

**SOCIALIST LEGACY AND TRANSFORMATIONS
OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN
THE CONTEMPORARY FORMS
OF COMMUNITY GATHERINGS
OF THE BULGARIAN DIASPORA IN THE USA**

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The main purpose of this text is to compare the forms of socialist urban festivity in Bulgaria with the celebrations of the contemporary Bulgarian immigrants in the USA, while highlighting the variety of historical and anthropological ties between the two phenomena. Before going further, I would like to note that the choice of this topic was predetermined by my specific binary position in this discourse – the position as an ethnologist and at the same time as an immigrant to Chicago from Rousse, Bulgaria. In addition to using the oral history method and the biographical approach, which are most appropriate for research on the collective and individual memory (Koleva 2009: 649), I also purposely use the method of self-reflection and integrated observation in this research. These methods provide a better opportunity to achieve a more complete change in the perspective from the subjective to the objective and to find the meeting point between them. On the one hand, I have cultural insight into the investigated phenomena and communities. On the other hand, I am a researcher who takes own personal experience into consideration alongside the collected empirical material (oral stories, archives, images, newspaper, etc.), and by doing so aims to achieve objectivity. Another motivation to study this topic is that I devoted a chapter of my dissertation and recently published book (Ivanova 2014) to the socialist holidays in Rousse. My long lasting interest in the celebrative forms and

roles in the community explains my desire to compare the socialist festivity with the celebrations by the Bulgarian diaspora in Chicago and to discover the relationship between the two forms on the social and individual levels.

A key to understanding the relationship between these two particular cases is the term “heritage.” More specifically, the construction of heritage is defined by the cultural politics and practices of communities in the search, discovery, and sharing of different cultural forms from the past, which the communities recognize as valuable for themselves (Nenov 2015; see also Vukov and Gergova 2014: 81). During socialism in Bulgaria, a new concept for the dimensions of national heritage was constructed which was subjected to the ruling ideology (see Nenov 2015), and this concept had the purpose of imposing this ideology on every aspect life within Bulgarian society. An important role was assigned to the recently formed socialist celebrative culture, which was constituted from a combination of new “socialist” events and rituals and selective community and traditional festivities that had been emptied of their religious and “bourgeois” content (see Brunnbauer 2010: 309–310; Ivanova 2014:83).

After the collapse of the communist regime in Bulgaria in 1989, the national cultural heritage – and the festivity culture in particular – were once again re-thought and re-constructed in the spirit of the new democratic and pluralistic environment. The socialist holidays that reflected the ideological propaganda vanished, and there was a revitalization of the religiousness of the festivities, proving that festivity is dynamic and strongly influenced by the particular historical and political context in which it takes place. All these examples of the transformation of the Bulgarian festive heritage aim to contextualize and explain the model of Bulgarian celebrative cultural carried over by the migrants to Chicago that will be discussed below.

Holiday Celebrations during the Communist Period (1944–1989)*

Realizing the important social, symbolic, cultural, and economic capital (see Bourdieu 1986) of the celebrations for the modeling of society, the communist authorities paid special attention to the modification and ruling of festive culture.

The management of holidays was entrusted to local administrative, political, and public bureaucratic organizations, such as the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP), Otečestven Front, and Comsomol (a nation-wide youth communist organization; see Brunnbauer 2010: 314; Gruev 2009: 158; Taylor 2006: 18; Koleva 2007: 244–257). The propaganda imposed upon each event removed any sense of spontaneity, and as a result, the authorities enforced most of the activities as mandatory. Exemplary speeches were developed by the central and regional committees of the communist party to be distributed throughout the smaller settlements of Bulgaria (Petrov 2003: 133).

Celebrations were introduced as a means to solve important social and economic problems and to be a medium for “the patriotic and class education of the people” (Simeonova 2000: 60; Petrova 2003: 239). The need for “education” resulted from the problems that arose when massive groups of villagers were forced to migrate to larger towns to support industrialization. One major task of the socialist ideology activists was to socialize the migrant workers to town life (Roydeva 2004: 145).

Until the passing of the Dimitrov Constitution in 1947, multiple parties existed in the Bulgarian political arena. *Zvenari*, “farmers,” and communists – all part of the Fatherland Front – organized neighborhood political clubs and a variety

* The text devoted to the Bulgarian Holiday Celebrations during Communism is a summary of a chapter of my recently published book Ivanova, D. 2014.



