalist party. What was more concerning was that it was not simply nationalist but it also had no qualms calling itself a Nationalist Socialist party. The difference is important, as highlighted by some of my informants. Ataka gained even more votes in 2009 (11.96% of the vote), but started to decline in 2013 (gaining just 7.3%), under the weight of internal strife and public dissociation with their media-partner, SKAT. However, had I chosen them as my topic of study, they would have formed a significantly different case than what I had in mind. Ataka were, and are, predominantly a political party.

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[3] The name literally translates to "Attack".

In this research project, my interest was to understand how people could continue to believe nationalism was a relevant category of identification. To capture those subjectivities, I wanted to engage with people whose motives for participating in an organisation would be as much as possible driven by a belief in a certain ideological cause – in this case a nationalist worldview. I made a formative initial distinction between activist and political parties. Some of the understandings I gained through fieldwork impressed upon me the need for further sophistication in understanding the balance of activism and party dynamics within these different organisations.

The right wing political spectrum in Bulgaria is fluid and interconnected. It is possible to differentiate between organisations, splitting them into types. This does not mean that the organisations in question are part of vastly different arenas. It was my experience that events in Sofia pertaining to right wing issues often included collaboration between a number of right wing actors who nevertheless had members with different degrees of extremism. During my fieldwork I quickly came to mark out a set of nationalists as part of what I shall denote as a 'street-level' right wing dynamic. These were loose, informal organisations, formed out of sets of networked acquaintances and the dynamics of football fan club organisations. They had no formal agenda and no political programme or cause.

An example would be 'Blood and Honor'[4] who on a number of occasions acted as security at events for the organisation I settled on as my focus of study – VMRO (or IMRO, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation). Similarly, informal ties existed between the Levski football club in Sofia, infamous for its nationalist banners and flags of historic personalities and VMRO. Banners were printed with the collaboration of VMRO's leaders in Sofia. The connections stemmed from friendships and mutual respect between the organizations' membership, as well as the informal and social elements of activist group conscription. A number of people, now part of

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[4] A Neo-Nazi reference – the two English words are used internationally, as the German variant is banned.

the street level organizations, were disillusioned former members of VMRO who maintained friendships with those still in the organization. On occasion, the basis of the relationship were kinship ties.

When I started researching VMRO, I attended meetings of the youth organisation, the organisation's most active participants in the capital. As my fieldwork progressed, I learned that both leaders within the Sofia headquarters and the youth organisation considered that group to be the key source of the organisation's activism in the capital. My interviews and interactions with older organisational members showed, on a more frequent basis, that a number of them were primarily interested in 'doing elections' and showed somewhat shallow motivation for the deeper ideological engagement I otherwise observed amongst my day to day informants.

While all activism is political, activism of the non-party kind is different from that with a party affiliation. This is an issue that my fieldwork cannot address since in the end I predominantly worked with activists who were both nationalist and involved in a political party. The most important condition of selection in line with my research objective was, however, met. My participants included a variety of people who considered themselves to be nationalists or were moulded into this subjectivity by choosing to participate in a nationalist organisation.

Discovering my Bearing: chaos followed by immersion

My first step was to start attending weekly meetings at VMRO and BNS's headquarters. I gained permission to do so from Sofia's regional leaders of both organisations – Angel Djambazki (VMRO) and Bojan Rasate (BNS) – and became an observer. BNS meetings were held in the leader's garage on the edges of Sofia. Walking through the evening twilight before I disappeared behind a fortified iron door in a room full of nationalist youth made me distinctly uncomfortable, yet none of my direct interaction with the activists presented any hostility. VMRO's meetings were held in their central offices in the city centre of Sofia in a somewhat old-fashioned and dilapidating yet

prominent building. The members of the youth organisation were my entry into the movement. For the most part they were students from the university, friendly yet wary. I would later learn that they often suspected newcomers of being spies- as an anthropologist I was prone to fall under such suspicion.

 During the meetings of both organisations, active local members met to discuss and plan upcoming activities, reflect on current events and generally, catch up. I sat and wrote down what I heard, often coming away disturbed and confused. I was unsure how I could connect more with the activists I saw at weekly meetings. I was rarely invited to events which were underway even when I asked to take part. Organisation seemed spur-of-the-moment and selective. I was not on the list. While I seemed to be superficially accepted at one level of participation, there was much that eluded me. Information presented itself and then slid off like glass- I understood the words but not the significance of what was being said. My understanding was limited by my ignorance of the commonly accepted beliefs of the organisation.

Figure 1Timeline of my Research – between 2009 and 2011.

While choosing my connections and trying to work out how to bridge the distance between myself and my informants, in May, three months into my fieldwork, my grandmother who lives in Bulgaria fell gravely ill and had a sudden stroke. I was the only member of the family in Sofia and took time out from my research to care for her. The months that followed saw me abandon fieldwork to cope with this family emergency. It was a challenging time during which my guard, that of a researcher, was

broken down by a transformative personal event.

While my personal circumstances were chaotic, so was the Bulgarian public arena. There were elections underway. VMRO were a part of a pre-election coalition NAPRED. Marketing stickers bearing that name adorned lighters and lamps everywhere in the central offices. During fieldwork, and prior to my family crisis, I had observed glimmers of political coalition-making. I was aware that the leadership was meeting to discuss the coalition.

VMRO is a small political party, being rather more prominent for its reputation as an organisation intrinsically connected to the Macedonian cause[5] and the personage of its leader – Krasimir Karakachanov. It had never participated in elections on its own but had rather formed strategic coalitions with other parties in the political arena. In the 90s, they were aligned with the leading anti-socialist party, ODS (United Democratic Forces). As that party entered into troubled times, they were replaced by a combination of an Agricultural party and a flirtation with emerging power-party GERB (Citizens for the Democratic Development of Bulgaria). When I started studying VMRO, they had five representatives in parliament as a result of a successful coalition called "Bulgarian National Union" in the 2005 election.

The elections of 2009 were thrown into disarray by an electoral law which saw the barriers for entry into parliament shift. Coalition mathematics proved suddenly mistaken. It was a double election – EU elections followed by national elections. The EU ones served as a poll, showcasing the political support held by different parties. Due to these circumstances, VMRO made a sudden new coalition with the recently launched political organization RZS (Order, Law and Justice). Its new partner had a very poor reputation – it was rumoured to be funded by a prominent oligarch. The RZS coalition inspired the majority of the youth organization in Sofia to leave VMRO. The elections were also a disaster – the organisation lost its five seats in parliament.

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[5] See further below for a description of the issues which are part of this domain.

VMRO's members demanded an emergency party congress.

When I re-entered fieldwork at the end of the summer 2009, my field participants had undergone a change. VMRO's membership was in disarray, numerous meetings were being held behind closed doors, intrigue hung thick in the air. BNS meetings had also shifted in atmosphere, Boyan Rasate, the leader, was irritable and was easily inspired into long rants. He talked more of money, while my VMRO informants were quick to tell me (with no prompting) that BNS's funding had come through the old political set-up and under the shift of power it ran dry. On a separate occasion a VMRO member gossiped, remarking that BNS were funded by the previous government to cause dissent among nationalists. I was also told that Rasate, the leader of the organization, had angered one of the head football hooligans and would suffer the consequences (be beaten up) in the coming weeks. As with Ataka, VMRO members believed that BNS had 'good nationalist boys' in it who were let down by a corrupt and flawed leadership. Of course, BNS also thought that about VMRO.

My return to a semblance of my researcher subjectivity was marked by going on the annual hike in honour of the nationalist hero, Todor Aleksandrov[6]. Both organisations held events around the reputed place in which the historical figure met his demise, the South-West of Bulgaria, near the border with Macedonia. Attending both organisations' separate events, held on successive weekends, made me feel uncomfortable. I was open about what I was doing, but felt this was not viewed well. The tradition of commemorating this occasion was instigated by VMRO. BNS, in this instance, were mirroring them and contesting their claim to speak on account of this national figure.

The hike shifted the balance of my fieldwork. With VMRO I had stumbled into an unexpected initiation. The VMRO's head organizer and soon-to-be deputy leader, Angel, agreed to have me sit in at the open-plan central offices. I felt the bonds

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[6] See below for an overview of his significance.

between the activists who went on the hike and myself were formed and solidified around the campfire up in the mountains. The ties that had so far eluded me when attending meetings in Sofia, suddenly started to make more sense. As my research with VMRO took off, the research with *BNS* deteriorated. The two organizations were not on good terms. This can be seen in reference to the hike. In previous years, *BNS* and *VMRO* had collaborated and done it together, but it had not gone well.

The nationalist organisations' history of collaboration stemmed from their co-existence within Sofia's right wing continuum. Relations between VMRO and BNS had deteriorated before I arrived on fieldwork. VMRO members remarked that the BNS boys were too anti-Semitic and mocked them for not being particularly good hikers. They were disgusted when BNS marked the trees at Aleksandrov's grave with their name. Meanwhile, at one of their meetings, BNS members discussed beating up VMRO activists and discussed at length the VMRO leader – Karakachanov's – poor reputation. A number of BNS's older members had visited VMRO meetings before going into BNS (the inverse was also true: at least one VMRO member had attended BNS meeting before changing sides).

I judged the animosity between the two organizations to be too strong at that time to sustain participation in both while gaining further access and trust. BNS meetings were more difficult to attend. The danger was higher and their members (in some cases rather violent youth) were more threatening. I stopped going. I later heard that Rasate was taken down as its leader. He was quickly discredited by a video which seemed to show his wife engaging in sex with an Albanian man, while he filmed. Later, I met one of the more prominent BNS activists, Plamen. He told me that he had stopped going once it became clear that the problems with the organization did not stem from Rasate (who at the time I attended would spend up to half an hour demeaning particular members for their supposed faults), but higher up. After I left fieldwork, Plamen appeared in a number of VMRO protests. Even later, Angel called for a united nationalist front and seemed to be attempting to create a more united front out of

Sofia's right-wing organizations. This tenuous union did not last long, but further reflects the constant flux in the organisations' alliances – as discussed by most theorists of social movements.

The Research in Practice

Research design can mean different things, depending on your source of information (Ellen 1984; Bechhoffer and Patterson 2000; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Bernard 1995). I understand my field to be a Latourian (2005) network, a particular movement or assemblage, association and re-association leading to a social tie nexus – a set of ties between things and persons. Ties are sometimes forgotten, misplaced, or wilfully erased. The image of the network is especially good for understanding dense networks of ties between people and objects based on common locality, in parallel with ones which involve traversal of larger distances. What matters is the ability to enact a strong relationship, not physical distance.

When I started fieldwork, I considered my location. I contemplated whether to complete multi-sited ethnography, given the geographic dispersal of VMRO through the country, inspired by Marcus' (1995) call to multi-sited ethnography. I quickly realised there was no need to switch locales to be part of different regional networks. A number of my participants travelled often, as an extension of their organisational activity. As I started to accompany them, it could be said that at least one site of my research was a participant's car which shuttled between different meeting and commemoration sites.

The key site of my fieldwork was VMRO's central office, which, due to the intensity of work, and the kind of socialisation within it, was considered a home for a selected number of people, as well as being the heart of the political organization. The intensive travelling schedule of the youth organization in Sofia (a sort of travelling protest group and commemoration group), as well of the leaders of the organization meant a particular sort of mobility and multi-locality. The schedule was decided at the

last minute often because of political contingencies or intense debate within the leadership. Once it was agreed, a select set of people were called on and constituted a small, highly mobile group.

VMRO's activists were officially estimated to be at or above 3000, although on occasion members could be heard to cite double that figure – the organisational structure audit I observed on the occasion of the party's congress revealed the difficulty of firmly establishing this figure. I had significant interaction with up to 52 core activists whom I met through the Sofia organisation – including those from regional organisations who attended communal events with some frequency. A large part of my fieldwork was constituted by being at the very core of the organisation and knowing its key leaders and committees. I observed them acting and reacting to each other in the context of meetings about mundane and profound elements of organisational life. As such, this thesis focuses on centralized authority, leadership and campaigns rather than the more dissipated elements of activism.

My ability to participate was based on the ability to be on the list of people to be called, who were usually those readily available and deemed useful in one way or another. I learned early on that if you wanted to be part of organizational work, phones always stayed on the table and the sooner you answered the better. This encouraged and allowed a lot of dynamic on-the-go planning. I entered into the flow of my participant's activities. During fieldwork, I found it difficult to maintain a separate schedule or lifestyle due to the demands of the organization's rhythm. Earlier on in my fieldwork, I would ask to be called when certain trips or meetings were about to take place, but found the call never materialized. If I didn't spend a lot of the time there, I would not find out about such events. Later, as I became more deeply embedded in the group, the problem disappeared. I could be away from the central office without worrying that I would miss something. My ability to take photographs became a commodity which ensured that a seat in the car was saved for me.

The prominent disadvantage was the kind of participation required to study the organization. As already indicated above, work in VMRO tended to envelop a person. I wasn't the only one who thought so. Activists would remark that if you allowed it, it could take over your life. One young activist found herself failing university exams partly as a result of her activism. VMRO would take me to places and people who were fascinating from the perspective of my study, but the activists had a schedule and often, delicate political work. Thus, frustratingly I found I could not engage with the people there as a researcher without conceiving myself to be disruptive to the purpose of the visit. When early on I acquired more and more knowledge, one ambitious member found it threatening. In an organization which worked on a need-to-know basis, my escalating levels of knowledge about the organisation seemed like a basis for competition.

If successful interaction in the group guarantees the validity of the data (Ellen 1985), then by the end of the fieldwork I could say the data I present here is valid. I gave myself up to the flow of the organization. Early on, having achieved access, when I started asking people questions about what they were doing, while I do not think I was being particularly obtrusive, one member told me to shut up or risk being slapped. He did not mean it but it expressed his frustration at being asked to verbalize his daily practice to a larger degree than he was used to. As suggested by Davis (1999) more meaningful discussions became possible only when I entered into the ethos of my field-site more deeply. I learned to cultivate a particular kind of silence, to engage with others curtly and directly. I understood there to be a masculine(*ist*) ethic imbued with a particular kind of common sense language and insults. After learning to be silent, I learned to talk anew, but in that fashion. As remarked by DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) my level of participation and observation brought both advantages and disadvantages.

Again I kept silent (to a degree) and observed. These moments of silence rewarded me with the ability to observe multiple organically-occurring conversations between members and non-members, being trusted to take on VMRO business and to gather

much data by virtue of continuous observation. The leadership allowed me to listen in on their deliberations and in the end to record a critical one – a key meeting at which the leaders of the organisation planned its future. This provided many notes, many nodes of knowledge, which I have woven together in the narrative that follows.

I conducted some interviews at various stages of the research but found them to be problematic. More seasoned activists/ politicians gave me frustratingly glossy versions of events punctuated by meaningful silences on specific topics. Often they were nothing more than what was released to the media in public statements. More particular views could be found in casual conversations which happened on a daily basis. Young activists were somewhat puzzled at being studied and also gave their views, priorities in life and histories openly in daily conversation; however, as I became more integrated into the organisation, people were more reluctant to talk to me with the same honesty as to a stranger. What was somewhat more helpful were a small number of interviews I conducted with people who left the organisation in the course of my participation.

In retrospect, I can see that I was shy with interviews. It seemed the right thing at the time and I judged it to give me deep enough understanding of VMRO then. I was undoubtedly deeply embedded in the organisation. It became my life. I learned a lot about how the organisation functioned, about its members, about their official roles and real practice. I felt I understood the rhythm of work and the logic of ideologies. Yet, especially initially, I was also overwhelmed by homo-politicus; given more experience in such a setting, I could have managed the terrain better. I found intrigues and political contests especially difficult to understand and manage when I first arrived on fieldwork.

My data has been formed out of a mix of my embeddedness in nationalism and a more wide-ranging "context of awareness" (Stuart Hall cited in Billig 1999) which informed my understanding of what I have conceptualized as a public arena. This was provided

by the unexpected data of various mediated domains which were thrust upon me by virtue of my participation both in daily life in Bulgaria and daily life with VMRO. The distinction is not superfluous. This can be illustrated by a quick reference to my engagement with Facebook. Prior to fieldwork, I had left the social networking site. When I saw the extent of my participants' engagement with that domain, I re-joined. As I started sharing photos of VMRO events, I was quickly 'friended' by a variety of people who I knew and did not know. Some of them were VMRO members, some were 'simply' activists for 'the Macedonian cause'.

I could not have ignored these media-scapes. My participants would arrive at the central headquarters fuming at some media scandal. Their internal dynamics were affected by disputes that happened online in social media. I soaked up my participants' engagements in 'popular culture', the kinds of newspapers they read, television programmes they watched, and why they found them interesting. Online life and life-in-person (Wittel 2000; Miller and Slater 2000; Wilson and Paterson 2002), the digital and physical realms, were somewhat entangled. My online (Facebook) activist network grew exponentially and gave a view into disparate nationalist actors' media-scape. I paid close attention to the affective visual semiotics utilized by my actors in computer mediated environments – the images they picked up from television and films, and the music they listened to.

Positionality and Ethics

The ethical dimensions of this thesis have a set of dove-tailing external and internal aspects. Namely, both the need to treat one's informants with respect and consideration as well as the problem of researching people who hold views which are sometimes deeply morally problematic. I chose to focus on representing my informant's world-views in all their discomforting bias as opposed to focusing on de-mythologising nationalist perspectives. As I will discuss in detail below, the latter endeavour has already been approached by a number of anthropologists at a high

level. While that has yielded important results for the discipline, it is not an endeavour without its own power dimensions. There is much that can be said about the power dynamics of an academic's own ideological positionality– whether left, right or anarchist, however in the interest of space I will focus on some basic elements which matter for the positionality I took in this thesis.

My argument, I propose, fits within a classic anthropologist trope– representing the voice of one's participants. Listening to that voice is discomforting. Such an endeavour is a modified version of 'studying the other' in which nationalists are other to us, the anthropologists. This claim takes into account the fluidity of master discourses and aims to destabilize the previously established claim that contemporary anthropology is similar to nationalism as presented by Handler (1985). Given global changes in ideological tendencies since the sixties, given that the history of the twentieth century is also the history of the Soviet Union, it might be time to concede that nationalism can vie for the status of what is exotic, strange, or other to most Western anthropologists. In this I follow the thinking of Torel Moi, herself indebted to Julia Kristeva, that any political idiom eventually has the potential to become another master discourse. Even as mass movements demolish the old order, they are happy to establish a new master discourse. (Kristeva 1977: 511 quoted in Moi 1986)

Subjectivity, relativism, and post-modernism, as key trends in contemporary scholarship, have brought about a reluctance amongst scholars in the social sciences to engage with earnest beliefs in unitary truth. Anthropologists since the 1960s have been anxiously asking themselves: what is the difference between nationalism and culture? Does nationalism take the place of organic culture in the modernist world? Anthropologists have historically studied the marginal and the exotic, showing generous amounts of tolerance for practices beyond common Western morality. This hasn't prevented, but rather, has fuelled fierce debates regarding some of the more controversial cultural practices encountered by anthropologists, such as genital mutilation (Walley 1997) or infanticide (Sargent 1988).

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In anthropology, we are used to studying those who are other to the society from which we write. Nationalists are not culturally other. They are, instead, politically other to most academic readers nowadays. They embody the inverse of reflexivity, cultural relativism and de-mythologising: some of the core paradigms of anthropology of the past ten to twenty years. This was not classically the case. When Handler (1988) and Herzfeld (1987) wrote that anthropology was close to nationalism in its paradigm, they were not only acknowledging its historic roots in Herdian logic; they also accurately reflected on the belief in the fixity of culture. Hence, I believe the majority of my readers will find that claim is somewhat unorthodox.

My motivation in pursuing research on nationalism was always to open up a theoretical enquiry into an arena which is discomforting from the perspective of anthropology – a somewhat contrarian pursuit. With all the eagerness of a recent undergraduate (2005) I wanted to challenge new anthropological paradigms by directing my gaze to what now falls outside it: a belief in fixity. In contemporary anthropology it has come to be the case that a fixed identity is something peculiar, something 'other'. Richard Handler's (1985, 1988) writing lays out his arguments for de-mythologising anthropological work. However, in his papers he also makes the distinction of how we should treat claims of cultural fixity made by those who are powerful (such as the state actor) versus by those who are not (such as minorities) (Handler in Gillis 1996). He assumes nationalist claims are a feature of the powerful; everything else can be classed within minority cultural politics. That presupposition is reinforced by his focus on state nationalism. However, recent studies of nationalist organisations such as Holmes' (2000) cast doubt on such simplistic understandings of the moral imperatives when researching nationalism.

While my interest in nationalism's positionality *vis-à-vis* anthropology's central tenets started as a contrarian pursuit, this dedication developed further as a result of observing the emerging 'fixity' of discourse within academic literature on Macedonia and Balkans. This can be seen in the works of some key authors on the Balkans:

Danforth, Cowan, Glenny and Brown. Danforth (1995), following Handler, declares that an anthropologist's task is to de-reify the nation. He summarizes his purview of the histories of the Balkans by noting that all nation states had guerrilla fighters who "attacked the Turks, fought each other and terrorized the local population." (*ibid.* 58). Similarly, Glenny writes, citing H. N. Brailsford:

> *The reality behind the whole muddle of racial conflicts, beyond the Chauvinism of the Balkan peoples and the calculation of the great Powers, is the unguarded figure of the Macedonian peasant, harried, exploited, enslaved, careless of national programmes, and anxious only for any day when he may keep his warm sheepskin coat upon his back, give his daughter in marriage without dishonour, and eat in peace the bread of his own unceasing labour*
>
> Glenny (2000: 205)

Brown (2003) similarly remarks that local histories in the Balkans do not confirm the Western narrative of deep-seated hatreds. He suggests that one should rather conceive of Balkan people as enduring the lot of their geographic location. When people died in conflict, they "became martyrs of causes that they did not necessarily support, and victims of revenge for crimes with which they had no connection" (*ibid.* 100). These perspectives converge with Wilkinson's (1951) assertion, subsequently strengthened by Jane Cowan's (2000, 2008) work on nationalizing states, that national identity in the Balkans was superficial and the population was not ethnicized (or at least not completely) for most of the hotly contested periods of history.

It should be evident from my interest in the flux of master discourses that I am arguing that these works were not in themselves inappropriate or unnecessary. However, they carry the potential of becoming rather problematic if their frameworks of analysis are unreflexively appropriated in work about the region. My dedication to disentangling these rather convoluted power-dimensions of studying both the Balkans and nationalists placed me in the position of studying a set of political actors who were

both very different and morally problematic. I have taken my lead from Douglas Holmes' writing about a similar conundrum. He presents the positionality of the researcher of nationalism as that of having 'complicity'. It is a delicate balance to create this portrayal, one which I hope I have somewhat accomplished in this thesis. Holmes describes it under the rubric of portraying "Illicit discourses" where:

> *"When political authority is in question and intellectual consensus in doubt, the ethical imperative is to draw the reader through these complexities, compelling them to render discrimination. The aim is to obstruct easy ideological resolution or escape."*

> (Holmes 1998: 278)

Researching nationalists is unnerving. Their morally ambiguous conclusions about what should be done *vis-à-vis* 'the others' among us, as well as the abject among us, combine with sometimes "diagnose[ing] fundamental distortions and contradictions" (Holmes 1993: 72) in the public sphere in Europe at the close of the twentieth century. Like Holmes (Holmes 2000: 199), I was unnerved to find it difficult to sustain a consistent oppositionary stance against all elements of nationalists' arguments. Writing about the right wing, we embed ourselves within that logic as we discover actors who point at valid paradoxes, even if we do not agree with their conclusion as to what should be done to remedy these conditions (Holmes 1993: 257).

Hence, I have taken my task to be one of unflinching representation, guiding the reader through the views of my informants and hoping they will embrace the discomfort it should effect. Holmes's perspective is markedly different from Handler. Holmes recognizes that nationalist actors might be powerless, marginal and marginalised. For the reader, that might be a discomforting proposition. For a number of years we have been urged to fight for the rights of the marginalised. I am not suggesting that because nationalists are marginalised they need to be treated as more ethical than they are. However, I do think that it is our imperative to study those who

are obscured because of the current dynamics of power.

To understand my informants I had to walk in their shoes. Being a *halfie* did not make this a common-place occurrence. I was 'other' culturally (due to my mixed upbringing) and politically (due to my liberal education and belief system) to my informants. I somewhat fill Abu-Lughod's (1991) category. I was born in Sofia, Bulgaria in 1985 and lived there until 1996. My early childhood was shaped by the fall of the socialist system, but my teenage and adult years were shaped by the British public school system in Scotland and the modernist architecture of Cambridge's New Hall College. The inevitable result is that I am hopelessly hybrid. The Bulgaria of my childhood is long gone. It is replaced by something more garish and daring, a place where my immigrant status is viewed with a dose of resentment. As I have already remarked, when I started my research I found it difficult to understand the hooks, the ties which bound my informants' into action. The dimension in which my *halfie* status was helpful was in the elements of affect developed in childhood, the early memories of my grandmother telling me tales of her family under the Ottomans, the chills and sense of horror instilled in the Bulgarian young adult about that heritage lived within me.

I understand ethnographic research to be the practice of the ethnographer instrumentalising her social being for the sake of research. Field research entailed that I enlarge my internal nationalist other. Doing so was the only way to conduct this research and to provide a truly empathic understanding of my field participants. My early childhood conditioning presented an opportunity. My dedication to reflexivity presented an avenue through which to instrumentalise this. As a migrant to the UK, I had developed a reflexivity about my affective ties and rebellious affection for the Oriental as a form of opposition to that conditioning. Nicholas Gallerd (in Ellen 1984) considers the psychological adjustments and conflicts within the ethnographer – in particular those having to do with the need to adjust and to some degree internalise different logics; 'other' logics. Through that process of internalisation, the 'other' moves from being an external other to being an internal other. He argues that one's

identifications multiply (as I found to be the case), and this process of identification and internalisation is key to the ethnographer's claim to knowledge.

In writing this text, the nationalism I expanded for the sake of my fieldwork in order to understand my informants has gradually become the material, as my voice has 'come back from fieldwork'. I have listened to nationalists and understood them with more compassion than most people would allow. This has been possible because I am comfortable with my own political identity. As my informants would often remind me, I am unquestionably liberal. This thesis is probably an uncomfortable experience— it should bring the reader closer to people who are discomforting. It does not, however, advocate nationalism. Rather, it presents it, as far as it is within my abilities as an ethnographer to do so. As with most anthropological work, it involves an element of translation— where I have to translate to the best of my understanding the positions of those I studied, it should be evident that the objective is not to normalize it from an ethical perspective, but to complete my task as an ethnographer.

Aside from the moral dimensions of studying nationalists, I had to define how my engagement with my participants fulfilled my ethical obligation to them. There are things I have chosen not to disclose. They would have been interesting data, and my thesis is made poorer by not including them, yet given that this document goes into the public domain, their disclosure is impossible. I avoided recording some kinds of data, finding that 'forgetting' was an important aspect of giving privacy to an organisation in which I was involved. What I should have forgotten versus what I should have kept can be endlessly discussed; the judgment is one I had to make privately. I tried to find the balance between faithful honesty and a sensationalist journalistic-style expose.

On the level of consent, I was careful not to force my presence on any person. People have the right to not be studied. I gained permission to study the organisation from people leading meetings, as well as informally, through the invitations to social events

by the organisation's members. I attended a large number of events. Gaining formal consent from everyone in my presence was not possible. Furthermore, most events were public or under the remit of the organisation. When I attended the organisation's meeting with third parties, with whom VMRO had sensitive political business, revealing myself as a researcher would have disrupted their activities. People within the organisation were aware of my researcher status. Their sensitivity to that was demonstrated by their intermittent requests for me not to discuss certain personal information I gained about their relationships within the organisation in my thesis.

Bulgarian History: the catastrophe as a framing event

My desire to introduce some historic elements of the organisation's history stems from a number of motives. The most pertinent one is to present enough of a context to make legible the material which follows. The second one is to give a preliminary sense of the different historical processes and power dynamics which have affected this region and organisation. These will be further discussed in Chapter 4 under the rubric of philosophical geographies. Let me start by introducing the importance of territory to nationalism.

Nationalism as an endeavour aims to link state and nation, citizenship and ethnicity (Ozkirimli 2000). The key driver of Balkan histories is ethnic belonging and its complicated relationship to new political units – a process of matching up the jigsaw puzzle of the Balkans under the chaotic order of history. Within literature on the region, it is commonplace to identify Balkan nationalisms as both specifically ethnic and defensive – read as pitched against each other (Ignatieff 1994; Brubaker 1996; Todorova 1997; Danforth 1995). Nationalism focused on ethnicity premises that the right to territory is correlated with ethnic self-determination (Brubaker: 1996), making ethnic minorities a particular threat and territorial ambitions endemic. Seen through the prism of nationalist belief, the state exists mainly for the fulfilment of the destiny of a "core nation" or nationality (*ibid.*: 388), employing ethno-cultural terms which

distinguish the general citizenry from "the legitimate owner of the state" (*ibid.*: 5). This also links national minorities, nationalizing states, and external national "homelands".

The stories that follow should be seen as a road map to understanding the context of the way stories of 'who we are' were narrated by my informants. When I entered the field, I was often told that to understand VMRO and to understand many of the stories re-told here in this thesis, one has to "know history". Although a number of members and ex-members of VMRO are trained historians, not everyone possesses that degree of understanding or needs it in order to relate to the grievances being alluded to by the organization in its public

* see Appendix 1 for cast of characters and actors
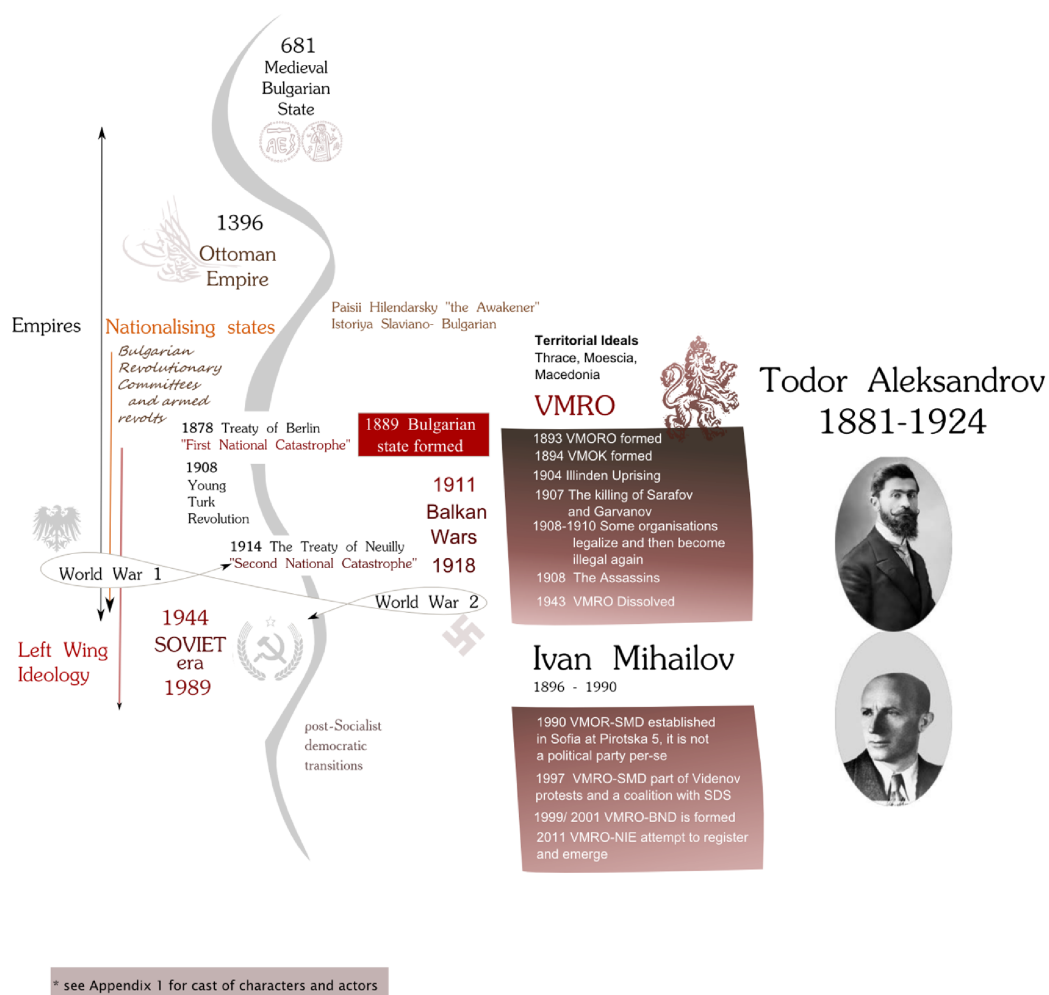
Figure 2 Historical Timeline

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statements. In the place of elaborate historical knowledge, the majority of VMRO members are aware of a set of common-sense histories. In reality, one informant told me, there are only a few people in the organisation at the current time who can really tell you about history, but everyone shares the conviction that the context of histories should inform one's present action. In chapter 3, I will discuss how this plays into group identification in VMRO. While doing fieldwork, I also learned enough of these histories to work with members of the group.

Trying to tell a history in order to contextualize one's writing has a particular genealogy which makes it a problematic endeavour. Authors writing on Macedonia have provided a set of different approaches. Keith Brown (2003), following Bourdieu, has focused on community identities which produce "idioms of the taken for granted". He has criticised zero-sum approaches to historical interpretation, preferring instead to utilize Deborah Tanner's notion of an "argument culture" or that of a Burkean conversation, following Rosaldo (1993). The Burkean conversation is a metaphor which envisages a 'mass of words'; textual communities and spoken communities where people enter and exit the conversation at will, contributing partially, significantly, or not at all. It is, by far, the best description I've seen of the experience of trying to understand the histories of the region. Brown encapsulates the researcher's sense of futility, the sheer size of the literature and the ongoing struggle to capture it as knowledge production of local histories is pursued by disparate actors. He chooses to focus on the idea of the 'textual community'.

Within the histories provided by different actors in the Balkans, one encounters accounts of events which select different points of emphasis. Brown defines this as different styles of imagining, following Anderson, and declares nationalist thought to have a double standard when it comes to history: some events are ordained while others fade. In other work, he and his co-editors term this understanding the "usable past" (Brown and Hamilakis 2003). This idea is mirrored by Roudomentof (2002) who remarks that there are many possible pasts, while some are lost, others are carefully

reproduced. Danforth similarly finds the endeavour of accounting for Macedonian history problematic, mostly due to competing claims by its neighbouring states. He focuses on the idea that history is always symbolic and goes on to give different histories of Macedonia - one of them being his own, an endeavour which Brown (1999) critiques as self-defeating. Roudomentof (2002) also makes a point to stay away from claims of objective truth. Instead, he focuses on the relationship between collective memory and national identity.

For Brown, the genealogy of confusion in the Macedonian question ultimately stems from attempts to solve it. It seems most of his colleagues would agree. Ultimately these approaches converge in Vereni's metaphor (Vereni in Cowan 2000) of what constitutes identity: a man reacting to misfortune and turbulent events goes about doing a task. On his walk back, he look towards his previous location and sees a pattern akin to the shape of a stork - by its nature, intrinsically accidental, yet "The uneven marks produced by activities only partially intentional are interpreted as a design endowed with semantic unity" (*ibid.*: 47). This semiotic elaboration allows people to interpret their lives as more than the product of chance, their locations of birth become origins and they imagine themselves rooted (Malkki 1992).

Anticipating my argument in Chapter 2, and in agreement with the arguments discussed above, I want to pose the hypothesis that some of the problems discussed above arise out of the attempt to narrate as history the symbols and stories used to create collective identity. People's sense of reality, their *doxa*, is infused with partial truths and "the useful past". Symbols allow us to interpret the world around us and ourselves yet this process is one of which people are not self-aware, believing that what they perceive as the 'objective world' just 'is' (Kertzer 1988: 4). The ability to make the world objective is what rescues the subjective actor from the chaos of reality.

Following the concerns detailed above, and cautious of the problem of telling a history, I would like to highlight the role ideally served by the story I provide here. It is to

reveal the impact of historical turns: the Ottoman Empire, multicultural yet permeated with violence, is narrated and re-narrated by East and West Europe in the context of different claims to superiority; Fascism is both a category imbued with power by socialist actors, who used it to define their endeavour, (Daskalov 2011) and a descriptive political category (Frusetta & Glont 2009). Anything that has been a lived social category has power dimensions. No positionality as researchers can free us from that burden: hence, here I take the narrative approach.

It is important to understand that Bulgaria's nationalism is validated in reference to a national ideal. The fight for the territories of the national ideal was driven by a belief in the injustice of the borders created by international 'dictates' after it was disentangled from the Ottoman empire (Mahon 1998). While the international community in the late 19th and early 20th centuries believed minority treaties could protect people in South-Eastern Europe (Cowan 2003, 2007a, 2007b) assimilation was often the handmaiden of

new borders. Left wing ideologies provided an over-arching alternative to the imperatives of competing national dreams, substituting them for an internationalist dream where national priorities were neatly pre-ordered by the Soviet elite.

In this thesis, I will argue that to understand these events, one needs to

Figure 3. This map was originally published in the '*Nie*' magazine 1998 (the red line shows the land allocated by the San Stefan treaty while the green is the perceived breadth of the ethnic spread of Bulgarians)

understand the Ottoman Empire. It existed in the border region between Europe and Asia from 1301-1922 and had overarching authority over the territory of Bulgaria from 1396-1878. It was perceived to be tolerant (Brown 1996) but absolutist, a dark spot on the map of a Europe illuminated by the Enlightenment (Wolff 1996). The advent of nationalism and the modern national state presented a pivotal moment where political power started to shift from divine agency to the will and culture of the masses. In the Balkans, Ottoman subjects initiated a series of parallel nationalising processes (Hroch 1996). National revival movements, inspired by European advances in political theory, mounted claims for independence from within the Ottoman Empire's borders. Nationalisms in South-East Europe were anti-imperial in nature. The Bulgarian National Revival was hybrid in character; it 'caught up' with its European peers. It recapitalized those epochs and made up for them – giving it "a clearly compensatory character" (Daskalov 2004: 44). The revival was transforming the peasant masses and their existing political and social identities into modern national subjectivities (Brubaker 1996, Cowan 2008). However, as I will argue in chapter 2.1 it left traces of worries about measuring up to Enlightened Europe.

New states in the Balkans were only possible through international consensus. That process was heavily influenced by large scale geo-political concerns, often referred to in the context of competition between Britain or "the West" and Russia (Crampton 2003: 83-86). The discussion of the states' independence was contextualised within a discourse of progress, development and tolerance (Wolff 1996). At the same time, 'the European powers' decided the territorial limits of new states in line with their own geo-political concerns (Todorova 1997). Nationalist fighters instigated organized uprisings which usually produced enough casualties to provoke public outrage and campaigners for their cause. Revolutionary nationalists achieved their aim with the help of the Russian Army. The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 led to Bulgaria's independence in the international arena.

The frustration with the borders set by international committee at the Treaty of Berlin

(13 July 1878) is sometimes referred to by nationalists as "the first national catastrophe", the start of the national *malaise*. The territory claimed by the Russians fit well within an imagined national ideal that activists had hoped for (Radev 1973; Mahon 1998; Daskalov 2004). The Treaty of San Stefano (3rd of March 1878), signed solely between Turkey and Russia, allocated a wide breadth of territories to the Bulgarian state, which were close to 'the national ideal'. Figure 3 presents the location of the San Stefano borders. Internationally mediated peace treaties were more stringent. This grievance is at the heart of VMRO's creation. This is captured by the historian Simeon

Radev who, reviewing the reactions of prominent figures within Bulgarian politics at the time, notes that they ranged "from the intoxication of a dream come true to the horror of a catastrophic event" (Radev 1973 : 25–46).

The image of the Bulgarian ideal territory was recurrent during my fieldwork, and I quickly became familiar with its illustration – maps being an important tool for framing territorial claims (Dijkink 1996; Guentcheva 2003; Wilkinson 1951). The perceived homeland of ethnic Bulgarians was referred to by my participants as simply: Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia[7]. This echoed historic usages of the toponyms. In the late 19th century, after the treaty of Berlin, the newly liberated and internationally recognized lands of the Bulgarian state were an abridged version of the ideal. The

Figure 4. "Neuilly old enemies, new friends" Bulgaria is threatened by the hands entitled Greece, France, Serbia, England, Romania, and Russia or eaten by the pigs of the same names.

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[7] The terms are borrowed from toponyms dating back to the Roman Empire.

remainder of the territories were left under the control of the Ottoman Empire. Radev's (1973) historical discussion of the processes immediately after the Berlin Treaty relates how the initial shock of the border's limited domain gave way to considering how this could be undone. In the aftermath of the Treaty of Berlin, a number of revolutionary fighters re-defined their aims. National independence was not sufficient. It had to come with specific territories, territories which – for the most part – were still held by the Ottoman Empire.

The early twentieth century saw first the Balkan Wars, then the World Wars. They contributed and emerged out of the chaotic contestations between the South-East European successors to the Ottoman Empire. Bulgarian fighters did not make significant gains in line with their ideal (Mahon 1998; Daskalov 2004) but rather, together with their neighbouring states, gained a negative reputation (Todorova 1996, Glenny 2000). The Ottoman Empire retreated into the territory of the Turkish state during the Balkan wars. However, the fixation with borders and the self-identified minorities left outside the new borders meant that Bulgaria, like other states in the Balkans, contested territory with its neighbours Serbia and Greece – who then became Bulgarian nationalists' new 'enemies'. From 1911–1918, the region was engulfed in fighting, which alienated its international allies (Todorova 1997; Glenny 2000; Brown 2003; Glenny 1999: 228).

As will be explored further in the final chapter, the idea of ethnic Bulgarians being 'beyond borders' is inter-laced with a discourse of suffering, particularly suffering under those regimes. It is one of the affective discourses which most acutely feeds into VMRO's nationalist discourses. This discourse was transposed to the international area (Cowan 2007), yet when dislodged from national mythology, it is less convincing. That period is the source of my research participant's dislike of Serbia. During fieldwork, they told me stories of the terror of historical Serbian domination and related it to contemporary assimilationist practices. Part of Bulgaria's misfortune with borders stemmed from being on the 'wrong side of history'. In both World Wars, it was on the

side of Germany (for a variety of reasons discussed by Crampton 2003).

The fighting of the Balkan Wars flowed into the First World War. Bulgaria entered into the conflict eager to confront a 'new' enemy, the Serbs. Being on the side of the Germans, Bulgaria was punished at the Treaty of Neuilly (part of the Treaties of Versailles, signed on the 27th of November 1919). This marks what is known as its "second national catastrophe". It lost 'its' Macedonia, this time to Serbia and Greece. It also lost other territories to Serbia, namely what Bulgarian nationalists call the Western Outerlands[8]. Bulgarian national newspapers put out *traurni* (mourning) editorials for the region. The diplomat who returned back to Bulgaria with the signed Treaty of Neuilly famously said: "I am carrying back Bulgaria's coffin".

The Western Outerlands' minority Bulgarian population were an obscure cause pursued by VMRO, which highlights how such losses could be treated. Encouraged by political activism such as that of VMRO, the population of the Western Outerlands continues to mark the Treaty of Versailles with a mourning shroud. Members of the population commemorate the date by hanging a black headscarf over the national flag on *Zadushnitza* – typically the date when the Eastern Orthodox Church honours its dead. This consciousness is kept alive by local activists such as Ivan Nikolov. He is a long-term activist for the Bulgarian minority in the Outerlands with a background in law. Nikolov presents his version of the Outerlands' history in a memorandum on the minority (Nikolov 2002). I became more closely acquainted with him when I travelled with VMRO across the border.

Nikolov's perception of history, expanded at length in both his memorandum, and in a variety of public events which I attended throughout my fieldwork, presents a lucid example of how 'the misfortunes of history' are narrated. Nikolov narrates the contemporary minority in the Western Outerlands as suffering, as people made

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[8] Although the naming of the region might seem like an irredentist claim, the denomination is older than the conflict.

subservient to European history, having "the misfortune to end up under the influence of an international military and political hurricane". He elicits the commonly used notion of "a dictate" of the international order, of being left behind as orphans to face a stillborn state (Yugoslavia). Nikolov reflects on the historically set border, calling it one of the least humane borders ever created. In his memorandum, he writes that it was called by a Western journalist 'the black border'. It is customary for members of VMRO to ritually burn the treaty after a torch-lit procession on the date of its signing. 'Down with Neuilly!' echoes around torch-lit processions. My participants' Facebook status updates announced and echoed this just as clearly as on the streets during commemorative events. Multiple participants posted the images in Figure 4, which show Bulgaria being torn to bits. An informant elaborated his distaste:

> *The Treaty of Neuilly is a symbol of the injustice, the arrogance and short-sightedness of the winning states, who had torn off a primary part from the body of the fatherland*

In these portrayals, an active agent of the minority's misfortune is Serbia and its nationalist intelligentsia.

The contentious histories of the early twentieth century in Europe were imbued with political tensions accompanying the appearance of socialism, fascism and national-socialism (commonly referred to as Nazi ideology) onto the world stage. The events of World War II changed the meaning of nationalist ideology (Ozkirimli 2000). Nationalism became more than a form of political ideology, marked by a preference for the nation-state. It gained moral dimensions, refracted through the horrific consequences of the Nazi government in Germany. Politically formative historical moments, such as Bulgaria's entry on the side of Germany in World War II, and strong right wing tendencies within at least one proto-organisation of VMRO, defined the historical understanding of the denomination "VMRO" vis-à-vis that history. The association between the most violent variants of nationalism and the Macedonian question were strengthened by the fact that Macedonia was briefly Bulgarian in 1941-44 – namely,

during the Second World War. This contingent of history branded the semiotic associations with Bulgaria's pursuit of Macedonia bother internally and externally.

Although there were elements of extreme right wing ideology within historical VMRO and Bulgaria at the time, this description alone obscures the ideological struggles which existed at that historical period. Conflicts in the early organisation were defined by different activists' positionality *vis-à-vis* a spectrum of left to right wing ideology. Elements and degrees of right and left wing ideology could be found within early VMORO, which is partly why it is so easy to claim common heroes from different ideological perspectives. However, when narratives of history were written in the Bulgaria between 1950 and 1990, a whole set of organisations were over-emphatically branded "fascist" as a way to justify the left-wing struggle for a socialist revolution (Daskalov 2011). Daskalov, after subtle historiographic examination of Bulgarian Soviet literature on fascism, concludes that socialist hard-liners' view of Bulgarian fascism "can be called metaphysical in the literary sense of being above empiricism" (*ibid.* 149). After 1944, the label "fascist" was used to exclude certain people from positions of power, the right to freedom, and even from the right to live, by naming them "enemies of the people" (Crampton 2003: 185–186). This is not to say that fascism, extreme nationalism or anti-Semitism did not or do not exist. Rather, it is to stress that in the context of the consolidation of the Socialist state in Bulgaria, narratives of history were heavily politicized. Following Holmes, I will approach the moral ambiguities of this domain by drawing out and presenting the conflicting stories that make up the history of Bulgaria and VMRO's early twentieth century past.

After the end of World War II, a left wing government was established in Bulgaria – it became a 'people's republic' in a series of complex political events (see Crampton 2003: 181–195). The central government in Sofia did not join a pan-Balkan federation – a model which was formalised in the Yugoslav state. Instead it remained independent of Yugoslavia and become a satellite of the Soviet Union. Within the Yugoslav federation, a collection of scholars formalised Macedonian nationality (Crampton 2003:

194). If negotiations of territorial boundaries had previously happened on the axis of European foreign policy and different nationalist factions, they now took place in the context of Communist Party politics[9]. The post-war Bulgarian government did not directly oppose the elaboration of a Macedonian national identity. The schism between Yugoslavia's Tito and Stalin provided yet another dimension to the Macedonian question and the question of ethnic Bulgarians in Macedonia, and inversely of ethnic Macedonians in the Pirin region of Bulgaria (Crampton 2003: 203-204; Atanasova: 2004).

Negotiations over contentious territories persevered throughout the duration of South-Eastern Europe's Communist period. This can be illustrated by the case of Pirin Macedonia (Frusetta 2006). The Communist leadership of Yugoslavia asked Bulgaria to give up its historically acquired south-western regions, those of the Pirin Mountain range, where much of the fighting throughout the Macedonian movements' history took place. Alternatively, Bulgaria was asked to accept that a Macedonian minority exists therein. Contemporary manifestations, and continuing conflict, around this issue can be observed in the ongoing attempts to register the political party OMO Illinden. OMO Illinden claims to represent a Macedonian minority in Bulgaria located in those regions. In 2009, the organization protested in front of the Strasburg Council of Europe because they were refused registration as a political party in Bulgaria for the third time. Meanwhile, my research participants follow OMO Illinden's progress with interest and considered various responses to their activism.

VMRO's History

The organization which forms the basis of my analysis, VMRO, embodies a number of classic thematics of Balkan nationalism and claims a stake in the heritage discussed above. Most important from the perspective of understanding the affective nature of

[9] See chapter 2.1, discussion of the socialist national subject.

national belonging and geo-political imagination, the original Macedonian question in Bulgaria represented a disappointed national ideal (Mahon 1998: 391). VMRO is intrinsically tied to the end of the Ottoman Empire and the Macedonian question. While my informants would state that you needed to know history to love your nation, here I lean upon the premise that you need to know history in order to understand the power dynamics of how specific categories emerge in the course of history.

According to the majority of my participants, the "Macedonian problem" stems from the fundamental injustices that lie at the heart of the "national catastrophes" discussed above. The two catastrophes, the Treaty of Neuilly and the Treaty of Berlin, led to people with Bulgarian consciousness being left outside borders and thus subject to assimilationist policies. When VMRO say "Bulgarians abroad" it is a shorthand reference for people who were left outside the Bulgarian state's border. Documentary archives show that the adjustment of borders left numerous refugees (Vasileva 1993), amplified by the assimilationist policies of the states under which the populations remained – a common process throughout South-East Europe (Brubaker 1996). This has been presented by VMRO activists, and other Bulgarians, as the product of international short-sightedness, if not negligence, in establishing borders in the Balkans.

VMRO now, as well as historically (Cowan 2003), continues to point out "the suffering masses": those left outside borders and out of sync with the borders of existing political units. Its activism is directed at the macro and micro scale: the frustrated national territorial ideal as the most intimate domain of the political subjects' sense of self in its micro aspects. It is the conviction of VMRO activists that the reason the organisation continues to exist is because there are still people who want to say, but who are unable to freely express, that they are Bulgarian, in the Republic of Macedonia (as well as some who are scattered in the territories of its other neighbours, significantly Northern Greece) and who suffer repercussions for doing so.

When I first entered the VMRO office, I was struck by stickers, posters and books that

filled the place, most of them bearing a historical theme. A low set of drawers bore a large collection of stickers from past campaigns – many, with a historical thematic. I found many to be familiar from my walks through the streets of Sofia. As will be discussed in Chapter 2.3, commemorations of historical figures were an integral part of the organisation's life-world. During my fieldwork I was part of a yearly hike that commemorated Todor Aleksandrov's death, where I bonded with the activists and was told adventurous stories of *cheti*[10] walking through the legendary Pirin Mountain, often around the campfire and in between singing songs about revolutionaries. Today's organization draws on a genre of history-related activities usually involving a torch lit guard. They produce printed calendars, both large and small, with the VMRO's emblem or the likeness of its famous leaders, such as Mihailov or Aleksandrov. The VMRO of my fieldwork, especially those in Sofia, celebrated Mihailov's infamous assassins.

VMRO's proto-organisations are two parallel structures, which historically took up the cause of 'liberating Macedonia' from Ottoman rule. These are VMOK [IMOK], founded in 1894 and VMORO [IMORO] founded in 1893. The different meanings of the "V" in the acronyms indicates the difference between the two: the first one is *Vurhoven* (overarching/ supreme), the second is *Vutreshen* (interior). It is a question of disputed histories, particularly with regards to the history of VMORO, between contemporary Bulgarian and Macedonian historians and laymen, on the question of whether both organizations believed in the ethnically Bulgarian nature of Macedonia. Some have argued that VMOK was Bulgarian in character in opposition to being Macedonian. VMORO in contrast has been interpreted by different historians in contrasting ways as propagating either Macedonian or Bulgarian nationalism.

VMORO is the organisation whose heritage is most contested. These debates point to what Frusetta calls 'the use of history', and particularly of common heroes mobilised for different ideological purposes (Frusetta 2004). Within contemporary VMRO, it is

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[10] Informal, fighting units akin to paramilitary groups.

claimed that VMORO was created in the spirit of the Bulgarian Revolutionary Committees established under the Ottoman Empire, as described in Zahari Stojanov's iconic work "*Notes on the Bulgarian Uprisings*". A key thematic of the contestation around VMORO is whether revolutionaries used the distinction 'Bulgarian' and 'Macedonian' as a national distinction, rather than as a regional one within the same nation.

The VMRO of my fieldwork imagines the difference between VMORO and VMOK to be tantamount to a kind of division of labour. VMORO's scope of work was *zad granitza* (behind [the] border, meaning behind Bulgaria's western border), while VMOK created structures on the territory of Bulgaria on the basis of existing refugee communities (situated in the territories of Macedonia) and rallied Bulgarian public opinion. VMOK counted as its members the emerging Bulgarian intelligentsia and prominent military men educated in the newly established nation state Bulgaria. It was even, for some time, favoured by the ruling elite in the country. The history of these organizations in the early twentieth century is one of continuing fluctuation between degrees of illegality *vis-à-vis* the different governments on the territories within which they operated. The two organisations also had turbulent biographies where relations oscillated between cooperation and animosity.

The reproduction and representation of the two organisations was ensured by a set of formal and informal practices – which become objects for interpretation within historical analysis. The formal practices included the production of documents as statements of official positions, the conscription of members who had taken an oath and position within it, and events known as congresses, where documents could be agreed upon, disputes could be settled or escalated, and members could be excluded. Amongst the contemporary descendants of the organisations, similar processes exist – congresses held and still hold a special place in the life of the organization. During a congress, the organisation might change its name, split, change leadership or even disband. This reflects the dynamics of an organisation's re-production in time.

VMORO is the key basis for the symbolic capital claimed by the many organisations named VMRO in Macedonia and the contemporary VMRO which I studied in Bulgaria. Claimants of the letters VMRO spin versions of history from bifurcations in the ideological positions of the historic organization. One such division occurred over debates on whether to have an uprising or not on the territory of Macedonia in the early 20th century, when would be the right time to try to organise an uprising with, or on behalf of, the local population and what would be the aim of that uprising. Along those lines, the unsuccessful Ilinden uprising of July 1903 caused considerable internal strife.

Further bifurcations derived from the emerging left wing ideologies amongst a number of the organization's members. The *Serska* (Serres) organisation headed by Sandanski is eponymous in contemporary VMRO's narrative of that problem. It is considered to have been a hotbed of left leaning (often referred to as internationalist) ideological beliefs. In 1906, Sandanski, and a number of organizations in his region, left congress. In 1907, in inter-organisational fighting, Boris Sarafov and Ivan Garvanov were killed in Sofia by Todor Panitza as part of the conflict between left-leaning and right leaning factions. The murder was said to have been ordered by Sandanski and is commonly considered the start of "fratricides" in the movement. These killings, which continued for many years after, are flashes of the conflicts happening within the organisation concerning its trajectory. In the congress of 1908, Sandanski was officially excluded from VMORO. He and his cohorts were given 'death sentences' – a kind of assassination order. Sandanski's assassination was carried out in 1915, and is believed to confirm the well-known dictum "VMRO gets there slowly but does not forget".

In 1908, what remained of the Ottoman Empire reformed and the "Young Turk revolution" took shape. Sandanski was one of the first to form an allegiance with the new authorities. His ideological convictions led him to be interested in a leftist, federalist Balkan state which might encompass Macedonia. Following Sandanski's example, a number of the *cheti* in VMRO declared themselves to the Ottoman

authorities after the Young Turk revolution and became legal. In the stream of events which followed, legalization proved premature. Subsequent years saw the killing and torture of a number of the old fighters. The organization became illegal again in the spring of 1910. In these turbulent times, Todor Aleksandrov emerged as a personality on the new central committee of VMORO. He is an important figure for contemporary VMRO, viewed as a unifying force who declared: "If anyone says I am not Macedonian, I will cut off his tongue, if anyone says I am not Bulgarian, I will cut off his head".

With the Treaty of Neuilly, the territories for which VMORO had so far fought shifted from being within the Ottoman Empire to being within Serbian rule. After The Treaty of Neuilly, VMORO – as far as my participants were concerned – was re-formed as VMRO, a structure with Todor Aleksandrov at its helm. This structure directed its attention to Macedonian territories under Serbian domain and "Serbian assimilation politics" towards the local population. Macedonian Brotherhoods organized by and dedicated to, refugees from the territories that were outside the Bulgarian state appeared alongside the revolutionary organization. The refugee Brotherhoods agreed on memoranda at conferences and sent petitions first to the head of the Paris Peace Conference, then to the League of Nations in Geneva and to the Congress of Minorities (Cowan 2003, 2007b).

As an armed and trained paramilitary organization, VMRO was courted by the Comintern[11]. VMRO's left leaning activists put pressure on the leadership to agree to collaborate. In a series of events surrounding that courtship, a document called the May Manifesto was drafted in Vienna (May 1924). It was written as an address to the Macedonian population urging it to join the Comintern's fight. Contemporary VMRO believes that the historical leader Aleksandrov was assassinated on the 31st of August 1924 because he was starting to doubt the May Manifesto and thus VMRO's association with the Left Wing revolution. Aleksandrov's secretary at the time of his

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[11] The Communist International.

death, Ivan Mihailov, took charge of the organisation. Within ten days of learning of the assassination he organized the events of Gorna Djoumaija[12] – a bloody settling of accounts (Georgiev and Biliarski 1993: 217–248). Those he held responsible for Aleksandrov's death and for divisions within the organization were given death sentences. In February 1925, at the sixth congress of the organization, Mihailov became VMRO's new leader.

Mihailov's VMRO no longer had a Left Wing. He reformed the organization into new fighting units that undertook symbolic assignations, moving away from the idea of organizing an uprising (Georgiev & Biliarski 1993). The organisation which had always been conspiratorial became even more so. Mihailov focused on creating youth organizations in Bulgaria and across the border into Macedonia – now within the territorial boundaries of Serbia, in international centres like Geneva (Cowan 2007) and amongst the Macedonian diaspora in America[13]. Their focus was on the printing of books and articles which portrayed VMRO's perspective on history.

Contemporary VMRO commemorate a set of assassins which testify to their positionality *vis-à-vis* the stream of history. Foremost among them is Vlado Chernozemski[14]. He conducted one of the most infamous assassinations of the 20th century – the killing of Serbian King Alexander Karadjordjevitch (9th September 1934). VMRO in Sofia commemorates it annually with a shooting match under the slogan "death of the tyrant". The female assassin, Mara Buneva, preceded Chernozemski. She killed Velimir Prelić (13 January 1928), a Serbian prosecutor who had been prosecuting members of Mihailov's youth organisations in Belgrade. Ivan Mihailov's wife, Mencha Karnicheva assassinated Todor Panitza – who was held partly responsible for the "fratricide" in the organisation.

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[12] An old denomination for contemporary Blagoevgrad.
[13] Setting up MPO – the Macedonian Patriotic Organizations.
[14] Vlado Chernosemski also assassinates Dimo Hadjidimov Hadjivanov, an influential left wing VMRO member, at the behest of Mihailov.

The events outlined above provided the stories I found in the context of my research. There are undoubtedly those in the Bulgarian public arena who have more sophisticated historical understandings of these events, which go beyond the crudely polarized versions. There are complex Burkean conversations surrounding these events. There are also certainly those within the contemporary VMRO who would firmly insist that the organization is neither left nor right on the basis of its history, and that for them, the national fight transcended these divisions.

The Contemporary VMRO-BND

Through the prism of commemorations within contemporary VMRO-BND, the organization is presented as authentically right-wing, hierarchical, and conspiratorial. Tensions surrounding these historical representations appear occasionally in the course of organizational life (as will be discussed in Chapter 3.2). The ideas of left-wing internationalists were not always antithetical to VMRO. The bureaucracy and violence of making and breaking organizations in congresses, the choosing of central committees and the presence of charismatic leadership, are constitutive of the heritage given to this name in the Bulgarian context.

What is uncontested is that VMRO are four letters that have large political capital. VMRO in Bulgaria has, over more recent years, become synonymous with Krasimir Karakachanov, a politician and a historian who – paradoxically for some – is not of Macedonian descent. During Socialism, VMRO was banned, but the Macedonian Brotherhoods housed on Pirotska 5, a street in central Sofia, continued to exist. They were organized according to the territories in Macedonia from which they came. During an interview, a long-term activist remarked that the old ones, the members of the Macedonian Brotherhoods, failed to bring their children into the organization. Thus, as democratic changes opened up new political possibilities in the 1990s, the new structure which emerged featured fewer and fewer people of direct Macedonian descent. Prominent families, reverently referred to as *veliki rodove* (great ancestor

lines) had been a feature of the historical organization. Those, too, seemed to disappear from organizational work. Contemporary activists instead remember a time when many of the old Macedonians were dying, noting:

> *we used to go to a funeral every week, I had this suit, all the young people would be sitting around not eating anything but you would see the old ones, the ones that knew death was just round the corner, eating at funerals taking in as much life as they could.*

Students from the Sofia and Veliko Turnovo Universities, who were unrelated to the existing Brotherhoods, became interested in the Macedonia context even before the change of regime in 1989. A number of them were inspired by public lectures in the hall in Pirotska 5 which dared to voice unpopular opinions (Karakachanov : 2004). According to Karakachanov, the Cultural-Enlightenment club *Gotze Delchev*, of which he was a part, was a particularly prominent part of the Brotherhoods during the final years of Communism. After '89, in 1990, VMRO- SMD (*Sujuz na Makedonskite Drujestava*- Union of the Macedonian Brotherhoods) was registered as a political formation. It participated in the politics of the Macedonian Question through its campaign for the recognition of Macedonia's sovereignty as a state in the wake of the dissolution of the Yugoslav conflict. The Bulgarian government recognized Macedonia in 1992 and was among the first countries to do so. Over the formative years of the Post-Socialist organisation, Krasimir Karakachanov rose through the ranks and gradually, with each congress, became part of the leadership of VMRO.

Karachanov's rise to sole leadership of the organization came in the aftermath of wide-scale protests led by the organisation. The then prime-minister, Jan Videnov, had led the country into an economic downturn (Konakchieva 2003). VMRO were the first to protest, staging mass demonstrations throughout December 1996. The government subsequently resigned. One activist who became a member then (but distanced herself later) told me that she was attracted to its paramilitary nature, and the discipline, order and structure. Activists from that era generally remember this time as being 'at the

barricades'. They built piles of stones which stood menacingly in protest locations. Those were replicated in a contemporary protest by VMRO; however this time, in contrast, the protest was more symbolic than mass-scale. One newspaper immediately identified the parallel, printing a photo of the original action.

These early 90s are portrayed in golden-hued tones by many of my sources. It was for them a more romantic and ideologically principled time, although maybe this is refracted through the prism of the narrators' nostalgia for the idealism of their youth. One of VMRO's older members remembers carrying a TV into the foyer of the (Sofia) university to show films about Macedonia. He says with a side-note of disapproval that the current youth organization does not seem to exert itself as much. The youth do not, it seems to him, 'burn for the cause' in the same way. Other activists remember travelling through conflict-torn Yugoslavia 'on a task' or going to the border at that time to taunt the guards.

After the congress of 1997, when Karakachanov was chosen as sole leader of VMRO-SMD, he pushed for VMRO's registration as a political party. The period 1997-2001 was imbued with controversy and for this reason, it was not commonly referred to amongst my participants. I have had to piece together its history on my own through a number of blanks, disgruntled internet articles, old newspaper articles, stories by former activists, and fragments of inattentive narrative. In 1999, the organization split. A number of the older members did not want VMRO to be registered as a political party. They believed the Macedonian question would be better served by an organisation akin to an NGO. One of the men who left was an ancestor of VMRO's co-founder, Hristo Tatarchev. Hristo Tatarchev's ancestor – Ivan Tatarchev – was in his own right an important man. He was lawyer and the country's first post-socialist chief prosecutor. Two years later, in 2001, the entire youth organisation was excluded at congress. They left, saying that VMRO should not be a political party. Since then, VMRO's name has been tainted with the accusations that the warring parties threw at each other. The main one was that Karakachanov had created VMRO-OOD (OOD is an

abbreviation used after the name of a commercial entity) i.e. that VMRO had been recreated as a firm that appropriated the lands originally held by the Macedonian brotherhoods[15] and constituted capital for his political and personal advancement.

In the late 1990s VMRO had high approval ratings due to their Videnov intervention but also to the connection to the historical organisation. This allowed contemporary VMRO to present itself as an authentic, Bulgarian organization, dating back to the nationalism of the Bulgarian revival period. VMRO declared itself to be against the national nihilism of the socialist era (see Chapter2.1). The party was semi-mockingly referred to as *voivodite* – meaning approximately "the chieftains", a reference to the revolutionary past but one that also set them apart. Where did the political approval ratings go? What happened to that political capital that 'the barricades' had generated? These questions were asked by two intelligent, young, professional, long-term members after a few beers loosened their tongues.

