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# National Indifference in Post-Ottoman Spaces: A Case from Northwest Bulgaria

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## Abstract

This study represents an application of the concept of national indifference in the Post-Ottoman Balkans. It addresses the question of why two minority communities in Northwest Bulgaria in the first half of 20th century – the Protestant Voyvodovo community and the Catholic community of Bărdarski Geran, both marked by a strong principle of religious endogamy, intermarried. The author maintains that the main reason why these two communities intermarried was – despite all the differences between them – their national indifference, a parameter that both communities shared. These marriages did not cross the ethno-national boundary (the communities were nationally indifferent and thus ethno-national borders did not divide them). Contrary to standard understandings of the concept of national indifference, the author emphasizes that national indifference can be said to have two sides. On the one hand, nationally indifferent groups represent those in which the “we-they” opposition does not follow national lines, while on the other hand these groups identify and organize themselves on the basis of principles other than national ones. In the example of the inhabitants of Voyvodovo and Bărdarski Geran, this principle was religion. The appreciation of the “positive” side of national indifference enables us to grasp “the native’s point of view,” how people themselves perceived and understood their reality, their identities, and loyalties.

**Keywords:** national identity; national indifference; nationalism; religion; Bulgaria

## Prologue: The Post-Ottoman Balkans and the Concept of National Indifference

In the first decade of the new millennium, “a new school of historians” developed in the United States (Stourzh 2011, 296). In a number of works, these historians developed the concept of “national indifference” into its own independent interpretational paradigm, which “ranks among the most innovative concepts shaping research on nationalism in the past two decades” (Van Ginderachter and Fox 2019b, 1). The “canonic” authors of this school include Pieter Judson (2006), Jeremy King (2005 [2002]), and Tara Zahra (2008; 2010), who often cite Gary B. Cohen in their works as (not only) a source of inspiration, primarily his monograph *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861–1914* (Cohen 1981).

In their contributions these authors focus on phenomena and processes that took place in the area of the former Austrian half of the Dual Monarchy of Habsburg Central Europe. The Habsburg Monarchy is portrayed in these texts as a “nationally neutral” (Zahra 2008, 10), “nonnational” or “more-than-national” state (King 2005, 5), with an “anational government” (Judson 2006, 49). The character of this state was paralleled by non-national collective identities of (some) inhabitants of

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the Empire that were based on (non-national) loyalty to the monarchy and dynasty (King 2001, 118–119; Cohen 2000 [1981], 27, 33).

General traits of anationality/non-nationality/national neutrality, which the authors in question attribute to the Habsburg dynasty and monarchy as well as to loyalties and collective identities of the inhabitants of the Habsburg Empire, are very akin to traits associated in the scholarly literature with corresponding domains in the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire, as a state, has been also portrayed as “non-national” (Haddad and Ochsenwald 1977), “anational” (Karpát 2002, 712), or “supranational” (733). Identities and loyalties of the inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire have also been depicted as “nationally neutral” (Konortas 2007, 177), or simply as identities in which “national elements were hardly relevant” (Frantz 2009, 457 *et passim*).

Many works focused on identities and loyalties in the area of the post-Ottoman Balkans identify very similar phenomena and processes addressed by proponents of the “school” of national indifference (Cowan 2008; Fine 2006; Karakasidou 1997; Yosmaoğlu 2013); some of them even explicitly use the term of “national indifference” (Konortas 2007, 178). Despite this fact, works devoted to the Balkans are rare that explicitly refer to the concept of national indifference (or the works of authors who use this concept), both in cases when the author believes in the applicability of the concept in the Balkan region (see, for example, Erdeljac 2015, 63) or does not (Dragostinova 2016, 106–107).

In my contribution I will thus first attempt to show the possibilities of the applicability of the concept of national indifference in the post-Ottoman area. This continues to be the area which – despite the recent publication of a collection of studies seeking “to extend geographical remit of the discussion” of the concept to other parts of Europe (Van Ginderachter and Fox 2019a, 248) – remains rather out of the reach of authors working with the concept. In other words, I will try to demonstrate that it is possible to apply the concept of national indifference to materials from this area and period, and that this application will allow us to view the situation from a new perspective in which we will be able to answer questions and solve problems that otherwise would appear anomalous and difficult to understand. Specifically, I will try to show that the concept of national indifference causes different boundaries and collective identities to appear key than those that are common today (and that are commonly retrospectively projected into the past).

## Two Sides of National Indifference

The members of the “school” did not coin the term “national indifference”; this term, alongside its parallels, have long been present in the works of authors dealing with the issue of the foundation of modern nations, including scholars that study nations that rose from the ruins of the Austrian half of the Dual Monarchy (Hroch 1985 [1968], 35 *et passim*; Křen 2013 [1986]; Kutnar 2003 [manuscript completed 1939], 92) and even in the publications of the time (for example *Česká revue* 1909, 115, as cited in Kamusella 2016, 12). For these authors, however, national indifference always represented the same thing – a state (and the consciousness/identities/loyalties corresponding to it) preceding (the culmination of) the process of nationalization. That is, the term “national indifference” in this case was used to designate a state in which national consciousness/identities/loyalties were (still) absent.

This usage, however, is explicitly rejected by the proponents of the “new school” (Zahra 2010, 111). Actors of their texts are not the people whose identity repertoire *did not include* national identity and whose dominant collective identification was *not* national (Zahra 2010, 111), but they are persons, who *intentionally manipulated* national identity *depending on the context* (Judson and Zahra 2012, 27; Judson 2016, 153–154), in other words they are so called “side-switchers,” “fence-sitters,” “amphibians,” “hermaphrodites,” “utraquists,” etc., or – as Judson summarizes – “national opportunists”<sup>1</sup> (Judson 2013, 132).<sup>2</sup>

The merit of the “new school” in the field of national indifference is unquestionable. However, the rather unambiguous adoption of the situationalist (circumstantialist) or instrumentalist approach by the proponents of the “school” led to a loss of consideration for a fact that was clear to scholars using the term “national indifference” before or outside this “school” – the

fact that a phenomenon of national indifference is *two-sided*. A nationally indifferent group on one hand represents a group in which the “we-they” opposition does not follow national lines, while on the other hand these groups identify and organize themselves on the basis of principles other than the national one. This “other side” of national indifference will be important for us, as it is this “other side” that is a constitutive element for the researched groups. I will try to demonstrate that the situation of national indifference does not necessarily only mean that certain groups are indifferent to national ideology and agitation because they oscillate between two (or more) national identities, but that the reason for their indifference may be that the primary mode of belonging of their members was principally anational, or in other words, religious.

Empirically this study is devoted to the relationship between two strictly endogamous religious groups settled in close proximity to one another in northwest Bulgaria. These were Protestants inhabiting the village of Voyvodovo and Catholics inhabiting the village of Bårdarski Geran. However, this contribution will not be an ethnography; in the tradition of one of the central figures of modern social anthropology, E. E. Evans-Pritchard, who makes a fundamental claim “to study problems and not peoples” (Evans-Pritchard 1951, 87) I will strive for the solution of the problem that is posed by the relationship between these two groups – particularly intermarriages between their members. The tool for this solution will be the (slightly refined) concept of national indifference. I will try to show that the exchanges of marriage partners between these communities were due to the two sides of national indifference that have been discussed above. On one side, or “negatively,” these communities were nationally indifferent and thus ethno-national borders did not divide them; this also implies that marriages between these groups did not cross the ethno-national boundary. On the “positive” side, members of these groups inter-married on the grounds of a shared faith (albeit of a different denomination). It was the shared faith that was what was (the most) important to them and this was also the reason why members of these communities repeatedly intermarried.

The analysed example and the results of the application of both dimensions of national indifference, the “negative” one and the “positive” one, will also show that the national identities that we take for granted, or even natural, today, probably did not exist at all then – just as there were no groups based on them and no social boundaries that would define them. In the given historical period and geopolitical space, there were still groups with radically different organizational principles and modes of belonging of their members, even if they already were in decline. To thematise these groups we need a different terminological apparatus and explanatory schemes than those used when studying current groups. I believe that the following pages will demonstrate that the concept of national indifference could be such an alternative.