Youth gatherings or Vecherinki in 1967, Cultural Rest and Artistic Decoration Album, archive: Rousse Regional Museum of History

of entertainment events, often called *vecherinki*. These entertainment events were intended to stimulate the creation of ideologically safe and reliable families (Ivanova 2014: 89).

After the death of Stalin in 1953, the environment in communist countries “unfroze;” in other words, the waves of terror died down, and society settled into a new status quo. Taylor (2006) notes the paradoxes shared with her by individuals who spent their youth during socialism. For example, the government forbade western-style music, yet young people used different types of gatherings to do exactly the opposite – they listened, danced, and sang to western music (Taylor 2006: 7). The development of the jazz and hippie subcultures was a concern for the regime, which was especially worried about the fact that Komsomol clubs were organizing “dancing parties where perverse dance styles occur” (Gruev 2009: 167).

Manifestations were mandatory celebrations of official government holidays during communism, including the holidays of September 9, May 1, May 24, and November 7 (Todorova 2012). The narratives about these events reflect the mandate to participate; however, for the party leaders, critics of the regime, former political prisoners, and “national enemies,” their presence at manifestations was mandated



Manifestation on May Day in 1950s, archive: Rousse Regional Museum of History

proof of loyalty to the authorities. D.M., a wife of a political prisoner born in 1946, recalled her husband saying, “‘I have to go, because I do not know if someone is following me,’ and when they yelled ‘Hooray!’ for the socialist leaders, he did not yell, but he did move his lips out of fear...” In some life histories, socialist manifestations receive positive praise. They served as a means for social meetings, or a reason to wear new clothes or to get a new haircut. Manifestations were a reason to stroll around town, and a way to get out of a mundane workday.

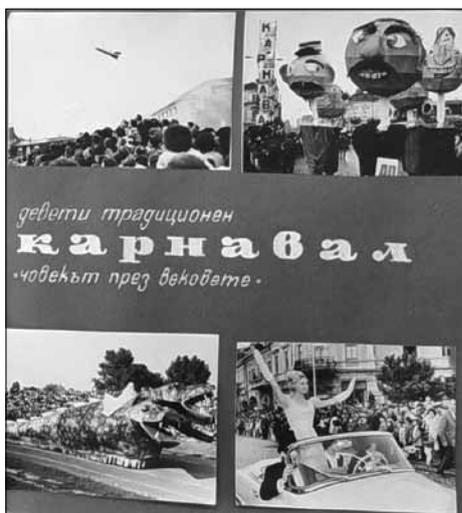
In contrast to the mandated meetings and manifestations, people preferred “the organized holiday banquets, where fun and relaxation from daily labor dominated” (Petrova 2003: 243). Banquets were connected with the calendar holidays, such as New Year’s Day, Babinden, and St. George’s day; while formal dinners and casual entertainment were connected with personal holidays such as birthdays, name days, and retirements. Socio-political holidays like March 8 (International Women’s Day) and May Day were sometimes also celebrated with a banquet (Roydeva 2004: 157).



**Banquet at the Rousse Regional Museum of History, 1980s,
image: N. Stojanova**

With banquets, the accent in official speeches and the ceremony itself shifted toward food and eating, entertainment, and dancing (Petrov 2003). For bigger holidays, including New Year's, the families of the workers were also invited to attend. Professional holidays appeared as way to intensify labor “with the working class, and the working team” (Brunnbauer 2010: 73). Classical, pop, and folk music allowed banquet participants to dance, and dances were the culmination point of the holidays: “When the show was over, everyone was gone, and we and the orchestra stayed and danced – *hora*, *račenitci* – and then it became really fun” (G.G., male, born 1947). Entertainment helped to neutralize the accumulated stress from the workday, as well as to strengthen the team and reduce the distance between the team and the leadership (Petrov 2003). The interviews and photographs from Rousse support Brunnbauer's (2010: 315) opinion that “the ideological importance which the authorities gave to holidays did not equate with the meaning given

**Masquerade in 1967,
Cultural Rest and
Artistic Decoration
Album, archive:
Rousse Regional
Museum of History**



to them by the people, and so the celebrations lost that value. Socialist holidays are meant to be subliminal and beautiful, but instead they turned into regular nights and sometimes drunken evenings.”

