

**BULGARIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AS A “HOLDER” OF THE
NATION. A RECONSTRUCTION FROM SOCIALIST TIMES**

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Abstract

In Central and Eastern Europe, religion is often an important factor of collective national identity. The case of Bulgaria is not an exception – in order to understand the local context, the researcher should see Orthodox Christianity not as a system of symbols and values that create the connection between God and the believer, but as a manifested collectivity which holds communal life together. In this context, in the Bulgarian case the institution of Christianity - the Orthodox Church, has a privileged status because of its “traditional” role in Bulgaria's national history. Starting from a post-colonial perspective of secularism and based on a thematic analysis of the official newspaper of the Bulgarian Church from the 1970's, the current research shows how the attempts of the Communist party to find its place in the nationalist discourse resulted in the unification of Church and state in the national narrative, thereby creating an even stronger, “civil” image of the Christian institution.

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Introduction

In order to study productively the relationship between religion, the state and nationalism, it is important to take into account the varieties of ways in which these terms are understood with regard to the specific subject of study. A classical secularist theory, describing religion as a sphere of the private life, might be appropriate for the specific development of nationalism in the European West, while the total denial of such an approach can be convenient, for example, for studying Islamic countries¹. This thesis is influenced from the possibility of a “middle way” which could be useful for the understanding of nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe. For this specific purpose, it presents the case of Bulgaria and the development of the relations between the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the state in the 1970's – a period of significant shift in the political course of the Bulgarian Communist Party toward stronger nationalism. By introducing policies of “civilizing” the religious action, the party questioned the authority of the Church as the main pillar of national identity.

The relationship between religion and national identity has been studied by various authors². In this respect, the post-communist region is particularly appropriate, as it represents a variety both of ethnicities and of various religious belongings³. Moreover, the nationalist

1 Brubaker, Rogers. 2012. “Religion and nationalism: four approaches”. *Nations and Nationalism*, 18: 2–20. doi: 10.1111/j.1469-8129.2011.00486.x

2 I.g. Brubaker, Rogers. 1996. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press.; Casanova, José. 1994. *Public religions in the modern world*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

3 For the connection between ethnicity and nationalism, see Brubaker, Rogers. 2002. "Ethnicity Without Groups" *Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, XLIII.2: 163-189.; Brubaker, Rogers. 2004. "In the Name of the Nation: Reflections on Nationalism and Patriotism" *Citizenship Studies* 8.2: 115-127.; Brubaker, Rogers. 2011. "Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Modernity" *Dalla modernità alle modernità multiple*. Ed. Consuelo Corradi and Donatella Pacelli. Soveria Mannelli, Italy: Rubbettino.

conflicts in the post-Soviet space and on the Balkans have contributed significantly for the development of the academic field. Some of the most important works in the discipline of Nationalism studies examine exactly this region. Rogers Brubaker's best-known research⁴, for example, focuses on the rebirth of nationalism in the context of the falling apart of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia. Drawing on Bourdieu's methodology, the author compares the nationalism of New Europe with the one that emerged between the two World Wars in "Old Europe" in order to introduce a new, more precise, more "institutionalized" understanding of the term and its internalization – much more complex than the broad "imagined communities" offered by Benedict Anderson. Another emblematic example of a scholar who has dedicated her career to the region is Katherine Verdery⁵, who examines the development of nationalist thought among the intellectual elite of communist Romania – a study emphasizing both the institutional and the cultural aspect of nationalism.

The concept of religion, on the other hand, has developed in two main branches. The secularist line develops the well-known perception of the differentiation of the religious sphere from the other aspects of life. Casanova⁶, the most famous name in this group of scholars, contributes significantly to the field by questioning the understanding of secularism as a decline of religion, while still emphasizing this differentiation as the core of the Western modernization. On the contrary, a post-colonial perspective, well developed by Talal Asad⁷ and his followers, build on the basis of post-colonial view a new perspective aiming at understanding various types of secularism, just as there are various modernities, and the clear division between religion and other spheres of life does not help the understanding of

4 Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*.