I too have wondered. Aside from the in-fighting which left a mark on its public persona, one hypothesis might be that VMRO's decline mirrors that of ODS, their early coalition partner. VMRO never had enough votes spread evenly across the country to be elected independently. They had been successful only when in coalition with ODS, the democratic opposition movement which boldly dominated the post-socialist 90s. VMRO, as a coalition partner, helped to boost ODS's electorate in the Blagoevgrad area. The coalition disintegrated in 2001. ODS faded politically and became embroiled in endless leadership struggles.

After its collaboration with ODS ended, VMRO plunged into the world of coalition politics. When Bulgaria elected Simeon II, the descendant of Bulgaria's last, pre-socialist monarch as Prime Minister, VMRO formed a coalition called "Gergiovden".

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[15] The Macedonian brotherhoods had a fund and properties that were historically utilized to aid refugees coming into Bulgaria. For example, it built the orphanage "Bitola" for children who arrived in Sofia with no parents. When refugees died they would sometimes leave their property and/or belongings to the brotherhoods.

They tried to regain political capital in 2003 by gathering signatures against the closing of AEZ Kozludui, the nuclear power plant which ensured Bulgaria's energy independence. This was an early form of opposition politics to the EU and an attempt to engage with issues beyond that of Macedonia. In 2005, another coalition handed the organization some seats in parliament, leading up to the start of my fieldwork.

The material which follows in this thesis does not describe the operation of a successful political organization. It does describe one that has, in various incarnations, tried to keep itself in the public eye and engage the public imagination and affects. VMRO has– apparently successfully– helped to reproduce nationalism even when it could not reproduce an electorate. As such, its attempts at orienting its message has provided focus to my search for the meaning of 'being nationalist'. This thesis foregrounds how nationalism is produced and reproduced by a nationalist organisation. Nationalism is not simply an aspect of the nation–state, the elements with which it is formulated are not immaculately conceived.

Just as the historical narratives of VMRO and Bulgaria echo, but do not overlap, similarly the frames of identification which activists had between themselves (which served to create an organisational identity and sense of affinity) were somewhat different from the more common national symbols and subject–positions. In Chapters 2 to 2.3 of the thesis I will consider the dynamics of national subjectivity as a general principle. From 2.3 onwards, I will consider how the imperative of 'being nationalist' is built on the basis of tensions within the construction of national subjectivity. I will make the case for why this is best understood through the prism of affective politics. In Chapters 3 to 3.2 I will consider the internal dynamics of socialisation of VMRO and how the organisation is reproduced in time through bearing various motifs in the context of particular social dramas and symbolic practices.

When the ideal nation–state was not achieved following Bulgaria's emergence out of the Ottoman Empire, these moments of failure were – and continue to be – perceived

as catastrophes wounding the nation, contributing to its perpetual 'ill health'. From 'above' it seems that the blind passion of irredentism prevents regional peace. The impression of the 'Balkan mess' that an outside observer might see is invisible from the ground, where it is replaced by a belief in a particular narrative of history: by a conviction that, historically, there have been unjust decisions about territorial boundaries followed by turbulent regime changes. This conviction feeds into a wounded collective national self.

The Bulgarian national subject and the nationalist activists' vision of the world are brought together in the context of particular campaigns. I will consider these in Chapters 4 to 4.3 of the thesis. These reveal the dynamics of other-ing in the widest sense in the context of the Balkans. I examine how local reality is conceived dialogically in relation to being European. 'Being European' is a marker which is both coveted and problematic. Europe can represent both a standard and an alien, a meddling international arena in which Eastern European states need to validate their existence and are neither authentically other and exotic nor familiar and safe. This defines the conflict or complex of the flawed national self – encouraging its affective politics.

Chapter 2 Being Worthy: The national subject typified and diagnosed

In this thesis, I argue in line with Berezin that nationality is a pattern of emotional attachment to the polity, a kind of sentimental education (Berezin 2001). Macro and micro-level processes unite in the context of citizens' 'national experience', providing feelings of security, familiarity and comfort. Authors of the Balkans such as Todorova (2011) and Verdery (2000) have argued in favour of understanding nationalism as more akin to the realm of kinship and religion; that is, as an ancestor cult, rather than rational political theory. In this second chapter, I will consider existing theoretical differentiation between citizens' emotive and rational engagements with the state. In subsequence, I will propose ways in which we can talk about nationalism's emotive nature in a nuanced way, without resorting to the problematic division of ethnic and civic forms of nationalism.

In the following three chapters, in particular, and in a more diffuse way throughout the thesis, I will explore how my informants' inner affective states have come to be intertwined with "the nation" through their conviction that à national subjectivity is deeply tied to their personal subjectivity. I will show that this is particularly aligned with culturally configured worries about the negative connotations of one's national identity, discussed in the following two chapters as either 'the complex' or 'national psychology'. It would be going too far to say that my participants were Strathern's "dividuals". However, the emotional involvement with the category of the nation of a number of Bulgarian nationalists whom I encountered, suggests to me that their mode of personhood is not individual, but is rather tied into a historically constructed national subjectivity. In the following chapters I will flesh out how that subjectivity comes into being from theoretical (further below), genealogical (Chapter 2.1) and ethnographic (Chapter 2.2) perspectives.

My informants and other people within Bulgaria's public arenas narrated the nation as being 'ill'. Within those narratives, a person is affected by a national malaise and cannot remedy it without also seeking to act on the wider polis. I will argue, that this is how people slip towards 'being nationalist'. This is the groundwork for looking at how being a national subject implicates Bulgarians not only in remembrance and memory work (Connerton 1986; Gillis 1994:3), but in specific affective states: being proud or ashamed; angry or sad.

The purpose of Chapters 2 to 2.3 is to explore how the dense jumble of semiotic poetics and familiarity, which one encounters in daily life in Bulgaria relate to the symbolism and the subjectivity of 'being Bulgarian'. The theoretical literature related here leans on Kristeva's distinction between the 'semiotic' as an arena of subversion, process and inter-textuality, poised in opposition to the 'symbolic' – the arena of structure being created and firm meaning (Moi 1986). The category of analysis I will employ in this thesis, that of national subjectivity, embodies the dynamic relationship between symbols (as structure) and the semiotics of day to day life. The work done by this framework is similar, but not identical to, Živković's (2011) usage of the dreamscape. He utilises the term 'dreamscape' in response to the erratic and sometimes 'downright bizarre' Magical Realist elements of the Serbian public discourses he relates – describing them as nightmarish, delirious and twilight forms of consciousness. Hence Živković rejects treating the narratives he observes as 'texts'. Within a different vein, here I revert to treating the themes of Bulgarian daily life – overviewed in these introductory chapters – as 'texts'. Most of the material that will be reviewed in this thesis has emerged out of textual form or is inter-textual. Within the discourses I will relate in the following few chapters, there are tendencies towards structure within which do not resemble a dreamscape. Unlike Živković, I will not be looking at the very real domain of conspiracy theories in the post-socialist public domain. I will interpret the metaphor of 'mud' in the Bulgarian context through Kristeva's notion of abjection.

This is a distinct perspective from the way that nationalism has been approached in existing literature. The idea of the nation as a shared semiotic space is well-established within existing academic literature (Billig, 1999; Anderson, 1983; Edensor, 2002; Herzfeld, 1997); however, the focus is more on 'disenchanted' components and on the symbolic as opposed to the subjective. Theorists, such as Billig (1997) have been sceptical about the focus on subjectivities in contemporary theoretical thought. Through the concept of banal nationalism he suggested a return to looking at symbols, proposing a focus on the forgotten and thus unseen significance of one's everyday surroundings. Billig argues that the nation is reproduced not by dynamic imagined communities, but through 'accepted banal myths', the continuous and somewhat unself-conscious flagging of certain symbols which tie one to the nation state in everyday life. This is a secular vision: a ceremony can be just a routine, bled from transcendental connotations, and yet still matter. The banal is found in routine and habits – where people collectively forget the constructed nature of lived experience (*ibid.* 37) and lean on existing *doxa*. In this framework, the analytic focus is diverted from subjectivities. Instead there is a focus on the production and reproduction of the common-sense, of what is considered simply as normal: an *enhabited* life-world (*ibid.* 37-40)*.*

Billig (1999) resists the subjective, bemoaning the psychological variables that underlie borders in Anderson's idea of imagined communities. Namely he argues that as this category is predicated on psychology, there would be an infinite way of imagining communities. More precisely "National identities are forms of social life rather than internal psychological states: as such they are ideological" (*ibid.* 24). In his portrayal, ideology is detached from the matrix of its production in nationalist activism. In my observations during fieldwork, this did not seem to be the case. While he provides a new and insightful approach, he fails to take into account self-conscious national identities (probably as a result of his case studies).

Analyses which follows Billig focus on the "daily flagging" of the nation. In my

fieldwork in Bulgaria, these would include instances when I heard the national anthem in the background of an event or advertisement; saw some nuts being marketed under the familiar slogan "There is nothing better than our own" (which customarily also refers to Bulgarian women or children being superior); encountered pieces of advertising in the German/ Austrian supermarket chain Billa, such as one which stated, "long live-Bulgaria" in a speech bubble (in the shape of the Bulgarian state with a background of the Bulgarian flag). Another poster in the same store featured a quote from the prodigious national author Ivan Vazov asserting love for the motherland. On separate occasions I encountered a branded serviette holder advertising *raki*[16] which said "Made in Bulgaria" while an advert for another brand of *raki* called the alcoholic drink "the spirit of Bulgaria". I saw an advert for filo pastry featuring grandmothers 'making banitza in a traditional way'. Walking around Sofia, I observed people wearing patriotic t-shirts - some of them sold out of the garage-base next to the Sofia West football fan club. In a daily newspaper, a football match between the Bulgarian and Swedish national team was illustrated with two photographs: one showing young boys holding national flags, another featured a young woman with the Bulgarian flag painted on her face painting one onto a man's. The article clarified that 'charming ladies' were offering to paint people's faces before the match, an initiative by one of the sponsors of the football club, the mobile operator M-Tel.

However these perspectives focus primarily on the daily flagging of positive connotations of the nation. There is a poverty of literature which can shed light on the nation's emotive content - including negative and neurotic affects relating to the nation. Here, I will argue that focusing on the positive flattens out the complex domain of affective engagement with one's state of residence. Aside from positive significations, I heard my research participants and various other citizens of Bulgaria talk of *doxic* ideas such as a prodigious "Bulgarian laziness", or people's *kompleksarshtina* - "having a complex". In Bulgaria, as in Britain, the term is derived from the dictionary of a psychiatrist.

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[16] A strong alcoholic drink.

Figure 5 Daily flagging of the nation.

People I met in day-to-day life in Bulgaria, as well as amongst my field participants, would invariable remark on the presence of "too many crazies wondering the streets" and attribute it to an "illness of the nation". As the reader will see in this chapter, these assertions were not exclusive to nationalists. Nationalists, however, had particular solutions for redressing these circumstances and attempted to shape the discourses which diagnose the degradation of the nation. What was being 'flagged' in this case was not conceived as banal; rather, it was a national condition of derangement.

Bulgaria was perceived as a country where society and the state's current incarnations are so far from the norm that they form the abject – that which is filthy and which must be cleansed in order to form a neat category of belonging. The idea of national pathology is central to my thesis as it helps bring into view the full range of affective engagements with the nation.

Here I employ Kristeva's usage of 'affect' – a building block "in the formation of what Judith Butler has aptly called 'the psychic life of power', but also in the emergence of collectivities and the transformation of social relations" (Chanter and Ziarek 2005: 2). Therein, affect and abjection are subjective experiences enmeshed in power-laden social relations and symbols. Kristeva's subject is inscribed within existing power relations – emotive, inter-textual. It is part of an assemblage of objects and people, the result of semiotic elaboration which is constantly in flux due to its dialectic nature. Through this literature I argue that the national subject does not simply exist in the present 'suspended in time' they is embedded in a wider genealogy.

Contentious actors, such as nationalists, attempt to shape and mould a public domain imbued with emotive predispositions. This thesis shows how this emotive content is mediated and shaped in various modified forms, transcends the milieu in which it first appeared. During my fieldwork, amongst the nationalist activists I encountered, the affective is part of the framework of sentimental attachment enmeshed in nationalism. One of the common forms in which affects manifested themselves were those related to worries and perceived harm vis-à-vis threatening 'others'. This themed echoed Ahmed's understanding of "longer histories of contact" which create a sensitive 'skin of the community':

> *'You hurt me', which might become, 'You are hurtful', or even 'I hate you'. These affective responses are readings that not only create the borders between selves and others, but also 'give' others meaning and value in the very moment of apparent separation, a giving which temporarily fixes an other, through the movement engendered by the emotional response itself*

In this thesis I will explore how affective states constitute various borders. Using Butler (1993), Ahmed clarifies that the nurturing of affective states requires "a process of materialization that stabilizes over time". Here, I argue that nationalists enter into these process, but to understand the full spectrum of the relationship, I wish to first present the domain on which they make their claims: the Bulgarian public domain.

Approaching the National Subject and Their Affect

Before the affective can be utilised here, we need to examine pre-existing common divisions in the theoretical literature between 'good' and 'bad', civic and ethnic, rational and emotional nationalism. In this literature, the emotional side of nationalism is viewed with certain presuppositions which should be considered before a new perspective based on the affective can be proposed. These divisions are part of the compartmentalisation of the world according to un-reflexively reproduced Enlightenment norms. This is also part of the history of political anthropology, in particular the classic differentiation between 'Western' political forms as rational, and non-Western political forms, as mythical and symbolic.

Anthropologists classically addressed what were conceived as pre-modern forms of governance; for example, the Asiatic, despotic state. They were marked by emotive, symbolic elements. Those elements defined their separation from the modern state (Wolff 1996; Wolf 1982). The category of the Asiatic state is a typical example, since it was considered to be intrinsically tied to a cosmological arena. Political order was understood to be performed in a dynamic relationship to wider metaphysical imaginings: "what a people prizes and what it fears and hates are depicted in its world-view, symbolized in its religion, and in turn expressed in the whole quality of its life." (Geertz 1957: 426).

Geertz's 'theatre state' is based on spectacle and ceremony. Within his analytic

framework of the state, "feeling", "meaning", "religious truth" and objectivity mix (*ibid.* 430). Akin to Turner (1975), Geertz examines "categories of belief and the arena of symbolic meaning … orientation to an organism which cannot live in a world it is unable to understand" (*ibid* 436). In a similar spirit, Tambiah coined the notion of a galactic polity, an analogical design of the mandala as a key structure of political life and a way "to represent the design of traditional Southeast Asian kingdoms, a design that coded in a composite way cosmological, topographical, and politico-economic features" (Tambiah 1977: 69). This representation was utilized to identify how the people studied conceive of friendly and enemy states. Tambiah hence looked at the ways in which cosmological schemes served as a medium for classifying and shaping of the political process (*ibid.* 74).

On the other hand, for understanding 'Western political authority', Weber (1968) was influential in declaring the modern world disenchanted, pointing to modernity's rationalizing principles. In *Politics as a Vocation,* he outlined the change of political strata which led to the contemporary disenchanted bureaucratic state. However, enchantment didn't "fall", it was "pushed". Weber's work was supplemented by that of Marx. Enchantment's death was proclaimed in the Marxist tradition in problematisations of the mystical and the mystification of relations of production. Through a variety of discussions, originating in these debates, disenchantment and rationalisation became notions associated with a conceptualisation of modernity and Western ideological dominance. Thus they have also inadvertently gained the potential to be a totalising image of reality akin to colonial modernism's images of progress (as discussed in Mitchell 1998).

The idea that modernity is a movement to a more rational modality exists across a number of theories. Hence, care much be taken when approaching a variety of theorist who talk about nationalism. Edensor (2002) considers the nation to be akin to popular culture. Gillis (1996) argues that modernity is characterized by an anti-monument movement: aesthetically and epistemologically. Remembering is "deritualized and

dematerialized," becoming part of everyday life in an episteme where memory and history are increasingly conflated (Gillis 1996: 17).

Problematically, philosophers and political theorists who undertook to "*écrasez l'infâme*, to destroy entrenched superstition by progressive reason" failed to realize that "cultures are generally foreign in origin and local in pattern" (Sahlins 1999: xi), and that "cultural subversion is in the nature of intercultural relations" (*ibid* xvi). Indigenous societies which had been 'written off' as having been subsumed to rationality (as modernity), interpreted global categories in local ways. Non-Western societies developed worldviews, sometimes different from what was 'traditional', where the end result was not identical to a rationalistic 'Western' model. Sahlins, like Grey (2003), takes pains to emphasize that 'Western cosmologies' have a pre-history which is deeper and more complex than the already over-used Enlightenment.

Enchantment and emotive, symbolic forms of political authority, survived through anti-Enlightenment thought (Berlin 1980), and through local, hybrid interpretations of the modern political forms. The processes of modernity which Weber called disenchantment do not result in a static rationalization of life (Jenkins 2000). Rather, we are part of a reality which features disenchantment and positivistic knowledge, as well as, (re)enchantments of various sorts.

> *In politics there is the ritual, symbolism and theatre of nation, the show-business glitz of party conferences and conventions, and the staged drama of international summitry.*

> (Jenkins 2000: 13)

Charisma, cinematic images, "heroic figures and demonic enemies" all make sure that "Secularization and disenchantment are not the same things, although they are easily confused" (*ibid.* 19).

Nationalism developed within the Counter-Enlightenment in parallel with rationalistic

forms of political authority. It is akin to a structure of feeling" (Alonso 1994: 386; Berezin 2001). The nation enters national subjects' private and intimate domains. Subjects can come to love the nation and experience it as primordial (Alonso 1994: 386-387). Enchantment (and thus affect) are at the heart of modernity, in part through nationalism in its various traditions. Recognizing this tendency, Holmes places the "sublime political yearnings" (Holmes 2000: 9) of his research subjects within European integralist tendencies, a defence of some "sacred patrimony" (*ibid.* 8). The Counter-Enlightenment tradition, which Holmes explores through the work of Isaiah Berlin (1980), represents a modern yearning for communities. The Romantics of the Enlightenment era aided enchantment's survival utilizing emotion and imagination against a cold scientific experience of modernity (Llobera 1994: 174). They retained foundation myths and historiographies within European history.

In this thesis the ongoing existence of enchantment is considered through the idea of affect. I define affect as the emotional education of national subjects. My usage of the term points to a propensity to respond to particular learned themes, such as those within Ottoman history, as discussed in Chapter 4.1. The Radical Enlightenment provides a starting point from which to reflect on, and disentangle, how affect is enmeshed in the state. Spinoza, a key representative of the Radical Enlightenment, theorised people's various drives to partial or mystified understandings and how these fit within governance (Israel 2001: 232- 241). For him, actors' internal drives, their emotions, or 'affects' are a key element of the relationship between people and state (*ibid.* 236). In Spinoza, reason is not geared towards the individual, but as a mechanism to minimize conflict. It is a Hobbesian reason whereby men give up their personal preferences with a view to a higher good, choosing the virtuous path. In this thesis, for the purposes of clarity I will refer to personal affect as emotion. This is a divergence from Spinoza's usage. When I elicit the notion of affect, I refer to emotion among the collective.

Some theories of nationalism see its emotional nature as testifying to nationalism's

primordial, infantile and irrational characteristics. In other words, they use its entanglement with the realm of affect as a reason to view it negatively. I would like to argue that that is a problematic proposition. An example is Ignatieff (1994), who considers nationalism to be pathological: *a narcissism of minor differences*. From this purview, nationalists escape the realities of life through a mythologized and exalted national arena – leading to a politics of fantasy. They block out rational reactions to the outside world in favour of reacting to the fantasies with which they live:

> *… the authority of nationalist rhetoric is such that most people actively censor the testimony of their own experience … nationalist rhetoric re-writes and re-creates the real world, turning it into a delusional realm of noble causes, tragic sacrifice and cruel necessity.*

> (ibid. 186- 187)

Ignatieff's solution is to propose that people should be sceptics and ironists, philosophers and poets, not be those "mad in fear or mad with vengeance." (*ibid.* 189). He seems to reject the realm of the emotive and mythical portrayal of identity and exalts the virtues of sceptical, rationalist thought. Nationalism is thus portrayed as a failing to reach the ideals of enlightened, civic (as opposed to ethnic) identification.

This fashion of conceiving the emotive nature of the nation is too imbued with a historically constructed divide between reason and history, on the one hand, and emotion and myth on the other. Ignatieff presents a rather flat and uncritical approach to these classic dualisms. Authors such as Liah Greenfeld (1993) have treated it more subtly – revealing the inter-connections between Romanticist thought and the Enlightenment and placing the "pathology of nationalism" in a conflict between reason and passion, born in this formative era. This conflict is what Isiah Berlin (1980) called the Counter-Enlightenment[17]. Greenfeld sees the origins of the German Romanticism, of the affective nature of nationalism, in its Pietism. She argues that the Romantics

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[17] See later chapters.

formed a secular religion on the basis of "feeling as a defence-mechanism in dealing with the fear or experience of failure in a world which prized rationality" (*ibid.* 334). Ignatieff in contrast endorses a kind of Enlightenment rationality and is thus deeply unreflective about existing critiques of the power relations that emerged therein. The tendency of Enlightenment-derived thought to reject indigenous histories when they contain elements of the mythical has been critiqued by theorists within post-colonial thought (for example Gandhi 1998) and discussed within philosophy (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997). The failure to employ this post-colonial heritage to Eastern Europe, as I will discuss in later chapters, is partly because it is not recognised as authentically other. It is instead a dark self, the abject of Western Europe (Todorova 1997).

A quick view at the material in this thesis, as well as wider writings on nationalism, shows that contemporary nationalists assert particularistic historical visions, while the theorists who analyse them discuss these visions as myth, partial or contested truths and collective memories as opposed to historical narrative (Kapferer 1998, Brown 1996, Danforth 1995, Roudomentof 2002, Frusetta 2004). The authors in question (particularly Roudomentof) and other contemporary social theorists (Ozkirimli and Spyros 2008) choose instead to garner their analysis with cross-communal histories. While they don't claim their narratives are objective, they clearly believe them to be better, particularly in being able to bring together populations separated by national practices of remembering. While these interventions are well meaning, they feed into the polarisation of objectivity and myth; reason and enchantment.

The idea that the sacred and emotive have a lesser place in a contemporary setting can be over-assumed to a degree where like Ignatieff, a theorist can begin to ask the inverse of 'why do people need the sacred' or enquire after the work performed by affect and instead ask 'why are they still primordial'. Discussing contemporary mummers rituals in Bulgaria, Creed (2011) emphasises rituals' ability to create intimate moments of negotiating social relations in local communities. However he proposed that we looks at the ways in which 'irrational' rituals are re-enchantments of modernity

almost as a form of protest. He argues that mummers festivals should be examined as a reaction to the absurdity of the events of transition. While Creeds presents an example of the continuing relevance of 'enchantment' in modern times, framing of the rituals as a reaction to the absurd is problematic.

 Katherine Verdery's (1996) ethnography presents a lucid discussion of how, and why, sacred and emotive forms continue to exist in contemporary states. She explores the role they fulfil in social and political life, illustrating how affect and the politics of symbol are at the heart of a set of contemporary commemorations. Her ethnography explores how dead bodies became a vehicle for creating or manipulating "cultural categories", especially in times of transition between different systems of meaning (such as in the case of post-socialism). Verdery argues that dead bodies allow those who speak through them to enter into 'sacred time'. They place utterances and symbols, pertaining to the dead body, on the transcendental plane of cosmological thinking by asserting continuity between the living and the dead (*ibid.* 26).

Social actors who utilize dead bodies as symbolic vehicles strengthen their interpretation of morality and ideology through the visceral reality of a body. The body's authority lies partially in its ability to create affect, we all have one and we are all somewhat aware that one day it will be dead. Thus, Verdery concludes that authority *always* has a sacred component, even if it is reduced merely to holding secular values as sacred (*ibid.* 37). Following Leach, she argues that celebrations of the dead are also still accompanied by taboos which assert the particular sacred quality of the authority being elicited.

Greenfeld's understanding of the historic emergence of nationalism reveals the intrinsic inter-connection between the emotive and rational sides of modernity. In the face of objectively defined development in the era of the Enlightenment, intelligentsia within Germany developed envy and complexes of 'catching' up. Nationalism served as a guarantor of dignity in the context of the unequal development of different states

(Greenfeld 1993: 487). It provided persons with reasons to be proud. Historically, nationalism undercut the significance and construction of an individual(ist) subject, yet soothed citizens from the anxiety of reflecting on their own state of under-development (*ibid*. 488). Boym (1992) has shown how a similar process of rescuing the national self can be seen in the concept of a national soul and its ongoing relevance even as Russia modernized. The 'Russian soul', the concept of *nardonist* – the people's spirit in Russia – is the psyche bled from the scientific element of the conception, based on myths portraying the national community (Boym 1994 :84-85). Similarly to Greenfeld, Boym presents nationalism's appeal as that of providing a sense of belonging, a comforting collective identity to replace potentially flawed personal ones.

In Greenfeld's understanding, national subjectivity and its affective nature competes with rational, individualist subjectivity. In an increasingly inter-connected world, it appeals to the hyper-awareness of uneven international development on collective self-worth. Contemporary persons have to cope with a hypersensitivity to international opinion and position themselves in the modern world (Friedman 1994). These inequalities would otherwise, through the objectivist turn of Enlightenment thought, lead disparate populations to consider themselves (collectively) inferior or to deride origin for the difficult start it gives them in the global world.

The National Subject Reimagined

So far I have been re-pivoting nationalism away from its Enlightenment-derived polarities, of reason and emotion, by focusing in on the genealogy of its emergence. Nationalism is "a class of political ideologies" (Greenfeld 1993: 7), which are part of the "the symbolic blueprint of modern reality" (*ibid*.). It is part of the very fabric of what it means to be modern as a new kind of modality of experience (such as Hobsbawm 1992; Breuilly 1994; Gellner 1983; Anderson 1991; Llobera 1994; Ozkirimli 2000). The advent of the nation-state effected a fissure in time, created a new era, new ways of

being. The change was pervasive and included developments in the spheres of economy, politics and culture. People, began to equate themselves with the state in a historically unprecedented way (Hobsbawm,1992a; Hobsbawm, 1992b; Breuilly, 1994; Anderson 1991). A fundamental aspect of this condition is a re-configuration of the mechanisms of traditional identity. This had been preceded by "a crisis of the European mind" (Israel 2001:14) experienced by Enlightenment thinkers.

In this thesis I propose that the key use of the idea nationalism is for conceptualizing some globalized transformations in the way some people construct their personhood in relation to the state they inhabit. The notion of a 'modern subject' and its prevalence in the 'modern world' is best viewed as a heuristic device which suggests a set of polyphonic transformations. Nationalism is uneven in its development and deeply palimpsestic *vis-à-vis* older forms of collective identification across different locales, manifesting itself in a variety of forms (Greenfeld 1993; Gellner 1983, Hroch 1996). In a number of instances the drivers of nationalisation as modernisation were colonial entities which tried to create modernity amongst their 'primitive' subjects. For example, Mitchell (1988) and Rabinow (1989) describe the French government's enforced modernist transformations in Morocco and Egypt. Contemporary ethnography provides ample evidence of the hybridity of transformations between tradition and modernity (Kuper 1986; Abu-Lughod 1990). Having abandoned the quest of 'salvage anthropology', anthropologists still predominantly study those who would have been considered 'primitive' not so long ago. The nation-state, however, prevails as the most dominant governmental norm in a complex set of permutations of the connections between notions of ethnicity, nationality, people and nation-state.

In order to understand nationalism and its intimate, affective manifestations here, I will explore how it maps relationships between citizens in cultural idioms that are 'simulacra of social relations', mimicking what can be perceived as traditional forms of authority (Herzfeld 1997: 6): the sacred and the ancestral. This points to the modalities of establishing national subjectivity in contemporary life. Employing elements of the more 'traditional' narratives of kinship and gender is a particularly salient element of nationalism. While citizenship is often conceived as a more rationalistic category of relatedness it is imbued with narratives based on blood, and a particularity of gender norms (Yuval-Davis 1997).

The use of relatedness in the national imagination is easily illustrated through examples from my fieldwork: "a patriotic primer" published by VMRO Plovdiv a few years ago or illustrations such as the one in Figure 6. The primer was designed as a textbook with the customary young boy and girl on the cover; its framing colours were the national tricolour. Addressing its young audience, it declares, "we know your parents and your teachers want all of you to become good people". To do that, the children are told they can't just love their kin, they also

Figure 6 'Mother' Bulgaria as illustrated by an unknown internet artist– the caption reads: "Mother of kings, chieftains and heroes; this is Bulgaria, she needs her sons and daughters"

have to love their *Rodina*[18] . In a similar spirit, within the primer, R stands for "*Roden Dom*" (Ancestral home). The text makes an allegory between one's home as one's house and the larger home Bulgaria, the shared space with one's country– and is rounded off with the very common refrain (it is usually sung) "in the world there is only one – our dear Ancestral Land". The introduction to the text states that it aims to express "the Glory of Mother Bulgaria". Children are told that by reading this, they should arrive at a feeling of pride when reciting the poem by Ivan Vazov "I am Bulgarian". This also showcases an example of the construction of affect and national subjectivity.

Changes to the way time is structured in contemporary life point to how kinship and other traditional idioms are being transposed in the transformation to national subjectivity. Kinship is a narrative that connects past and future through placing value on reproduction. It is not only biological, it has a social dimension that engages socially structured ways of cognizing relatedness (Carsten 2000). Kinship also has a fundamentally temporal dimension often expressed in the notion of ancestry. Through the production of national subjectivity, this sense of relatedness is transposed to everyone within the national space: "the nation is kinship writ large [where national imaginaries] … produce communities with particular shapes in time" (Verdery 2000: 120). The uses of these modalities can be seen in the case of the primer discussed above. There the typical formulations of Bulgarian national subjectivity are expanded by connecting actors to proto-ancestors – national revival figures and prominent figures within the Macedonian pantheon, such as Gotze Delchev and Ivan Mihailov.

Imagining other people within the nation state doing the same thing simultaneously creates the national community (Zerbuavel 1981; Anderson 1991). Time, in parallel with kinship, provides idioms of relatedness which enlarge the community (albeit with

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[18] A common substitute word for 'the nation' whose literal translation is "Ancestral-land".

a mix of alienation) of those with whom a person might associate within the national domain. The scale of relatedness expands. This can be seen in the adoption of a national calendar. Zerbuavel proposes that people carry 'a temporal map' leaning on literature by Leach, Mauss, Durkheim, Evans-Pritchard, and Alfred Gell, who had previously written about 'sharing' time as a way of creating communities. In more traditional forms, Bourdieu terms this "submission to collective rhythms," clarifying that "temporal forms" and "spatial structures" order 'the groups'' relationship both to itself and to the wider world:

> all the divisions of the group are projected at every moment into the spatio-temporal organization... the organization of time in accordance with mythical structures leads collective practice to appear as "realized myth"

> Bourdieu (1977: 163)

The nature of modernity entails the need for closer attention to subjectivity as an object of theoretical analysis. Modernity (and post-modernity) are characterised by an imbalance of identity, a subjectivity imbued with contradictions, ambiguities and fragmentation (Elliot 1996); "everyone belongs simultaneously to different groups, each with its own collective memory" (Gillis 1996: 16). How to forget, and then to form communities on the basis of selective memory, is the pervasive problem of modern life (Gillis 1996; Connerton 2009). People fashion a distinctive subjectivity based on a combination of fantasy, drive and affect, thus responding "to the continuities and discontinuities of contemporary social processes in terms of one's own distinctive subjectivity" (Elliot 1996: 13).

Experience of modernity is double-edged: "progressive" and "defensive" paths of self-discovery result in fantasies of omnipotence, self-control, ordering mastery. Gills (1996) coined the phrase 'memory work' to discuss the constant negotiation between practices of shaping public memory and various identities. This 'work' is fundamental to the politics of identity. Commemorations thus become a performance of these

subjectivities. Commemorations in Bulgaria provide matrices of identification, in which people assert their national subjectivity within a pre-established framework. They choose between bifurcating categories played out in pre-existing politics of contention: Russophil or Russophobe (pro-and anti-Russian), Fascist or anti-Fascist (Daskalov: 2011) amongst many others.

As previously mentioned, the nation can be understood to be problematic, exposing its subject to the possibility of shame and embarrassment. That dynamic is portrayed in Herzfeld's work, and in particular Herzfeld's category of cultural intimacy, defined as:

> *...the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality*

(Herzfeld 1997: 3)

This is also expressed in his notion of as *disemia* – "the formal or coded tension between official self-presentation and what goes on in the privacy of collective introspection." (*ibid.* 14) Herzfeld identifies a significant domain: the worry about the gap between 'what is' and 'what should be' are fundamental aspects of national belonging. However, he doesn't provide a framework for understanding why or how people take that cultural intimacy into the public domain and make it part of their cognized national subjectivity. I found this to be the case in Bulgaria. Herzfeld on the other hand imagines persons to be engaging in "*emotional labor*" in the "transmutation of private sentiments into public acts" (*ibid*. 7) and assumes the public image will always be idealized. How can that explain people who pathologise the nation and try to cure it in a process which is not intimate but, as we shall see later in this chapter, highly public?

To confront some of the problems discussed above, I will look at the nation as "an apparatus of production" following Butler's approach to gender (Butler 1990: 10).

Chapter 2.1 will consider the parameters of national subjectivity. A personal subjectivity is constructed across a limited domain which can be conceived here as the national domain:

> *The domains of political and linguistic "representation" set out in advance the criterion by which subjects themselves are formed, with the result that representation is extended only to what can be acknowledged as a subject.*

(Butler 1990: 2)

Within her framework, the coherence of identification is formed through enactment, meaning 'we' become who we are through performance. Butler thus follows Michael Harr in a turn away from "a metaphysics of substance" and Nietzsche in the assertion that "the 'doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed'" (Nietzsche quoted in *ibid.* 34). The ontological integrity of the subject before it faces structures of power is a fallacy; cultural coherence appears, but only subsequent to action within the social milieu. Personal intelligibility, coherence and continuity are guaranteed by "socially constituted and maintained notions of intelligibility" (*ibid.* 23). I will be arguing that the existence of a national identity as a substance appears out of such "performative twists" (*ibid.* 26) – often in the context of performance and conflict over the content of commemorations or the significance of public scandal (as shall be discussed in the last two chapters of the thesis).

However, in *Gender Trouble* (*ibid.*) we see no trace of the production of 'the law' which regulates the subject's intelligibility as a cultural form. This is problematic when we try to apply it to activist arenas where social actors are constantly trying to shape 'the law' of social practice. Butler offers the possibility for subversive performance as a way to challenge 'the rule': after a social performance some actors would be censored, while others' performances would be made to fit the *langue* of the land. Kristeva's framework for semiotic poetics (the creative, inter-textual nature of daily utterance) suggests to some degree the dynamics of change. In the paradox of semiotic theory,

the speaking subject is at once subversive of and dependent on 'the law' as meaning is never truly fixed (Moi 1986). Thus, contention must build on pre-existing forms. It is inter-textual and thus has creative potential. In the similar anthropological notion of social poetics, signs are not fixed but constantly constructed in the process of description – involving structure, destruction and reformulation (Herzfeld 1997).

The framework I have given above is homologous to the general trend in political anthropology which has for the past few decades reached the conclusion of focusing on social interaction, not 'cultural content' (Eriksen 2002: 36). This resonates with a wider anthropological paradigm shift – from spatially limited, essentialised objects of study to the social as something understood better through metaphors of performance (Coleman and Collin 2006), where "culture" and place are not a given, but are to be examined as contested (and often global) processes (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Hastrup and Olwig 1997). This model "recognises that people deploy the debris of the past for all kinds of present purposes" (Herzfeld 1997: 24) and therefore, reality is intrinsically palimpsestic.

However, anthropological analysis are also prone to fall into the trap of imagining a binary division between 'the people' and 'the state'. Theorists counterpoise rigid cultural practices, originating primarily in state apparatus and Western political models, and 'the people', imagined as separate from formal institutions, who then are portrayed as embodying poetic fluidity. This presupposition appears particularly when Handler and Herzfeld discuss 'the Western' state's role in essentialising identity and culture. Handler critiques notions of identity as used in older anthropological work, suggesting that they take as natural the permutations of identity typical to the Western world i.e. a "globally hegemonic nationalist ideology" (Handler in Gills: 1996: 28), characterized by the idea of a fixed and bounded identity. Herzfeld's analysis confronts the structured representation of culture in Greece with 'the reality' which is more fluid. Both anthropologist derive their emphasis from a desire to account for the permutations of personhood, the fluidity of identity-related practices that can be

observed when conducting anthropological fieldwork.

My positionality, writing about the lived practice of nationalism in Eastern Europe, discounts the easy simplifications which are particularly prominent in Handler's work. The region and the people I study are neither Western, nor easily described as subaltern minorities. The people I researched are complicit in recreating representations of fixed identity. Herzfeld is the more pertinent and complex of the two theorists, however his writing is still too imbued with a dualism between state and people, coded as fixity and fluidity to push me to use Kristeva and Butler as my primary analytic referents.

Conclusions

The two chapters that follow (2.1 and 2.2) show that despite being traditionally conceived as a modernist ideal, in the Bulgarian context, national subjectivity reveals itself as an incomplete and anxious realization of contentious personhood. In Chapter 2.3, I will show how celebrations are conceived of as restitutions for the 'illness' of a nation. Commonly agreed on flaws are brought forward into the public arena in order to be 'resolved' through a redemptive and often sacral performance. The subjectivity of being national, just like the subjectivity of being gendered, is contingent on the genealogy of that project. The first section of this chapter, 2.1, shows how Bulgarian national subjectivity is constructed as *complexed* and prone to catastrophes and gaffes from the outset. The chapter that follows, 2.2, shows my participants' rejection the reality of contemporary Bulgaria. It was deemed to be worthy of shame, the antithesis to the representation of an ideal national self.

The chapters are a pointillist endeavour of what I call 'found stories'. The data in them is less sought than something that impinged on my everyday fieldwork experience – in a "context of awareness" as discussed in the introduction. It is akin to eavesdropping, listening in electronically or physically to strangers, or listening to participants and

friends provide a stream of unsolicited outbursts of frustration and characterisations of 'us', the national subjects. I picked up a set of motifs connected to the national subject which are presented in the following chapters. The brevity is deliberate: rather than look at the current incarnation of my informants' identification, I am interested in the kinds of representations they exhibit and present socially, which are often short and said in a common-sense manner. They have the effect of constituting particular public arenas imbued with the notion of a collective 'us'. The arenas in question include TV and online media (a space in which the Bulgarian public actively participates) such as Facebook or the blog articles of www.webcafe.bg. This 'virtual coffee place' seemed to transpose the usual debates regarding "who is *homo bulgaricus*[19]" (which could happen in the café, in a pub, or at a dinner party) onto the online arena which is rich in eloquent blog pieces by non-journalist citizens[20].

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[19] Here I utilise Neuburger (2006).
[20] For instance an informant, who is not a journalist, wrote an article for Webcafe and it was accepted.

Chapter 2.1 The Bulgarian Self Between National Psychology and Nihilism

The TV broadcasts the evening news. I sit on the sofa with a pot of yogurt and some dry stick salami, my staples after a frantic day. I imagine my neighbours, friends and research participants also watching the news. This was usually confirmed the following day when I meet someone who wants to talk about them or I log into Facebook. People's *reading* of the news could often be *read* in their Facebook posts. One particular evening the president appeared on the screen commenting on the death of a famous public intellectual, Vera Mutafchieva – a writer of historically inspired prose. She was a popular author who now, in the instance of her death was described as a *narodo-psiholog* (a national psychologist) and a *rodovet* (someone who concerns herself with ancestors[21])*.* This was a typical example of the prevalent idea that Bulgarians have a national psychology*.*

The idea that there is a national psychology is emblematic of the *doxa* which tie personal subjectivity to the collective. Many of my informants and day-to-day contacts in Bulgaria persistently referred to this idea of "national psychology". The idea carries within it the implication that personal character traits or habits can be deemed to 'be Bulgarian'. It is a pertinent entryway into the parameters of national subjectivity and thus the nation as an apparatus of production in the fashion discussed the previous chapter. Starting from that perspective, it is important to frame the genealogy of Bulgarian national subjectivity, the patterns which give the ideas some semblance of regularity – the basic symbols which are recreated in texts and rituals, and brought to life daily in semiotic elaboration. From thereon in this chapter I will also consider the more specific idea of national nihilism – again a personal category writ large. Both national psychology and nihilism exist as *doxa* in day to day life in Bulgaria, although the latter is more utilised amongst nationalists. That category also reveals the

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[21] The word has no direct or eloquent translation in English. It is a derivative of the word *rod* (meaning ancestry).

difference between national subjectivity and nationalist subjectivity. This chapter will explore how they are shaped by historical processes and collectivist dynamics.

National psychology as a day to day category should not be confused with epic founding stories of 'our people' which are the staple of most narratives of nationalism. Like affect, it is more subtle and elusive. The modern idea of a distinctly Bulgarian nation has its roots in an eighteenth century work of history completed by a monk called Father Paisii (Daskalov and Elenkov 1994). It incites those who had 'forgotten' their identity under imperial rule to remember they are subjects of something called Bulgaria in its totality. Bulgaria is described as embedded within histories of Balkan conflict and counter-definition. Paisii presents an epic narrative of 'who we are', a category of belonging related to a grand founding story. The national psychologists conceive of a different story of 'who we are', although it is usually interlaced with the wider history. It is a story which uses a characterization of different traits amongst the people of the nation's territories to construct a parallel, accompanying story.

While the large-scale "epic" narratives tie a person's sense of self to transcendental glories and shame (often presented as victories and defeats), national psychology asks you to examine your unwitting character for expressions of a deeply held national predisposition. National psychology connects the person to a national subjectivity by focusing on the connection between the grand narrative of history and micro narrative of national subjectivity (Daskalov in Daskalov and Elenkov 1994). The narratives of the national mythology give way to suggesting why a 'Bulgarian person' might have a particular character. In Bulgarian doxa this is called a *mantalitet*, a way of thinking in ethnic patterns, and is often referred to in the negative. These notions are conduits of pride or shame on the basis of one's national subjectivity.

The origins of the idea of national psychology in the Bulgarian context lie with Bulgarian academics and public intellectuals. It is often subsumed within the local variant of ethnography, ethnology. National psychology is considered an academic

field in Bulgarian academia. One of its key proponents taught in the journalism faculty of the St. Kliment Ohridski University, educating generations of students who would go on to influence the public arenas of the Bulgarian media-scape. Bulgarian academics are not absent from the Bulgarian public arena (Todorova 2011). They form a fraction of a wider set of important persons, that of the Bulgarian *intelligentsia,* which includes writers and other proponents of high culture. Bulgaria is closer to the French model of public intellectuals than current Anglo-American practice[22]. The *intelligentsia* as a whole have a strong enough public presence to influence the masses. Discussing Romanian intellectuals under socialism, Verdery (1995) shows how they "produced culture" and constructed politically relevant fields of discourse about the Nation, thereby reproducing national ideology through time" (*ibid.* 302). There, too, a concern with "the national essence" pervaded "political and intellectual discourse" (*ibid.* 46). The study of national psychology is not unproblematically accepted as a valid academic field, as seen in the seminar work of Roumen Daskalov and Ivan Elenkov's 1994 *Why are we like this?*[23]*,* which takes a critical approach to the category.

As with nationalism itself, the idea of national psychology emerged from the transition between tradition and modernity in the formation of Bulgarian public thought (Elenkov in Daskalov and Elenkov 1994). The changes effected by the Bulgarian Enlightenment period- *Vuzrajdane*[24] are part of a schism with 'traditional identity'. The *Vuzrajdane* period in the nineteenth to twentieth century bears a deeply compensatory developmental character (Daskalov 2004: 44). National psychology as an open-ended category of analysis addresses the nature of that tension*.* While tradition and modernity are problematic terms, Elenkov uses them as heuristic devices to consider a conflict between 'the markers of traditional society' and the 'destructive onset of modernity'. He also employs them to analyse the resulting negotiation between the two

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[22] Perhaps that is only to be expected as France also has a tradition of using anthropology 'at home' to understand its internal contrasts between traditional and modern forms in the contrast between urban and rural life (Chavelier 2006).
[23] Title translated from Bulgarian, no English edition has been published.
[24] Which literally translates to Renaissance or rebirth.

in contemporary social life. Bulgarian ethnology (within which national psychology is subsumed) emerged in order to fill the gap between the 'national' of official institutions and that of the *narod*, the nation.

The transformation of traditional identity through historical processes, which can only be delimited by the category 'modern', is never complete. It carries markers of traditional identity. Here I follow Elenkov and argue that national psychology is a way of bridging a particular kind of disemia[25] related to the problem of the inception of a modern nation state in place of tradition. The hybridity of the national subject, the divergence from an ideal-typical modernity is expressed as being '*bulgarified'.* Elenkov highlights that while there are a number of classic discussions of national psychology within Bulgarian intellectual thought, a number of them remain fundamentally anti-modern, containing justifications and even glorifications of retaining a mixture of modern habits and customary ways of life. This is what becomes defined as the native category, *the complex. Complex* is "a general expression of the resistance against the lived-through change" (Elenkov and Daskalov 1994: 14) to modernity, a state in which people embody the tensions between modern and anti-modern internal drives. This is a nested version of Sahlins' mixed modernity or the hybridity of the Counter-Enlightenment.

My argument in this thesis is that these issues are not only historic or academic, they appear in day to day life in Bulgaria as people 'think with' culturally imbued categories of analysis. An example is a public debate regarding Turkish soap operas on Bulgarian television and its subsequent discussion in the newspaper *Kultura*[26]. The Red House[27] hosted the event, a number of my research participants and I attended. The debate

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[25] Used in line with Herzfeld, as discussed in Chapter 2.

[26] Its audience is primarily intellectual and academic.

[27] A debate space in Sofia which featured in my fieldwork. I first learned about it whilst spending time with some of Sofia's anarchist and left wing activists. The organisers tried to bring together Sofia's varied political communities- featuring academics, the extreme left, anarchist and the right wing under the same roof.

echoed the issues raised in the previous paragraphs. A number of the academic participants remarked that the response of parts of the Bulgarian public towards Turkish TV series is based on Bulgaria's *complexed* attitude to modern and traditional family life. A research team presented insights on the topic from their work on "Nations and Citizenship". They identified a number of elements deemed attractive to the Bulgarian public in Turkish TV series: patriarchal society and similarity in the *bit* represented on screen to the one in day to day life. *Bit* is a Bulgarian word for the traditional habits of one's everyday, small but indicative actions such as taking off one's shoes when entering the house. This affinity was absent in previously aired Latin-American soap opera fare. In opposition, within the debate political scientist Kaloian Metodiev viewed the Turkish series as a geopolitical instrument, which subverts Bulgaria's European character, by drawing it closer to non-Christian traditional family values, especially patriarchy. This is also the commonly held view of most nationalists.

The turning point of this debate, and Bulgaria's connection to Turkey, came with the discussion on remnants of and craving for a traditional value system within Bulgaria. The participants debated whether the series *shows* shared *complexes* among the Bulgarians and Turkish or *gives rise* to them, seen through instances when viewers would argue that the Turkish are more moral *vis-à-vis* the series. The reflections were not inaccurate; a number of people, predominantly elderly women with whom I came into contact, commented on the amazing respect shown towards the patriarch in the TV series. In the article in *Kultura*, below the one discussing the debate, serendipitously or as a result of clever editorial work, author Nina Ivanova touched on similar concerns. Nothing has changed, remarks Ivanova (2010), since the end of Ottoman times the whole progression of Bulgarian history starting with the April uprisings, liberation, the Bulgarian Communist party, universities, all developments continue to see 'us' constantly worrying our "civilization choice", about 'our' ability to be modern.

Ivanova was not writing about the debate, but reviewing *Mission London*, a hugely popular Bulgarian film that was released when I was on fieldwork. It is based on the eponymous book by Alek Popov, and presents a 21st century collection of Bulgarian anti-hero misfits in London. It mirrors the satirical style of *Baj Ganio* (short for *Valio Balkanski* , a prototypical Balkan subject), a character immortalized by the author Aleko Konstantinov at the turn of the 20th century (Konstantinov 2010). Ivanova reminds us that this trope, our country-folks' foolish attempts to be civilized, is even more long-standing. She identifies a similar effort in Dobri Vojnikov's 1871 satirical play performed amongst Bulgarian émigrés in Bucharest *The Ill-Conceived Civilization*.

Mission London confronts the question of Bulgarian's European belonging and international irrelevance, the fate of 'small' nations and big ambitions. In it, a *complexed* first lady commissions a grandiose folkloric ensemble spectacle of epic dimensions for a banquet that she believes will finally realize her dream to host the queen of England at a state dinner. This pursuit leads her protégé, an enterprising young diplomat, to the Bulgarian embassy. Within its walls he finds a host of maladjusted characters who form the basis of this modern-day satire. Its key satirical moment is predicated on two subversions of British values. In one, a member of the embassy team attempts to make a profit by kidnapping and killing ducks from London's Hyde Park, with the intention to sell them to Chinese restaurants in the city. In the second, a young Bulgarian woman who is both a cleaner and a resident of the embassy, whilst stripping for a living[28], takes an opportunity to rise up in the world as a Princess Diana look-alike. Both of these inadvertent subversions seem to stem from the Bulgarian *mantalitet* of the heroes in the narrative. They backfire and destroy the hopes of the Bulgarian president's wife. The main characters, however, persevere and make do, somehow coming out 'on top'.

The common mechanism behind these tropes is best seen through a frustrated note

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[28] I dare say this is supposed to be representative of many young Bulgarian women who go abroad.

from a friend, which one of my informants re-posted on Facebook. Her friend declared a vehement frustration with the utopia of European standards embodied in the commonly utilised phrase "*be Europeans*". She remarks "why not 'be Bulgarian'?" – protesting against the allusion that Europe is an ideal or a marker of civility. She elicits the notion of savagery – the white European in conceptual forms coming to pass judgement "in the wild jungles of Bulgaria". She also expresses her frustration with those who continuously 'ask others to be Europeans' but don't follow their own advice. She chooses to conclude with the one hope, that one day when she travels abroad she need not be ashamed to say "I am Bulgarian". She nevertheless remarks that she knows this might lead to the retort "Oh but Bulgaria is full of gangsters, Roma and prostitutes" (i.e. 'the abject') concluding, "and for them to wonder which one I am".

These vignettes present how national psychology as an expression of a kind of national subjectivity which appears in a number of dispersed contexts. The above portrayals introduce the main elements of the typical narrative of the Bulgarian anti-hero and the key trope which lies behind these musings – a worry about being modern and European. There is always an international audience and the hero is always acting in accordance with his own mentality, which is not quite modern. In the following sections of this chapter I will consider the genealogy of these musings by looking at two historical milieus. I will present how the characteristics of the anti-hero who embodies national psychology are most prominently defined by turn of the twentieth century author Aleko Konstantinov's fictional character – Baj Ganio. This presents the worry of matching European standards in the immediate aftermath of the Ottoman Empire. In a second instance I will consider how the dynamics of state socialism further shaped national subjectivity and will look at how they form the basis for the idea of national nihilism.

The Anti-hero as National Psychology: Between pride and shame

The fictional character Baj Ganio remains the proto-image of the anti-hero of Bulgarian

national psychology. He has some of the characteristics of the Greek satirical puppet Karagiozis or Sasha Baron Cohen's Borat character. Baj Ganio is self-possessed, self-unaware, and deeply 'uncivilized' (Neuburger 2006, Todorova 1997: 41). In fact, he is the perfect subject to be studied by anthropologists in our enchantment with traditional features. Had he been chanced upon by an anthropologist he might have ended up being portrayed as a Zorba the Greek or the fat landlord of Gosh's (2010) *In An Antique Land.* He represents the entrenchment in a 'complex' about "who we are" and "why are we this way", expressed with a tinge of despair and pride. Daskalov (Elenkov and Daskalov 1994) proposes that the label 'Baj Ganiovshtina' presents all that which 'we' (i.e. Bulgarians) find shameful in ourselves. However, there are some who value his transgressive nature and ask why they should not embrace their inner Ganio? This echoes Elenkov's observation that there are those who exalt Bulgarian's 'mixed' character (*ibid.*). The discourses about shame are reversed by some citizens who relish in their ethno-identification and resist inner judgment to find pride in even the most common of habits.

An example of such practice is a casual statement by Krasimir Karakachanov, VMRO's long-term leader. Karakachanov is a goldmine of such subversive quotes. In a meeting with other VMRO members he remarked with a twinkle in his eye: "Euro-*pederasti* don't drink and don't womanize, that's why they are Euro-*pederasti*", later adding to a few of his VMRO colleagues "if you want to pretend to be Europeans fine, but be aware that Europeans don't slaughter pigs". The latter referred to a controversy regarding the slaughter of pigs that occurred when Bulgaria entered the European Union. It is customary to bleed animals before they die. At Christmas time, villages are filled with the sound of pigs squealing. The EU deemed it an inhumane way of killing pigs.

Ganio defines the *complex*, the roots of national psychology. He 'haunts the national imagination', a *homos bulgaricus* (Neuburger, 2006). This provides the entryway into the genealogy of Bulgarian national subjectivity. Daskalov proposes that 'we', the generalized Bulgarians, are always looking over our shoulder, concerned about

becoming Ganio, of showing we're not European and we're not 'civilized' after all. In 1894 Aleko Konstantinov wrote a semi-fictional travelogue *To Chicago and Back*. At the Great exhibition in Chicago in 1893 he sees Ganio in the Bulgarian stall and is overcome with shame (Neuburger, 2006), embracing the ridiculous only with the help of sarcasm. Daskalov wonders whether that worry about being Baj Ganio does 'us' a disfavour. These mediations in national psychology inevitably lead to an over-preoccupation with the collective 'we' as a Bermuda triangle which cannot be escaped. This heritage acts as a matrix for the nation, as an apparatus of production and reproduction for a national sense of self, and as such requires some closer attention.

Aleko Konstantinov, Baj Ganio's creator and an erudite member of Bulgaria's early 20th century intelligentsia, played the national psychologist in his role as a narrator, suggesting that the qualities he describes (negative, uncivilized, not-modern) seem inborn in Bulgarian children and are deeply damaging to the development of the nation. Konstantinov (2010) vehemently asserts that the quality of being cunning seems to have become a virtue in Bulgarian society. He elaborates on the term *kelepir,* a spirit present in his countrymen which is typified by taking advantage of a good situation, getting more than you put in, avoiding work; in short, a predisposition to celebrate other's ill fortune, the constant inclination to look out for an opportunity to take advantage of a situation.

The narrators of Konstantinov's text are Baj Ganio's countrymen who meet him on his trip to Europe. They are émigrés who make an effort to be civilized, erudite, European. Baj Ganio, although crass, is not abandoned to his own devices: they go to the opera with him, he picks up a young man he meets at a cafe and asks him to go to the public baths. The man at the cafe is sitting down, 'reviewing our newspapers', catching up with possible developments regarding the newly formed Bulgarian constitution. He attempts to halt further interaction with Baj Ganjo by telling Balkanski he is not free. Baj Ganio of course, lacking finer subtleties of manners responds "*Why are you sitting in a café, if you're not free".* The narrator concedes, citing a necessary helpfulness to

his fellow countrymen as the virtue which leads him to the decision. As a premonition of the embarrassment to unfold, his heart "tightens" in anticipation.

The émigrés' stories are parables which reveal different aspects of the prototypical Ganio's lack of civility and the embarrassment experienced by the tellers. In most stories a focus is put on habits that fall within a catalogue of virtue, which could be described by Norbert Elias (2000). Ganjo's shortcomins include blowing snot out of one's nose by blocking one hole, spitting on the carpet, overall dirtiness; eavesdropping, constantly being suspicious and thinking someone is going to steal his precious cargo (rose oil); not understanding social hints, taking advantage of other's kindness, and talking about politics at inappropriate times (in the latter he conforms to the 'every man is an expert' dictum).

The 'problem' of being European is not only in Baj Ganio. In his trip to a grand Exposition in Prague, the representatives proudly depart their country on a Bulgarian train. This is meant to show that "Bulgaria isn't sleeping" – there is progress. Yet as the train leaves Bulgaria via the Serbian Border near Tzaribrod, "patriotic enthusiasm" gives way to depression and in-fighting about who should be blamed for the failure that follows. It seems someone has forgotten to bring lanterns, and the carriage is plunged into darkness. The practical problem of the situation is mixed with the passengers' worry about how this is going appear to the foreigners in the carriage. The train to Prague 'becomes Bulgarian'. Passengers stick candles to the windows for light, they start washing their clothes in the toilets. Konstantinov's first person narrator sees the train decorated with flags of the Bulgarian nation – but not the tricolour of white, green, and red. He sees instead the bicolour of yellow and white in the underclothes of the passengers that hang on the windows of the train (Neuburger 2006 is similarly struck by this turn of phrase). Potential glory becomes embarrassment of the more self-conscious, of those aware of having to measure up to some greater civilizational quality.

Ganio is not self-conscious; as discussed by Elenkov, he is one of those characters who takes pride in his mixed modern and traditional characteristics. Juxtaposed against his performance at the baths is Baj Ganio's ignorance of how transgressive he is. Canonballing into the public baths, he sees in the eyes of the German patrons not shock, but awe of his 'artful' performance, pronouncing his nationality proudly and with some condescension: *Bulgarian*. His companion interprets his performance as "patriotic" claiming an eternal heroic, Balkan "genius", discursively connecting to the heroic performance of the Bulgarian army at the infamously won battle at Slivnitza, a self-defeating attempt to showcase that Bulgarians are not common after all. Ganio utilises national pride inappropriately to justify selfish and obnoxious behaviour. When misfortune befalls the train to Prague he looks for people to blame other than himself and his fellow countrymen. He fiercely glares around, looking to squash any Serbians who might be laughing. The narrator tells us Baj Ganio does not miss out on the opportunity to insult Serbians he comes across, reminding them of the Slivnitza (the battle was won against the Serbs) and 'reminding' them that they are actuality Bulgarians who believe themselves to be Serbians. The allusion is that he, meaning the stereotyped patriotic and proud Bulgarian, usually reacts in such a way to failures, delving into mythical discourse, blaming others, not taking personal responsibility. To make matters worse, he takes advantage of his train carriage fellows, drinking and eating what they purchase along the way, mixing his transgression with salutes to Bulgaria.

Konstantinov bemoans how these proto-typical shortcomings also affect the development of the Bulgarian state. Baj Ganio travels to Europe and returns to Bulgaria only to do "elections Bulgarian style". Ganio thinks little of ideology. He acquires power by playing off different groups of people. This includes gathering a group of shifty characters whose task is to frighten the electorate when they come to vote. The caricature is not only of Baj Ganio. It's also of his opponent. He is described in the extreme, a young idealistic, educated man, "more a dreamer, with love in his heart, with a belief in goodness, faith in the future, he wasn't yet experienced in reality, in

life... used to looking at everything from the perspective of good , he trusted to a degree which was naive, amounted to foolishness ". The victim is 'the Bulgarian', the enemy, the same.

In *Baj Ganio* Konstatinov diagnosed the Nation. It is miserable, beaten by fate, condemned to suffer and struggle, "victimized by enemies and even more by friends". Elections 'Ganio style' make "the otherwise frightened Bulgarian give up his well understood right to execute his free will in the government of the country". The Bulgarian, as imagined in collective form by Konstantinov, has lost faith in himself and his fate and has become "practical" and sombre to the point of losing all sense. Yet Kostadinov declares we shouldn't hate Ganio, "he is the child of a rough *milieu*, the victim of rough educators; evil is not intrinsic to him but in the influence of the environment which surrounds him". He reflects on the possibilities for reforming the internal abject of the flawed population typified by its anti-hero. Bulgarians who go abroad, the reader is told, often carry with them their own *milieu*: their own habits and traditions. He proposes they should abandon this dedication, learn from their European colleagues and be guided by Western Europe to develop a greater civility.

In an era when the West discovered exotic others in the East, the Balkan intellectual sees the prerequisites for modernity ever out of reach and "have difficulty seeing themselves without looking at their own reflection in Western European eyes" (Neuburger 2006: 428). Balkan personhood is developed "with the world as a backdrop"(*ibid*. 444). Ganio "crawled out of the book" and into the everyday consciousness of the nation"(*ibid.* 430). *Baj Ganio* is part of the Bulgarian national education curriculum. Each generation is given the opportunity to consider and worry about their *baj ganiovshtina*, (their similarity to the problematic behavior of the literary character and proto-Bulgarian Baj Ganio). Testimony to this is the contents of coursework exchange site Pomagalo[29], where a variety of students relate their daily

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[29] Students upload their coursework for school projects and share it with their peers.

experiences to this turn-of-century character. This shows how discussions come from bottom up and top down about 'us', the Bulgarians, and 'our national psychology'.

Nationalism and Socialist Legitimation: departures from folklore

Despite similarities, I would argue that the implication that national ideology and nationalist ideology are the same is a misconception. By national ideology I mean: the mechanisms by which a nation-state validates itself by virtue of constructing its citizens as national subjects. The problem with equating socialist national ideology and nationalist ideology can be explained in two ways. One is theoretical and I will pursue it in the paragraph below. The other is ethnographic and will be pursued in the subsequent pages of this chapter. The theoretical perspective is inspired by Gellner (1995) writing on 'the origins of society' considering the oppositions between the Romantics and Universalists; *Gemenischaft* and *Gesellschaft*. The crux can be found in his account of how they are re-interpreted within classical anthropological tradition.

The Romantics believed in particularity of time and space (in opposition to Universalists, who saw one humanity across the board). Malinowski however, reinterpreted the particularity of time, of embeddedness in history, and a particular path of development, replacing it with the useful fiction of the 'ethnographic present'. Time was flattened out, to be replaced by context. Thus Malinowski could be a cultural nationalist and political internationalist at the same time (Gellner 1995: 15-16). Different beliefs in particularism treat time and space differently. Looking at how ideologies account for spatial and temporal dimensions can aid us in understanding the particularity of socialist national ideology. For example, Socialist national ideology could not be irredentist in the context of the Soviet Union. Thus, it could not make claims to what would be conceived as the full territory of the nation known as the national ideal. Similarly, with regards to time and history there were two modalities. Socialist national ideology formalized and re-worked tradition – conceiving it as timeless and ready to brand national subjectivity. It also conceived of a particular time-

scape of national history. As is usually the case, specific periods and persons were emphasized over others to tell a particular story.

The construction of national markers of subjectivity gained new meaning and debates with the inception of the Bulgarian Socialist state, and then in the post-socialist moment. A new form of national identity emerged out of the socialist era, one which side-lined particular approaches to confronting the question of national identity and instead focused on building a socialist subject in which national subjectivity was, an add-on, a way to engage pre-existing symbols which citizens could recognize while bleeding the category of ideologically problematic traditional characteristics. In this section I will explore the difference between national and nationalist subjectivity. I will do so by reflecting on how socialist politicians and technocrats re-worked pre-socialist cultural symbols in order to utilise them in legitimising the Socialist state. They thus created a national subjectivity that wasn't necessarily nationalist - this is particularly revealed in the idea of national nihilism. A good avenue to explore how this occurred is the creation of Socialist folkloric ensembles and the re-working of the Bulgarian alphabet after 1944.

Figure 7 A christian priest is executed, the enslaved Bulgarians look on at the Oriental Ottoman tyrant in the *Bulgare* production.

Sitting down with a fellow anthropology student, an emigrant to Chicago, she asked: "Have you seen *Bulgare?*". When I said "no", she proceeded to recount to me the embarrassment of a spectacle of national self-representation given by a folkloric troupe touring in America. Later, on reflexion, I came to realize that we had inadvertently echoed the émigrés of Konstantinov's prose. The folkloric group was

panned in American media. New York Times describes it as "the ridiculously simplistic and glorified historical glosses", a circumstance which inevitably contributed to the debate about its *complexed* nature within Bulgarian public arenas and intelligentsia. In line with the usual practice of Bulgarian newspapers to translate and re-report international news (especially ones which feature some mention of Bulgarian), this was quickly translated. The *Dnevnik* newspaper related the bad news. A reader soon comments below the online version of the article: "Nowadays the whole of Bulgaria is an absurd kitsch, so it seems that the spectacle is entirely appropriate". Forty three other readers went on to 'like' this comment. Meanwhile the real folk ensemble took part in a sombre national remembrance – in 2008, its performance at the socialist named 'National Palace of Culture', entitled *Bulgaria across the ages*, commemorated 100 years of independent Bulgaria. The performance related a heroic narrative of 'the Bulgarian story' – a version of the history given by the monk Paisii Hilendarski.

The folkloric spectacles in question would be later recounted humorously in the film "Mission London". The author, A. Popov, clarified in an interview that his mocking portrayal was aimed at reflecting on *nationalisticheskite iztzepki* (the embarrassing nationalist spectacles) with which people try to represent Bulgaria to the world. Particular narrative attention was focused on a scene where the audience is suddenly terrified by the emphatic portrayal of a violent Ottoman past. Popov followed a tradition in reflecting on national particularity, with a self-denigrating edge, however the ensemble did not arise simply out of 'the complexes of the Bulgarian soul'.

This kind of portrayal has a particular history stemming from the heart of socialist state legitimisation. An understanding of those dynamics can be gained by looking at work within ethnomusicology on the transformation of traditional music in Bulgaria under socialism. After World War II, with the onset of socialist modernity, Bulgarian 'peasant culture' was studied internally as a representation of origins, of the past that was dying in the face of increasing urbanisation (Valtchinova 2004). Like Elenkov (Elenkov in Elenkov and Daskalov 1994) does for personhood, Timothy Rice (2004)

situates the change in music as having been dictated by a transition from traditional society to a particular kind of 'modernity'. The continuity between traditional music and the formalized new versions were ideologically shaped through the practices of production within state-sponsored folkloric ensembles. This transition was highly managed. Raw tradition posed a set of problems for socialist ideology: it was connected to mystification, to the cyclical practice of agricultural life. However the state found it useful to engage with the population's fundamental symbols to validate their rule. Classical music posed other problems: it was connected to bourgeois values and Culture (with a deliberately capital "C").

