

Nacho Dimitrov

Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum,
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia
dimitrovnacho@gmail.com

Policy, Mobility and Everyday Culture in Competition in the Identity Construction (the Case of Karakachans in Bulgaria)

The political changes in Bulgaria in 1989 are accompanied by severe economic crisis, high unemployment rate, and the emergence of acute social inequalities. These factors lead to intense migration processes. Furthermore, the ambiance generates conditions that enable the activation of new ways of constructing identities amongst most ethnic and confessional communities in the country. Immediately after the changes the Karakachans in Bulgaria become the object of political interest from neighboring Greece: from the beginning of the 1990s community members (as well as their spouses), unlike other Bulgarian citizens, have easy access to visas for entry into Greece, which determines the emergence of a mass labor mobility within the community. Thus, the Karakachans from Bulgaria find themselves at the center of a complex tangle of relationships and mutual influences between politics, identity and mobility, which will be the subject of this study.

Key words: policy, mobility, identity, Karakachans, Bulgaria.

Политика, мобилност и свакодневна култура у надметању у конструкцији идентитета (случај Каракачана у Бугарској)

Политичке промене у Бугарској 1989. године праћене су оштром економском кризом, високом стопом незапослености и појавом акутних друштвених неједнакости. Ови фактори довели су до интензивних миграцијских процеса. Штавише, амбијент је произвео услове који су омогућили активирање нових начина за конструисање идентитета већине етничких и конфесионалних заједница у земљи. Одмах након промена, Каракачани у Бугарској постају предмет интересовања за суседну Грчку: од почетка 1990-их, чланови заједнице (као и њихови супружници), за разлику од осталих грађана Бугарске, имају олакшан приступ визама за улазак у Грчку, што битно утиче на појаву масовне радне мобилности унутар заједнице. Тако су се Каракачани нашли у средишту комплексног сплета односа и међусобних утицаја политика, идентитета и мобилности, што представља тему овог истраживања.

Кључне речи: практична политика, мобилност, идентитет, Каракачани, Бугарска.

The political changes in Bulgaria in November 1989 were accompanied by a severe economic crisis, high unemployment and the emergence of acute social inequalities that led to intense migration processes. Furthermore, there were conditions for activating processes of constructing identities in a new way in most ethnic and confessional communities in the country. Karakachans in Bulgaria are a very illustrative example in this regard.¹ Immediately after the changes they became the subject of political interest on the part of Greece. The speed of the Greek national political reaction is impressive: from the beginning of the 1990s, the community members (and their spouses), unlike the other Bulgarian citizens, have had easy access to visas for entry into Greece. This condition determines the occurrence of labour mobility. In a few years a significant part² of community members was involved and located at the center of a complex tangle of relationships and interconnections between politics, identity and mobility, which is precisely the subject of this study³.

In order to understand the interconnections between politics, identity and mobility we must answer the following questions: what is to be a Karakachan in Bulgaria before and after 10th of November 1989; how does the policy of Greece determine the direction of these changes; how is labour mobility of Karakachans determined by the policies of Bulgaria and Greece toward the community; what is the role of labour mobility in the construction of the Karakachan identity?

Bulgarian state policy toward Karakachans after 1944

To answer the question of what it is to be a Karakachan in Bulgaria under socialism and how this was changed after 1989, we must take into account two factors: the overall political-ideological context in the country from the period of settlement⁴ of Karakachans till November 1989; the specific policy of the state toward Karakachans.

The policy of the state toward Karakachans in Bulgaria under socialism cannot be seen as an isolated phenomenon, but only in the context of minority poli-

¹ The issue of Karakachans in the text, as seen from the title, is being viewed through discussion of the political and social scene, and discourses towards Karakachans in Bulgaria and it is not applicable for the Sarakatsans in Greece.

² "At least 80 percent" as early as 1994, according to the chairman at the time of the Cultural and Educational Society of Karakachans in Bulgaria (Miloev 1994). Based on the information from my own fieldwork I can certainly say that almost every household is affected by labour mobility.