5 Verdery, Katherine. 1995. *National ideology under socialism: identity and cultural politics in Ceausescu's Romania*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.

6 Casanova, *Public religions in the modern world*.

7 Asad, Talal. 2003. *Formations of the Secular : Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

different possible perspectives on secularism.

In this debate, again, “New” Europe fits quite well. Religion has been proven to play a significant role in defining national identities in the region, and at the same time the institution of the church has often been crucial – or at least perceived as crucial – in the nation-building process⁸.

However, neither religion is the only factor influencing the national attitudes, nor is the Church the only institutional actor to be blamed for the development of nationalism. The Communist parties well understood the legitimizing power of the nationalist paradigm and often tried to strengthen the national affiliations, seeking, at the same time, for their own place in the national ideology, thereby reducing the inevitable contradiction between the internationalist Marxist ideology and the nationalist narrative. Totalitarian elites realized the role of the Church and often tried to isolate it in order to reduce the possibility of institutionally organized opposition.

In this sense the case of Bulgaria is both representative and exceptional. In Poland, for example, the state introduced series of cultural policies in order to compete with the Catholic Church for the dominance over national identity – although unsuccessfully⁹. The case of Romania is similar¹⁰. What differentiates the case of Bulgaria, according to Maria Todorova¹¹, is that the Bulgarian Communist party, unlike the others who initially perceived nationalism as a temporal trend which should pass with the development of the communist society, from

8 Kitromilides, Paschalis. 1994. *Enlightenment, nationalism, orthodoxy: studies in the culture and political thought of South-eastern Europe*. Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum.

9 Hann, C. 1994. “After Communism: Reflections on East European Anthropology and the “Transition”. *Social Anthropology* 2 (3), 229-249.

10 Gilberg, Trond. “Religion and Nationalism in Romania” in *Religion and nationalism in Soviet and East European politics*, edited by Ramet, Sabrina, 328-352. Durham: Duke University Press, 1989.

11 Todorova, Maria. 1995. “The Course and Discourse of Bulgarian Nationalism”. in P. Sugar, ed. *East European Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*. Lanham Md: The American University Press, 55-102.

the very beginning of its rule in 1944 realized and tried to occupy the nationalist rhetoric as a legitimizing mechanism for its ideology and rule.

The Research Problem

Specifically in the Bulgarian case but possibly in others - one can notice one quite consistent relationship between the Church and the state, in which the Church is not an arch-rival of the Communist party, but rather act as a convenient national symbol which needed to be appropriated if the Party wanted to dominate the national ideology. This specificity of the case goes hand in hand with a specific perception of religion which fits the post-colonial paradigm. Religion is not a separate sphere of life, in which case a clear distinction should be made between the Church and the state, and consequently, the former should not intrude into state affairs, but rather a collective marker, holding the nation together and unifying it around its symbolic system, and hence being an inseparable part of it. Consequently, the Church is close in position to the state institutions, and, although having its independence guaranteed by the Constitution, co-exists in the public space in a symbiosis with the authorities. In this respect, the Church is important not with regard to the relationship between God and the people, but with regard to the relationship between the 'sanctity' of the nation as such and the individuals that constitute this same nation. Religion has been transformed into a national symbol, and the Church is the institutionalized agent that legitimately reproduces this symbol. The term *symphonic secularism*, introduced by the American anthropologist Kristen Ghodsee¹², well reflects both the relationship between nation and religion and between Church and state in the Bulgarian case. The roots of such a process can be traced back in history, in the years of the nation-building process in the late

¹² Ghodsee, Kristen. 2009. "Symphonic Secularism: Eastern Orthodoxy, Ethnic Identity and Religious Freedoms in Contemporary Bulgaria." *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 27 (2) (December 5): 227-252.

19th century, in which the Church played a crucial role, and later, in the historical reproduction of this narrative.