The ensemble, under the guidance of the state, formalized local language; it separated audience from performers, altered rhythms. It created a new form which simulated the old. The resulting form was akin to High Culture. An *obrabotka*, a re-write (Buchanan 2006, Baker 2010); would take the place of traditional motifs along principles more in tune with formalized music traditions and socialist values. Through thick description and analysis of the process within a state ensemble, Donna Buchanan concludes that the state was both a benefactor and an oppressive element in the process. It formalized traditional cultural life in a way that constituted a cleansing. Folkloric spectacles were thus both an exhibition of state national-cultural ideology and an alteration of the forms which were previously in existence. They also served to represent a unique, packaged representation of national Culture to an international audience (Buchanan 2006). The grand folkloric spectacles mocked in Popov's book and film are an echo, remembering that tradition.

Reflecting on the features of these modes of producing Culture, it is pertinent to ask: Was socialism nationalist? Scholars of Southeastern Europe have persistently emphasized that the socialist state reconfigured folklore studies (and in fact the entire study of traditional culture, hoping to turn it into High Culture) and utilised it within its project for legitimizing the state – hence, socialism is portrayed as only a fictional rejection of nationalism (Neuburger, 2004; Verdery 1995; Kaneff 2006; Silverman

1983; Valtchinova 2007; Vodenicharov 2005). The Soviet model of transition is portrayed as nationalist, having gone:

> *further than any other state before or since in institutionalizing territorial nationhood and ethnic nationality as fundamental social categories. In doing so "it inadvertently created a political field supremely conducive to nationalism"*
>
> (Brubaker 1996: 17).

Similarly, the intellectual elite of Romania were embroiled in a process of culture-production in collaboration with the Communist party, which resulted in a hegemonically constructed national ideology (Verdery 1995). With regards to Eastern Europe, but apart from Socialist politics, Herzfeld (1987, 1997) has written on the role of folklore studies and thus, notions of culture and ethnos in constructing national conceptions of the region. Herzfeld concluded that ethnographers have played a role in the development of nationalism (Herzfeld 1997: 68): serving to "suppress internal contradictions between unity and variety" (Herzfeld 1987: 16). This arena of scholarship continued to reproduce nationalism in 'acceptable garb' (Valtchinova 2004:
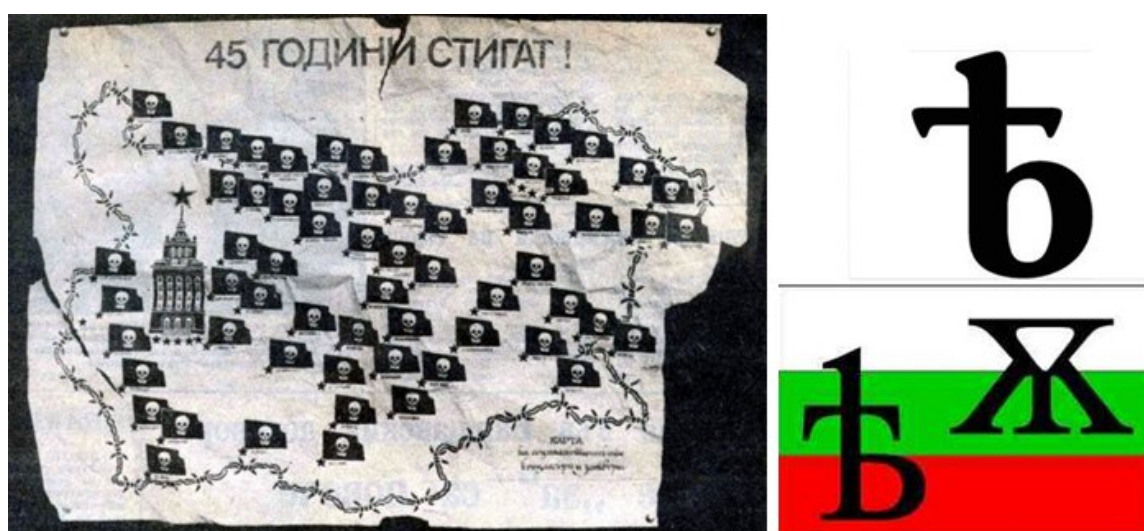
Figure 8 Left: map entitled "45 years is enough"; right: illustration of banned letters posted by participants on facebook.

5), and this process of knowledge production was embodied in a variety of scholarly institutions.

The shape of the story the socialists told was not the same as the nationalist historic myth prior to 1944. The difference between the two came to be known in the Bulgarian public arena as the national nihilism of socialism. Many of those who had conceptualised themselves as fighters for the national ideal (with that idea's particular temporality and space) were killed after the left-wing government took power, in the *People's Trials* – they were called fascists, and still others were sent to work camps and never heard from again. The map on Figure 8, where each flag is a work/death camp, illustrates the cleansing violence executed by the socialist regime.

The idea of national nihilism is fundamental, and was deeply tied to the abandoning of the Macedonian cause and other elements of the national ideal, under the threat of death. This prepared the way for the reconfigurations of national histories and territories which characterised Socialist national ideology. In 1990, after the end of Socialism, VMRO-SMD outlined their task. They portrayed the Bulgarian nation as "having been through many stages of despair, with no clear way out". The class-party approach to history, we are told, created the preconditions for national nihilism. They give as an example the state's actions with regards to Macedonia. They conceptualise the remedy as the inverse – defending national interests. (Bulgarian National Archives f.20695k *op.*1 no 290). This implicitly suggests accepting and thus defending a different version of history and territorial claims.

An example of the symbolic arena which represents national nihilism is the Socialist-led simplification of the Bulgarian alphabet and language in the 1940s. A number of VMRO members would argue for reversing that change. Kostadin (VMRO's deputy leader) for example wrote a protest piece which was published in one of the larger newspapers, the letters pictured above allow for inflections of language used within what he conceives of as the western parts of Bulgaria (including areas within Serbia and

Macedonia) – an example is the word for grandfather pronounced as "diado" in the East and "dedo" in the West. Under socialism they were dropped from the official alphabet in Bulgaria. Proponents of the letters argued that through this removal, the Bulgarian left-wing government gave up "the unity of Bulgarian lands", exhibiting its national nihilism and aiding *Macedonianists*[30]. The three letters aided the integration of western (i.e. Macedonian) speech patterns into the Bulgarian language and thus gave up one of the echelons of national unity: linguistic unity. The Socialist regimes could hence pursue its central policy of considering the two: Bulgaria and Macedonia as two separate nations.

National nihilism is not only used in relation to the Macedonian cause. Todorova shows how it is used in relation to a scandal regarding national hero Vasil Levski's bones (Todorova 2011). She does not attribute much analytic weight to the term, however, due to the thickness of her description we can 'read' its existence. Vasil Levski was a key organizer of the Bulgarian Revolutionary Committees during Ottoman rule. He was apprehended (as a result of being betrayed) and executed by hanging by the Ottoman authorities. The question of whether he was secretly buried by the Bulgarian community, after his hanging, or ended up in the criminal's graveyard, formed a topic of contention in Bulgaria's public life: was the nation worthy of its hero?

What drove the debate were worries about flaws in national psychology – in fact the very *character of the nation* which might leave the national hero betrayed, hanged and buried with no accolades (Todorova 2011). When, during the early years of socialism, bones were found in the excavation site of an old church in Sofia's city centre, academics speculated they might be those of Levski. An analysis of the bones never materialized and they mysteriously disappeared. The intellectual and writer, Haijtov, a key actor in the scandal which Todorova conceptualises (following Turner) as a social drama, suggested this reburial fiasco of the socialist era was an exhibition of "national

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[30] The term *Macedonianists* refers to proponents of Macedonian versions of history, especially avid ones.

nihilism", a lack of patriotism. In the prolific debates which followed, Haijtov insisted that the remains of Levski were destroyed, probably by "a man the writer despised" (*ibid.*), Todor Pavlov. Pavlov had been an early party ideologue connected to other 'cultural crimes' – the execution of right wing minister Bogdan Filov and the handing over of Gotse Delchev's bones in 1948 to the Macedonian state. Haijtov considered the question of Levski's bones an indication of whether "the nation was [by nature] frightened and passive" (*ibid.* 100). Haijtov conceived of Pavlov's actions as national nihilism. He asserted that "the nation's self-perception and self-esteem" would be burdened by historical individuals not having acted otherwise than to bury Levski's body.

Todorova's (2010) discussion of historian Nikolai Genov, another opponent of national nihilism, provides us with further detail on how ideology was shaped during Socialist times. Bulgarian state practice allowed for persons like Genov and Haijtov to both 'play' on dissidence, yet both were personalities within the political and cultural elite. Genov could be read as "a real dissident, a child of the regime, sometimes reprimanded, privileged with charisma and connections." (*ibid.* 325). His natural leadership skills mixed with a history of being in the socialist upper echelon made him a kind of tolerated *enfant terrible.* Genov is said to have dominated discourse by virtue of charismatic presence and political manoeuvring, having a particular charm that had, and still has, value in Bulgaria. Similarly, as a persona larger than life, Haijtov was allowed to vocally pursue an issue [Levski's bones] and make it into a public debate and was tolerated by the regime.

From the '60s onwards there was relatively more freedom – it was experienced as a 'velvet prison' where 'writing between the lines could happen' (Todorova 2011). The debates discussed above occurred only after the initial inception of the regime in '40s and '50s when nationalist views were outlawed and nationalists executed (Atanasova 2004). Freedom of speech post-1960s had its limits, as illustrated by the case of Liudmilla Jivkova, described below. Those limits define national nihilism and thus the

limitations of the construction of national subjectivity under socialism. Put simply, the national was an *obrabotka*, a re-working, of society in the sense given by Buchanan.

Liudmila Zhivkova was the most prolific and problematic of 'culture makers' of the socialist era, as well as being the socialist leader Todor Zhivkov's own daughter (*ibid.*) Zhivkova attempted to act on national subjectivity and engaged the affective states of Socialist-era Bulgarians. She attempted to make Bulgaria readable to an international audience and thus alleviate the 'anxieties of the nation' regarding its irrelevance (*ibid.*) At the heart of Zhivkova's projects was what Atanasova identified as attempts to heal "the national soul" and engage with "the national character". The problems of the nation's soul were identified as: the quest for cultural achievement vs. limited state resources [to pursue them]; 'the Balkan map', being stuck in a position of irrelevance and completion, a small nation amongst big power plays; and the definition of a negative national psychology, 'being Bulgarian' as discussed above was conceived as a problem. She tried to address these problems through a number of policies including: coining the slogan, "we, too, have given something to the world" as well as focusing on prestigious medieval history. Her work on an international level can be seen as parallel with that of a psychiatrist of the national soul.

In the midst of her pursuits Zhivkova fell afoul of the limits of national ideology under socialism (thus revealing those limits). She clashed with the old Socialist elite on fundamental ideological grounds. Zhivkova was supposed to bring her father, a simple peasant, closer to 'the intelligentsia'. They were the ones who could guarantee the legitimacy of the socialist state, and validate the socialist *obrabotka* of the national idea. Her work as cultural secretary eventually became deeply problematic for the socialist elite – who had to account for their policy to the central Soviet authorities. She was seen as a problem, was under surveillance and her phone was tapped; the second in command in Bulgaria ordered the secretary of ideology, Stoyan Mikhailov, to re-write her speeches (*ibid.*). According to Mikhailov, Zhivkova was simply not Marxist. However, there is one issue from which Zhivkova was banned at the onset. She was

told to not even consider discussing the Macedonian question. In the context of this tension, when the Yugoslav leadership made a fuss about her planned celebrations of the 1300 years state anniversary because of its clear connection to the national ideal, the celebrations were quickly muted. Eventually she was stripped of all her authority and mysteriously died. Rumours that she was poisoned emerged and persisted.

I have argued that the Socialist national subject is different from the national subject and that this is particularly evident in the conception of national nihilism. A detailed description of the elements of the Socialist national subject and its transformations can be read in Hirsch's assessment of the Soviet approach to nationality:

> *"The party-state was both high-minded and vicious at the same time - combining its "beneficent" policies with the use of violence and terror. It attacked traditional culture and religion, destroyed local communities, and persecuted individuals and groups which exhibited "spontaneous nationalism". It imprisoned, deported, and in some cases executed individuals and entire communities for the crime of "bourgeois nationalism."*

> (Hirsch 2005: 9)

The Soviet Union, as a set of centralized policies, Hirsch relates enacted a double assimilation, a double re-working of ideas it saw as a threat: Western imperialism and Nazi racial theories. A common 'fight against backwardness' or traditional structures "forged a working relationship between radical revolutionaries and liberal experts- a relationship that shaped the very formation of the Soviet Union" (*ibid.* 23). Soviet nationalities policy re-worked spontaneous nationalism and forced states under its central leadership to collaborate in creating a stable Balkan block while utilizing the elite to create cleansed versions of national ideology for the purposes of legitimating its rule, which had to try to contain the national movements within certain domains (Arnason 1993: 119-121). In fact, the Bulgarian socialist state compromised modernization in gender relations for the purpose of constructing a socialist national ideology (Vodenicharov 2005).

Conclusions

By reviewing the genealogy of two narratives which present forms of national subjectivity, national psychology and national nihilism, I have reviewed how in the past 100 years we can trace a set of common motifs and currents in thinking with the category of the nation *vis-à-vis* the person. One of them is a conflict between modernization and tradition – discussed in relation to national particularity as idiosyncratic, combined development. National psychology is learned within the Bulgarian public ecumene and thus ties national subjects into a form of personhood which is not individual in its essence. The personal and collective self are tied into each other through a sense of anxiety. People's affective states are tied to the 'fate of the nation'.

Various traditions have contributed to citizens' understanding of 'who we are'. I have considered how a number of texts display these worries about being European and modern, *vis-à-vis* 'the Orient within'. I have also considered how structured belief of 'who we are' such as those formalised by the socialist elite are not necessarily accepted as adequate if they refuse to speak about particular themes within national history. While national subjects are embroiled in a set of imagined national histories, which provide them with a sense of the origins and relatedness to one another within the nation, there are a number of national histories with different shapes in time as a result of the shifting ideologies of Bulgarian governments since its emergence from within the Ottoman Empire. Contemporary life in Bulgaria is characterized by the fall of socialism and the devaluation of the pre-existing systems of meaning. The national story has been thrown back into the realms of contention, which has led to a re-organisation of the citizens' entire meaningful world; a 'cosmic' shift, "an orgy of historical revisionism" similar to the one described by Verdery (2010). These are the preconditions, the primers of a set of self-pathologisations which I encountered during fieldwork, and which I will review in the following chapter – filling out the ways in which 'the need' for nationalism appears.

Chapter 2.2 The Pathology of 'us'

It is difficult, brother, to live amongst uncomprehending fools

On first arriving in Bulgaria one hears the government is 'very ill'. The longer you stay there the more you will hear that 'people are ill' too. This leads to phrases such as the often-quoted one cited above by historical playwright, and national hero Hristo Botev, expressing distaste about living in a country of fools. Diagnosing national pathology involves two modalities. Both will be presented in this chapter through a plethora of found stories, frustrated utterances and instances of intense despair; these proliferate in the Bulgarian public arena. One modality is identifying problems and picking up themes from pre-existing motifs, from the known problems of national subjectivity. The second modality is to explore avenues providing restitution for those problems.

It is difficult to claim that there is a common matrix behind everybody's way of thinking about something as effervescent as the nation with absolute certainty. By showcasing some features and genealogical elements of the ideas of national psychology and nihilism I have attempted to highlight the specificity of this construct. During the course of fieldwork itself, I felt assaulted by a set of stories depicting the national self as ill. What made them particularly salient and what urged me to collect them is their sheer repetitiveness and doxic nature. I gathered the stories whilst on fieldwork, as well as on my return to the UK, through ongoing interaction with my participants on Facebook. If we go back to Kristeva's discussion of the symbolic and semiotic, while in Chapter 2.1 I discussed the formation of a symbolic domain which pertains to structural elements of one's national subjectivity, the material below very much embodies the semiotic. The utterances presented in this chapter are consistently similar, yet dialogic and hybrid.

My objective here is to relate these utterances. I believe them to be a fundamental element of the construction of a national subjectivity in day-to-day life in Bulgaria. They do not appear to be unique to the nationalist *milieu* – although nationalists are

more preoccupied with the nation's ill health. Nationalists argue that the nation's ill health is directly relevant to one's personhood, while others may easily denigrate their state of origin and refuse to engage with it, even to the point of outward migration. These narratives set the scene for how nationalism appears in daily life.

The largest media-scape through which I encountered these 'found stories' is Facebook. In interpreting the data I follow Miller and Slater's (2000) assertion that the virtual world is a continuation of, and embedded within a wider social milieu. Observing people talking on Facebook is akin to sitting in and eavesdropping in the village café – online, on TV, in printed newspapers. The divergence is that interaction can be more atomised and demonstrative, agreement easier to spot. If someone 'felt with' or 'agreed with' a particular article or quote they "liked" it. If they felt it represented their views more strongly and wanted to relay that message, they "re-shared" it.

My participants were particularly active Facebook users. Shared news stories and 'liked' comments quickly became for me a good 'lay' way to gauge popular ideas. As I took photographs at VMRO events and shared them through my profile, I was rapidly 'friended' by a variety of VMRO activists from across the country and sympathisers from Macedonia and Serbia. As well as joining a physical *milieu*, it seems I had also been conscripted into a virtual network and community. Activists I had never met in person engaged me in the online environment – I sometimes met them physically at a later date, when travelling with the VMRO Sofia organisation, and our acquaintance was textured with previous awareness. I took the opportunity to observe their interaction in virtual space. I embraced this avenue of participation.

Negativity in the Bulgarian public domain about the national self was not something familiar to me prior to fieldwork. I did not find it easy to understand. My ethnographic engagement with Bulgaria, with my informants, and my subsequent readings on the genealogy of Bulgarian national subjectivity brought illumination to a genre of writing

and speech that had previously eluded me. The experiences described below are part of the sense of everyday reality people in Bulgaria experienced and took for granted. To further validate this, I would need to conduct more research in survey form, with a wider part of the population so the claim can be enumerated and quantified. Gallop's recent findings that Bulgarians report an extraordinary degree of suffering somewhat confirms that there exists a particular kind of negativity amongst the Bulgarian public (Mendes 2012).

This material does not suggest that everyone in Bulgaria would share experiences of mediated arenas, a proportion of people would watch the programme 'Bulgarian Memory'[31] led by Bojidar Dimitrov, others will not. Some would read newspaper articles in online media Webcafe.bg or seir.bg, others would not. What I highlight here are possible associations, which cannot be quantified with statistics within the frame of this work. Within a qualitative approach it is difficult to measure the spread and breadth of specific ideas. While recognising there can be no unilateral experience of daily life, I wanted to foreground some impressive regularity in the utterances I encountered. My claim is that if you go to Bulgaria and you engage with people, it would not take very long for someone to start explaining why the nation is ill or damaged.

This chapter is dedicated to utterances that both express the problem of the nation in the context of the pre-defined markers discussed above and in the context of the abject elements of the national self. Reacting to the abject entails reacting to that which is difficult to rationalize or confront: filth and decay – the things which need to be expelled, in order to form a healthy self. Revulsion towards the abject shapes the self (Kristeva 1982). As in older literature on taboos, abjection as theorised by Kristeva requires cleansing rituals.

Cleansing and rituals is a common motif in classic anthropology, hence the material

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[31] A programme which recounts historical events.

which I propose to account for through the idea of the abject has been addressed in a number of different frameworks. Todorova (1997) focused on the lowermost – van Gennep's notion of "shadow structurally despised alter ego" (Todorova 1997: 18). Similarly Mary Douglas (1966) could be employed to talk of 'the polluting presence' and a concern with purity in social life. My reluctance to engage with these categories is the lack of the subjective, semiotic and affective elements which compliment the idea in Kristeva's conception.

My usage of the abject is somewhat separate from other notable usages of the abject. My usage is also distinct from Navaro-Yashin's (2009) examination of abject, affect and melancholic in the context of post-war ruination – a very different context. Ferguson (1999) takes an approach which is closer. He utilizes the term to talk about the relationship between Africans' Westernization and Westerners' treatment of their claim to modernity. He describes the experience of Zambia's denigration in the scales of modernity, by defining the subjective experience of Westernized Zambians who felt themselves expelled or discarded, lowered in rank *vis-à-vis* the industrial West. The subjective experience he defines is an effect of being disconnected, counterpoised to never having been connected at all. Zambia's failed industrialization, blocked the development of a contemporary subjectivity which was, he argues, experienced as abjection. The difference is that Ferguson's usage is from the perspective of those feeling expelled from an imagined separate political domain– the West. In this thesis, the West as an ideal still plays an important role, however the abject is configured *vis-à-vis* an integral taint, not an exclusion.

My usage refers to the national subject who sees 'the enemy within'. Europe, which is tantamount to Ferguson's West, has not cast Bulgaria aside. Bulgarians have instead internalized a language of being damaged and needing 'to be cleansed'. In this my analysis fits closer with Živković's (2011) discussion of discourses about 'mud' in Serbia. In the material below and in the latter parts of the thesis, I will argue that "the abject within" can mean both the abject within the subject as an individual, as well as

the subject as 'the national subject'. Hence, in this thesis you will encounter two instances of talking about the abject – the abject as the diseased national subjectivity detailed in the chapters which follow immediately and the abject discussed in Chapter 4.2 – the citizens internal to the nation who embody its abjection and ruination – the Bulgarian Roma population.

The idea of cleaning the self is fundamental to the themes of this thesis and brings us to the crux of the material which will be considered in this chapter. The stories below present a diagnosis of national abjection followed by three reactions to that diagnosis of national decay and derangement explicated below. The first is to re-appropriate the pathology into a new semiotic system where it comes to represent the new national *complexed* subjectivity; the second is to avoid the abject by rejecting the arena in which one encounters it, meaning to remove one's personal subjectivity from a deranged national subjectivity. The final is to ritually reaffirm and heal the nation through commemorative events. Note that the final element is the only one which could be analysed through van Gennep or Douglas' work on pollution. Insight into the other dimensions is gained by considering these frameworks through Kristeva's framework.

The Abject State

Within the discourse given below, a consistent point of discussion when approaching the nation's health proved to be the health of its government, which should, in theory, effectively structure the nation's territory, providing its population with a sense of security and comfort – keeping abjection at bay. From Bulgarian media-scapes we learn that the government in this post-socialist condition is in a sad state. A mainstream media asked "In which political power do you trust?". In a poll of 2831 respondents, 37% replied "none" (Baruh 2011). Despite indications of such a staggering lack of faith, the results should not be interpreted as suggesting that all 37% have ceased to hold an attachment to their national subjectivity or an imagined ideal

Bulgarian government. Instead it indicates that the majority of citizens, feel that the current government does not represent the nation.

The relevance of that distinction is best illustrated through a discussion I had with two key activists in VMRO. They commented that on a certain issue, VMRO might file a complaint against the Bulgarian government with the EU. "Wait a minute", I remarked, "does this not undermine the integrity of the nation?" While one activist considered side-stepping the debate, the other one, older and more experienced, quickly stepped in. He explained that he made a distinction between the government in its representative and executive capacity. Undermining it internationally might embarrass the nation, if it is attacked in its representative capacity. Asking the EU for help to make sure the state fulfils its obligation to the people, and bring it closer to the ideal nation, is another matter.

This schism between an imagined ideal and actual nation state was re-iterated in many avenues. A thirty-something informant, a former VMRO member, posted a quote on Facebook by a historical figure of the early 20th century. It stated that due to the low social consciousness of the nation and intelligentsia, those who came forth to lead the state were "not only half-developed, but also all too frequently spiritually ill, morally dull, suffering from moral idiotism or megalomania". At the time I spotted it, four hours after the post, ten people, including a number of my informants, had "liked" the comment. A friend of the informant who posted the quote commented on it: "I still think that the book is a work of genius, it very accurately portrays the identity of the Bulgarian".

Using a similar trope, online media *Webcafe.bg* posted a picture representing the development of different government structures on its Facebook profile. Havana is presented as growing from humble roots to greater affluence under socialism, similarly with Hong Kong and capitalism. Bulgaria meanwhile is portrayed as the same under

Todor Zhivkov and Bojko Borisov[32]: Idiotism.   A satirical post in seir.bg presents bad roads littered with pot-holes asking "what needs to change, so that Bulgarian roads match European standards?". The answer is "EU standards". On a non-mediated environment people I spoke to commented that, the hardest thing in Bulgaria is to find a kindergarten, an old people's home and a grave plot.

This sense of frustration seemed to encompass the totality of people's lives – an ongoing struggle with national institutions' inefficiency and unavailability. Many commented on the terrible state of the health system as lengthy delays and bribes can embroil the efforts of the whole family structure[33] of anyone who might find themselves ill. Elderly women I knew would trade stories on how to source a needed hospital document most effectively, a bureaucratic path to certain medicines whose price hikes were commonly announced in the news in an ominous tone. Any successful strategy to navigate the healthcare system would be shared and would become a popular commodity as relatives and friends vie to find routes through the complicated system. Treatment of patients in hospitals seemed at best cold and disengaged unless a relationship of some kind was activated, whether monetary, one of kinship or showcasing position and authority. This relationship was often demarcated under the umbrella term of having *vruski* (lit. ties or connections). I observed women in hospital wards pool resources and build a temporary community to cope with the failure of the system of care.

Citizens expect and pre-empt inevitable system failures, forming a community out of failures, out of expecting the worst. My own experiences of the health system left me exhausted and weary. Through conversations with those around me, I realised that by virtue of its sheer complexity and irrational nature, the state appeared in people's

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[32] They are respectively: the old socialist Leader of Bulgaria and the current Prime Minister.

[33] If a person needing care or medical help had no family, or their family could or would not assist them, it could easily lead to them falling out of 'the system' altogether and in the most extreme cases become homeless – known as *kloshari*.

banal lives, as something which needed to be talked about and incessantly negotiated. The state just didn't work. These irrationalities, the degradation of the state structure, became symptoms of how 'the nation' needed fixing but also came to define a flawed collective. A piece of research by Alpha Research seems to corroborate the idea of Bulgarians wanting radical change – over 80% of about 1000 respondents want radical change: interior, juridical, health (*profit.bg* 2008).

This uncertainty formed the basis for the politics of contention by right wing activists. VMRO's co-deputy-leader Kostadin was eager to engage with issues often seen in the agendas of socialist parties: pensions, monopolistic energy companies, rural areas' rapid de-population, the decline of infrastructure or the lack of support for young families. The state was not fulfilling its role of authoring 'a healthy nation'. Some within VMRO commented: "that is too far left". However Kostadin was one of VMRO's activists who did not identify the good of the nation as existing within a right-left dichotomy. He raised issues he had learned about through his own experiences, from friends, from his father. The 'fight against the monopoles' was conceptualized as pertaining to energy security, a re-iteration of older VMRO policies such as opposition to the decommissioning of Bulgarian nuclear power plant Kozluduj. This problem transposed itself into people's everyday through the soaring energy bills of ordinary citizens. One of the first documents Kostadin produced for campaigning in July 2010 declared 'the nation' (*narodut*) demanded the resignation of the minister of energy Trajcho Trajkov for "systematically failing to fulfill his responsibilities" backing that bold statement by referring to the Bulgarian constitution. Similarly, VMRO raised the issue of demographic decline (Bulgaria's population drops rapidly at every census) representing it as "a national genocide" caused by the irresponsible attitude of the state.

Such positions are presented in the daily *milieu* visually through graphics, such as the ones collected below. While some are sourced from newspapers originally, they were all shared on Facebook and attracted many comments. They are some of the

caricatures through which people show their frustration with the government: disillusionment with the promises of then leading political party GERB and its leader Bojko Borisov. They reiterate the idea that Bulgaria has indeed always been ruled by an 'Idiocracy' and showcase exceedingly low opinions of current politicians. Two of the cartoons allude to the idea that the Bulgarian government is the abject through portraying its members as taking part in homoerotic acts. This was a persistent theme – the notion of "*pederasti*" was often used as to denote the abject.

The Abject Self

The shortcomings of the state in Bulgaria are often discussed in conjunction with the shortcomings of its people. People do not simply feature as the victims of poor government but as intrinsically implicated with it, a flawed public. Two of the cartoons below accentuate that point: one suggests that if a citizen could not identify Paisii Hilendarski, the man who played a prominent role in forming modern national subjectivity, but could recognize a *chalga*[34] singer (who is especially transgressive as a Roma and a transvestite), it follows that "you are what's wrong with this state". Another one inverts the Bulgarian Enlightenment song in honour of Cyril and Methodius (the creators of the Cyrillic alphabet). It declares "go forth misguided nation" instead of "go forth enlightened nation".

In a typical newspaper article within the genre of finding faults with the national subject, the general public is told "the Bulgarians are the most mistrustful of Europeans" (Baruh 2011). Starting with the results of a survey, the author elaborates on an epidemic lack of trust. He concludes that everyone is 'out for themselves'. There is no charity, nor collective action, nor civil society. Baruh elaborates that people don't believe "in those who rule them, in justice or even in themselves".

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[34] Chalga has specific connotation for the question of national subjectivity. It tends to stand in for the change which has occurred in society over the past 10 years. (see Rice 2002).
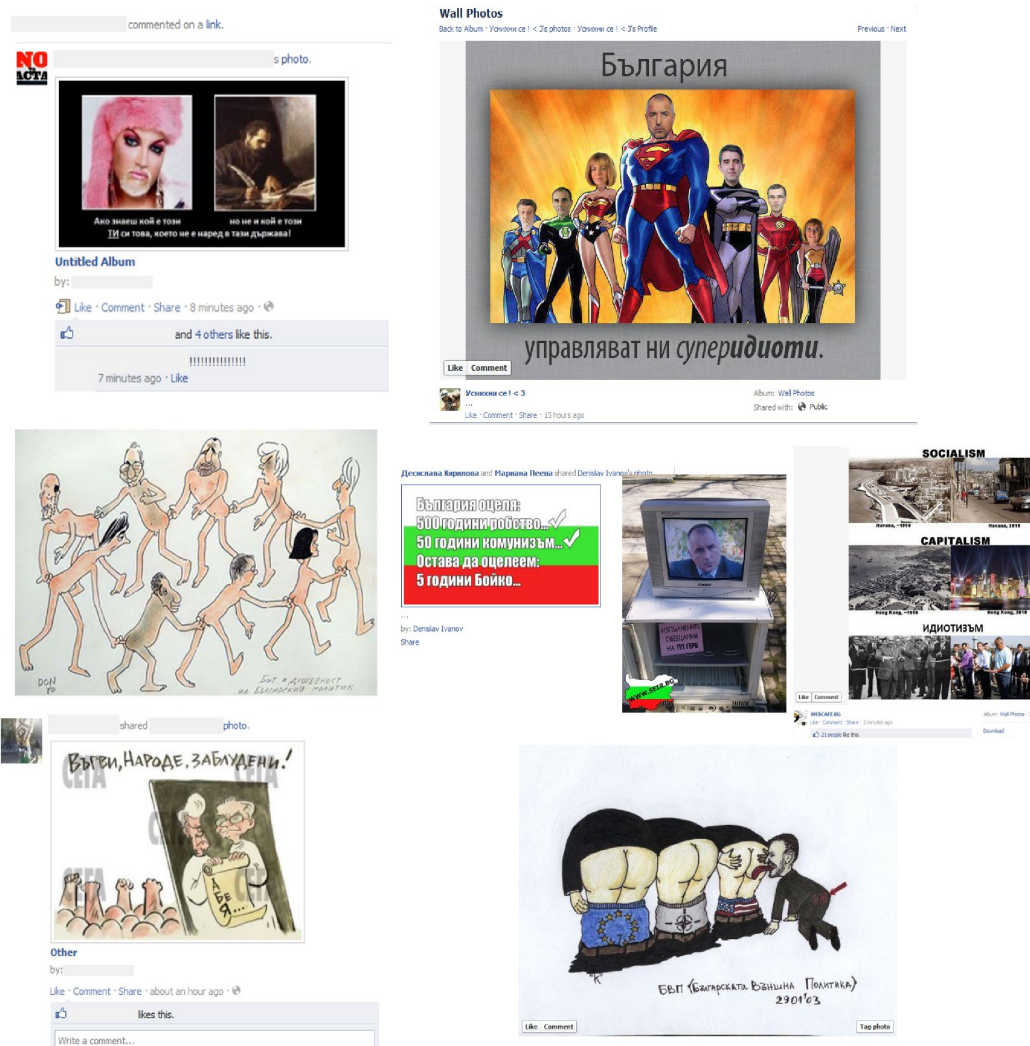
Figure 9. Top to bottom: "If you know who he (image on the left, Aziz) is but don't know who he (Paisii) is "You are what's wrong with this state"; " We are ruled by Super Idiots; "*Bit* and Spirituality of the Bulgarian politician" (an allegory of the text of national psychology *Bit* and Spirituality of the Bulgarian nation); "We survived 500 years Turkish slavery, 50 years Communism, we now have to survive 5 years of Bojko; A fridge of 'full of' "The fulfilled promises of Political Party Gerb"; "Socialism, Captialism, Idiotism" ; "Go forth, confused people of the nation" (a parody of the usual "Go forth Enlightened nation" sang in honour of the Cyrillic alphabet); Bulgarian Foreign Policy

Figure 10 Below: seir.bg's absurdities; right: a caricature drawn for an exhibition in the City gallery of Sofia shows the varied daily experiences of Bulgarian life.

These journalistic portrayals elaborate on the sense of "personal powerlessness" engendered by citizens' engagements with the Bulgarian nation state.

> *If you meet a good person in Bulgaria – shoot him, so that he doesn't suffer.*
>
> A quote by historian Stefan Tzanev posted on Facebook. Within an hour it has 30 likes and is re-posted thirteen times, this is an unusually large engagement rate.

Here, those diagnosing national psychology are not scholars trying to define a transition from traditional to modern form, but professional journalists and members of the public commentating through modern mass media, echoing pre-existing motifs. A newspaper diagnosis asserts: "Absurdities: Bulgarian specialties" (*DW* 2011). Similarly the often used phrase: "nice work but Bulgarian", presupposes a predicated flaw in the national psyche, something reminiscent of forgetting the lanterns in the train to Prague featured in Baj Ganio's story. In October 2009, a barrage of TV reports reflected on the topic "Is the Bulgarian lazy?", leaning on the notion of a common Bulgarian mentality. Most people commenting in real life or online took it as granted that 'the Bulgarian' has a specific psyche.

A particular embodiment of it is the site seir.bg which explores the condition of life in Bulgaria in its more idiosyncratic forms. One post shares a logical string "you are Bulgarian if ... you always blame others; you go to work but you don't see much point in it and you hate most of all taking responsibility". A webcafe blogger recounts her experience of Bulgaria as the country of "it can't be done" (Mudeva 2011). Wherever she tried to conduct business she found herself answered in the negative. She was stuck between mirth and despair at the absurdity of iteration. She recounts the moment when an observer takes pity and engages her attention. An elderly man remarks: "What do you expect?! This is Bulgaria. We have to get used to it." She rages, "Is this what is wrong, that we haven't gotten used to it? "

I encountered a set of particular doxa which embody the assumed particularities of

Bulgaria and 'being Bulgarian'. They are well represented on the site seir.bg, best summarised by one subtitle – "Bulgaria, a country of absurdities". The site's emblem is the outline of the country (see Figure 10) painted with the colours of the national flag – making the object of portrayal unambiguous. Ethno-living is characterised by large piles of cabbage, wood and sacks of flour being transported in cars. A caption satirically reads "of European standard".

Another set presents signs with an overly-familiar address: a sign for a hardware shop called *kaka*[35] *Tzetza*; an advert selling a *raki*-making *set* – to find the vendor you "Ask for Vesko"; a shop bearing the sign "Shout, I'm nearby, I'll come quickly". Another portrays drunkenness: badly parked cars, the morning after, a drunk sleeping it off at an unusual (public) location with an empty water bottle of homemade wine. The humour is contingent on knowing the intimate short-hand references of the national arena such as the fact that home-made wine is usually stored in empty bottles from mineral water.

The seemingly ethnic or typical is mixed in with the downright surreal in "DIY Bulgarian style". Objects are modified and fixed in ways which are both ridiculous and ingenious. They betray a lack of truly developed capitalist consumption patterns whereby the modified items would have long since been replaced. A strip light is encased in an empty bottle from a fizzy drink; a variety of side mirrors are fixed DIY-style; a bike is modified with a water pipe; a photo saying "limited edition" shows a horse pulling a *trabant*[36]; "for your comfort", says the caption on a park bench with car head-rests; a satellite dish is attached to a street light; another image sees computer cables intertwined to support a router in mid-air; "almost a jeep", a Polo Golf with a tire placed on its back end.

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[35] Lit. older sister: an age-set kind of idea which remains part of Bulgarian daily life and introduces notions of kinship into otherwise formal social interactions.
[36] A Soviet car which has become iconic of the era.

This mixed and uncertain environment re-iterates all the elements discussed above: tradition, modernity and mixed stages of development define the national 'us'. An exhibition in Sofia City Gallery explores the theme "the city without which we can't function", the Bulgarian entry (see above) introduces the theme of the mall, the high-rise home of consumerism with sheep emerging from its main entrance. In an article in *Kultura* , Prof. Pravda Spasova writes how 'grey socialism' had the misfortune to end up in the similarly spiritually empty halls of the mall (Spasova 2010). Spasova describes the micro-world of the mall 'a la Baudrillard': clean, affluent, modern – charming in its 'plastic' beauty. She envisages the shopper going home and watching a TV series which features the mall. She is of course right, a new Bulgarian TV series placed its female characters not in the post-socialist bric-a-brac of the local hair salon, but in the mall. Everything in the mall, we are told, is "simulacra and chalga", no real world problems exist. Spasova concludes that this purveys not only lipstick, but 'good national self-confidence'. She is right. Yet, parallel to that flashy reality is the ethno-culture of the everyday. Patches of modern affluence and plastic glitter are joined by the crudest of make-do 'mixed developments'. The act of existing in the flashy mall presupposes an active battle against the surrounding reality which fills most people with despair.

A set of Facebook statuses by my informants declare:

> *We fall, we fall through, we wilt as a society, from inside out we rot... and so to eternity to the end itself.. that inevitable agonizing end of history of one tribe, called also nation, ... Destroyed, demeaned, covered with "traces" and dead bodies of heroes, which don't inspire even a third of that mass of wretches!! Goodbye Bulgaria!*

> *in our time you have to be an optimist to open your eyes in the morning*

> *it is one of those days when I simply don't want to live in Bulgaria*

Such (relatively frequent) statements provided an ongoing re-assertion that despair is a central feature of daily life in Bulgaria. The reality they refer to includes the following genre of experience. A tram journey, a *kloshar*[33] had settled in a carriage, probably at some point early in the morning or even last night. Seeing *kloshari*, diving into bins in Sofia, is a common occurrence. The tram as infused with a foul smell, people were bunched up as far away from the man as possible. Eventually an annoyed elderly man goes up to the driver and asks her why the man has not been removed yet, why not call the police? Recently, recalling the incident, I come across an article in a small online media. It takes the form of a poem. The narrator is a successful businessman.

Figure 11 Top: the "sad reality" ; bottom: car with caption: "there is no such state".

Living in the world of simulacra, he is detached from the realities of Bulgarian life and ignores the *kloshar* who sometimes inhabits his doorstep. One day, unexpectedly he recognizes her - it is his favourite school teacher. He tries to give her a gift by putting it in the trash where she would find it. She leaves a dignified note, rejecting his gift because he did not dare give it to her face to face. She never appears again. Mortified, he writes the poem.

Another instance of electronically relayed despair was provided by an acquaintance who complained on Facebook that she came across the body of "yet another suicide victim in Bulgaria". She follows her remark by noting "Damn Bulgarian reality". Engaging another person commenting on her status, she notes "it is not the individual, but "the reality" which "makes people do such thing". Her interlocutor promptly declares that he is just drowning his sorrows in beer. A friend of hers, and a key participant for me, encapsulated that sense of despair and subsequently '*hater*'[37] attitude to all around. My informant would post news such as a BTV report which states that "every second person in Bulgaria thinks that their life has worsened". When referring to her colleagues in the University she would state that they are predominantly apathetic and materialistic. Her Facebook feed, as well as her casual conversation, attested to a deep anger and despair with the national condition.

Like others, she had come to pathologise Bulgaria as ill and damaged. Its people, forced to live in such a sick reality, are infected and they themselves become sick. In *seir.bg*, this is represented in a series of photos which symbolize that "sad reality": flags in bad repair, one dragged through on the ground engendered hundreds of furious responses, a car sticker says "there is no such state" i.e. there no state which as absurd as Bulgaria.

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[37] This exists as a pre-defined social category in Bulgaria for people who bear a certain negative and terse approach to those who surround them.

Diagnosis

Bulgaria "is full of crazy people" is a commonplace refrain which needs closer scrutiny due to its wide-scale presence. In a slightly different context it becomes "people have become overly cruel (*ozlobeni*)", another "it is full of spiritual homosexuals[38]". One twenty-something male informant, a member of the VMRO youth organization, similarly states on Facebook: "even in this business there are crazies who bother you, [filling in] what's going on with our health system if the people walking the streets are spiritually ill?". The young 'hater' girl discussed above pipes in: "the Nation is ill, I thought that people knew this". The linguistic construction of the latter phrase "*mizleh si che horata si gu znaiat*" relays a sense of intimacy to this knowledge; a valued insight, a key piece of information for one's survival. The question of the dysfunctional everyday becomes entangled in a chicken and egg dilemma: is the state destroying the people within it or are the crazy and dysfunctional people destroying the state?

In this imagined state of degradation, persons within VMRO made the significant distinction between persons who are *izrodi* (freaks) and *jelezni* (iron) *izrodi.* The latter are people who were obviously damaged but are of the kind fit "for times like this". They are strong, but somewhat deranged. VMRO's Sofia organizer recruited a possible activist who turns out to be psychologically unstable. He told me why he continues to work with her nevertheless "it is with people like this that ATAKA created an organization". This logic is akin to Aleko Konstantinov's disparaging portrayal of the idealistic, educated youth who is Baj Ganio's election opponent – he simply cannot cope with the savagery which confronts him. This makes him futile and ridiculous. This reality is echoed in a myriad of utterances in daily life in Bulgaria where it is said 'good' people cannot win 'here'.

An abstract kind of fear and caution form the basis of the sense of despair within

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[38] Due to many Bulgarians' illiberal, or what they would term 'traditional' approach to sexuality, homosexuality is commonly used to indicate abnormality.

social life. It relates both to an experience of 'real dangers' and of mediated possibilities of danger. There is widespread awareness of organized and petty crime which can be seen in numerous books on the dark underworld on newspaper stands or the barrage of reports on ransom kidnap victims or raped elderly ladies which feed into people's imagination of ever-present danger. A sick story unfolds every day in the media: criminality, corruption and sex appear in a set of predictable permutations. Sex stories testify to the decay of the nation's moral system. One daily newspaper writes that a local *chalga* club declared a price for a couple who would go on stage and have sex. A young woman dating "a businessman" is bought breast implants by the said businessman but he doesn't want to drive to collect her after the operation. She travels by plane against her doctor's advice and her implants explode.

I came to understand the acute and lived nature of this despair partly through my own experiences in Sofia. I too came to be afraid, 'infected with negativism', disgruntled with the world and Bulgaria. I thus started to empathise with the experiences of precariousness and danger amongst my informants. One morning my field diary simply states: "I start the day being afraid". The frustration when 'nothing works here' and sediments of negative experiences create a symphony of embodied fear. They form a prelude to accommodations to be made for living in such an environment and a sense of limitation in personal growth. As I absorbed the inefficiency, harassment and fear of daily life in Bulgaria, reactions which previously seemed paranoid or unfriendly became normal. I, like my participants, developed a different bodily experience of how you handle yourself in public, one based primarily on the necessity of self-preservation.

My purse was stolen on a tram and subsequently, every time I mentioned it to others, I was met with a chorus of similar experiences. Some emphasize, "they stole it in front of my house", another elaborates, "I caught her with her hand in my bag". A woman in the bag shop: "they are psychologists, they judge when you are distracted and that's when they strike". A middle aged informant, states that when it first happened she felt

like she might have gone crazy were it not that she was with a friend. The second time, she did not have things stolen but had her bag cut into. By then she had bought a bag with a specific design which left valuables unexposed, even if it was cut. In a similar story of accommodating and pre-empting crime, another informant stated she now carries her documents in separate cases, another man pipes in, he doesn't carry his identity card, just a photocopy. He scolds me for being so stupid as to carry the original. My original informant tells me she suspects that the second time, the pickpocket might have been a seemingly pregnant woman who she made an effort to get a seat for. Now, she says, she is 'savage'. She just does not help people and even if someone had a fit she might not help because it might also be a trick.

Solutions

In the concluding remarks of a number of different public statements which discuss "the reality of life in Bulgaria", the solution given for this malaise is dissociation from one's national subjectivity. The people, as one journalist eagerly asserts, are convinced that the pertinent question is not whether "the Bulgarian" loves work but the rather despondent "is there a point to the Bulgarian loving work"? Another online commentator calls the *Rodina* (a common word meaning lit. 'The ancestor-land') Bulgaria 'a stepmother' ('My Teacher' 2012). Another yet remarks the nation becomes 'close and dear' only to those who have left it (Bimbalov 2011).

Two of my informants, both nationalists, one of whom eventually emigrates shared a Webcafe.bg article "I just don't want to live in Bulgaria" (Georgiev 2011). Bimbalov's (2011) Webcafe,bg article, opens with the phrase: "I was created here, I was proud. I grew up", but he concludes "here I am tourist …, I was created here, but was I created for being here?". An eminent dissident of the socialist regime (1975), the writer Atanas Savov, returned to Bulgaria in 1992. In January 2005 he gave an interview for novinar.net in which he concludes "the nation is dead", and stated that he will emigrate again (Sedlarska 2005). He describes the feeling that brought him back: the tug of the

umbilical cord, the sensations of the place where you were raised. However, he remarks, he didn't know Bulgaria was dead, he thought there was hope but things just 'don't work as they should' – "[that] is not in the Bulgarian character". What remains is degradation, a sensation akin to daily being daily "dragged through mud". It is, he states, intolerable.

The question of how to address this reality can be seen through variations in the musical preferences of my research participants. Following Baker (2010) I argue popular music provides reference points and semiotic frameworks for articulating pre-existing sentiments. The head of the VMRO youth organisation was a big fan of the singer *Bate Sasho*. In songs such as 'On Top' he sings: "Bulgaria is dear to me not the state", it tells of his emigrant wanderings and affirms he would rather remain in Bulgaria, sit there and fight: without pretensions, without *complexes*. Another song says 'head up'; encouraging people to get on with life despite the problems. Similarly a young man who intermittently frequented VMRO events, wrote a rap song. The texts states: "under every stone and tree I look for change", with no clear path just endless weaving of narrow paths with many obstacles, everyday you lose hope. Other artists, also popular with some of my research participants, such as Milena Slavova and the group *Hipodil*, express disillusionment and aimless wanderings in the post-socialist space. They give voice to a generation uncertain of where to find its moral bearings. *Hipodil*, in particular excel in profanity and somehow express post-socialist, disillusioned youth. Its album *Hora ot Naroda* (People of the Nation) echoes the recent socialist past and combines it with drunkenness and a haze of meaningless sex.

One can find a number of passive coping mechanisms in Bulgaria such as musical vocalisation. One is discussed in a newspaper opinion piece, reflecting on a statement by the Prime Minister who accused the general public of incessant groundless complaining. The author asserts complaining is 'our':

> *survival … therapy… a way of returning fire… self-defence.. that which the*

westerner only receives on the sofa of the psychiatrist..[we]complain away
our life because it's easier to carry it

(Sedlarska 2011)

Among the general public there are a number of divergent suggestions for a cure, as opposed to bare survival and coping mechanisms. The main bifurcation is situated as whether one should change one's outlook and expectations, or wait for institutional change. One joking portrayal of a day dedicated to spring cleaning encourages people to "clean up Bulgaria", prompting "choose your weapon" and shows a set of guns. Most choose more conventional musings. A Webcafe.bg article proposes that rather than sinking into the status quo and accepting it as a given, or sending 'our' children to foreign lands, 'we' should civilise society (Tomov 2010). This, Tomov estimates, entails two lost generations – the current teenagers and their parents. The parents "lost their value system in the transition, didn't know what to teach their children and didn't have the time to do it because they were trying to survive".

In this thesis I argue that nationalism steps in to address the question of how to navigate this arena of fear and indeterminacy. An article in nationalist blog altermedia.bg (Angov 2011) takes as its inspiration a debate between two individuals: one expresses negativity about the status quo in Bulgaria, the other one believes that pessimism is something harmful, a capitulation of sorts. Instead people should 'fight' in 'life', not be crushed under life's difficulties. The nationalist differentiates between strong people, who will fight and weak people, who are pessimists, nihilists and pacifists and thus cannot sustain their national consciousness. Abandoning the nation by 'giving up' (by leaving either physically or ceasing to identify closely with 'being Bulgarian') is termed an inexcusable weakness of character. The differentiation between those who simply complain and roll with the punches, 'the sheep' (as will be discussed below) and those who fight back is often used within nationalist rhetoric as in this Facebook status by a nationalist informant:

"mrun mrun [onomatopoeic – suggesting complaining] that's all you hear from everywhere, from the television, from internet and that is what the activity of 90% of the people concludes with – endless complaining and 0% activity.

Kostadin, VMRO's co-deputy leader, wrote a powerful blog entry sharing his understanding of 'the problem'. He starts the piece by citing national revolutionary poet Hristo Botev[39]'s work *Elegy*. It describes the nation, in fetters not raising a voice to freedom, with a yoke around its neck, waiting its turn for freedom but not fighting for it as it is lulled into slavery. The Yoke is a common motif of writing about Ottoman times and an allegory which was ready to use with regards to citizens' apathy to the ever-decaying political arena. Kostadin reflects, how thinking allegorically of "the demographic catastrophe" he "dared to blame the nation ... a heavy accusation, but easy to make", not in the least because others do it too. At that point he references the infamous gaffe of a minister who asserted that Bulgarians are made of "bad material". Kostadin reviews typical expressions of such sentiments: they say they love Bulgaria, their *Rodina* but hate either Bulgarians or the state, or both. He concludes, the elegy sounds as pertinent 'now' as it did in 1870. Extending the allegory he concludes that perhaps it is time for us to follow the historical example to revolution.

The *Elegy* by Botev, cited by Kostadin above has been adapted into a musical piece by a rock band called *Epizod*. My field participants were for the most part hard rock and trash metal fans and would bond with regards to that sub-cultural identification. *Epizod* which commonly uses literary themes, like nationalism itself, elicited noble emotions and tried to shape sentiments (Baker 2010). VMRO's answer to the problems discussed above was akin to their preference for *Epizod*'s music: an affirmation of pride and self-worth with a sacral edge. The song below is a typical example and it features all the common hallmarks of a heroic discourse:

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[39] Hristo Botev (1848-76) was a National Revolutionary and a peer of Vasil Levski. He a poet with some leanings towards anarchism, is heavily featured in the school curriculum.

Bulgaria [as an addressee] , for you they died,

One were you worthy because of them

And they were worthy of you, mother

And they when uttering your name

Died without fear

Conclusions

As can be seen in the material above, the national domain in Bulgaria is publicly pathologised. The problematisation is not a conceit, a light-hearted critique. It expresses deep affective states – states which indicate abjection: a suicide, daily traversing of mud. The abjection entails an ongoing struggle with possible remedies for this sad state. There are a number of suggestions which crystallize in the public domain. One of them is abandoning personal complicity with national subjectivity. This cuts the abject – the decomposing nation– out of the self-entailing the destruction of national subjectivity in all respects but the conviction in a negatively defined Bulgarian national character. In that remedy cutting ties with the symbolically elaborated nation is sometimes accompanied with physical migration. Another resolution is to suggest a re-definition of the national self which sees negative characteristics integrated into a new semiotic system of a flawed but real national subjectivity.

The solution suggested by Bulgarian nationalists, as with their French peers (Holmes 2000), is to play the national physician. They propose a revolution to remedy the abjection of the nation. Nationalists like VMRO try to re-inscribe the weary Bulgarian citizen into the domain of redemptive memory, of national subjectivities cleansed from the filth of daily life and represented in symbolic form. They define the causes of national decay and propose to address them. The first resolution will be considered in the following chapter, the latter in chapters 4-4.3.

Chapter 2.3 Redemptive Memory

> *Be proud with Bulgarian history, with your Bulgarian heritage, defend the interests of the Bulgarian population in Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia. If we don't take strength from our past, then from where? Long Live Bulgaria!* [twenty minutes later someone responds] *the past is past, we live in the present and it is very regretful but we can't be proud of it.*
>
> *The only exit from this ugly circumstance in which we find our nation is revolution, and at that a revolution of the nation, immediate, desperate.*[40]
>
> *Wake up, you Bulgarian or you risk dying in your sleep!*

On the basis of my fieldwork, I will argue that the doxic belief that the national everyday can be diagnosed as 'ill', drove a series of commemorative projects for its restitution. As discussed above, for a number of actors within the national domain – particularly nationalists, it logically follows that the nation being ill is intertwined with a metaphorical illness of the people within it. Within the polyphony of voices which create this ever-present impression, we can identify some of the motifs discussed in the previous chapter. The constructed nature of social doxa is particularly revealed in the post-socialist moment, as the upheaval social norms make it difficult to produce "a truth effect" or introduce a sense of absurdity into daily life (Verdery 2010; Creed 2011). Verdery argues that the visceral and concrete quality of bodies assist in creating meaning through newly elaborated ceremonies. Reburials are one of the more specific mechanisms through which the histories of those who have lived through previous regimes of power are framed. Dead bodies are metaphorically resurrected and placed

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[40] Text written by Botev, engraved on a memorial, a photo of which is shared on Facebook by several of my informants in succession; within a few hours at least 10 people had liked it.

in a new light (Verdery 2010: 113).

In order to understand how nationalists intervene to address 'the problem of the ill nation', we need to understand how they utilise commemorations as key tools in their mode of activism. This is a useful first vista through which to understand nationalist intervention into the public domain. Ritual commemorative action can engage different publics and emotions. In this thesis I will be primarily considering rituals and symbols which address the symbols of the nation and mould the experience of national subjectivity. When it comes to understanding nationalism ritual has often been considered under the rubric of remembering (see Connerton 2004), however there is more at play.

When considering contemporary rituals, particular attention has been paid to the mix of sacred and secular, the emotive and rational as hybrid modalities in modern times. A specific strain of this conversation exists within literature reviewing socialist use of ritual events (Kideckel 1983; Binns 1979; Binns 1980; Lane 1981). Celebrations and national holidays provide what Jenkins calls "carnivals of surplus emotion" (Jenkins 2000) which represent both cyclical time (they have an annual cycle) and discontinuities in the more rationalised schedule of modern life. The onset of modernity is often symbolized by the wide-scale adoption of the Georgian calendar- a revolutionary modernising and globalizing change (Zerubavel 1981; Verdery 2009; Todorova 2010). Debate about the degree to which cyclical rhythms and sacred time continue to exist in contemporary political systems are particularly illuminating about the status of nationalists' narratives, and in particular their emotive and rational characteristics. The French and Bolshevik revolutions both introduced radical changes in the weekly rhythm of collective life (Zerubavel 1981) as illustrated in the analysis of socialist moulding of time given by Verdery (1996). One commonplace proposition is that the cyclical temporal modality of commemoration became secondary to the ability to mark progress and coordinate trans-global industry in preparation for the age of fast capital (Harvey 1990). This is a fundamental tenent of theories which present

modernity as more rational, linear and disenchanted.

Commemorations are based on sacred modalities that establish order in the face of uncertainty (McCrone and McPherson 2009; Verdery 2009). In modernity, despite a tendency towards more rationalistic forms of memory work, the rational and sacral elements of commemorations are part of a continuum, both a neat division and an unproblematic continuity are problematic (McCrone in McCrone and McPherson 2009). They provide days of rest and celebration while validating particular versions of history and affirming particular versions of history or morality. Periods defined by their exceptional nature or by an outpouring of 'surplus emotion' do not cease to exist despite the rational character of modern life. Instead people are implicated within a wider variety of modalities – both sacred and profane. In the following chapters I will show how nationalist actors enter into sacred modalities of power in order to lead an inspiring and redemptive story of origins and national relatedness.

I have already discussed the importance of the abject – that which lies outside of what is conceivable, the filth of life – and the importance of this set of diagnosis in the Bulgarian daily *milieu*. The discourses detailed in the previous chapters have highlighted elements which must be cleansed in order to allow for a healthy category of self-identification. As a subsequence of voicing the concerns described above, Bulgarian citizens tend to take one of two approaches – either consider the abject to be intrinsic to the state of the nation, or to conceive that they can take action to remedy this condition. As the status quo is defined as one of derangement, cleaning the abject means bring life back from madness. The latter reflects a continuing faith in the nation and the importance of national subjectivity – often through a sense of continuity with a historic fight for a "clean, holy republic"[41]. Caring for the nation, and nurturing pride, is activity which is then conceived by nationalists to lead to both a healthy national subject and a healthy nation.

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[41] Quote of a turn of phrase used in Bulgarian literature, and echoed by some of my participants.

The theme of creating a healthy, proud nation appears in a continuous stream of semiotic elaborations. Exploring these showcases how the nation acts as an apparatus of production. Various actors vie to provide the framework within which people might escape the despair of encountering the abject in daily life. A myriad of initiatives provide a daily influx of successful and unsuccessful attempts at inciting pride and identification in line with past elaborations of national subjectivity. Historically, national writer Ivan Vazov's (1850–1921) prose posed "a challenge to the syndrome of underdeveloped nationalism"; addressing "a nation which is proverbially apathetic" (Todorova 2011: 211). Vazov saw himself as educating and inspiring national consciousness and his work has, in subsequence, become integral to the construction of national subjectivity. He consciously shaped the national pantheon, inspired by Victor Hugo and Finnish-Swedish poet Runeberg, and became the "ideologue of the nation" (*ibid.*). On the eve of the inauguration of Levski's monument in Oct 22 1895, his play *Hushovete* was staged for the first time. During my time on fieldwork it was enjoying a revival in the theatre and on TV screens. It tells the story of émigré Bulgarian revolutionaries – living in Romania, bumming around in-between bouts of fighting. Vazov presented:

> *a glorious, heroic image of the past and projected it onto the collective consciousness in such a powerful way that it came to be accepted as the "sacred truth" by future generations. … Together with Zakhari Stoyanov, he sanctified the epoch [the national revival period] and its personalities and inspired a strongly pious attitude*

> (Daskalov 2004 : 5)

Away from the commonly revered Vazov, my fieldwork revealed that the turbulent history of the Bulgarian state in the past century provides a vault of possible alternative symbols which are held in reserve. In particular, history before 1944 (before the start of Socialism) provides a rich symbolic resource. The end of state socialism permitted the opening up of a set of symbolic reservoirs closed off by the killings of those

declared "enemies of the people" in the years after 1944. The inter-war years become a reservoir of the "usable past" (Fruscetta and Glont 2007). The Socialist interpretation of Bulgarian fascism (1923–1944) is in the process of being re-examined in contemporary Bulgarian scholarship, as well as more widely in society, as a way to redeem this past and make it "usable". Nationalists are particularly active in semiotic excavations of these histories, obscured through the politicization of the label 'fascist' by the Socialist elite from '44 onwards (Daskalov 2011). They use the pre-'44 national hymn (*Shumi Maritza*) as an alternative to the current one. Projects such as Pejo Peev's photographic archive www.lostbulgaria.com, the community of *Bojna Slava* (military pride) http://forum.boinaslava.net with its large library of out of print books, and blog *Edin Zavet* (One Bequest) http://edinzavet.wordpress.com provide a set of commemorative communities which have engaged a number of my participants.

These endeavours relay an impression that something was 'lost' in the socialist suppression – an authentic national self, reconfigured by the left-wing government, a possibility for the development of an independent Bulgarian state. This is typified by a quote shared by one of my research participants on Facebook. Moments before he was executed by the socialist government, Todor Pavlov Kojuharov (1891–1944), a Bulgarian minister, is said to have stated: "You should not cry for us but for Bulgaria". The analysis of this notion of loss alone could in itself form ample material for a research project. Pejo Peev's project shows Bulgaria before '44 (at least in pictorial form) painstakingly collected, thanks to the author's connections within Sofia's second hand book and antique communities. He is a freelance design professional, an artist and an intellectual. The pictures he has scanned and uploaded on his website are rare and well restored. When I asked him what he personally meant by 'lost Bulgaria', he replied it is predominantly a provocation, an allegory to Vazov's project *Epos of the Lost*. Vazov's *Epos* as a project establishes a national pantheon of heroes from the Revival era which were not at the time crystallised in public consciousness. Pejo's 'lost' are the forms of social life socialism tried to extinguish- officers, bourgeois merchants, members of the monarchy, nationalist fighters. These were often the kind

of people who were either exiled, killed or imprisoned by the socialist regime. In the aftermath of socialism, nationalists and people like Pejo, attempt to create a renewed set of symbols.

Such redemptive projects are interwoven with discourses which ask for the purging of the old Soviet elite from the current ruling elite. In socialist Bulgaria, work for the secret service (abbreviated to DS), was an avenue to status and influence (Glenny 2008). The institution "habitually subordinated ideology to the love of power" (*ibid.* 18). Seeing the move towards democracy, the old elite colluded to keep their positions in the new order creating what has been widely perceived as 'a managed transition'. Public resources were quickly transferred into private holding companies controlled by the old elite. A variety of projects seek the transition of contemporary society away from the Socialist model. They commonly ask for transparency in political life – in particular for DS to be de-classified so as to reveal the collusion of those currently in power with the previous socialist regime. Thus the site dese.bg, dedicated to a transparent transition from socialism, ran a rubric in September 2011 (Hristov 2011) revealing the secret service past of the then current candidates for president– including VMRO's leader Krasimir Karakachanov.

The post-socialist transition did not spare nationalists such as Krasimir Karakachanov. In 2006, on live TV, Karakachanov was named as a DS informant. This was disastrous for the organisation's public image. Karakachanov attempted to mend the damage by claiming he never informed on Bulgarian citizens and was sectioned in matters relating to Macedonia. However, the current incarnation of the organization was deeply discredited. Thus contemporary VMRO also needed to take part in exercises to cleanse itself of the debris of recent history in order to present itself as a clean, legitimate version of nationalism.

Contested Semiotic Regimes

There is divergence between state institutional identity and the elaborations of nationalism in daily life. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, here I make a distinction between state nationalism and various other forms of nationalism which emerge in daily life. Specifically, I argue that it is

Figure 12 'Illegal' semiotics. Vasil Levski, the emblem and the flag.

problematic to assume that nationalist semiotics is purely centralised, not polyphonic and dialogic. For example, in the portal for the institutional identity of the state: http://www.identity.egov.bg/ we find the formal definition of the state's official symbols. It states "the emblem of the republic of Bulgaria is a state symbol, which expresses the independence and sovereignty of the Bulgarian nation and state". It specifies the elements of the national symbol – its structure, its typography. It also refers to two accompanying symbols the hymn and the flag. A clarification points out in what ways it should not be transformed. In accordance with that definition, the illustration above which features the emblem, flag and image of national hero Vasil Levski is illegal, yet it was an exceedingly popular image in social media amongst my participants. The official branding of the state differs from the rich semiotic elaboration which can be encountered in daily life.

Similarly, the education system is a key instrument of the state, shaping how the effervescent category of pride is tied into historical narratives and the sense of national subjectivity (Todrova 2010, Kaplan 2006 amongst others). An interview with an editor in a textbook printing press revealed the process of production. The topics which writers can elaborate on and their relative proportions are set out in a document published by the Ministry for Education. Different publishing houses then create

textbooks which are approved and then can be used by different schools. Yet the topics given by the ministry have been in flux for some time.

However, as with the state symbols above, the role played by the education system was supplemented by other modes of production. The curriculum, according to different actors, was perceived to have gaps or misunderstandings. An interview with a teacher, and participant in self-reflexive projects on history books with Prof. Aleksanur Kiosev, revealed another layer of the process and unearths the problem of students' responsiveness to the history they learn in school. When students arrive, he remarked, they arrive to the school desk each day with a specific set of ideas. He believes these ideas are predominantly formed by the media (rather than by their parents), that students learn much more from the internet and these impressions stay with them. As a teacher he tries to re-educate them, "to get under their skin". He imagines the task as one of fine-tuning their sensibilities. For him this is not simply a deconstructive projects. He remarked that students, especially when they are older, might need to be reminded of the virtue of patriotic feeling. Yet while his story presented a somewhat positive story of education and school, some of my informants shared stories of school days where teachers were drunk, deeply troubled and unable to establish or retain authority over a class long enough to educate anyone. This was often evidenced in my informants' irreverent approach to authority.