³ The analysis is based on empirical data collected during fieldwork carried out by me in the 2012–2013 period in Samokov, Berkovitsa, Dupnitsa, Sliven, Golyamo Chochoveni and Kotel in Bulgaria, Thessaloniki and its satellite settlements Ruins, Panòrama, Kalamaria as well as areas around Alexandroupoli, Komotini, Xanthi, Kavala, Drama, Serres (field study within the research project "Cultures, memory, heritages in the region of the southern Bulgarian border" led by Assoc. Prof. Svetla Rakshieva of IEFSEM-BAS).

⁴ Karakachans finally settled down for life in the late 1950s. For more on this topic see Pimpireva 1998b.

cy at the time, which is defined as "communist integration-assimilation project" (Gruev, Kalyonski 2008, 7). According to Büchschütz, the policy of the Communist Party against the ethnic and religious minorities aimed at homogenization of the Bulgarian people (Büchschütz 2000, 7). Indeed, this was not a "discovery" of socialism, but is inherent to any nation state and "every nation state avoids the recognition of "minority" and therefore the use of the term "ethnic minority" (and even more national minority) when considering different ethnic group available within its borders" (Grekova 2001, 22; Grekova 1997, 254), and virtually all countries react to aliens with hostility (Hobsbourn 1996, 177). After 1944, the approach of the party/state in this respect has not been consistent. Until the 1970s, it was believed that reaching this goal was possible through the flourishing of national and cultural differences. After the proletarian internationalism, however, the time of the unitary socialist nation came with the proclamation of the absence of any distinctive features, which was expressed in restricting the cultural and religious rights of minorities. This was the context – the party's ambition for creating and strengthening the social cohesion of society (Program of the BCP, 1971, cited in Bonina 1981a, 39), which must transform into cultural uniformity.

In terms of the specific policy toward the community on part of the Bulgarian state, it is particularly important to note that Karakachans under socialism can be counted among the so called "ostentatious minorities" (Büchschütz 2000, 13), which means that in reality they were not subject to a special policy (Pimpireva 2008, 85) because they were relatively small and were considered loyal and almost indistinguishable from the majority. After the settlement of Karakachans and with the changes that occurred in their daily culture, throughout the period of socialism there were undergoing processes of integration into the Bulgarian society and adaptation to the patterns of the sedentary Bulgarian population (Ibid. 84, 86), which was facilitated both by the common religion with the macro society and the similarity of some traditional cultural practices with those in traditional Bulgarian culture, such as the wedding, for example (Bonina 1981b, 45– 46), as well as by the lack of historically rooted contradictions and respectively – by the lack of a state policy toward the community as a national minority (Pimpireva 2008, 85).

After the changes in Bulgaria in 1989, the construction and the real manifestations of a collective ethnic identity became possible. Karakachans, like most of the other ethnic communities in Bulgaria, took advantage of this right and created their own cultural and educational organizations (The Cultural and Educational Society of Karakachans in Bulgaria; since 1995 – The Federation of the Cultural and Educational Societies of Karakachans in Bulgaria, abbr. FCESKB).

In the context of this study the main conclusion that can be drawn is the following: the fact that the socialist state did not devise a special policy toward Karakachans, as for example in relation to the Muslim population, is important for the subject matter as it facilitated namely the high degree of integration of the community into the macro society. This only shows that the policy of the socialist Bulgaria to Karakachans did not create conditions for encapsulation of the community, and therefore the formation of a negative attitude among its members to the Bulgarian state and the ethnic majority. This is important because it explains the

construction of one of the key markers of the Karakachan identity - an important part in its three layers is that the community members define themselves (except as "Karakachans" and "Greeks"), but also as "Bulgarian Karakachans" and, hence, Bulgaria is perceived as their "homeland" and Greece as "primordial homeland" (Pimpireva 1998b, 151; Pimpireva 2008, 86). This specificity in turn affects the way in which Karakachans react to the Greek policy after 1989 and, therefore, it is important for the development and form of labour mobility and the way the respondents regard it. Here I have in mind the fact that the labour mobility to Greece is perceived by migrants as a strategy to deal with the economic difficulties in Bulgaria, so it is something temporary. Therefore, it develops as a temporary and (though for a long period of time) periodic migration and only in very rare cases, as emigration.⁵

The policy of Greece toward Karakachans in Bulgaria after 1989.