### Voyvodovo<sup>3</sup>

Voyvodovo was founded in 1900 by roughly twenty Evangelical families from the village of Saint Helena<sup>4</sup> in (today’s Romanian section of) Banat. These families left the village for reasons of religious conflicts and lack of land. The later inhabitants of Saint Helena or their ancestors – so-called tolerance sectarians – were forcibly transmigrated to Banat from Eastern Bohemia. This happened after the Patent of Toleration was issued (1781) when they refused to join one of the four “tolerated” confessions of the Patent (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran [Augsburg] and Calvinist [Helvetian]). The manorial lords at first attempted to convert the members of these groups to some of the tolerated confessions but quickly acknowledged the futility of such actions as “sectarians were convinced of the legitimacy of their interpretation and refused all else” (Nešpor 1999, 130). These were groups that had gathered around folk religious teachers, independent interpreters of the Bible who strictly adhered to their own interpretations of Christian learning. The basis of these groups was the sense of the exclusive salvation that was felt by their members (Nešpor 1999, 129–130). Religion and religious life was “the primary content of their being; it held a central position in it and was a source of life from which they drew and to which they returned. It *affected all*

*elements of their individual and collective lives*" (Kutnar 1948, 165; italics added). In other words, *religion* was the defining element of these groups.<sup>5</sup>

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From the time they entered Bulgarian territory (just as in the previous period), the Voyvodovo community was a significantly closed and self-isolating community characteristic for its high degree of endogamy or endogamy in the position of an ideal (Budilová 2008, 2010, 2020), in other words the desire to close itself in from the surrounding population. The rule of endogamy was one of the basic principles for preserving the existence of the Voyvodovo community and one of the primary mechanisms preventing it from assimilating into its surroundings.

A number of authors have already mentioned the endogamy of the Voyvodovo community; however, they understood it as *ethnic* endogamy, as in the unwillingness of *Czechs* to marry *Bulgarians* (Večerková 1983; Vaculík 2009; Penčev 2006). This understanding of Voyvodovo endogamy stemmed from the (primordialist) assumption that Voyvodovo Czechs were a part of the Czech nation living beyond its borders – a “Czech compatriot community.” It was already pointed out (Jakoubek 2010b) that this understanding is erroneous – the ancestors of Voyvodovo’s inhabitants left the Czech lands for *religious reasons* before the period of the Czech National Revival, before the mass population living in the Czech lands began to share a nationally defined identity. Therefore they did not share Czech national culture/identity/loyalty that had been established in the Czech lands or created after they had left. *Religion* (not national affiliation) was the pivotal organizational principle of their community as the central factor determining their collective identity, while national identity (in the modern sense of the term) was absent in their identity repertoire. The inhabitants of Voyvodovo thus primarily saw themselves as *believers* (in opposition to *non-believers*) and built their village not as a compatriot community, but as a *Civitas Dei* (Jakoubek 2010b, 692)<sup>6</sup> – their goal was to create “a kingdom of God on earth” in Voyvodovo, where people would live “under the flag of faith; under the wings of God” (as cited in Jakoubek 2010b, 688). Also, we have a number of first-hand testimonies of the period that all concurred that the members of the Voyvodovo community were “nationally illiterate” (Folprecht 1937, 40) or, in other words, “not nationally conscious” (Findeis 1930b, 3). They showed an absolute “lack of national consciousness” (Findeis 1930b, 1). The authors quoted saw the reasons for this absence of national identification fairly clearly in the “desire for absolute Christianity” (Findeis 1930a, 2), in the fact that for the Voyvodovo people, “pure Christianity [...] had always been [...] the meaning of their life” (Findeis 1930a, 3). Thus, they represented an example of a nationally indifferent group – a community whose us-them dichotomization does not take place on a national level.

The national indifference of Voyvodovo’s inhabitants was not uncommon given the time, region, and corresponding geopolitical space. The territory of Bulgaria had long been part of the Ottoman Empire, which only recently had left its dominant position in the area. According to Muslim religious law, *religion was one of the main criteria for differentiation of the population in the Ottoman Empire*: Muslims had a privileged position; a stronger social ascent could only be achieved by conversion to Islam (Arnakis 1963, 120–122). At the same time, however, followers of other monotheistic religions in the Ottoman Empire received special treatment. The sultan’s subjects who fell into this category were split into separate religious-administrative communities for which the designation *millets* became known. Within the Ottoman legal framework the terms used had only religious and not national connotation and “the main element of collective identity was religious” (Konortas 2007, 165).<sup>7</sup> So, the *millet* system followed the line of religion, *because it was the only criterion that the Ottoman government accepted* (Sugar 1996, 5–6). Generally speaking, what mattered in those days was religion “not loyalty to the nation, or ethnic-cultural traditions” (Arnakis 1963, 127). And the impact of the Ottoman administrative system did not vanish immediately after the fall of the Ottoman Empire; the long ideological influence of this system proved to be long-lasting and deeply “imbued in the culture and behavior of former Ottoman nationalities” (Karpát 2002, 644; Konortas 2007, 174). So even after the liberation of Bulgaria in a

court in Plovdiv “when asked if they are Greeks or Bulgarians, the orthodox defendants replied that they were Christians” (Konortas 2007, 175), and in the first decade of the new century in many parts of the region “many orthodox villagers considered themselves belonging not to a nation but to a religious community,” finding themselves in the situation of “national neutrality [...] contented with the sole religious classification between Christians, Muslims and Jews [...] indifferent to or ignore the distinction between Greeks, Bulgarians or Russians” (Konortas 2007, 177). *So it was the religion – rather than the language, culture, “race,” or “ethnicity” – which very long played a crucial role in the definition of collective identities in the Balkan area* (Glenny 1999, 74; see also Cowan 2008, 352; Anscombe 2014).

And not only the Ottoman *past* mattered – in the period of transfer of the part of the *Saint Helena* population to Bulgaria, the country had a valid principle of protection of minorities resulting from the Berlin Treaty (1878), where, however, minorities were understood as religious minorities. The first Bulgarian constitution of 1879 followed this line, in which the understanding of minorities as religious minorities was already an exclusive interpretation (Kanev 1998, 68). And, we should not forget the regional context. Symptomatic for the situation in northwest Bulgaria at that time are, for example, the group appellations used during that period. Most of the groups were not labelled (and did not call themselves either) by the national epithets common today. Inhabitants of Voyvodovo were called *Banatians*, and Voyvodovo was not called a Czech village, but a Banatian village (*Banatsko selo*). This was in no way exceptional. It would be a vain attempt to look for *Slovaks*, *Germans*, *Romanians* or *Serbs* at that time. Instead, we would find *Slavonians* (since they came from Slavonia), *Swabians*, *Vlachs*, and *Ratzi* (named after the medieval Serbian state with the capital of Rashka). And the same was the case of Banat Bulgarians, a group, whose members called themselves *Palkene* and were called Paulicians (*Pavlikjani*) by the surrounding population (and whose villages of Bårdarski Geran and Gostilya are located in the vicinity of Voyvodovo<sup>8</sup>). *Paulicians* in fact, represented a case very similar to Voyvodovo, as their community was also defined by their religiosity, or the (Catholic) confession (Nyagulov 1999, 92; Telbizov and Vekova-Telbizova 1936, 3). The only group that already acted under the term common today were the local Bulgarians. However, it would probably be incorrect to infer from this fact that local Bulgarians were a nationally conscious population. As J. Findeis<sup>9</sup> mentions, they were “nationally illiterate” in a similar way as the Voyvodovo (Czech) “compatriots.” Also, we should not forget that the term *Bulgarian*, as in the last centuries, had still a strong Orthodox connotation, so that conversion to Protestantism entailed that in the eyes of the local population the convert *ceased to be Bulgarian*<sup>10</sup> (Budilova and Jakoubek 2014, 76–83; Clarke 1971, 304; Nestorova 1987, 115; Stoyanov 1964, 57, 60; Shopov 1974, 156–157). In other words, a clearly profiled national awareness of the population was, in the region at that time, presumably, more of an exception than a rule.

### Bårdarski Geran

As already mentioned, Voyvodovo endogamy must be understood on *religious* axes. Just as the community was defined in terms of its religion, the endogamy borders were also religious borders (Budilová 2011, 181–185). Its primary directive was *to marry co-believers*. Most marriages, recorded in the period 1898–1950, took place among the Voyvodovo Protestants (Methodists). Apart from these endo-local marriages, there were other, exo-local, marital unions with co-believers: namely 5 with Baptists from Kovachitsa and 15 with Lutherans from three villages in Plevan region, Gorna Mitropolya, Podem (before: Martvitsa) and Brashlyanitsa (Budilová 2010, 169). The general acceptability of these marriages for Voyvodovans is obvious from the text above. However, from what has been said so far, the fact that exo-local marriages (marriages with someone who is not an inhabitant of Voyvodovo) include 13 cases of marriages with *Catholics* remains inexplicable.<sup>11</sup>

The Catholics concerned came from the village of Bårdarski Geran whose population of the Catholic religion consisted partly of Banat Bulgarians – Paulikians and partly of Banat Swabians.<sup>12</sup> Both groups came together to Bulgaria from Banat, in whose territory they had long been neighbors.

