

Yelis EROLOVA, *Dobroudža. Granici i identičnosti*, Paradigma, Sofija, 2010, 317 p.

The book is a PhD thesis of Yelis Erolova, thesis presented in 2009 at the Ethnographic Institute, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. At first sight, it seems that the author is tempted to specialize in a well-defined area of research, the study of Romani people. On the fourth cover of her book it is mentioned that this PhD thesis is a continuation of her MA' work from 2003, "Authority and prestige at coppersmith gypsies", which she defended at the State University Kliment Ohridski, Sofia. Among the tutors that taught her were Elena Marušiakova and Veselin Popov, two renowned researchers in Romani studies (p. 8). However, Erolova goes beyond Roma/Gypsy groups to Tatar and Lipovan people. This perspective creates a comparative view. Furthermore, Erolova takes into consideration the whole historic region of Dobrudja, region that nowadays is split between Romania and Bulgaria. This latter aspect is not neglected, the author aiming to take it into account. Thus, she states in the introduction that the three ethnic groups have their "homelands"/*rodinata* not neighboring nor close to the countries they live in.

The book has no theoretical ambitions, as the author herself noted in the first and shortest from the five chapters of the volume. It takes into account the historical aspects of the evolution of the three population groups within the Dobrudja region and some ethnographic data through which each of these groups are building up their identities. The focus is therefore on presenting empirical data, primarily those resulting from field research, the latter supplemented by data from the archive of the Institute of Ethnography of Sofia. But this focus does not diminish the overall quality of the research nor of the book itself. We must keep in mind that to achieve her field research Erolova had to appeal not only to her native language and culture, Bulgarian, but also to Romanian and native languages of the groups studied, namely Romanes, Russian and Turkish. Being mobile in the field was also a requirement that Erolova has assumed, research being done over a period of five years (April 2003 – July 2008) in 21 localities in southern Dobrudja (10 towns and 11 villages) and 16 in northern Dobrudja (8 of them being towns). The methodology of data collection was of ethnographic type, interviews focused on autobiographical topics corrected through participatory observation. To complete, open discussions led by research themes were conducted. In the introductory section the author defined a number of key concepts like, research subjects called interlocutors/*sūbesednici*, Diaspora identity (Gabriel Sheffer), ethnic otherness, as a constructivist perspective (Fredrik Barth, Benedict Anderson, Richard Jenkins) on interpretation of field data.

The whole set of issues pursued by Erolova throughout the investigation finally focus on the following two topics:

1. How the three ethnic groups react to pressure from two distinct and different countries, Romania, respectively Bulgaria, where they live.
2. Degree of similarity of social conditions and attributes of identity by which the three ethnic groups define and develop their "Diaspora identity" (p. 24).

The first chapter of the book, which follows the introduction, refers to "Crimean Tatars" (pp. 27–100). The author sheds light on the formation of this population in Dobrudja, namely its continuous immigration under the Ottoman Empire political power, from the northern Black Sea, Crimean Peninsula and western Caucasus. The last and most substantial wave of migration was in the 1860s when no less than 100.000 Crimean Tatars were settled in Dobrudja after the Crimean War. Political context and conflicts, generated by it, have influenced the fate of Tatar population in Dobrudja well beyond this date. Formation of Romania and Bulgaria as nation states and pressure created by them have led to a drastic drop in Tatar population, circumstances which the author summarizes until the contemporary period. Thus in 2000 in southern Dobrudja their number was just over 1800, while in northern Dobrudja their number well exceeded 23.000 (p. 45). Long protection which Ottoman rule provided to Tatars, as well as living with Turkish population, makes tracing the border between ethnic Tatars and Turks relative (pp. 46–72). This is added to the present Turkish policy of attracting Tatar population in its area of influence. Thereby, many Tatars are considering Turkey as their country, the ethnonym "Turko-Tatar" being very common in northern Dobrudja. On the other side, their mother language, "Crimean Tatar", separates Dobrudja Tatars from the rest of the population, especially from Turks (p. 65). The author is describing the cultural space of the Dobroudja Tatars, also suggesting the