Aspects of the Greek national politics

The policy of the Greek state toward Karakachans in Bulgaria also fits into a broader interpretative frame – Greek nationalism, the construction of the Greek nation and the state of all Greeks. Since the 18th century to the present day, before the Greek nationalism and the Greek national policy the question where Greece stands and what the Greeks are, has remained. This is associated with the incorporation of territories and assimilation of communities. For the purpose of this text, it is especially useful to consider the study of Anastasia Karakasidou based on field research in northern Greece in the late 1980s and the first half of the 1990s. During this period, Karakasidou tells in the first person (Karakasidou 2008, 14), the Greek society and the Greek state unconditionally accepted not only the Greek-speaking, but also the Turkic-speaking Orthodox refugees⁶ from Asia Minor and their descendants as pure Greeks. Subject to the same policy was the Slavic population.⁷ In

⁵ For details on the different forms of labour mobility of Karakachans see Dimitrov 2015.

⁶ During and after the Greco-Turkish war in Asia Minor (known in Greece as the Asia Minor disaster) from 1922 to 1923, and as a result of the Treaty of Lausanne in June 1923, about 1.5 million Christian refugees were resettled from Turkey into Greece, as most of them were settled in northern Greece, from where around 350 thousand Muslims emigrated. By "encouraging and concentrating the resettlement of refugees there", the Greek state "asserts its claims to the territory". The newcomers - the Orthodox population was not homogeneous. It included East Thracian, Pontian and Asia Minor refugees. A significant part of them (karamanlides) are Turkic-speaking, but used the Greek alphabet (Karakasidou 2008, 195–197; Hakov 2000, 61–74).

⁷ The Bucharest Peace Treaty on July 28, 1913 "imposes not fair, but armed peace in the Balkans. According to it, Serbia and Greece divided amongst themselves the entire Macedonia". Hundreds of thousands were the refugees to Bulgaria (Statelova; Grancharov 2006, 285–287). This is what happened with the Slavic population that remained within the borders of Greece: "The so-called (from the Greek national rhetoric – my note) Liberation of Macedonia in 1913 was the symbol that marked the beginning of unquestioned hegemony in the production of the culture-nation. Whatever the people of Central Macedonia were, henceforth it was clear that they would be Greeks. And so it happened" (Karakasidou 2008, 284).

this respect it is appropriate to present a larger quote that offers a condense interpretation of these processes in the context of which the multiethnic Greek Macedonia was turned into one-nation: "These refugees were identified as Greeks by the national government as well as by the international agreements, mainly on the basis of their religion. The vast majority of refugees accepted this identity, but it was challenged or questioned by many residents of northern Greece, where they settled. Their integration within the culture and the Greek national statehood became an integral part of the broader process of national acculturation of the population of Greek Macedonia" (Karakasidou 2008, 197). And similar to Bulgaria which in the 1970s transformed into a national territory without minorities in the same way and at the same time "Greece became a country virtually without minority problems" (Karakasidou 2008, 199 cited in Clogg, Richard 1979, 121). How far from the truth is that finding was very convincingly described by Karakasidou: in the 1990s the population and the municipal government of a village in northern Greece was put under pressure from citizens, media and authorities and was forced publicly (in a letter to the media, to the Ministry of Macedonia and Thrace, as well as to the director of the Interior at the Bureau of Thessaloniki Prefecture) to declare Greek origin and national consciousness (Karakasidou 2008, 286–287).

Such is the context of the specific policy of the Greek state toward the community of Karakachans in Bulgaria considered here. Its presentation was necessary because it evokes the following question: if such were the public attitudes and government policy toward the Turkic-speaking and Slavonic citizens of Greece (and/or their descendants) in the 1990s, what might be the policy of the Greek state toward the Greek-speaking population in a neighbouring country at the same time?