In this context, the current research aims at explaining *how the Communist party fits in the religious-national narrative in Bulgaria*. In the beginning of the communist rule, the Church was seen as the “face” of the nation – the one which, had been able to survive together with the Bulgarian people through the centuries. This image, however, was supported with strong religious claims. The Church, with its sanctity, held together the Bulgarian community. I claim that through series of nationalist policies introduced in the 1970's the Communist party managed to release the tension between religion and Marxism by emphasizing the unified image of the nation, and thus simultaneously to strengthen the national feeling and to “civilize” (implement a civil meaning) to the role of the Church. In this way, instead of replacing the Church as the “pillar” of the nation, it managed to strengthen the relationship between Church and state and to contribute to the contemporary “symphonic secularism.”

The Research Process

For this purpose, I am conducting a thematic content analysis of the Church newspaper from 1970 to 1979. Identifying several themes in which the national discourse is visible and tracing their common points in the official discourse of the Church, I emphasize the change in the relationship between the religious institution and the state and the unification of religion and civic life. In this “media”, one can see the interaction between the two institutions reflected in the official discourse of the Church. The image of the nation, as presented by the Church and party officials, is what gives public legitimacy to the existence of the clergy – and, hence, it becomes a natural part of the very image of the institution. What I *cannot*

research here, due to resource constraints, is something that can be developed as a hypothesis for a further study – this “merger” of Orthodoxy and nationhood contains a great potential for the exclusion of “other” religions from the nation. Such an exclusion is a possible legitimization of repressions as the ones that follow in the 1980's, namely, the Revival process. The period of study is justified, first, by the chronology of the Church-state relations in Bulgaria, and, second, by the strengthening of the nationalist policies of the Party, starting from the 1970's.

State-Church Relations and Communist Nationalism

In contemporary Bulgarian historiography¹³ three periods are easily differentiated with regard to the policy of the Communist Party toward the Church. The first, from 1944 to the mid-1950's, is the period of heavy repressions toward the intellectual elite of the clergy. The second, from Stalin's death and the destalinization to the early 1970's is a period of more freedom, although the Church had to give up its “religious propaganda” for a more “scientific” world view¹⁴. The last period, from the 1970's on, is one of “soft” administrative oppression, when the Party extensively forced civic rituals that substituted the religious ones. Hence, from a symbolic point of view, the beginning of the third period is the most interesting – it is a period which shows not only the difficulties of the political relations between the two institutions – doubtlessly an important part of the study of religion as a part of the national identity – but also the symbolic transformation through which it is possible to see the problematic role of the Church in a socialist society; a transformation in which the

13 Kalkandzhieva, Daniela. 1997. *Bulgarskata Pravoslavna tsurkva i durzhavata 1944-1953*. (Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the State 1944-1953) Sofia: Albatros.; Metodiev, Mochil. 2010. *Mezhdu vyarata i kompromisa. Bulgarskata pravoslavna tsurkva I komunisticheskata durzhava (1944-1989)*. (Between faith and compromise. The Orthodox Church and the Communist State in Bulgaria (1944-1989)). Sofia: Siela

14 Ibid., p. 638

image of the nation is crucial.

Following a similar chronology, Maria Todorova claims that, although the Bulgarian Communist party uses nationalism as its own legitimizing ideology from the very beginning of its rule, it is the 1970's when the development of state-driven nationalism reaches a state of a “full-fledged movement and ideology”¹⁵.

This thesis will continue in the following way. First, I will introduce a brief literature review in which I will discuss various aspects of the present discussions on nationalism, religion and secularism, and Church-state relationship in Central and Eastern Europe. The main aim of this review is to illustrate better how the present research fits in the overall development of the field. Then, in the first chapter, I will try to present as a theoretical framework the specific role of the Orthodox religion in the case of Bulgarian nation-formation. I will do this by presenting a contemporary case which I find illustrative for this specific role. In the second chapter, I will present the methodological frame and the very research process. The third chapter will present the results of the research, and the extent to which the theoretical framework fitted these results. Finally, I will briefly conclude the most important achievements of the current thesis.

¹⁵ Todorova, “The Course and Discourse of Bulgarian Nationalism”, 74.