Rousse carnivals are a part of the old glory of the town, but by the late 1950s, the town’s citizens had changed. The masquerades in the years of socialism greatly resembled the manifestations, which were conducted to demonstrate the strength, progress, and victory of the socialist system over the imperialist West (Nenov 2000: 126). The Carnival was revived in Rousse in 1958 (Nenov 2012: 313; Nenov 2014: 46). Unlike the masquerade before September 9, the new form of the carnival created group experiences by ignoring individual presentations: “Each enterprise, factory, and school sends delegates to the carnival to promote its products and demonstrate its loyalty to the Party” (I.S., female, born in 1956). The Carnival in Rousse during the socialist regime became a primarily political event. The procession started from the old town center and ended at the monument to Alyoša, where people

who carried figures of Uncle Sam and Churchill, bowed to the Soviet army (Nenov 2000: 126). Thus, Western countries subjected themselves symbolically to the Soviet Union. Once its mandatory nature was dropped, the Carnival died down in the 1980s, but it was revived again in the early years of democracy in a different form, with a new look and new features.

All the above examples of the socialist festive culture reveal its mandatory nature, owing to the aspirations of the communist rulers to maintain total control over the Bulgarian population. On a symbolic level, their attempts sought to ideologically modify the mentality of the people in order to more easily control society. On a social level, the government tried to integrate the village migrants into the new urban environment, and the entire society into a unified socialist society. On a cultural level, the rulers sought to form a new mentality and individual identity. In terms of the economic benefits, the authorities attempted to stimulate the economic productivity of society as a whole through the control of the celebrations, festivity, and joyful events. Inevitably, the festive system under the socialist regime has influenced the Bulgarian celebratory culture even today. Though there are many examples from the Bulgarian experience, the purpose of this discourse is to reveal how the socialist legacy has impacted the cultural memory of the contemporary trans-border migrants in the USA, and specifically the festive culture of the migrants to Chicago.

The Festive Culture in the “Suitcase” of the Migrant

During the communist regime, the transnational migration to Western Europe and the USA was extremely limited by the authorities. After the collapse of the regime in 1989, and despite the restrictions imposed by the western countries, the lifting of this limitation induced a wave of

transnational migration to countries in the West (Angulo 2008: 251–52). In their attempt to integrate into the host country, along with their personal belongings and emotional baggage, the immigrants brought their festive cultural model, which was subject to modification and transformation due to the particular environment in the host society and the individual's migrational social network. Chicago and New York both have large Bulgarian communities, and among them there are a large number of middle class individuals who live “with the need of its own face and personal voice that would be heard in the macro-society” (Karamihova 2004 230). According to Karamihova, in contrast to the locations in the USA with small concentrations of Bulgarians, in these larger urban areas it is very likely that representative Bulgarian culture will be constructed and performed in order to show the culture to American society and to designate the Bulgarians in these centers as a cohesive group.

The Bulgarian Community in Chicago

Chicago is home to the largest Bulgarian community outside Bulgaria. According to unofficial data, the community in the city and the suburbs numbers between 150,000 and 200,000 people. There are three Bulgarian churches in the Chicago area – two Orthodox and one Evangelical – and the community has nine Bulgarian schools, and several Bulgarian grocery stores, bars, and restaurants. The community has developed four Bulgarian newspapers and has even tried to broadcast a local Bulgarian TV network. There are also several Bulgarian non-governmental organizations that deal with cultural and social activities. Most often, the individuals involved in these social and cultural endeavors are intellectuals or artists who do so as a hobby in their spare time.

Anderson suggests that the nation be examined as an “imagined community” because its members have an idea

of unity, despite never knowing most of their fellow countrymen. I suggest that the Bulgarians in Chicago can also be seen as an “imagined community” (Anderson 2006: 6) due to its strong middle class of migrants and numerous intellectuals of the diaspora. The research interests of the diaspora focus on the collective identity and its preservation, transmission, and development (Luleva 2012: 351). In terms of the diaspora identity and its construction, a leading role has been played by the elites (i.e., intellectuals, politicians, public figures, and economically successful individuals), who are an important factor in the formation of the ethno-cultural memory and the awareness of community belonging (Luleva 2012: 350). In this regard, it is important to stress the role of the Bulgarian diaspora elite and the local cultural non-profit organizations in Chicago in the organization of community gatherings as a resource for the preservation and maintenance of community identity.