***Constructing the "external national homeland"*⁸**

On the basis of the empirical material, Kiril Kertikov aptly defined the policy of Greece to Karakachans in Bulgaria in the early 1990s as protectionist (Kertikov 1993, 169). Jean-Francois Gossiaux also noted that Greece, following the concept of national and state identity, aimed to "naturally integrate under its wing the Greek-speaking Orthodox" and therefore assumed towards Karakachans the role of "country protector or mother-country" (Gossiaux 2004, 248). It remains to see what the nature of this protectionism is, how far it extends and what the consequences are.⁹

Here I will present an aspect of the Greek politics to Karakachans that allows for a very specific perspective considering their labour mobility, namely as a choice, as the preferred option and not only in comparison with the alternative to live only in Bulgaria during the difficult last decade of the 20th century and after, but compared to the opportunity to be Greek citizens and actually move to Greece. The information in the scientific literature about the existence of this opportunity

⁸ According to Brubaker 2004.

⁹ The Karakachans in Bulgaria are not a unique community which is an object of the Protection Greek National policy. The situation is similar also by the so-called "Privileged Return Migrants" from the Former Soviet Union. See for example Voutira 2004.

for Karakachans since the early 1990s is too scarce.¹⁰ The information given by the Greek Embassy in Sofia on this issue is zero.¹¹ However, the information contained in the materials I collected during the fieldwork in 2012–2013 is abundant and impressively uniform. All respondents presented the possibility of moving to Greece as a proposal by the Greek state, communicated through the local associations by representatives of the Greek Embassy, in some cases, by the Federation of Sarakatsani in Greece.¹² Almost all respondents confirmed the information in the scientific literature (see footnote 10) that the Greek state provided for potential emigrants a specific livelihood – sheep breeding. Absolutely all mentioned the area of Greek Thrace as their proposed area for settlement. Part of the respondents believed that the aim of the Greek authorities was to use Karakachans as carriers of specific knowledge and skills for the development of agriculture and especially sheep breeding in northern Greece. Some of them sought explanation for this proposal in the desire of the state to "saturate" the region of northern Greece with Greek-speaking population because of the presence of Muslim population there, and because of the proximity of the border with Turkey. All respondents pointed to villages located in the administrative region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace. The most often mentioned settlement was Shapchi (Sapes) in County Rhodope Mountains, which is part of the municipality Maroneia-Shapchi. There was no unanimity of opinion on the nature and extent of the possible financial and material support from the Greek state for those wishing to emigrate. The most popular was the knowledge about advantageous credits, houses, land and direct financial support. Here is just a small fraction of the stories:¹³

“The year ’89–’90 a man came from the Embassy here on our first meeting and he said that people, who wished to obtain Greek citizenship, could obtain it. They should reject the Bulgarian citizenship and leave for Greece to be accommodated there. They gave 100 sheep to each family and three million drachmas or was it 1.5 million? I cannot

¹⁰ See Kertikov 1993, 135–136; Pimpireva 1998b, 153–154; Pimpireva 1998a, 256–257; René 2002, 85; Pimpireva 2008, 94.

¹¹ I made the following inquiry via e-mail to the Embassy of Greece on 05. 03. 2014: “1. After 1989 the Sarakatsani in Bulgaria achieved an easy access to Greek visa. Why?; 2. What kind of visa was this and how long was its duration?; 3. How was the kind and the duration of the visa changed during the years?; 4. Did the members of mixed marriages (for example Bulgarian married for Sarakatsan or children from mixed marriages) have the same access to visa as the Sarakatsani?; 5. How was the Sarakatsani origin proved and were there some attempts for fraud (for example Bulgarians who pretend to be Sarakatsani and actually they were not)?; 6. Was Greece ready at the beginning of 90 years of the 20th century to receive and help Sarakatsani from Bulgaria, in case they want to settle in Greece and by what kind of terms? Did the Greek country have a particular proposal for help to such Bulgarian citizens?” This was the reply dated from 21. 03. 2014: “Dear Mr. Dimitrov, Regarding your request, we would like to inform you that due to the large amount of time that has elapsed, it was not possible to find relevant data. We wish you success in your research! Embassy of Greece in Sofia.”

¹² There is no reason to believe that the actions in this direction of the Federation of Sarakatsani were not consistent with the government in Greece.