Despite many commonalities, both groups will be discussed separately, starting with the Banat Bulgarians – Paulikians.<sup>13</sup>

The origin of the group is, within its earlier history, actually double, confluent only after some time. One of these roots is Paulikians. Those first labeled with this term (which is perhaps a reference to Paul of Samosata) were the adherents of a sect with a consistently dualistic teaching, influenced by Manichaeism, whose origin dates back to the end of the 7th century in Armenia, Syria, and Asia Minor. The movement arrived in the Balkan Peninsula in the 8th to 10th centuries, when its followers were settled by Byzantium in present-day Bulgaria (especially in the Plovdiv region), where they were expected to become frontiersmen protecting the empire from invasions from the north. Their learning quickly took root, spread and, in the 10th century, greatly influenced the formation of the Bogomil sect, some of whose members Paulikians themselves became.<sup>14</sup>

The other root explaining the origin of this group is represented by Bulgarian Catholics. The first contacts between Bulgarians and the Catholic Church date back to the second half of the 9th century; in our context, what is important is the settling of Saxon miners and the establishment of their colonies around Chiprovtsi in the 14th century. Saxons gradually merged with the surrounding Bulgarian population, but they managed to give them their Catholic faith, so Chiprovtsi and the surrounding villages formed the first homogeneous community of Catholics on the Bulgarian territory, and the region became the center of Catholicism in the country. Here, later, the Franciscan Missions operating in Bulgaria since the 17th century also found a significant foothold. This, on the one hand, strengthened the faith of existing Catholics; on the other hand, it sought to spread the Catholic faith in the country. One of the objects of their interest were the Paulikians.

The mission celebrated partial successes, partly also due to the significant Paulikian antagonism against both Islam and Orthodoxy. The number of converts, however, was not high. The converts also continued to retain their designation as Paulikians. A significant turnaround occurred, however, in the year 1688, when there was a so-called Chiprovtsi uprising of (mostly) Bulgarian Catholics against the Ottoman domination. After its defeat, part of the Catholic population of the region (including Paulikian converts) left the country and settled in, among others, Wallachia, in the Oltenia region, also called Lesser Wallachia. In 1737, however, the Bulgarian Catholics settled here were involved (on the side of the Habsburg Empire) in war with the Ottomans, but the war would be won by the Ottomans and the Habsburg monarchy was forced to give up Lesser Wallachia. So another forced migration occurred, first to Transylvania, then finally (and this time permanently) to Banat, where their centers were (Old) Beshenov<sup>15</sup> and Vinga.

After the defeat of the Chiprovtsi uprising, Paulikians were exposed to significant repression in the territory of Bulgaria. Partly for this reason, and partly because the fugitive rebels found very favorable conditions under Habsburg administration and many of their villages enjoyed considerable privileges, many Paulikians left their village, crossing the Danube and joining the already settled migrants from previous refugee waves from the Bulgarian territory (first in Wallachia, then in Banat). Their population then even outnumbered the former Chiprovtsi population in some municipalities (Vinga), resulting in the fact that the term Paulikian prevails for the identification of the population in Banat. In contrast, as the rest of the Paulikians subsequently adopted Catholicism, the two groups, in principle, merged.

Soon after the liberation of Bulgaria (1878), the Banat Bulgarians sent a delegation investigating the opportunities for a “return” to the country. This opportunity would come shortly in connection with the issuance of the *Law on Populating Uninhabited Land* (*Закон за населяване на ненаселените земи в България*) on May 20, 1880 (according to some authors, this law was directly motivated by the interest of Banat Bulgarians in resettlement). This resulted in several waves of movement of parts of the group to Bulgaria. One of the main regions where the migrants settled is the northwest of the country. A certain part of the population was subsequently made up by Banat Bulgarians calling themselves Paulikians (*Palkene*) in several existing communities – for example Machmudija (today Radojkovo), Bregare, and Dzhurilovo (today Nivjanin). In addition, they were also establishing their new settlements, purely Paulikian ones, such as the communities of Asenovo,

Gostilja, or the “central” Paulikian village in Bulgaria, Bårdarski Geran. Bårdarski Geran was founded in 1887 by fourteen families resettled from Banat. After them, more and more families came. So, in terms of population and area, the village, soon, hugely increased. In addition to Banat Bulgarians – Paulikians, in 1893, ninety families of members of another very unique group – Catholic Banat Swabians – settled in the village.

For our topic, the relevant history of this group is much shorter than in the previous case. Members of the group came to Banat in the 18th century, in the framework of colonization efforts within the Habsburg monarchy focused on settlement and change of the confessional structure of the population. It was based on the Treaty of Passarowitz (1718) obtained for the territory forming the border area between the Habsburg monarchy and the Ottoman Empire (Šesták et al. 1998, 131). A specific incentive for resettlement was the allocation of land for free, tax exemptions and other benefits. The Catholic confession of the migrants was, on the contrary, a condition on the part of the monarchy. Although resettlers came from a variety of regions (Alsace-Lorraine, Bavaria, Hesse, and others), in the new country they were collectively known as *Swabians* (perhaps because the vast preponderance of them began their journey to Banat with a boat ride on the Danube down from the Swabian town of Ulm). The natural conditions in the region were favorable and the colonies were quite successful. But pressure was initiated by connecting the former crown lands (Serbian Vojvodina and Temes Banat) to Hungary (1860), and significantly increased after the Austro-Hungarian settlement (1867). It eventually led many colonists to leave for the liberated Bulgaria.<sup>16</sup> There they settled mainly in the villages of Gostilja and Bårdarski Geran.

Both groups of Bårdarski Geran population shared many traits. First of all, of course, the Catholic faith, as well as the Banat origin; in many places, Banat Swabians and Paulicians were immediate neighbours (Nyagulov 1999, 121; Georgiev 2010, 90; 106; Bosilkov and Andreev 1937, 13; *Istorija na Bårdarski Geran* 7, 13). But also the factor which we have mentioned as “cultural proximity” was very important. This was true for a number of spheres, such as food, household management, organizing domestic and municipal areas (order and cleanliness), and land management – the use of iron plows pulled by horses, breeding geese (and the use of feathers as filling for pillows and duvets), pigs and others (Nikolov 1996, 40–41; Nyagulov 1999, 23; Kalchev et al. 1987, 24–25). The architecture of residential houses was also unique and for both groups also common (Bosilkov and Andreev 1937, 8). As for the equipment of houses, the presence of internal furnaces heated with straw was also common. To sum up, in Northwest Bulgaria (in the period a rather backward region), Catholic residents of Bårdarski Geran, Banat Bulgarians and Swabians were, due to the above-mentioned and a number of other (see below) characteristics, a model for the surrounding Bulgarian population (Nyagulov 1999, 101; Nikolov 1996, 41; Necov 2006, 35; Bosilkov and Andreev 1937, 15).

### Voyvodovo and Bårdarski Geran I.

But why did we take this relatively extensive excursus? For a simple but very compelling reason: for the surrounding population, members of Voyvodovo community significantly merged with the residents of Bårdarski Geran. Voyvodovo was, since its foundation, known as the Banat village (*Banatsko selo*) and its inhabitants as Banat people (*Banatchani*) (Necov 2006, 34; Stoyanov 2005; Krāsteva-Blagoeva 1999, 130; Popov 2010, 260). Although in this case the origin of the term was linked, in the beginning, (apparently) with the fact that Voyvodovo founders came to Bulgaria from Banat, the term “Banat people” was generally used just for the Banat Bulgarians – Paulikians (Nyagulov 1999, 99; Telbizov and Vekova-Telbizova 1936, 3). These inhabited several municipalities in the region; their center was, however, Bårdarski Geran (see above). And that was confusing. What was the approach of the surrounding Bulgarian population towards both municipalities and their residents? This is revealed to us by the first (1926) Voyvodovo teacher, J. Findeis, in his essay, based on years of personal experience. The corresponding segment of the text (Findeis 1932) begins with a Bulgarian villager looking for “*baj*<sup>17</sup> Vasil” in Voyvodovo. This *baj* Vasil is called “Banat

man.” After a short series of clarifying questions and answers, the Bulgarian continues: “And in Bardar, [i.e. Bårdarski Geran] there are your people too, right?” After a negative response by the Voyvodovans,

the Bulgarian is shaking his head dubiously. Still, he remembers some new people founding a new village on the *Gladno pole*<sup>18</sup> and that they were and are called Banat people. He knows many of them ... He recalls that he was in the army with Voyvodovo Banat people and with Banat people of Bardar. He only talked to them in Bulgarian, true, but it never occurred to him to ask them who they actually were; he knew they were not Bulgarians. (Findeis 1932, 46)