Moreover, the celebration of Bulgarian holidays and events in Chicago is a vital condition for many immigrants to overcome the fear of social isolation in the new habitat through integration in new social networks (Dimitrov 2014: 162). Their participation in the public festivity allows the individuals to become a part of new networks, gain social capital, and especially avoid social isolation.

The maintenance of Bulgarian festive culture in Chicago could be explained by the nostalgia for the migrants’ place of origin, which is a natural reaction by individuals who migrate. The nostalgia also could be interpreted as part of the attempt to preserve the migrants’ own identity, continue the tradition through constant renewal, and restore it in new forms identified as “heritage.” The interest in heritage “is determined from the awareness of the social capital which heritage contains in the contemporary world of mobile cultures and washed out cultural boundaries” (Vukov and Gergova 2014:82).

In regards to the holidays, it is important to note that the cultural model of the Bulgarian community in Chicago (like the ones in St. Louis, St. Petersburg, and Miami) is quite open to cultural borrowings. At the same time, the model maintains many elements that are experienced as a re-creation of the unique Bulgarian cultural code and as a preservation of a personal cultural identity (Karamihova 2004: 234). Each generation makes a decision about which features of the tradition are recognized as inherent and therefore followed or maintained. This choice is linked to the collective memory. It is determined not only by the passive knowledge of the community, but also from experience, namely that of “the actual parameters of the social performance of each generation” (Ganeva-Rayčeva 2000: 128; Karamihova 2004: 186). Karamihova (2004: 186) notes that the situation is even more complicated for immigrants, because in the process of adjusting to the new environment, they need to combine the choice of their generation in their home country with the leading tendencies of the new cultural system.

The Bulgarian holidays that the community in Chicago observes can be categorized as calendar holidays, historical holidays, and public holidays. The first group includes Christmas and Easter, which are often celebrated in churches, schools, and banquet halls, and sometimes in restaurants. The celebration of the New Year is most likely to occur in a banquet hall or a restaurant. Some years, the community observes May 6th, the day of St. George. The church of “St. Ivan Rilski” organizes three fairs every summer: one on June 29 for the observation of St. Peter’s Day, another on July 20 for St. Ilija’s day, and a third on August 15 for the Assumption of Mary. March 1 is also celebrated each year, with great interest from Bulgarian schools; this is the day of Baba Marta, when children make “martenitsi” – small pieces of adornment, made of white and red yarn and worn from

March 1 until the end of the month, or until the wearer sees a stork, swallow, or budding tree. “Baba” [баба – Bulgarian] is the word for “grandmother” and “Mart” [март – Bulgarian] is the month of March.

The second group of Bulgarian holidays – the historical occasions – includes March 3 (the Liberation of Bulgaria), February 19 (the hanging of the national revival hero, Vasil Levski), and November 10 (the Day of Democracy in Bulgaria).

The public holidays consist of June 1 (Children’s Day) and May 24 (the Day of the Slavonic Alphabet). The community also organizes a festival entitled “Bulgarian Days in Chicago,” which occurs twice per year: once in early May, and again at the beginning of October.

The community also celebrates events such as the opening of exhibitions, book presentations, fundraisers, concerts, and dance festivals. Between 2011 and 2014, four Bulgarian community events were held at The Field Museum in Chicago. The first three were lectures, one dedicated to the Bulgarian archaeology, and another to the recent Bulgarian history, and the third to the Bulgarian Jews. The last event was a celebration of the national holiday, March 3, and it was attended by almost 200 guests. I participated in the organization of all these events in my capacity as a program assistant of a Bulgarian archaeological grant program at The Field Museum and later in my capacity as an administrator of the American Research Center in Sofia of the US office. The last two events were initiated and co-organized by the General Consulate of the Republic of Bulgaria in Chicago. Recently, the mayor of Chicago acknowledged in writing the role that the Bulgarian General Consulate, The Field Museum, and the American Research Center in Sofia play in the organization of the life of the Bulgarian community in Chicago.



Celebration in banquet hall for 2014 New Years Eve, organizers Petranka and Petar Stamatovi, image: D. Ivanova

Now I would like to turn to some of the forms that the Bulgarian celebrations take in Chicago, their technology, and the importance that the community attaches to them. These include celebrations in banquet halls, observations of historic dates, picnics, gala concerts, events held in Bulgarian schools, and church fairs.