Literature Review

In order to understand the specifics of the relationship between Church, religion, nation and politics in Bulgaria, it is important to place each of these terms in a broader context and then to describe the path that one needs to follow within this context. As I claim that religion in the Bulgarian case is not so much of a symbolic system of understanding the world, but rather a constitutive element of the nation, I shall start with the basic, although necessary, claim that the very nation *is* a social construct with its constitutive elements.

In his already emblematic work, “Imagined Communities”, Benedict Anderson¹⁶ gives the most popular constructivist definition of the nation – it is not a natural phenomenon that led to the historical development of nation-states, but rather an “imagined political community”, a “group” imagined by its citizens as having “boundaries” and “sovereignty”¹⁷. It is to a certain extent not even an objective reality, but a mental concept that unifies the people who “imagine” it and construct their social collectivity with respect to this imagination. In order to protect its boundaries and to differentiate itself from other such communities, the nation needs to introduce collective manifestations, or, more precisely, manifestations of its collectivity: the common symbols, heroes, history, laws and memory. The national flag, the anthem, coat of arms are nothing but the symbolic representation¹⁸ of the national imagination. We can say that this imagination has two main channels of

introduction: one is that of official authorities, the power of the state which has the monopoly
16 Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*.

17 Ibid., p. 7.

18 Pitkin, Hanna Fenichel. 1967. *The Concept of Representation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.: pp. 92-111

over the legitimate historical narrative and introduces it through the school program, the history textbooks, the official holidays; the other is the “collective memory”¹⁹ of the people which interprets these official channels and incorporates them as mechanisms of identity.

What is the objectivity that makes a nation possible? Another classic theory of nationalism, Ernest Gellner's²⁰, sees the nation as rooted in modernity and as a result from changes in the societal structure due to historical and structural events. It is the need of cultural homogeneity of modern societies that creates nations and, respectively, nationalism as a self-identification with the nation. The nation is, therefore, a necessary consequence of a historical process of modernization in which power is consolidated and reproduced in the mechanisms of the modern state, together with the monopoly over violence and the civilizing mechanisms of self-control²¹. This understanding of nationalism as a modernization line is taken into account by Eric Hobsbawm²², in whose view nation is an “invented tradition” of the political elite that would serve as a power-legitimizing mechanism in an era of radical social change²³. The social (in opposition to “natural”) character of the nation is already widely recognized.

Anthony Smith²⁴, who is, on the contrary of Anderson's theory, famous for his ethno-symbolic idea of the nation, is rather devoted to showing the specific lines that could serve as basics for such a “selection” of the common characteristics of a nation of the modern period.

19 Halbwachs, Maurice. 1992. *On collective memory*. Ed. Lewis A Coser. Chicago, Ill.; London: University of Chicago Press.

20 Gellner, Ernest. 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell.

21 Elias, Norbert. 2000. *The civilizing process: sociogenetic and psychogenetic investigations*. Ed. Eric Dunning. Oxford: Blackwell.

22 Hobsbawm, Eric. 1990. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.

23 Hutchinson, John, and Anthony D Smith. 1994. *Nationalism*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.: p. 48.

24 Smith, Anthony D. 1999. *Myths and memories of the nation*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

In Smith's perception, nationalism is the “new religion of the people”²⁵; nationalism is, just like religion, binding people by giving them a sense of belonging, and at the same time replacing sacred with secular symbols in accordance with the modern secular state (instead of relying on God and priest, the new “sacred” unifiers are the state and the patriotic heroes).

This subjective-objective relation is leading for the present thesis. In order to understand religion as a “brick” in the high wall of the national identity, a brick with a symbolic meaning, one should take into account the importance of memory – memory as a category of both objective reality and subjective interpretation of this reality. Memory is a constitutive element of imagination; and imagination is, of course, the basis of an “imagined community”. Memory is, however, a matter of official enforcement (as mentioned above), just as it is a matter of personal interpretation. By following the official discourse of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in the 1970's, represented through its official newspaper, I am actually trying to understand the logic of the “game”²⁶ of power, a game of language interpretation in which the state imposes a particular view of religion with the attempt to construct a certain memory of the nation, a certain image of an “imagined community” which will legitimize the role of the very state in the historical narrative.