The narration of national history was a favourite public endeavour which supplemented, and sometimes contested, the official curriculum creating an educated public who learn their affects from a medium apart from the history books. Mainstream newspapers and dedicated TV programmes feature historical narratives. They present and create a collection of knowledgeable public intellectuals who educate the general public about historic events or folklore. The minister for Bulgarians abroad at the time of my fieldwork, Bojidar Dimitrov, presented a programme called *Bulgarian Memory* on Bulgarian National television. Similarly, a new TV programme called 'Operation Glory', emerged at the time of my fieldwork. It commonly presented glorious moments in

Bulgarian battle history. A popular folklore programme and information series, *Site Bulgari Zaedno*, was led by Nikola Grigorov, a TV personality and VMRO member. It featured the folk ensemble which 'lives' in Pirotska 5 – *Gotze Delchev*[42]. *Site Bulgari* shared the everyday of a number of citizens who would declare a passion for 'our music'. When its future on air was threatened, a speaker for the programme poignantly referred to its purpose (now endangered) of doing everything to "preserve *bulgarshtinata*[43]", that they are forced to do even the impossible for "Bulgarian song and music to survive"   Their reference to "our music" refers not only to Bulgarian folklore, but also significantly to Bulgarian-Macedonian folklore.

Kostadin shared with me that his earliest interest in VMRO was kindled by Karakachanov's articles in newspapers. He collected them in clipping-books and they nourished his interest in history, as well as his respect for Karakachanov. Karakachanov has the connections and established authority as a popular historian to be published in the bigger daily newspapers. After I left fieldwork Krakachanov was featured in his own mini-series on TV7[44]. It focused on historical murders – from the murder of Vasil Levski, to the metaphorically stretched "murder of the Bulgarian spirit of Macedonia".

Another avenue of educating the public is books published by newspaper publishing houses. They provide optional supplements which can be purchased at newspaper kiosks. These have included series such as "Mysteries From the Centuries" number six of the series being "Macedonia- Bulgarian Land: The Historical Truth", authored by Plamen Pavlov and Liudmil Spasov; a series called "1000 things we should know about the Bulgarians"; and one of CDs with Macedonian music. When the series "Bulgarians of Note" was introduced in two daily newspapers, *Trud* and *24 hour*, an article reviewing it declared the series to be "ten volumes of self-confidence", "an investment

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[42] See page 215.

[43] Lit. Bulgarian-ness. It is customarily referred to with reverence.

[44] This was not a mainstream channel but it was still a respectable one.

in the confidence of the nation" (*Trud* 2012). The publishers stated that for a decade they have been "trying to return dignity to the Bulgarian people" (*ibid.*).

Another variant of patriotic remembrance and homage could be observed in some VMRO members' expressions of love for travelling through Bulgaria. They took part in projects such as a national tourism passport where one could collect stamps on visiting each national attraction on the passport's list and completing one's mental map of the national space of significant locations. One woman noted that she constantly discovers new wonderful places and juxtaposed her experiences with the imagined experiences of those Bulgarians who cannot appreciate the wonders of the country, who are blinded by "those otherwise rich in appearance, but actually so empty Western states". Another female VMRO member, was a fan of the organisation "Rodoppe Haijduti", which conducts historical re-enactments. Other young patriots go on a Vasil Levski hike, linking topology with heroic history. Trails of patriotic visits are displayed, and hence mediated, by some nationalists in neatly arranged and proudly displayed Facebook albums – such as one which featured elaborate photo collections of national monuments.

Proud assertions of national subjectivity are cultivated through the disparate avenues discussed above. They showcase how the production of nationalist ideology is not centralized within the state. The state is pedagogical and has an institutional identity, but that pedagogy is not ever-pervasive and it shifts with changes within the ministerial rota. Furthermore, semiotic elaborations of national subjectivities have multiple sources. An accurate portrayal of this domain is that of media-scapes[45], which form public arenas defined by a well-articulated set of "common points of reference" (Madianou 2005). These wider common points of reference, which are present within Bulgarian public arenas, supplement the reference points built into the national curriculum, official state representation and the inherited symbols of national

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[45] Using Appadurai's (1996) conception.

subjectivity. These resources, due to their dynamic nature, are more easily utilized by politics of contestation than by institutions. They provide a framework for possible discourses which can be utilized either in commemorations to tell particular stories of 'who we are' (strengthening the narrative through the medium of public rituals) or in political campaigns.

Temporal Dimensions of Asserting Identity

There is a gap between what is expected of the nation, the ideal expression of the national domain and the experiences people have of living in that nation (Todorova 2011; Herzfeld 1997). This disjuncture is addressed by the elaboration of heroes and execution of rituals to re-assert an ideal collective identity. Hroch conceptualized the national movements of the 19th century as self-conscious "organized endeavours to achieve all the attributes of a fully-fledged nation" (Hroch 1996: 80). Thus he clarified something which is often muted in literature on nationalism: a nation is often self-consciously in the process of becoming its best variant. Nationalism is imbued with the idea of progress and the values and aspirations of a social group. Through my fieldwork, I gradually came to realise that the national subjectivity must be appealing to the persons it wishes to encompass. It can become too discomforting if no rites are performed to cleanse it from abjection experienced within everyday life in the nation.

Commemorations are part of the processes of resolving the problems of the nation's uneven development (as per Greenfeld 1993). In the Bulgarian case they address the problem of the abject and the moral vacuum left by the recent collapse of socialism. 'National days' of commemoration are created with particular purposes in mind, often these can be generalized to the endeavour "to make 'us' whole again" – attempting to heal the nation (McCrone and McPherson: 2009). Established heroes are utilised as legitimizing devices by different groups trying to mobilize disparate audiences (Verdery 1993 used in Todorova 2011).

National event are thus primary for creating significant symbols for the construction of a national subjectivity imbued with pride. To borrow Edensor's superb conceptualization, utilizing resources for the purposes of eliciting national belonging entails engaging with:

> *dense spatial, material, performative, embodied and representative expressions and experiences of national identity which are inextricably interlinked with each other, which constitute a shared compendia of resources, akin to a vast matrix into which individuals can tap into to actualise a sense of national belonging*

(Edensor 2002: vii)

In a rubric on television entitled "Lessons in patriotism", produced by Nikola Grigorov, famous choreographer Neshka Robeva, spoke to the students of the national dance academy. She touched first on "Turkish slavery", then on the importance of one's 'roots'. You, she told the audience, need to learn about the essence of what it means to be Bulgarian (*Bulgarshtinata*) and how to embody it through national dignity (*natzionalno dostoinstvo*). She remarked on the importance of national *buditeli* and *vuzrojdentzi* – famous nationalising figures of the 19th century termed respectively: those who wake up and those who revive [the nation]. Both ideas are dialectical, implying the nation needs awakening and revival from specific, denigrating conditions. The reasons for 'sleeping' are slavery and oppression under the Ottoman Empire. Figures who have positively transformed the nation are celebrated in a variety of holidays. The 1st of November is the day of *buditeli*, while national revival revolutionaries of the 19th century (such as Levski) are customarily celebrated on a separate day devoted to them alone. The notions of being asleep or being 'a slave' did not remain limited to a particular historical period; my research participants used them to diagnose the status quo of the contemporary Bulgarian nation.

The presence of the national calendar provides a dictum of following "our tradition", a sense of continuity, comfort, intimacy and causes for a more subdued pride. Part of it

is necessarily re-educated through popular TV programmes such as "Society and Faith" (*Obshetstvo i viara*) which on Saturday morning discusses the religious rites traditionally performed during the holidays coming up in the near future. This form of knowledge is confirmed by priests and academic specialists such as ethnographers. A similar exploration of the need to articulate forgotten traditions can be observed in books about the national calendar, such as one authored by the publishing house "Tangra". It declares its aims within the parameters of glorifying the "antique heritage" of Bulgaria and its place in "world civilization" and "to finish writing Paisii's history".

The redemptive healing power of celebrations is not matched by most holidays in the national calendar, most are closer to Billig's definition of banal nationalism. Name-days accentuate the yearly cycle. On Ivanov day, the quantity of the people named Ivan (a newspaper article informs us there are 300 000) means people start to complain: Margo puffs, "all day today I am eating chocolates"[46], Kostadin makes constant calls trying to not forget, and thus offend, an important Ivan. Karakachanov also receives a mock greeting – his code name in DS (the secret services) had been Ivan.

This can be explored further by considering the various commemorations associated with the 3rd of March, Bulgaria's official national holiday. It marks the signing of the San Stefano Peace Treaty (3 March 1878) and independence of the Bulgarians from the Ottoman Empire. Media disseminate the effect of the national holiday. The president is featured on the news saying the holiday is a source of national pride and self confidence. Television channels relay celebrations happening on the day – sometimes from the various locations of different commemorative events. They show thematic programmes breaking their normal schedule to mirror the near-sacred nature of the event. A series of films tell the story of the nation. One TV channel airs a production of Vazov's play *Hushovete* and the rather older Soviet era film, *The Heros at Shipka* (1955), which features sympathetic Russian liberators. On the 3rd of March the news

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[46] This follows the tradition that people should *cherpi* on their name day, meaning provide those around with drinks or sweets.

features a series of vignettes: a village where everyone ordered flags, one woman says they feel better after doing so, "the tricolour is in our blood"; we are told by 'mothers' they wanted their kids to learn to respect national customs ensuring the continuity of the nation; in a Bulgarian school in Thessoloniki, Greece a child knows and recites Vazov's "I am a Bulgarian". Bulgaria's Big Read (a televised programme surveying 'the nation's favourite books') culminated on the date. The book which wins is Ivan Vazov's *Under the Yoke* – a literary embodiment of historic Bulgarian experiences of living in the Ottoman Empire. The narrator of the series declares that this text defines the Bulgarian moral setting, he tells the viewing public that it defines 'us'.

On the day itself, two sites of celebration come alive, the city centre of Sofia echoes with the bells of Aleksandur Neveski, the sound pervades the air of the capital for more than four minutes. It is a rich sound, familiar to those raised in the capital. A small child waits with her parents, her hat in the still cold spring air is in the colors of the tricolour. Children enchanted with the lines of soldiers coming out discuss what "the most powerful weapon in the world is", they fight about who gets to hold a flag, a sullen '*daj mi go*'(give it to me) rings out, a bit later a complaint, she can't see. Her dad tries to point her to where she can see the President. Spectators spot the dignitaries in the delegation, mothers argue with their children. A child on his father's shoulders says he wants to go home while his father tries to convince him that the guards really are exciting to look at. A member of the public remarks there are many policemen, few Bulgarians – with a cynical edge. Another one shushes him it's not the time for such talk. One man remarks to another, he's seen this many times before. He knows the steps. The soldiers are out of sync and need more practice. An official routine features the guards, the president and a fair amount of marching. It is held in front of 'the flame of the unknown [fallen] soldier' which is guarded by two large sculptures of lions. Groups gradually disband afterwards, there is a brief swarm as the president goes to meet the public.

An acquaintance would later ask me how many people there were, on my reply: "not

that many" she quickly retorted: "yes, the people who go every year are the same and go mostly out of a sense of duty". Another site of commemoration is Shipka, the mountain pass defined by a fierce battle between Bulgarian and Turkish forces (August 1877). Throughout the day, in good weather or bad, a number of people make the ascent to the top. One woman, interviewed by the news, declares she "felt more Bulgarian there", another that it was worth celebrating the time where the Bulgarian state was really great. A research participant remarked "this place is sacred". Online, holidays are marked through a form of digital flagging. On the day commemorating Levski, a number of people changed their profile pictures to his image. The moderator of the *Gotze Delchev ensemble* Facebook page organised a virtual flag-waving campaign and asked people to change their profile photos to a version of the tricolour. When a member of the general public followed this guidance the ensemble's site would acknowledge it (see Figure 13).

Within VMRO, a set of banal utterances form a parallel arena of commemoration, marking dates of note in Macedonian history – there are Facebook status updates such as "Eternal memory to Illinden"; "Eternal memory to the fallen! Let their great achievements come again!". One such remark accompanying a photo of the corresponding hero led a friend of the man who posted it to declare – "let us be proud that there were such Bulgarians" urging those who see this to emulate this love for, and dedication to Bulgaria. Another chain tried to propose "press share if you're Bulgarian" with a photo of Levski. Three of my Facebook friends (and fieldwork participants) did so. They also shared with the Facebook audience experiences of seeing how the sacred becomes profane. An uploaded photograph revealed a wreath from a commemorative event had been thrown away in some dusbins in front of the National Archive building. A portrait of national hero Vasil Levski, a thing to be cherished, was also snapped next to a dustbin.

Sitting with some informants, we debated the importance of executing traditions. One

remarked in reaction to her tradition-shy boyfriend, "it's a good thing to do in Bulgaria, there aren't many other unifying institutions". Thus she alluded to the role of customs as a way of performing 'us', Bulgarians as unified. Particularly loved among national holidays were the 1st of March (*Grandma March*) and Easter. The holiday *Grandma March* ushers in spring with *martenichki* -puppets or bracelets of white and red wool which are sold in a multiplicity of stalls that appear overnight in the lead up to the date. You give some to your friends and become adorned by *martenitzi* yourself. On Easter, people colour eggs and greet each acquaintance with "Christ has risen" to which the other person customarily replies "Indeed he has". At midnight people circle their local church – forming human eddies of candlelight easily seen from the heights of the surrounding high rise flats.

Finally a set of holidays were completely banal. They provide a sense of national community and synchronicity but are otherwise rather profane. For example International Women's Day, 8th of March, is widely celebrated. People rushed around with flowers, mothers and daughters lunched together to mark the occasion; TV programmes decided to comment on the differences between men and women. In the Cineplex and mall a big 'happy-eighth-of-march' greeting took pride of place, authored by children who were encouraged to share why mums are special. As the end of the school year approaches, public arenas are imbued with the topic of proms, news emissions report on popular dress designs while in the street one can clearly hear those graduating following the custom of loudly counting down the years they spent in school and beeping the horns of their hired cars. As summer arrives in full swing it changes everything. There is a lightness and carelessness which comes with the change of weather. Theatres in Sofia are closed, notices on their doors announce 'on holiday'. Cafés pop up in town squares and life moves further into the balmy darkness of the night. The sacred is nowhere to be seen.

Figure 13. A virtual flag waving campaign; Vasil Levski photo "Press 'share' if you are Bulgarian"; mediating irredentia "This is my Bulgaria"; the flag and *martenitzi* placed on the different online media logos during the appropriate holiday.

Transformation and Commemoration

While the calendars discussed above provide a dense matrix of associations, with regards to which people can actualize their sense of national belonging, nationalist actors discuss how to strengthen the effect of these unifying rituals. This can be seen with-in contestations surrounding the date of the national holiday, the 3rd of March. I will refer to two events: a debate in the Sofia University St. Cyril and Methodius with a set of my research participants and VMRO deputy leader Angel's participation in a popular TV show where he discusses the national holiday. The classic arguments in favour of the existing date are presented by the defenders of the status quo on both occasions. It is the date of the signing of the San Stefano treaty. It represents liberation, the creation of an autonomous Bulgarian state and the temporary realization of the national ideal.

The opponents of the date in the two discussions are Angel (on TV) and Nikola Grigorov (at the University). Both emphasise that San Stefano was quickly overturned, and the national ideal was not achieved. The 24th of May is proposed as the best alternative. The date celebrates the Bulgarian language, which they argue joins together "all Bulgarians", including "Bulgarians beyond borders". Angel highlights one stanza in the song written to accompany the celebrations on the 24th, "go ahead knowledge is sun … go ahead, the nation does not fall down where knowledge shines", remarking that it was sung by children from the Bulgarian minority in the Outerlands in a recent commemoration. There is a poignant expression on the other participant's face, his brows gather together thoughtfully. As the audience rewards the point with applause, he joins in. In this instance, contestation about the national holiday is used to discuss the territorial breadth of the nation and thus its geographic unity.

The participants at the university contribute another dimension of what the national holiday should represent: "for it to be a national holiday it must be connected to the feelings in us" says one participant, another that it should not give rise to negative

emotions. The participants in the debate seemed to agree that it is best if there exists a "national feeling", an existing affect amongst the population pertaining to that date. Thus by harnessing such a date people will feel an affinity for the nation and the celebration can symbolize national health. In the film studio, Angel declares to the small, as well as the wider public, that the neglected celebration of the 24th is isomorphic to the fact that people are ignorant of history; there is a disregard for values and asserting it as a holiday might help alleviate this condition.

In addition to attempts to mould national consciousness through the careful choice of holidays, nationalist actors also propose new commemorations as an aspect of the post-socialist politics of establishing new 'healthy' value systems. This requires a return to a "status que ante" (Verdery 2000), to what was 'lost'. Given the wide-scale unmooring of history, dead bodies become 'good to think with' helping assert affect and victimization in favour of varying interpretations of history. Not all dead bodies are desirable, Nikola Grigorov was vehemently against proceedings to return the bones of King Ferdinand, Bulgaria's first (and unpopular) monarch after liberation.

VMRO's appropriation and burial of the bones of a founder of the historic VMRO Hristo Tatarchev accentuates a number of the points made above. It is a remarkable event which occurred during my fieldwork. One evening, Radko, the head of the Sofia youth organisation, was told to get in touch with the youth organisation, something important was about to happen. People started gathering at six o'clock. After a few hours of waiting, looking at the latest football result and nibbling on clandestine scraps of food, Angel arrived with a metal box draped with the VMRO flag. It was evident this was a significant moment. The atmosphere shifted from highly profane to sacred. In a voice imbued with emotion Angel told us to stand up, to stop what we are doing, switch off the TV; "Here is one of the founding members of VMRO – Hristo Tatarchev", indicating the metal box. Tatarchev had been buried in exile in Rome (just like Ivan Mihailov); his brother who didn't leave Macedonia was executed by the Socialist regime. Angel invites us to step forward and pay our respects. People go

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forward, cautiously, reverently.

Angel proceeded to tell us the story of how this occurred. VMRO members, he related, had been contemplating doing this for at least six years, but were pushed into action on learning that the Macedonian government had started making arrangements to claim the bones in order to try to inscribe Tatarchev in their historical canon. The appropriation of the bones is thus termed as an attempt to prevent further contested heroes (Fruscetta 2004). Tatarchev's remains were due to be re-housed by the Italian authorities. His living descendants were contacted but we were told they did not seem to care. Angel remarked that although the bones themselves matter, the documents the Italians issued were almost as important. They prove legally that these are Tatarchev's bones – the affair had to be conducted so that all documents would hold up. The evening concludes with 'the men of the organization' briefly considering other candidates for reburial, remarking on heroes, venerated by the organisation, whose bones are buried outside "national soil". When people close to the organisation come into the offices in subsequent months Angel takes them to the room where the remains were held. A sand enclosure was placed in front of the metal box, where candles were lit in accordance with Orthodox custom.

The potential symbolic significance of the occasion was not wasted, the organisation took its time – it was nearly a year before VMRO decide they were ready to proceed and bury Tatarchev. By that time I had just left fieldwork and returned briefly to observe the commemoration. A procession of individuals accompanied those carrying the bones: people from the organisation, those of Bulgarian identity from Macedonia and a scattering of various nationalists. A solid stone monument was constructed in the central Sofia cemetery. Its inscription declares that Tatarchev, in creating VMRO, was pursuing the creation of the Bulgarian ideal. At the gravesite Karakachanov defines the burial as a national duty to bury Tatarchev "on free Bulgarian land". Using the power imparted on him by the occasion he provided a carefully worded biography. This is deeply strategic. From this locale it will resonate and will be remembered.

Karakachanov asserted the Bulgarian character of both Tatarchev, VMRO and Macedonia as opposed to "Macedonian-planned falsifications".

Two Bulgarian Macedonians spoke at the graveside, remarking in particular on "the silencing of memory" by the socialist regime. They declared the occasion a possible conduit for reversing this process. One was a relative of the deceased, the other the eminent figure Pande Eftimov. Danail Tatarchev, an ancestor of the deceased speaking in Macedonian started his speech by saying: "Let me speak to you in a dialect of the Bulgarian language". He then spoke mournfully of having had to avoid mentioning Tatarchev's name, clarifying "for he had left too much good writing which established his position as to the Bulgarian character of Macedonia". Eftimov also presented this perspective, remarking that the memory of the Tatarchevi ancestral line had been silenced. Tatarchev's home, his whole library is gone – taken by the government after the death of one brother and the exile of the other.

Eftimov took the wider perspective and emphasised the commemoration as a possibility to reverse the erasure of this and other "ancestral lines" from common history. To these "sons of the nation", he remarked, "we owe not just a bow but an explanation as to why generations have been allowed to be silenced". To Eftimov's pessimistic and worried "I hope this will be his final resting place" Angel responded "I hope, one day he rests in his place of birth, Resen", the sub-text that one day maybe Macedonia will be Bulgarian and he can be buried there. The bones at their feet added gravity to their contemplations and an inevitable pathos, an emotion. A government minister, Bojidar Dimitrov, speaking after Karakachanov, affirmed that "many deserving people" were forgotten, their deeds were misrepresented and slandered, they disappeared completely from history. He concluded that Tatarchev's reburial shows that history doesn't really forget people who have committed worthy deeds. The occasion was thus portrayed as one through which Tatarchev could take his deserved place in the national pantheon. The minister's speech culminated with the customary common utterance: "*vechna mu slava"* (eternal glory to him).

Conclusions

Through participation in these rites, the citizens of the modern state identified themselves with larger political forces that can only be seen in symbolic form (Kertzer 1988: 1-2). Durkheim divided the world into the sacred and the profane, but added that "worship of a god is the symbolic means by which people worship their own society, their own mutual dependency" (Durkheim cited in Kertzer 1988: 9). In their attempts to utilize society's set of pre-existing, established symbols, political and social actors reproduce the perpetual existence of rituals in contemporary social life – despite greater tendencies towards rationalisation. Ritual action is, after all, highly effective in shaping collective identification:

> *Through ritualized action, the inner becomes the outer and the subjective world picture becomes a social reality. participation in ritual involves psychological stimuli; ritual works through the senses to structure our sense of reality and our understanding of the world around us*

 (*ibid.* 9-10)

Through rituals society's members become implicated in the perpetually emerging social order. Rituals' bodily dimensions help the populace form an emotional attachment with the symbols of collective identification. Symbolic action gains ontological status (Turner 1975: 55-56). For Kertzer, and I tend to agree with him, "man's desire for the theatrical" cannot be overcome to form a simply disenchanted political domain "mystification is a product of the social construction of reality". It is only through such constructions that we can visualize our political universe (Kertzer 1989: 48).

These stimuli are utilized by nationalists to heal what is perceived as an ill nation. What is the source of this tendency to pathologise the nation? The answer lies in the dissonance between the necessary symbolic construction of social life and its *representativeness* – the extent of similarly between the observed phenomena and the

constructs or categories the person has for interpreting them. In times of crisis rituals can offer comfort despite the deconstruction of the status quo. This is how Verdery (2000) conceives the role of reburials in the post-socialist era – as cementing a *doxa*, a common interpretation of historic events, in the face of wide scale uncertainty about the markers of collectivity.

Part of VMRO's claim to righteous nationalism is in the lack of appropriate action by government representatives and an ability to themselves create redemptive action. For example, the youth organisation runs a campaign called 'clean memory' removing graffiti from Sofia's memorials, which would otherwise be left in a woeful state. This is one of the conduits through which VMRO author a specific set of commemorations and elaborate their own variant of memory work, implicitly and explicitly critiquing the current government.

In this first section of the thesis I have outlined how personhood and collectivity are structured by narratives and symbols employed in commemorations. Nationalism shifts the epistemological – citizenship as category – towards the ontological –citizen as a felt identity. (Berezin 2001: 86). Modernity is an incomplete realization of individualism with a penchant for diffusion which allows the modern subject to ponder their ties to various collectivity ethics (Alexander 2004; Elliott 1996). Nationalism is one of these ethics. However identifying with a Bulgarian collective self exposes the subject to the abject. This is seen both in the experience of dissonance between the national ideal and day-to day life represented in Chapter 2.2 and as an element of the polyphonic nature of how the national subjectivity was constructed *vis-à-vis* historical contingency, as portrayed in Chapter 2.1. Both chapters discuss the degree to which national subjectivity is pervaded with worries and insecurities about 'being European', and in particular the ability to 'be modern' as opposed to oriental and traditional.

Ritual performances attempt to re-fuse social life and thus the collectivity. They act as established ways to create a sense of ontological security. Thus citizens' experience of

the abject, of the dissonance between the ideal self, and day to day life are addressed through particular rites of commemoration. In this chapter I have drawn out the ways in which VMRO attempts to present commemorative solutions to the nation's malaise through elaborating their own variant of the national calendar and re-focusing attention on 'silenced' heroes. In these chapters I have identified nationalism as a redemptive endeavour, a way of re-asserting strength in the face of uncertainly and mixed outcomes. This is not however, an abstract endeavour. Considering nationalism as such is a key weakness in established texts on the matter. Nationalisms' characteristics are the result of the particular productive nexuses, of concrete organisational structures. I will consider these in the following chapter.

Chapter 3 Who are We?: The making and re-making of a political organization

Nationalism seems to appear out of thin air, its symbols seem ever-present. Yet as hinted at in the previous section these symbols are the result of specific political projects. These political projects are situated in the context of social movements, political parties, citizen's activism and charismatic personalities. Contestation between all of these addresses formulates a multi-vocal public arena using the repertoires of already available symbols which are intrinsically ambivalent (Turner 1975; Kertzer 1989).

In the next two chapters, I will introduce VMRO's life world through disputes surrounding its party congress. This is akin to the moment when in the *Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy is faced with the fearful Wizard. He expects her to follow protocol, and puts up a mighty performance. However, Dorothy discovers that behind the intimidating rattle of the Wizard's formal display is a deeply ordinary man. The same thing holds for most political actors and settings. So, let's peek behind the curtain.

Disputes point to "norms and ideology, power, rhetoric and oratory… meaning and interpretation" (Caplan 1995: 1). They provide a setting in which differences are socially elaborated and discussed, although not necessarily resolved (*ibid*). These differences then become socially constitutive. Social life in any case is pervaded by fluctuation, its stable nature is a collective fiction:

> the culture of any society at any moment is more like the debris or "fall-out"
> of past ideological systems that is in itself a system, a coherent whole …
> Yesterday's liminal becomes today's stabilized, today's peripheral becomes
> tomorrow's centred
>
> (Turner 1975: 14-16)

A dispute allows the observer to enter into the domain of liminality, the gaps between the ordered worlds where the cultural script is very much under construction.

Paradigms are formulated, established and debated in "abstract cultural domains" which Turner calls "fields". Subsequently, these paradigms are transformed into metaphors and symbols with reference to which political power is mobilized in concrete settings called "arenas". Contention is embedded within what Berezin (2007) identifies as the distinction between nation and state and the way these two are historically transformed by a "consolidation regime". The state pertains to all the institutional mechanisms of the nation-state. This domain is the subject matter of the anthropology of the state and policy (detailed in Shore and Wright 1997). The nation is roughly speaking the cultural content. Consolidation regimes are sites of national experience. They *produce* habits – ways of interpreting and acting in the national space, which depending on the form of consolidation can be more or less vulnerable to nationalist contention.

A political field is constituted by actors who invest in the same dramas and prizes, and who aim to contest or control the same system of distributing resources (Turner 1975). Creating or identifying oneself with popular symbols is a means of gaining power and legitimacy yet power holders cannot entirely control ritual (Kertzer 1989). This thus opens up an arena for successful and unsuccessful contestation. Social schemas pre-structure the world. Nationalists try to mould social schemas to expand their domain. Emotions (or affects) form socially structured dispositions to act within an existing schema (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2001: 14). As discussed in the previous chapters, emotions such as guilt, shame and pride form the basis for bonding the national collectivity as well as forming the basis for people's moral sensibilities. Protest can be a point of pride or dignity: an end rather than a means. It must be denoted that the emotions which become implicated in politics are "more constructed than others having more cognitive content" (*ibid.* 13). Moral shock is an important first step into activism, since "activists must weave together a moral, cognitive, and emotional package of attitudes." (*ibid.*).

Two sides of political movements must be identified: one is internal, the other

external. Political movements have to both shape their internal organizational culture as well as engage on a wider scale, across the public arena, with the larger collectivity of the nation. In the thesis the two will be addressed separately so as to not cause confusion. Chapters 3.1 and 3.2 discuss the internal dynamics whereas Chapter 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 address the question of the organisation's embededness in the social milieu of the nation.

VMRO's internal organizational culture is difficult to specify within existing categories of nationalist movements. As I will discuss at length in the next two chapters, it is a political party as well as a kind of social movement. Its leadership pursues issues which would make it politically successful while in parallel members pursue activism relating to their nationalist convictions. This activism relates especially, but not exclusively to Macedonia. I use here Tarrow's (1998) influential definition of social movements:

> *contentious politics occurs when ordinary people, often in league with more influential citizens, join forces in confrontations with elites, authorities and opponents ... [they petition through] known repertoires of contention and expand them by creating innovations at their margins. When backed by dense social networks and galvanized by culturally resonant, action-oriented symbols, contentious politics leads to sustained interaction with opponents. The result is the social movement*

(ibid. 2)

VMRO roughly fits within this definition and Tarrow's overall framework. VMRO activists name grievances and construct frameworks which they hope will rally the general population. They diagnose the problems of social life in Bulgaria. Aided by the conceit central to the enterprise of nationalism: that they speak for the wider community, the nation. VMRO's existence as a political party hybridises the model.

However, that hybridity is sustainable and is in fact useful as a way to relativise a model which is over-focused on Western-centric genres of protest activity. Kopecký

and Mudde's (2003) discussion of how right-wing organizations in Eastern Europe are construed as proponents of 'uncivil society' provides an evocative argument for the need for reflexive utilization of West European political concepts in Eastern Europe. Kopecký argues that narrow conceptions of civil society obscure the way in which extremist organisations become involved in political protest i.e. "contentious politics". Kurti's contribution to the edited volume discusses how the street culture of skin-heads constituted political contention. Further to those arguments I would add that there is also an ideological bias in the under-developed study of right wing contention. Scholars have often focused on movements with which they feel sympathy – left wing, anarchist, indigenous or minority issues – sometimes taking the role of an academic activist (Edelman 2001). Edelman divides such scholarship into three different categories: a) identity-based and anti-identity politics, b) right-wing and conservative c) transnational movements – globalisation from below. Identity and anti-identity research has focused on the politics of assembling solidarity and activism around markers related to gender, class and ethnic categorizations. However, these categories should not be seen as independent in processes of mobilization (Pratt 2003). They also cannot be universal. One of the weaknesses of scholarship on social movements is its embededness within activist *milieus* which fill specific tropes.

The division of civil and uncivil movements is parallel to the division of 'good' and 'bad' nationalisms in the East and West (Kopecký and Mudde 2003: 46-56), which in previous chapters was discussed as the division between reason and emotion. As will be discussed in Chapter 3.1, VMRO's trajectory in 1999 was disputed. Would it become a political party or an NGO? Similarly in 1990, activists for the rights of the Bulgarian minority in the Western Outerlands of Serbia debated whether to register as a political party or an NGO (Nikolov 2002). Both processes led to the creation of political parties. Both parties often take on issues which in Western Europe would be on the agenda of an NGO. This hybridity is what makes VMRO's organisational structure fit well within what constitutes a social movement.

A key apparatus of achieving synchronicity when creating social movements is matching up the *frames* of organisers and participants and creating social solidarity between the members (Tarrow 1998; Goodwin Jasper Polletta 2001). However, movements need to mediate between "inherited symbols that are familiar, but lead to passivity, and new ones that are electrifying, but may be too unfamiliar to lead to action." (Tarrow 1998: 107) Activism, as argued by Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, is not simply policy-oriented. A social movement is also ideally a community, built on bonds of trust, loyalty, and affection. Movements are spaces where activists' beliefs and emotions are to be moulded away from the commonplace. However that emotional involvement can also spell the decline of movements as resentments, romantic liaisons and fractured friendships tear at the fabric of the collective leading activists to revert back to private life (*ibid.*).

Leadership forms a key node in the dynamics of organizations. Klapp's (1964) analysis of celebrity and political leadership in America is particularly pertinent for understanding these processes as it engages heavily with the conflict between the leader as a person and a symbol. Klapp proposes that when a leader addresses a public, they must develop their image within pre-existing tropes. The creation of a public persona is not instantaneous but dialogic. A leader, if savvy, will try to present themselves within a specific frame. The public react to their attempts and give them cues for elaborating an amenable image. It is not a given that the image will be agreed upon. The life cycle of a public persona is full of potential pitfalls as public dramas can overtake the existing symbol. As Klapp remarks, in fact the real person's death can be the final stage in allowing the image to be consolidated: the physical person is no longer liable to disrupt the image. In the case the image of VMRO's main leader (Karakachanov) as a nationalist was disrupted by aspects of his biography, namely his involvement with *DS* (the secret services). In public interpretations this thrust him into another category than the one he had coveted. Historic contestation about the trajectory of VMRO as an organization also disrupted his public image. The label of having betrayed the real cause of the Macedonian brotherhoods would not go away

despite the successful inheritance of the organisation's material base: its central buildings.

It is within that context that we can observe the emergence of two young leaders: Angel Djambazki and Kostadin Kostadinov, both of who elicited characterisations as charismatic by the organisation's members. Spencer (1973) argues that the secular charismatic leader differs from the sacred one in a number of aspects, however at their root the categories point to people who have "mastery of events": "He resolves the existential chaos of reality" (Spencer 1973: 345) The charismatic leader also stands out as a person with the backdrop of rigid institutional structure which he is able to bend to his will.

As will be discussed in Chapter 3.2, VMRO's deputy leaders at the time of my fieldwork, Angel and Kostadin attempted to showcase their mastery of events with varying success. They engaged specific frames to identify themselves both internally to the organization and externally to the general public. Angel engaged with the trope of a dynamic, adventurous, risk-taking revolutionary. His re-patriation of Tatarchev's bones and similar 'adventures' such as secretly transporting a statue of Todor Aleksandrov across the border with Macedonia, consolidated this image. His drinking, womanizing and speedy, assertive driving played on the idea of the buccaneer even as his neat suits and careful manner hybridised that image. He took the leading position in most events, cultivating overt mastery of VMRO as an organisation. Kostadin, meanwhile, presented himself as the enlightener, publishing numerous books and engaging his acquaintances in erudite conversation. He cultivated the image of a family man and invited respect with his 'cleaner than clean' public persona.

At the time of my fieldwork the two men clashed within the organisation revealing the cracks in both of their cultivated images and conflicts within the organisation. Furthermore, while these images worked internally, eliciting in some cases large amounts of dedication by VMRO's membership base, the public construction of their

image was somewhat disjoint as it engaged a different dialogical process. Kostadin's public image was closer to the organisation's internal one, but Angel's was not. To different audiences his image fractured and fissured. In public he cultivated the guise of a common-sense statesman – a young, smart, patriotic politician mocking the excesses of liberal society.

The following two chapters consider how leadership conflicts and processes which match up activists' frames of reference author VMRO's particular organisational culture as a living organism. The conflict between the two leaders is a common motif running through the organisation's internal *milieu* which reveals the possibilities for tensions, conflict and affect amongst VMRO's activists. Being a nationalist is not a unilateral ascription, it involves a degree of interpretation which can only be understood by considering processes internal to the nationalist organisation.

Chapter 3.1 Congress: Unity in what we are, but what are we and who?

The VMRO party congress in October 2009 proved to be a fertile soil for my growing understanding of the party and its reproduction in time. The dispute at congress was initiated by the Plovdiv and Blagoevgrad organisations. They demanded for Karakachanov to step down as leader and prepared to fill the empty position with a delegate from their ranks, Slavcho Atanasoff. It constituted a social drama (in the sense used by Turner 1975) which technically lasted two days, but had a long-build up and tail. This proved to be an occasion for reframing and reproducing the organisation.

The congress was in large part a performance for an internal organisational audience. As with historic conferences[47], this was an opportunity to renew and redefine the organisation while reproducing its existence in time. A number of congresses in recent history had seen divisions and re-definitions of the contemporary VMRO. Key points of contestation occurred in 1999 and 2001. Krasimir Karakachanov wrote a book to narrate his vision of the history of the organisation and published it in 2004. In his narration of events, each VMRO congress after 1989 is a progression to the point where he takes sole leadership of VMRO. The conflicts at the turn of the 21st century are reviewed with great brevity. The dissertation of a former member (Illina Konakchieva 2003) narrates the changes in more detail. In 1990, a Bulgarian VMRO was re-established as a "cultural-enlightenment organisation" called VMRO-SMD (VMRO- Union of Macedonian Brotherhoods). At the time it was not a political party. It emerged out of the structures of the demographically ageing, kinship-based Macedonian Brotherhoods.

Karachanov's rise to power is correlated with the rise of VMRO as a political party. In the congress of 1999, VMRO-SMD becomes VMRO – BND (Bulgarian National Movement). Konakchieva (2003) characterizes the conflict leading up to the event as

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[47] see introduction

that between *prosvetiteli* (Enlighteners) and politicians. The latter won. The new

acronym highlighted emerging attempts to dissociate the organisation from the

Macedonian issue for the sake of establishing wider regional support – outside its

typically strong regions in the South-West. The change in name was also accompanied

by a change in legal status: VMRO became subject to the law of political parties which

subsequently formed the basis of the audit culture, which I will describe when

discussing the 2009 congress. A long-term activist shared with me that he thought

1999-2001 was a watershed moment – this was the time, he noted, when people

motivated by the desire for political gain started to come into the organisation. Those

who refused to join the reformulated VMRO presented themselves as being the

authentic ideological descendants of the Macedonian brotherhoods.

VMRO post-1999 attempted to shift away from its historical image and to present

itself as a political organisation. While the historical VMRO was associated with

nationalism in the South-West of Bulgaria and across the borders of those regions into

Macedonia (both Vardar and Aegean), its renewed form re-defined it as one speaking

for the wider Bulgarian nation. This formed the basis of being able to claim to heal the

whole nation. If speaking on the Macedonian issue was an avenue to healing the

'suffering Macedonians', the expansion of VMRO's aims obliged it to speak of the

national ideal *vis-à-vis* the whole nation.

The two moments of contestation surrounding the 2009 and 1999 congresses were

compared by one of the older members who remarked: "what you witnessed here

[2009] is nothing compared to the bitter battles which I saw in those years [1999]".

There is however a difference in the basis of contestation in the two cases. While the

1999, and to a lesser degree 2001[48] congress conflicts, seemed to have been about

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[48] Where Karakachanov excluded the youth organisation from VMRO. Karakachanov
declared them ineffectual, a choral society. They retaliated that VMRO should have
never become a political party and that Karakachanov was privatising the lands of the
Macedonian brotherhoods.

the unfolding transition away from an old (in some cases already dying by natural causes) guard into a new and fresh-faced structure, the 2009 conflict was in essence about leadership. However, it still contained echoes of the previous contestation which bears testimony to these events' ability to establish new semiotic battlegrounds. For example, a key discourse throughout was whether those competing for leadership were *ideino motivirani* (motivated ideologically) or whether they were 'just' in it for the sake of a political career. The importance of this discourse reaffirmed the idea that VMRO is far from being simply a political party. The contemporary organisation continues to elaborate on the mixed heritage of its descent.

The conflict during my fieldwork closely followed the Bulgarian national elections in the summer of 2009. Prior to the elections, VMRO had five parliamentary representatives. The summer saw two elections – EU and national. The EU election served as a kind of a poll which mapped political support. Unexpectedly parliament accepted last-minute electoral reform. Parties had already formed viable coalitions. They were suddenly faced with a new set of thresholds. Bulgaria's party system supports parties of varied size and electorates. The last few years have seen a consistent atomization of politics and the ruling elite has been formed on the basis of coalitions. The conflict within VMRO was based on the coalition that VMRO formed with new political party - RZS - in response to the new electoral thresholds. RZS was considered a poor partner on ideological grounds, but the coalition also failed pragmatically. It did not bring electoral success. VMRO lost its seats in Parliament. This downgrade had wider repercussions. The law for political parties in Bulgaria provides those represented in Parliament with both a monetary allowance and material basis to conduct their work. Thus, the financial subsidy for the local party clubs, the organisations' base of support, was about to be taken away.

The build up to the congress, the summer of 2009, is constructed out of my research participants' narratives. I was on leave during that time, as my grandmother had a sudden stroke. The need arose to care for her, which put me in direct contact with the

tumultuousness of the Bulgarian health system. The events surrounding the congress themselves reflect first-hand experience. When I returned from my grandmother's sickbed, I was told the youth organisation was preparing for its yearly hike. I showed a desire to attend. After a raised eyebrow or two, arrangements were made and I was conscripted into a week of intense high altitude bonding. The hike proved to be my rite of passage into the organisation. It bears similarities to a pilgrimage as its ultimate destination is the gravesite of Todor Aleksandrov. On my return I started spending time in the offices at the organisational core of VMRO. Around me I witnessed the conclusion of a savage disagreement about the leadership and future of the organisation. The kinds of conflicts and politics which could be observed at the time ranged from high octave swearing to subtle power plays. Whilst the former were difficult to miss, the latter to my then more un-trained eye were more hidden. The gradual ability to see those power plays was to become evidence of my growing understanding of *homos politicus*.

Observing the events of the congress in this chapter provides a set of avenues for considering a number of important themes within VMRO organisational life. It introduced Krasimir Karakachanov's position as a problematic figure and revealed some of the mechanisms through which he continued to be at helm of the organisation. Exploring it here allows me to relate the practicalities of leadership contests, revealing how they appear in practice. It is an entry into considering how affect structures the internal dynamics of the organisation by revealing the emotive nature of congress' proceedings and discusses how these emotions are challenged into a social drama.

The congress was a perfect social drama. An older activist told members who had not attended a congress before that this was an initiation, a vital piece of experience in the political world. It proved to be introduction to a number of important motifs. It framed participants' understanding of the organisation and created a context in which Karakachanov re-asserted his authenticity as a leader. After the event those who had

been part of it were invested in a particular version of reality that was enacted in its course. It reveals the salience of Caplan (1995) and Turner's (1975) work for understanding organisational life.

While the affective and symbolic are important elements of what shaped the event of the congress and its significance, list-making and legal work accompanied these dimensions. There was a multiplicity of processes which authored the event and the organisation in parallel. These parallel processes will be echoed later in the referendum chapter. The preparation for the event of the congress itself included accounting for the organisation – the rational framework of organisational work, within which its more emotive content can be channelled. It also revealed the regional elements of the organisation, showcasing familial relationships within the activist structure and the norms of how organisational structure should be moulded by internal procedure.

Audit, Rumour and Regionalism

The congress was organised in Sofia, where it was prepared by the *org otdel* (the organisational unit), who worked with increasing intensity in the weeks leading up to the event itself. It was mediated by a number of documents and a series of procedures – namely the law for political parties, that situates the organisation within the legal system of the state (Bulgaria), and the party's constitution. Documents which describe the distribution and size of VMRO structures across the country were reviewed and summarised. This constituted a kind of audit culture, a ritual of verification entailing a power relation between the scrutinisers (the *org otel*) and the observed (regional organisation) (Shore and Wright 1996). Its participants were delegates who in theory represented the membership of the political party across the country. If a regional organisation had a member who held a seat in the local council or a mayor, they were entitled to additional delegates.

The 'make up' of the organisation is not something that could 'just' be accounted for. In the run up to congress, it became clear that the records of how many organisations there really are, whether they were registered appropriately and how many members are within the structures were grossly outdated. This opened up the possibility for forgery and the election of illegitimate delegates. Any organisation which had to be registered anew at this point of time was under suspicion of being 'invented' for the purpose of swinging the balance of power in the congress vote. After the congress, Sofia members asserted that the other side had 'stuffed' their area with fake organisations, insisting that many of the delegates they saw were unfamiliar faces – council employees or contractors from Plovdiv.

The rationalistic, audit approach to membership led to conflicts which brought out debates about the definition of VMRO's dual nature – as both a political party and an ideologically motivated organisation. Whether 'real' or 'fake', organisations had either to be previously registered or had to submit a document to announce their existence. This document, the so-called *protocol* or record of proceedings, announced that an organisation had been formed and had its first gathering – featuring a minimum of five members who signed the document. In parallel each member filled out a membership form.

The parallel, sacral form of gaining group membership in VMRO consisted of taking an oath. It followed 'traditional' form. The member swore to defend the cause of re-uniting Macedonia and Bulgaria. They bowed down and kissed a Bible, a dagger, a pistol and a cross layered on top of each other. This form of the oath dates back to anti-Ottoman revolutionary committees formed

Figure 14 A traditional oath in the contemporary world: a man kisses a bible, the revolver and a knife to swear an oath to VMRO.

by national hero Vasil Levski. Reflecting the tension between these two forms of belonging, at a regional party conference in the aftermath of congress, a number of representatives expressed their sense of affront at not being allowed to be at congress despite having taken the traditional oath, which they translated as being a real organisational structure, deeply motivated to work for 'the cause'. The counter point was they had not registered their structure in paper form. The conflict highlights tensions between formal membership of VMRO and people's self-perception as activists.

The task of processing these matters prior to congress fell on the three young men who had made the transition from activists to paid employees in the *org otdel*. A lawyer was consulted on complex matters. In a scenario with no contestation, such matters could have been overlooked. In this case, everything was done 'by the letter'. If a consensus could not be reached the disputing parties might end up (as they eventually did) in court. There the discussion of 'organisational ownership' was judged on the basis of rational criteria, not ideological markers. During congress, VMRO divided in two. The new factions went to court, asking legal practitioners to decide whether the congress was legitimate, and whether the new organisation could use the prefix VMRO. After more than a year, the courts ruled in favour of VMRO-BND. Thus the authenticity of the organisation which retained Karakachanov as a leader was validated through legal means. However, this form of validation was not sufficient. The organisation had to also be validated in the context of the events which preceded legal disputes. The build up to the congress and the event itself had to create an environment conductive to establishing a sense of organisational identity and meaning for those who continued to participate in the organisation.

The built up to the congress involved a large number of informal and semi-formal conversations within and outside the organisation. These conversations were formative of a new set of definitions which drew up the lines of conflict and debate for the upcoming congress. They revealed tensions within the regional structure of VMRO.

While some conversants had a role in negotiating the outcome of the congress, others were merely interpreting what was happening and trying to choose a side.

This preparatory process entailed an extraordinary level of communication between various people across the country. Rumours abounded. A cacophony of perspectives emerged as people attempted to decipher the drama. Divisions formed and re-formed, often in accordance with regional cleavages accompanied by large-scale meetings, small-scale private arrangements, secretive or loud phone calls and finally, but significantly, statements to the media about support of one or another of the candidates. This included animated phone conversations with members of the *org otdel* conducted (often in angry raised voices) with their peers across the country. A number of the people who were at the party centre in Sofia had connections with the structures around the country. Lines of communication were deployed which combined the political and personal.

It became evident that VMRO as an organisation and political party layered informal and formal relationships. Some members were employed by the party, others were 'simply' dedicated activists who received no financial remuneration for their work. One informant would tell me later - "you have to recognize people are each other's *kumi, krustnitzi*" .This meant they were witness to each-others' weddings or godparent to their fellow member's children. These are important social relationships in Bulgaria. Such familial relationships author VMRO as more of an organisation than a political party, but they also create the preconditions for the kind of impassioned response which was seen in the context of this public drama. The various relationships mingled to create complex stories of allegiance and particularly impassioned responses to organisational conflict.

The event revealed the formal and informal organisational structure of VMRO at the time. VMRO sectioned the country into a number of constitutive "organisational regions". Each region had its own organiser, given a hefty petrol budget to allow them

to visit sub-regional organisations. Some organisers are well recognised figures and seem to have a talent for the job, others, less so. Organisers were employed by VMRO, but were not solely reliant on it for their income[49]. With the proceeds of the congress recognition was proportional to the attention and the cheering that a person might receive. Each region had its own micro-culture, key figures and leadership with an unevenly developed relationship to centralised leadership and uneven execution of centrally defined (when there were any) policies.

Regionalism became one of the key components of this public drama. The two opposing camps were labelled *vis-à-vis* their regional belonging. One was named 'Plovdiv', as the proposed other leader was also the mayor of the town, and the other as 'Sofia', Karakachanov's stronghold. The build up to congress was evident when newspaper articles about it started to appear in the wider media – detailing competing claims for leadership and different regional organisations' support for one or another of the candidates. Sometimes the decision had been anticipated by people in Sofia beforehand. Sometimes Karakachanov had been invited to speak with regional leaders in advance, sometimes not. Sofia's activists intermittently reminded me that despite the seemingly solid nature of these regions' position, there was considerable amounts of confusion. Not everyone was equally well informed on key issues. Some were vulnerable to being swayed by miss-information. Activists were deeply concerned with the need to present their version of events to the various regional representatives who would vote in the congress and establish its outcome.

Within the *org otdel*, as spirits in Sofia ran high, a video was continuously played in the part of the VMRO offices inhabited by the *org otdel*. It accentuated the emerging regional elements of the conflict. A TV (comic) sketch satirised a man's decision to go to Plovdiv and the series of unfortunate events which befell him as a result. The clip

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[49] If members have had electoral success they gained a post in local government for which they would also receive a wage. In some cases organisers had their own businesses as a separate source of income.

seemed to accentuate the use of the word *maina* (a slang word for those from Plovdiv) for the individuals 'from Plovdiv' within the organisation. Of course, not all significant figures who formed the opposition were from Plovdiv, in fact a lot of them were not, but this quickly evolved as a nominal category. '*Mainite*' became a common name for 'the others', i.e. the opposition (from the perspective of the 'Sofia' faction). Phrases of the comic sketch, were quickly memorized and uttered indiscriminately and repetitively by anyone who spent enough time around the *org otdel.* This repetition objectified the 'other side', it replaced the complicated set of relationships with a set of abstract markers that became imbued with animosity and could then be easily fed into the category of 'traitor'.

VMRO's Sofia organisation appeared dedicated to Karakachanov. However a number of the members of the youth organisation withdrew during the general elections as early as the summer months, during my absence. As I gained further access to the organisation at a later stage I realised that many small conflicts simmered beneath the surface, discussed only in specific, smaller groups and back rooms. 'Sofia's' understanding of the conflict was filtered by the organiser for Sofia at the time, who at the time of my fieldwork was VMRO's co-deputy leader, Angel Djambazki. An example of the kind of meetings happening across the country was Angel's meet-up with local activists a few weeks before the congress. In its course members raised questions about the upcoming congress. They had heard rumours from their network around the country. The asked about stories published in the media. This event gave me an early glimpse into the views of an individual who otherwise resisted elaborating on issues of an 'intimate' organisational nature. One person remarked "I heard those in Plovdiv, have started celebrating". Angel responded that this was misplaced ,"last week I was concerned, but this week, not so much. It seems that good sense has returned to people around the country". Angel highlighted that members of local organisations around the country were still forming opinions and voting on resolutions – discussions like the one he was having with his immediate peers.

This event gave Angel a chance to narrate why local activists should disapprove of 'Plovdiv'. He denigrated the opposition for gathering support by proposing an enlarged leadership structure, a political tactic appealing to leaders' ambitions of raising in the ranks into the central committee. The suggestion that they were politicking within the organisation was a serious one. This is something that was generally disapproved of within VMRO. Politics, Angel reminded the activists, was to be conducted outside the organisation. While politicking within the organisation, 'Plovdiv' were deemed to have also ruined VMRO's chances within a wider political domain. Angel relates that they were responsible for ruining the coalition arrangements which VMRO had started with GERB (the party which 'won' the election of 2009). One day 'they threw out everyone from a local coalition with GERB', breaking the possible chances of a coalition in national elections. To survive politically on a local level they aligned themselves with BSP, the socialists – a party and ideology which the majority of VMRO members considered intolerable. In conclusion he revealed that when the central committee had voted on the RZS coalition, the original reason for many of the member's displeasure, it potentially primarily benefited the Plovdiv organisation and was voted in by them.

As indicated above, the domain of contestation leading up to the congress revolved around the character of the opposition and their ability to represent 'real change'. Few members declared themselves in favour of Karakachanov's leadership in abstract. During a speech at congress, one 'Sofia' activist denigrated the opposition's claim to being ideologically motivated and moral was contradicted by the verbal and electronically mediated mud-slinging which happened prior to the event: "the impression one gets from all these emails is that we are all a group of bandits". The opposition's method of contestation was deemed inappropriate. The activist stated his distaste for the practice of conscripting through *sreshtichki* (using the diminutive word for meetings), meaning not leading debate in public forums, but trying to gain support slyly. Some members also claimed they were threatened and pressured by a series of distressing phone calls. My informants explained that it was traditional within VMRO to attempt to resolve conflict previous to the event of congress itself as a way to keep

disputes internal to the organisation out of the public eye. Hence some VMRO members found the public nature of the conflict over leadership so distasteful that they boycotted the congress. This was indicative of a wider set of codes defining 'honourable behaviour' within the organisation.

In response to media reports of the congress, members from Sofia emphasized that it was a pity that the internal conflict was being leaked out into the media. This kind of behaviour was described as a "dishonourable thing" and "not how things are done in this organisation". One informant remarked that it 'cheapens' VMRO. On the basis of comments posted below a particular news article published online, regarding the internal struggles of VMRO, he reflected that 'outsiders' did not understand the ideological divides. They simply equated the party with others political organisations[50] which have disintegrated into smaller units before finally dropping off the political radar. One particular comment was considered illustrative "*vie se osrahte sushto*" (you shat yourself too). Throughout the congress it was reiterated that VMRO is not "just any party", and members should not be airing their dirty laundry in public. People in Sofia were warned to avoid talking to the media and clashing with the other side, either in person or on the internet. "Whatever happens we are going to have to work together after this" noted Angel, "there is no logic to making this worse". The Plovdiv mayor was described as taking a coward's route by crawling to the media rather than dealing with matters only within the organisation.

When the day preceding congress arrived these accusations were amplified by the tone set from the beginning. Delegates from remote regions arrived at the hotel, where the congress was to be held, early on Friday evening. Registration commenced. Sofia delegates were being registered at the hotel and in Pirotska 5, the VMRO headquarters. Angel received a call and subsequently started making a series of other urgent calls. 'Plovdiv' had set up in another hotel. On being denied a separate copy of the lists of

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[50] Notably VMRO's ex-coalition partner SDS fell from their position as the ruling anti-socialist party.

delegates (they were told that they can only view it), they sent some *mutri* (gangsters) to forcefully take the folders and make photocopies. Angel called some street-level nationalists to intervene on the side of Sofia, preventing Plovdiv from getting the folders and thus in his own words "demonstrating they cannot be intimidated".

Registration remained a tense process. On the first day of congress, the registration tables were open again. They were located next to the door of the hall where the congress was about to be held. There was a bustling, erratic atmosphere. Delegates registered with their national identity card and were given a large (pre-printed) name tag which would then act as a voting card. Members from the 'Plovdiv side' looked over the shoulders of those running registration and wrote down delegates' names. This created a jostling and somewhat unpleasant atmosphere. When the registration process was completed, the notary was fetched to verify the lists and finalise the audit process. The congress had been compiled. Affective and auditing processes had set the scene. Discourses and lines of argument had been primed. It was time for the main performance.

The Two Days Play: Form and Passion of the Schism

The congress opened with the national anthem, followed by the organisation's anthem and finished its introductory section with a traditional VMRO call – "for the organisation" accompanied by three rounds of chanting "VMRO". Spirits were roused. Everyone was packed in tight, there was almost no room in the hall. Angel was in the process of overseeing all details of the congress' execution, seemingly existing in three places at once and in constant touch with a variety of other people within the hotel via a mobile phone which seems almost implanted into his hand[51]. This was the kind of event where he could display mastery – creating order out of chaos and emerging as a charismatic figure.

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[51] In fact everyone involved in these intense negotiations had their phones on and would communicate extensively throughout the congress.

The congress was somewhat public, journalists set up in the corridor to interview the key protagonists. They were initially admitted into the main chamber. Krasimir Karakachanov was introduced by Angel. He addressed the congress, stating a commitment to achieving the ideal aims of VMRO and the nation, reminding the audience that the slogan of VMRO is "Unity and Strength". He wished the participants "wisdom and above all, progress for the interests of Bulgaria". It was a master discourse, framing the position he would take in the event itself. At the end of the short speech, the media were asked to leave and the doors to the congress hall were closed making this a space of discussion internal to the organisation. When the opposing leader later presented his vision for the organisation to the congress, it was not public and external until he made the subsequent choice to present it to the journalists in the corridor outside the main hall. This choice was judged and evaluated *vis-à-vis* the organisation's code as bad behaviour.

The congress had an agenda, yet the timetable was quickly distorted. The head of congress, chosen at the beginning regulated the schedule, although the large number of smokers contributes to an ongoing flow of people in and out of the main hall. There are two main arenas – the main hall which housed the majority of delegates and a smaller conference room upstairs where key protagonists took part in finer negotiation. The smaller conference room was a space inhabited by a much closer circle of persons – the opposing parties and key regional leaders. This is when I first saw Kostadin, who would become a co-deputy leader in the congress, and who was a key participant in my fieldwork. I was later told that that he 'saved' Karakachanov, tilting votes in his favour. In return, Kostadin was promised by Karakachanov the leadership of VMRO, which would be 'given' to him in the subsequent congress. He was warned by the opposing side: "you don't seem stupid but you are stupid if you believe what he told you". Their words proved wise, at the time of writing this, a new congress has passed and Karakachanov is still at the helm of VMRO.

The congress proceedings had a set structures. This included electing people to take

part in various commissions, who would regulate the finer points of the congress's activities. The deliberations of the commissions also took place in smaller rooms. The main room was reserved for reviewing the budget and other reports. It becomes a forum where delegates could discuss the core conflicts between the two candidates and express grievances about the course of events in the organisation over the past few years. A number of speeches culminated with public declarations of support for a leader by delegates representing themselves or their area. Decisions were made by a public vote of all congress delegates present in the main hall at the time of voting. Again, finer aspects of the negotiations were exported to the smaller conference room.

Audit culture continued to play a strong part in the proceedings. Voting took place on the principle of quorum – if there was a large enough proportion of people in the room, a vote was valid. A voting mechanism was put into action. Two individuals manually counted each row of delegates. There were twenty-three rows. Then, those counting each row, in turn reported the number of votes back to the person leading the congress. This is a somewhat tedious and technical process. The numbers were shown and added up on a large screen on display in the hall. Being able to see the numbers prevented, to some degree, accusations of miss-counting. About an hour after the official start of congress, a roll call established the number of individuals.

The first vote was on who would chair the congress– the Sofia side suggested Dr. Milen Mihov while Plovdiv countered with Ilko Iliev. This was a tense moment as the congress was about to see the constituency of supporters in the room. It was assumed that each region would vote en block for either of the candidates. The words "we announce a procedure for voting" were followed by rumbling from the room; someone said: "wait for the delegates to get in". At this point Angel stated: "whoever's inside, is inside", turning to security to "lock the door". With 665 people in the room, 365 were for the 'Sofia' delegate, 300 against. Key activists such as Veliko Turnovo's Boris Vangelov stood firmly behind Karakachanov. The result was significant, not only because it put someone from the Sofia side at the head of congress and thus of procedure, but also

because it showed that the make-up of the room is in their favour.

From this moment onwards, all other forms of authority within VMRO were considered disbanded. Mihov, the chair, represented the organisation. He did it with a steady voice, calling throughout for procedure to be followed, and at some of the most turbulent moments, denouncing rowdy behaviour by firmly noting: "we are not in a football stadium" or "respect each other". The congress was set up by voting on the agenda for the day (*dneven red*) and for a number of committees: one to help the congress (*pomoshtna)*, one to validate the mandate (*mandatna*), one dealing with the organisation's constitution (*ustav*), an electoral one (*izborna*) and lastly one pertaining to the party programme (*programni nachala*). Of the voting procedures, the one which selects member of the mandate committee was the most contested. The committee would decide on the validity of the delegates. It would verify the work of the *org otdel* on the appropriate registration of all delegates. If the congress was declared to have mandate, it would be declared to be legitimate and its decisions would be binding. The first morning's activities formed the congress as an event. The medium for attempting to resolve the dispute was constituted.

The statements given by delegates at congress provided a set of 'talking heads' presenting the issues which frame the conflict. They were given in the context of reports which detail the political and social life of the organisation from March 2007 to October 2009 reviewing electoral decisions and achievements across the country, the work of former parliamentary representatives, coalitions made during that time and the more traditional work of the organisation (such as the erection of a monument to Todor Aleksandrov in Veles, Macedonia). A large number of delegates spoke of their personal distaste for a coalition with RZS, one noted "for RZS we worked with disgust". They remarked on feelings of shame towards the people they rallied during elections in their local area, describing the difficulties of having to ask their usual supporters to go into such a coalition. "I no longer have words to explain to people why we are such *leketa* (an insulting word roughly meaning stains)" commented one delegate. Another

delegate exclaimed in an outraged tone: "VMRO supporters weren't voting for an entity with an umbrella name but, pure and simple, had to be asked to vote for another party". Yet another echoed a common concern: VMRO had started its political trajectory with a lot of "moral capital" but wasted it after too many 'unprincipled coalitions'. Thus, the delegates presented a crisis of leadership where the party has lost internal and external support: members and supporters. The situation – diminishing membership, political tactics gone very awry– suggested a need for reform. The coalition with RZS came to embody 'what is wrong with VMRO'.

A number of the people in the main hall of the congress declared they wanted 'change' but resisted the idea that Plovdiv's proposed new leadership constitutes appropriate change. The clash was between those who would accept the change of chairman and those who highlighted that those claiming to represent change had been members of the highest decision-making bodies of the organisation. They were in the committee which decided on the coalition with RZS and voted for it. A number of the candidates who sided with Karakachanov argued that for them change means that those four other ex-members of parliament did not nominate themselves for leadership positions. That meant that they should not be in the executive committee – VMRO's main decision making body. Plovdiv were promising a new way of work, yet a number of delegates remarked that they know how they work. Some delegates noted that VMRO's parliamentary representatives, including those from Plovdiv, had "slept through their time as elected officials". Instead of creating a name for themselves, they were inactive – leaving Karakachanov one of the few recognizable faces in VMRO. Talking about 'problems with the organisation' an activist once told me "the fish starts to smell from the head". At that time he meant Karakachanov. Yet the question in congress became – which head?

Deposing Karakachanov from VMRO's leadership would be symbolic of change, but would it be effective? Karakachanov's public image was poor. The majority of negative connotations the general public had with VMRO were related to him and the fall-out

from 1999 and 2001. Karakachanov's competitors were not publicly recognizable. VMRO was still only symbolised primarily by him. Karakachanov encouraged these musings, declaring that he wanted this to be his last congress. He noted that since the last congress, they had introduced some fresh young people into the executive committee and that this group should be expanded so that the executive committee was made up of even more promising young people from around the country.

The speakers at the conference persistently interjected affective flourishes. They accentuated their authenticity and ties to VMRO – some pointing to their long-term membership, some mentioning the pre-socialist brotherhood structures, some stating with an impassioned voice "I have sworn myself into VMRO" with a hand on their heart, others alluding to work in Macedonia as the authentic cause and aim of the organisation, explicitly noting the common adage

> *the political structure is supposed to be the weapon for achieving the aim, not a purpose in itself; after all VMRO as a political party is made with the aim of being disbanded some day when it achieves its aims.*

At particularly heated moments there were rounds of chanting 'VMRO'. When one such moment falls flat and a few half-hearted shouts are heard, Karakachanov showcased leadership and authority remarking: "if you intend to do this, you have to do it as it should be done, stand up, one and all, in unison". His call was answered with enthusiasm.

As the first day closed, emotions were running high. The congress had become an intensely affective experience. The room was roughly split in two: right and left. The main hall was abuzz with debate while the leaders from both sides negotiated in a quieter setting. Statements by different delegates rallied the crowd. At 21:00, the mandate committee descended from a smaller room. It had been in session since early afternoon. Mihov counted the *quorum.* It was at 531 – low but permissible. The report

was read and announced by Angel. It detailed the various protests and requests that were submitted into the committee, but concludes on result of these contestations: the congress is legitimate. Two formal phrases signal the legally significant decisions behind this decision: "685 legitimate delegates are declared" and "with that, the work of the mandate commission finishes".

Various other committees return to the main hall bearing their resolutions. The delegates continue to vote on a number of smaller issues. It was late and some members, viewed with a degree of scorn by the die-hard delegates, had already abdicated to the hallway in favour of dinner arrangements: 'they're outside gorging on sausage' remarked one delegate, adding that they were from the Plovdiv camp. Little by little, the congress disbanded for the day. However for those staying at the hotel – some of the key actors in this drama, the day was far from over. The key protagonists kept negotiating and drinking late into the night somehow miraculously (in their own estimation) managing not to fight each other despite passions running rather hot.

The next morning, on the way to the hotel, I accidentally met a long-time member. We chatted while grabbing some coffee. He received a text message and suddenly became agitated. The negotiations last night seemed to have led to a proposal for co-leadership between Karakachanov and Atanasov. He started calling other VMRO members asking them to call Karakachanov and rally him not to do it. Throughout the negotiations Karakachanov had maintained that "we all need to come out of this united", seemingly attempting to find a diplomatic path and urging everyone to follow a good tone in their communications. In this case, my conversation partner noted, Karakachanov should not yield: he is trying too hard to keep unity in the organisation but the other side proves unworthy of such efforts. As we arrived at the hotel, before we entered the main hall, we observed the press already camped out and ready for events to come- the culmination of the two days' play.