Today, the New Year's Eve is very actively celebrated in the Bulgarian community in Chicago, in contrast to the late 1980s and early 1990s when Bonka Stojanova-Boneva carried out her research on the Bulgarian diaspora in Chicago. The author argues that in contrast to the socialist Bulgaria, where the New Year's celebrations were the focus of the winter holidays, the North American version of the holiday lacked social and psychological significance. This factor influenced the Bulgarian community in Chicago as well, as it

did not mark the New Year's Eve with a large celebration (Stojanova-Boneva 1991).

However, this reality has changed. For example, a respondent shared that she began celebrating the New Year's Eve with friends in 2003, and that she has been the main organizer of these "parties." According to her, she and her group of friends were the first to begin celebrating the New Year's holiday with a large party. The parties started because her large group of friends wanted to celebrate the holiday together. Every year, they rent a banquet hall for the event, order catering, and sometimes hire a DJ. The guests who attend the parties could number between 100 and 200. Occasionally, the organizers arrange for an entertainment program to take place, but because of the complexity of organizing such events, these are an exception rather than a rule. They also hold raffles and quizzes. One possible explanation for why Bulgarians seek opportunities to celebrate in large groups is the fact that in North America, people tend to observe New Year's as a family holiday, whereas Bulgarians are used to larger gatherings:

"We gather people who like the same music. I send emails to friends and they bring their friends, which means that they have the same interests. Then I pick the music, so it is easier for people to celebrate and feel good. The point is that you remember Bulgaria. Bulgarians listen to Bulgarian music, played by Bulgarian people. We have fun in a Bulgarian way. At midnight, we play the Bulgarian anthem. We play the *Dunavsko horo* dance, and that's it." (P.S.)

In order to ensure the integrity of the group of participants at the New Year's celebration, people are not invited randomly, but only friends or friends of friends. As a result,

all the attendees feel close, contributing to the spontaneous nature of joy during the holiday celebration. It can be argued that this way of celebrating New Year's was inherited from the socialist period. Among the Bulgarian community in Chicago, it was revitalized at the threshold of the new millennium. Once it was brought to life, the holiday enjoyed the attention of a large group of Bulgarians who found in it a way to maintain their Bulgarian identity, to be a part of social networks, and to satisfy their natural need for daily relaxation from work with joy and dancing.

Celebrations of a Historic Day

The Day of Democracy is distinctive to the Chicago Bulgarian diaspora, celebrated since 2007. It is organized by the weekly newspaper "Bulgaria", whose owner, Hamid Roussev, is a refugee from Bulgaria and arrived in the U.S. in the 1960s. Early on, the holiday was arranged in a banquet hall in one of the churches, and it included entertainment. It was later organized in a special party hall, and then returned to the church banquet hall. For its eighth celebration, the festival was held in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church of St. Sofia in Des Plaines, IL.

"Minutes before the beginning of the concert, the church hall was filled with groups of Bulgarian emigrants who came to celebrate this significant date in Bulgarian history. Handshakes; hugs; talking; recounting what, how, and where people heard the important news first – once 23 years ago, when the era of "great expectations" started for many Bulgarians." (Bulgaria 2013a)

In memory of the victims of the communist regime, Father Gruyo Poptsonkov prayed for those who had died, and



Rising of the Bulgarian flag in downtown Chicago outside the city hall on March 3, 2012, image: K. Tomova

everyone in the hall honored the victims with a minute of silence. The Consul General of Bulgaria in Chicago, Simeon Stoilov, spoke about the significance of the date of November 10 as the beginning of a historical transition. The main initiator of the event, Roussev, welcomed the guests. The festive program included local singers and the dance groups Vereia and Horo. The folklore program inspired the guests to dance and have fun.

Every March 3, the day of the Bulgarian liberation from the Ottoman rule, the community raises the Bulgarian flag outside the City Hall in downtown Chicago (Figure 6). This celebration of the National Day of Bulgaria is a tradition that was started in the 1960s and resumed in 2006. At noon, the Bulgarian flag is raised beside the American and Chicago banners to the sound of the Bulgarian anthem. Once this is done, the crowd usually enters the City Hall to hear the greetings

from the Governor, the City Hall administrators, and the Attorney General. A short entertainment program follows the official greetings, and normally includes Bulgarian traditional dance groups, school dance groups, or individual children's presentations. The celebration is listed in the official calendar of the city – a point of pride for the community in Chicago.