The main reason why the two groups, Voyvodovo Protestants on one side and Catholics from Bårdarski Geran on the other side (or just concerned villages and their residents), blended in the eyes of the inhabitants of the surrounding villages was as simple as valid – the communities *were simply substantially similar*. This similarity covered a wide range of levels: firstly, the “Banat” origin; secondly, a similar spatial plan of the two communities (both villages consisted basically of a rectangular grid of wide streets, having no parallel in the region of the period<sup>19</sup>), which can be regarded as a kind of external factor. But mainly, the communities had a number of similarities in areas such as material culture, for instance, a similar disposition of residential buildings, as well as furnishings (to represent the above-mentioned, we can mention the furnace or pillows and duvets), farm equipment or machinery such as typical light wagons with an iron axis (Necov 2006, 31; Nyagulov 1999, 95; Bosilkov and Andreev 1937, 19); mechanical hoes (Necov 2006, 55; Nyagulov 1999, 95); wide rakes for hay-making (Necov 2006, 55; Nyagulov 1999, 95) and many others. There were strong similarities with regard to the use of many (especially agricultural) procedures – a typical example is using horses as pulling animals (Stoyanov 2005, 117) – and the species of animals raised, such as horses and, typically, flocks of geese (Stoyanov 2005, 232; Nyagulov 96; Kalchev et al. 1987, 25). Both communities were admired by their neighbours for their personal hygiene and the cleanliness of their homes, yards, municipal public spaces, and fields (always clear of weeds) (Penčev 2006, 103; Necov 2006, 53; Stoyanov 2005, 234; Kubka 1949, 84; Nikolov 1996, 41; Bosilkov and Andreev 1937, 8, 22).

In addition to the elements of material culture, both communities were highly similar to each other in the “intangible” part of culture – members of both groups were perceived by their neighbours as extremely hardworking (Necov 2006, 55; Nyagulov 1999, 25; Nikolov 1996, 41), enterprising (Nyagulov 1999, 25; Jakoubek 2010d), tidy (Penčev 2006, 103; Necov 2006, 35; Nikolov 1996, 41; Popov 2010, 256, 259, 267), disciplined and organized (Nyagulov 1999, 102; Stoyanov 2005, 234; Gyukov 2006, 89), respectful of other people’s property (Nyagulov 1999, 25; Necov 2006, 50; Penčev 2006, 98); generally speaking, they were perceived to be people with high moral principles and qualities (Nyagulov 1999, 102; Findeis 1929, 222; Stoyanov 2005, 234). In all these features, these two communities differed largely from the neighbouring villages and residents on the one hand, and, on the other hand, resembled each other. Similarly, the culture of both these communities was unanimously regarded by the surrounding population as higher than the culture of the common Bulgarian population in the region (Stančev 2012, 1; Necov 2006, 35; Nyagulov 1999, 101). It is perhaps therefore not surprising that the two groups were considered (for the reasons mentioned) and spoken of as models for the neighbourhood (Nyagulov 1999, 101; Nikolov 1996, 41; Penčev 2006, 103; Michalko 1936, 54), or a model to follow (Nyagulov 1999, 96; Penčev 2006, 102; Findeis 1930b, 2). In both cases, researchers have agreed on the “civilizing role” of the two communities in the region, which, it is true, was generally considered rather backward (Penčev 2006, 102; Nikolov 1996, 41; Bosilkov and Andreev 1937, 20, 22).

It may be added that the arguments about the “cultural closeness” of both communities as well as about their “higher culture” (compared to the surrounding population) were (at least since the end of 1920s) in the given region shared and declared by several layers of the society of that time. These arguments can be found not only in the texts of local elites represented by the Czech teacher

(Findeis<sup>20</sup>) and the Slovak teacher (Michalko<sup>21</sup>) or by the pastor of the local Evangelical church (Popov<sup>22</sup>), but also in the memoirs of ordinary Bulgarian residents of Voyvodovo (Necov,<sup>23</sup> Stančev<sup>24</sup>) and Bărdarski Geran (Gyukov<sup>25</sup>) and of surrounding villages (Stoyanov,<sup>26</sup> or “baj Vasil” mentioned above by Findeis). The arguments are the same, whether it regards the works written in 1920s (Findeis), 1930s (Michalko), 1950s (Necov<sup>27</sup>), or several decades later (Stoyanov, Gyukov, Popov). Interestingly, after the remigration processes after WWII, it was local Bulgarians who had not been part of the local Evangelical community who became the maintainers of the tradition of the “civilization role” of Voyvodovans. Similarly, however, the local Evangelical community is in the surrounding villages still remembered today, and the thesis of a “model village” still is part of the image of the former Voyvodovo (Jakoubek 2010d). There is not enough space here for an analysis of this image that also includes certain moments of Orientalist discourse<sup>28</sup> – which was very common in South-eastern Europe in the time period. Anyway, it is extremely interesting that its local form of that time fully corresponds to the one which later appeared in scholarly literature; as well as the fact that it was shared by people of very diverse background, religion and social ranking.

Now is perhaps the time to come back to our introductory question. It was the following (seemingly difficult to explain) fact: from the total number of exo-local marriages of the members of the Voyvodovo community, whose emblematic element was the *Protestant-oriented religion*, marriages with the also significantly endogamous *Catholics* from Bărdarski Geran amounted to 13 cases<sup>29</sup>). For comparison, this constitutes only two cases fewer than marriages between Voyvodovo community members and members of the Pleven Lutheran community (otherwise most preferable marriage partners of Voyvodovans apart from partners from within their own community). As follows from the preceding paragraphs, it seems that we could find the answer or the justification of that disproportionately high number of marriages between Voyvodovo *Protestants* and *Catholics* from Bărdarski Geran in the sphere of culture. It seems that one of the major reasons for the high rate of marriage between these confessionally different groups could be unprecedented *cultural proximity* of the two communities, namely the fact that in a number of key aspects, these communities were significantly similar and close to each other and their members therefore “understood” each other very well in terms of culture.

Although I believe that the just-mentioned “cultural” explanation contains a great deal of truth and therefore I consider it to be highly plausible, I do not intend to be satisfied with it. The explanation also has at least one weakness, which is that it ignores or takes no account of a key and for both communities crucial factor – religiosity. Just for the role that religiosity played in both communities, no explanation that does not include this element in its framework is adequate and satisfying. The following section will therefore attempt to provide an explanation of this phenomenon; an explanation that not only does not shy away from the religious dimension, but quite the contrary – I will try to provide an explanation in which religiosity will constitute the very basis and starting point.

## Voyvodovo and Bărdarski Geran II.

The aforementioned “cultural” comparison of the two communities indicated that the reason for the disproportionately high rates of intermarriage between the two groups could be the “cultural closeness,” or similarity that prevailed between the two communities. The explanation ignored religiosity because, in the corresponding sphere between these communities, a consensus was obviously rather absent. On the one hand, nothing seems more obvious – one of the groups was Protestant, the other Catholic. On the other hand, however, it must be noted that things appear to be like this primarily due to a biased perspective. In many respects, the two communities are actually significantly similar, even if we focus mainly on their religiosity.

We have already discussed the position of religion in the case of the Voyvodovo community in the introductory chapter on Voyvodovo. Now, the Banat Bulgarians are going to be discussed.