In the main hall Mihov initiated a count of the quorum, a number of key protagonists

were missing. The count was at the rather low 526 delegates yet that is sufficient for the congress to proceed. As this was announced, there was a cacophony of much murmuring and conversation. Mihov firmly stated: "Please keep quiet, I won't continue with this much noise in the room". Voting resumed; repetitive, formulaic, and uncontentious. Suddenly Ilko Iliev from Plovdiv took the podium asking for a change of article 12 of the constitution which relates to the ability to have more than one leader. This set off a round of whistling and calls of "we are not monkeys" – the build-up of passions from the day before re-emerged. The vote went through with the support of 409 delegates. The atmosphere heated -up further. Two boys bearing false delegate cards were discovered voting in favour of the Plovdiv side. The Plovdiv side suggests secret voting. The room again exploded to that suggestion, partly due to the commonly shared belief that no one in VMRO should be afraid to show where they stand[52]. These episodic moments escalate the already impassioned atmosphere. At one point Karakachanov had to step in to call for order.

In this tense atmosphere a thirty-something man took the floor. He said little and burst out crying. The man is from Sofia and this signals a fracture within the Sofia organisation. In future months the man was portrayed as a traitor while the crying earned him the nick name *Revlioto* (the cry baby). From his interventions onwards, a section of the Sofia region started voting in opposition. Their actions engendered feelings of betrayal amongst the Sofia organisation. This set a precedent for a discourse about 'the traitors' of Sofia's organisation.

Charged with the affective build-up of the days' events and proceeding weeks, the congress hall quickly descended into chaos. The partiality of the ex-members of parliament from Plovdiv and their way of doing politics was emphasised forcefully. Delegates asked the Plovdiv side not to stand for future leadership. This then escalated to a discussion on whether they should be asked to resign or whether the congress

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[52] Towards the end of the congress, those who vote in opposition, but remain in the room, are congratulated for their show of character.

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could evict them. Slavcho and his colleague Ilko exited the room to talk through the unfolding situation. Angel took in the chaos and "created order", enacting charisma and leadership. He declared: "let's not have any more debate. Let's vote". Once again he asked for the door to be shut. The Karakachanov side have prevented Plovdiv's attempt to swing the balance of power. The opposition asked for a fifteen minute break, but the request was not granted.

As a group of delegates from Plovdiv rushed the podium and crowded Mihov, he asserted: "I want everyone behind me to move away". Security flanked him on either side and pushed the Plovdiv crowd away. A chant filled the hall: "resignation". One contrary voice could be heard saying "whose resignation are you calling for, we haven't elected anyone yet". One of the Plovdiv side declared he would resign while Karakachanov took the stand and declared they have only said they would resign after seeing 'the mood of the congress'. This was followed by a general rumble and a particularly impassioned call of 'VMRO' three times.

A member of the opposition walked up to the podium and stated that he has been given the authority to announce that the opposition are leaving the congress. At this announcement the congress explodes: there is an incredible amount of heckling, and delegates shout "traitors!". Observing an elderly member who sided with the Plovdiv splinter group and rose to leave the congress, a young man sitting next to me became impassioned. He raved at her, telling the elderly woman she should be ashamed – if Todor Aleksandrov could see her, he would be.

The drama had escalated and reached crisis point. The self-concept of the organisation had been re-affirmed. Its members were affectively tied to the outcome of the event: the newly emerging organisational structure. At this point of time Karakachanov played the magnanimous leader, a besieged martyr for unity. He took the floor and asked two delegates to go outside and check if any of those who left wanted to come back. He then spoke 'revealing': for two months he and people who

stood by him were the subject of various kinds of pressure, slander, even threats. "I heard a lot of bad things behind my back, I ground my teeth, I didn't respond because of one simple aim– not to create added pressure and schisms. I regret what has happened, but the blame is not ours". He pointed out he had declared that if he failed to gather enough support he would not split the organisation. His opposition had said the same – but they clearly did not intend to fulfil that promise. He remarked that while there was a deal last night which would lead to unity, the fact that Plovdiv broke it leaves him with absolutely no qualms. He concluded that the delegates should not be concerned, people will come back within a year. Those who do, will be the ones which are *ideino motivirani* – motivated by the cause. Thus he completes the cycle of the event.

As with other public dramas, the organisation's core values have been defined in the context of the struggle. The opposition have been declared impure. The Plovdiv side's act of leaving the organisation has been portrayed as a form of cleansing the organisation from those who do not share the same values. To consolidate the victory, Mihov confirmed that the meeting is quorate and can vote in a new leadership. Voting, in subsequence became a more unanimous action – agreeing, en-bloc for the suggested new leadership. Out of the original 685, there were 384 delegates left. Three voted against the new leadership and were demonstratively commended 'for exhibiting such strength of character'. The newly elected leadership gathered around the podium looking somewhat dazed.

Karakachanov performed ideological authority effortlessly. He consolidated the purity of the organisation through the moves discussed above, and through a finishing touch – he introduced to the hall a closing speaker: Vida Boeva. She is the former secretary of Ivan Mihailov[53]. Her presence blessed the outcome of the congress, she reaffirms: "VMRO, this party is not just a party; it is also an organisation ... I and my husband and

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[53] He passed away in 1990.

the departed [meaning Ivan Mihailov] are with you." She shared that, as a young student, Karakachanov wrote to Ivan Mihailov. Before he passed away, Mihailov read those letters. This, she declared, shows that he is not the business man creating VMRO-ODD (as a firm). She thus gives his leadership a blessing of ideological legitimacy. Her announcement was followed by applause. The congress was declared concluded, with a sense amongst those remaining in the room that the ideologically motivated have won.

Traitors, Duplicity and a Long Follow Up

While the drama over the leadership provided symbolic and affective renewal of the organisation, it was followed by the more technocratic business of re-establishing VMRO's structural integrity. This could be observed in reference to the split in the Sofia structure. At the first meeting after congress, the chairperson opened the occasion stating they have to decide what to do from then onwards. He remarked: 'I was surprised that there was a division between us, there is nothing wrong with this in itself were it not for playing games'. He reasserted- there is no disputing the results of the congress. They are perfectly legitimate and accounted for by the notary, adding: "do not be pulled in if someone tries to rile you into believing anything other than the fact that the new leadership has been chosen already".

Karakachanov, who was also present, addressed the group. He asserted: "it is clear this [support of the opposition during congress] was arranged in advance. I am not new at this. It was not honourable. "To be honest, I am disappointed ... thing cannot happen with pre-arranged talks". Along with chastising, these statements re-asserted Karakachanov's role as a unifying figure. He remarked that there had been much emotion and it's still very fresh, but "there should not be a build-up of negative moods", "let's not break down our human relations, we have been close to each other, we have been friends". The congress was elicited as a chance at catharsis moving on to "getting work done".

The internal Sofia opposition leader, Martin, appeared to have had a historic conflict with Angel, Sofia's organiser. This emerged in the discussion about the schism – revealing that the break happened across an existing fracture. Martin declared they had not betrayed VMRO as an organisation because they voted otherwise, they contested the label of 'enemies'. He emotively declared that they had given their 'souls' to the organisation, everything of themselves. This discussion does not lead to re-alignment within the Sofia organisation. Martin and his colleagues started to secretly meet the opposing side, which re-consolidated in an attempt at form a parallel organisation. They, like others across the country, were observed in the months that follow. Their intentions were judged and a number of them are eventually excluded as members by the executive committee (when they did not voluntarily resign). The process of exclusion was presided over by Karakachanov who, true to the sentiments expressed in congress, attempts to 'keep' as many people as possible. After congress, the leadership continued to discuss the issue of how to maintain the support of local sections. Yet eight months later, a VMRO member remarked that people across the country were yet to completely recover their morale from the events surrounding congress. Nobody had quite believed that VMRO would split.

Aside from the logistic work with VMRO's membership base, the VMRO's leadership continued to address new challenges from its opposition. Subsequent events re-embedded contestation within the domain of audit culture. The congress was successful in establishing validity in organisational terms. However, contestation by the opposing side was also played out within the Bulgarian legal system. VMRO is registered as a political party and thus is subject to laws which govern validity of its congresses. Those who left declared the congress illegitimate and requested that a new one should be appointed. Three month after the first congress they submitted a petition which claimed that over 3000 of VMRO's members wanted a new one. This bureaucratic contestation was addressed on a number of levels. The *org otdel* were given the petition and they proceeded to count signatures and check those against members. They quickly set up a system for accounting for each page which denotes

how many are real members, which areas have real signatures, and which are clearly fakes. In some cases a whole village had signed, that was seen as very dubious. The petition was examined for familiar names. In one case the surprise of seeing a certain name on the list prompted the person reviewing the document to call them. The individual contacted assured them they did not sign and agreed to give a written statement to that effect for evidence in court. The discovery of eleven dead people on the list caused more outrage and prompted a discourse of further disillusionment with their former comrades and now rivals.

The *org otel*'s irritation at this genre of repetitive work was expressed by their emerging habit of shouting at anyone who came in and disturbed them. The tension infused the atmosphere of the central offices. The space of the office was briefly transformed using a curtain as a divide and one of the people who was previously based there moved to a separate room to escape the stress. Karakachanov periodically came in asking for updates on the work's progress. Expecting his visits, and having to deliver an impending report the executive committee drove the *org otdel* into a flurry of work. The final report on the validity of the petition was announced in a protocol by the legal advisor of the *org otdel*. It was written in legalistic form and presented to the executive committee, to the wider public and eventually to the Bulgarian court.

In March 2010, the proposition for a new party, formed by those who split apart at congress was evidently in the works and started to be reported in regional and national media. This had been in the works as early as January 2010, which saw the first congress of the new party, in parallel to the opposition requesting another congress of VMRO-BND. When the executive committee gathered for a meeting, casual 'gossip level' talk between them before the meeting was littered with expressions of outrage that anyone would dare duplicate the name VMRO. Aside from being a transgressive action within the VMRO code of honour, it was also illegal within electoral law. The trick the newly formed party used was to name itself in such a way that it abbreviated to VMRO. Technically, their registration was accepted. Their use of the abbreviation

"VMRO" in publicity campaigns, posters, t-shirts and so forth was meticulously documented and would be presented in court to show that counter to the registration, the name which was used in practice was a duplication of an already existing one. VMRO ultimately succeeded in banning the use of "VMRO" abbreviated publicity a year or so later. Internally to the organisation, this was considered highly transgressive – although as seen in the introduction to this thesis it was also not rare. Inevitably, historical allegories were made with splits in the organisation both in the historically recent period and ones further away. Karakachanov framed one such allusion - remarking this was the first time in VMRO history a split did not occur due to ideological differences but was purely for political gains.

The 14th of June 2010 saw the first official congress of *Viara Moral Roloubie Otgovornost- Natzionalen Ideal za Edinstvo*[54] (abbreviated to VMRO-NIE). It was arranged that someone with a press pass would give a copy of pictures from that congress to VMRO-BND. People in the central offices crowded around them looking for familiar faces and commenting on how few they see as well as on the absence of particular individuals. Speaking to the media one of VMRO-NIE's leaders remarked: "some of our brothers are still in hell, but they too will see". This prompted one of the *org otdel* in Sofia to write a Facebook status "I am still in hell, but I too soon will see". By that framing, and the name of the newly formed organisation, the opposing side were clearly trying to suggest that, unlike the debauched and secular figure of Karakachanov, they occupy the moral high ground and represent a traditional belief in Orthodoxy.

For some time, before the courts reach their decision, VMRO-BND and VMRO-NIE existed in parallel to each other. VMRO-BND employed temporary symbolic solutions for the intermediate term. They considered adding "BND" to the end of the name in posters so as to make sure people know whose initiative the event would be. An

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[54] Belief, Morality, Ancestor-love, Responsibility- National Ideal for Unity

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organiser quickly interjected that there was every indication that the public at large still has very little knowledge of the split. In late summer when NIE covered phone booths with posters commemorating the Illinden Uprising, VMRO activists from the Sofia organisation tracked down the locations where these were posted, putting stickers over the suffix as a form of internal policing.

Conclusions

While the split was not instantaneous, and developed rather slowly after the public drama of congress, as a result of the process of contestation, VMRO acquired a new leadership and, as I will discuss in the next chapter, a new way of working. Organisers at the core of VMRO-BND encouraged the organisation to 'move on'. One person remarked that Karakachanov has taken it personally, as a matter of honour. Following his lead and delving into the split too much, the activist reflected, could ruin their public image.

In this chapter, through my focus on the congress, I have enabled the reader to peek behind the curtain of VMRO's public image and enter into its formative matrices, as well as the practices of the organisation's ongoing existence. One of the key insights gained from this examination is an understanding of the affective, binding role played by the perceived dual nature of the organisation as a political, technocratic entity and as an ideologically motivated descendant of VMRO, the historic organisation. History- and specifically historical ancestry- provide the key symbols for creating unity. This formulated a central conflict within the organisation's life - what motivates its members is not necessarily matched by the work of maintaining a political party.

The chapter which follows presents some of the ways in which VMRO's activists attempt to form an effective and affective political entity while maintaining their sense of historic identity. I will focus on the key metaphor provided by one ideologue who after congress insisted: we have to "keep producing content". This deliberation also

reveals how personalities weave together attempting to form an organisational whole. While the emotive work discussed above creates centrifugal forces, the nature of political work has the potential to dissipate the processes of internal cohesion. The dynamics of production discussed below can inevitably lead to the requests for change seen in the drama of the congress discussed above.

Chapter 3.2 The Productive Nexus of Organisational Work: Drones and leaders, ideology and activity

My desire to talk about the particulars of organisational work stems from a key conflict in the relationship between activism and ideology. Namely, there is a tension between intellectual elaborations that we call ideology, which have their 'prophets' (their theoreticians) and the everyday practice of people who choose to identify themselves with such ideologies. The performance of these identities in particular ways nevertheless produces a re-definition and elaboration of the notion examined in this thesis: that of nationalism. I thus want to address the matrices of production which constitute VMRO's organisational activity: "submerged organising", informal networks, protest activities, internal tensions, ideological differences, repression and public claim making (Edelman 2001: 310) – in other words, daily practices of 'creating' this form of political contestation.

The 'filling' of organisational activity entails a variety of positions, campaigns and consciously or unconsciously created public images. The context of these practices of production is VMRO's organisational life. It creates itself through a series of visible and obscure performances– releasing a stream of semiotic content, be it in the realm of material culture, including objects such as leaflets, stickers, posters or books, or in the less material realm of mediation and reportage. These symbols and performances attempt to capture the attention of the general public by managing to combine political contention with a feeling of familiarity.

Around the time of congress, one member of VMRO remarked with respect to the conflict over leadership – "we never saw them on Pirotska 5". 'Pirotska 5' is synonymous with VMRO, it is the building in which the organisation is housed in Sofia and sits in the centre of the city. In the aftermath of congress members guarded the building, worried that it would be stormed, as it had been in the past by street level

nationalist formations[55] . This testifies to the space's symbolic significance. 'Pirotska 5', otherwise known as the 'Macedonian home' was a key symbol of VMRO and a space that tied together a number of activists through the feeling that it was home.

The VMRO headquarters are housed on the fifth floor of the building. Its layout is the shape of a horseshoe – with a set of offices on each end, a small foyer, a conference room and the youth organisation's offices next to the entrance. The conference room customarily holds VMRO's central banner at protests which reads: "Moesia, Thrace, Macedonia", a reference to the irredentist national ideal. Following Tatarchev's funeral, the flag which adorned his coffin during the funeral rites was framed and hung there.

One side of the horseshoe contains Karakachanov's office – a large, luxurious room with an adjacent apartment – decorated with paintings of revolutionary leaders. Notably, this includes Ivan Mihailov whose presence is an allusion to VMRO-BND's understanding of history. Just outside that office, past a painting of national hero Vasil Levski, is an open space secretarial pool. Stationed there is the sole member of VMRO secretarial staff, as well as, on a sporadic basis, the press secretary. Every so often you would see people waiting for a meeting with Karakachanov looking rather formal in their suits. Mail arriving for him would include scribbled letters from people passionate about 'the Macedonian question', often written in the distinctly shaky hand of the elderly. They testify to Krasimir's status as a public figure, as does the fact that in Macedonia VMRO was known as 'Karakachanov's VMRO'. Meetings were catered by the secretary and an elderly lady caringly referred to as *baba* Gina who would prepare coffee in the kitchenette which was part of the open plan space. Three other offices were adjacent to this space. The largest one became Kostadin's office, another

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[55] In one story, the young men then active in VMRO were taking turns to sleep and guard the building. The person relating the story eagerly added, "it was like being in barracks". An additional version of the story told how Krasimir, the current head, cleared the staircase of storming opponents with his girth and fists. Akin to urban legends, the stories could account for a strengthening of a sense of place and belonging.

eventually housed the so called *tvorcheski otdel* (the creative team) which will be discussed in further detail below together with Kostadin's arrival (as the two were parallel and very much related to one another). Towards the end of my fieldwork the third office was used by a young man who became VMRO's 'Macedonian representative'.

A set of offices line the way to this space from the front door including one housing the building's security, a vault room and an office that belongs to Rajna Drangova. Drangova is in her eighties and is the granddaughter of a legendary general Boris Drangov and the daughter of VMORO fighter Kiril Drangov (a close cohort of Ivan Mihailov). She is a previous co-leader of VMRO – a position she shared with Karakachanov in his ascent towards his current sole leadership. It enacted a symbolic transition from an ancestor based- refugee model of running VMRO, to an arena of young political activism. VMRO's younger members were in awe of her due to her descent and were enchanted by stories of her meeting Ivan Mihailov when young.

On the other end of the horseshoe, the mirror image of Karakachanov's office, is a large open plan room with two computer spaces and a big conference table, pervaded by the fumes of incessant nervous smoking, and thus jokingly referred to as the *lisitzarnik* (fox hole). It housed the *org otdel*. The *org otdel* was (at the time of fieldwork) made up of three people: the organiser for Sofia, a legal consultant and a man responsible for publicity. The oldest was Orlin. He was responsible for the composition of fliers, coordination with the printers and so forth. He was a largely self-taught professional who had spent some time as a baker in Poland and a cook in a number of other places. He graduated from the Veliko Turnovo University, together with many of the people who now take up key positions in VMRO. He was responsible for creating and disseminating a daily bulletin to members of the organisation, making posters and leaflets to accompany VMRO's campaigns, as well as negotiating printing costs for the final products. As the way of work changed over my period of stay in Sofia, his work was subsumed by the newly formed *tvorcheski otdel*.

The legal consultant[56], Ivan, was a long-term core activist and the youngest member of the group. Ivan had been part of Sofia's youth organisation in previous years. It was one which was rowdier, more ineffective and closer to street-level right wing individuals than its current incarnation. Although deeply attached to Bulgarian nationalism, his father was actually Cuban. Ivan was closely affiliated with the VMRO section in Pernik, a post-industrial satellite town of Sofia whose population seems to exist in urban legends as inhabited by incessantly drunk bar-brawl of a people. The carnavalesque atmosphere of Pernik has come to publicly embody the principles of drinking, brawling and 'tough-man behaviour' as well as a style of irreverence and caricature. It does so both figuratively and symbolically. It hosts an annual mummers folk festival called 'Surva' which embroiled Sofia's activists in three days of continuous drinking.

Pavel became an organiser for Sofia after the congress. He is a skinny tallish young man roughly my age, but as he liked to point out, with much more experience of the world. He dressed all in black and, until ordered otherwise by Krasimir, bore a shaved head and two or three heavy silver rings, one of them with the likeness of an eagle. He was a history student who, as he liked to say, had not graduated due to political reasons. There were teachers who simply refused to pass him on the oral exams, which are commonplace at the Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski. He was infamous amongst staff and former students for his outspoken views on the 'correct version' of history and his intimidating behaviour towards those lecturers who presented a sanitized version of history or who were outspoken in their leftist interpretations – especially pertaining to Macedonia. In the recent past, the rector of the university had written to Karakachanov, asking him to inhibit Stefan from such future action. Subsequently, Stefan would simply state: "I am following orders. I am not allowed to do this anymore".

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[56] He was a law student in the Sofia University.

These rough tactics reflected his time spent as a street nationalist/football hooligan. He narrated his past to a young boy whom he tried to convince to skip the street -level organisations and stick to the order of VMRO's structure. The induction into street-level nationalism was to be repeatedly kicked to see how much one could stand – much tougher, he remarked, than what is commonplace nowadays. His methods of propaganda reflected this duality. He wallpapered the university with VMRO stickers and graffiti-ed many building in Sofia. Another member of VMRO (a staunch football team supporter) related how drawing graffiti of his football team, he would see the words VMRO appear miraculously after a few days. At the time he thought 'Wow the walls can identify me', but it was simply Pavel.

Pavel defined himself as an extreme nationalist. However, for the sake of organisational work, he differentiated others who did not fit that category, who might be of a more liberal persuasion, (some of whom he called *costumartcheta* – i.e. those who wore suits) but were acceptable as VMRO activists. He would sometimes clarify that different people were fit for different tasks. During my time in VMRO, I saw him develop relationships and work with a variety of people of different levels of persuasion (from 'soft' to 'hard'-core in their beliefs). However, I never overcame the impression that due to his personality, his worldview, and his uncompromising attitude to other belief systems, those relationships were imbued with a kind of implicit tension. I observed that aside from his assessment of people's character (which constituted an assessment of what kind of nationalists they were), he attached a sort of trial-use value to people's ideas. People could prove to be useful or not – he might acknowledge that their ideas could work or not, even if their viewpoint was incommensurable with his. Thus his understanding of the imperatives of practice modulated his staunch ideological beliefs.

Attached to the space of the *org otdel* are two offices. One housed the organisational

secretary, the other became the second[57] deputy leader, Angel's office. The organisational secretary Julian, once a settled migrant in Italy, who long ago returned to help the organisation's regional structures in Ruse in election time and stayed, spent the first few months trying to cope with the financial problems inherited from the previous regime. At that time VMRO was subject to an audit from the finance ministry (people only half-jokingly assumed that it was brought on by the Plovdiv side) thus for months Julian dealt with the necessary paperwork. In parallel he engaged in 'housekeeping' the building – making sure that rent was paid on time, that accounts balanced and so forth.

Julian was a seasoned bluffer with a good poker face. He always left at 5, hardly ever let his guard down and loved to offload by messing with one of the regular 'crazies' who appeared periodically at VMRO. He seemed to play at being a confidante and a friend to people he considered important. He had done so with the then head of the agency for Bulgarians abroad – Rajna Mandjukova. His belief in their proximity was so great that when *chicho Grisha*[58] burst in to announce that Rajna had been fired, Julian unguardedly exclaimed: "How come she didn't tell me!" and proceeded to dial her number on his mobile phone.

In the corridor, just outside the *org otdel*, is a larger row of offices, which held the office of the city organisation for Sofia, that of the accountant, a store room (and impromptu library), and the offices of two members of 'general staff' whose responsibilities loosely correspond to this bi-polar spatial organisation of the fifth floor. Todor was 'on duty' to act as chauffeur to Karakachanov and Drangova. This would be seen in the care with which he would have to be asked to do anything that involved other individuals. Stamen, who inhabited the office opposite Todor, was more closely affiliated with Pavel. Stamen and Pavel maintained a jovially dysfunctional

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[57] Although technically there is a third deputy leader, his participation in shaping the organisation and in decision making was minimal.
[58] The elderly head of security.

relationship, where abuse and affection mingled with driving, assembling displays, picking up documents and a variety of other (sometimes unorthodox) tasks.

Todor was part of a group of people on the fifth floor who embodied the tradition of VMRO. Drangova and the Head of Security *chicho* Grisha were two others. When Drangova was in the building, she usually stopped to talk with *chicho* Gri(sha) at the security point. In a trip where I accompanied Todor and Mrs. Drangova we drove to a memorial ceremony for one of her ancestors in Skopje. In the car the two discussed various persons within the Macedonian community in Sofia. Unexpectedly a descendant of the historian Simeon Radev (quoted in the first chapter) had passed away and Drangova was notified and needed to return to Sofia promptly to make sure 'vultures' didn't take the material history which had been in his care.

Chicho Gri, frequently had tea with the elderly head of the Macedonian Institute which existed on the second floor. He religiously read the newspapers which came in every day and highlighted articles which he thought pertinent to the national cause in bright red boxes. In a moment of frustration one young professional who worked in VMRO exclaimed on the idiosyncratic nature of having the security edit the newspaper. The significance of this remark was not to denote any malice towards the elderly man who was indeed much respected but to reflect on the disorienting feeling of working in a place where relationships were partly governed by the principle of community and 'home', but where some activists would try to establish an ethos of professionalism and formality.

Pirotska 5 was a kind of community, a home for some, but it wasn't without its divisions. Todor reminisced about the old days of the youth organisation, which he was part of, noting how much more active they seemed to be then. Todor and his sister Margarita had been in VMRO for a few decades. The siblings sporadically referred to the irreverence and lack of manners of 'the young ones', or as Todor would call them *mladite dihateli* – roughly translating to 'the young active ones'. Yet the complaints

and inability to make them 'behave' only showed, implicitly, the mastery of the young ones over this key space. VMRO, in the 21st century had undergone a culture change.

Margo was the first to tell me about the past life of the building. Although the headquarters are on the fifth floor, the whole building is owned by the organisation. For most of its existence, it housed the Macedonian refugee organisations and was built by them. Thus while the fifth floor is now the central base of activity, the second floor is a palimpsest, bearing a memory of a different kind of VMRO past. It still has a plaque that one of the rooms is the offices of the Macedonian '*casa',* meaning fund, an allusion to a past time when refugees pooled resources to support each other. On memorials of important occasions, such as the date that a significant figure had passed away, a *nekrolog* (an obituary notice common in Easter Orthodox churches) would appear on the notice board of the first floor pinned up by one of the elderly remaining heads of refugee representatives (the majority have by now died) whose offices were on the second floor.

Significantly, the second floor houses a large hall. On two of its walls hang the portraits of Todor Aleksandrov and Ivan Mihailov. The quality of the paintings suggests that at some point in the not so distant past they were painted by some student activist. Their size is certainly impressive and they dominate and make the room. The
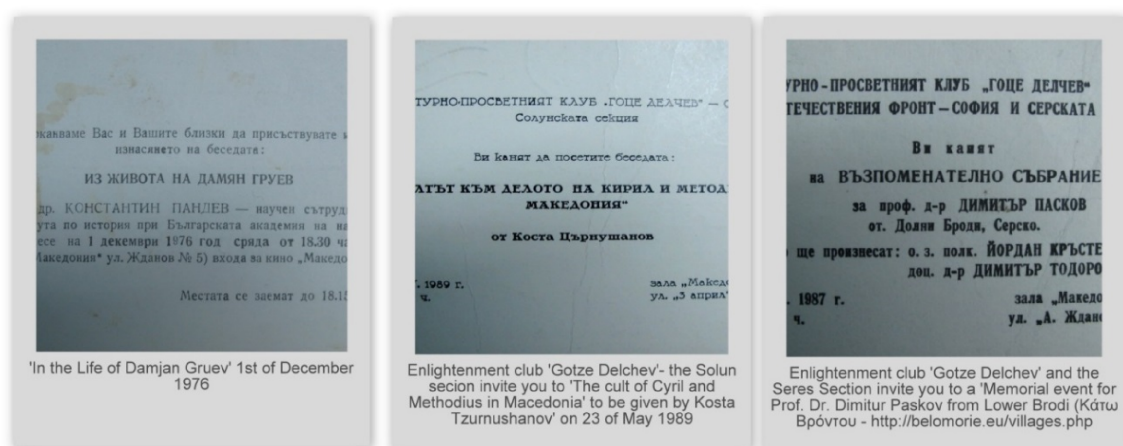
Figure 15 Invites to the Macedonian home in past times.

floor is hardwood, one wall has a row of French windows that open up to an elegant façade across the busy central street. The room contains a long wooden table that faces out to an array of chairs. It is used to house larger gatherings of representatives of VMRO as a political party or activist organisation (such as regional conferences), as well as, more profanely, for the Christmas party of the youth organisation. In the past it housed a congress of a slighter size than that one described in these pages. Further back in time, during socialism it held lectures of somewhat politically risqué character. Gotze Delchev's[59] nephew passed away and left his book collection to the organisation. Going through it, tucked away between the pages of the books, I found invites for lectures in the hall on the second floor, then referred to as 'Macedonia Hall'. Notably, the second floor also held the offices of the Macedonian research institute and a library. Margo acts as an administrator there and it, like the folk ensemble is funded almost entirely by VMRO.

Margo leads the folk ensemble *Gotze Delchev* and is a key member of the women's organisation. She felt her existence in VMRO was infused by the fact that her office had

Figure 16 The ensemble dances.

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[59] See Appendix 1 for further details on Gotze Delchev.

held the bones of Gotze Delchev. Margo's knowledge of folklore was impressive[60], as were her connections with the Macedonian folklore community. The *Gotze Delchev ensemble* was featured on a Macedonian retrospective on Bulgarian National Television as Margo organized performances by famous folklore performers of Macedonian songs. The ensemble was funded by VMRO under the same category as the Macedonian institute: an enlightenment, non-profit activity. The dance group was an asset when VMRO conducted events with traditional overtones. The ensemble rehearses in the large hall on the second floor. On those evenings the building trembles under the stomping of their feet. The second floor and the fifth were disjoined– near, but far. Margo exists between two planes – making an appearance on the fifth floor for formal meetings while dominating the second floor.

Pirotska 5 in fact formed a little world. Rooms on the second floor were rented out to various businesses. Thus the building housed a clothing alterations firm, an accounting firm and a notary - all services which were used by VMRO staff. An appendix to this microcosm were the *Sofia hali* across the street – a large food court

Figure 17 The Dacia, the car as a locale. Left: driving to the Outerlands; center right: loading the petition

to which frequent trips were made to purchase lunch, drinks (such as litre or two of beer) or cigarettes. A restaurant in the basement of the building was a favourite haunt and featured heavily in the social history of the organisation.

I have so far shown that the building on 'Pirotska 5' exists as an important space for

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[60] For example she commented with ease on the versions of songs which existed in different volumes of Macedonian folk songs volumes.

organisational activity. However, there are also a number of other significant 'locations' which are important in the life-world of the organisation. A significant 'locale' for the Sofia organisation was Angel's car – 'the Dacia'[61]. It fit up to eight people, leading Karakachanov to jokingly refer to it as *marshrutkata* [62] and the joke stuck. The Dacia transported the boxes of signatures for the Turkey-EU referendum, various forms of equipment, a large number of leaflets, 'a mobile press centre' which consisted of three metal A2 boards and could be 'talked in front of' and even at one point a statue of Todor Aleksandrov which was illicitly transported across the Bulgarian-Macedonian border. VMRO work entailed a large amount of travelling, some of it decided and executed on the spur of the moment with great haste. The Dacia made certain journeys frequently, such as the one to the Bulgarian Cultural Centre in Bosilegrad, and others annually, such as the one to Todor Aleksandrov's grave in the mountains above Melnik. It was experienced as an extension of the 'Pirotska 5' space, its journeys - steeped in habit.

While the persons discussed above were paid employees of the organisation, a lot of them nevertheless spent previous years as unpaid activists –employment practice was never a product of advertising and employee market deliberation. A number of them spent a considerable amount of time at Pirotska 5- well beyond any financial or moral obligation and explicitly said this was 'home'. Calling it "home" indicated an exclusive relationship to the space; it was a mark of sizeable time and engagement with the people there, of knowledge regarding its inner workings and the people who inhabit it. Alongside the work-place relations, a number of practices broke with regular workplace conventions.

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[61] It was referred to by its brand name.
[62] Marshrutka is a form of route-based, hail-able taxi common in many post socialist countries.

Figure 18. Ancestors. Chicho Gri and Drangova. Mid to bottom row, memorial for Drangova's ancestor. Bottom right graves of communist enforcers: "these should be used as target practice".

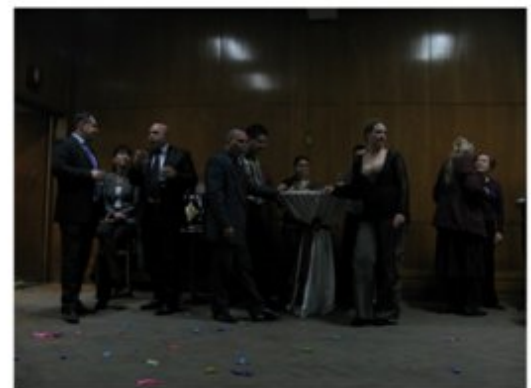Figure 19 VMRO celebrate in the main hall. This and next page.

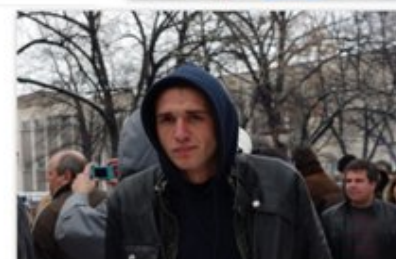Figure 20 The Pernik mummers festival.

Figure 21 Non-folkloric carnavaleque. Satire of the government, much drinking and *zurli.*

Figure 22 A memorial for Mihailov with Vida Boeva in Rome.

After the congress, 'Pirotska 5' changed, mirroring the change in the organisation. It saw the arrival of new characters: Kostadin- one of the new deputy leaders of the organisation, and Julian- the new organisational secretary. Kostadin repeatedly stated that he had been reluctant to move to Sofia: that the choice to relocate his family away from Varna was a tough one which he only made following Krasimir's insistence that he could only do the work required from the capital. His arrival in 'the centre' would force him to coexist with two other strong leader-figures: Karakachanov and Angel, and engage with the way of work which exists on 'Pirotska 5'. His presence accentuated differences in methods of work and socialisation between regions.

Creating an Organisation

VMRO's organisational culture was driven by key figures – leaders who shaped the production of content. Konakchieva (writing about VMRO in 2000–2002) also remarks on the importance of leaders' heavy guiding hand, and discipline in VMRO organisational life, remarking: "how could it be otherwise for an organisation with this history?". In this, she alludes to historical leader Ivan Mihailov's leadership style (amongst others), which was based on secrecy and direct leader-to-activist task-setting, without the use of public forums (Georgiev and Biliarski 1993).

Activists were conscious of VMRO's hierarchical nature. Their engagements in the matrix of production, at least in Sofia, were filtered by the organiser's assessment of "who is fit for what work". Leaders' charisma and authority counter-balanced the possibility for limited engagement. Participation in discussion on proposed activities was contingent on one's position within the organisation. 'Being listened to', in other words, was not a given, but rather a privileged position. Persons who subverted the more strict 'top-down' approach that was used in the Sofia organisation were accused of being anarchist. This was despite their semiotic affirmations of nationalism.

Within VMRO, being nationalist was a label which could not be guaranteed simply by

participation in the activities of a nationalist organisation or by specific kinds of semiotic elaborations, (although this is how most people outside the movements might define who should be called nationalist). Being considered nationalist was also dependent on activists' ability to fulfil certain norms of organisational behaviour such as obeying the orders of those who are hierarchically superior figures. It must be stressed that this understanding was more prevalent in the Sofia organisation and in fact typified it to its colleagues across the country. Activists, coming from other organisations, could be heard to joke about Sofia's militaristic style. Those raised within it seemed to take this rather competitive, confrontational, and hierarchical structure as a given and intrinsic to their concept of what a nationalist organisation should be like.

When 'something needed to be done' in Sofia, a group would be chosen on the basis of criteria judged by the organiser. Pavel for example preferred to work with specific teams of people whom he chose on the basis of a personally developed set of criteria which seemed to evolve as he gained experience in the job. He developed relationships with people whom he trusted, and who could be called on 'on the spur of the moment'. They would preferably be willing to work late nights and weekends 'for the cause' without making a fuss. They would learn to always have their phone on and to pick it up. He preferred the slightly rougher characters of VMRO who would nevertheless be dedicated, without pretension. A number of them could easily be judged as 'crazies' (in one case which went awry, medically certified), as deadbeats or go-no-wheres. A group of people on whom he depended could be relied on to get drunk and tell rowdy stories.

The rough nature of the interaction, the ability to offload in moments of stress (of which there were many) without the need for civilities created an easy interaction which was preferable. VMRO in Sofia is pervaded by the feeling of 'rough masculinities' which I had to get used to within my first few months at the VMRO office. Not modulated by social niceties, these would involve a prodigiously abrupt manner, a propensity to

argue aggressively with any view put forward, especially if it was suspect of being too liberal, to drink heavily after work and make an array of sex-related jokes or jibes – especially ones with a homoerotic undertone.

This silent but authoritative judgement which let different activists into the circle of trust and thus of decision making or participation, would mean a sense of closure and secrecy were often first felt when one became a new activist. However the inverse is also true. With long-term participation an activist is taken into a closer circle of trust engendering a sense of inclusion, 'passing the barrier' – in effect, group membership. I had the chance to do so and hence felt it on my own back, subsequently seeing the same process with others who took part in the organisation.

Due to VMRO's history and the nature of the political system in Macedonia, members – especially older ones, often presupposed spies and intrigue. This made it harder for new members to become part of the group and develop a sense of solidarity. While youth organisation meetings were open to the public, at one point Radko, the head of the youth organisation, was convinced that a new attendant was a spy for another organisation and would not discuss more sensitive issues. Kostadin described one case when a man showed up at their local office, eager to take part. He seemed deceptively normal, so they thought he was a spy. Kostadin took it upon himself to check him out. It turns out, he remarks, the man was perfectly sincere in his interest. Kostadin jokingly declared: we are a bunch of paranoid people.

The sheer mass of work meant activists' willingness and enthusiasm were sometimes exhausted, straining further the ties between the members' base. Similarly the top-down approach of the leadership engendered a sense of 'being used'. As a form of counter discourse, the organiser would sometimes elicit the notion of duty – thus an activist was confronted with the question, 'aren't you doing this because you believe in the cause?' There seemed to be little space for social niceties. People who were exhausted, overwrought or 'stepped out' weren't necessarily engaged back in, in any

systematic fashion. This again was considered specific to the Sofia organisation and its 'way of work'. In other organisations, I was told, solidarity was cultivated in a more consistent fashion. A number of people who experienced this weariness and did not leave outright lost their eagerness to respond to frequent calls. A cautious partial-withdrawal was a useful, possibly necessary skill for those who continued to spend time in the organisation. VMRO's youth organisation in Sofia served as a resource for furnishing events, the props of an activist event –filling in a protest crowd, holding banners or flags, putting up billboards or performing previously choreographed events to the media.

One young woman remarked that when she first came to VMRO because of her 'passion for the Macedonian cause', derived partially from her ancestry, she was frustrated that the first event she was asked to partake in was a 'clean up' of a playground in a particularly dour, post-socialist quarter of Sofia. The passions of personal ideology did not directly translate to a passion for the pragmatics of activism. The practice of nationalism was often exhausting and lacking in transcendental glamour. However, given enough time activists seemed to develop an affinity and attachment to their role. This can be seen in the way they handled the VMRO and Bulgarian flag. When relaxing and dancing, flags would be incorporated into the choreography of the dance. The practice of incorporating the flag in these dance events didn't happen by itself but was learned by emulating older members.

I was chatting with one activist about the structure of the leadership in VMRO when he suddenly exclaimed in reaction to my comments on its top down approach: "Vessi, this is VMRO, at least we are trying to be". Meaning, the organisation in itself presupposes a certain ethos[63]. His utterance and my observations also suggested that being part of VMRO is a process of becoming. By looking at practice, we also inevitably confront the idiosyncratic and uneven nature of ideology at the grassroots level of organisations.

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[63] Although that too can be the subject of historical debate.

This allows us to consider the nature of nationalism as an identification, as a performance and as embedded within specific power dynamics.

VMRO nowadays has fewer people who are there by virtue of descent and who thus have an organically derived consciousness of the Macedonian cause. Therefore those who come into the organisation can be somewhat out of sync with its historical context. Sometimes they are history students and therefore well informed. Other times, new members are drawn into the organisation through social acquaintances or its more general socially conscious activism. Even if new members are self-identified as nationalists this does not guarantee a match between their frames of understanding and those of the organisation. Thus it becomes necessary for them to be educated into a common framework when they enter the organisation.

Figure 23 Carrying flags as an embodied practice.

A common calendar was utilized for the purposes of creating social solidarity (Zerubavel 1981) and common understanding of events. An engagement with VMRO eventually thus engendered an understanding of the significance of dates. A VMRO-specific calendar and community was created by the customary celebration of specific individuals or events connected to the Macedonian revival. Seasoned activists become accustomed to the cycle of commemoration. These include the death of Mara Buneva in January as well as that of Gotze Delchev on the 20th of April and Todor Aleksandrov in September. VMRO commemorates the start of the Ilinden uprising near Bansko in the

area Predela and mourn the treaty of Neuilly with a torch lit procession. Predela and the commemoration of Todor Aleksandrov provide opportunities for members of the organisation across the country to meet – it is a space and time of organisational unity. This is also the case for the national holiday the 3rd of March at Shipka.

Significant dates thus provide the backbone for members' socialisation. Commemorating notable dates was often portrayed as an obligation to one's nation through imagined kinship with historical ancestors. Activists are reminded that those ancestors gave their life for the cause– 'let that sacrifice not be in vain'. Acts of remembrance helped establish members' affinity for the cause. Some events are one off events, others are celebrated annually. One off commemorations held the possibility for adventure and allowed VMRO to validate itself in reference to new symbols.

 In 2010, on the ten year anniversary of Ivan Mihailov's death a delegation travelled to visit Ivan Mihailov's grave site in Italy. Its location was held secret. Vida Boeva, his lifelong secretary, remarked that at Mihailov's funeral in 1990 guests from America came to remember him. She was relieved. For her, it meant the organisation was still alive. On the day of the memorial with Karakachanov's VMRO there, she states she again feels reassured VMRO is still alive. The trip to the graveside itself, by bus and following a day of sightseeing in Rome is rather profane. Kostadin kept himself to a select group of people whose company he enjoyed; Pavel spoke to Mitko from the Western Outerlands (who would, a month later, be taken in for questioning by the Serbian police department). He also socialised with his future wife, Mariana. A large part of the group was from Bansko. They brought with them a priest and flowers from the Pirin mountain. From Sofia, Angel has invited a VMRO member who was an ex-coal-miner from Pernik. His person and behaviour bore the marks of chronic unemployment, he was rather rough around the edges and a perpetual drunk, yet he was someone who had for years responded to many a call for the cause. This mixed group made for a rather tumultuous journey on the road.

On the day of the commemoration itself there was an air of sacrality. Mitko had brought soil from the Western Outerlands, Boeva accepted it gladly and they exchange information on well known *surbomani* (Serbo-philes) in the Western Outerlands. In her speech at the gravesite Boeva expressed gratitude for gifts from the fatherland. Afterwards, soil from the Western Outerlands and Mihailov's place of birth, Shtip[64] was poured next to his grave by a long-term Sofia activist. Pavel tucked a VMRO flag behind the gravestone. The guests were given food to take away with them, both as lunch snacks and in the form of more customary *pomen* (memorial) food. Soon after this trip, Pavel and I made arrangement to visit and greet the son of one of Gotze Delchev's nephews, Milan, for his 104th birthday. Pavel gifted him with a VMRO flag – the version the contemporary organisation used in all its events. When Milan was told of VMRO's visits to the graves of Mihailov, Gotze Delchev, Dame Gruev, and the then upcoming burial of Tatarchev he remarked "you have visited many holy places, a good show of respect to deserving Bulgarians". This accentuated how, through their activities, VMRO's activists could imagine themselves to be part of a grand ancestry irrespective of their biological descent.

Taking part in VMRO activities could be adventurous as well as ideologically laden. This can be a key motivation for young men's engagement in the organisation. On one occasion the head of the youth organisation insisted they should lay flowers on the gravesite of Dame Gruev[65]. This was not customary practice. Although seemingly reluctant, Angel agreed. There was some discussion with long term-activists about the exact location of the grave. The memorial was in the Macedonian mountains near the village Rusinovo and had only been visited once or twice before. Once we were on the road, Angel started calling people to see if he could concretise the grave's location. Someone from Blagoevgrad offered to come along and act as a guide but the two cars were already full.

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[64] It was taken at a memorial for Todor Aleksandrov held there a few months earlier.
[65] Historical figure active in the 'Macedonian cause', see Appendix 1 for his significance.

We arrived in the village. It was snowing. Angel enquired after the suggested guide until he found him. The group came under the tutelage of the person in question. He immediately remarked that we shouldn't have looked for him in that manner. He was flustered. Gruevski, the prime-minister of Macedonia was imminently scheduled to arrive for a commemoration of Gruev's passing. VMRO's presence could be seen as "a provocation". Later, Pavel predicted that this man would, as a result, be picked up by the police for questioning (also remarking that these men are used to it, and know what they are getting themselves into). On seeing the cars we were meant to travel with, the guide objected – it is snowing outside, it is dark and the grave is in the mountains. He departed – only to come back with an old Soviet Laska. We fit thirteen people in it and advanced into the mountains. There was a minute's silence at the grave – the commemoration was framed by a speech which declares this "the final resting place of one of the founders of VMRO". The event was short and terse, exasperated by circumstance. We exited the country by a different border point from the one through which we entered – Angel was worried that we would be held up as news of the visit would have "reached the secret services by now".

In subsequence, this event was re-narrated by its participants in various social settings, with them taking particular delight in the more adventurous aspects of the trip. Such events are a reassertion of VMRO's identity through the performance of rites of remembrance. They contain a 'serious' and a 'play' elements as can be seen in cross-comparison to the annual hike to the grave of Todor Aleksandrov. The hike happened across historic terrain: Pirin mountain, imbued with a history of *cheti* and *vojvodi*[66]. The hike provided a lived experience of a mountain steeped in the myth of the Macedonian struggle. I learned songs around campfires and the names of peaks.

Each evening at the campsite the hikers unfurled the VMRO flag and placed it next to their tents. They carried it on their backpacks. They stuck VMRO's round stickers onto

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[66] Local word which roughly translates to chieftain.

trail markers and in *chalets*, they chatted with the chalets' owners – who knew to expect them at a certain time each year. VMRO gave them flags. Throughout the hike they sporadically shouted "*Za organizatziata V-M-R-O*" (For the organisation V-M-R-O). Throughout the hike, Angel narrated VMRO's stories to the youth. The evenings were full of hajduk songs, which infused the atmosphere of the hike with symbols of great battles and heroes. The hikers shared moments of wistful historical thinking – what could have been if Aleksandrov had taken more than one bodyguard. They reminisced about General Vazov beating the British army in the battle at Slivnitza. This is predominantly a domain of socialisation, which bonds members, despite the tensions of hiking together– different paces, getting lost, tired and irritable. The mountains are compelling: the group gels through dirty jokes and plenty of *raki* drinking.

At the culmination of the hike, a traditional oath-taking ceremony for new members occurs at Todor Aleksandrov's reputed resting place, followed by speeches from the leaders and a pistol salute. The participants in the hike often take the oath of allegiance to the organisation in front of their peers at the grave site. One former member would share that while he was in the organisation, he didn't necessarily approve of other members' political positions. He remarked that if they would talk about nationalism they might fight, but this can be overcome and over-whelmed by positive social aspects like going hiking.

Going on the hike is an event with social capital which was especially salient for women who would try to prove that they had a place in an organisation defined by its 'male-ness'. In 2010, women in the organisation took part in it in greater numbers than had been the case in past years. One of them, Nora, told me that when she attended for the first time she was possibly the first woman to do so. She was allowed to accompany the men because her boyfriend promised to carry her backpack if she was tired. Laura was one of the first women from the Sofia youth organisation to complete the hike. She claimed that subsequently she was more respected. In another version of events, Angel

reflected that girls, upon completing the hike, became genderless. Similarly talking about the tough, sporty girl who did it first (who always carries a big knife and a gun 'her daddy gave her'), he would say he is sure 'she had a dick hidden away somewhere and that she probably fucked her boyfriend with a dildo'. While jokes about bodily fluids flowed readily and joyfully, women's engagement with them is more problematic. One woman who joined in heartily seemed to bear the brunt of more pointed comments by the men who appeared to consider her too rough, too sexual. After she had drunk from a beer bottle one of the other members remarked to his peer about to follow suit – "you might not want to do that who knows what disease you might get". The issue of gender also appeared in male activists' protectiveness. In light of the sometimes violent character of street movements or the danger of certain events, Angel exhibited caution about taking women to all organisational business: "I didn't want to see women who have been beaten up".

 Despite some unifying experiences the membership base is heterogeneous in its understanding and dedication to the Macedonian cause. The difference can be illustrated in reference to two members of the Sofia city organisation who clashed in the course of working together. One was a philosopher, graphic designer and long term *vojvoda* Venelin, the other, Anton, was the head of a newly formed organisation and a businessman. Venelin was the kind of member to make a photo for the city organisation with the heads of the local members overlaid with those of a *cheta* of *vojvodi*. He had kinship ties with Macedonia. Anton was keen to help organise a march about Levski but was equally interested in the protests against the rising costs of electricity. He was ambitious to help in organisational work, but didn't quite understand the wider resonances of VMRO's historic endeavour. It was difficult for the two members to establish a sense of affinity between each other off the bat: Anton was efficient, Venelin was a Romantic.

Radko (observing the unevenness discussed above) often talked of the need to

establish uniformity in the organisation. He took pro-Iane Sandanski[67] sentiments amongst local members at Todor Aleksandrov's grave, the fact that some members had wished each other 'happy holiday' when in fact this was an occasion to mourn and others attempted to play *chalga* at the site, as symptomatic of regional unevenness. In previous years, this work of ideological education was partially done by 'a black book'- given to new recruits. It provided an overview of pertinent histories and commonly sung songs. However it was copyrighted to the Plovdiv organisation and could not be used again. Radko organised informal lectures on different periods of history in the youth organisation. However the authors (the organisation's members) were not always engaging and the lectures were not hugely successful. Radko also proposed the need for cross-regional lectures in the context of a country wide-youth organisation. He was promptly reminded by some of the older members that this idea had been tried before with uneven results.

Despite some turbulence VMRO overall tended to cement a patriotic education among its member base. The success of ideological engagement effected through the organisation could be seen in interviews with members who had left. One youth replied he was disillusioned with some of the leadership but still cared about the Macedonian cause. This echoes those who after congress said they still carry the ideals of VMRO 'in their hearts' but they now believed they were not represented appropriately by the organisation.

VMRO's membership base is fluctuating. It has a few too many ex-members. Yet even if unsuccessful as a self-propagating organisation, VMRO could still be said to train a part of the Bulgarian public into an interest in Macedonia. An ex-journalist with the national TV channel BNT, Milena Milatinova was a former member of VMRO. In the late nineties she produced two documentaries "Chronicles of a national betrayal" and "Only because they were Bulgarian" which informed the viewing public about the Macedonian

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[67] For Sandanski's significance see Chapter 1 or Appendix 1.

question. Similarly Plamen Pavlov, a public historian who hosts a TV programme on SKAT was educated in the Veliko Turnovo University and is also a former VMRO member. In an interview from 2010 for the Information Agency "Focus", he stated he now believes VMRO is a cause and should not have become a political party (Information Agency "Focus" 2009). A former cultural attaché in the Bulgarian embassy in Skopje was said, on one occasion, to be *nash chovek* i.e. our person. These and many other cases show that even if people withdraw their support from the organisation as activists or possible voters, VMRO can nevertheless be, in my informants' own words, a *shkola* – i.e. a school, in the very least an informal one, which propagates 'the cause' – namely the Bulgarian nature of Macedonia.

VMRO members are educated into believing themselves to be the defenders of an elusive national ideal, the protectors of those outside the country's borders with Bulgarian self-consciousness. Faced with the remark "I am a theorist of assassins", one VMRO leader remarked "I almost could not resist saying– we are those who practice it"; on a separate occasion he joked "would it not be good to run on a platform of assassination and *coup d'état*?" Even VMRO's pragmatic policy advisor, Svetozar was delighted in one specific instance remarking: we are repeating our position from 1903, giving a link 'to something written on the Gutenburg press'. The older men (and sometimes women) of VMRO are collectors of antiquities, self-conscious historians. Amongst VMRO's members, there are erudite and highly educated interpreters of this history such as Dr Milen Mihov (the head of the 2010 congress described in the previous chapter) and Boris Vangelov (who presides over the Veliko Turnovo *shkola*[68]). Older members of the organisation competed over their historical acumen. Karakachanov would discuss history in his visits to the central office or at social gatherings with his peers.

On the other hand, more often than not, Svetozar could be overheard declaring that an

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[68] For more details see page 204.

initiative is too much work and would consume too many resources 'for something historical'. He would remark: "we are not after all a history society". Karakachanov seems to have come to a similar conclusion. At a meeting of the central initiative committee he declared that only about 10% of the population truly cares about the Macedonian question. It is not an electoral theme. A female member of the executive committee agreed, confirming "All of us carry a soft spot for Macedonia, but people are interested in their everyday lives".

An older activist reminisced that when he joined VMRO the youth organisation were boozy intellectuals. They were romantics (like Venelin) who romanticized the VMRO of the 30s and 40s – what Karakachanov termed a choral society. "No one then expected to make a political career out of being a VMRO member", explained a member of the 90s VMRO. Nowadays the Romanticism of Macedonia and its music has persevered. However, it is now more limited to the socialization of new members – providing the 'common frames' of organisational life. In the mountains of Pirin we learned songs around the campfire and bonded. Kostadin would relate how important it is to that people should know and sing songs when they are together, proudly remarking that the Varna organisation, where he comes from, did that. With a similar sentiment, at meals after a successful event, Angel would give a favourite toast:

> *let us drink to our graves which will be made from the oak trees which we*
> *will plant on the banks of the Ohrid lake when the Bulgarian soldier again*
> *washes his pannikin in its waters*

The Macedonian cause formed a primary domain for validating members' worth and belonging to VMRO. Around the time of congress, the organiser for the Kiustendil area Valeri Nenov, released a statement to the media denigrating the Plovdiv side. It became a favourite quote in the *org otdel* :

> *A deputy head for fifteen years, in parliament for four and they did nothing*
> *for Bulgarian-ness in Macedonia and the Western Outerlands ... they slept*
> *like brown bears and only woke up in spring to gather forest strawberries*

and to eat the pots of honey

Nenov was a businessman of dubious morality and would be imprisoned for various miss-deeds during my fieldwork leaving his harassed female assistant to run the organisation in the region. He pursued a female member of the organisation who was increasingly exasperated and upset with his advances. Nenov would lie about getting an organisational task done – sending a photo-shopped picture to (unsuccessfully) pull the wool over people's eyes. Somewhat humorously, he seemed to travel with a small orchestra at hand for a number of occasions. Nenov was the personification of a 'Balkan character'. The more rational(istic) members of the organisation thought having him as a member could only compromise the organisation. However, Angel on occasion reminded them that one could always depend on him for business pertaining to Macedonia. Angel remembered one instance when they visited Skopje, Nenov took a group of scraggily impoverished Macedonian Bulgarians who always hung out in one humble cafe to the most luxurious establishment in town and forced the waiters to treat them with respect. Nenov was the kind of character who was excused under the 'old' rules of the organisation: he was deeply flawed and somewhat criminal, yet none of it mattered as long as he was ready to work for 'the cause'.

A number of older activists described their dedication to 'the cause' with reference to personal sacrifice. One member admitted that he could have been a political analyst, but this would have entailed compromising his ideals. Another highlighted (somewhat pointedly) that when he was a student it took him some time to graduate because he spent all his time doing VMRO work. The remark was addressed with reference to a member who often missed events because 'he had to study'. Angel on occasion related that he had been offered the chance to be local mayor in an area of Sofia which was created by refugees from Macedonia. However he would have had to switch allegiance to GERB, and fill out their membership papers. He remarked that he had answered, with contempt: "Don't bother me with such conversations".

VMRO's leaders attempt to sustain its 'dual' nature – as both an activist organisation and a political party. These two imperatives presuppose different planes of engagement. As they existed at the time of my fieldwork, the two forms were hopelessly entangled. Certain positions, even if unpopular or irrelevant to a wider public, were followed on the basis of principle. However, in order to engage successfully in contentious politics, the organisation had to also resonate with 'populist issues'. Inevitably members complained that less and less attention was paid to the organisation's fundamental issues. They would denigrate VMRO's engagement with *bitovismi*[69] – a rather profane plane of concerns pertaining to people's daily life. The complexity of trying to maintain this dual identity required delicacy and a specific kind of engagement with members. This allowed for slippages in activists' collective identities across the country. Some of them can be seen in the context of the congress, others are evident in the conflict between the two new deputy–leaders after the event.

Porochni Praktiki (Flawed Practices) and Charismatic Conflict

When Kostadin arrived in Sofia he didn't recognize 'Pirotska 5' as being a home. For him it represented a problem. Kostadin is a self–conscious Enlightener. He publishes books and absorbs a dizzying array of facts, which he deploys with new acquaintances to strengthen his image as a deeply knowledgeable man. He built up his authority among his peers with his film about Bulgarians in Northern Greece[70] called *We are One Nation* and accompanied this endeavour with the publication of an online map of old (particularly Bulgarian) place–names in the region. He published a prototype edition of the turn of the century text *Almanac Macedonia*. He embodied a specific organisational ethic. The essence of pedigree and rank was derived from his belonging to a rather elite community in VMRO, people from '*kovachnitzata na organizatziata*' *i.e.* the place where cadres are formed'– the Veliko Turnovo University. Subsequently, his charisma, work ethic and personal connections had allowed him to create an organisation in

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[69] See page 89.

[70] In his estimation there are roughly 500 000 such persons.

Varna that simply amazed people. It was not a typically strong region for VMRO. His reputation preceded him when he came to Sofia. Young activists had been talking about arranging a screening of his film at the Sofia University. However, Kostadin was also accustomed to doing as he wished; he even encouraged involvement in risky enterprises when there was nothing to lose in Varna. Engagement in Sofia did not carry such freedom. He was also used to being the person defining the ideological frames of the Varna organisation. In Sofia he found alternative definitions of nationalist activism and he had to share the deputy role.

Kostadin's critique of the Sofia organisation, which evolved into a dispute in its own right, was both a leadership contest and a commentary on effective practice for recruiting and keeping cadres. He had, he said, observed the situation for some time and received reports on what the core issues were. With his arrival he initiated an offensive. He associated the problems with Angel's leadership (although he also discursively flirted with the notion that it was not in fact Angel's fault – he had been under the wrong influence i.e. Karakachanov). Cadres[71] from all over the country arrived and become disillusioned by the atmosphere. He thus diagnosed the organisation's ill health and its cause– Sofia's organisational culture. He was in touch with a number of former activists to rally for their return and promise a new beginning – achieving mixed results.

The conflict between Angel and Kostadin developed to the stage where it informed a large proportion of the organisation's atmosphere, leading to a bi-polar working pattern. It was difficult to judge to what extent the conflict was amplified by inter-regional differences in recruiting members, and to what extent by a desire to compete for leading positions. It also remained uncertain how far Kostadin was being side-lined (as he claimed). At congress, he had been promised that he would replace Karakachanov in the next election of the central governing body; increasingly this

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[71] This is the word used by the Veliko Turnovo *shkola* of nationalism for its potential new recruits. Its meaning is roughly equivalent to the English translation.

began to seem tenuous. Kostadin exhibited a deepening bitterness and resentment, a much more guarded side. For some observers – interpreting his behaviour – it seemed petulant and stand-off-ish (a sulk). For others, it was just anger and frustration. The ambiguity of the situation was more important than any need for a definitive position on how such behaviour should be perceived. The conflict gave rise to divisions, it shaped events and informed the organisation's working life.

A year into his stay in Sofia, Kostadin had become detached from the activists in his immediate surroundings. He dedicated his energies primarily to projects in which he was the definitive central figure, especially ones which related to his 'home' regions. Kostadin concluded he would be a man of leisure rather than his usual workaholic self. He didn't need to push so hard, he would just do the jobs that wouldn't lead to such conflicts. However, he didn't arrive at the decision to distance himself from the Sofia activists on his own. Initially he talked to the activists both in the youth organisation and in the city one. He claimed to want to inspire them towards an improved method of work: one that was more in the spirit of Veliko Turnovo or Varna. In his typical rhetorical style, he provocatively declared to the Sofia youth organisation that they are the future of the organisation, that he wanted to build up cadres who would eventually replace the current leadership from amongst their numbers. He took pride in the sense of shock he believed this attitude would bring to the audience, used to the top-down model of work in Sofia, unaccustomed to such motivating treatment.

Kostadin excelled in the skill of making people feel listened to, drawn in and respected. He embroiled select people in tasks and built up their confidence in the ability to contribute to organisational activity. He wanted them to develop their confidence and personal charisma as a key tool in 'organisational work'. He gave himself as an example relating that as a young activist in Veliko Turnovo, his confident demeanour was such that 'just by walking down the hall of the university' he could gather the crowd for a well-sized protest. However as he started building relationships with Sofia's activists with his typical flair, he was soon met with a push-and-pull

dilemma. As he took people 'under his wing' he quickly perceived them to be drawn out of his reach. He repeated the experiment, drawing different people under his wing only to see them pulled into projects and initiatives with Angel and Pavel. That person's potential would suddenly be 'recognized' by the wider leadership, inhibiting Kostadin's further use of them. At one point he indignantly declared that he believed politicking should happen only outside the organisation but he believed it was happening on the inside.

This theory, like any other regarding these circumstances is impossible to confirm and forms part of the wider ambivalences and conjectures which existed around these events. I now associate these ambivalences, the 'grey areas of motivation' within politics, with the exhausting atmosphere and the problematic nature of trust or friendship within such environments. This is what Kostadin calls politicking. He accurately highlighted its potential to be detrimental to feelings of internal solidarity. The conflict, however, also motivated some members. The head of the youth organisation in Sofia seemed eager to prove him wrong. He created a lively youth organisation which employed, but also improved on, the ideal typical principles of the *Sofia milieu*.

Kostadin's aim was to create new structures which would be able to provide a home for people he wanted to draw into VMRO and who lived in the capital. In his estimation, these persons would not fit in with the ethic of the Sofia organisation. With regards to female members, he was afraid that they would be subjected to too much of the 'wrong' kind of attention; with men, that they might be quickly disillusioned. This could also be interpreted as an attempt to create structures that would vote for him in the coming congress.

Kostadin attempted to create new structures without 'properly informing' the head of the youth organisation or Angel – stating that he was under the impression that he didn't need to. The result was immediate, this was considered an infringement, an

affair – the persons he involved in it felt the pressure of negative opinion and the immediacy of suspicion. In the midst of such tensions and ambivalences of loyalties and trust, I was at one point accused of being part of an intrigue. 'My first intrigue' had me worried, scared and emotional, feeling vulnerable but also 'at play' with the environment around me. I must have looked frazzled when Pavel told me to stop worrying. He said I would learn and in time there would be more dramatic events than this. It dawned on me then that this was part of participant observation, the subjectivity of ambivalence and being 'at play' – being 'broken' into your 'first intrigue'. The experience made me recognize when others went through this process, while it also left a lingering sense of machination and grime. The tension of being around these kinds of processes bothered me much less over time. I started to realize that people around me had learned these lessons before, the sense of knowing when you might be being used, allowing or not allowing it to happen, withdrawing or participating. They were all choices, positionalities which people took, while understanding the need for caution, for a cool assessment of the kinds of situations in which one might find oneself when involved in the political domain.

I started to accept this as part of everyday life and subsequently doubted the viability of Kostadin's belief that politics can be cleanly separated from the internal dynamics of the organisation. If you look at other political parties, he said, they are constantly stabbing each other in the back internally. Kostadin asserted that "we should be different" – hinting at VMRO's dual identity as a cause as well as a political party. Ironically he wasn't alone in that conceit, Angel took pride in the (false) belief that VMRO members in Sofia did not talk behind each other's back on principle. The subjectivity engendered by acting as *homos politicus* which activists utilized within the wider political domain would not be easy to abandon when they returned 'home' to the organisation's internal domain.

My gradual understanding of the sensitivities and undercurrents around me, as well as the fact that I had gained their trust and thus had greater access to rationales which,

previously, had been abbreviated to "that's just how it's going to be" allowed me to

bear witness to how Kostadin's identification of Sofia's 'flaws' constituted a rejection

of the micro-culture of the organisation. He would often assume that people had been

'missed', that they weren't being listened to or woven in the organisational structure

because of negligence. This wasn't usually the case. There was often a more

complicated, but rarely explicitly discussed rationale behind dismissing certain

persons or groups or not engaging with particular events. They constitute modes of

assessing people's character and abilities learned from years of experience and

interaction. Due to some aspects of the Sofia organisation's local culture this was often

missed when observed by outsiders. Sofia had a more top-down character. Its

organisers also found it, as indicated above, antithetical to nationalist activism that

they should have to overly-indulge their membership. That membership should either

want to work 'for the cause' or not get involved at all, in their view.

The Sofia organisation had a culture in which, more acutely than in other regions,

ideological conviction had to be conflated with pragmatic political action. What

happened in Sofia had a much better chance of being reported across national media.

Activists were much more closely scrutinized. Angel and Pavel had both existed in the

circumstances of the Sofia organisation for a sufficient length of time to know that

events can be cancelled at the last minute, the intricacies of being at the centre of

coalition making, of coming to terms with unpopular decisions and that everything

needed to be run by Karakachanov. In other words, they had the detriment of being, in

Mihov's words, at the 'heart of the administrative centre'.

Also at stake were different definitions of professionalism and ways of doing work

which were conflated with different internal frames and led to accusations of

ideological dissonance. Kostadin cultivated the image of the atypical politician – he was

deeply involved in the policy making process. His positions derived from intellectual

labour and a deep understanding of the issues at hand. Angel on the other hand was at

ease with having statements prepared by others, as long as he proof-read them for

ideological consistency. Kostadin criticized informal gatherings at VMRO's central offices where activists drank and socialized. Angel was happy to indulge in that domain, reinforcing his buccaneer image. Furthermore, for him 'being VMRO' could not be separated from alcohol, play-fighting and, overall, a 'rough masculinity'.