¹³ For more details from the fieldwork material see Dimitrov 2015.

remember. Gratuitously gave them the money and the sheep free of charge, just to pull us out of here. It was about a place where there was no population. This is close to Alexandroupoli, which is next to the Turkish border and there are many Pomaks. They wanted to develop sheep breeding there. Not only that, but to say that there are Greek population there.” (♂, 50 – IEFSEM AEIM-980-III, 140)

“They wanted to mislead us into going to live in Greece. They had built houses. Even people came to me here from the association, from the Federation – they asked me to sign that I will go to live in Greece. The village is called Sapes. Bungalows, two chambers with kitchenette, I don’t know even if there is a bathroom, so that I never entered. I passed, and only from outside I’ve seen it. To go to live there. To settle there. 2-3 years later they invited there Georgians, Ponti, they were called. They wanted us to move to Greece and make us shepherds there, pastors.” (♂, 55, – Ibid. 260–261)

The empirical material clearly shows that in the early 1990s the policy of the Greek state to Karakachans in Bulgaria has created conditions which have made possible the emergence of an idea in the community that if they wish, they can settle permanently in certain areas of northern Greece, obtaining specific support from the state. Moreover, in the narratives of some of the founders and the first presidents of the associations from the beginning of the 1990s, the role of Greek state in regard to the founding of FCESKB clearly stands out: “Immediately after the perestroika in 1990 in a conversation with one representative from the Greek Embassy told me that if we wanted to attract attention from the Greek or the Bulgarian side during these changes when anyone could develop a non-profit or cultural-mass activity, this is the way – registration of an association in court.” (♂, around 65, founder of one of the local associations – Ibid. 78) The association sets as its main objectives the study, promotion and preservation of the history, culture, traditions and language of Karakachans¹⁴ – activities supported under one form or another by the Greek state (for example, free trips, camps, educational materials for studying Greek, Greek language courses and vocational training in Greek universities, and cash). In the empirical material, however, another story on this subject is clearly visible – the objectives and activities of associations. In the narratives of “ordinary” Karakachans the accent on the priorities, associated with the role of the Federation, is quite different and it is connected with labour mobility. All without exception stated the role of the organization to provide access to Greek visas as the most important. The fieldwork material clearly shows that the main function of FCESKB is to legitimize before the Greek institutions in Bulgaria the Karakachan origin of its members or to ensure that they are members of mixed marriages. Even though it was generally perceived that a sufficient proof of belonging to the Karakachan community was the membership in the respective local association, it was not enough to get a visa - visa was promised only to those members who paid their dues and gets membership cards: “Membership cards they gave us – to be a Karakachan already (!). With this card you get the visa.” (♂, 55 – IEFSEM AEIM-980-III, 256)

¹⁴ <http://www.karakachani.com/bg/home>.

Therefore, after 1989 the Karakachan origin became capital that allowed for easier entry into Greece, but in practice the associations turned to be checkpoints not that much for a quicker and safer (Pimpireva 2008, 92) way of getting a Greek visa, but for the only possible way of getting it. In this sense, one can say that the associations are becoming an essential tool for producing and marketing identity. Respondents told of a practice from the early 1990s, which lasted until 1998 – the chairmen of the associations issued membership cards to Bulgarians (for a fee or as a friendly exchange, depending on the relationship between the respective chairman and the "candidate-Karakachan"), so that they could gain access to a visa. There is also mention of fictitious marriages between Bulgarians and Karakachans concluded for the same purpose. There are even cases of fake associations in northwestern Bulgaria. As the primary role of FCESKB was perceived to be the provision of the access to visas for its members, the abolishment of visa policy between Greece and Bulgaria following the accession of Bulgaria into the EU in 2007, resulted in the reduction of the activities of the local associations and plummeting of the number of their members. At the time of the fieldwork (2012–2013), some of the associations did not function at all, while others existed only fictitiously, represented by a chairman and a few members. Narratives in all the places I visited revealed the same causation and sounded like that: "I do not know (!) whether there is now a federation." (♂, 27 – IEFSEM AEIM-980-III, 56); "The association not only here (in Kotel – my note), but all over Bulgaria died away. They seemed to have fulfilled their role. They were mainly needed to provide visas. 99.9 percent were for visas. Federation also has almost no activity." (♂, 57 – Ibid. 245); "These people were members of the association for visas only. Now there is no association." (♂, 47 – Ibid. 251)