Among the authors dealing with the group, there is a clear consensus that they are a significantly and strongly religious community. Banat Bulgarians are considered and considered themselves to be “*Christians with firm belief*” (Bokova 1998, 268; italics in the original), and it is their faith which is, in the case of their communities, considered to be a constitutive element, meaning the bolt holding together the social structure of the respective communities (Telbizov and Vekova-Telbizova 1936, 3). This fact has an entire range of different manifestations. A well-known example is the fact that Banat Bulgarians, from the beginning, strove to be able to settle on Bulgarian land within their own communities, separated from the rest of the population; it was because they – as they stated themselves – “have a different faith, the Catholic faith, and they in no case can live with people of a different faith” (*Istorija na selo* 14). In light of this, it is hardly surprising that “the first and fundamental motive of this effort was the religious” (Nyagulov 1999, 92–93). Also, endogamy controlled by religious principles goes hand in hand with this effort to preserve the identity of the community (Elenkov, 31). The heightened religiosity determines the character of the Paulikian communities in other ways; for example, it has a significant influence on the sphere of ceremony, where it caused, inter alia, the elimination of secular folklore (Nyagulov 1999, 26) – which is the same conclusion that V. Penchev made about Voyvodovo (Penchev 1988, 485). To sum up, in the case of the Banat Bulgarians,<sup>30</sup> we are dealing with a society for which the overarching religiosity is the central axis of its existence (Nyagulov, 1999, 92), where religiosity also dominates the collective identities of its members (Elenkov, 37). We could go on, but it is hardly necessary. It is quite obvious that the Banat Bulgarians represent the kind of community whose central organizing principle, as well as a central factor in determining the collective identity of its members, is religiosity. It remains only to add – just like in the case of the Voyvodovo.

Leaving aside the question of confession, if we assess the *type* of the corresponding groups or their general socio-anthropological character, or if we look at religiosity with sociological eyes as a structural parameter, then one must conclude that the communities of Voyvodovans and inhabitants of Bårdarski Geran are significantly similar – and it is mainly due to the role that (structurally conceived) religiosity plays within them. It seems, therefore, that the greatest mistake of the “cultural” explanation presented above was, that it stopped halfway. Indeed, if it had included religiosity in its framework, religiosity as a cultural phenomenon, then it would have turned out that it was in this consideration that perhaps its greatest potential lies. Specifically, as I have just shown, it is only the consideration of religiosity which shows us the extent to which the given communities are close, or how much they resemble each other as a socio-cultural formations.

The presented “upgrade” of the “cultural explanation,” which not only takes into account religiosity, but even puts it, in its entirety, in the leading position, shows, like the previous version, that the unusually high rate of marriages between the two (confessionally) different groups was the result of the significant structural similarity of the two communities, communities sharing not only a number of cultural traits, but also, an eminently religious worldview in whose center stood the Bible and God. The final part of this section will be devoted to a discussion of this situation.

Already the previous text has shown that, in certain respects, it is possible and beneficial to discuss the faith of members of the thematized communities, so to speak, regardless of their confession. In the previous case, we performed this analytical separation and gave precedence to the structural and cultural dimensions of religiosity over the confessional aspect. Now let us see if it would be possible to take off the confessional gown from the faith of the analysed groups, and focus on such nature of this piety that could be identified as existential.

Again, in this case, we have better information regarding the Voyvodovo community. The relationship of (the ancestors of) Voyvodovo community to a confession and, in general, to the institutionalized expression of their (otherwise really extreme) faith, was quite free. This aspect of their faith was already evident in Saint Helena (see, for example Jakoubek 2010b; Pavlásek 2011b); more recently it significantly arose especially in the context of migration to the Bulgarian territory. Here, the resettlers – members of the Evangelical Reformed Church – found no appropriate institutional framework, so without much ado they became Methodists. The transition from one

denomination to another did not constitute a major problem for the people concerned because their needs were, in this respect, relatively modest: “Only the basis to be the Word of God. This is what they wanted!” (Míčan 1934, 108). In addition to the aforementioned fundamentals that stemmed from the Bible, what was characteristic of the faith of members of the community was also the emphasis (in the wording of their present-day descendants, as well as their former neighbors) on the “true,” “genuine” faith – that is, the faith in what we have called its existential aspect – accompanied, of course, by a certain lack of interest in its formal endorsement. Apart from general theses about the exalted nature of their faith, in the case of Catholics from Bårdarski Geran, we have no such evidence (which does not mean that it did not exist); we can do nothing else than resort to an extrapolation based on a comparison of the two communities, and assume that, due to their strong similarity in many other areas, or the structural analogue of both groups, at least a certain degree of consensus prevailed here as well.

We can also cite the example of Jurij Bobojchev, a Paulikian from Bårdarski Geran as one piece of evidence of the validity of the assumption provided. Jurij, after having married the Voyvodovo community member Marie Křivánková – which was preceded by (as it was usual in similar cases) conversion to Methodism – moved to Voyvodovo. Here Jurij Bobojchev attended the local Protestant church without a significant discontinuity until his death. He took part in the religious life of the Voyvodovo community and his religious zeal did not falter by changing confession. He took part in the corresponding events, as former Voyvodovans say, “just like us”<sup>31</sup> (according to others, even “more than our men and women”<sup>32</sup>).

### (The Problems of) Spreading a National Ideology in Voyvodovo

So far I have dealt with Voyvodov and Bårdarski Geran exclusively in their own local context and on their own terms. I considered this approach necessary, especially for the presentation of the “other side” of national indifference, the eminently religious nature of these communities. Nevertheless, the image I have presented in this way is significantly insufficient. The key authors (King 2005; Zahra 2010) as well as the recent contributions (Van Ginderachter and Fox 2019c) demonstrate that national indifference is “a response to ... the claims made by nationalist” (Van Ginderachter and Fox 2019b, 4). A typical situation of national indifference thus involves two parties: nationalist propaganda by states and/or local elites and the (usually) rejection of this by minority communities. An analysis of the confrontation of these parties in both of our cases would, however, require more space than this article can offer. Therefore, I shall only concentrate on the situation of Voyvodovo whose inhabitants became subject of a targeted nationalization program, which has moreover been documented in several explicit reports about the confrontation of the locals with the proponents of national ideology.

The call for the establishment of an organization whose goal would be “to unite the whole Czech nation in the Czech lands as well as anywhere abroad” (Auerhan as cited in Brouček 1985, 41) could be heard in the Czech lands already at the beginning of the 19th century. It is therefore not surprising that shortly after its foundation in 1918 the young Czechoslovak state established the division of “Compatriot Care” whose aim was to “save compatriot communities from imminent assimilation in an environment of different nation” (Pavlásek 2011a, 116).

“Compatriot care” with the aim to protect the compatriots from being “denationalized” was carried out via schools, national education, libraries (or through books and magazines), puppet and amateur theatrical performances, and other physical activities (Hirt and Jakoubek 2005; Jakoubek 2010b). The content of these activities was to provide compatriots with Czech (national) culture, the culture of a nation of which they were (assumed to be) an age-long and integral part.

Voyvodovans became an object of the “Compatriot Care” program at the second half of the 1920s. However, the religiously oriented collective identity has from the beginning been incompatible with the national identity that the exponents of “Compatriot Care” began to apply to them.

Soon after the first contacts,<sup>33</sup> it became clear to exponents of “Compatriot Care” program, aiming at spreading the Czech national(ist) idea in Voyvodovo that the “attempts at absolute Christianity [within the Voyvodovo community] suppressed their sense of awareness of nationality” (Findeis 1929, 224); they were confronted by “people who were afraid of secular education, which according to them ‘led straight to hell’” (Michalko 1936, 250) and soon would learn that the majority of their national enlightenment practices would fail when applied to Voyvodovans. Let us have a look, for instance, at the history of the Voyvodovo school – “the degree of strength of compatriot life” (Folprecht 1937, 11).

Education had already begun on the way from Saint Helena: still in Sesek,<sup>34</sup> in extremely challenging conditions, the migrants “taught their children in earth-homes – without school desks, the door in place of the school board, the Bible in place of the spelling book” (Penčev 2006, 99). Subsequently, in Voyvodovo, education continued to take place in the home but did not abate; in school, however, “only the Bible and spiritual song was taught in place of reading, writing and counting” (Folprecht 1937, 40). A Bulgarian (state) school was opened in 1910, and attendance was mandatory, meaning Voyvodovo’s children attended. When a Czech school was founded in 1926, the Czechoslovak head office in Sofia had to lead “strong battles to prevent the school from being religious” (Folprecht 1937, 41), because Voyvodovans “envisioned the school as one for Bible study that would be under their administration” (Míčan 1934, 122). It seems that when this expectation was not fulfilled – together with the content of study that was wholly unacceptable to the inhabitants of Voyvodovo – it quickly led the Voyvodovans to speak out “against the Czech school” soon after it was established. “A Czech school for what?” they asked (Míčan 1934, 114). Many Voyvodovans saw the “mission of the school, in comparison with saving one’s soul, to be rather insignificant” (Míčan 1934, 114). To summarize, the inhabitants of Voyvodovo “showed their teacher much harshness soon after his arrival in their sometimes almost fanatic religiousness” (Michalko 1936, 249).