Kostadin was a family man – he had a young child and a wife. He didn't stay up late for drunken fun as a point of principle. He understood the difficulties of childcare, healthcare and budgeting. Like his old mentor from the Veliko Turnovo organisation, Boris Vangelov, he understood VMRO to be neither left nor right wing. Thus he engaged with social issues much more readily. Inter-regional organisational differences fed the emerging conflict on 'Pirotska 5'. Regional branches of VMRO were evidently strongly influenced by the preferences of leaders and strong personalities within different organisational structures. The Veliko Turnovo school valued qualities which were different, and to some degree incommensurable, with those prized in the Sofia organisation –an interest in Orthodox Christianity as a mark of nationalism, an affection for enactments of local history and an interest in ethnology, in other words, a deep form or 'cultural nationalism'. By contrast, a number of key Sofia activists were atheists, staunchly anti-left-wing, and pursued a kind of aggressive nationalism more often associated with street-level organisations or the early terror tactics of Ivan Mihailov. Such, sometimes surprising, variations emphasise the degree to which ideology and organisational culture are dialogic and need to be examined in parallel in order to understand why an organisation pursues certain agendas while failing to pick up others typical of ideologically similar organisations.

Conclusion

In summary, socialisation in VMRO entailed dissonances derived from the dual nature of the organisation as a political party and a cause. The topics VMRO engaged with in the public domain reflected both concerns, but its activists were primarily socialised in reference to a buccaneer past, a glorious history. They were encouraged to think of

themselves as the metaphorical descendants of the proponents of the Macedonian cause. Yet the political seeped into the organisation's daily life through leadership struggles and suspicion over activist's degree of affection for 'the cause'. Socialisation was not fully successful. Activists across the country found themselves subject to different leadership regimes which sometimes entailed 'harder' or 'softer' definitions of nationalism. In Sofia, for example, extreme views were encouraged. Elsewhere the organisation bent to more popular frames – embodying a kind of cultural nationalism, often denoted by the alterative term for nationalism – *Rodolubie* (lit. love of one's ancestral line). Confirming Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta's (2001) contribution to the literature on social movements, there is significant emotional labour in being part of a contentious movement. In VMRO much of that is employed through affective attachment to heroes and national holidays.

I would argue that, paradoxically, leadership conflicts and congresses also engendered solidarity at the same time as they created divisions. As people became involved in the emotional labour of selecting candidates, in anxiety over intrigues, directed to worry passionately about organisational purity, they became more deeply implicated in the organisation. Those who didn't leave as a result of the tensions internalised the categories employed in conflicts and thus reasserted a particular organisational identity.

A key theme of the 2010 conference, not explored above, was the need for centralisation within the organisation. Throughout my fieldwork with the members of VMRO in its central headquarters I observed how activists attempted to pursue that end with mixed results. At the same time regional differences were both divisive and uniting. They allowed for strong charismatic leadership which infused local organisations with the interpretational frames of the person in question.

VMRO was by and large not successful in gaining new members. Its hybrid form – between NGO and political party – was difficult to navigate. People within Bulgaria who

cared about the Macedonian cause did not unanimously believe VMRO should be a political party and thus did not necessarily join. Furthermore in my time around VMRO I witnessed a number of debates about the interpretation of history both within and outside the organisation. Despite the common belief that narratives of history in such contexts inevitably engender fixity this was far from the truth. When members of the organisation were in fact interested in history (some were not and would more readily reproduce common narratives), this could give rise to internal debates. Historical curiosity seemed to be naturally expansive and this interfered with the need for common frames for activists within the organisation. There was an uncomfortable moment when new members joined and had to subordinate themselves to existing narratives. Many who cared about Macedonia simply did not join or eventually left – like Plamen Pavlov, discussed above. That tendency was exacerbated by Karakachnov's reputation, which affected that of the organisation. Due to its declining popularity, few people joined VMRO for its political potential.

People came to VMRO's headquarters on the basis of three dynamics: the desire to do something pertaining to the Macedonian question, nationalism and agitation by friends. The three processes interlocked. Subsumed with these is the pervasive pathologisation of Bulgaria and the desire to effect change. Remaining in the organisation depended on the dynamics discussed above. If members did remain, their notion of nationalism was shaped by those dynamics. VMRO's success was only partially dependent on the size of its activist base (although that was definitely useful when planning events). Its aims were to be politically successful and to shape the Macedonian question through gaining representation in government and thus being able to shape that dimension of politics. In that way their approach to politically deploying a cause could be said to be in the spirit of Green parties. The internal dynamics could provide a cosy self-affirming atmosphere. Ex-members or disapproving observers would go as far as to compare the organisation to a cult, given its sometimes insular nature.

To fulfil the task VMRO has set itself – national political success – the organisation drew on an image of authentic nationalism. It is an important task as it has the potential to rally the general voting public. VMRO's success is thus dependent on its ability to be read as authentically nationalist (rather than 'Macedonianist') and (according to its own assessment) to engage with people's daily lives. The concern with the Macedonian cause which helps to socialise activists and define the frame for their nationalism must then be turned to a more general audience. They do so through a collection of authored events which orient VMRO within the political arena. The following (concluding) set of chapters considers those processes in more detail. They show how, in the turn towards a general public, VMRO created itself dialogically – identifying a specific domain of contention. It is within that dialogic interaction that they move away from the specific history of the organisation towards the general problem of 'healing the nation'.

Chapter 4 Addressing the General Public, Healing the Nation

So far in this thesis I have shown how specific subjectivities emerge in the *milieu* of national public arenas and how separate ones develop as an aspect of in-group identification within VMRO. In both the nation becomes a site of production. These final chapters are about how the two are connected. I have argued that the semiotics engaged in the collective construction of a national subjectivity are fundamental to understanding the contestations of nationalist actors. This formed the first part of my thesis. In the second, I examined how activists form a more specific domain- a nationalist activist organisation. This domain, although constantly in flux, also has processes for defining and establishing a unitary nature. Here I will conclude by considering the contexts in which nationalist activists appear in particular campaigns. This completes the cycle. They engage with, and try to shape the public domain.

Nationalist activists attempt to expand the space around the state (both 'below' and 'above') to address the public and the international arena on behalf of a conceptual collective, the nation. Support for this endeavour[72] by the general public has to be created or, as I shall argue below, affected in engagement with issues which somehow resonate with pre-existing modalities within public arenas. In this thesis I focus specifically on VMRO's engagement with public arenas where activists attempt to engage affect – often collective fear, but also pride, shame and worry. Due to the dual nature of VMRO as an activist and party political organisation, success was defined along those two strands – on the one hand, the ability to effectively engage the public 'to be nationalist'[73] and on the other, to recognize VMRO as an organisation which deserves to be in parliament. These attempts crystallize in specific events and topics. Sometimes issues arise when VMRO competes for 'ownership' of particular causes with other nationalist organisations.

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[72] Despite the tendency of the state to exhibit certain structural behaviours commonly referred to as a form of nationalism.
[73] Which is here tantamount to agreeing with its prescriptions.

The medium for the realisation of these strands of political action is the execution of particular events. Using Durkheim, Berezin (2007) argues that events constitute 'social facts', moments of enough coherence that the general public can recognize them as being discrete and important. Here I argue that events are only part of the story. They are building blocks. Focusing on them in isolation risks atomising one's understanding of a political organisation and side-lining the parallel politics of creating unity. Unity is not a given. It is an ongoing and sometimes ill-fated project to create homogeneity in organisational life and present an engaging public face.

Unity behind VMRO's actions is provided by contestation around whether the current Bulgarian state as an institution which can truly represent national subjectivity. Nationalists insert themselves between the nation (as a collectivity of people) and the state. They portray themselves as kind of medium, a purifying sieve which can guarantee collective dignity. Bearing similar markers, the Slovak national movement successfully became a key mediator between citizens and state in the post-socialist period, mobilising 'effective collective action' through nationalism (Malova in Kopecký and Mudde 2003). These emerging aspects of nationalism contrast with the commonplace notion that right-wing, extremist or dangerously essentialist social movements are fundamentally uncivil. Different national consolidation regimes are constitutive of the character of national movements I would like to delve further into the power dynamics which inform such differentiations as a way to understand the different discourses which VMRO utilised through a more nuanced lens. There is long-term nexus of power which informs the shape of contestation within Bulgarian nationalist movements: the Enlightenment and the idea of Europe born in the Enlightenment period.

As discussed previously, if we deconstruct the binaries of the Enlightenment, the difference between historical narrative and myth diminishes as well (without disappearing completely). However the desire to view politics within a rational paradigm does not disappear – nationalists still claim objectivity. As we look at

nationalism and its epic narratives, ethnographic imperatives require us to look at myths (Kapferer 1998). Myth's lack of rationality or objective truth is not the right mode of analysis as it is impossible to differentiate it from civilizational tropes. However, the desire to present oneself as objective is a notion which needs to be examined further. My research participants were deeply dedicated to the objective reality of their narratives, while it was easy to spot mythical elements in their narrative. This needs to be accounted for— the only way to do so is through reflecting on the power dynamics discussed above and the formative matrix of the category 'Eastern Europe'. It elucidates how 'being objective' and 'being rational' became powerful discourses.

Eastern Europe and the Two Europes

European consolidation and illiberal politics have gone hand in hand (Berezin 2007, Holmes 2000). Europe, Berezin argues, creates vulnerability and anxiety within the national domain. I would extend her argument that it does so by virtue of both macro-scale institutional consolidation and its existence as the conceptual nexus in which liberal thought has incubated since the era of the Enlightenment. Namely, Europe came to be synonymous with radical approaches to personhood, collectivity, belief and co-existence. What is thus contested in nationalist discourse is not only the political structure 'EU' but the existence of Europe as a moralistic philosophical geography[74]. Europe "threatens to make national space unfamiliar", it lacks 'affectivity' –the ability to create wide-scale emotional attachment. (Berezin 2007: 252). Similarly Holmes (2000) identifies the domain of modern life as a site of alienation which is overcome by the "praxis of belonging" of integralist politics[75] (*ibid* : 3). Both authors are right in principle but not in practice. Although in their case studies "being European" is not an affective issue, that is not a given. In the context of Bulgaria, due to the genealogy of production surrounding national subjectivity (as discussed in Chapter 2 and as shall be

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[74] I borrow Wolff's (1996) term. It will be discussed in more details below.
[75] He however focuses on fast-capitalism as a key source of alienation.

discussed in more detail below) the question of being or not being European is highly affective, albeit not in the same way as the affects which are produced pertaining to the category of the nation.

Holmes and Berezin's theories propose that the nation's ability to engender affect is a restitution for the alienating effects of contemporary life. This assertion has a prehistory. If we momentarily return to Greenfeld (1993), we might remember that the Enlightenment and the Counter-Enlightenment clashed in the 17th and 18th century, over the terrain of Christian piety as Herder and Vico reacted to the totalizing and alienating effects of French philosophical thought (Berlin 2000). Herder in particular conceives of the discourse of rights as intrinsically interconnected with politics, as universalising domination of the French through the rights of man (*ibid.* 242).

> '*So powerful and long standing was the tradition of enmity in the Balkans, it was argued that they had lodged themselves in the genetic makeup of the region's inhabitants*. **Western Europeans conceded that the Balkans belonged to Europe... But with at best a foot at the door of civilized Europe, the Balkan people had followed a different evolutionary path, in which blood and revenge were the preferred forms of political discourse***.*
>
> (Misha Glenny 2000: 83)

The peripheries of Europe "are not quite modern", yet they are not authentically other – indigenous. They are subject to a regime of philosophical geography (here used in line with Wolff 1996) which differentiate the region from Western Europe. Designation of the still-'wild' side of the Occident was a cleansing exercise, a resolution of remaining inconsistencies within Enlightened Europe. Eastern Europe is a construct animated by "a paradox of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion" (Wolff 1996: 7). The discourse cannot be justly considered as only prejudicial – it is both condemning and inspirational towards a specific form of life which is conceived to be 'superior'. The Balkans are not other to Europe in the same way as subjects in Africa or Asia, but they

are also not considered similar. They exist in the liminality between east and west, passion and reason, efficiency and Asiatic opulence. Eastern Europe forms a dark self, not 'an other' (Todorova 1997). Todorova employs Mary Douglas' work to discuss fear of the anomaly: the Balkans are seen through the prism of pollution. Thus they hold no potential for enchantment; instead they represent mostly backwardness- being neither the 'noble natives' of the 'modern citizens', but a difference within a type. Hence, when considering post-colonial possibilities, there is seemingly no authentic type to oppose the ideal rational European subject. There is no way to constitute authenticity.

Bulgarian nationalism emerges in a specific consolidation regime enmeshed in the categorization of being an ambivalent European and the creation of a new state in the debris of the declining Ottoman Empire. The differentiation between Eastern and Western Europe is deeply enmeshed with the existence of the Ottoman Empire. In its most resonant configuration this divide is defined by the Enlightenment-born opposition of reason and irrationality. Being post-Ottoman is accentuated by being post-Socialist. As discussed in previous chapters, aspects of that condition are provided by a wide-ranging literature on post-socialism (Hann 2002; Cellarius 2004; Kaneff 2006; Creed 1998; Buchanan 2006; Ghodsee 2005, 2011) and are revealed in the deep schisms of othering left by the Cold War (Hann 2002 : 17).

In post-socialist studies the self-constructed West imposes its 'self-identity' - a trio of 'privatisation', 'marketisation' and 'democratisation' on ex-socialist spaces (*ibid.*). The socialist/post-socialist and colonial/post-colonial should be considered as dynamic in their inter-relation. This has the capacity to free study of the Cold War from "the ghetto of Soviet and area studies" (*ibid.* 20) into the wider disciplinary arena. Yugoslav state's disintegration solidified the regions' reputation for Balkan strife. (Todorova 1997; Roudomentof 2002). It has also engendered new divisions. Countries never involved in the conflict such as Bulgaria, Greece and Romania are subject to different processes from those which were, such as Serbia and Croatia. Uneven EU entry across South-Eastern Europe forms another divide which is inter-dependent with the Yugoslav

disintegration and its consequences.

The post-Ottoman, has been pushed to the side, despite its role in informing the original differentiations of East and West[76]. This is an oversight dictated by the circumstances of history. Bulgaria was already 'behind the Iron Curtain' when the post-colonial analytic paradigm started to impact the social sciences. Western scholars addressed their gaze to Bulgaria in the context of its emergence from the Soviet Block. Thus they overlooked the post-Ottoman dynamic and its similarities to the post-colonial. The dynamics of the post-Ottoman seem to have promptly been denigrated to insightful scholarship by historians spread across literature which analyses the categories: 'the Balkans' and 'Eastern Europe' (Neuburger 2004, Todorova 1997, Wolff 1996). There is much to be gained from transforming these categories into a framework which accounts for the post-Ottoman period in a way akin to the work done by the category of the post-colonial.

In a conversation about 'the Balkans in 2020' at the LSE, London, in the Spring of 2011, with the Bulgarian and Serbian foreign ministers, the Balkans were stereotypically cast as the space which lacks reason. The introducing speaker remarked:

> *For centuries people in the Balkans lived between hope and despair, between the passion of their mentality and the trials of reason. Between Europe and ...*

Further into the event the Bulgarian Foreign Minister notes:

> *It is always easier to talk about the future of the Balkans when you are not in the Balkans, ... when you get back to the Balkans it gets much more difficult because it gets much more emotional because of the past. That is something which I think the new generation would like to change*

He then clarifies that he hopes one day not to have this distinction between Eastern

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[76] It is clear to see how it, in turn, was informed by Orientalist discourses.

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and Western Europe. For him, this transition entails a move away from history and emotion, towards accepting the Balkans a common space of rational dialogue. This unproblematically reproduces the common tropes discussed above.

If anthropology's engagement with post-colonial theory is to prove to be much more than a 'cleansing' of responsibility for ethnography's own colonial past, it must recognize it by virtue of cross-application of the analytic capital of post-colonial theory to other similar contexts and a process of deriving a more general framework of analysis. It must provide insight into statements like the ones above. Then, far from remaining a narrow historical circumstance which needs emancipation, the analysis of post-colonial circumstances will appear in its full potential. One such element is the shift of attention from "national origin" to "subject-position" (Dirlik 1997: 505), overriding interest in "politics informed by fixed categories" and taking refuge in exploring the "politics of location". Actors in a local arena do not simply engage with those who are near; the local and the global are both more complex and more studied in their inter-relatedness (Kearney 1995; Wolf 1982; Mintz 1985; Wallerstein 1990).

The Affective Orient, Rational Europe and the Two Europes

Eliciting 'being European' in the Balkans entails entering a terrain on which objective knowledge and reason are embedded within the relationships of power described above. In the ethnographic material which follows, the distinction between affective politics and 'objective truths' is an important arena of contestation. Although clearly engaging in the domain of affect, my participants presented themselves as rallying public opinion on the basis of objective reality. This objectivist stance was informed by the power dynamics of the region. In an almost paradoxical statement I would like to suggest that my informants' dedication to objectivity was based on the affective capital of 'being European' seen through the prism of the Enlightenment. Thus, and significantly, my informants seemed to divide 'Enlightenment' Europe, to which they were dedicated, from contemporary Liberal Europe.

While the Renaissance conception of Europe had divided its civility on a North–South axis, the Enlightenment perceived line imagined it on an East–West axis, thus marrying the conceptualization of Eastern Europe to the already emerging ideas of the Orient. On the domain of Bulgarian national subjectivity these imaginings contributed to a pervasive sense of being caught between a European and an Oriental self (Neuburger 2004). Bulgarian identification is thus consistently narrated through insecurities about being European (as the echelon of progress) (Stoicheva 2007) often in relation to the negative ascription of being Balkan (Todorova 1997:39). This contributes to a sense of national inadequacy: the 'complex' discussed in the first few chapters.

Balkan people were widely regarded as somewhat savage and Oriental (Wolff 1996), but they were not simply subjected to these outside categories. They attempted to contest and mould them. In the 19th century, Balkan subjects became aware of the frameworks used to categorize them and tried to enter into these logics by using the same language to argue their civility. Bulgarian revivalists utilized existing Western (Christian) Orientalist discourses. They drew a strong opposition between the population they claimed to represent and its 'Turk' 'Oriental oppressors' (Neuberger 2002). This worked and in the Eastern Question, Gladstone spoke in defence of subjugated and brutalized Christian subjects.

Defining 'savages' and a lack of civility forms the markers of geo-political power relations. Othering has its origins in Spanish colonial discourses about 'savage others' (Todorov 1984; Llobera 2003). The Spanish colonizers employed Aristotle's concept of 'natural slaves' (Llobera 2003: 19) and fused it with Catholic theological thought. This definition fed into the Enlightenment definition of 'irrational being', 'unable to rule themselves' which rationalised European powers' sense of entitlement to define the geo-political order, displacing possible local discussions of just governments and borders.

Aside from the two polarities of East and West, despotism and Enlightenment,

Bulgarian national subjects were enmeshed in a diplomatic philosophical geography which encapsulated large-scale politics:

> *Balkan nations at one time or other have served as pet nations for the great European powers ... just as Europeans were discovering their Greeks as the source of their civilization Russians were discovering their Bulgarians as the roots of Slavic culture.*

(Todorova 1997 84)

Recognition of Balkan subjects' political sovereignty was predicated on diplomatic deliberation and validated in reference to a discourse of 'deserving' or not deserving this form of liberty by virtue of one's civility. A number of the markers of these discourses were furnished by virtue of antique history (Wolff 1996: 360) and in many ways the discourse of antiquity continues to inform debates in the Balkans.

Following this strain of thought, Todorova (1997) argues that the label 'Balkan' and the discourses that accompany it embody a paradox- the process that started to be denigrated in the beginning of the 20th century as Balkanization was in fact Europeanisation:

> *the Balkans were becoming European by shedding the last residue of an imperial legacy, widely considered an anomaly at the time, and by assuming and emulating the homogeneous European nation-state as the normative form of social organisation*

(Todorova 1997:13)

In her understanding, the difference between Western and Eastern Europe is that the 'organic' growth of Western European societies into nation-states was a product of many years of social engineering, of ethnic and religious wars and expulsion (Weber 1976). The Balkans, on the other hand, had to start un-mixing their populations at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries (Cowan 2008; Hirschon 1998).

Todorova's conception of the region is narrower than Wolff's, dominated by the impact of the Ottoman Empire and its disintegration. 'The Balkans' as a negative denomination is derived from the period in which it came to be elaborated, namely in the context of the Balkan wars (1912-13), of bloody killings and outrage regarding unrest (Todorova 1997). The Balkans covers a smaller area than Eastern Europe- what Wolff called *l'Orient de l' Europe* -the least well mapped of the regions of the east.

The stigma attached to the region neatly presents a continuity of international judgments but also fluctuating apparatuses for their execution which represent changing paradigms of philosophical geographic imaginings. Nationalism is one of them – having its peak in the Enlightenment and new political philosophies which defined it. From World War II onwards, nationalism is viewed with larger unease.   The judgment towards the region--full of conflict zones, full of projects which 'cleanse', which 'disentangle'-- emerges as a Western morality story: it concerns the question: what becomes of too many nations and too much nationalism? Thus, the 'troubles' of Eastern Europe become synonymous with too much Romanticism, too much impassioned government.

The discourse of underdevelopment has historically been, and continues to be, a key nexus for the production of knowledge and thus power. Racism, development, civilization, even Marx's demystification all have a common trope and have a similar effect- the notion of geo-politically defined 'backwardness' and worry about the backward self. Local subjects are enmeshed in its discursive net and come to see their selves as a problem to be solved (Mitchell 1988; Fanon 1967 as well as the specifically Bulgarian literature discussed above). Despite the fact that being post-Ottoman is not strictly tantamount to being post-colonial (Todorova 1997: 16-19), looking at it through these frameworks allows us to gain a better view into narratives about domination and victimhood and their relationship to micro and macro processes. In the discourses indicated above, geo-political space is ordered temporally and used as a basis for judging the local subject. These geographic philosophies emerge as a form of

knowing and mapping relationally another space (Said 2003). These narratives join the grander scale of international relations and geopolitical imagination with the intimate arenas of people's imagination.

I would like to argue that when nationalist actors talk to, and about, the international, it is not a 'real' international. They often address types or supposed positions derived from the power dynamics discussed below. Amongst Eastern Europe nationalists, contesting the subordination of the Balkan subject to West European categories of analysis often takes the form of contesting liberalism and tolerance. To do so they inconsistently[77] operationalise the two notions of Europe. The two Europes reflect a paradigm shift in the definition of the category. Since we have entered the age of rights, nationalism and the nation state are deeply problematised. In the new Europe, to Balkanise is a symbol of violence and transgression of individual rights and economic stability for the sake of 'primordial passions'. Bulgarians tried to be European in the context of 'Enlightenment Europe':

> Under the influence of such West European intellectual frameworks as nationalism, fascism and communism, and informed by a subtext of Orientalism, the most powerful voices within Bulgarian nation-building projects attempted to carve out a place for Bulgaria in a presumably superior and culturally privileged Europe.

> (Neuberger 2004: 3)

Being Bulgarian as a consolidation regime has entailed turning one's back on the Orient both within and without.

With the paradigm shift of the notion of European civility, some actors within Bulgarian national space have re-interpreted their understanding in reference to the new co-ordinates. However, the nature of nationalism – specifically the need to assert

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[77] i.e. they do so with regards to some issues such as Turkey's EU entry but not pursue it in others such as the question of Tolerance when addressing the Roma issue.

continuity and authenticity – does not allow sudden changes in dominant paradigms. The notion of national pride or dignity – termed among Buglaria's nationalists as *natzionalno dostoinstv --* becomes a key prism through which nationalists contest these changes in paradigm or the general turn towards liberalism, which they also identify as a Western product. If the 'old Europe' asked for the cleansing of the Oriental subjects, its sudden friendly approach to the Orient asks the mimicking Balkan subject to change its referents to mimic Europe's paradigm shift. However they have to do it without the same historical contingency.

 Thus the idea of 'a Balkan mess', of a set of irrational fancies, is now revealed in its full complexity: as people are caught in shifting requirements of their redemption from being a liminal European self. That is, however, not the position taken by many actors observing the Balkans. They perceive politics as shifting on an irrational axis of emotion and nationalism, which mark its pejorative qualities. This "releases the 'civilized world' from any responsibility or empathy that it might otherwise bestow on more 'reasonable' people" (Todorova 1997: 185).

The difference between 'the two Europes' accounts for some of the contempt, exhibited by my research participants, when talking about the introduction of sharia law, or the presence of many Mosques, in Britain. However, in parallel they expressed their approval of European countries which have instigated measures against politically charged practices such as wearing of the veil. The power dynamics discussed above make the Muslim-cautious or racist West seem consistent in its dominant ideological requirements with a particular kind of Eastern European audience. In a similar fashion, tolerance and multiculturalisms are discussed in relation to their power dynamics rather than their moral imperatives.

Tolerance and rights are important way markers in the consolidation of Eastern Europe's nation states. Ideas about multi-ethnic coexistence are pegged against the idea of self-determination. However this discourse on rights is not at the level at which

anthropologists usually address it – the domain is more philosophical and contrarian and thus I embed my own discussion, following Holmes, in discussing the intellectual roots of these debates. Fundamental tensions are being played out when VMRO contests how the Bulgarian government addresses international actors, claiming rights and contesting tolerance and liberalism (as well as tolerance as liberalism). I will explore these further in the chapter below on tolerance and the Roma.

My research participants often questioned the justice of borders set in the 19th and early 20th centuries *vis-à-vis* the territories' ethnic make-up. Their central argument was that very little attention was paid to these factors when setting the borders of states in the Balkans (instead, the borders were mostly strategic and motivated by other concerns) – led them to conclude that they were unjust, "a dictate" constitutive of the Balkan mess which characterized the period of the early 20th century. In fact, ethnically homogenous borders would have been impossible. As the Ottoman Empire was so mixed, its unmixing and nationalization were processes rather than pre-determined facts. However, the degree of minorities and refugees and the inability of international actors to guarantee their rights formed a base for a counter-discourse which determined the decisions as unjust and destructive. In the debates which follow, this is discussed under the rubric of the affective border which entails fear.

Scholars of Bulgaria, and indeed the region as a whole, have seen nationalisation in itself as the main problem of Ottoman disintegration. This mirrors dominant discourses of the new Europe: had the Balkans stayed in a modernized Ottoman empire or transformed into federalist form, a balance might have been struck so as to create a more peaceful multi-ethnic entity. This conceit is also an extension of previously existing categories of thought which understood the Ottoman empire as a tolerant state, albeit a non-liberal one (Capell in Williams and Waldron 2008; Brown 1996). This hope for coexistence is shared by a number of people within Bulgaria, but not by my research participants.

Nationalism is not a static ideology. Nationalists have moulded their discourses to changing paradigms. Holmes discussed how Le Pen has developed a discursive field– resistant to critical scrutiny – "within which 'racism' is increasingly difficult to define, confront, or oppose" (Holmes 2000: 73). It erodes the clarity of pre-existing moral stances. It is dialogic in construction and takes nationalism further than its historical domains. What is clear is that despite these divergences, the contestation of nationalist politics often effectively shapes public discourses. This defines the problem of studying contemporary nationalism.

My research participants discursively challenged this pre-determined order and re-imagined it, revelling in the inconsistencies between the image and reality of Europe. Britain is asserted to be 'done', internally invaded, France's expulsion of the Roma is greeted with "you couldn't stand them either, could you?" and Merkel's declaration that multiculturalism is 'done' is met with approval 'for finally admitting the evident'. For example, Kostadin took on a vendetta against Mr. Warlick, the American ambassador in Bulgaria and his propensity to 'encourage', to propose and urge certain positions especially in relation to minority and gay rights. This, Kostadin wrote on his blog in a scathing attack, gives the impression that "at any moment his excellency would get angry and would strike us with lighting on our disobedient Balkan humps". Kostadin compares the ambassador's attitude to that of "a general-governor towards his colony". In a separate article, Angel mirrors this phrase, commenting on Warlick's position on Gypsy ghettos as having "the delicacy of an elephant in a glass shop".

The Campaigns: recognizable mouthpieces

As hinted at by the above statements, there is a relationship between the movement, the topics it addresses and the semiotic public domain. They co-constitute each other. The public has a number of roles. It is an inhibiting factor in relation to specific campaigns, as suggested in the quote above, as well as in a different way, when VMRO attempted to speak on the topic of local (*felsher*) doctors and found a distinctly cool

audience. This and similar instances led them to be cautious when taking on issues with a social dimension, although they are considered to be necessary in order to capture public support. As Svetozar noted: "they don't recognize us as being able to speak on social issues". In this respect journalists were a key filter of the public domain. They were particularly active in pruning contentious topics. They filtered access to media channels[78] by connecting topics with particular personalities. The ability to 'be that person' depends on a number of factors. When it came to VMRO, the most important was a dynamic relationship between representatives of the media and VMRO's leaders. VMRO leaders attempted to be recognised as an authority on specific topics. By extension, VMRO could also be recognised as an authority on these topics.

As discussed in chapters 2-2.3 more ruminative discussions of the decay of nation blame almost all citizen for contributing to the condition. More often than not nationalist diagnosticians also identify particular persons or groups of persons as primary causes of the condition. Ideas such as '*vragove na naroda*' (enemies of the people) or *Destroyers of Contemporary Bulgaria* permeate such refection. The latter is a book by Nikola Grigorov. In it he asserts the Bulgarian nation had an optimal or natural progression, which the individuals named in the booklet have transgressed. Grigorov's language is confessedly 'peppery and sharp'. In this and other texts and utterances, 'those to blame' are sometimes internal to the nation: corrupt politicians, nihilist citizens; sometimes they are 'outsiders' both within and without the territory of the state: 'Turks', 'Roma'.

One of the 'transgressions' which lead to the nation's decay is *chujdopoklonichestvo* – bowing down to all things foreign, suiting oneself to various external actors. Grigorov emphasises that it is exactly those foreign agents who 'commit [metaphical] genocide against the Bulgarian people'. Grigorov's key example is Serbia. He denigrates the

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[78] At the same time, as noted by a number of activists, they were mercenary, and given that enough money was paid to a particular media station, one could be featured on it. Thus, for some time VMRO paid Focus News to publish its stories.

current political attitude to Serbia as being excessively positive. The root of his distaste is the Macedonian cause:

> *Even today in the Serbian concentration camp Macedonia, Serbia through its servants and through the most frightening (typically Serbian) police and propaganda terror tries to Serbify through a Serbian-comintern hogwash 1 200 000 Macedonian Bulgarians*

Hence when VMRO engage in the public domain, they attempt to engage external publics and their concerns. The problem with such discourses as self-reflexively defined by Karakachanov in a meeting of VMRO is as follows:

> *we are talking against everyone – even when we don't need to be – Greece, Serbia, Turkey: people will be saying: fuck it, you're trying to get us in trouble with everyone … we haven't said anything only about Romania yet, but if there appears someone who says something .. then we will be the first to comment, and to everyday people we will seem like we are the ones who stand against everyone, which is called xenophobia*

Collective laughter follows this remark. One VMRO leader remarks: "well, we are like this". Karakachanov retorts:

> *Then I suggest that we forget about our political future and make a more unitary sect of similarly minded people. Why should we spend money on making organisations... let's make a rather close group, "us against everyone".*

In view of self-reflexivity such as the critique given by Karakachanov above, VMRO leaders attempted to develop their activism more widely. One of these bifurcations was their activism with regards to the energy market. During my fieldwork they undertook a campaign about E-on, the energy company, and were just initiating one about the chief water supply provider. They formed and publicised their opinions on shale gas extraction. This was built on an earlier history of contending AEZ Kozluduj's closure- a nuclear power plant which was deemed to be outdated by the EU but which had previously guaranteed Bulgaria's energy independence. Its closure was a condition of

entry into the European Union.

VMRO would consider that there was a genre of topics which could be referred to as 'VMRO-ska tema', namely ones which were intrinsically related to the organisation by virtue of its heritage. When it came to speaking about Macedonia, VMRO were often sought out to comment. Similarly, commenting on the Roma or issues pertaining to the Turkish minority was accepted with more ease by journalists and the general public. The main campaign that I witnessed was a VMRO-led petition in favour of a referendum regarding the Bulgarian government's official position on Turkey's EU entry. With regards to issues pertaining to "Bulgarians outside borders"[79] VMRO members would remark that when no one cared, VMRO cared: 'if it weren't for us they will be forgotten'. On another occasion one activist noted: "this is what VMRO is for, to concern itself with such issues". Aside from many other instances of activism related in the following section on Macedonia, Karakachanov often took journalists to villages divided by the Bulgarian-Serbian border to publicize their plight.

The concluding chapters of this thesis give an overview of three topics VMRO could speak on with relative authority. The topics start to typify the organisation and its role in the Bulgarian public arena. They identify fear and threat in ways which resonate with citizens' experiences of Bulgaria. The chapters present the way this is pitched at specific registers. These registers are synchronous with the ones discussed above. As such, they show how far nationalist politics attempt to enter and shape public affects while still conceptualising itself as pursuing civic contention.

This easy recognition of VMRO's entitlement to be the primary authority on particular issues was not undisputed. Dynamics of competition between different publicly recognizable nationalist causes could be observed with respect to a number of events and persons. Representatives of the Bulgarian minority from the 'Western Outerlands'

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[79] This is a label used for people who are believed to be ethnically Bulgarian, but who, as result of historically set borders, have been left outside the Bulgarian state.

came to Sofia. They joined a VMRO led protest in front of parliament. Later that day they took part in a public conversation with ATAKA[80]. The latter event was more widely reported in the media, the work done by VMRO was submerged and ATAKA were able to claim, for the time being, ownership of the cause. On another occasion VMRO were able to mould a personality within the public domain – Spaska Mitrova (I will discuss this event in the following chapters). They organised TV appearances, protests and newspaper articles that explained her plight and its connection to the condition of Bulgarians in Macedonia in general. She came to represent "the plight of Bulgarians in Macedonia". Spaska's story was subsequently 'appropriated' by ATAKA and came to be utilised as part of their political agenda.

The tensions around who would claim this affective capital are relevant for understanding how an organisation becomes recognizable. ATAKA were, for some time, the most popular and populist nationalist political party in Bulgaria. The question of Bulgarian government's positionality with regards to Turkey was part of a wider set of affective, 'ready-to-go' topics which became a fought-over resource by nationalist politicians. Earlier in 2010, when VMRO's petition regarding Turkey's EU entry took place, ATAKA organised a petition against news broadcast in Turkish on national television. A number of people who signed during the Turkey-EU campaign mentioned this, remarking: "we signed a petition about news in Turkish and nothing ever came of it". They were promptly assured that this petition, unlike the other, is in accordance with the law and would be more effective.

News broadcasts in Turkish for the minority were discussed publicly by both ATAKA and VMRO. In that instance ATAKA succeeded in taking ownership of the issue. This is easier to do for an organisation represented in parliament. On 17th May that year the leader of ATAKA, Volen Siderov used his position as an officially elected representative of the people to propose a vote in parliament that would assert that there had been a

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[80] Political party discussed briefly in Chapter 1. For details, see Appendix 1.

genocide of Bulgarians within the Ottoman Empire and that it should be commemorated on the 17th of May. Parliamentary representatives found it difficult to oppose that motion openly, 39 voted for, 26 against and 50 abstained, the motion was not passed.

VMRO had a complicated relationship with ATAKA, as evidenced by the collage made by one party member, featured above and showing Siderov in bed with the Turkish minority party leader Ahmed Dogan. The homoerotic thematic was aimed at subverting Siderov's claim to represent an adequate nationalism. The caricature insinuates that Siderov's genre of nationalism extremised Bulgaria's ethnically Muslim population, driving them to seek protection in Dogan's political party. At the handing in of the Turkey–EU petition, when one journalist asked Karakachanov why VMRO were entering into ATAKA terrain by enacting a more extreme kind of nationalism, he retaliated that "to defend the Bulgarian position" or interests is not extreme. Yet another VMRO leader
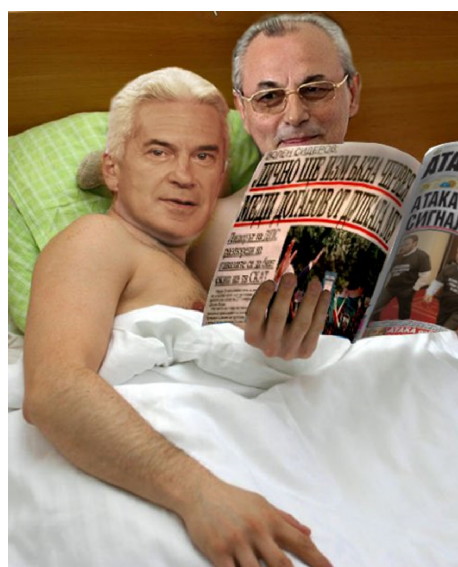

Figure 24 Images from the Turkey–EU campaign.

'reminded' the journalist that France and Germany had also said they would hold a referendum, eliciting a notion of 'old Europe' approval. The worry was also internal. At a meeting, an executive committee member remarked to his peers that they were extremising themselves with the campaign and they had to consider what limitations that engendered in terms of possible future political allegiances. At the beginning of the campaign a key activist Svetozar asked, "would we enter ATAKA's territory if we go ahead with this campaign?" Angel quickly interjected that there is no infringement, "this is ours now".

When VMRO handed in their signatures and started negotiations with parliament with regards to having this request processed, ATAKA seized the opportunity of delays and bureaucratic hurdles to declare that VMRO betrayed the citizens who signed by being 'soft' in negotiations with parliamentary representatives who were obstructing the processing of the petition. They accused Karakachanov of agreeing to postpone the referendum until further notice. ATAKA proposed a project for reformulating the question, attempting to re-appropriate the topic. Karakachanov in retaliation accused Siderov of encouraging ATAKA members to not sign the petition, adding that he is not a psychiatrist so it is difficult for him to comment on Siderov. A selection of people in the VMRO offices spent a day delighted by the thought that Siderov might have not signed the petition and could be revealed as caring more about political partisanship than the importance of the cause. That delight was cut short by an activist's recollection that he had in fact signed at her table.

Organisations that wanted to present themselves as nationalist had to validate their claims in reference to pre-existing issues within the rubric of "Bulgarian nationalism". This was a limited domain – a circumstance which led to intense competition amongst different organisations. At a meeting, one VMRO executive committee member asked: "is SKAT[81] going to form a political party, and if so, would it have a patriotic rhetoric?".

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[81] See Appendix 1 for details.

This concern exhibits the ongoing worry about competing claims to the political capital of nationalist issues. Karakachanov's answer to the question is indicative of his approach to politics: "if there is a project, he is hiding it very well; we drank until 3 am".

Campaigns such as the Turkey-EU petition were not simply causes. One VMRO member keenly proclaimed that it was like "doing elections without elections"[82], a way to enter into 'real life', to move on from the dramas of congress to a more productive conversation. As noted by one member of the executive committee, it provided an exemplary piece of opposition politics. Members of the committee insisted that a leaflet should be given out while the petition was being conducted as a piece of overall publicity for the organisation. It was a broadsheet: large and awkward. It contained not only information about the campaign but also about VMRO as it liked to present itself. It was considered a success by members who remarked on the number of people who came to VMRO as a result of this campaign.

Engaging the Public: Mediums and Sieves

Mainstream television was generally disinterested in reporting events organised by VMRO – stemming from the dynamics of public politics discussed above. Being featured on programmes or in newspapers often came about as a result of their 'recognition' that Angel, Kostadin or indeed Karakachanov had a special 'understanding' of particular issues. Angel frequently took part in programmes relating to Roma minorities, which subsequently meant he was increasingly recognized by the general public in that capacity. This reflected an existing practice within news media to form contact with pre-identified 'specialists'. In his media appearances, Angel often appeared alongside the same guests. This reinforced a pervading sense of a narrow set of actors in the political domain, an 'in-crowd' of public figures. Given a deficit of hard cash (as VMRO at the time I spent there was constantly 'in the red'

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[82] It was too early to campaign for elections.

financially), the accumulated reputation and personal connections of the organisation's leaders was an important resource for VMRO. Both active deputy leaders, Kostadin and Angel, built a reputation and connections with journalists and other public figures. Angel remarked that he had been a guest to a particular TV presenter, Milen Tzvetkov, during his drift across a number of different television channels and programmes.

A party's participation in government guarantees some media attention. While VMRO lost its representatives in parliament, Angel's position on the Sofia City Council[83] was a valuable lever in seeking publicity for specific topics. Within the organisation this was expressed as "in Sofia, VMRO have an *'obshitnski suvetnik'* – it related a degree of influence and ability to engage with the media on a different footing. Angel could submit reports or propose regulation 'playing the statesman' and thus present these proposals to media outlets with some credibility. However, his lothario ways, his propensity to drink and his contact with people on the extreme right wing spectrum informed his reputation to a more acquainted audience in a negative way. That hardly meant that any of this would reach a wider public at this stage or that in fact such behaviour was especially 'taboo' in Bulgarian politics. Although never explicitly acknowledged, women's attachments to a leader extended to the party and this seemed to be deemed useful. In 'gossip mode' with various activists this was revealed as a double edged sword. Early conversations with one person who was key in shaping events would note that the in-crowd gossip at television studios revealed a wider acquaintance with Angel's vices and shortcomings. Given Karakachanov's negative reputation, many members still seemed to believe that only Kostadin – with his more virtuous personality, his family man aura – would help elevate VMRO's reputation.

Kostadin had less political capital in Sofia – compared to Varna, where he had a wide network of personal acquaintances. He was not well known amongst journalists. To bridge this shortcoming, even after he had been in Sofia for some time, Kostadin still

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[83] This was as part of a coalition during local elections between VMRO and GERB. He was later also chosen as the head of a commission on public order.
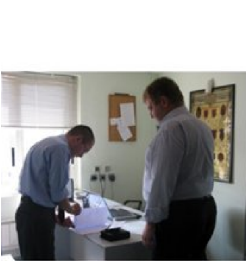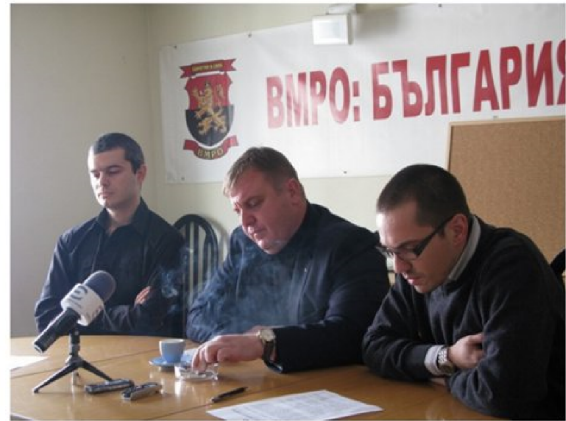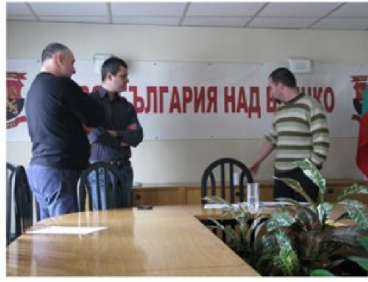
Figure 25 Karakachanov, Angel and Kostadin: working.

utilized his connections in Varna – whether to print publicity material or lead discussions with local political actors. In Sofia he needed to start anew, form a new network. It was a different kind of network. The Sofia *milieu* held the central news media and the campaign development team. It meant having exposure to a wider public.

Both Kostadin and Angel worked at being recognizable mouthpieces for particular issues. Just as Angel became the figure pushed to the forefront of discussion on questions regarding Sofia and the Roma, so Kostadin was at the forefront of discussions to do with energy monopolies and 'the demographic crisis'[84]. As discussed in previous sections, there was a clash of personalities between the two deputy leaders, Konstadin and Angel. The conflict was mediated by Karakachanov and Svetozar. Karakachanov had warned Kostadin not to clash with Angel when in Sofia, but it was futile. Both Karakachanov and Svetozar were thus embroiled in making decisions about the overall policies of VMRO which straddled these two strong personalities' conflicting interests and views. Karakachanov's office featured lengthy tense discussion and became a key space where final decisions would be made on the organisation's course of action on various issues.

The VMRO Creative Unit was formed after congress and consisted of two individuals: Svetozar and Boris. Svetozar was a well-educated VMRO activist. He had a Bachelors degree in Political Science from Sofia University, had worked in television and was doing a PhD on Politics. In line with the existence of an intimate public domain, Svetozar's PhD supervisor was a respected commentator in the political arena. He brought his protégé into his think tank work. Svetozar had pedigree and found that acquaintance with Sofia's political analyst elite raised his profile in Karakachanov's eyes. His attachment in VMRO had waned in previous years, due to the organisation's

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[84] An issue connected to the Roma issue which I will discuss in chapter 4.4.

character, its flirtation with hooliganism and right wing street level associations, and its glorification of a 'tough masculinities' character. However he saw hope for VMRO in the face of Kostadin. The deputy leader took pride in having 'induced' Svetozar to re-engage with VMRO. Kostadin narrated it as symptomatic of his ability to attract talented and educated young people to the organisation.

Svetozar was driven to create a new way of work. He seemed frustrated with the lack of order and structure in everyday interactions at 'Pirotska 5'. For a short time he worked in the open plan office on Angel's side of the horse-shoe. He found the noise and a constant flow of people difficult when working to a tight schedule. When he eventually moved to 'the other side of the corridor' it was welcome self-isolation. The spatial re-distribution removed him from the daily conversations and debates of the *org otdel*, of Angel and his cohorts. It placed him next door to Kostadin's office. The movement to and fro between the two offices became a physical representation of their ongoing dialogue. This should not assume a disconnect between Angel and Svetozar. Svetozar was heavily associated with Kostadin by activists in Sofia, but Angel and him had a long term relationship and worked together in an ongoing fashion – over the phone, live, over Skype. Svetozar appended comments about Angel's way of work with "don't get me wrong, he's a friend and he has many good qualities". As tensions between Angel and Kostadin escalated, putting everyone who worked on the fifth floor in the middle, early attempts at a morning creative meeting, at which VMRO positions and news for the day could be discussed and decided, were met with slow disintegration. Svetozar found himself mediating between the two leaders. In addition he found it frustrating unravelling the chain of command at VMRO, the sense of who edits and who has the rights to veto certain material. Tita, the secretary, would every so often edit something he had written. The acting press secretary was sometimes there, sometimes not.

Svetozar's appearance at VMRO did re-formulate the way the organisation worked. He took over much of Orlin's work reforming the email bulletin which went out to

members[85], editing publicity material and coming up with slogans and graphics. At one painstaking meeting Orlin and Svetozar argued for the best part of an hour about copy-editing the text on a bookmark commemorating the Treaty of Neuilly. In another instance, Orlin made a promotional video which Svetozar criticized and ultimately refused to post on the official website as part of the campaign. Early into his job, Svetozar decided he wanted to introduce a person who is there "only for the job". The second member of the creative team, Boris dealt almost exclusively with the dissemination of publicity throughout the internet, primarily through the organisation's Facebook page. He performed some copy editing. Svetozar emphasised that if he wasn't there the place would grind to a halt.

Whilst VMRO's internal ethic has been undergoing a change since 1990 towards a more professional image (Konakchieva 2003) , when I arrived at VMRO, the work ethic was still familial and activist. People working at VMRO attended each other's weddings. The weddings featured a large number of attendees from the organisation. Older activists working at Pirotska 5 joked that their children would go on to marry. Professional and personal relations were overlaid by paid relations and work 'for the cause'.

Svetozar and Boris were ambivalent about their engagement with VMRO. This was a divergence from the organisation's customary fusion of work and activism. Both of them kept their employment under wraps in their wider social and professional circles. When I asked Boris, a year or so into his time at VMRO, how he reconciled his job with his beliefs he remarked - "it's just a job". He played on his outsider role - in one instance building a wall of radical literature around himself, in another carrying prayer beads adorned with the Turkish flag. He jostled verbally with anyone who tried to have the best of him. Eventually Boris' presence was accepted without him becoming part of the 'family'.

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[85] The audit of membership conducted by the *org team* around congress provided a database.

VMRO's new website, launched in spring 2010 exemplified the change in VMRO practices brought about by Svetozar and Boris. It presented VMRO's key agendas and was managed by the creative unit. After the initial period of establishing practices the organisation was presented online across a number of themes: current daily positions, news articles about VMRO, news about VMRO structures across the country and 'blog entries'. Blog entries were usually on themes which mattered for the organisation, but were not quite 'newsworthy'. The right side panel of the web page featured banners presenting VMRO's key campaigns. Members had to contact Boris and Svetozar if they wanted to feature content on the site. Boris and Svetozar then decided whether it would be presented on the site. As the site established the official image of the organisation, this sieving process was fundamentally formative. Reflecting its importance, what would be featured was also shaped by an ongoing negotiation between Svetozar, Kostadin and Angel. These negotiations were marked the tensions between the two leaders discussed above and formed a conduit for the conflict between them.

Svetozar employed an economic logic when judging the viability of various enterprises and positions. This was separate from his understanding of what would be beneficial in the current political climate or what would fit within his personal (strongly developed) understanding of a patriotic-nationalist organisation. He was always concerned with economies of time. Svetozar constantly had too little of it and thus disciplined those around him to interact in a time effective way. He did not work with activists on developing their ideas or pushed them on delivering something they had promised to do and had not delivered yet. Activist activity which needed few people and was not over-ambitious on resources was the default. He reminded those around him: "think in terms of our limitations". Svetozar propagated the use of 'happening' events (not protests) as key to the organisations' political activism. VMRO simply couldn't gather the necessary crowd for most occasions for him to be convinced that events declared as protests would not look pathetic. The art of working at VMRO, he would state, is the art of working with the existence of roughly three active people and convincing others

there were many more.

Svetozar's ideal for VMRO was that it need not depend on the personal charisma of its leaders or on populism. There are, he remarked, people in large cities in Bulgaria who would vote for 'a modern movement", which can lean on civic principles and well thought-through national campaigns that can assert a Bulgarian position filled with the promise of pride and development. Not everyone in VMRO agreed. At the conclusion of the Turkey-EU petition, in an internal meeting, one leader noted that such "shall-we-say-populist or popular" campaigns can be very effective. Yet another leader however would declare at a subsequent meeting "let us not talk empty words and tilt towards populism … we should be flexible not slippery".

Presented above are some of the dynamics which, at the time of my fieldwork, impacted the way VMRO campaigns were authored and presented. In the material which follows, the different campaigns reflect distinctive elements of that productive nexus. Chapter 4.1 addresses the dynamic relationship between the affective Ottoman past and VMRO's campaign regarding Turkey's EU entry. Subsequently 4.2 addresses how campaigns about the Roma inform a tense public discussion of abjection and internal cleansing in which the imperatives of "the nation's survival" are discursively pitched against an international rights regime. Finally, Chapter 4.3 looks at other ways in which VMRO attemptes to highlight aspects of Bulgaria's past which are less well known in the public domain by defining an affective border between Bulgaria and its Western neighbouring states.

Chapter 4.1 Affects of the post-Ottoman: Narrating the present through the past

A Bulgarian, an American, a German and a Turk climb to the top of a skyscraper.

For America! – said the American, jumped and died

For Germany! – said the German, jumped and died

For Bulgaria! - said the Bulgarian, and pushed the Turk!

(popular joke)

The campaign for a referendum on Bulgaria's official position regarding Turkey's entry into the EU allowed citizens and politicians to engage with, and mould, the affective heritage of being post–Ottoman. Most of the immediate consequences of the Ottoman Empire are gone, leaving Bulgaria with a generalised underdevelopment which is often blamed on its 'Oriental past' and the emotive politics of remembered violence. Thus, as argued by Todorova (1997) being post–Ottoman is mostly a heritage of perception. The first dimension of that heritage is a pervasive sense of threat and a continuing sense of having been injured with no recompense. These notions are semantically tied to an assessment of the nation's health.

In the interpretation of a number of my informants, the national 'we' is still sleeping or has fallen back to sleep. This, for them, suggests the need for *buditeli* in contemporary times. *Buditeli* is a term born in the Bulgarian National Revival period which roughly translates to 'those who awaken others'. It is a strong discourse within the Bulgarian public arena. The Minister of Culture utilised it during commemorations on the 1st of November 2010 by stating: "we need contemporary *buditeli*". One of my research participants would angrily exclaim on numerous occasions that people remains sleeping, that "we are a nation of slaves". Another, would state that "we had been slaves for five centuries, how can we expect to awaken for one?". Those who defend changing the term Turkish 'slavery' to 'occupation' in Bulgarian textbooks are labelled

spiritual janissaries, referring to the emotive history of converting young Christian boys to be Muslim soldiers/enforcers. It follows that those who "do not know who they are", who do not have respect for their national history are consigned to bend to outside influences, they do not uphold their nation's dignity and "uniquely determined position". Those who do not take a standpoint grounded in recognized Bulgarian history are labelled traitors to themselves and the nation. An emotive lexicon derived from the Revival Period is utilised to diagnose and determine the cure for an ill nation. On a number of occasions, I heard VMRO members exclaiming that Kostadin is a modern day Vasil Levski and thus embodies a hope for a revival of the nation. As well as showing the salience of the symbols from the revival, such utterances foregrounded Kostadin's success in pitching his mode of leadership within existing categories of analysis – fitting Klapp's (1964) understanding of how leadership matches existing frames of reference.

Although it's easy to deconstruct the diexes of the national "we" (Billig 1999: 93–85) and the focus on national particularity – bemoaning its determinism – it is more important (as I have argued throughout this thesis) to highlight how this reflects existing national subjectivities. The discourses which will be discussed below suggest national subjects are implicated in sustaining and cultivating an affective engagement with the nation and its history. Ideally they need to cultivate pride in order to author a

Figure 26 On the left: the illustration from a newspaper article showing a controversial map featured in Turkish school books; On the right: VMRO's poster for the Turkey-EU referendum. It reads: 70 000 000 turks, 7 000 000 bulgarians, Bulgaria disappears

healthy national subjectivity. However, as the material below shall show, they might also need to embody vigilance, wariness and fear. VMRO invites Bulgarian citizens to associate their affective states with their campaigns. The campaigns then offer the possibility of transforming fear into pride and dignity.

A number of the aspects of such discourses can be seen in discussions surrounding Turkish soap operas. One of the reasons VMRO members often gave for opposing the soap operas was that they present an overly positive vision of Turkey. This, in their view, was inappropriate – given the Ottoman era history of violence. The soap operas were interpreted as part of Turkey's foreign policy. One commentator emphasized that Bulgaria and Turkey should focus on mutual tolerance and coexistence. He didn't perceive a threat in the muting of the history of violence and slavery. Others considered enforced tolerance to be an attempt to gloss over what they saw as a real threat and a still raw history of violence. For them, this constituted a combination of foolish idealism and *rodotsupnitchestvo* – defecting from one's ancestor-line.

When the Turkish ambassador presented the reasoning for Turkey's entry into the EU at the European commission centre in Sofia, he faced a number of questions. Aside for inadvertently admitting that Ottoman history was the elephant in the room (one he tried to avoid by talking only about economic rationalities), he was asked about the lack of schemes for making amends between Turkey and Bulgaria, such as those which exist between it and Greece. This was similarly commented on by an audience member in another discussion. These memories of violence form the Turkish as outside the 'skin of the community' within Ahmed's (2004) terminology, as a threatening and dominating other. This creates a specific, acute local sensitivity to Turkish dominance, entwined with emerging concerns about extreme Islam. From the Eastern European conception, "extreme Islam" had different connotations.

Within another strand of the discourse, the assertion that Turkey was definitely not European prevailed through that campaign. Thus, a variety of people asserted that it

was within a different civilizational arena and, as one commentator termed it: "political union can't exist if there exist civilizational conflicts". An objectivist discourse of geography was commonly utilized. It derived from the pre-existing power relations (discussed in Chapter 4) which differentiated Europe and Asia. Proponents of the campaign would often note that Turkey's territory is only 3% in Europe, the rest - signified by Anatolia - is not as civilized as the Istanbul elite, and is not within the classical boundaries of Europe. At the press conference which announced that VMRO was ready to hand in the petition, Karakachanov responded to a series of questions by a sceptical journalist declaring "we'll get you a geography book". Thus VMRO tried to elicit an objective domain aside from the affective history of the Ottoman "Empire. A rather humorous subversion of this discourse was enacted by a discussion participant who remarked: "they [Turkey] show up on the European stock market, we (Bulgarians) don't."

Another "objective concern" which however overlaps with the affective was defined by my research participants as follows: Since Erdogan's government has come into power it has carved out a new path for Turkey, a neo-imperial one. They further clarified that his foreign policy can be termed neo-Ottoman, substituting military for economic might. VMRO emphasised that if the large and powerful Turkish state were to be allowed into the EU it would disrupt the existing hierarchy of power and overwhelm the institutions due to its sheer size. They also asserted that there is a large "savage" Anatolian population which would "flood" the country if the border was opened. These discourses present these factors as objective and realistic projections. Thus, they aim to give rise to anxiety by presenting the possibility of a new international arena which is more threatening to 'us'. The "objectivist discourse" was extended by the affective assertion that a powerful Turkey led to the possibility of "a new Turkish slavery".

'We' The Slaves or 'Robska Psihika': Affects and effects of the past

> *I am very curious, is there a Jew who would glorify the Holocaust or an Armenian who would reject the Armenian genocide. Damn it! Are, we the Bulgarians the biggest fools and sell outs in this world?!*
>
> an informant's reaction to the proposal that the phrase "Turkish occupancy" should be used instead of "Turkish slavery" in history books

I have so far argued that the past is affectively charged and Bulgarian national subjectivity is marked by the Ottoman experience through a legacy of perception. The material of that history is told by history books and public intellectuals. It is re-used and enacted in contemporary avenues. Lay notions, such as *robska psihika* (slave psychology) propose an aspect to Bulgarian citizens which makes them passive and unwilling to revolt in the face of foreign influence or outrageous abuses by politicians. 'Who we are' seems to be part-slave, part-European, fully marginal, fully affected by that history. However, as indicated above, that affect does not appear out of thin air. It is authored by memories related by elderly relatives and mediated memories in history books or across TV channels. There is a resistance to the modification of themes in these narratives in order to fit European liberal criteria. This can be observed amongst day-to-day citizens and certainly amongst my informants. This reveals that they consider the affect to be just and appropriate.

Many people who signed the petition led by VMRO did so simply stating: "we hate the Turks, of course we'll sign". On the 12th of January 2010, one of VMRO's ex-deputies came to the central offices. After glancing at the poster for the Turkey-EU campaign on the conference table he nodded approvingly, remarking "the Bulgarian hates the Turkish flag, it reaches into his guts". A few months later, at the same table, after a day of gathering signatures one man remarked: "'Look, this is why I am like this, when I hear this music, when I watch this clip I have goose bumps". He was commenting on a famous film, *Vreme Razdelno* (A Time of Separation), based on an infamous book

which came second in Bulgaria's version of 'the Big Read'.[86] In the film a crescendo of

bagpipes and cinematic tension reveals how a Bulgarian community in the Rodope

Mountains is converted to Islam by a band of janissaries[87]. Some Christian subjects of

the Ottoman sultan would rather die, some convert. Acceptance is illustrated by

donning "Muslim clothes": a full veil for the women and an Ottoman style turban, a

precursor to the fez, for the men. This kind of scene is part of the affective markers for

a number of my participants.

While coordinating the gathering of signatures for the referendum, the organiser for

Sofia continuously played the song *Batak*[88], performed by the previously discussed

rock group *Epizod*. The song poignantly and affectively tells the story of boy left an

orphan after an infamous massacre in 1876 in the eponymous town. A aide memoire

was made some time after the massacre featuring a survivor of the events (see below).

The bones morbidly spell out: "remains from 1876, Batak 1927". More recently, the

bones of those who died in Batak were canonized by the Bulgarian Branch of the

Eastern Orthodox Church. A new icon was painted featuring the saints (see below), a

crowd of martyrs to the national uprising. The story of this instance of violence

remains and resonates. One man engaging with a conversation about the topic and the

photo below remembers being taken to the museum in Batak and dreaming about it

Figure 27. Left: the new martyr-saints of Batak; Right: a memory aid of the massacre's victims.

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[86] Vazov authored 'Under the Yoke' which was voted first in Bulgaria's 2009 'Big read' which also defines the Bulgarian public's understanding of their ancestors' existence under the Ottomans.
[87] For definition of see page 243.
[88] It is also based on work by Ivan Vazov.

after, another how he read a book describing the events notes: "I read this book in one go. During the whole time I had a lump in my throat". The emotional response above indicates and describes the affective potential of such histories.

A young member of the organisation authored a booklet commemorating the April uprising during the Turkey campaign. It was printed in limited edition for free by a friend of Kostadin's. In it, the VMRO member includes a poem by the aforementioned Ivan Vazov, as well as, an infamous affective description by American Journalist MacGahan of the aftermath of the massacre. This 19th century description, together with Gladstone's pamphlets during the debates around the Eastern Question, are fragments of the activism which rallied the consciousness of Western Europe in 19th century to concede to a revolution in Eastern Europe against the Ottoman Empire. The 21st century booklet which echoes the events of the 19th century was handed out at the Sofia University St. Kliment and Methodius (which the author attended) and at the tables of the petition. It was an active embodiment of the affective memory of violence and death. It explicitly imbues the campaign with historical resonances. A sense of the history elicited can be given by the following passage:

> There was not a roof left, not a whole wall standing; all was a mass of ruins, from which arose as we listened a low plaintive wail, like the "keening" of the Irish over their dead, that filled the little valley and gave it voice. We had the explanation of the thin curious sound when we afterwards descended into the village. We looked again at the heap of skulls and skeletons before us, and we observed that they were all small and that the articles of clothing intermingled with them and lying about were all women's apparel. ... The skulls were nearly all separated from the rest of the bones - the skeletons were nearly all headless. These women had all been beheaded. We descended into the town. Within the shattered walls of the first house we came to a woman sitting upon a heap of rubbish rocking herself to and fro, wailing a kind of monotonous chant, half sung, half sobbed, that was not without a wild discordant melody. In her lap she held a babe, and another child sat beside her patiently and silently, and looked at us as we passed with wondering eyes.

This affective history was judged by some VMRO members to be somewhat less resonant these days than in the past. This was attributed partly to the influence of Turkish soap operas. On a visit to my grandmother, we were sitting chatting, when in a well-known manoeuvre from my childhood she grabbed the remote and switched on the TV, right on the hour. She didn't seem to mind that the series was Turkish. In this she confirmed the much maligned fact that, as Karakachanov once said, "they no longer remember *Time of Separation* when they think of the Turks, they now think of *Listopad* "[89]. The soaps become so eponymous with good feeling towards Turkey that at one discussion about the petition, a VMRO member remarked: "maybe the fans of the TV series will prove more numerous and even if we had a referendum, we would lose".

At the tables of the petition, those gathering signatures came to know 'the angry granny response'. This featured elderly women who had re-defined their semiotic associations when it came to the Turkish and thus protested loudly against "the sowing of hatred" by the petition. One participant dismissively joked that these grannies, being irradiated by Turkish series were, before, irradiated for years by communism, proposing a sort of permanent damage to the elderly by the manipulations of the previous regime. This damage was also the topic of an infamous gaffe by the finance minister, Diankov, who referred to people in the country as "bad people material".

The early enthusiasm for the series, and the subsequent acquisition of Turkish series by most main channels, seems to have been dampened a year later by the emergence of resentment towards this sudden dominance based on the previous affective terrain. This is exemplified in numerous Facebook groups demanding that these series should be taken off the air. One group proclaimed "I am fed up with Turkish TV series" racking up to 145,918 'likes'; others were riled at the transmission of these pieces of "foreign

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[89] Yaprak Dokumu – one of the most emblematic and popular Turkish series.

propaganda", especially when series were screened on the 3rd of March, the day commemorating Bulgaria's liberation from Ottoman rule. In another instance, field participants posted on their Facebook walls, and discussed in person, an article in the Bulgarian edition of Deuche Welle (Dimitrova and Andreev: 2011). The article discussed the series as an effective tool of Turkish diplomacy, an instrument of new domination by a calculating, neo-Ottoman Turkish elite. At a Red house discussion about Turkish series, a BtV90 executive announced that in fact they will listen to this discontent; they were commissioning a season of Bulgarian series which was loudly proclaimed in adverts on the channel as I was leaving fieldwork. Those seemed less concerned with family dramas, and more with mafia, crime and business deals. These daily dramas show that despite contestations, Ottoman affective capital remained very much active, a 'live wire' which could be politically strummed for effect.

Academics in Bulgaria were part of an escalating conflict regarding the diffusion of these affective states. Bulgarians seem to be being 'nudged' to be reflexive or

Figure 28. VMRO's long standing banner: "Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia"

reconciliatory. History books were being re-written so children no longer 'learn their affect'[91]. Their projects were funded, often by international bodies, under the rubric of de-mythologizing Bulgarian history as a way to create a better model of coexistence between people from different ethnic groups in the country. Academics in Bulgaria were also subjected to international pressure to reform their models of work. A recent

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[90] One of the main TV stations. They were pioneers in launching the series.
[91] An infamously instance among my participants was that of the phrase "Turkish slavery" being taken out of history books.

European Science Foundation report reviewed the Humanities and Social science unit of the Bulgarian Academy of Science. The report aligns 'the international' with good practice. Bulgarian scientists were told to innovate by interacting with this arena. Particular emphasis was put on the need to de-nationalise local knowledge production practices (European Social Science Foundation 2009: 8-11).