Considering the aspects of the policy of the Greek state to Karakachans in Bulgaria after 1989 presented here, the logical conclusion should be that Greece assumes the role of a national homeland, external to the community. According to Brubaker, a state is constructed and positioned against a community in another country as it's (of the community) "external national homeland" when it monitors the status of this community and protects and promotes its interests through various political action "as, for instance, privileges for immigration and citizenship" (Brubaker 2004, 110). The mechanism of constructing external national homelands, so convincingly described by Brubaker, is clearly recognizable in the case of Karakachans: we have the political behaviour of the Greek state, defining Karakachans in Bulgaria as members of the Greek nation.

Constructing of socio-cultural boundary

After 1989 there were conditions for constructing of the Karakachan identity in a new way leading to situational upheaval in its three layers (Pimpireva 1998b, 151; Pimpireva 2008, 86). I will pay a special attention to the relations of cooperation between labour mobility and identity. For this purpose I would consider the role of labour mobility in the construction of socio-cultural boundary between Karakachans and Greeks (including Sarakatsani), but also the role of the socio-

cultural boundary in the way Karakachans respond to the policy of Greece. In other words, the process of imagining the state border as socio-cultural will be analyzed, focusing on the period after 1989. Bearing in mind that identity is “a fluid construct with historical roots” (Karakasidou 2008, 48) and that the boundaries between the groups can change their location, functions and permeability according to socio-economic and political situation, here I will attempt to defend the thesis that in the long run Karakachans in Bulgaria do not perceive themselves as a national minority external to Greece, for two main reasons. First, the birthplace (the local identity) and everyday culture (cultural background) are proving them with stronger “center of loyalty” (see Hobsbawm 1996, 92) than the mother tongue and knowledge of origin. “Only when a loyalty comes into direct conflict with another or others, the problem arises of choosing between them” (Ibid. 134). In the case of Karakachans their labour mobility is the cause of this conflict. And second – labour mobility is important for the outcome of the competition between the centers of loyalty precisely because of its importance for the construction of the mentioned socio-cultural boundary.¹⁵

The nationalist doctrines of the new sovereign states in the Balkans, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, belong more to the so called “non-Western model of ethnic concept of the nation”,¹⁶ according to which the nation is primarily a community of common origin, usually recognizable through language (Smith 2000, 23–24). Therefore the essence of the national question both for Bulgaria and Greece consists in striving to achieve the basic goal: a nation within the borders of the state. This is the reason why the state borders in the Balkans are of great importance to the process of constructing a national identity in this region – they were thought as national borders through which the young Balkan nations were distinguished from the Ottoman Empire and from each other (Luleva 2006, 47).

After the World War II the world was divided into two warring camps. The boundary between them was heavily guarded and difficult to overcome. For Karakachans this “iron curtain” was the border between Bulgaria and Greece. Unified in its nomadic past, the community was divided, leading to the construction of one of the key markers of the Karakachan identity – “the distinction between ‘Bulgarian’ and ‘Greek’ Karakachans who *have different life* (my emphasis) on both sides of the border” (Pimpireva 2008, 84). This is the first condition for the construction of the socio-cultural boundary on the outline of the territorial border. This process began before 1989 in case of rare meetings between relatives from both sides of the state border: “We did not have jeans, at that time, more modern sweaters, and shoes. They wore some jeans and we thought it was big deal there,” (♂, 52 – IEFSEM AEIM-980-III, 109–110).

¹⁵ In developing this issue, I found very useful the arguments and reflections, expressed by Luleva 2006.

¹⁶ Here I take into account the arbitrary nature of distinguishing nationalism into two ideal types: Western (more French or political) and non-Western (also German or ethnic – see Giordano 1999). In both types there are ethnic identities and boundaries, but with the Western-style nationalism they are more easily penetrable (Giordano 1999, 10).