In addition to the general refusal of a supplementary Czech school that surfaced shortly after it was opened, various elements of Czech education were met with especial resistance: “The curriculum for evening school also included singing that was met with sharp opposition. Songs such as ‘Vrť sa dievča’ [Dance, My Girl] and ‘A já su synek’ [And I am the Son] incited a wave of ill will. They began a campaign against the Czech school and its teacher” (Michalko 1936, 250). And this was no surprise, as the Voyvodovans “are Evangelicals ... and do not sing other songs [than spirituals]” (Míčan 1934, 119). The inhabitants of Voyvodovo explained the aversion to singing mundane songs in a simple manner – *it is a sin* (Folprecht 1937, 40).

It also became clear that the *content* of the lectures was not the only problem in Voyvodovo; the formal organization of the education itself caused problems, as the inhabitants of Voyvodovo “do not allow boys and girls to attend evening school or lectures together for moral reasons” (Folprecht 1937, 41).

The next general problem that arose was the character of the teacher. And the reason? “He was not an Evangelical” (Míčan 1934, 114). When the inhabitants of Voyvodovo learned that the teacher was not an Evangelical, they “recoiled in fear of who would be teaching their children” (Míčan 1934, 114). Some “followed him. They watched him to see if he was taking the lord’s name in vain” (Míčan 1934, 114), while for others he was “a worldly person who should be chased with mallets back to where he came from” (Michalko 1936, 250).

In reading sources of the time, it is quite difficult to avoid the impression that the largest problem of the Czech school and its teacher in Voyvodovo was the misunderstanding on the part of the village (either in the form of not being able or not being willing to understand) the main purpose of the Czech school, of which one of its main directives was “*a national and preservation directive that attempted to maintain national particularity among compatriots*” (Folprecht 1937, 16, italics in the original text). At the same time, this feeling was shared by witnesses such as Vladimír Míčan, who visited Voyvodovo at the time and claimed that the Czech teacher did not have an easy job, as the “efforts toward exclusive Christianity [in the Voyvodovo community] suppressed and subdued ... their awareness of nationality” (Míčan 1934, 122).

Attempts at national education, the spread of a national concept amongst adults or efforts to spread national awareness through books and magazines, were equally restrained. The Voyvodovans “hold a certain aversion to worldly reading – either they read no secular magazines or books at all or they do so only rarely” (Míčan 1936, 119). They “only have religious books and the magazines they subscribe to are also only made by the church” (Auerhan 1921, 94). In 1926, when the first Czech teacher Jan Findeis arrived in Voyvodovo, he expected to find his compatriots yearning to learn about Czech history and culture, but found a community whose members “with the exception of the Bible, biblical supplements and songs, ... had read nearly nothing” (Findeis 1930a, 2). And the reason? “They were afraid that Czech books could interrupt their spiritual growth” (Míčan 1934, 119).

Attempts made by the drama and puppet branch of the T. G. Masaryk Czechoslovak National House in Sofia to spread national concepts via theatre also failed – the Voyvodovans “viewed the marionette show in a puppet theatre to be a sin” (Folprecht 1937, 41; Michalko 1936, 256; Hašková 2012, 60).

The only exception in this regard was the teaching of the Czech language, which was understood as a pillar of Czech (national) schools abroad. In the ideological bedrock of this approach we find the concept that the “most significant symbol of national identity is and will remain the language” (Folprecht 1947, 9). In case of Voyvodovo, however, the author of this statement himself had to admit that “religion maintained ... the language as *its own* expression and not as an *ethnic one*” (Folprecht 1947, 24; italics in the original text); he had to acknowledge the fact that the language of this community “has no true national basis” (Míčan 1934, 24). For the Voyvodovo community, Czech was primarily the language of their Bible and thus the language of their religious services, and this was the reason that the Voyvodovans clung to it so tightly. The link to Voyvodovo’s language and the language of the (Kralice) Bible<sup>35</sup> has also been mentioned by numerous other authors (Kubka 1949, 209; Šrámková 1987, 298). Other authors have in the case of this community cited the (Kralice) Bible (together with the hymn-book) as the dominant linguistic teaching tool (Michalko 1936, 248). The Voyvodovans themselves also cite the Czech-language Bible and hymn book as a tool and means of support through which they maintained their Czech – “that is why we have not forgotten our language, because we had the word of God, and the Kralice Bible” (Dobiáš 1990/2011, 122), “The Kralice Bible and the hymn-book, that sustained us” (Voyvodovan man cited in Jakoubek 2012, 172). Generally speaking – in thematizing *language* in the case of Voyvodovo, the *religiosity* of this community constantly enters our field of focus. Although language in the diction of exponents of “Compatriot Care” is tied exclusively to nationality – language being “not only a means of communication, but also the embodiment of nationalities” (Folprecht 1947, 8) – it seems that in the case of the Voyvodovo community the sphere of language was subject not to national affiliation, but religious affiliation.

If we attempt to summarize the previous paragraphs, we see that the largest difficulties in dealing with the inhabitants of Voyvodovo as Czech compatriots arise due to the absence of a national conscience among the Voyvodovans. As one of the prominent officials in the area of Czech minority education abroad stated – “at the time when the Czechoslovak school was established in 1926, 95% of Voyvodovo’s compatriots were nationally illiterate” (Folprecht 1937, 40).

The school eventually operated in Voyvodovo until the beginning of WW II when it was closed. We do not know what would have been the impact of the national ideology on the Voyvodovan community. Shortly after the end of WW II there came the onset of a violent collectivization, and therefore the Voyvodovans accepted the offer from the Czechoslovak state and moved to Czechoslovakia hoping that they would avoid collectivization (Vaculík 1983, 1986). However, the move to Czechoslovakia has caused disappointment on both sides. On the one hand, the Voyvodovans did not avoid collectivization and, moreover, they soon began to face persecution by the state due to their religiosity. The state authorities shortly after found out that the re-settlers had no desire to become part of the new Czechoslovak society and that they were separating themselves from their surroundings instead of getting integrated. Although they now lived in a society with whose

members they were – supposedly – sharing the (Czech) collective identity, the truth was that the central trait of the Voyvodovo community was not lost after its move to Czechoslovakia, and outside observers – as late as in the 1980s – (again) claimed that the (ex-)Voyvodovo people “*hold together through religion*” (Večerková 1983, 254; italics in the original text). Or, as the Czech ethnologist Iva Heroldová who carried out research in the group in question in the 1970s puts it:

their religious life ... made them into a special group after their remigration, which does not strive to integrate with the surrounding population and, on the contrary, attempts to maintain isolation as they had done in Voyvodovo. (Heroldová, 1975, 117; Heroldová 1978, 201)

We can therefore probably also state that the religious basis of the Voyvodovan community and the associated specific (anational) identity of “believers” or “sons and daughters of God” proved despite all regime changes and other social and political turbulence a rather pronounced continuity and persistence. I do not claim that the identity was static and unchanging – it certainly underwent a number of significant transformations (Jakoubek 2018a) – however, its generally religious character was rather constant.

Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that (ex-)Voyvodovans represented a group that “for religious reasons stood aside from all other activities ... and did not participate in public life in any way” (*Chronicle*, entry “1957”), it is certain that at least at the time around the move to Czechoslovakia, the (former) inhabitants of Voyvodovo had already included the “Czech national identity” in their repertoire of collective identities. In any case, this identity was not an emanation of any (primordial) potential that was lying dormant in the members of this community; it was created *ex novo* in response to the work of exponents of “Compatriot Care” and other disseminators of the Czech national ideology, who came to Voyvodovo from the outside. Still, it is as if some things have not changed. Thus, when in 1947 a group of Bulgarian agricultural workers arrived to Znojmo in South Moravia as a part of an intergovernmental agreement (cf. Vasileva 1990) which also included some inhabitants of Bårdarski Geran, two more marriages were entered into between the members of the group and (former) Voyvodovans settled in the nearby Nový Přerov;<sup>36</sup> however, these were already part of a different context and their analysis would thus exceed the horizon of this study.