To elucidate this point I will present as an example Desislava Lilova's presentation from a conference on Political Myth held in the Sofia University in 2009. It was a perfect example of a myth-breaking approach. A confident, erudite piece of research, it deconstructed the commonly used triad of "Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia" which often (as in my participant's long standing banner) denotes the ideal national territories of Bulgaria. Lilova examined the geographic notions that existed in newspapers and books in the 19th century. She presented widely divergent sets of maps featuring these toponyms and discussed how Europe equated Bulgaria with Moesia. She then explains that revivalist scholars in the 19th century responded by starting to use the triad, thus claiming wider territories.

Lilova's argument expanded beyond the material to present a strong preference towards a multinational ideal as a framework for understanding the region. Although her analysis explored how various historical public figures shaped a national imaginary, she ultimately foregrounded her own preference for an ideal shared Balkan ancestor-land, "European Turkey", arguing that this should have been the nexus of identification for the populations in the regions. She thus ended her presentation by confronting a national echelon, a poem by the national writer Ivan Vazov entitled 'Where is Bulgaria? She proposed that ideological capital should be invested in the question mark implied in the poem.

In contrast, my participants were concerned with establishing a basis for national pride and dignity, of common morality and virtues. A document outlining the aims of VMRO authored in early 2007 defines the problems that they, as a nationalist organisation, need to address. Key within it is the question of how to effect a better quality of life for

Bulgaria's citizens, one which would also make our life "here" equal to other European countries. They define their role as akin to that of civil society which can keep a check on social individualism with its anti-societal forces utilizing the "national cultural canon".

Observant of the de-reifying tendencies discussed above, VMRO and other nationalist organisations presented themselves as the defenders of particularity and of citizens' affective states. In this way they also presented themselves as defending the memory of the community, and thus by extension, the national community itself. They did so under the rubric of defending national dignity. Bulgarian academics, NGOs and politicians were considered to be only mediators of the real threat: an international liberal regime. Local actors were denigrated for *chujdopoklonichestvo* -bowing down to foreign objects. Thus VMRO activists often exhibited hostility towards academics they knew to be propagating de-constructivist analysis. The inception of these conflicts is exemplified by the scandal 'The *Myth of Batak*'[92].

The Red House, the de facto centre for debate at the centre of Sofia, became "the seat of liberals"—an accusation pronounced with resentment – of frustrated debates which only seem to concretize the ideological boundary. Academics who were seen to be mimicking liberal notions were denigrated (rather than given the respect normally shown towards a public intellectual in Bulgaria). Nationalists stated academics were 'selling out'. In the case of the myth Batak, activists "discovered" that the project was partially funded by Turkish money. This confirmed their prejudice. Specific NGOs and academics become infamous for their deconstructivist stance amongst the nationalist milieu. Paradoxically, both academics and nationalists believed the other side in the

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[92] In early 2007, a conference was set to present work supervised by German academic Ulf Brunnbauer and conducted by a Bulgarian Art Historian. It was held in the public debate venue the Red House. In the piece of research the authors present a famous massacre of the Bulgarians by Turkish forces in its elements as myth, as construction. The youth organisation of VMRO went to the venue to protest this. The commotion set off a series of public debates on the question of sensitive history, engendering comments such as: "you wouldn't joke about the Holocaust so why this"?

debate to be dominant in social life and thus inversely considered themselves rebellious outliers within the motifs of the general public.

VMRO saw their voice as unjustly silenced in these new domains. Kostadin attended a conference on the veil and Islam in Bulgaria organised by the Helsinki committee. With a confidence derived from extensive research on the topic, he believed he provided an intelligent perspective and was heartened by acknowledgements of the validity of his views amongst the conference participants on the day of the event. However when this debate was subsequently summarised by the organisers, his participation was reduced to a lukewarm, (and what he considered to be) a misleading sentence.

VMRO's contestation was built on a differentiation between Liberal and Conservative Europe. They defined themselves to be fighting international liberalism and thus liberal Europe while at the same time identifying Bulgaria within the domain of Conservative Europe. This identification was not without its problems. The nationalist position was not considered 'sufficiently modern' to exist in the contemporary world. A professor in history at a debate about Turkey's EU entry at the Sofia University concluded her presentation with the question:

> *do we have the right at all to say yes or no to Turkey, given that, at odds with western humanist tradition, we here [in Bulgaria] assume that nationalism in the twenty first century is a positive phenomenon?*

This is analogous to often heard phrases at tables gathering signatures about the petition, "who are we to say anything?", or in similar spirit: "let Western Europe reject them". In fact, people responding to the petition seemed consistently puzzled by the idea Bulgaria could be making or should be involved in making the decision about Turkey. The puzzlement was fuelled – it seems – by a mixture of their own recent insecurities about EU belonging, and a long-standing worry about belonging to Europe and a sense of Bulgarian irrelevance. The professor's positive interpretation of Turkish behaviour was based on its congruence with international standards and thus (in her

interpretation) commonly agreed on civilizational norms. Various strands of the discourses about Turkey's EU entry elicited Europe as an important marker in their positionality. Nationalists implicitly rejected the paradigm shift in Europe's understanding of Oriental others and rights. While they saw this as a matter of dignity and consistency, other actors within the national domain construed nationalists' positions as old fashioned.

In these debates, the fez came alive as a symbol of the various contestations. It was utilized as a subversive reminder of the oriental subject, which nationalists claimed Turkey continued to embody; if not in the 3% of Turkey –wealthy, erudite Istanbul, then in the short-phrase for the Orient – Anatolia. The first draft of the poster for the Turkey–EU campaign was entitled "Fez in EU?". Kemal Atatürk banned the fez to affirm the idea that 'the Turk' is civilized within the new dictum of the era (Nereid 2011). Its use here served as a symbolic denial of the possibility of this shift. The continuous use of the fez accentuated the rhetoric of Turkey under Erdogan as neo-Ottoman. The fez was used by VMRO as a way to subvert institutions– it was added to the logo of BtV when the contents of its emissions was deemed hostile to nationalism. It was also collaged onto the heads of errant politicians such as President Parvanov, in protest at his decision to take part in a coalition government with MRF (the Movement for Rights and Freedoms) – the political party which represents citizens of Bulgaria who are ethnically Turkish. The symbol was re-appropriated by the ethnically Turkish Bulgarian citizens, brothers Uzairovi, who wore fezes when handing in documents asking for the formation of a new Turkish minority party.

VMRO did not have only a negative attitude towards Bulgaria's Muslim citizens. Ulian, the organisational secretary, told me of friendships and collaborations on a local political level when he was an organiser in the North- West[93]. Similarly, at VMRO's congress people who represented heavily mixed regions spoke of a need to consider

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[93] An area with a large Muslim minority.

the specific character of the issues there. However, the sense of threat and the dialectically narrated need for vigilance by nationalists stemmed from the sensitive skin of the national community which, having only recently healed, is still pink and vulnerable. It enacts the remaining suspicion that these are the people who 'injured us before' and they are not to be trusted again. Thus we also need to look at the perceived contemporary threat posed by Turkey in order to understand why and how history is elicited.

The Need for Vigilance: Defining contemporary threats

The concerns about the subduing of Ottoman history mix with contemporary events, which provide VMRO with occasions to elaborate a threat and to conduct redemptive action. During the early months of my fieldwork, it emerged that Turkish activists in Dobrich[94] had built a monument to the fallen Ottoman soldier. It had no planning permission. It was not a monument registered with the institute for national heritage. Kostadin warned that this could not stand. Members in Sofia prepared to lend a hand in demolishing it. The youth organisation spent an evening discussing strategies. Women were banned from going due to the possibility of violence. The men were excited at the possibility of an adventure. The local council baulked: faced with the chance of direct violence, they sent a tractor to demolish the make-shift monument. Kostadin proudly announced that he had a role in negotiating this outcome. A rumour emerged that a VMRO member had driven the tractor. Months later, the same activists, brothers Uzairovi[95] who build the monument, entered a request to form a political party called 'Ottoman' in Bulgaria. VMRO made moves to block this as they had done with previous such attempts.

VMRO had led a number of earlier campaigns concerning the Turkish minority– one

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[94] An area of Bulgaria in the north of the country. It is part of the region for which Kostadin was responsible.
[95] Later, I came across an article that these same brothers were arrested in Germany on charges of trafficking.

opposing broadcasting news in Turkish on the national TV channel in November 2009 supplemented the older "Bulgarian language – official for everyone". They produced anti-mosque stickers and spoke against loud calls of prayers in city centres. In March 2009 Angel wrote an article against a new law which might allow mosques, which have so far been preserved as cultural monuments, to open their doors as places of active worship. He highlighted the sites' palimpsestic nature, that many of them, before being mosques were Christian or pagan (Thracian) temples. He delved directly into the post-Ottoman discourse with regards to the Eksi mosque in Stara Zagora, remarking that the city was completely torched and destroyed by Turkish forces in the wars of liberation and its population killed mercilessly. To reinstate it would be insensitive.

In early 2009, when I began fieldwork, the key themes of discussion around contemporary threats emanating from neighbouring Turkey were the presence of radical Islam and MRF's possible re-election into government. In July 2009, election time, my field diary screams forth a saturation with the media spectacle: the infamous orchestrated scandals and posturing between political party leaders, the personalities who seem to dominate: Iane Ianev (the leader of RZS), Ahmed Dogan (the leader of MRF) and Volen Siderov (the leader of ATAKA) caught up in a variety of "ethnic scandals". MRF had been a coalition partner for a number of previous governments, a matter which was resentfully noted by a number of people in Bulgaria. Bojko Borisov, as the candidate prime minster and the "tough-guy" head of the newly founded and 'messianic' GERB played into it by promising no such coalitions.

MRF had come to be associated not only with "unconstitutional[96] ethnic politics", but also as a funnel for "foreign interests" (meaning Turkey). As one participant liked to state in arguments about Turkey's EU entry, "Turkey already has representation within the European parliament", meaning though their participation in Bulgarian politics. In VMRO's primary campaign leaflet about Turkey's EU entry, this was listed as "Turkey

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[96] It was commonly remarked that parties which represented ethnicities, not citizens were banned in Bulgaria's constitution.

interferes in the internal affairs of Bulgaria". It built on a wider, mediated awareness of MRF's corrupt nature. In one 2009 election newscast, a journalist queried why there were so many voting centres in Turkey (for Bulgarians abroad) and so few in places which have high concentrations of Bulgarian students and migrants (such as in Germany).

Similarly, various citizens spoke of bus-loads of people, coming from Turkey during election time, who had double passports and hence could vote, but who did not live in Bulgaria and had not done so for at least a decade. In the Bulgaria media, this was widely termed as 'voting tourism'. The majority of the 'unacceptable voters' were individuals who are the product of the re-naming process – a process of culturally cleansing the minority Pomak Muslim population predominantly in the Rodoppe mountains of Bulgaria in the very last years of a largely nationalist Socialist regime – a modern fixing of 'national subjects' (as per Cowan 2008).[97] VMRO's activism on Turkish 'voting tourism' included a blockade of the Bulgarian-Turkish border before elections in 2007 and proposals to ban voting of those who hold dual citizenship. It was implicitly understood that these election-time tourists would be casting their ballot for MRF.

Stories circulate, whispered over lunches and shouted over drinks that to work in agriculture in places where MRF held the key ministries of agriculture and forests and environment, you had to be a member of MRF. A VMRO protest chant echoes that sentiment: "I predi i sega DPS e mafia" (now and before, MRF is a mafia). Almost synonymous with the party is its oligarchic leader, Ahmed Dogan (pictured in Figure 24 in a tight embrace with Volen Siderov). In the elections which followed my entry in fieldwork, Dogan was at the centre of a scandal (it would not be his last). At a

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[97] Here, I do not try to give an accurate account of this minority, but to indicate their presence within and a national and nationalist consciousness. For a good ethnographic discussion of the topic see Ghodsee (2008) and Neuburger (2011). See also: MICROCON project in Contemporary Conflicts and Ethnic-religious Tensions, Project 6: Muslim integration in Bulgaria and Serbia.

gathering in the heart of his electoral stronghold, Dogan, while drunk, declared that he distributes the state's funds while his representatives do almost no work. In the studio of a popular Bulgarian TV program, *Seizmograf*, RZS leader Iane Ianev, the yet to be elected culture minister Vejdi Rashidov and investigative journalist Emil Koshlukov discussed the scandal. The participants, following a general trend, touched on corruption charges against Dogan. One participant notes, although Dogan may have had an authentic position once, he has by now 'forgotten himself'. Ianev enters the discussion with a sound bite, declaring himself against the 'corruption slavery' thus attempting to access the post-Ottoman affective capital. He cements the dictum by referring to the situation in villages in South Bulgaria as 'Anatolian': as 'feudal', not Bulgarian. Mirroring these public debates one woman signed the petition remarking: "I know what it is like to work for a Turkish company in Bulgaria".

The Turkish minority population was politicized even further as a result of an election-time scandal in March 2009. RZS with its leader Iane Ianev introduced into the public arena another ethnic issue: "Extreme Islam". It referred to the arrest of a series of people in villages in South Bulgaria for preaching an extreme version of Islam, radicalising the moderate Muslim population. I heard about this in my first visit to VMRO's headquarters. The head of the youth organisation in early 2009, before he left during the RZS coalition, Petur was impassioned, angry. He had known about this, had visited these villages, seen the radical literature. No one had concerned themselves with the topic before. The danger "was real", but it was dragged out into the public domain as an orchestrated scandal. For him it was proof that Iane Ianev was sent by DANS, the national secret service. Through this scandal RZS introduced themselves as a new political party.

The issues above, were widely known and referred to. As such, they were the framework dialogically to which the campaign against Turkey's EU entry was constituted as an event. The notion of minority politics corrupted by outside interference was consistently referenced in lay discussions about the petition. Thus,

while the notion of danger is entanglement with the affective heritage of being post-Ottoman, it lays claim to seemingly objective dangers and realities. At the tables for the petition activists were consistently explaining why the assertion "the day Turkey becomes part of the EU, Bulgaria will stop being" is not 'just' an affect, but pertains to real dangers. The campaign combined 'the objective' with the affective as well as the past with the present.

Galvanizing the Public, Submitting the Petition

The act of materialising and funding the campaign should not be taken for granted or ignored. Facebook is full of Bulgarian-language groups 'speaking' against Turkey's entry into the EU, against Turkish news and ones simply stating 'We hate Turkey'. This is what Pavel described as 'internet patriotism'. For him it meant very little, and was of almost no value. Enacting the campaign, gathering signatures required energy and compromises.

The process of gathering signatures was mechanic and formulaic, akin to the audit work during congress. This was largely due to the fact that VMRO were petitioning for a referendum. A new law had made this possible. The party engaged the state, which entailed entering into a particular bureaucratic process. As the first referendum to be requested in line with the new law, the petition was an innovative political strategy. At first, when Angel suggested it, Svetozar and Kostadin were sceptical. They were wary of the potential embarrassment of not reaching the targets required by law. Angel pushed. They had just declared themselves against news in Turkish and proposed, yet again, a change in voting laws which would limit voting by dual nationals of Turkey and Bulgaria at a press conference at VMRO's headquarters. There was momentum in this direction. The campaign then had to be materialized in order to access the public domain and elicit signatures. In doing so, it became a new event which crystallized conflicts about inter-ethnic relations.

The materials made for the campaign included a poster, and a leaflet. A set of metal boards for holding posters with retractable feet, suitable for holding a quick outdoors 'press conference' were made by a newly initiated middle-aged member, who also owned and managed a window factory, Anton. They formed a 'moving media centre'. The boards accompanied the petition propped up by each table accompanied by VMRO's flag, a Bulgarian flag and that of one of its new media partner, SKAT. They were 'christened', at the announcement that there is to be a campaign pertaining to Turkey's EU entry in front of the Turkish consulate in February 2010. A set of media channels responded to the press announcement. VMRO's two deputy heads led the event and were surrounded by journalists, including – as one activist nudges me to note – a Turkish channel. Weeks later, as the announced date for the start of the campaign drew near, Kostadin judged that there was no adequate preparation and proposed vocally that this would be "yet another" initiative poorly pursued by the Sofia organisation. He proposed taking over organising the starting event for the campaign. His criticism initiated a number of inter-office meetings on the fifth floor and kicked Angel and Pavel into action– subsequently there was a vehemence to Pavel's work ethic clearly motivated by Kostadin's scepticism towards organisational culture in Sofia.

The Turkey-EU campaign opened on an exceptionally windy day. The Youth organisation stood behind two plastic tables wearing t-shirts which said 'Turkey is not Europe'. Krasimir Karakachanov and TV channel SKAT's leader signed the petition in front of the media. Angel posed as if signing then, too, but due to superstition left his signature to the end – signing the last line of the petition. Kostadin put his name down with his son by his side – the consummate family man raising a young patriot. Ordinary people passing by followed suit. They were interviewed by attending journalists. Their views would then make up the 'common man' opinion mediated 'through the nation'. Prior to the media partnership there would have been no guarantee that a TV channel would run a feature on this event, and thus the general public would have only been aware of it when encountering activists on the streets. With SKAT's broadcasting, a pre-formed patriotic public was informed about the

campaign.

The youth members started handing out leaflets – for weeks and months later they would litter the streets and bins of the city. Sometimes the leaflets would be taken and read at home. Tables for gathering signatures would pop up all over the city, set out early in the morning and collected at night. Their frequency was only limited by the submitted applications for permission to set up the tables with the city council – a procedure which Pavel had by now perfected, joking off-handedly about the man responsible for the process and his habits.

Pavel spent a large proportion of his time in a newly re-purposed room on the fifth floor, where a large photocopier spluttered and spat its way through photocopying every page of the petition, dying on the very last day. Each sheet was numbered, hole-punched and packaged in ringed bundles. Pavel kept statistics of each region's performance, which the executive committee then used to assess each region's relative strength. The extraordinary amounts of work he did, which his wiry frame seemed to bear with prodigious consistency, left him on the verge of complete exhaustion.

This was the first time that Pavel, as a newly elected organiser, exhibited his ability to manage a group. He declared that this campaign had brought in more people than any other, as people arrived at the organisation wanting to take part in gathering signatures for the petition. He collected and organised a set of eclectic characters. A number of them were viewed with open disdain by the head of the youth organisation, who firmly believed that with regards to the signature gathering process in particular, the general public "have to see the faces of young, *idejni*[98] people from VMRO". The activists who he so openly disregarded nevertheless conducted a large amount of work for the organisation. At some point, given the influx of peculiar individuals into the central offices, a long-term activist earnestly exclaimed, "you know you're doing well

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[98] Lit. People who generate ideas, figuratively who are good to brainstorm with, are imaginative.

when the crazies start coming in". Eventually some of these persons would misbehave and would be scorned and steered away from returning or in one case thrown out of the building altogether.

Aside from the core group organised by Pavel, whom he galvanized into gathering signatures as if they were paid by VMRO, the organisation's pre-existing structures were also activated. A wider training exercise was conducted for people of the regular organizations. They were urged to construct a timetable for gathering signatures in different regions of Sofia and encouraged to take the printable sheets away with them and gather signatures amongst acquaintances and in businesses local to their area. As a result of VMRO's publicity, some signatures arrived unexpectedly, sent into the central offices by citizens who printed them off from the VMRO website. One sheet featured a whole village in the South West, albeit suspiciously in the same handwriting. People who undertook the initiative to take part and gather signatures would be thanked by a SKAT representative at the handing in of the petition. He was addressing and thus acknowledging the public which engaged with his channel and its political affiliation.

Sometime at the start of the campaign, a quick conversation took place in Angel's office about who can help gather signatures – wider networks which could be utilised. Who could be depended on? Football clubs were first on the list. When the church was mentioned, the conversation turned sneering. Surely, I said, they would be interested in such a position – "those policemen, no" – said on the attendees – "there, the conversation is on a different level, you pull different strings". Support from church figures indeed never materialised. On the other hand, negotiations with a football hooligan chief, *the Duche,* led to a table at the start of a *CSK*[99] football match where relatively large numbers of those signing said 'of course I will sign against the *turchelia*', the denomination of the ethnic group was turned into a denigration. Similar

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[99] A Bulgarian football team.

conversations occurred with other football clubs and yielded a large number of signatures. In a different stream, a small table at an annual Armenian genocide commemoration on a rainy evening was quickly swarmed as people lined up to sign.

There were also a number of failed mobilisations of particular networks. A newly formed organisation, led by a rather eccentric ex-army man who publishes a small newspaper for the military and patriotic community, also promised to contribute. Practice proved weaker and he was deemed a time waster. His calls were not returned. In the process of trying out different strategies, a small group of VMRO activists went to gather signatures at a "National Ideals" conference in the Military Academy in Sofia. The initiative proved problematic –not due to a lack of an interest amongst the very elderly participants – but because of the slow motion quality of their signing. A female member's suggestion to gather signatures at a pop folk concert was resisted by Pavel who insisted that no signatures are worth such a clash of values. On the level of political allegiance, Karakachanov negotiated with SDS[100] to support the petition; however that did not occur – one reason given was that they had a fair amount of elected Turks as representatives, although that was not mentioned to the press.

Villages near Sofia were toured, utilising resources provided by a member who is a business owner. A similar process was followed across the country although there, distances are greater and local areas could not be visited without incurring larger expenses and thus needing 'top-ups' of funding for petrol. At one meeting, local organisers declared "we don't have the resources for more signatures" meaning that they did not have petrol money for travelling to villages. They also couldn't buy "media presence", though in that regard they were 'saved' by the collaboration with SKAT.

The SKAT TV channel announced the dates when signatures would be gathered in particular areas and drove to those areas. It also encouraged people to print off the form and send it to VMRO's central offices. VMRO's organisational gaps were

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[100] See earlier descriptions and Appendix 2.

strategically filled by engaging SKAT to gather signatures in specific areas. Some

peculiar, rough and non-standardized sheets were sent in by some of those citizens.

This led some in the VMRO office to nickname the TV Channel '' SCOT'' (meaning,

'bumpkin'): a reference to the public accessed through SKAT.

Funding to materialise this activism came primarily through Karakachanov. Similarly

the SKAT partnership was described as based on a personal interaction between

Karakachanov and its owner Valeri Sugarev. In one meeting of VMRO's highest

committee, Karakachanov spoke of finding party donors. This is a private, hidden

world of delicate negotiations between powerful men. Yet a few things are clear: after

certain TV appearances Karakachanov was contacted by businessmen interested in

funding the party. Sometimes there are strings attached regarding where or how this

money should be spent. Furthermore, I was once asked to interpret in meetings

between Karakachanov and Israeli delegates, an invitation I had to unfortunately

decline due to being out of the country. I assume this fits into a larger politics

referenced by an investigative journalist called Patrashkova, who ran the newspaper

Galeria and declared that she was funded by Israeli money while others were funded by

Arab money.   Hence we could conclude that there is real yet murky politics of

submerged influence and money. My research does not cover this domain due to time

and access limitations. It is worth remembering that it is this financial support that

enables activism to be materialised.

Civic Engagement?

In VMRO's understanding, the petition about Turkey's EU entrance had civic elements.

From his initial proposal for a referendum, Angel presented this as a piece of

innovative politics. He noted that there had only been two referendums before in the

history of the country and they were dictated: one to decide monarchy or democracy

and one to decide on the constitution. When VMRO came back from the parliament

building where they had completed the petition handing-in process bureaucratically,

Angel joked: "we saw this person running out to buy a new notebook to start a register and write 'entry number one'!". The law which was at the base of this initiative stated that referenda could be requested by the general public on any topic, given that a sufficient amount of signatures were handed into parliament within a period of three months. Given 200 000 signatures, parliament would be forced to discuss the issue and vote on it. Given 500 000 a referendum date would have to be set automatically. On the 14 of July 2010 VMRO handed into parliament boxes a petition containing roughly 330 000 signatures. I left fieldwork shortly after the submission. VMRO waited throughout the summer for an outcome. Svetozar released an article on the VMRO web site asking citizens who signed their name to lobby their parliamentary representatives, eliciting a notion of civic engagement. The autumn political season kicked off with a question of: "what happens next?".

An event of ethnically motivated contention was suddenly turned into a test of the democratic system. The government did not want to make this decision in collaboration with the Bulgarian population. Six days after the legal date at which parliament should have voted in accordance with the law on referenda, VMRO – together with citizens who signed the petition – waited outside Parliament ready to hear how Bulgarian democracy worked and were faced with the verdict – deferral. They chanted "Be Bulgarians, not mice". Parliament had decided not to vote on the issue on the day meaning, as VMRO emphasised, it broke the country's laws. There had been a failure to make arrangements to check the validity of the signatures by this date. Bulgarian politicians attempted to avoid a public discussion on the topic. The media at large were not necessarily sympathetic to the petition but a number of journalists wrote pieces wondering whether the government was going to have to be 'dragged by its hair' to fulfil its legal obligations. A newspaper reported that a paper fez was left by the crowd in front of parliament as a form of protest.

A newspaper article on the topic declared this event 'Referendum Bulgarian style' (Oncheva 2011). The article exhibited relative disinterest in the core content of the

campaign, focusing rather on how this instance of citizens' activism is treated by the state. The author elicited the notion of national psychology to say that one thing is clear, that the dictum, "good work, but Bulgarian" stands true. The statement "we too are European, we too will hold a referendum, but a Bulgarian version" indicates the implicit comparison being made with Western Europe. Kostadin played into the civic discourse. He wrote a blog entry in which he declared: "shall we for once allow the Bulgarian nation to vote on a question of such importance to it or treat it as a small weak minded child. The lack of respect to the nation shows only national complexes".

A law allowing referenda suggests a political system that is ready to hand over some of its decision making authority to the citizens of its country. However, in the run up to the possible vote on the Turkey–EU campaign, Boiko Borisov met with Erdogan to reassure him that the government will put foreign policy above internal issues. As time progressed VMRO continued to foreground the question of democratic practice. One commentator remarked "we don't have the money to do a referendum", another quickly replied: "do you have the money for democracy?".

On the 16th of November 2010, the "Citizen Registration and Administrative commission", confirmed that there are at least 200 000 valid signatures. When by the 3rd of March the following year, there was still no vote in Parliament, VMRO took protest posters to the site of national commemoration Shipka on the country's national holiday. Even later, as parliament disbanded for the summer on the 30th of July 2011, a VMRO- friendly reporter from SKAT posted her reportage on Kostadin's Facebook wall, commenting that they were yet to discuss the subject of the petition. Kostadin's reply drips with irony: "Really? I can't believe it, I am extraordinarily surprised by these otherwise so honest and principled people". In the end, VMRO announced they have sent a complaint to international authorities, having been given no just cause why the discussion about the referendum was not held.

Conclusions

Ethnic and civic logics, objective and affective engagements were entangled in the course of this campaign. Active citizenship and nationalism were in some instances defined as one and the same. VMRO authored an event which employed a variety of discourses and actions. A nexus of pre-existing symbols and semiotic association pertaining to Ottoman history and European belonging were utilized and moulded. This was not uncontested. As discussed in Chapter 4, ATAKA attempted to seize the event and its capital.

The event provided a milieu in which Turkey's, and indeed Bulgaria's European nature could be discussed publicly. It communicated in an unprecedented way that Turkey is a powerful neighbour which could overwhelm Bulgaria's small economic might if the border of the EU was to be taken away. Thus VMRO evoked fear and a need for vigilance among Bulgarians. It is not a new fear; rather, it utilised previous worries and embedded them in a campaign which demands a possible resolution for this fear– excluding Turkey from the EU. By its response, the Bulgarian government provided the space for VMRO to portray themselves as the defenders of a wronged populace.

The nationalist organisation thus represented itself as a conduit for the population's suppressed political claims. When the campaign's opposition declared that a referendum could not be voted on objectively because the population is impassioned on this subject, they author the national subject as having a valid voice only when they are rational. This creates the space for VMRO to portray themselves as defenders of the population's affective associations, of their communal bias: defenders, in VMRO's terms, of '"national dignity".

Chapter 4.2 Roma as the Abject

The double standards are an irritant.

Krasimir Karakachanov (talking about the Roma question)

A discourse of tolerance was widely utilized both among my informants and within wider Bulgarian society because of the way in which it was embedded in the wider concern of 'being European'. Tolerance was however also discussed under the rubric of obnoxious liberal moral superiority and the misuse of resources by NGOs. The variety of people who express nationalist positions, often conceived that they are especially sensitive to 'the real' local realities, dangers and problems. This forms an exceptional, messianic self-identity: they alone see 'the reality', un-blinkered by the pressures of a liberal international gaze. The definition of a nationalist emerges in the context of this contention as a sense of self which is unashamed, unapologetic.

A number of authors working on 'the right-wing' have discussed the ways in which nationalism relies on a contestation of what they see as a totalizing liberal political life (Mudde 2010, Dahl 2009). Most nationalisms' success in the wider public domain is aided by the spaces left empty by the political modalities of liberalism and democracy, namely the symbolic space of the nation (Berezin 2001). My fieldwork confirmed these findings, while it also presented the kinds of variations which appear when we look at nationalism outside 'the West' – unlike the case studies in Holmes and Berezin's work. Within the academic literature, nationalism's contestation is seen as reactionary, based on nationalist actors' "consummate hostility to elite portrayals of reality" (Holmes 2000: 131).

VMRO's engagements with an international political space and the notion of rights, which they saw as stemming from that domain, seem multifaceted and inconstant. It is unified by a request for contextualisation and thrives on paradox. VMRO

instrumentalise rights, treating them as power relations rather than embedding themselves in their moral imperatives. Their positions, while individually coherent, can be seen as collectively dissonant. With regards to the Roma, VMRO requested an exception and re-contextualisation of international human rights and tolerance so as to encourage national health and unity. However, when it comes to Macedonia and the Western Outerlands, they ask the international community to take a side on guaranteeing rights of Bulgarian minorities independently of the context of internal state security (this is claimed both for Bulgarian minorities in Macedonia and Serbia). A comparison between VMRO's politics towards the Muslim minorities in the South of Bulgaria and their requests for the treatment of Bulgarians in Serbia would also reveal paradoxes.

A way to look at these would be to see the claims as self-interested, irredentist and ultimately, hopelessly 'Balkan'. In lieu of the analysis of the power dynamics between European and Eastern European representations of the self, I resist this reduction, although in many ways it holds true. I would rather like to point to the way in which the discourses presented below ask for local knowledge and local understanding. They privilege particularity and are defensive[101], attempting to guarantee dignity and "freedom from fear". They are explicitly anti-universalist. Nationalists target fundamental contradictions and paradoxes within theories of rights and tolerance and the practice of applying these notions in Bulgaria. They instrumentalise the discourse of universal rights since they primarily see it as an instrument of power rather than a moral dictum.

My participants juxtaposed tolerance and equal rights against a notion of what would be a healthy state and just international order. When it came to the Roma, VMRO nationalists focused on 'equal responsibilities' and 'pragmatic', timely solutions juxtaposed with symbolic projects for integration. In Macedonia they focused on

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[101] This is not a novel argument, Todorova (2011) has argued that Bulgarian nationalism is ultimately defensive.

historical truth and freedom from fear, the latter being the more dominant discourse. In the 'Western Outerlands', more classic minority rights were accompanied by some problematic[102] irredentist claims and thus a request for the reassessment of the internationally dictated border. The discourses in question are easily identifiable as illicit discourses, namely aiming at "re-establishing the boundaries, terms, and idioms of political struggles" (Holmes 1993: 258). They are deconstructive, picking up on paradox, gaps and contradictions.

It is not surprising that in contexts where formative power dynamics have crystallised around Enlightenment-derived ideas, a key concept of contestation is that of tolerance. Tolerance carries and transmits the semiotic baggage of that formative era. The rationalities of the Enlightenment are not what they claim to be, purely rational, transcending cultural bias. They are built on the skeleton of Christian theology (Schoppenahour in Grey 2003). The spread of these ideas is never a pure copy; rather, there are many instances of local modification and hybridization (Sahlins 1999 : v). For the anthropologist of Europe, local dissonance with globalization does not only exist within 'the Third and Fourth Worlds'. In the heartland of 'the West' we are confronted with an uneven transmission of the core concepts of the Enlightenment in the form of both the Counter– Enlightenment and the radical Enlightenment (Israel 2009; Sahlins 1996: 395; Grey 2003).

The question of tolerance crystallises the uneven nature of Europe's Enlightenment origins, as well as the paradoxes and crises at its core. Enlightenment debates led to innovative understandings of personhood and personal faculties especially in relation to faith[103], government's ability to shape it and tolerate the various belief systems

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[102] Problematic because minority rights are usually premised on abandoning irredentist claims. However, in some formulations VMRO members would clarify that their irredentist claims stem from Serbia's systematic failings to guarantee minority rights. This breaks the 'peace agreement' which would compromise territorial claims with minority rights.
[103] Often filtered through confessional identity.

within its borders. Between 1520 and1650 there was widespread confessional antagonism. A scientific, philosophical and political revolution was underway and it "engendered a crisis of the European mind" (Israel 2002: 20). In these unprecedented circumstances the question of tolerance formed an important cornerstone in debates about just government and societal coexistence in the midst of uncertainty about moral codes. Pierre Bayles, a representative of the Radical Enlightenment, distinguished between what is rational (as a derivative of justice as fairness) and what is moral - as a derivative of belief (Israel 2009). He changed the preceding idiom fundamentally, citing the notion of *lumière primitive et universelle* : " God gives human beings the natural light of universal reason" (Williams and Waldon 2008: 86). In his dictionary, faith is not defined as irrational, rather it exists on a different plane from reason. Toleration is not an easy pursuit. It entails a tension between commitment to the principle of toleration and one's beliefs, which might be infringed upon by those who hold other views (Williams in Mandus 1998).

Nowadays tolerance is not as highly regarded as in the past; the ideal of social and political relations has changed (Mandus 1998). The contemporary state does not 'suffer' other beliefs; rather, it is ideally neutral, based on constitutional principles. The ideal is more commonly that of justice and equality on the basis of universal principles. (Hayed; Abrahams in Williams and Waldon: 2008) This notion again descended from Christian tradition mirroring the notion that all men were created equal in God's Image (Pojman and Westmoreland 1997). The most radical of liberal traditions nowadays see all beliefs as having equal value, vowing to try to maintain neutrality. This position is not entirely coherent philosophically and in practice states are more likely to act short of that, while maintaining a discourse of ultra-liberalism (Smith in Williams and Waldon 2008). Toleration, in opposition to rights, allows those who employ it to acknowledge that they are acting on the basis of belief. While the rights project has its own culture (Cowan, Dembour and Wilson 2001), those who employ it often claim neutrality.

These indicative discussions present the debris that toleration, as a key product of European modernisation, carries in its wake. The interconnected ideas of Europe, Eastern Europe, rights and tolerance bear these predefined conflicts as they are normatively dependent concepts. Contesting the modality of personhood of the rights bearer (or person subject to toleration) introduces fundamental problems in the execution of these categories. This is the domain in which my research participants contested these notions, speaking on behalf of defending the nation from degradation and fear.

Tolerance and the Roma

The Roma are a good example 'to think with'. At the heart of narratives about the Roma is a conflict over what to do with specific sections of society whose value systems and very existence is seen to jar with or obstruct the creation of a better status quo. Two key supporting frameworks help to understand these concerns on their own terms. The first is a definition of the abject. The Roma are commonly conceived in Bulgaria as 'termites', as degrading the structure of society, feeding on the already existing poverty. They were represented as integrally 'other' to the preferred social value system for Bulgaria, and were classed as intolerable. Furthermore they were often referred to in the context of 'filth'.

The second framework is a separation between the ruling elite and the poor, ethnically[104] Bulgarian population and the different consequences of toleration for this population. Both the Roma and the ruling elite are seen to benefit from 'the charade' of a liberal regime and thus become objects of spite. The notion of international actors as a self-interested, manipulative audience for the government's farcical performance of tolerance was never far from being elicited when nationalists talked about the Roma. The ruling elite were often portrayed as subservient to two ethics: one is the desire to

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[104] I use this distinction here because it such a pervasive one within Bulgarian society. Please see the discussion of 'the abject abhorred' below for further discussion.

buy votes from Roma, an easy way to ensure an election, the other to appease international actors. That ruling elite is thus painted as self-serving. In a number of instances the Roma became the exemplar of their poor governance. The question of illegal voting arose when nationalists spoke of Bulgaria's two key 'others'[105]: Gypsies and the Turks. This points at the fit between the abject and the other – one accounts for the removal of a group from the collective self, the other to the ways in which this constitutes pollution.

The tensions between the Roma population and 'ethnic Bulgarians' (for lack of a better phrase) proceed nationalist activism, but are being mobilised politically (Stewart 2012). With a long-term purview of Roma, Stewart diagnoses a deterioration in public language about the minority and a rise in vigilante attacks. He argues that integralists are now actively drawing the European project toward a new trajectory, a Counter-Enlightenment cultural pluralism which is defensive against the threatening forces of globalization and is made up of "the most disillusioned, 'the losers of globalization"(*ibid.* 18). The proponents of these politics symbolically take back the space lost to them in the cosmopolitan move by infringing on the politically correct

Figure 29 Commonly Used Illusrations of the Roma.

and engaging in what Efremova in the same volume terms 'redemptive politics'. In an argument which is particularly relevant for the following analysis she asserts that it is

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[105] See section of the Turkish and post-Ottoman

"not enough" to say that politicians utilise people's anger, amplifying anxieties and angers; rather, we have to penetrate the very logic of integralist politics.

In agreement with Efremova (Efremova in Stewart 2012) I argue that for nationalists the Roma are both a cause and a manifestation of state weakness. Having done some research with BNS (the organization I encountered at the start of my fieldwork), Efremova concludes that the Roma are turned into a scapegoat for the ills of the nation. In this chapter I want to deepen this idea and would argue that being the manifestation of state weakness is primary to being the cause of it. The Roma, with their irreverent approach to the state and social structure, act in ways which erode both. However, the Roma are only seen as a problem because there is inaction towards them by the state. Furthermore this inaction is not only indicative of state weakness, it is seen by nationalists as the result of paralysis in the face of an international dictate – portrayed as human rights imperatives. As the material below will show, this paralysis creates resentments amongst Bulgarian citizens, which nationalists take as the starting point for their campaigns.

The key motif in nationalist discourses about the Roma is that, in reality, they are the ones with privilege in society, despite being "sub-human". Their lack of humanity is indicated in the pejorative nickname they were given by some of my participants – 'the orcs', the unruly and disobedient beings at the bottom of Tolkien's imagined social structure of Middle Earth. The images in   Figure 29 are recurrently used in print and on Facebook pages when referring to the Roma. They are a raw representation of abjection and threat. Montages of Roma children playing in puddles or various degrees of poverty dominate news reportage. In one instance, Angel and Orlin were looking for illustrations that represent gypsy people and discussed what was representative of the minority. The first suggestion is that it would be someone urinating and defecating. While van de Port (1999) argues that Gypsies represent the barbaric underpinnings of the Balkan subject stripped of the pretense of *kultura* and European civilization, I argue that - at least amongst my informants – the Roma represented complete alterity.

Other informants within Bulgaria might have more readily found a shared barbaric soul, but not nationalists. Nationalists are too dedicated to the epic self which van de Port peels away to reveal the barbaric underpinnings of his Serbian research participants.

Nationalists are conscious of an internalised liberal or 'NGO' voice which consistently chides the Bulgarian population for their prejudice towards Gypsies or other minorities. A young, female activist, shows the depth of feeling that tolerance can elicit:

> The female participant: *What people want is for laws to be maintained and for gypsies to start paying [their bills], to be tried [in court], only after that will they stop being 'the other'. Tolerance- that's an absurd idea! These termites, these disgusting nits, which suck out the living juices of everything alive, to which they touch, infest, force, BURY US – till when shall we tolerate them!? Hate is a natural feeling. What Karbovski says is more than true. It is wonderful that he doesn't mince his words. Speech enters through the ear and echoes in the consciousness of those sleeping.*
>
> Angel responds: *it's not hate... it's self-defense.*

As with others who will be featured in this chapter, the level of distaste for the Roma led her to define them in relation to the abject – a sense of overwhelming incommensurability and danger. Her frustration is echoed in more detail by another young female informant (who was a BNS member). In a Facebook essay she relates that she feels pressured to be tolerant, European: to integrate herself.   She lists the things which bother her and of which she thinks she is expected to be tolerant. This includes a mix of civic and ethnic 'problems'. However it also includes a wider set of issues relating to corruption, public culture and social wellbeing. She culminates the piece with the words: "I am sick of being tolerant". The inverse of tolerance is portrayed in her narrative as the only way to survive.

This defines what is commonly called a 'hater' attitude which is present amongst a number of my informants. The participant not only resisted tolerance, she resisted

commonly held virtues as an extension of her frustration:

> *If instead of keeping quiet, I give everyone who deserves it the finger. If I realise the bitter truth, that the better you are, the more they think of you as a dupe, and when you are bad- they look you in the eyes. If you start to say more often "I don't like it" more than "it doesn't concern me".* ***If I become aggressive against everything around me which is an aberration.*** *If I defend my right and territory and don't wait for someone else to do it. If instead of silent good manners and static politeness,* ***I enter into open war with the whole profanity which drowns us – they will declare that we are intolerant.***

Tolerance to her was an inhibition of the natural drive to protect oneself, the ability to adequately defend oneself against a hostile social environment.

A different approach could be observed in a petition "Against the unequal treatment of the citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria by the authorities" which was for some time hosted at http://www.bgpetition.com/diskriminacia/. It presented a deeper engagement with tolerance and rights as technocratic, not imagined entities. Its instigators were a collection of party-independent citizens who requested that the petition should not be politicized by any one party. The document was addressed to a variety of ministries, to the president of the republic, to the "media, syndicates and NGOs". It declared:

> *Recently, in the Bulgarian society there has been a tendency for the discrimination of the non-Roma population of the Republic of Bulgaria, e.g. people are being treated in a different way, most often unfavorable and discriminatory, on the basis of their race, ethnicity, background and social status* ***in favor of the Roma population.***

They concluded the petition with the statement: "The undersigned plead for EQUALITY and NON-DISCRIMINATION". It listed a number of issues which they found to be disconcerting: the provision of free apartments and aid funds available specifically to people of Roma origin; inequality in paying bills to the electricity company, public

transport, court system and police. They suggested that the inevitable consequence of such unequal treatment, given the widespread poverty in Bulgaria, will be ethnic conflict. In their view, the state's inadequate policy towards the Roma minority, its tacit toleration of the status quo, instigates racism and hatred between Bulgarians and Roma. They culminated their petition by listing a selection of crimes by Roma citizens "which have not been punished".

 A VMRO member authored a piece in webcafe.bg : "What to do with *tolerastite*" (Drenchev 2011). The words tolerant and *pederast* (i.e. the Bulgarian word meaning fag[106]) have been merged. The term 'tolerasti' was subsequently frequently used by VMRO members. It was in response to another article entitled "What to do with the nationalists". The definition he gave is as follows:

> *He is different from the truly tolerant person (including the tolerant nationalist) in that the tolerance which he seems to preach is not internally inherent. Tolerastite are easily recognized by their extremely intolerant attitude to those who think otherwise.*

In particular he took issue with the recommendation: "nationalists should be written and spoken about, so as to leave no doubt that ...the actions and aims of nationalists are not acceptable and reprehensible". Then he proceeds:

> *What if the words and actions of the nationalists are admissible and nonjudgmental? If they are noble and unselfish? If they are wise and measured and timely? If we are concerned, because we know the situation in the county and the pulse of our nation? Would they still go to war with us? Why?!*

His piece inverts the charges against nationalists by calling '*the tolerasti*': "maestros of viciousness and hate". He accuses them of being mercenary and cantankerously adds – the other author should be so tolerant as to not ask him to pay for the gypsies, just as

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[106] Within Bulgarian society it is still acceptable to use "fag" as an insult.

he does not ask her to pay his electricity bills. If she wishes to be virtuous she should go into the ghetto and educate Roma children, not impose the responsibility of paying the bill for integration projects which never come to fruition on others. He concludes by presenting a liberal paradox – Roma children. How can *tolerasti* stand to let these things happen to gypsy children: under-age sex and rape, teenage pregnancy. How can they look at this as "a quaint, not outrageous" phenomena? How can they not look at it as the destruction of young women's lives? He concludes there can be no agreement if anyone dares to say, as with the Bulgarian Helsinki committee that, there isn't an equal law for everyone. If that is not negotiable, then let's be ready for a fight.

Vigilantes

In Orlandovtzi[107] the nation cries out due to tziganite.[108]

One says: when I get up I first look at the yard to see what they have stolen from us.

Another says: before I had no Fence, because we didn't need it. Now I don't have a fence

Because they stole it from me.

All say: there is no salvation from this plague.

I don't want to live in Tziganska (gypsy-fied) Bulgaria.

The fighting is meaninglessly cruel... I don't know why but

everyone's gone crazy.

There are no innocent gypsies... do you kill innocent cockroaches in your house

Roma criminality is ever-present in the media-scapes of contemporary Bulgaria. The discourse of 'criminality which goes unpunished' is accompanied by a discourse of vigilante retribution. On the 28th of June 2009 I found a newspaper bearing the

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[107] An area in Sofia at the edge of town.

[108] Although impossible to translate, the phrases used here have a literary allusion. They refer back to turns of phrase used for the state of 'the poor population' of the Ottoman Empire before liberation.

headline: "People from Kustendil want to lynch murderous Roma". One evening before these events, when I was at VMRO with one of the rougher members of VMRO, a news report appeared on the TV about gypsies stealing fruit from peoples' garden. After hearing it, he addressed Angel: "you see, there is an idea, let's form an *otriad* (i.e. a work group here meaning vigilante group) for ones such as these". Another nationalist posted a Facebook status: "to the attention of MVR[109]: today I KICKED[110] two persons of Roma origin who in front of my eyes tried to extract the wallet of one female citizen of Bulgarian origin on bus number 72". In another story, a woman related that she was the subject of a string of robberies. When she confronted the thieves, they threatened her. When she rang the police, no one appeared for a while, eventually those who arrived give her some paperwork and remarked that nothing will come of it. Her conclusion was to decide she needs a gun. On fieldwork I heard stories of vigilante groups in Sofia. One person who travelled to industrial parts of the city kept a baseball bat in his car. As highlighted by Michael Stewart, the expression of anti-Roma sentiments is on the rise across Eastern Europe. Nationalists seize upon these instances of conflict.

One morning after I left fieldwork, I woke up to the growing significance of 'an event'. A young man was killed. It was rumored the killing was enacted by people close to Tzar Kiro, a Roma oligarch in a suburb of Sofia in supposed retribution for the young man swearing at the grandchildren of the oligarch when they called him *gyaur* (a word for the unfaithful, used to denote Christians under the Ottoman Empire). He was hit and dragged by a car driven by people associated with Kiro. Media channels immediately populated the site of conflict. They filmed local 'ethnic Buglarians' who expressed their anger at the lawlessness of the area and the man who dominated it. The general public was informed that Kiro should have probably been imprisoned years ago for making moonshine, prostitution and other legal infringements. A local initiative committee was quickly set up in response to the events and asked for Kiro to

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[109] The Bulgarian police department.
[110] His capitalization.

leave the area. Something more developed, the seething cauldron of resentment spilled into a protest which turned into vigilantism. It was spearheaded by various football hooligan groups. VMRO members also lent a hand. An event appears on my Facebook notifications: attend 'war with the *mangali*!!!", *mangali* being the offensive word for gypsies. The location was announced as Katunitza Sept 2011; a football hooligan acquaintance posted „*na noj bratja*" (let us fight brothers), eliciting a Balkan war-era call to arms against the oppressors; others state "for those who say that we only sit and write in forums". Chants were made for the occasion and shared over Facebook: "We don't want glory, we don't want money, we want to see how the ghetto burns!". Another more sinister comment accompanies it: "from the little gypsy boy a soap, from the gypsy woman two, from the gypsy ghetto laundry powder".

Angel launched himself into the public domain. The Roma were 'his' topic. He had specialized in commentating on them and was a recognizable figure, often featured in debates on the subject. He too wrote a call to arms in his official blog, attempting to lead street-level and organized nationalists into action:

> *Now. Outside. On the street. Show yourself. Protest. Do not explain and make excuses and don't hide away. Don't theorize what's of use and what is not. It is time. Ask for your right to work, ask for your quality of life, ask for your European standard wage... Ask where do your taxes go ...Today, young Bulgarians are on the street. Those who care, those who will stay to live here. Those who dare. ...Go out, it's your time. Don't miss it. Go out, but not with empty hands.*

Between the concluding and ending paragraphs he calls the activities against King Kiro the actions of 'civil society' and resists attempts to dismiss the event. Are the events civic or ethnic? This was debated in the wider public domain by newspaper articles which dismiss the ethnic content of the protest in favor of interpreting the event as a protest against an oligarch. A similar direction was taken by journalist Miroliuba Bentova whose negative remarks against the vigilante mob drew scorn from right wing circles – so far reserved for Brumbaur and constructivist understandings of the Batak

massacre. Numerous 'internet warriors' proclaimed that she was paid to express this opinion, that she should see how she feels when she herself bears the brunt of unacceptable behavior by the Roma. She was declared an 'enemy of the nation' on Facebook and was (in her own words) symbolically killed on Facebook as activists co-ordinated and en-masse reported her profile as offensive. The backlash was so strong she appeared on TV to defend her words.

At the time I was back in Britain but I discussed the topic of football hooligans with the head of the youth organisation; he countered, saying that this is just media coverage, that the majority of people at the site were those fed up with what's happening, that 'grannies' and 'grandpas' were filling the bottles with petrol, and that it was "normal young people who are sick and tired of the double standard". Bentova's quip about drunken football hooligans lead the people who had protested to comment across the Facebook media-scape "We are not hooligans, neither are we drunk". Language was re-appropriated. Photos from the protest are then mockingly dubbed 'the hooligans'.

A young lawyer, a VMRO member, chimed into the media-scape to declare that the protests should be in front of the police in Plovdiv and the Court. This perspective is shared by a journalist in a daily newspaper. He wrote:

> *There is always a spark, which is not difficult to trace. The difference is that in one place it ends with washing one's wounds, in another – digging graves. And the difference is made by those who are incited to keep the order- the police, the prosecutor's office, the local authorities"*
> (Tzekov 2011)

In contrast to Angel, quoted above, he declared: "The court of William Lynch cannot be a demonstration of civil society". These discussions should be seen as different responses to the following highly popular Facebook status (it is not only very 'liked' it is also very 're-shared').

> *The truth is that we killed [the boy]… because we allowed the chaos to take*

over Bulgaria. How many of us will realize this and will try to change things?

Such a statement elicits a sense of personal responsibility for the murder derived from belonging to the nation, the collective 'we'. It represents a worry that the collective 'we' has allowed lawlessness to prevail. This provides VMRO's space for intervention, for re-establishing the social order.

These tendencies towards vigilante justice seem best interpreted within Englund (2008)'s notion of a "context for remembering" the failures of justice (*ibid.* 254). The notion of justice which should prevail in society is discussed within specific politicized events. The events give semiotic form to existing grievances; they create shared referents within the public arena which can be activated in the future as a short-cut for specific grievances. In reviewing his data, Englund seems to recognize that what can be viewed as uncivil action, and thus with indignation by the voices of civic virtue, resulted from a lack of recognition for lived experience. This is what my informant seems to be responding to: the imperatives of local particularity, of survival in extreme circumstances with an international public gaze and pressure as a back-drop.

The backdrop for this activism is a perception of a society which is falling apart, a political elite and state who seem to uphold no values. Discussing another instance of right wing violence, journalist Ruslan Jordanov (2010) terms nationalists – especially young, street-level nationalists – 'the terrible children' who "don't pity themselves and nor anyone else", and who have in contrast to their materialistic peers "developed a sharp social sensitivity". He critiques their approach to remedying such problems, violence and hooliganism, but ultimately blames it on the failure of the state. If the state does not include in society the young people who are trying to "solve problems with a water pipe", then the force of this youth's anger will fuel other movements. "Who will come in out of the dark and ride the wave of these angry youths?", asks Jordanov. VMRO amongst other nationalists attempts to do so.

Political Engagement

As with other campaigns VMRO attempted to seize this domain which elicits fear and anxiety while representing the erosion of society. They transform it into campaigns and hence engage in the politics of redemption where the primary task is to cleanse the collective self by authoring events, meant to renew people's faith in themselves and in their nation. If VMRO are successful in creating a domain in which people feel they can cleanse their collective self, this would also provide a chance for them to build a reservoir of positive emotions toward the organisation. They, too, like Le Pen, can become physicians of the nation. In contrast to Stewart (2012) I would like to foreground the fact that VMRO crystallize pre-existing sentiments. The contentions discussed below cannot exist without what Englund (2008) refers to as lived experiences through which further elaborations are articulated dialogically to pre-existing semiotic assemblages in the Bulgarian public domain. For VMRO to exist, there have to be gaps. VMRO defined two key terms to engage this domain: in Sofia, the organisation defined 'the gypsy terror' while Kostadin elaborated the idea of a 'third national catastrophe'.

 The content of the idea of 'gypsy terror' is neatly exhibited in a video authored by VMRO's youth organisation ('Video About the Gypsy Terror and Gypsification of Bulgaria' 2011). Authored by a small work group for its official YouTube channel, the video features news reports of "Roma criminality" with segments of the elderly, ethnically Bulgarian population expressing fear. In their narratives, the elderly state they are afraid they will be "slaughtered"*.* The video features reportage of Roma declaring Bulgaria to be lawless, that they will form their own nation within it. The video highlights "they call us *gyauri* ", eliciting the fears born in the context of Ottoman history. The video ends with the ominous heading "It is time to put order in our own home".

I do not argue that this is a simple instrumentalisation of events for political ends by

nationalist activists. Furthermore, Angel's usual approach to the Roma question was more typically integralist, exhibiting civic elements by thriving on the paradoxes and slippages of liberal notions of rights and tolerance. When setting the agenda for VMRO's key political thematic with other members of the leadership, Angel insisted that gypsies should be a key theme. He seemed to combine "a concern for the state of the nation" with a populist turn when addressing "the Roma problem":

> *Whenever one of us says something [about Roma], it is reported on in every TV … It is one of the most serious Bulgarian national problems of the state. In fact it is THE Bulgarian national problem.*

In contrast to his impassioned vigilante impetus around the Tzar Kiro drama, on cool reflection he considers the issue from a more civil manner:

> *We have to keep this as a brand of VMRO without, of course, hysteria, without some monstrous image but with a clear position.*

Angel was at the forefront of petitioning for the destruction of Roma ghettos. The ghettos are at the heart of the intensifying conflict surrounding the minority. Roma citizens have been migrating from the countryside without means to acquire housing in their new locale. This is how ghettos arise – in Sofia and other cities. In his long-term media presence, Angel rallied public opinion on the topic.

Angel attempted to solidify the image of the ghetto as a symbol of the injustice and inequality described by the petitioners in the start of this chapter, and expressed by a number of Bulgarian citizens. Ghettos in his narratives in various media "give birth to criminality", they "breed a dislike of the state". Angel calls the police the representatives of the state and Roma attacks of the police are termed as direct attacks on the state. The Roma are also presented as breeding disease, such as hepatitis, risking an outbreak and hence a literal infection of society. Paying utility bills becomes a key marker of inequality. Roma divert electricity and water supplies to their shanty town arrangements and rarely pay for these services. This allows Angel to highlight

that in contrast, poor Bulgarian citizens are suffering under the brunt of large utility bills.

VMRO developed a counter-discourse to liberal and government expositions of 'the Roma issue' which goes to the heart of classical debates about tolerance and rights. They reiterate the need for integration and equality, a dictum which they abbreviate to arguing that Roma people have "responsibilities as well as rights" .They present concrete 'solutions' to the problems above and declare integration 'a personal choice' of each Roma person. TV debates featuring Angel and another (usually NGO) commentator often ended at a deadlock. Angel would ask if Roma people would stop begging, let their children go to school, stop scavenging the built environment for metal or robbing elderly people in villages[111]– these are all emotive and recognizable charges. This was commonly met by a vague response - it is difficult to find a resolution and that furthermore, we have to respect their cultural rights. When Roma in Plovdiv threatened to riot because their Welfare payments were cut off, Angel responded with a biting blog entry where he demonstrates his integralist discourse of rights. He listed Roma rights as tantamount to their perceived vices: "to call pedophilia 'tradition'; to never pay bills, to put their *katun* (wagons) wherever they want; to not respect the life and property of Bulgarian citizens" and so forth. In this form of contestation he hit upon issues which are intensely debated amongst theorists of state, rights and tolerance, the question of what to do with illiberal practices amongst minorities (Kymlicka 1997).

In 2009, as the city council (with Angel as a counselor) moved to demolish some Roma ghettos, their actions were inhibited by the ever watchful international gaze and internal NGOs. The Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHS) released a statement (Beekman 2009) declaring that the demolishing of Roma housing was tantamount to ethnic cleansing and was an infringement of the 2006 *Programme for Improvement of the*

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[111] Often the only ones still living there after vast rural-urban migrations.

Living Conditions of Roma. The Helsinki committee later proposed that if the council pursued this policy, which was legal since the ghettos are not, they should provide alternative housing or compensation to the displaced Roma (*vesti.bg* 2012). These discussions stirred the general public's sense of justice and thus were ripe soil for the creation of a contentious issue. A year later, the proposal re-surfaced. VMRO, with Angel at the helm, declared themselves "against the building of Euro-houses for the Roma" – shaping another campaign around the contentious issue. This was a popular position. A VMRO sympathiser remarked at the idea of Euro-houses: "And they want us not to be racists after this!". His implication, as was the case with other citizens who expressed outrage at this proposal, was that this seemed too unjust, too paradoxical, although sustainable within widely accepted theories of rights and tolerance.

Angel's mode of formulating 'the gypsy problem' is one of a number of possible permutations. Unlike Angel, Kostadin combined his approach to the Roma with a totalizing overview of demographics. He presented it as an aspect of the failure to reproduce a Bulgarian nation due to emigrating or not having children. To represent his campaign Kostadin produced the film "The Third National Catastrophe". This was in collaboration with SKAT. The sub-text of the demographic decline is the "gypsification of Bulgaria". In the film, the viewing public are told that "Every year a small village dies". Areas of demographic growth in the countryside are those with Roma. This growth is, in his narrative, accompanied with descent into chaos and return to a feudal state. The video suggests, that this will lead to a "Bulgaria without Bulgarians", suggesting a process which is the inverse of the revival period.

> *the future of the state seems to be a gypsy nation, the larger part of gypsies*
> *seem to intuitively feel it and put no work into integrating themselves*

The film culminates with images of Roma unrest, of chaos, lawlessness, interviews with frightened, elderly, village people who have been robbed. One, interviewed for the camera states: 'it seems we have to leave… or they have to leave'. In his mode of subversion of rights discourses, Kostadin compares the conditions of co-habitation

with Roma in contemporary Bulgaria tantamount to ethnic cleansing of the Bulgarian "being allowed with the quiet acceptance of the Bulgarian state". For Kostadin, as for Angel, this is "the largest problem" in Bulgaria – a demographic crisis where Bulgarians become "a minority in their own state".

Both VMRO deputy-leaders envisage "the problem" to be so great as to possibly lead to *an end of history* -the possibility of civil war, in the case of Angel, and the total ethnic re-population of Bulgaria, in the case of Kostadin. While Angel commonly asserted 'we' can win, Kostadin envisaged a much more bleak future. The demographic crisis means the battle's almost certainly already lost, there are going to be too many of 'them'. Furthermore, 'their' culture, termed as Oriental-gypsy culture, is already dominant. The persistent Orient which haunts Eastern Europe has returned, this time not through the Turkish, but through the Roma. Kostadin often echoed a popular sentiment "they are integrating us". Bulgaria is portrayed as the battleground of Oriental abjection and a desperate, impoverished, but European national subject. The difference between Angel's and Kostadin's discourses is also where they locate the resolution of the problem. For Kostadin it is within each national subject who must endeavor to give birth and to keep their values. For Angel the problem is wholly displaced onto the minority. As physicians of the nation they present different cures and different diagnosis. The commonality of these descriptions of national malaise is their cause- the Roma and tolerance of their 'problematic' way of life.

Conclusions

> *We keep the memory but we act in the present ...Because we are patriots, we work for a free, strong and successful Bulgaria. ...We don't want to take up your time with stories about history, territories, borders. However, we are concerned about the quality of life **'u nas'** [lit."in us", is used both in the context of ' in our country' and 'in our home'] . We know that the self-confidence of Bulgarians depends on this.*

VMRO campaign leaflet

In these campaigns, VMRO present themselves as the possible saviors of the national self. The implicit message is that they alone can stand firm, recognize and enact the actions which are made necessary by circumstance, they alone will speak the truth which can bring back self-confidence and normality to the national self. A sense of urgency is implicit given the understanding that these consequences would be difficult to avoid due to the advanced 'illness of the nation'. The incessant drums of the youth VMRO organisation's video on 'the gypsy terror' keep ringing in one's ears.

The simple shaming or report-making conducted by human rights organisations such as BHS, has led them to 'brand' those who express concerns about the way of life of Roma in Bulgaria as racist and intolerant. Nationalists in return portrayed human rights organisations as propagating "a foreign agenda", they accused them of cross-applying a model "which simply does not work here". They do not reject the international arena entirely. VMRO consistently engaged with international bodies, but they did so with the request that their understanding of events should be considered and given due attention.

Angel and Kostadin appeared to understand that contestation of these issues is different when it comes to the international arena due to realizing the subtle difference between the space in which developmental prescriptions were followed, and where they were created. Nationalist actors defined the Bulgarian government and Roma rights NGOs as blind followers of international models. Thus, they were not the site of debate. The debate was direct - addressing the EU as a representative of international governance. Using the expulsing of Roma from France as an event, VMRO sent a letter to the then president of the European Union, Jose Manuel Barrozo through the European commission in Sofia. In it they shared their position on Roma ghettos in Sofia. When they received a reply, a proud Angel remarked on the occasion and used it as a critique of the Bulgarian government who did not acknowledge similar letters. While international actors are deemed as degraded, ill-informed or simply interested in power plays, the ability to establish a dialogue with Western representatives was valued

and integral to creating a sense of a European self.

Nationalists took special pride in not bowing down to a perceived international pressure to be liberal and thus tolerant in the context of what they consider to be the abject. They asserted their ability to revel in their politically incorrect discourse as vigilante justice against 'Roma criminality' simmers under the surface. Nationalists thus proposed a need to re-balance integration and tolerance in the Bulgarian context, complaining: "it feels like they are integrating us" – into a social system outside the parameters of what should be acceptable. This tension, clearly felt in daily life, distances the citizens of Eastern Europe from their Western European counterparts. Popular media channels became ethnographers examining the strange and exotic culture of child brides and scrap metal challenges. Nationalist discourses insisted that there is an absence of systematic efforts to confront the serious governmental problems brought on by "gypsy criminality" – that instead the international arena and actors within it were preoccupied with maintaining the appearance of tolerance. They also provided a warning: "If we can't find a solution to it [the Gypsy problem], ethnic clashes are inevitable. We are not two-faced. We prefer to call what is happening by its real name".

Chapter 4.3 Claiming Rights on the Right Side of the Spectrum

He who tells me I am not a Macedonian - I will cut off his tongue, he who tells me I am not Bulgarian - I will cut off his head.

- Todor Aleksandrov

the treaty of Neuilly is a symbol of the injustice, the arrogance and short-sightedness of the winning states, who had torn off a primary part from the body of the fatherland.

- Informant

'all that we do, we do it for the unification of Bulgaria'

- Bulgarian revolutionary slogan used in VMRO processions

Macedonia is an emotive issue for fewer people in Bulgaria than Ottoman history. VMRO's activism on this potentially emotive question is of a different kind. Unlike Ottoman history, this topic was intermittently taboo in various incarnations of the Bulgarian state. Thus VMRO's attempts to engage a wider audience entail having to define an affective domain. Many Bulgarians are familiar with and eagerly accept an expansionist ideal of Bulgarian territory, as revealed in the often used phrases of "Bulgaria on Three Seas" or "Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia". The remainder of the latter sentiment, the history of the Macedonian question, is less commonplace. It is a specialized domain best conceptualized by Brown's (2003) allusion to a Burkean conversation: multifaceted, complex and overwhelming. VMRO members hold strong sentiments against Serbia for its "territorial greed" and the subsequent poor treatment of those who self-identified as Bulgarian under Serbian rule. On the 90th anniversary of

the Neuilly treaty in 2009 VMRO distributed a book. It was accompanied by a bookmark which explained how the text should be interpreted:

> *This book is a present to you from VMRO … In it you can read one objective testimony of a French journalist about the Serbian cruelties towards the Bulgarians in Macedonia. We give you this book, not because we want to awaken in you sorrow or desire for revenge, but because we believe in memory and justice… [on this] depends the new self-confidence of Bulgarians*

The two F's, fear and falsification, haunt discourses regarding Macedonians: namely, the people's fear of declaring themselves Bulgarian and the falsification of history, the invention of a Macedonian nation at the start of communism by the Serbian elite to convince them that they are not Bulgarian. This is considered part of the wider 'Great Serbia'[112] project, which also encompassed the Western Outerlands. Thus, narratives which pertain to Macedonia are extended to the Western Outerlands by virtue of an assumed shared Serbian political elite.

This animosity towards Serbia was difficult to translate to a wider public. VMRO chanted 'Serbe na Vurbe' (Serbians on willows) at the torch-lit processions commemorating The Treaty of Neuilly. I shared one activist's concern with Angel that the violent nature of the chant had alienated some sympathizers who had joined the procession and left when the chant began. Angel looked at me seriously and remarked: "don't you know we cannot not chant this?". In his understanding, dislike of the Serbs is a historical imperative, driven by a sense of betrayal and disdain. This imperative was not easily understood to all observers of such events.