The concept of memory is predominant for the French post-Durkheimian tradition. Maurice Halbwachs²⁷ introduced the term “collective memory” in an attempt to point out the social origin of imagination; memory – and forgetting – are, in his works, a matter of socially constructed selection. Remembering may be an individual act; however, it is an act of selecting the past in a manner which is socially predefined. “Collective memory” is, therefore, the memory of the collective; the shared memory of a group which defines it as a

25 Smith, Antony D. 2003. *Chosen Peoples*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.: pp.4-5.

26 Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *The logic of practice*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press.: p. 66.

27 Halbwachs, Maurice. 1992. *On collective memory*.

group. It is the memory for collectively important events which in fact constitutes the national identity. Another influential French historian, Pierre Nora, in Halbwachs's tradition and terms, opposes collective memory to *historical memory*²⁸ – in his words, the memory of “professional historians”²⁹. “Historical memories filter, accumulate, capitalize and transmit”³⁰. Historical memories are implemented in the institutionalized pillars of the nation – the historical textbooks, the national museums and the national symbols. The collective remembering which constitutes the nation symbolically is indeed under the social influence of this “historical memory”.

From this perspective, it is important to understand the meaning of the *institutional discourse of memory*. When the authority speaks of the nation, it constitutes the very memory of the nation. This is doubtlessly transformed then in the individual act of remembering. However, to underestimate the power implemented in the institutional discourse is to underestimate the very basis of power relations and their role in the creation of collective memory. With regard to the importance of this point in the context of the Balkans, the famous Bulgarian historian Maria Todorova has written and edited several volumes on collective memory in the Balkan region. In “Balkan Identities: Nation and Memory”³¹, an interdisciplinary edited collection, her aim is to explore local and national policies of memory and its mechanisms of construction, celebration and diffusion. The book touches the issue of the Bulgarian conversion to Islam during the Ottoman period and the way in which it is presented in the Bulgarian historiography, literature and film production. It also deals with

28 Ibid.

29 Nora, Pierre. 1978. *Mémoire collective*. In: Jacques Le Goffe, ed., *La Nouvelle histoire*. Paris: Retz.: p. 398.

30 Ibid., p. 399.

31 Todorova, Maria. 2003. *Balkan identities : nation and memory*. New York: New York University Press.

the mechanism of transmission of national identity by history textbooks. This study shows the practices of collective and historical memorizing (and remembering) of one of the constitutive narratives of the nation – the idea of an opposition to the Ottoman rule. Another study collected in a volume by the same editor - “Remembering Communism”³² aims to show how the “living” memory builds the opposition between the communist ideology and the reality of everyday life under the regime. The book discusses various explanatory models of the communist reality and of the regime collapse. A similar line has been developed by Katherine Verdery³³, who describes the process of institutionalization of nationalist thinking in the intellectual practices of socialist Romania, emphasizing, on the one hand, the role of the intellectuals, and, on the other, the importance of the cultural policies in socialist political economy. Important accent is put on the constitution of social practices by the dominant discourse, language, ideology and culture.

This leads me logically to the discussion of this constitutive element of the Bulgarian national identity that attracts my attention the most: religion (and, respectively, secularism – an element of particular importance for my study of religion in the socialist era). In association with the already discussed theories of the nation, the most popular understanding of religion is one of a universal system of values that was the main regulative mechanism of the pre-modern world. In a classic Weberian understanding, the process of modernity was in fact a process of *disenchantment*³⁴, in which institutions started operating in a distinctively secular, *rational* (in the enlightened understanding) way. As a result of the disenchantment and the *differentiation of spheres*, religion was reduced to a separate sphere of the private life

32 Todorova, Maria, ed. 2010. *Remembering Communism: Genres of Representation*. New York, NY: Social Science Research Council.