## Conclusion

I have shown that Protestants from Voyvodovo saw religion as the primary criterion for selection of a marriage partner. We have seen that they were willing to choose individuals of the same or similar confession, individuals who belonged to one of the Protestant confessions (Methodists, Darbyists, Baptists, Nazarenes, Lutherans, etc.) located in Bulgaria and the given region at the time. This fact is not surprising if we reiterate that faith, not national affiliation, had long been the cornerstone of their identity and the basis for their community. This is why Protestants from Voyvodovo were relatively willing to marry Bulgarian Methodists or Baptists but consistently did not marry Czech Catholics living in the nearby town of Lom, in Sofia, or Gorna Oryahovitsa (Jakoubek and Lančová 2019), or in other locations throughout Bulgaria (Budilová 2008, 2012, 2017). A shared confession and similar concept of faith represented a guarantee of shared values; what we today call “ethnicity” or “national affiliation” did not play a fundamental role, never mind a decisive one. The relationship between faith and confession, however, was more complex in this context. For the inhabitants of Voyvodovo, faith was important primarily as an internally experienced (and shared in the community) individual relationship with God. If this condition was fulfilled, the issue of a specific confession was more or less secondary (they changed their confessional affiliation twice in Saint Helena in Banat and once more after moving to Bulgaria). From this perspective, Voyvodovo Protestants evaluated other Christian faiths in their surroundings (Protestants, Catholics, Orthodox) in the same way.<sup>37</sup> However, Voyvodovans saw their Bulgarian and Vlach Orthodox surroundings as *non*-believing. This was not for reasons of their differing confession, but for their

insufficient interest in faith and the absence of an effort to establish an individual relationship with God. It was thus tepidity of faith (or, in the eyes of the Voyvodovans, the absence of it) in their Orthodox surroundings that stood (among the Voyvodovans) in the background of the given endogamous border, not affiliation with a different Christian confession or even a differing language or “national affiliation.” Although they regarded Orthodox Christians as non-believers for their lack of interest in faith, they viewed Catholics from Bårdarski Geran in a wholly different manner. With them they shared a similarly deep, devout faith and an emphasis on a good, morally correct life (“they went to church,<sup>38</sup> they read God’s Word<sup>39</sup> ... they were almost like us<sup>40</sup>). Although this was a group in many perspectives different from the Voyvodovans, they were brought together by their concept of faith (“they had faith in God, too, not like Bulgarians<sup>41</sup>) a factor that was decisive in this context. It was for this reason that Bårdarski Geran Catholics became marriage partners of the Voyvodovo Protestants.<sup>42</sup>

Now we have arrived at the conclusion of our hypothesis regarding the disproportionately high number of marriages between Protestants of Voyvodovo and Bårdarski Geran Catholics. In response to the question of what stood behind the surprising number of marriages mentioned between members of the two communities, I first proposed the strong *cultural similarity* between the two groups as one of the main possible reasons. Subsequently, I showed that part (quite a central part) of the cultural similarity was, despite the difference in the overt expression of professed faiths, also *religiosity*, in principle occupying an identical role in both groups and shaping both communities into structurally considerably identical forms. Finally, I showed that religiosity/faith is the same characteristic feature for both groups, not only in the cultural sphere (with respect to the overall character of both social formations, management of social relations within them, specific means of livelihood, etc.), but also in the existential sphere. In both cases, a clear contradiction on the confessional level was overcome by looking to a more significant conformity in other areas and thus, this contradiction was considered secondary.

We cannot ignore that in this section of our study, we have completed a remarkable circle: it was a certain aspect of religiosity, denominational affiliation, which made, to some extent, the number of marriages between Voyvodovo Protestants and Catholics from Bårdarski Geran a mystery; at the end, it was *another aspect of religiosity*, the “sincerity” or “genuineness” of faith which presented this “mystery” in a new light, in which this practice seems quite understandable and acceptable in the appropriate context. In other words, it initially seemed that the biggest obstacle to this marriage practice between the two communities stood on the religious level, but turned out that it was *the* religious sphere that provided probably the strongest reasons for this practice.

It has been repeatedly, although sporadically, pointed out that the present use of the concept of national indifference is only negative, and the whole concept in fact “belongs to the intellectual repertoire of national teleology” (Kamusella 2016, 14). The concept of national indifference thus does not allow for the study of non-/anational groups on their own terms, because research is set in the Procrustean bed of a conceptual framework of nations and nationalism when “groups of other kind are referred [to] through the negation of the national” (Kamusella 2016, 15) and the nation remains the key reference point (Jakoubek 2018a, 384); therefore, the research goal of the “school” – to return agency to non-/anational groups – cannot in fact be achieved (Kamusella 2016, 14).

Contrary to the understanding of the concept of national indifference in the works of the authors of the “school,” I tried to emphasize that national indifference can be said to have *two* sides. On one hand, nationally indifferent groups represent those in which the “we-they” opposition does not follow national lines, while on the other hand these groups identify and organize themselves on the basis of principles other than the national ones. In the example of the inhabitants of Voyvodovo and Bårdarski Geran, this principle was religion. In both communities, religiosity was a dominating organizational principle as a central factor of the constitution of identity. So, in the case of these communities, both criteria – the “negative” as well as “positive” – are met. These criteria, or parameters, are at the same time a response to the question posed at the introduction of this text: why members of both communities intermarried. On one hand, they shared a faith (albeit not a

denomination), and on the other they were not divided by a differing national identity/loyalty and were not crossing an ethnic/national boundary by marrying. The “genuineness” of faith in this case managed to overcome even the boundaries between Protestant and Catholic denominations. It was not *ethnic/national* – as older primordially thinking authors assumed – but *confessional* boundaries that were at stake in this case, divided the given groups, and, naturally, which were crossed. So, the case was not that *Czechs* were marrying *Germans* or *Bulgarians* – *believers* were marrying *believers*.

The term “national indifference” refers to phenomena typologically very different (Stourzh 2011, 300–303). However, it also almost never represents an *emic* category, and when it does, it represents a term of those who were trying to spread a national ideology, never those whom they were trying to mobilize (Zahra 2010, 104). The concept has proven its heuristic value as an analytical tool without question. But it has also some shortcomings. Already its first proponents have realized that national indifference is “fundamentally a negative and nationalist category” (Zahra 2010, 105); moreover – as has been pointed out repeatedly (Jakoubek 2018a, 385; Kamusella 2016, 14) – a (national) teleology is inherent in it. The appreciation of the “positive” side of national indifference makes it possible to avoid this teleology and to grasp “the native’s point of view” (Malinowski 1922, 25), how people who were seen as potential recruits of promoters of nationalist ideology themselves perceived and understood their identities, loyalties, and modes of belonging. True, from the outside they were seen as nationally indifferent, but this was not how they saw themselves. They were forced to cope with national agitation, of which they represented a target. But this does not necessarily mean that they accepted its premises. It is not enough to know that they did not show enough national enthusiasm and “failed to align themselves to the nationalist propaganda” (Van Ginderachter and Fox 2019b, 4), we should also be able to answer the question of why. In the case of Voyvodovans, we know that they saw the mission of nationalist recruiters, in comparison with saving one’s soul, to be rather insignificant. They did not care much about being Czechs, because what they were really striving for was not to be sons and daughters of a nation, but of God.

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## Notes

- 1 In these cases, Kwan notes that it would be more appropriate not to speak about *indifference*, but rather about “national flexibility and pragmatism” (Kwan 2013, 218, see also Stourzh 2011, 302). Moreover, this application of the concept of national indifference is obviously not suitable for the discussion of groups *stricto sensu* nationally indifferent, because the core of this concept consists in what these groups lack – national identity.
- 2 We can find many parallels of these phenomena also in the (post-) Ottoman Balkans: “it was not unusual to find one brother claiming to be Greek and others claiming to be Bulgarian or Serbian, *according to their interests*” (Karpat 2002, 434–435; italics added; see also Karakasidou 1997, 131–2), or a man that acted as “Greek when he traded, Albanian when he married, and Muslim, when he prayed” (Cowan 2008, 340).
- 3 In the following, I am using an historical/ethnographical material used in Jakoubek 2018b, Jakoubek 2019.
- 4 In Czech – Svatá Helena; in Romanian – Sfânta Elena.
- 5 An alternative hypothesis about the origin of Voyvodovo’s inhabitants has been published recently, see Jakoubek 2018a for its presentation.
- 6 In the past (Jakoubek and Nešpor 2006, 13; Jakoubek 2010a, 676), the opinion was published that the reason Czech ethnology before 1989 ignored the religious base (and thus the specificity)

of the Vojvodovo community was the ruling Marxist ideology of the time or the corresponding interpretation schemes that ignored or marginalized religious factors. The (methodological) inability to understand the (eminent religious) character of the Vojvodovo community was, however, typical even of pre-war Czechoslovak ethnography. Therefore, the reasons likely lie in a deeper (nationally-) essentialist interpretational paradigm or approach to social reality shared by Marxist ethnology and the ethnography prior to it.