Despite difficulties in translating their cause to a wider audience, VMRO consistently attempted to relate the key points of the Macedonian Question to a perplexed Bulgarian public under the rubrics outlined below. They utilized a similar set of notions

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[112] Of course, Serbians also claim there is a Great Bulgaria project which they try to circumvent with political activism.

as in other campaigns already discussed here, but the Macedonian cause did not seem to hold the same level of immediacy, a need for action, as the other two. The difference is indicative and thus informative. It highlights the complexity of propagating a cause in contrast to attempting to engage popular public support.

Falsification

Macedonian assertions of identity, according to VMRO activists, are said to be pervaded by historical fallacy. This, they claim is the consequence of a political elite who willfully ignore the state's Bulgarian ethnic heritage. Kostadin produced a booklet, entitled "the Bulgarian national identity and the Slav population in Macedonia: a brief handbook on the Macedonian question", which launches into the contested history of the ancient world from page one. To counter "Macedonianst myths" Kostadin explored the linguistic basis for nationality, defining the difference between dialect and language in order to make the argument that the Macedonian and Bulgarian tongue are the same, arguing the formalized Macedonian language bears the characteristics of being "typically created by committee". Kostadin concluded that subsequent to 'the socialist re-writing of Macedonian collective identity', "The biggest ethnic and historical falsification in human history is complete".

VMRO activists commonly stated that Macedonia in the 1990s, coming out of the Yugoslav project to form an independent state, had the opportunity to acknowledge its citizens' Bulgarian heritage, but the political elite rejected that route – 'failing its population'. Karakachanov (2003) writes that Macedonia's current ruling party, VMRO-DPMNE, was elected in the early 90s since "the population showed how great a faith was placed in these letters" [VMRO] implying they also understood that the acronym more or less meant a connection to Bulgaria. In his interpretation, VMRO-DPMNE betrayed that capital by, in VMRO's understanding, taking what is conceived as a "Macedonianist path". In mourning the passing of Dosta Dimovska, a Macedonian politician who was prominent in the 90s, Angel writes: "While Dosta was still in it, the

party [VMRO-DPMNE] still had a pro-Bulgarian wing". This, he remarks, is also the end of an idea, of a tendency which existed in 'the transition":

> *In public life around Vardar there are no longer personalities like her, who know, remember and declare their Bulgarian descent and consciousness. Today's statesmen and politicians there are born and were raised in the state 'The Republic of Macedonia. Not in Yugoslavia under Serbian-communist rule ... This state will naturally stray and form its own – even if political[113] - nation. With its own national belonging.*

Dimovska was thus portrayed by VMRO activists as part of the wider story of the end of Macedonia's possible Bulgarian trajectory.

Nationalist narratives – such as the ones produced by Kostadin, Angel, Karakachanov or various other activists - exhibited what I eventually identified as a strong understanding of constructivism. It was an integral part of their discourse regarding Macedonia. Variants of the following statement, related by one informant, were commonplace:

> *the consciousness of those in Macedonia has already been formed and is being formed. There may not have been a Macedonian nation in the past, at least not in the way Skopje historians believe, however there is one now. For 20 years they have been allowed to create one. A new identity was formed on the basis of falsehood and fabrications, the falsification of history.*

This kind of assertion held an implicit accusation against Bulgarian state politics towards "its ethnic population beyond borders". Without structures to uphold Bulgarian consciousness it will surely be erased. That erasure would be a fundamental failure of the nation, a sign of weakness and lack of dignity.

The best metaphor for what my participants believe happened in the Republic of Macedonia and hence their understanding of constructivism, was shared by a woman

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[113] Here used as a contrast to organic, see below for a further elaboration of that idea.

whom I meet in a project of gathering information about women revolutionaries. She

shared a set of articles from the *Literary Forum* magazine, written in 1990 and

dedicated to the prolific author Dimitar Talev[114]. The first article discusses the

creation of the Macedonian nation in the language of grape vines. A young vine is

created by inclining an existing one down until it meets the ground and it eventually

sprouts roots. The two, mother and child, are then separated "and not even God our

father can join the two together again". In another metaphor clearly remarking on

Macedonian antique identity, one kind of plant is grafted onto another. The two

become identical.

The question which emerges in subsequence to these morphologies is what to do

when talking to people from Macedonia. The author of the articles, Aleksandur Popov,

rejects rude assertions that 'the Macedonian nation does not exist', adding that it is

now internationally agreed that people have a right to self-identification. However, he

re-iterates that they don't have the right "to back-date the national self-determination

of their ancestors, ... who had in their time determined themselves clearly to be

Bulgarians". This is an approach taken by Kostadin above and indeed by most

Bulgarian public figures when addressing Macedonian citizens. They point out

inaccurate facts, but attempt restraint.

These attempts are not always successful. It was common among VMRO activists to

share tidbits of false beliefs being propagated by Macedonians, whether on Facebook

by news articles or in private (face-to-face) jokes. These existed alongside elaborate

debates on the correct version of history. My informants related having spent years

debating history on internet forums. Similar battles took place on YouTube with

variously arranged narratives presented in video clips which were furiously discussed

in the comments below audio-visual imagery. YouTube channels were run by activists

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[114] *Literaturen Forum* 2008 – 4 (534). Talev's narratives were shared by a number of
activists as the inspiration for their youthful enthusiasm for the Macedonian cause.

in VMRO as well as others interested in the cause. These included: MakedonBulgari, batuli, vmroyouth[115], PancheTodorov and EU parliament member Andrey Kovatchev among many others. In a similar vein, for some time a Sofia University student ran a rubric 'Macedonian documents' as a blog and Facebook group where he presented documents pertaining to the fallacies of Macedonianist history. Some such as http://makedonski-bulgari.blogspot.co.uk/ shared interviews with Bulgarians from Macedonia. Specific forums such as komitite.bg were advertised as discussion communities.

Despite warning notes about the need to have patience with Macedonian citizens and their beliefs, a mocking tone easily developed in these wide-scale online conversation about history. It is represented by the creation of groups on Facebook such as "Only the sun is older than Macedonia". When komitite.bg advertised itself, it hopefully presented that it should be a "forum without attacks, fighting and hate". In most cases however, conversations seem to create hostility rather than understanding, making most debates instances of further dissent rather than cohesion.

The source of conflict within these multiple conversations could be interpreted as stemming from a variety of circumstances. A version popular amongst my informants was related by Dragi Kirov at a press conference in 2010 (Dobrev 2008). He declared to the Bulgarian media that while in the 1990s the Bulgarian government sent tanks to help ensure Macedonia's security after the Yugoslav disintegration, nowadays they need to send psychiatrists. "The government of Macedonia is not well, it is psychologically ill", as is the Macedonian media, "something went wrong with the chip fitted by the Serbo-communists". He criticized solutions by Bulgarian intelligentsia which rely on encouraging Macedonian citizens "to read history carefully" and learn the truth. Young people are instilled with an anti-Bulgarian feeling from an early age, Kirov clarified: "you can't fight the unconsciously learned prejudice and fear". Thus, more

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[115] The VMRO youth organisation account.

often than not, conversations incubate negative emotion and frustration. The participants end up othered, the border is strengthened, not diminished.

Discourses responding to Macedonian versions of history don't simply diagnose dysfunction, they also position these statements as being indicative of a 'backward' and un-European ethic by Bulgaria's South-Western neighbors. A furious flurry of commentaries about Macedonian history crystallized in 2010 around the publication of an Encyclopedia of Macedonian history by the Macedonian Academy of Sciences'. Plamen Pavlov produced a TV program on the topic, hosting as a guest the then head of BKKS[116], Lazar Mladenov. Kostadin asked Trendafil Mitev, the head of the Macedonian Institute, to compose a letter to the EU on the topic. In his letter Mitev decried the Macedonian intelligentsia for "wreak[ing] spiritual decay among its *narod[117]*" – the creation of hate and "negative political thinking" through "crude falsification". He declared the Macedonian approach to culture the opposite of "European civilization"; it is instead, "primitive", the product of people "educated by the narrow-mindedness of Josif Broz Tito" and the former Yugolav Communist Party[118]. Mitev concluded that the key 'contribution' of the volume is to have gathered all "the old falsifications, fabrications and crude insinuations connected with various territorial claims" concluding: "The politicians and scientists in this Balkan state quite evidently, haven't forgotten anything old and haven't learned anything new".

Mitev's condemnation was not only a diagnosis, it also presented prescriptions for the Bulgarian government's foreign policy. Namely he argued that Macedonia, given these circumstances, should not be unequivocally supported in its road to EU entry by the Bulgarian government. Certain conditions need to be met. It has to inhibit "the use of

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[116] See Appendix 1.

[117] 'People', nation.

[118] The latter accusation is a rather common assertion abbreviated as an insult "*surbokomunisti*" (lit. Serbian communists).

hate speech" against Bulgaria and the falsifications of history, especially those which infringe on Bulgaria's own history. Mitev also highlighted a condition which is a favored topic of BKKS's first leader, Spas Tashev – the preservation of Bulgarian heritage in Macedonia. Tashev had, for a number of years, documented how fragments of writing in Slavic script and other such aspects of the built environment which could be associated with Bulgaria have been systematically obliterated in the Republic of Macedonia.

The position presented by Mitev above is VMRO's usual position on the Macedonian question. Karakachanov, as a spokesperson for the organisation (and a kind of spokesman for the Macedonian cause in Bulgaria), routinely presented it on television programmes as a featured guest. He would often accompany it with the assertion that the Macedonian political elite cannot be trusted. They say one thing on international forums or on visits to Sofia, while pursuing the old regime line internally. According to him, Macedonia is still totalitarian, based "on a primitive nationalism".

The implicit differentiation is between an Enlightened nationalism, which in his understanding is European – what he and his cohorts ascribe to – and the kind propagated by Macedonia, which is not European. Furthermore he would insist that people in Macedonia cannot declare they are Bulgarian without being imprisoned under exaggerated charges. This is an infringement on human rights. Karakachanov elicited both notions of Europe in parallel: he elicited the noble nationalism of Enlightened Europe, while simultaneously using the idea of human rights that is more closely related to post–World War II Europe. The fact that this is carried out inconsistently across different campaigns exhibits that it is an instrumentalisation- talking the language of power and hybridizing it in a way indicated by Holmes in his notion of 'illicit discourses'.

VMRO activists declare hopefully that there must be a different approach to Macedonia's citizens than towards the political elite which might help bridge the

politically affected rift. Macedonian citizens must be welcomed into Bulgaria. They are already subject to a law which allows them to claim Bulgarian ethnic origin and become citizens[119]. Thus, when in Winter 2009, the visa regime fell between Macedonia and Bulgaria, opening up the border, VMRO bought a radio slot on local radio in South-West Bulgaria, welcoming their "brother Macedonians". They created a large poster and placed it near the border. It stated "Welcome Brother Macedonians"*, where the asterix said "not valid for the mercantile Skopje elite and personally for Latas[120]". The billboard gained the status of *a site* for some Macedonian and Bulgarian citizens crossing the border. They started taking their photo with it. Some of the photos were uploaded on Facebook. It wasn't long before this was also contested: VMRO was re-written to MN̶O̶RO. The "M" stands for *Militzejska* (police) which refers to Karakachanov's engagement with the secret services.

The Affective Border

> *Subpoena[s] happen all the time and methodically. That is the purpose: that those who call themselves Bulgarian be wound up, pushed and for his life to be as hard as possible.*

VMRO author the above additional discourse to explain Macedonian citizens' reluctance to declare their Bulgarian identity. This can be observed in their commemoration of the historic creation of VMRO's proto-organisation in the Kisutendil area. On the occasion they made a barbed wire fence on a road leading into Macedonia and symbolically cut it, watched by attending media. The event was entitled: "Stop the terror over Bulgarians in Macedonia". The title alludes to the idea of being afraid to declare your self-identification. The believed root of that fear is illustrated by one instance of visiting the Skopje central graveyard, on the anniversary of the passing of one of Rajna Drangova's ancestors. Todor (who drove us) paused in front of two graves which bear a Communist star and remarked: "these men tortured a lot of people".

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[119] Although this is also used instrumentally to gain EU citizenship. (Neofotistos 2009)
[120] Latas is a Skopije journalist who is enthusiastic in his anti-Bulgarian discourse.

These historical phantoms represent the worry of being the next person to be called to the police station; they pervade the discourse of what it is to Bulgarian in Macedonia. A young VMRO member came back from Macedonia – having been on a cultural exchange program. He declared: "they are afraid to say they are Bulgarian". As I shall show in reference to the Spaska Mitrova case, when Bulgarian Macedonians enter into the Bulgarian public domain they become politicized and start to embody the wider politics of inter-party and inter-state negotiations. Fear engenders social recognition of having suffered under a repressive regime. VMRO has worked hard to author publicly available frameworks for interpreting the display of fear by public persons of Macedonian origin.

These instances hint at the second central concern in VMRO's activism vis-à-vis the Macedonian question – the creation of an affective border – a border which is defined by fear. Speaking at a talk organized by VMRO in the Sofia University, Spas Tashev[121] highlighted that the border between Bulgaria and Macedonia is non-porous. In his view Macedonian citizens do not have the chance "to explore their historical identity". This, he explained, is why he created the Bulgarian Cultural Club in Skopje (BKKS) – to dissipate the isolation between the two states. If there was more openness, Macedonia's citizens would "discover their origins on their own". During socialism, Bulgarian activists used to smuggle Bulgarian books into Macedonia (i.e. into the Yugoslav Republic). He emphasizes that people 'nowadays' still do not have Bulgarian books over the border. Macedonians, he remarked, cannot pick up a TV or radio signal from Bulgaria except for the *chalga* channel Planeta, adding: "you can imagine the impression they have of us". In 2010, a mundane event helped foster unity between Bulgarians and Macedonians: Bulgarian Music Idol was hosted collaboratively with entertainers from Macedonia. In one instance the presenter declared: "our two nations, if not to say nation" revealing one undercurrent to the show's format. However these moments of unity and connection were rare. Instead VMRO consistently talk about the

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[121] See page 295 and Appendix 1.

presence of 'the fear' which defines the distance between the people on either side of the border.

In one case, when crossing the border point into Macedonia with my informants, we were held for a long period of time as guards made enquiries. My informants stated "it is deliberate". They told me stories of being held there before and highlighted that in one instance the border guards took the car apart. One activist remarks he has crossed it on foot twelve times. His movements conspicuously mirror those of people in the Outerlands[122] – he conceived this as a kind of empathy with their condition. During our hold up at the border, I was told by an activists to keep a low profile, adding: "the fewer people who go into their black notepads the better".

Through a variety of utterances I learned that to be Bulgarian in Macedonia requires one to display that one is afraid or persecuted. Bulgarian Macedonians who did not seem afraid of institutions were viewed with suspicion. In my approach to these narratives of fear, I follow work by anthropologists who have examined them as a co-constitutive with a social world and thus having a relational dimension: "a primary idiom of defining and negotiating social relations of the self in a moral order" (Lutz and White 1986: 417). Emotion has been viewed as a possible resource which can help to structure change (*ibid.* 422). The obscured structures of power, draped in bureaucratic process as elicited above, resonate with other cases such as those discussed by Nuijten (2004) in the case of Mexico. Actors are engaged in a state bureaucratic machine which produces indeterminacy, hope and fear. Fear also appears in the guise discussed by McGranahan (2005) (drawing on Trouillot) – as the silencing of history. Like Tibetan resistance fighters, Macedonians seem to be indefinitely placed in "historical arrest", waiting to see if their 'archived' and muted histories will become usable in burgeoning political projects (*ibid.* 571).

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[122] People in the Outerlands enact multiple economic migrations into Bulgaria. There is no public transport. They group together with their peers, take taxis to the border, cross it by foot and are collected by their relatives of the other side.

Being part of such communities of fear, 'in reserve' for future politics, does not seem to be akin to commonly known forms of othering which aid the creation of homogeneous communal divides. Fear can lead people to recognize each other as members of the same repressed community, but it also has tendencies towards atomising those who experience it. The ambivalences surrounding various case of 'Bulgarians abroad', the lack of trust amongst activists in the Outerlands and in Macedonia are aspects of the pervasive tendencies towards denunciation and gossip discussed by Linda Green (1994). The use of Green's material might seem excessive. Her work is based in a physically violent locale while the stories above allude to different kinds of threat. However, it seems to me that the differences between the fear above and her description of fear are ones of scale, not of type. Self-identified minorities in the Outerlands and Macedonia embody a liminality. As long as citizens of Bulgaria's neighbors continue to assert their Bulgarian consciousness they also continue to be held in "historical arrest".

The stories that follow address contexts in which my informants felt fear and intimidation. Most of them are stories which I heard in the context of VMRO activism. The first, is that of a personal acquaintance outside of the VMRO arena, showing that there are grounds for this discourse in wider society, but they are more ambivalent. Lena is an elderly lady, a family friend, a woman whose Macedonian descent was only related to me after the start of my research. She offered her story, relating it only after I promised to never disclose her name or elements of the narrative which might identify her or her family – hence I have kept some aspects of her story brief. She remarked, exhibiting the customary fear: "I still have family in Macedonia". Lena wanted to continue being able to visit them without "problems". Her story inserts us at the very start of this history of fear.

Lena's family had a history of participating in Revival Era revolutionary activism: one ancestor was a healer and used to aid revolutionary fighters before he was beheaded, another was an organiser for VMORO, a *vojvoda* who was caught and hanged. Lena

spent her youth as a subject of the Serbian kingdom in the early twentieth century. At school she had to learn Serbian, at home they spoke Macedonian dialect, hence school was particularly hard. In parallel to school history lessons, she learned history from her grandmother – who told her about her Bulgarian heritage. Lena vividly remembered her grandmother saying an old phrase well-known amongst the Macedonian-Bulgarians "Do you see from where the sun rises, it rises from Bulgaria". One day when she was asked to answer a question in a history lesson, Lena told some of the stories she learnt at home. Her school teacher said he would come by her house later. Now frightened, the child went home. Her mother, filled with panic and fear, angrily derided her grandmother for putting the family at risk by telling the child this history. She insisted they burn the VMORO archive stored in the double ceiling in their house, inherited from the activist men in the family. Between the documents there was the *cheta's* money. They did so. As luck would have it, the teacher was 'a communist'. He came to the house only to tell them to be more careful in the future. They were relived but despondent to have burnt the archive. To add further complexity to the story, the Bulgarian army came to Macedonia during World War II. Lena highlighted that they were not 'good people' – they took advantage of the local population, appropriating property and land. This drove part of the population to join the left-wing opposition.

The second story of fear is from the wider media. It is that of a Bulgarian-Macedonian, Vladimir Parev, who tried to rally his compatriots in 2007 to sign two contemporary petitions, one to the then foreign minister of Bulgaria, Ivaylo Kalfin and one addressed to the European Union (Parev 2007). There he foregrounded "the problem" of fear with a discussion of its historical preconditions:

> *Do you know what the feeling of fear is? We talk about another fear, atavistic, a fear of putting your signature on some petition. No, I am not thinking about ecological petitions or about those in defense of animals, mushrooms or other "very important" for the European Union issues. We are talking about the fear of the Macedonian Bulgarians to put their signatures on a petition which would mark their national identity, which talks of the*

dirty role of Macedonian media against Bulgaria, against the Bulgarian nation... Macedonians don't know that they weren't always so fearful. They had not only signed, but they had also written many petitions, memoranda and Appeals to the international community in the period between the two world wars" [he then lists the petitions]

Both petitions performed poorly: one gathered 30, the other 70 signatures. Perev attributed this to:

the fear, the terrifying fear under which the Macedonian society lives, to admit that they are Macedonian Bulgarians and are looking for their rights... the fear, that unconscious fear, which has found its way deep into Macedonian Bulgarians.

He contextualised this fear in the Bulgarian government's "treachery", relating – history has taught Macedonian–Bulgarians that the Bulgarian state will do nothing to defend them. Toshev references the older generation of petitioners – Gena Veleva, Dr. Asen Tatarchev. The history he elicits is that which emerges chronologically after the context of Vera's story. In the Serbian kingdom between 1920 and 1930, there existed a Macedonian youth organisation which had ties with VMRO in Bulgaria at the time. Those from the organisation who were caught by the Serbian police were customarily tortured or imprisoned. In Perev's narrative, their fate aided the build-up of fear. Toshev mournfully remarks that they were clever, erudite people who suffered a heavy fate:

Some communist scoundrels daily offended their dignity, they questioned them, limited their movements, subjected them to moral suffering, known only to the insane Bolshevik idea. And all of these people to their last moment kept their dignity.

In the Western Outerlands, the minority activist Ivan Nikolov (2002) echoes this history as a condition suffered by all those who identified themselves as Bulgarian under first Serbian, then Yugoslav political power. As already discussed in the introduction, Nikolov has authored an intricate document, a memorandum which reports on the

issues of the Bulgarian minority for the past century. I have listened to variants of the contents of the text in a number of his public speeches and small circle conversations. I refer to the larger piece, favoring its systematic nature. Nikolov provides the story which follows after the Macedonian Secret Organisations were widely and systematically destroyed and their members often imprisoned by the interwar Serbian government.

Nikolov defines "the terror" of living in the Western Outerlands under the Yugoslav regime– the kind of circumstances which would lead him to open his speeches with the words "we have been the subject of almost all assimilation regimes known to man". Integration of the region into Yugoslavia after 1949 meant Bulgarian institutions were closed down, the memorials of the minority became the object of attacks. People were coerced into signing documents stating they are of Serbian ethnic origin. There was, in parallel, an attempt to create a separate nation out of the minority by using the regional denomination *shoppes*, which is also commonly used for the population the Sofia area.

In his document Nikolov proposes that dignity cannot be guaranteed personally, it can only be guaranteed collectively via the ability to freely identify one's ethnicity. He relates past terror to contemporary experiences of fear and suppression. This diagnosis leads Nikolov to declare that the weakness of International Minority Treaties was that they don't recognize the right to self-define as a collectivity. He criticizes the fact that defense of minorities is about defending a collection of individuals – not an existing community – and declares he would rather see minorities gain an administrative-political autonomy, allowing them to have sole responsibility for themselves and the execution of their rights. The existing condition of the minority, Nikolov typifies as follows: a decrease in morale; spiritual crisis; moral nihilism; a traumatised population as evidenced in its self-isolation from politics; human beings without value. His writing reiterates the need for national dignity because "the traumatised behavior [of the population now] is typical of people with a squashed

human and national dignity, people who are spiritually and physically enslaved".

I found many of the stories told by Nikolov and others when they tried to contextualize their grievances, and relate why the status quo is intolerable, difficult to grasp initially. Yet eventually, it they clarified by utterances such as Nikolov's statement: "your smallest mistakes are used against you and activists are frequently called to the police station to give an account of themselves". One such example was when VMRO provided the prizes for a mock Olympic games held at the Bosilegrad local school and publicized their generosity on their site. The mayors' office in Bosilegrad sent a copy of the statement to parents of the children in question stating "KIC are trying to make your children VMRO members". Nikolov, relating this story, used it as an example of how his actions and those of people who "work to preserve the Bulgarian nature of the region" are incessantly monitored.

The pressure of being constantly watched, always on the verge of another dispute is best represented by Snejana, a Bulgarian language teacher in the Outerlands, who was the head teacher of a school in her local town. Snejana was a nervous middle aged lady. She was criticised by one VMRO activist for being 'at war' with everyone in Tzaribrod, the town in the Republic where she taught. However, as far as most members of VMRO were concerned, she was also one of the few local activists who was effective in propagating the cause of Bulgarians in Serbia. Snejana had, in their estimation, done 'good work', reinstating the teaching of Bulgarian language in the school in Tzaribrod after a 40 year hiatus.

Snejana repeatedly stated to VMRO activists that she felt pressured and afraid. She attempted to petition European institutions, declaring that she has had to work in a politicized environment, where the ability to keep the school registered in a way that would allow it to have classes in Bulgarian, has been constantly endangered. Her grievances were presented in a letter to the European commission as follows:

*In the space of twenty eight years, since I graduated from university in Bulgaria, I was the subject of much repression and pressure. For twenty years I was refused work including the ability to teach Bulgarian despite the fact that for many years I was the only candidate for the job who had graduated Bulgarian philology in the "St. Cyril Ohridski" University in Sofia, the Republic of Bulgaria. When I had my first child I was blocked from taking my legal right of being on maternity leave because for seven years I worked according to article 64 [employed in a non-permanent capacity] despite the position being free after the death of a colleague. When I was having my second child, I was fired while on maternity leave (three months before it ran out) for no apparent reason or infringement. I tried to contest this in court, however the judgment was not in my favor. Hence I was unable to defend my right to not be fired while on maternity leave. This case is one of the reasons why I have ceased to have faith in the Institution in Serbia and generally consider turning to them as a waste of time and nerves. **In the case of Serbian politics I have cause to believe that justice is given according to the [ethnicity of the] person not according to the law.***

The law gives us the right to teach Bulgarian but does not provide for anything else such as textbooks, documents in Bulgarian, seminars in Bulgarian or exams in Bulgarian as part of the entry exams for university.

In her longer letter, Snejana describes her experiences of attempting to register the school so as to be able to hold Bulgarian language classes. It took three years (2004–2007) of wrangling over registration. She contends that media outlets in Tzaribrod have been leading a smear campaign against her. This led to her being alienated from her teachers and the school's board of trustees. Snejana also contends that the municipal council solicited people to sabotage the effective working of the school. A former employee was suing her– a circumstance Snejana believes to be a staged scandal. In her assessment, the teacher took the job with the purpose of misbehaving and being fired so as to lead to this circumstance. Her statements had a tendency to become more elaborate and difficult to follow as she proceeded with further explanations. Snejana was the subject of four lawsuits filed by four of her colleagues. She traced the source of these malignant actions to the mayor who, she claim, was instructed in the matter directly by a cabinet minister.

Snejana was convinced the fundamental problem is not her, but a desire to displace her and circumvent the teaching of Bulgarian language classes altogether. She asserted that the actions against her intensified around the time that the Bulgarian classes were re-introduced. The stress of this circumstance meant Snejana was consistently ill- at one point being hospitalized in the emergency ward. She wrote to the European commission:

> *I feel the ring is closing in on me and there are too many cases against me. They only amplify their assertions that the headmistress causes strife, 'everybody has a problem with her'. …In this whole story the headmistress of the school has to be labeled as being a conflict personality and the whole story will be narrated as 'the Bulgarians are fighting'.*

Activists such as Nikolov and Snejana form parallel structures to those which are supposed to officially represent the minority. There exists a 'National Council of Bulgarians in Serbia', an institution recognized by the Serbian government and in theory dedicated to defending the rights of the minority. Snejana and Nikolov work independently because they don't believe the institution to be effective. The council asked Snejana to step down from her position, saying she was becoming a liability, having being involved in too many conflicts. Snejana in contestation to that claim pointed out that she has a long-term engagement with the 'Bulgarian National Agency for Bulgarians Abroad' and other institutions in Bulgaria who have consistently commended her work. Snejana and the head of the council took turns calling each other Serbian spies. The headmistress filed papers for a defamation suit.

Snejana represents perfectly what Nikolov seems to have meant when we discussed how Serbian authorities operate. In his understanding, there is pressure hidden within bureaucracy, within small infringements for which the person who declares Bulgarian consciousness, engenders heavier penalties. Snejana's case too often seems like a strange kind of paranoia, as if too many years of socialist-led initiatives for citizens to inform on each other led to mass suspicion. Even if that is the only dynamic actually

active in these cases it would still be significant. Yet her seemingly paranoid narrative is not the only one.

A similarly confusing and 'dense' scandal is that of Spaska Mitrova. Mitrova is a woman born in Macedonia, but who stated she has Bulgarian self-consciousness. The backlash to her unlawful actions was deemed disproportionate – a consequence of her Bulgarian consciousness. As a result of the escalating dispute over child-custody during her divorce from her ethnically Serbian husband, it was deemed that Spaska has denied visitation rights to her husband; for this, she was put on trial and eventually arrested. Spaska was sentenced to serve three months in prison (although she served only two and a half). As remarked in the Bulgarian media, she was sent to the prison Izridovo – this echoes the fate of Bulgarian Macedonians who refused to reject their identity were sent there by the Macedonian Communist Party in 1944. In the legal proceedings which ensued, her attempts to regain custody of her daughter, she found it difficult to retain a lawyer. In one case it was claimed that one lawyer was threatened and thus did not appear in court. In June 2010 she was again sentenced, this time to nine months probation for slander against the judges in Gevgeli, her home town. She is said to have called them *udashi* (which means secret service agents) and *serbokomunisti* (see Kirov above).

To me Spaska explained the fear which pervades a person in such circumstances "you go to bed thinking: what is going to happen to you and those close to you tomorrow?". The fear, she says, appears instinctively – you are called to the police for seemingly no reason whatsoever, they come to your house and declare it's a mistake, they follow you for some time when you are driving and then go away. It happens gradually, she notes, you don't even feel it at first. As you start to realise it, the realisation entails a certainty that there is more trouble coming soon, that they are going to drain you of your financial resources and then strike where it hurts the most. The fear resulting from these processes passes onto one's relatives and peers who bear witness to them.

Spaska believes that it is easy to put someone on trial in Macedonia if a civil servant is ready to testify against them. The trials and verdicts, she concludes, only confirm the ideas propagated amongst Macedonia's citizens – what VMRO terms the "sowing of hate" – that all Bulgarians are traitors and criminals. She remarks – there are of course those who never know this feeling, those who are good, they don't question the official version of history and events. Spaska's Bulgarian self-consciousness comes from the home, but for the rest of her peers, she noted, there are many who fall under the dictums "one lie told a few too many times becomes the truth". This echoes Kirov and Nikolov's narratives discussed above.

The Politics of Fear

Pere Toshev concluded his remarks on fear by noting that it was unproductive for the historic Macedonian Brotherhoods to write to the international community because of the "the uselessness of that action... About us has forgotten both God, and enemy and there is nothing we can wait for from Europe- she [Europe] in our songs was called "Babylonian whore". He reasoned Bulgarian Macedonians need to write to the Bulgarian government.

The basis of VMRO's contention is that the government does not care. Angel, writing about Dospa, the Macedonian politician discussed earlier in the chapter, remarks that the state:

> *is illiterate, inactive and politically impotent on the topic "Bulgarians and Bulgarian-ness in Macedonia"... It is ashamed and afraid to declare clearly and vocally a decision to defend these Bulgarians.*

When the Bulgarian Foreign Minister declares his support for activist Ang Sung Lee, BKKS releases a statement highlighting that the government is more interested in the rights of people in Burma than in their [Bulgarian Macedonians'] welfare. Karakachanov later echoes that statement in an interview on TV. VMRO constantly 'advises' the

government what position it should take with regards to Macedonia – whether their opinion is solicited or not.

VMRO considers Macedonia to be its terrain, its natural domain. When required the organization supported protests pertinent to the cause by joining them 'only carrying the national flags', leaving the VMRO flags 'at home' in the VMRO's central offices – *tzentralata* - and thus abandoning party preferences in order to support the cause. When people from the Western Outerlands or Macedonia came to the *tzentrala* they would be greeted deferentially with respect. Pavel would bring coffee, offer them seats and make sure their accommodation in Sofia is sorted out. The main question VMRO would ask is: what do you want of us?

VMRO's ability to claim unique positionality with regards to the Macedonian issue is however contested and polticised. Furthermore, VMRO's political position means that when the Bulgarian government does "the right thing" *vis-à-vis* Bulgarian minorities, those actions do not necessarily engender delight or approval. VMRO's success depends on the Bulgarian government's shortcomings when it comes to defending the national domain. The ebb and flow of other political parties who try to engage with these issues becomes an infringement rather than welcome support for the cause.

In February 2011 the Serbian police forbid the annual commemoration of Vasil Levski in Bosilegrad. This quickly turned into a scandal. The Bulgarian defense minister at the time – Mladenov declared on Twitter that the ban is "shame for the nation" and will not be left without repercussions. On his Facebook page he declared that Levski is a historical figure "bigger than Bulgaria itself"; to prevent the Balkans from descending into chaos, these sort of bans must be left in the past. To official media outlets he announces he has handed a *nota* to the Serbian emissary and will inform "its European partners of such behavior". VMRO immediately suggests that the upcoming visit of the Serbian minister be either postponed or used as an occasion to discuss the relationship to the minority and to remind them that Serbia's EU entry must be

conditional on better treatment. The minister responded 'appropriately'. This seemed to elicit mixed reactions from VMRO activists (back in the UK at the time, I was observing my informants on Facebook) after all the ability to make a strong contestation depended on the government failing in its obligations. The head of the youth organisation grudgingly declared they need real politics, not "twitter politics", while another commentator remarked that in fact the foreign minister acted perfectly within diplomatic protocol.

The Spaska Mitrova case was turned into a public event by VMRO in 2009 – in it they tried to crystallize the discourses of fear discussed above. Bojko Borisov's government is the first to have a minister 'for Bulgarians abroad' (used in the same spirit as by VMRO), Bojidar Dimitrov[123]. In Oct 2009 Borisov stated to the media he will do everything possible on the Mitrova case. His interior minister, Rumiana Jeleva, declared she will inform the Swiss representatives of the EU parliament in Bulgaria of the case and will ask a representative to be present when Mitova has her trial. Dimitrov backed up his prime minister stating Borisov had used "silent diplomacy", and in several private conversations with his Macedonian counterpart Nikola Gruevski, he requested Mitrova's release "in a categorical tone." After her relese, in accordance with the public nature of her cause, Spaska was taken to the Bulgarian consulate in Skopje. When he publicized the release Dimitrov declared that he would find Spaska employment in Bulgaria, and would personally arrange Bulgarian citizenship for her family. Early on fieldwork, as I observed VMRO activists react to these events, they recounted that on the way out of that press conference Dimitrov deferred responsibility for finding employment for Spaska to VMRO representatives.

VMRO, as well as Spaska, declared her case would not be over until she received custody of her child – something which proved difficult to effect. VMRO claimed ownership of Spaska's case by protesting in her name and petitioning ministers on her

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[123] He was incepted into office with a scandal as he had a DS past and it had recently become illegal to appoint persons with such a background to certain position in power.

behalf. When she was released from prison they took it upon themselves to look after her. They set up a bank account for her use. The mayor of Bansko, VMRO's silent third deputy-leader and his team took responsibility for Spaska and tried to find her work. Like other people who frequented VMRO, I got to know Spaska as she visited the offices, always arriving with an entorage of people from Bansko. Spaska was keen to publicize the case. Current and former VMRO activists arranged media appearances for her. The organisation hired "two of the best lawyers in Macedonia" for her defence. VMRO members attended her court appearances in Macedonia as a show of moral support. When Spaska continued to be unsucessful in her attempts to re-gain custody of her daughter, Karakachanov declared an intention to hire a lawyer to represent her in front of the Strasburg court. Meanwhile, Spaska and her mother became members of VMRO. When I asked Pavel how an interview which featured Spaska went, he said that it went well because "she said what she was supposed to say".

As Spaska started to embody the cause of Macedonian Bulgarians in the public domain, she was courted by ATAKA. She was offered support from one of its representatives who was elected to the EU, Dimitur Stojanov. ATAKA announced her switch of allegiance to the media – she was employed by Stojanov to hear out other Bulgarian-Macedonians' stories. It lent credibility to Stojanov's declaration that he is taking the case of Bulgarian-Macedonians[124] to the European Parliament. From then onwards Spaska stopped answering Pavel's calls, truncating a previously close relationship. In October 2010, after years of legal contention, Spaska re-gained custody of her daughter. This was trumpeted across the media acompanied with the statement that ATAKA furnished her with legal defence. Subsequently VMRO wrote an article detailing all they did for Spaska finishing with the words: "We wish Spaska and little Suzana [her daughter] to be very happy together". When a newspaper article declared Spaska had been "stolen by ATAKA", the allusion suggests her previous objectification.

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[124] By doing so he is not unique: Evgenii Kirilov and Andrey Kovachev had also already done so.

Conclusions

This campaign, while being most fundamental to the organization, is also one which resonates least with the general public. Although Macedonia is clearly a political subject with enough capital to engender competition, Macedonian and Bulgarian citizens were divided by different narratives of history and a strong border of fear. That fear was not within the contemporary national domain, but of citizens across borders held in historical suspense. Discourses of fear and falsification divided Bulgarian and Macedonian citizens. They eroded cohesion amongst those Macedonian citizens who identified themselves as Bulgarian Macedonians. There were two discourses which everyday Bulgarian citizens could easily grasp in relation to Macedonia. One was that of Macedonian falsifications of history and the second was that of the possibility of a larger Bulgaria. The former elicited a kind of defense against those who might try to steal history and thus were border-forming, the latter had more potential to embody sympathies for "our Brother Macedonians".

Narrators featured in this chapter presented their stories to the media either through their own activism or filtered through nationalist organisations. The narratives required knowledge of a certain domain – the kind either gained from going through the VMRO *shkola*[125] or through family histories of fear in Macedonia among Bulgarian citizens. Macedonians were formed as a non-other – a similar self which needed protection. Yet their own propensity to resist this integration made them problematic. While VMRO activists tried to distinguish between the suffering Macedonians and 'the corrupt, false Serbo-communist elite', this was predicated on too much inside information. Although some persons entered the public domain, illuminating some of these issues, their affective potential was less immediate than the Ottoman legacy or 'the problem' of the Roma. The stories described in this chapter were publicly available, but were most accessible to those who knew how to interpret them. VMRO continued to address the Macedonian question, due to its role in the organisation's internal frames of reference

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[125] See page 204 for definition.

and socialization (as discussed in Chapter 3). However, key activists appeared to understand that it had limited capacity to help them gain political support or recognition.

In addition to those problems, VMRO found itself competing with other political actors for the role of the 'face' of the Macedonian Cause and its symbolic capital. Although Bojidar Dimitrov's post for 'Bulgarians abroad' was closed after he had an altercation with the prime minister, new voices within the Bulgarian government came to represent the Bulgarian side of the Macedonian question. The new (2012) Bulgarian president took a firmer approach to the question of Bulgarian minorities in Macedonia as did Bulgarian EU parliament representative Andrey Kovachev. Their actions suggest a new politics towards Macedonia, heralded by non-VMRO Macedonia activists, while VMRO keep quiet. All these elements fed into the Macedonian issue's status as a politically ineffective campaign for VMRO. The role it was able to serve, as described in Chapter 3.2, was one of crystalising VMRO's internal organisational identity.

Conclusion Redeeming the Nation

Throughout this thesis I have endeavored to take the question of nationalism out of the domain of studies which challenge or deconstruct fixity. I have instead focused on the creation of fixities and national subjectivity as part of the dynamic relationship between a person and different modes of collective identification. In Chapter 2, I argued that theories which deconstruct fixity associate nationalism with the state, while people's actions are assumed to embody fluidity rather than fixity. Similarly, work on the Balkans has increasingly conceived of nationalism as an intrusive ethnicisation of citizens' daily lives. Here, I have considered when and how, nationalism becomes a welcome intrusion without arguing that this is always the case. By focusing on activist nationalists who attempt to insert themselves between the two definers of the nation-state (the nation and the state), I have discussed citizens' engagements with the *doxa* of national subjectivity. Thus I have focused on what Berezin (2009) has termed 'consolidation regimes' – mechanisms which ensure the fit between the nation and the state. In particular, I have examined the Bulgarian consolidation regime. Activist nationalists in Bulgaria, and I would warrant to say nationalists elsewhere, claim that the state does not adequately represent the nation. By contesting the power of the state to represent the nation, they claim to themselves represent it.

I have looked at what constitutes that contestation by conceptualizing the construction of *doxa* (Bourdieu 1977) as dialogic in the fashion discussed by Julia Kristeva. I have examined the nation as an apparatus of production, focusing on its relevance for collective personhood and the ways in which collective personhood is tied to particular affects. Kristeva's subtle understanding of the interplay between the symbolic and semiotic has played a pivotal role in my theoretical approach to this apparatus. In particular, I have focused on the interplay between semiotic poetics as fluidity and creativity in social life, and parallel-running attempts to create more firm meaning

through symbolic action. Activist contention addresses, and thus moulds, a polyphonic public arena by using repertoires of existing symbols which are intrinsically ambivalent (Turner 1975, Kertzer 1989). Within this framework I have addressed the classic debate about the status of history in the Balkans by following Keith Brown's definitions of history as a conflation of partial truths and argument cultures (Brown: 2003; Brown and Hamilakis: 2003). However, in view of my interest in the role of asserting fixity in social life, I have focused on the emotive dimension of certain historical topics and their role as pillars of collective belief leads (which leads historical narratives to be objectified and simplified to common motifs). Implicitly throughout the thesis, I have applied these frameworks to both the perception of history within the public arenas of the nation state, and more explicitly to the historical themes which form the common frameworks for socialization in activist life within VMRO. In the latter case I have built my framework on Goodwin and Polletta's (2001) discussion of the importance of emotive ties in activist networks.

In a variant of Keith Brown's assertion that the problem of the Macedonian Question is that people have attempted to answer it, I have argued that many debates about history arise out of the conflation of academic debates on historical narrative and contestation of the narratives and key symbols which define collective identity. Thus in South-East Europe there has been a proliferation of scholarship and funding for de-reifying mythical motifs in national history.

To denote how I understand the wider public arenas, which were discussed in Chapters 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3, I have utilized Edensor's (2002) work to refer to it as "a shared compendia of resources", a matrix[126]. Within this thesis I have resisted attempting to answer the questions: "what are public arenas?" and "what is mediation?". It is not the direct topic of my research and the other engagements of my thesis have kept me otherwise occupied. The concern has been subsumed within my wider engagement

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[126] For a wider discussion see Francis Cody's (2011) review of work on publics and politics.

with the work of theorists who are attentive to semiotic construction. The question of what constitutes public arenas remains somewhat open-ended in the thesis. It seems to me impossible to answer it with the kind of data currently at my disposal. To keep problems at bay, I present the following disclaimers. I understand public arenas to be multiple, over-lapping, but also disjointed. As already indicated in the classic work of Turner (1977) shared symbols are built on ambivalent and partial understandings amongst the general populace. The benefit of provisionally understanding this domain as a "context of awareness" is that it also allows one to understand some people will remain unaware and many partially aware. There is one particular clarification which is important for the content of this thesis: public arena(s) feed into the dialogic construction of the national domain, but that process is less effervescent. It is a collective imagination which is more disciplined. The conclusion as a whole elaborates on this point.

In line with existing theories I have conceptualized 'the nation' as a shared semiotic space. However, while Herzfeld (1997) has argued that perceived national flaws are intimate knowledge, I have addressed the significance of their very public airing. Within the thesis I have looked at how the nation is conceived as *complexed,* as psychologically ill. I have examined how my informants' inner emotional states are intrinsically tied to collective affective states and thus the collective through socialization into a national subjectivity. I have argued that the specificity of nationalism, in its different forms, lies in the fact that persons who define themselves as nationalist tie their individual subjectivity into a version of collective subjectivity based around "the nation". While it is commonplace to remark on the "memory work" of nationalism, it is less common to consider the affective states in which it implicates people who are thus 'tied' to the nation through "emotional labor" (Herzfeld 1997: 7).

Despite an interest in the symbolic forms which shape the national domain, I have resisted foregrounding symbols rather than subjectivities, as suggested by Billig (1997), opting instead to look at the nation in the spirit of Butler's (1990) work as an

"apparatus of production". I avoided Butler's problematic dualism of 'the law' and the performing subject by focusing on Kristeva's subtle understanding of dialectical construction of the semiotic domain of a nation's public arena(s). Thus I have both embraced the move away from looking at cultural content and attempted to show how daily reality is experienced as Bourdieu's (1977) *doxa*, as commonsense.

In the first section of this thesis, I explored how the production of ideas about "our" mentality, psychology and flaws creates a collective personhood full of what Bulgarian society self-reflexively defines as complexes of the national soul. I have shown how these 'complexes' are intrinsically tied to a worry about 'being European', which in turn relates to the condition of 'being post-Ottoman'. I argued that these discussions transformed one's origins into a problem to be solved. When it comes to the Bulgarian national subjectivity the emotional labor of the collective self is embedded within a specific power nexus which is discussed both in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4. In Chapter 2, I discuss the emergence of nationalism as a modern type of collective identity. I argued that nationalism both tries to emulate traditional forms such as kinship and to formalize (thus transforming) them in order to influence a wider territory and group of people than traditional political forms. The forms of imagining the collective self are hence molded by a specific national calendar and a sense of simultaneity across the state's territory (Zerubavel 1981; Anderson 1991; Alonso 1994; Yuval-Davis 1997). These transformations in the scale and thus form of collective identity constitute what has been commonly denoted as modernity. The debates which gave birth to this transformation produced parallel significant notions: the nation-state, Europe, rational government.

In the thesis I have argued that understanding the nation as an apparatus of production and of its features as derived from historically specific consolidation regimes requires a genealogical excavation in the spirit of Foucault. I have followed Holmes (2000) to consider how the concept of modernity contains a conflict about the degree of rationality invested in the nation-state, as can be seen in the debates of the

Enlightenment and the Counter-Enlightenment. However I have also extended the domain. I have discussed the ways in which Enlightenment-era politics has fed into how we as anthropologists frame emotions and myth when we theorise political events.

Throughout this thesis I have considered how the Bulgarian national subject has been formed in the context of a particular worry about "being European" embedded in moralistic philosophical geographies denoted by such notions as 'the Balkans' and 'Eastern Europe'. As indicated in the material in Chapter 4, these distinctions are the result of the historical definition of an Enlightened Europe. This 'philosophical geography' entails a consolidation regime which necessitates the exclusion of the 'still savage' Eastern Europe. I have proposed that to better understand Bulgaria and its relationship to being both Eastern European and European, we need to be sensitive to its Ottoman past and the way it feeds into the consolidation of Bulgarian national subjectivity. In particular, I have highlighted that being Bulgarian means being caught between two recognized types: European and Oriental – there is no indigenous category to retreat to. A similar statement could be made about Serbia. Some of my research participants followed the example of infamous literary character Baj Ganio and chose to exalt the idiosyncratic. Others insisted on being European, with local modifications. These identifications seemed to have a precarious quality defined by the danger of being *complexed*.

In an almost paradoxical statement I would like to suggest that my informants' dedication to objectivity was based on the affective capital of 'being European' derived from the consolidation of the Bulgarian national subject. Significantly, they separated 'Enlightenment' Europe, to which they were dedicated, from contemporary Liberal Europe. This forms a subtle but fundamental contention at the heart of the nationalist discourse of 'being European'. What is thus contested in nationalist discourse is Europe in its recent post-World War II, liberal and rights-based incarnation. Understanding nationalism as an apparatus of production entails an understanding of

how various classically derived distinctions are constantly and dialogically re-constituted in what Holmes has called "illicit discourses". Bulgarian nationalists tended to contest existing definitions of Europe and their position within them. The layers of meaning invested in international relations forms what I call the "imagined international".

The imagined international, which my participants contested throughout a number of the campaigns described in Chapters 4.1-4.3, is a historically defined semiotic domain rather than some 'common-sense' interaction between international politicians. My participants' narratives about this domain were particularly invested in the notion of the ideal nation. The "historical fate" of certain populations that have been left outside the borders of the Bulgarian nation state were objectified in the category of "Bulgarians beyond borders". Such elaborations have been classically considered under the idea of ethnic nationalism and conflicts about history. I have attempted to re-define this domain and have looked at discourses about injustice, international consensus as a 'dictate' on the national level, the sense of 'failed dreams' and the notion of national dignity. This shifts analytic focus away from the morally loaded notion of squabbling neighbours, onto the wider dynamics of power in the negations of ideal and real borders; the dream of an ideal nation and its 'real' condition. Nationalist contestation is here positioned in the gap between the dream and the actual. Interestingly, nationalist contestation is also embedded within another dichotomy of prescription as opposed to 'reality': namely, the developmental prescriptions of international actors and the context of local particularism. There, the trend reverses and nationalist actors petition for the imperatives of context rather than ideal types. This tells us that the contestation which happens in this domain is fundamentally one in which symbolic categories should provide the structure for future practice.

Nationalists

Being nationalist can entail a variety of modalities. Common themes are the investment

in an ideal definition of the nation, affective engagement with national catastrophes and a firm belief in the need for national dignity. Amongst the citizens I encountered on fieldwork, it was evident that nationalism could be a private belief or it could be embedded within an organized movement. I have focused on the latter. In my introduction, I presented right wing organisations as existing within a continuum where they either collaborated or competed with each other – forming a variety of semiotic configurations which define 'what it means to be a nationalist'. The two are connected– activist nationalism influenced personal nationalist belief through continuously producing content i.e. acting as an apparatus of production. Nationalist organisations did not need to reproduce an electorate or membership base to successfully re-define or dialogically mold categories within public arenas, for example: Roma as a problem and the abject; Macedonia as Bulgarian or Turkey as a threat.

Through my research with VMRO, I 'peeked behind the curtain' into the milieu from which political action emerges. Chapters 3- 3.2 explored how organisational culture is shaped out of an amalgamation of persons who might become activists either through ideological beliefs or through pure socialisation. In order to attempt to constitute a domain of contention, nationalists have to first author themselves and to sustain a stable identity. Through analysing a party congress, I have shown how rites of passage such as party-congresses reproduce an organisation and shape its internal self-definitions. Conflicts can escalate into social dramas and are then 'resolved', providing new markers for members' self-definition as well as much needed 'emotional engagement' with the categories in question.

I have shown that contemporary VMRO is difficult to characterize: it provides a home and a microcosm for its activists. It has only recently transitioned from an organisation built on ancestral ties to a more 'rational' political organisation. Thus VMRO has two organizational forms: the party and an ideally inspired cause informed by a particular ancestry. Its political position is somewhere between an NGO and a political party.

VMRO's members are socialized into its structure by virtue of a buccaneer past and a glorious history, yet they have to come to terms with the less glamorous and technocratic work of political agitation. Thus, the organisation embodies dualities which sometimes transform into paradoxes. However, as discussed in those chapters, this complexity is not unique to the Bulgarian political domain (Kopecký and Mudde 2003). Continuing to examine and theorise less ideal-typical examples such as this one is a step towards informing future complexity in the types of analysis which can be used when confronted with nationalist organisations. Further problems faced by VMRO include leadership challenges, regional unevenness, conflicts about top-down decision-making, as well as a variety of gendered dynamics. I have explored how they help activists interpret their genre of nationalism and its position within the right-wing continuum.

While creating internal unity and authoring a specific ideological positionality VMRO members must also present themselves to a wider domain. The three campaigns which I reviewed in chapters 4.1 – 4.3 represent somewhat different dynamics of that engagement. The Turkey-EU petition exhibits the utilization of pre-existing affective capital. Following Kertzer (1989) I have argued that a cause much have *representativeness* – a similarity between the observed phenomena and the constructs or categories the person has for interpreting them – the symbolic domain. Paraphrasing Kertzer, I have argued that survival of the political system depends on having rituals which can confront dissonance in social life and re-establish unity (*ibid.* 134). VMRO attempted to do just that with regards to the Roma minority, picking up pre-existing definitions of the Roma as the abject of daily life in Bulgaria to crystallize existing animosity. They provided "resolutions" to "the Roma problem" promising to transform the citizen's lived reality to something closer to the ideal by cleansing the abject. The form of the events and their overarching campaigns helped to author 'social facts', define 'problems' and suggest strategies for their resolution – for redemptive action.

Throughout the thesis I have considered the Macedonian question in a variety of guises. One is its role as internal socialisation within VMRO. However the Macedonian question, as a wider political campaign, subverted the dependence on what is already affective within the wider public domain. Through a variety of campaigns for more than a decade, VMRO had elicited narratives of repression and retrograde, non-organic nationalism among the Macedonians as it attempted to define an affective border between Bulgaria and its western neighbors and then protest its existence. The Macedonian question is an old nationalist issue carried into the contemporary domain. It became a site of competition between political organisations claiming to represent the nation and its appropriate form of nationalism. This competitiveness reveals the salience of the issue as a representation of classic Bulgarian nationalism. Long-term political activism had established a stable discourse of "Macedonia is Bulgarian" within the Bulgarian public arena, accompanied by recognition of the cause.

Some aspects of the Macedonian cause were accentuated by a broader discourse of Bulgaria's 'stolen history' under Socialism. By bringing it back to light, political actors also conceived of themselves as reversing some effects of 'Socialist repression'. The final dimension in which Macedonia appears in this thesis is the Soviet re-write of history. In this thesis, I have argued – following Hirsch (2005) – that despite being commonly perceived as nationalist, Soviet Socialism was a re-write of nationalism. To elaborate on this form I have followed Buchanan's (2006) allegory of how folklore in Bulgaria was both reproduced and cleansed as an *obrabotka*, a re-formulation.

To clarify this process I have introduced a category commonly used within Bulgaria with regards to the socialist government, that of national nihilism. This discourse was utilized to explain the difference between the nationalism of nationalists and the legitimizing structural discourse of the Soviet era. In chapter 2.3, I overviewed some of the projects in contemporary Bulgaria which attempt to regain what was lost then – including Macedonia. VMRO activists utilized the common mechanism of reburials (Verdery 1996) to attempt to cement new *doxa* in the face of wide scale uncertainty

about the markers of collectivity.

Redeeming the Nation

Bulgarian nationalists authored a multiplicity of media projects which aimed to re-inform the public about historical contexts, elaborating on pre-existing symbolic markers while creating them as common points of interest[127]. A prevalent image within these nationalist discourses was the idea of a nation of sheep or "in chains" which must be saved from its own docility. As a result of the dynamics of both being post-Socialist and post-Ottoman, there was a dramatic distinction between the imagined, ideal nation and the 'real' one. The nation was narrated through the ideas of illness and decay. Nationalists stepped in to act as physicians of the nation – cleansing the abject from the national self to bring life back from madness.

Nationalism was utilized to create unity out of the diffusion of contemporary life (Alexander 2004) and to transform citizenship from an epistemological category into a felt (ontological) identity (Berezin 2001:86). When nationalists built political campaigns, they articulated particular problems and suggested resolutions. In this thesis I have suggested that particular public rituals formalise the differences between what is and what should be and thus situates it within a redemptive framework. Through rituals, society's members become implicated in the perpetually emerging social order through their affective attachments. I hence argue in line with Turner (1975) and Kertzer (1988) that social order only exists in symbolic form. For VMRO to exist, there has to be a gap between government policy and citizens' daily experiences; a gap between the recommendations (which they often interpret as 'dictates') of international actors and the imperatives of local circumstances – moments of uncertainty in which nationalist activists can promise to deliver order.

Rituals, as used by nationalist actors, emerge as a way to heal the nation. They engage

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[127] For a discussion of common points of interest see Madinow (2005).

people's collective selves and affects into the Leviathan, the nation. Thus, some citizens – faced with the dissonances between *doxa* and observable reality, faced with the abject filth of daily life in the nation - choose to reform rather than 'just' abandon their national subjectivity. They choose to nurture their collective self despite the pervasive sense of unease which stems from its abject elements. The foundational ideals set out for the 'imperfect' nation and national subject provide endless moments of worry and cries of symbolic retribution. In this thesis I have argued that, finding themselves positioned between individualist alienation and collective identity, some citizens experience anxiety that can only be cleansed through nationalist activity.

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Appendix 1: List of Characters

Historical figures

Vasil Levski (1837–1873)
Hristo Botev (1848–1876)

> Key historical national heroes, symbols of the revolutionary, nationalising movement during Bulgaria's Enlightenment.

Hristo Tatarchev (1869–1952)
Damjan Gruev (1871–1906)

> Two of the six founders of VMORO (3 of October 1893). Tatarchev passed away in exile in Italy. He was reburied in Bulgaria by VMRO–BND in 2010, during my fieldwork with the organisation.

Boris Sarafov (1872–1907)
Ivan Garvanov (1869–1907)

> Historical figures, affiliated with VMORO and other, parallel organisations (which had more clear right–wing tendencies). Their assassinations are believed to have started the fratricides in the Macedonian movements.

Gotze Delchev (1972–1903)

> A prominent revolutionary considered to be one of the early leaders of VMORO.

Paisii Hilendarski (1722–1773)

> A monk who wrote the first early modern history of Bulgaria. He is considered one of the main "Enlighteners" of Bulgaria.

Todor Aleksandrov (1881–1924)

> A teacher by training, Aleksandrov was born in Stip, contemporary Macedonia. He was an organiser for VMORO and a participant in the Balkan Wars, as well as the First World War. Together with other figures he reinstated VMRO in 1919. The organisation had dissipated during the World Wars. He led VMRO after that period until his assassination in 1924, presumably as a result of wavering on whether to agree to VMRO's collaboration with the Comintern.

Ivan Mihailov (1896–1990)

Born in Stip, Macedonia, Mihailov served in the First World War after finishing school. Subsequently, during his time as a law student in the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" he was invited to become Todor Aleksandrov's secretary. After Aleksandrov's death he assumed leadership over VMRO and took an organisational approach based on terror tactics. After the end of the Second World War, he became an exile in Italy. Throughout his lifetime he cultivated the Bulgarian–Macedonian organisations overseas, notably the American MPO Macedonian Patriotic Organisations).

Vida Boeva (1963–)

Born in Ohrid, contemporary Macedonia, Boeva was a long-term secretary to Ivan Mihailov. She is based in Rome and is in charge of his memoirs and archive.

Yane Sandanski (1872–1915)

A member of VMORO and a proponent of the left-leaning movement within the organisation. Controversial figure who was excluded from the organisation and given an assassination verdict for his complicity in the killings of Boris Sarafov and Ivan Garvanov.

VMRO – Organisations and Abbreviations

Note that in other scholarly literature VMRO is often translated as IMRO. Both versions translate to "The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation". Throughout my thesis I have favoured the Bulgarian transliteration "VMRO" where "V" stands for *vutreshna* i.e. "internal".

Macedonian Brotherhoods

Organisations set up in Bulgaria as a social support network for refugees coming from Macedonia in the early 20th Century. In Sofia they were housed in:

The Macedonian House aka Pirotska 5 (*Makedonskiat Dom*)

A building in central Sofia created to house the Macedonian Refugee Organisations. It currently houses VMRO-BND and the Macedonian

Research Institute in Sofia.

VMRO-BNS (*VMRO–Bulgarsko Natzionalno Dvijenie* – "Bulgarian National Movement")
This was the official appellation of the main organisation I studied during fieldwork. Founded in 2001 – a political party which partially derived from VMRO-SMD. The process of changing VMRO-SMD to VMRO-BND was incepted in 1999 and was hotly contested.

VMRO-NIE (*Viara, Moral, Rodolubie, Otgovorost – Natzionalen Ideal za Edinstvo* trans. "Faith, Morality, *Rodolubie*, Responsibility – National Ideal for Unity)
The contemporary VMRO-splinter organisation in Bulgaria which was formed after the split at congress during my fieldwork in 2009.

VMRO-SMD (VMRO – Union of Macedonian Brotherhoods)
Registered in 1990, in the years immediately after socialism, the organisation was based on the Brotherhoods housed in the *Makedonski Dom* during the Socialist ear. It was registered as having a primarily Enlightenment function.

Leaders and Structures

Angel Djambazki
Deputy leader of VMRO (2009 – now). Previously an organiser for VMRO in Sofia.

Boris Vangelov
Responsible for VMRO in the Veliko Turnovo Region. He was especially active in recruiting new members at the University in Turnovo and is responsible for the creation of a culture conducive to the VMRO ethos there. Under his tutelage, the region became known as *kovachnitzata na VMRO* (where cadres get made lit. hammered out)

Julian Angelov
The organizational secretary of VMRO elected during the congress of 2009. He hails from the same town as Krasimir Karakachanov in the north of Bulgaria.

Kostadin Kostadinov
Deputy leader of VMRO at the time of my fieldwork. His term as deputy leader lasted from 2009 - 2012. Before his 'new post' he was an organizer for the Varna and Dobrich regions. He joined VMRO at the Veliko Turnovo

University, under the tutelage of Boris Vangelov.

Krasimir Karakachanov (1965-)
Long-term leader of VMRO, controversial figure. A graduate in history, he is recognizable for his long-term engagement on the Macedonian question.

Rajna Drangova
Co-leader of VMRO in its emergence from VMRO-SMD. Granddaughter of the eminent historical figure General Drangov. Of Bulgarian-Macedonian descent.

Slavcho Atanasoff (1968-)
Mayor of Plovdiv from 2007-2011. He was proposed as an alternative to Karakachanov in the congress of 2009. After losing the conflict, together with other opposing figures he formed VMRO-NIE.

Org otdel (the Organizational Unit)
VMRO's main employees based in Sofia. Responsible for overseeing the organisation's national campaigns and central planning.

Tvorcheski otdel (The Creative Unit)

A newly created unit at the end of 2009/early 2010. They were responsible for shaping party politics and messaging.

Named activists

Anton
A newly incepted member of the city organisation in Sofia. Business owner with no historic connections to the Macedonian cause.

Chicho Gri
VMRO's friendly security guard, who would have tea with the head of the Macedonian Research Institute, and had a propensity to chat at length with Rajna Drangova. Represented 'the old guard' in contemporary VMRO.

Ivan
Legal consultant and long term activist who had made the transition to being a paid employee of VMRO.

Margot
Secretary of the Macedonian Research Institute. Dance troupe leader of Ensemble "Gotze Delchev". Member of the women's organization of VMRO.

Key member of the Sofia City Organisation.

Orlin

Formally in charge of publicity at VMRO. Joined the organisation during his time at the Veliko Turnovo University. Self-taught professional with a background as a cook. Was responsible for VMRO publicity. Left in the Summer of 2010.

Pavel

Organizer for Sofia – skinny, gaunt and infamous for his version of 'the correct version of history'. Defined himself as an extreme nationalist.

Svetozar

Headed the *tvorcheski otdel*. A PhD student with a degree in Political science and a rising figure in political analysis in Sofia's intellectual milieu.

Todor

Brother to Margo (below), a former activist of the youth organisation, driver for Krasimir.

Venelin

Leader of city organization in Sofia after the 2009 congress. He was a long-standingVMRO member with ancestral ties to the Macedonian case.

Radko

Head of the youth organization who had been a VMRO sympathizer from this school years onwards. He was a student in International Relations at the time of my fieldwork. He took over as head of the youth organisation when the former head quit in the summer of 2009.

Public Figures

Bojidar Dimitrov

A public figure, historian and TV-host. Dimitrov was elected as a minister without a budget in charge of 'Bulgarians abroad'. He was elected in July 2009 and resigned in February 2011 after a disagreement with the Prime Minister at the time, Bojko Borisov.

Ivan Nikolov

Long-term activist for the Bulgarian Minority in the Western Outerlands.

Nikola Grigorov

>A Deputy-leader of VMRO, inactive in day to day activism. He is also a well-recognized public figure, especially due to his popular TV program (*Site Bulgari Zaedno* – All Bulgarians Together) and writings on history.

Plamen Pavlov

>A former VMRO member, a public figure who hosts his own patriotic television program entitled "Lesson in Bulgarian".

Spas Tashev

>Incepted BKKS. He is a public figure who speaks on the Macedonian question and by professional qualification, a diplomat.

Lazar Mladenov

>Current leader of BKKS. Politically involved in raising awareness about the issues of Bulgarian-Macedonians.

Other Political Parties

ATAKA (lit. "Attack")

>The nationalist party with largest political support in Bulgaria at the time of my fieldwork. Headed by Volen Siderov. Had formed an early partnership with television channel SKAT until relations between the two disintegrated in 2009/2010.

DUB (*Demokraticheski Saiuz na Bulgarite* – "The Democratic Union of Bulgarians")

>Bulgarian Minority party in Serbia. Ivan Nikolov is one of its key activists.

GERB (*Grajdani Za Evropejsko Razvitie Na Bulgaria* – "Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria")

>Ruling party in Bulgaria, 2009-2011. Headed by Bojko Borisov who was Prime Minister.

MRF (*Dvijenie za Prava i Svobodi* – "Movement for Rights and Freedoms")

>Ethnic Turkish party in Bulgaria. Was part of successive coalition government in Bulgaria. Headed by the controversial figure Ahmed Dogan.

ODS (*Obedineni Demokraticheki Sili* – 'United Democratic Forces")

>The Leading anti-Socialist party of the late 80s and early 90s era. It has subsequently waned in its support base. They were a one-time VMRO

partner.

RZS (*Red, Zakonnost i Spravedlivost* – "Order, Lawfulness and Justice")

>Minor political party which arrived on the scene when I did – in 2009. They were the tipping point for VMRO activists' disillusionment with the organisation. Headed by Iane Ianev.

VMRO-DPMN (*Demokraticheska Partija za Makedonsko Natzionalno Edinstvo* – "Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity")

>Ruling political party in Macedonia.

Other Politically Engaged Formations

BHS (*Bulgarski Helsinski Komitet* – "Bulgarian Helsinki Committee")
>An NGO organisation in Bulgaria, which was in frequent conflict with VMRO.

BKKS (*Bulgarski Kulturen Klub Skopije* – "Bulgarian Cultural Club Skopije")
>An NGO in Skopije, Macedonia which attends to the affairs of the Bulgarian minority in Macedonia. In recent years it has consistently claimed its activists are persecuted by the authorities.

SKAT
>A patriotic TV channel which supported Ataka's rise to power. Eventually they 'divorced' from the party. They considered possibilities for collaborating with other political formations, including VMRO (in early 2010). After I left fieldwork they formed their own party – NFSB (*Natzionalen Front za Spasenieto na Bulgaria* – "National Front for the Rescue of Bulgaria").