“Over the past two years, after the new Consul General, Simeon Stoilov, advised us [the public organizations – note D.I.], we decided that it would be nice to do this on a weekend. The holiday is more popular... The festivities are organized outside because the City Hall is closed. After we raise the flag, there is a nice entertaining program, greetings and so on, but the only disadvantage of this new thing is that fewer Americans hear it. Usually in March, the weather is still cold and no one is outside on the streets on weekends, and therefore we are losing the American participants.” (P.S.)

Over the past two years, more than 500 people from the Bulgarian community have come downtown for the March 3 celebration. Students in Bulgarian schools are transported to the event, and their parents come as well.

On the holidays of March 3 and March 8 (International Women's Day), the newspaper “Bulgaria” also holds an evening celebration in a banquet hall with the participation of over 200 people (see Bulgaria newspaper, issue 10, 2013). The entertainment program includes local dance groups and performers. The Consul General of the Republic of Bulgaria, Simeon Stoilov, gives a speech, and Father Gruyu Poptsonkov blesses the event, the participants in the celebration, and the nation of Bulgaria.

Another holiday rooted in the socialist past is June 1, the Day of Children, which Bulgarians in Chicago began



Banquet hall celebration of March 3 and March 8, 2013, organizers Bulgaria Weekly, image: D. Ivanova

celebrating with a picnic in 2009. The festival was initiated by Petranka Stamatova, president of the Center for Bulgarian-American Heritage at the time. The event includes organized games for children, including a sack race, drawing competition, and more. “There was music, we had a DJ ... Overall this was a very pleasant atmosphere, a return to the past of this beautiful holiday. And people were very interested. They asked. The next year passed with even greater interest” (S.P.).

The following year, the focus of the festival shifted from a holiday dedicated to children to a festival for all Bulgarians. The event was organized by the newspaper “BG Voice” and the company Amerifreid. “For many of the participants, the main reason to come, even in spite of the bad weather, is that it is a reason for many Bulgarians to be together, which is a sign of unity” (BG-Voice 2013).



June 1, 2012 picnic of Amerifreid, image: K. Tomova

Gala Concerts and Other Forms of Observation of May 24

May 24 is also celebrated by the Bulgarian community as the Day of the Slavonic Alphabet. Various non-governmental organizations are involved in its preparation, the most active of which is the Center for Bulgarian-American Cultural Heritage and the newspaper "Bulgaria." The holiday is celebrated with a gala concert, involving students from Bulgarian schools in Chicago, local Bulgarian dance groups, and music and theater ensembles. Independent musicians perform with classical instruments, and singers and actors also participate. Usually the event is located in the Irish-American center and attracts more than 300 guests.

Just recently, on May 24, 2015 the Bulgarian community in Chicago gathered in front of the Orthodox Church St. Ivan Rilski to celebrate the opening of the monument of Vasil Levski. The main sponsor of the monument building

was Mihail Tomov (age 61) who lives in Chicago. He shared with the local media that his great-grandfather had been one of Levski's associates and this motivated him to provide his organizational and financial support for the idea (BG-Voice 2015). Among the audience were representatives of the motorcycle club *Haiduti*, the Macedonian Patriotic Organization, the Bulgarian Cultural Organizations and Schools, the Football Club *Minior* (also a sponsor of the monument), artists, journalists and other public figures. Greetings from the Bulgarian vice-president Margarita Popova were presented to the public. As in many other cases I attended the holiday, enjoying it as a member of the local Bulgarians while doing my study as an ethnologist. Other ethnologists from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Dr. Marianka Borisova and Dr. Nikoly Vukov who were doing their field work on the Bulgarian cultural organizations abroad also took part of the celebration and collected empirical material for further analyses.

“There is no public holiday without the participation of the Bulgarian schools” (P.S.)



Opening of Vasil Levski's monument on May 24, 2015



**Bulgarian School Slunchogledi, Christmas celebration in 2012,
image: V. Nalbantova**

Schools have also contributed to the festive life of the Bulgarian diaspora in Chicago. Each Bulgarian school follows a holiday calendar, which includes traditional calendar holidays such as Christmas, Easter, and Baba Marta, historical and public holidays like March 3, March 8, September 6 (Bulgarian Unification Day), September 22 (Bulgarian Independence Day), February 19 (the hanging of Vasil Levski), and the beginning and end of the school year.