33 Verdery, Katherine. 1995. *National ideology under socialism: identity and cultural politics in Ceausescu's Romania*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.

34 Weber, Max. 2004. “Science as a vocation”. *The vocation lectures*. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub, pp. 1-31

of the individual, one which is celebrated freely but is not a matter of state responsibility. In this regard, the Church is not the fundamental political agent that stands as equal to the monarch, but with modernization becomes the institution that regulates this distinctive sphere. The Church and the state operate separately. This principle stands as a basis of the modern concepts of religious freedom and independence of Church and state and presents a basic principle in constitutional law³⁵.

However, such an approach does not really satisfy a very specific study of the role of religion in a Balkan state, but rather serves a theory that describes a particular – distinctively Western – type of modernity. The insufficiency of this view will be illustrated in Chapter One. An important criticism to this view comes from the post-colonial anthropologist Talal Asad who claims that the inevitable connection that theory makes between religion and belief and the idea that this belief is then a matter of the “private” sphere serves a colonialist interest. Such a view by necessity privileges Western Christianity (particularly, Protestantism), and leads to the modernistic exclusion of other religions, for example, Islam³⁶. In Asad's view, social science needs to redefine both religion and secularism in a way that would fit multiple modernities. This approach is also shared by Emma Loosley³⁷, who in her introduction to the edited volume “Eastern Christianity in the modern Middle East” emphasizes the need for a distinctively “local” historical understanding of religion which would differentiate the problems of alternative types of Christianity.

35 Preuss, U.K. 1996. “The Political Meaning of Constitutionalism”, in: R. Bellamy, ed. *Democracy and Sovereignty: American and European Perspectives*. Aldershot: Avebury, pp. 11-27

36 Asad, Talal. 2003. *Formations of the Secular : Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.: pp. 206-207.

37 Loosley Emma. 2010. “Peter, Paul, and James of Jerusalem: the doctrinal and political evolution of the Eastern and Oriental Churches”. In: O’Mahony, Anthony, and Emma Loosley, eds. *Eastern Christianity in the Modern Middle East*. London; New York: Routledge, pp. 1-12

As I am interested in the understanding of religion as a “memory of the nation”, partly in the terms of the French tradition as described above, and partly in accordance with the post-colonialist call for studying the specifics of various societies, the view of the German anthropologist Kristen Ghodsee is especially important for my study. Ghodsee studies the relations between Eastern Orthodoxy, religious rights and secularism in Bulgaria and argues for the specifics of the Bulgarian Church-state relationship which the classic understanding of religion and secularism cannot cover. Drawing on Asad, she describes these relations with the term “symphonic secularism”³⁸ with the intention to show a specific symbiosis between the two institutions which allows for an often misunderstood idea of religious freedom. According to Ghodsee, religion in Bulgaria is important much more as a factor for national self-identification, than as a symbolic system of values. She claims that there is a consensus according to which the state allows and encourages the “traditional” religions in the country (which all serve as mechanisms for self-identification: mostly Orthodoxy, Islam, and Judaism, respectively for ethnic Bulgarians, Turks and Jews) and is quite intolerant towards new religions, or new, “non-traditional” forms of old religions. This consensus is shared also by the respective official religious institutions – the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the Chief Mufti, and the Organization of the Jews in Bulgaria.

Although very significant for the understanding of my research, Ghodsee's text suffers from several weaknesses. It is far too exculpating, and, although it calls for a more historical approach, it lacks it itself. Ghodsee's view is built on the popular idea of Bulgarian history and the way it is represented in Bulgarian public space. This is an important mechanism of explaining a present trend, as I will try to show in the next chapter; however, I am searching

38 Ghodsee, “Symphonic Secularism”, 228.

for some roots of such an image of religion, and I find them in the Church-state relationship created in the 1970's.