mixed character of ethnic identification. Traditional rituals are described, family ones like birth, marriage, funeral and collective ones, the latter being strongly influenced by Islam. Fashion style, traditional architecture and specialization on traditional occupations, are also mentioned. However, all these aspects are strongly eroded by the rapid modernization of national societies, the author emphasizes. As a conclusion, it can be said that Dobrudja Tatar identity is mixed with attributes of populations they live with (p. 100). There is nostalgia for a homeland but it is divided between Crimea and Turkey, as is the idea of a pure Tatar identity / “*čistija ili istinskija tatarin*”, that still coexist with either Turkish identity attributes or attributes of a local identity, namely Dobrudja/ “*dobrudžanska identičnost*”.

The next chapter is dedicated to the Gypsy population, or Gypsies / “*cigani*”, in the words of the author (p. 105–186). The author argues that the presence of Gypsies in Dobrudja is related to integration of southeastern Europe in the Ottoman Empire in the 15th century. The author states that the Ottoman army was the vehicle through which the original Gypsy population arrived in the Balkans from a geographical area correspondent to today north India. Some historical events of modern period are also presented. Gypsy emancipation of the two Romanian principalities in the middle of the 19th century led to important waves of major migration south of the Danube as well as in Dobrudja. Also, because of these waves Christian Gypsies have mixed with Muslim ones. Another crucial event was the decision of communist authorities in Romania and Bulgaria to settle down the population Gypsies. In this regard, the differences between the two sides of Dobrudja are important. If in southern Dobrudja mandatory settling of Gypsies began right after the imposing of communist regime in Bulgaria, in northern Dobrudja this took place only in the late 1960s. Hence, important features aroused such as the tendency of Muslim Gypsies in southern Dobrudja to convert to Turkish culture, or incomplete settling of Gypsies in north Dobrudja. The section of the chapter that describes and analyzes the indicators/markers of collective identity suggests extreme diversity of Dobrudja Gypsy. The author stops at four major groups present on both sides of Dobrudja, namely Turkish Gypsies, the Tatars ones, coppersmiths and Rudari, but warns that their subgroup identities are as powerful as generic group membership. And indeed, origin, language, religion and professional specialization are not homogeneous ethnic sources (p. 134–156). The second part of the chapter covers aspects of every daily life, such as food, housing, clothing, as well as family rituals and calendar. Details are abundant but inconclusive for highlighting defined identities. An interesting section is titled “Patterns of behavior and etiquette”, where the author addresses some of the core values of an alleged generic Gypsy identity: family solidarity, prestige, shame, clean vs. unclean / *čisto – nečisto* dichotomy, self-governing / *samoupravlenie* (p. 180–184).

The third population presented in the book is the Lipovans / *staroveri, staroobdreatsi* / Old believers (p. 186–251). In comparison with populations of Tatars and Gypsies, Lipovans in Dobrudja have a more pronounced uniformity. The history of their development as a diaspora in Dobrudja proves this fact. After their religious revolt against the modernizing reforms of Tsar Peter I in Russia, the Lipovans have been marginalized, ostracized and chased until they decided to leave the empire. They arrived in northern Dobrudja, in the mid 18th century. Since that time they separated into several religious groups: the *popovtsi* / “with the priest” and the *bezpopovtsi* / “without the priest”, being the most important today. Among them, groups of Ukrainians, Cosacks and Nekrasovtsi were hosted by the Ottoman authority in Dobrudja as a result of their armed opposition against the Tsarist Empire. Romanian last census (2002) gives a figure of almost 37 000 “Russian-Lipovan”, but less than half of them are Old believers as religion (p. 198). In southern Dobrudja they live only in two villages. Despite their traumatic past, Lipovans have not forgotten their link to Russian history and culture that provides a basis for building a strong ethnic identity. The author reviews the options for adopting a common ethnonym, “Lipovan Russian” / “Russian *staroobreadtsi*”, “*rusnaci*” / “Rusniacks”, and notes that the main trend is to eliminate religious connotations (p. 204). Moreover, the Russian language is accepted and taught in their settlements in Romania, although, as noted by the author, Lipovans’ dialect differs so much from Russian that they prefer to learn the language of the state they live in, respectively Romanian and Bulgarian (p. 220). The pressure of modernizing cultural patterns is so strong that it leads to a secularization trend in Lipovans identity. A fact which is, also, brought up is