In the early 1990s the Karakachan identity was facing new challenges. This was the time when the topics of origin are the most interesting and hotly debated in the community. Conferences, dedicated mainly to this issue, were organized at the Karakachan fairs (Pimpireva 1998b, 147). This was the time when Greece demonstrated its position as a foreign national homeland in terms of Karakachans. It is hardly far-fetched to assume that in return the community must demonstrate some form of loyalty to the “Greek”, and in this context it seems easy to explain the fact that at these conferences “neither the organizers nor the audience discussed any other hypothesis different from the Greek genesis of Karakachans”, and the community “declares its ethnic connection to the Greeks” (Ibid. 147–148). Without neglecting the pursuit of an ethnic group in alien ethnic environment “to establish itself and gain recognition” (ibid.), in this case I cannot ignore the question – recognition by whom? Not only the macro society in Bulgaria, but also the representatives of the Greek government should be considered as “the significant other” for Karakachans at this time. People from Greece were indispensable guests at the fairs, because they influenced the changes in the Greek policy to Karakachans, respectively the visas, and therefore the labour mobility that within just 2–3 years affected nearly every Karakachan household. Understanding the situational nature of ethnicity gives the opportunity to assess the instrumental nature of the ethnic. If we agree that identity can be instrumentalized, which means to be used “in accordance with individual or collective interests” (Smith 1991, 35), we must agree that this aspect is present in the construction of the Karakachan identity at this time and in these situations – in the 1990s in contacts with any representatives of the Greek state (including Sarakatsani) during the fairs. Here it was shown the construction of ethno-cultural border between Karakachans and the macro society in Bulgaria, but again with the proviso that it applies to certain situations and has a definite purpose. This is essential when considering the generation of symbolic capital – the trend Karakachans to be perceived as “very ancient people” and “the most pure Greeks” (Pimpireva 1998b, 148). Almost pervasive within the community is the notion that the Karakachan speech is the oldest preserved Greek. In this case it is clearly seen the dominance of origin and language over cultural background and birthplace in the construction of identity.

In the situation presented here, Very interesting is the relation of labor mobility with the construction of identity of a national minority (see Brubaker 2004, 114–115). In the situation I will demonstrate – the relations of Karakachans with the Greeks (and Sarakatsani) in the context of labor mobility and the reaction of the community regarding the policy of Greece, and in particular the possibility / proposal for eviction – it will be shown that just because and in the context of labor mobility the birthplace, cultural background and social status matter in the construction of identity and in this case Karakachans are not imagined as a national minority external to Greece.

Meetings between relatives occurred after 1989. Labour mobility is important in that it enabled and was an occasion for such meetings. It is interesting to note that at the same time labour mobility was rarely a topic of conversation. In fact, it turns out that communication was very rare because the meetings were often

onetime events. This was largely due to the onset of discomfort Karakachans experienced because of the awareness that they were materially poor and job seekers – in a subordinate position in relation to the society, part of which were their relatives. It can certainly be said that in most cases there was a feeling of strangeness. “They refer to relatives in Greece as ‘other’, different from ‘us’,” (Luleva 2006, 50). That finding, made by Anna Luleva for the Greek population in the southern Bulgarian Black Sea coast, applies with equal force to Karakachans: “They are not the same (like us, our relatives – my note) out there. Whatever other Greeks do, Sarakatsani do the same, without distinction. They are one lineage there in Greece.” The distinction made by respondents between “Bulgarian” Karakachans and “Greek” Karakachans is explicit and therefore “the territorial boundary is transformed into an imaginary social and cultural” (Ibid. 48). This is because the two communities lead a different lifestyle and absorb different models of everyday culture after settling down for life. In addition, however, the meetings between “Bulgarian” and “Greek” Karakachans take place in a particular context (labour mobility), which implies different social statuses. Karakachans are never in the role of employers of the Greeks, and this only highlights the feeling that *they are not like us*. It is not difficult to guess how Karakachans (as cheap work force) imagine Greeks to be. They are perceived as *rich, arrogant, tight, slave owners* and so on. And here it is obvious the importance of the combination of unequal social statuses¹⁷ and different cultural backgrounds in building this image: “And Greek women are fancy, we have nothing in common.” (♀, October 50 – IEFSEM-AEIM 980-III, 13, 16); “They are not like us out there.” (♂, 57 – Ibid. 156); “You are just not one of them. You are a foreigner, no matter who you are.” In this process the “relational aspect of identity” immediately stands out (Luleva 2006, 51) – the role of the significant others in the construction of self-image and it is obvious how the respondents perceive themselves as increasingly “more-Bulgarian” Karakachans: “I am no Greek. We have been born here; I’m Bulgarian, Bulgarian Karakachans. There is a big difference between a Karakachan and a Greek.” (♂, 71 – IEFSEM AEIM 980-III, 64)