The way in which the people are able to interpret “higher” categories of the nationality is well described in Michael Herzfeld's “Cultural Intimacy”³⁹. His anthropological research develops an important argument for the understanding of nationalism as an everyday category. He develops the term “cultural intimacy” in order to describe how the “higher” categories of national identity, introduced by the state, such as national tradition or religion, are refocused through the prism of the skepticism of everyday language and practices. The result is quite good “understanding” of these categories, which actually legitimizes the state ideology. Following this approach, another anthropologist – Sonja Luehrmann⁴⁰ opposes two types of public – the “liberal” and the “didactic”, in order to show that secularism, as exercised in the Soviet society, was not about restricting religion to the private sphere (as the private sphere was not really to be taken into account at all), but rather about finding appropriate social practices to substitute for religion and, therefore, creating an “exclusively human community”. This approach led to the disattachment of its “methods” from its aim and, as a result, the “methods” were successfully reproduced after the end of the socialist regime, even for the purpose of religious socialization. The process illustrates a unique diffusion of two basically separate phenomena – the sacred and the profane – which is best described by the Weberian term *elective affinity*⁴¹. This work is a good example of what Ghodsee wanted to achieve – a particularly local, though historical understanding of the desacralization of religion in the socialist era.

39 Herzfeld, Michael. 1997. *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation State*. New York, NY [u.a.]: Routledge.

40 Luehrmann, Sonja. 2011. *Secularism Soviet style: teaching atheism and religion in a Volga republic*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Luehrmann, Sonja. 2011. *Secularism Soviet style: teaching atheism and religion in a Volga republic*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

41 Ibid., pp. 7-17.

The relationship between religion and nationalism is well reconsidered in Rogers Brubaker's theoretical article "Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches". The article is a generalization on the ways of studying this relationship. By bringing into consideration the widely spread understanding of nationalism as a distinctively secular phenomenon, the author gives four approaches to the problem. The third approach treats religion as part of the national ideology, which serves to specify the local nationalism and sometimes to intertwine with it. According to Brubaker, in the Christian context religion is often seen as "etatized", which is the attempt of the state to control each aspect of the church affairs. This is again a reproduction of the old secular understanding of nationalism which deprives the researcher from the possibility to understand religion and nationalism as one, and religion as a dominant way of self-identification. Yet, Brubaker searches for what can be preserved from this secular understanding, which is valid for the development of the modern state, and how can this be done by taking into account all adequate criticisms towards this approach⁴².

A good and important study of the Church-state relationship in the case of Bulgaria, showing both the etatization and the construction of memory, is Carsten Riis's book "Religion, Politics, and Historiography in Bulgaria"⁴³. The study discusses how the political control over Bulgarian historiography from the socialist period legitimated the church-state relationship of that time and linked Bulgarian national identity and religious affiliations avoiding any contradiction with the socialist ideology. Referring to the history of Christianity during the Ottoman period of Bulgarian history, the ideological merger of religious and

⁴² Brubaker, "Religion and nationalism: four approaches"; Casanova, *Public religions in the modern world*.

⁴³ Riis, Carsten. 2002. *Religion, Politics, and Historiography in Bulgaria*. Boulder, Colo.; New York: East European Monographs ; Distributed by Columbia University Press.

national identity framed the religious and minority policies of the socialist regime. Riis discusses recent theories conceptualizing the nation and focuses in a good and useful way especially on the connection between religion, history and national myth in the Bulgarian context.

Several other authors have discussed the Bulgarian case. Some of the most popular volumes were written or edited by Sabrina P. Ramet⁴⁴. However, she concentrates on the political oppression over the Church institution, and not on the specific relationship between politics, Church and the particular form of religious practice. The same line has been developed by Daniela Kalkandzhieva⁴⁵ and by Momchil Metodiev in their historical review of the relations between the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the communist secret police you mean communist secret police⁴⁶. Although Metodiev's book does not concentrate on the theoretical depth needed for the good understanding of religion, it is an important historical source, as it is based on a huge archival work from several rich archive collections, some of which barely researched before. A much more “understanding” approach has been introduced by Yannis Sygkelos⁴⁷, whose study discusses the entering of nationalist ideology in the main communist discourse in Bulgaria after the Second World War and describes its adaptation to the local context. The author explains the reasons for the nationalist motives to become suitable for the establishment of the new order and how through them the party presented itself as the hegemon of the nation.