- 7 Even after 1870 when the Bulgarian exarchate – the Bulgarian millet (*Bulgar milleti*) in Ottoman terms – was created by imperial *ferman*, in Ottoman administrative, *Bulgars* (in opposition to *Rums* belonging to Rum millet) “were not Bulgarians but those who were faithful to the newly established ecclesiastical authority”; *Bulgars* thus were officially “not national, but still religious group” (Konortas 2007, 168).
- 8 The distance between the two villages is 14.5 km.
- 9 Findeis, Jan. *Report for the Czechoslovak National House T. G. M.* in Sofia (June 2, 1932), p. 47, ACNH, f. 124.
- 10 The religious meaning was not the only non-national meaning of the term *Bulgarian* in the Balkans during the Ottoman period. Another case was a *social* meaning, when the label “Bulgar” was used “to denote peasantry *per se*” (Roudometof 1998, 13; cf. also Vermeulen 1984, 234), so that when “Bulgars” moved into the urban world or became members of the middle class they “shifted their identity to Greek” (Roudometof 1998, 13; see also Stoianovich 1960, 291, 304, 310–311).
- 11 For their specification see below note No. 29.
- 12 Swabians from Bardarski Geran have frequently been *a priori* counted as a part of Germans in Bulgaria (Eldárov 2002; Nyagulov 1999; Tsenkova 2007). German identity of the Swabians was not, however, neither self-evident, nor natural. For example, S. Karadzova, the former mayor of Bardarski Geran, who was herself born in the village, states that when the Swabians from Bardarski Geran were being resettled to Germany within the scheme of the resettlement project *Heim ins Reich*, “they did not understand at all why the Germans take them ... only there [in Germany] they have, step by step, become Germans”; (interview with S. Karadzova, Bardarski Geran, November 20, 2016). In this context we should also mention that it was only “after 1920” – some three decades after the move of a part of Swabians to Bulgaria – when “Swabians and Saxons came together in a single ‘German’ community” in Banat (Verdery 1985: 81).
- 13 In the following recap, we use, without an exception, literature; with regard to the character of the text, we will not refer to each finding separately, but will content ourselves with a lump reference to the works. They are: Kalchev, Kukov, Michev, and Shipkov 1987, 7–23; Nyagulov 1999, 14–42; Eldárov 2002, 31–380, Georgiev 2010; Bosilkov and Andreev 1937; Miletich 1903.
- 14 As for the character and content of the teaching of a given group in the period mentioned, see for example Conybeare 1898 or Garsoian 1967.
- 15 In Romanian: *Dudeștii Vechi*.
- 16 The possibility of free allocation of land probably also played a role (Nikolov, 1996, 41; Telbizov and Vekova-Telbizova 1936, 6).
- 17 *Baj* – (from Turkish) a form of addressing an older man, similar to English “uncle.”
- 18 *Gladno pole* (*Hungry Field*) – the territory where Vojvodovo was founded; also: a designation of part of the Vojvodovo area.
- 19 Naturally, this statement is partly based on the fact that both villages were built on the greenfield site. In addition, the “settlement habits” of Banat Bulgarians and Swabians should also be taken into consideration, as the villages, situated (not only) in Banat, were purposely built in the rectangular “enlightened” way, as was mentioned above.
- 20 Jan Findeis worked in Vojvodovo since 1926.
- 21 Ján Michalko worked in the period 1930–1940 as teacher in Gorna Mitropoliya and Brashlyanitsa (Pleven region).

- 22 Simeon Popov was the Voyvodovan pastor from 1937 to 1949.
- 23 Neco Petkov Necov, born 1897.
- 24 Tosho Metodiev Stanchev, born 1920.
- 25 Anton Gyukov, born 1934.
- 26 Lyubomir Kirilov Stoyanov, born 1921 in Kovachitsa.
- 27 The manuscript of Necov's "History of Voyvodovo" was completed not later than in 1958 (see Jakoubek and Nešpor 2006).
- 28 I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for notifying me of this fact.
- 29 Jurij Bobojev (1916–1985) Marie née Křivánková (1922–2019); Gyuka Peev (1911–1980) Olga née Kopřivová (1920–1987); Pavel Fabouk (1876–?) Kata née Gyukova Toshkova (1900–?); Mišo Fabouk (1891–1977) Kata née Chavajova (1890–); Jan Skalák (1886–1947) Marie née Schmid (1890–1957); Michal Gashparov (1899–1987) Anna née Dobiášová (1909–1986); Nikolaj Tuturilov (1915–1981) Etelka née Křivánková (1917–?); Stojan Zhivkov (1911–1996) Marie née Pitrová (1914–1993); Štěpán Kopřiva (1910–?) Regina Samson (1921–?); Joži Samson (?–?) Emilie Kopřivová (?–?); Julius Edich (1894–?) Alžběta Kopřivová (1915–?); Pavel Dudáš (?–1926) Marie née Chavajova (1877–?); Anton Bosilov (191?–?) Anna née Štrbková (191–?). The data come from repeated field research carried out from 2006 to 2016 both in Voyvodovo and Bårdarski Geran, and in several villages in southern Moravia, where the majority of Voyvodovans resettled in 1949 and 1950 (Vasileva 1990). Information obtained from interviews with my informants was supplemented by data from other sources, like birth, marriage and death certificates, gravestones' inscriptions, Bible inscriptions (that often included genealogical information of family members), or family photographs. The most important source of my data was Voyvodovo parish registers from the municipality of the town Mizija (former Bukjovci) for years 1915–1950, that include marriages of the inhabitants of the village of Voyvodovo. Unfortunately, records are absent for the period 1900–1915, and also for years 1917, 1919, and 1920 (for a detailed analysis of Voyvodovo parish registers as a source see Budilová 2020). The number of marriages between members of both communities could therefore have been even higher.
- 30 In relation to the situation of Bårdarski Geran, we may claim: together with Banat Swabians (with whom the Paulikians in the given village made up a singular confessionally defined community).
- 31 Interview with L. Fabouková (née Křivánková), June 17, 2012, Nový Přerov.
- 32 Interview with B. Čížková (née Karbulová), January 11, 2010, Mikulov.
- 33 The reason why both parties established contact was the (supposedly shared) interest in establishing a local Czech school. However, as the further development showed (see below), both parties had had very different expectations from the Czech school and their claims proved to be mutually incompatible.
- 34 Sesek – the first village founded on Bulgarian soil by later Voyvodovo inhabitants; sat up in 1897 and left in 1900 due to conflicts with surrounding population (Jakoubek 2008, 2010c).
- 35 The Bible of Kralice (*Bible Kralická* in Czech) was the first complete translation of the Bible from the original languages into the Czech language. The translation was made by the Unity of Brethren, printed between 1579–1593 in the town of Kralice nad Ostravou. The third edition (1613) is still the widely used Czech translation.
- 36 Daniel Sak and Naďa Saková (née Krcheva); Alois Křivánek and Květa Křivánková (née Krcheva).
- 37 There were no Muslims located in the region (after the foundation of an independent Bulgarian state in 1878, they were either ejected or left for the Ottoman Empire on their own accord).
- 38 For Voyvodovan Protestants Sunday was devoted to going to church, work was forbidden on that day: "Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest. It was a law" (qtd. in Penčev 2006, 98). The local Bulgarians were much more relaxed in this regard; Necov writes: "We know that Orthodox Bulgarians have many religious holidays that we in Voyvodovo,

however, did not celebrate much. Not even Sundays were held as holy days” (2006, 49). For Voyvodovan Protestants this attitude was an evidence of absence of faith on the part of Orthodox Bulgarians.

- 39 The possession and knowledge of Bible were rather an exception among Orthodox Bulgarians, by far not only in the local context (cf. Mojzes 1965, 59–60). As for the Bulgarians who bought the Bible, their motivation was often “not to read it but to own it as a sign of loyalty and patriotism, and as a magic thing whereby to drive away bad spirits and to assure God’s good will” (Morse as cited in Mojzes 1965, 59–60).
- 40 Interview with N. Supková (née Dvorská), November 10, 2020, Mikulov.
- 41 Interview with N. Supková (née Dvorská), November 10, 2020, Mikulov.
- 42 Since both groups came to the territory of Bulgaria from Banat, the argument that it was not religiosity but rather geographical proximity that led to intermarriages between the two groups needs to be disproved, before we approach to the conclusion. As an example of such a disproof we can use another group that was at that time coming from Banat as well – (Orthodox) Vlachs. Although its members settled in the village of Särbenica (today Sofronievo) located 6 km from Voyvodovo, we do not find information about a single marriage between Vlachs and Voyvodovans nor between Vlachs and members of Bărdarski Geran community.

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