The role of local identity and cultural background in the construction of the Karakachan identity after 1989 can very well be seen from another perspective – the reaction of the community against the proposed eviction. In this case, labour mobility is important as an alternative to the proposal, therefore the possibility of displacement can be measured by the opportunity for labor mobility. In this sense, labor mobility proved crucial for the reaction of the community, which in short, is the following: the proposed evictions to Greece received negative or no response among Karakachans. And there is a remarkable uniformity of the field work materials on the subject; I will cite just two examples: “I will go for what – to become a slave to a Greek? We were born here.” (♂, 71 – Ibid. 68); “We never wanted to go

¹⁷ Thede Khal (Kahl 1999, 63–64) described a very interesting process of constructing a socio-cultural boundary between Aromanians and Karakachans before their settling down for life just due to the asymmetry of social relations among them (Karakachans work for the partly settled Aromanians).

and live in Greece permanently. In brief – to become Greeks. Never! We are Bulgarians.” (♂, 47 – Ibid. 23)

The analysis clearly shows the role of the four factors important for the Karakachans' reaction to the Greek proposal – local identity, cultural background, social status and Bulgaria's policy toward the community. The role of labour mobility was marked above. In order to once again emphasize its importance, especially in connection with social statuses I will mention one aspect of the effects and consequences of labour mobility, which is important for the reaction of the community to the possibility of deportation. It is about the better material and economic situation of Karakachans in comparison to the majority thanks to labour mobility. It is mostly obvious in two directions – housing and livelihoods. A majority of Karakachans managed to renovate old houses¹⁸ or build / buy new, which reflects favorably on the next generation, and they manage to develop some private small or medium business that also reflects favorably on the next generation: “In town the restaurants are owned by Karakachans, the largest construction market is Karakachan, the biggest construction store is Karakachan, the largest gas station is Karakachan, the regular buses taking students to (city X – my note) are Karakachan,” (♀, around 40 – Ibid. 82). These realized advantages realized are also essential for the construction of identity. They have consequently led to a new way of creating a positive image of “Karakachan”: it is prestigious to be a Karakachan, because Karakachans are carriers of values such as hard work, initiative, persistence, etc., proved by the precisely described advantages: “The Karakachan is enterprising and facts talk about it. 80% of the businesses in (the city – my note) is owned by Karakachans,” (Ibid. 227).

So, in search of answers to the questions, we saw in action one of the mechanisms of nationalism in constructing/imagining a homogeneous nation, namely the selective argumentation: in the case of the Greek nationalism the Slavic population in northern Greece is absolutely Greek, therefore the language does not matter. Meanwhile, Karakachans in Bulgaria are treated by the Greek policy like Greek population and therefore only language matters. In conclusion it can be said that the processes of constructing the Karakachan identity after 1989 are multilayered and complex. We must be careful when making generalizations. Yet, it can be assumed that the empirical material rejects the possibility Karakachans to be perceived as a minority, external to Greece as their labor mobility plays an essential role along with accompanying processes of constructing identity.

¹⁸Karakachans are not affected by this form of loss of status – depreciation of housing, marked by Andrey Raychev and Kancho Stoychev: “close to year 2001, nearly two-thirds of households in Bulgaria have not done repairs and have not invested in housing in the recent 5 years” (Raychev, Stoychev 2008, 109).

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