Many parents and guests attend these events. Often the organizing committee arranges treats for all the guests and gifts for the children.

“The concert of the school “John Atanasov” was held in the beautiful hall of the famous Chicago Oakton College, where the school classes are held once per week. The principle Bojanka Ivanova opened the concert by reading the welcoming address to the General Consul of the Republic of Bulgaria in Chicago Simeon Stoilov. Each class had prepared scenes, poems,

songs and dances. Santa brought more than 180 gifts – for each student personally” (EuroChicago 2013).

The two Bulgarian Orthodox churches in Chicago have also contributed to celebrations for the Bulgarian community, organizing sacrificial rites for Easter and Christmas. An offering to the church, paid by one of the laity, is made separately for the commemoration of Vasil Levski. Two or three people bear the costs of the holidays and commemorations.

As I mentioned above, gatherings for St. Ivan Rilski are organized three times in the summer: on St. Peter’s Day, St. Ilija’s Day, and the Assumption of Mary. After the traditional liturgy, Bulgarians enjoy the shade of the trees in front of the church. Participants come from all over Chicago, and sometimes even from other states. People dance *hora* dances. The church board and the priest prepare the feast for health and well-being. The church provides sausages and meatballs, Bulgarian beer, brandy, *šopska* salad, and other dishes. This is how the newspaper “Bulgaria” comments on the feast of the church, held on August 15th, 2013 (Assumption of Mary):

“[The Bulgarian] knows to rejoice because he is in love with Bulgarian music and song. He is nostalgic and jealous of everything Bulgarian ... “Sometimes I forget I’m in America” – says our compatriot, panting from dancing – “how nice that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church gathered us together. We should be glad that we have it!” Indeed, loaded with good emotions, fascinated by the Bulgarian music around you, you forget that you are on the other side of the ocean.” (Bulgaria 2013b)



**St. Ivan Rilski church fair, St. Ilija's Day (July 20) in 2013,
image: D. Ivanova**

Regardless of where and how the holidays take place, their core functions are to structure social relations and to maintain community identity (Karamihova 2004: 233). All members of the Bulgarian community in Chicago appreciate the celebrations. They are used to implementing the functions of joint communication, helping to identify the culturally specific social roles. More importantly, this communication “replicates” the content of Bulgarian culture, allowing it to be experienced as an active association with “our people” or with “our own kind.” First, these are our countrymen; second, they are actual immigrants; and third, they are socially “equal” (see Stojanova-Boneva 1991: 56).

Conclusion

The particular case studies of festivity presented here appear to be a way of gaining one or another form of power or capital, which according to Bourdieu could be economical, cultural, social, or symbolical. (Bourdieu 1986; see Dimitrov 2014: 160–161). The case studies demonstrate the gaining of

capital through festivity, but they occur in different temporal, social, and cultural contexts and serve different roles in the construction of heritage.

Both groups of festivals – those taking place in the socialist Bulgaria and in the post-socialist Chicago – serve the natural need for entertainment, joint communication, and structuring and validation of social networks. The socialist holiday system was state-organized, as opposed to the celebrations of the Bulgarian community in Chicago that stem from the initiative of non-governmental cultural organizations, schools, churches, private companies, individuals, and the Consulate General of Bulgaria in Chicago.

During the period of socialism in Bulgaria, the festivals and events were widely used by the authorities to advance the socialist ideology, while the celebrations among the Bulgarian community in Chicago today lack this ideological element. They serve instead in the formation and maintenance of Bulgarian identity and connections to Bulgaria.

In other words, the festival in the communist country served the political doctrine of the formation of the new socialist man, while in the postmodern environment of the Bulgarian diaspora in Chicago, the festival serves their needs and increases their visibility in American society. Both cases of festivity serve to integrate migrants. In the first, these are migrants from villages, who inhabited cities en masse in the 1950s and 1960s, and in the second, they are the increasing number of immigrants following the advent of democracy in 1989. However, the immigrant group uses the holidays to differentiate the community and become more visible in American society, thereby seeking greater integration into the Chicago region and within its economic prosperity.

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