the problem of relationship between the two different religious groups of *popovtsi* and *bezpopovtsi* whose boundaries are disappearing through mixed marriages. The same pressure of modernization is revealed in family and calendar rituals.

The book ends with a concluding chapter (p. 253–271), a substantial bibliography (p. 273–308) and an Appendix of photographs taken during field research. In the concluding chapter the author tries to generalize data, displaying it through tables and graphs contrasting in quality and ethnography with previous chapters. This is also one of the major shortcomings of the book. Ethnographic details are so abundant that they suffocate the analysis. Another major gap is the extremely large time differences, historical, social and cultural between the three groups selected for comparison. Also, the book needed a chapter dedicated to Dobrudja itself, showing the way in which the history of this corner of south east Europe is linked to the fate of its all inhabitants.

Stelu Șerban

Martor. *The Museum of the Romanian Peasant Anthropological Review*, vol. 17, 2012, Bucharest, 240 p.

The volume is a special issue on everyday life in the Communist era, with its echoes in the present: public memory, personal remembrances, oblivion. On the one hand, *Martor* is amongst the few top journals in the field of social anthropology/ethnology that appear in Romania. On the other hand, the evolution of the journal interweaves with the development of the Museum of the Romanian Peasant as an institution. The name of this museum is inappropriate, because it collects items of peasant art that belong to various ethnic groups who live in Romania. And this is indeed an unforgivable mistake. The museum is not about the Romanian Peasant, but about the peasants *in* Romania. Notwithstanding, someone could excuse this error, as the history of the museum has known dramatic changes. The Museum was settled by the beginning of 20th century as a result of the endeavour of Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcaș who gathered private collections of peasant art, coming from eminent Romanians. The building of the museum was erected then and was opened in the presence of King Carol I, who contributed to the first expenses of construction. After the Communist party came into power, the museum still remained in function, albeit as a museum of “popular art”, but in 1952 the Communist leaders took the decision to move the collections in another place and hosting here two museums about the “history of the Romanian Communist Party”. In 1990 the museum came back to its original conception and resettled as “Romanian Peasant Museum”. In addition, the museum became one of the most radical voices of anti-Communism. Still, ironically, the artefacts once exhibited about the Romanian Communist Party stayed in the same building until the late 2000s³⁶.

The final point, at the end of 1989, after more than 50 years of a totalitarian regime, has been celebrated through several symbolic events. All these envisaged to break with the former rule. However, the legitimacy of the changes brought by 1989 was still contested then. In 2013, after the elapsing of more than 20 years, we are able to have a more balanced view of what happened in the revolution. The creation of the National Council for the Study of the *Securitate* Archives in 1999,

³⁶ Seminal analysis of the institutional lifespan of Peasant Museum could be found in the articles: Simina Bădică, “National Museums in Romania”, in Peter Aronsson & Gabriella Elgenius (eds), *Building National Museums in Europe 1750–2010. Conference proceedings from EuNaMus, European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, Bologna 28–30 April 2011*, EuNaMus Report No 1, Published by Linköping University Electronic Press, pp.713–731, (http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en), and Gabriela Cristea and Simina Radu-Bucurenci, “Raising the Cross. Exorcising Romania’s Communist Past in Museums, Memorials and Monuments”, in Oksana Sarkisova and Peter Apor (eds.), *Past for the Eyes. East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989*, CEU Press, Budapest, 2007, pp. 273–303.