44 Ramet, Sabrina P. 1987. *Cross and commissar: the politics of religion in Eastern Europe and the USSR*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.; Ramet, P. 1988. *Eastern Christianity and politics in the twentieth century*. Durham, Duke University Press.; Ramet, P. 1989. *Religion and nationalism in Soviet and East European politics*. Rev. and expanded ed. Durham: Duke University Press.

45 Kalkandjieva, *Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the People's Democracy (1944-1953)*.

46 Metodiev, *Between faith and compromise*.

47 Sygkelos, Yannis. 2011. *Nationalism from the left: the Bulgarian Communist Party during the Second World War and the early post-war years*. Leiden; Boston: Brill.

Going back to where I started from, the understanding of the role of politics for the local interpretation of religion happens extensively through language. I am analyzing the political language towards religion as a source of power⁴⁸ – the power to create and re-create the national identity. This local understanding can be a basis for the political discourse, or it can be constituted by it; my research will show any of these two cases. The importance of language, however, for the social construction of the nation is what connects (or re-connects) religion and nation in a way that possibly allows the communist party to become the already described main agent of national identity. From this perspective, analyzing the language of official documents is appropriate – the public speech reflects and recreates the relationship between the various actors in a social field. The thematic analysis I am conducting aims at illustrating how this reflection happens.

I tried to describe some important frameworks in which the present thesis possibly fits. I briefly presented the understanding of the nation as a social and historical construct – an approach which itself is already rarely reflected upon. Then, I gave an overview of the framework of memory and remembering, which well describes the possibility to implement the role of the Church as “historically bounded” to the nation. I discussed various understandings of religion and secularism in order to place the current research in a framework of “local” approaches, which is important with regard to the specifics of the Bulgarian case. Finally, I presented some studies on the Bulgarian institutional relations with a focus on the Church and the state, and tried to justify the method used in the present research.

In the following chapter, I will try to develop Christen Ghodsee's approach, which I find crucial for understanding the relations between the Church and the Communist party,

48 Bourdieu, P. 2001. *Langage et pouvoir symbolique*. [Paris]: Seuil.

over a contemporary case – the opening of the secret files of the Church officials in Bulgaria. At first sight, this case is not directly related to the subject of the present research. However, it serves, to my opinion, as a good illustration – and hence, justification – of the theoretical approach which I have chosen.

1. Chapter One. Secret Files and Metropolitan Bishops

Several months ago, a specialized state Commission (popularly known as “the File Commission”) opened the secret files of high members of the religious organizations in Bulgaria who had worked for the State Security – the secret police of the Bulgarian Communist Party before 1989⁴⁹. Especially the files of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church provoked very high public interest – in the period right before and right after publishing the information, many public figures reacted with various arguments supporting and contesting this act – politicians, journalists, Church members. It turned out that 11 out of 15 metropolitan bishops (shortly metropolitans) had collaborated to the State security. Patriarch Maxim and several young metropolitans were the rare exceptions.

In December 2011, a month before the official decision based on the files, the Church was obliged to provide the private data of the metropolitans for the research process. Although the Synod initially agreed, only a few hours later the decision was changed with the motive, expressed originally by Metropolitan Natanail and often recited later, that “the legal norm, according to which the members of governing bodies of the religious communities are subject to investigation with regard to revealing their secret files, is unconstitutional and is a rude violation of the principle of separation of Church and State”⁵⁰. According to Natanail, there is no other state that would make the mistake to discredit “the Church that revived its statehood”. In the following month, this decision changed several

49 The very files are probably an interesting document to analyze. First, this is not the focus of this paper; second, although public, these files are relatively hard to reach – the procedure is complicated and, above all, time-consuming. For these two reasons I am not using the information from the files in this paper.

50 Bulgarian Patriarchate. 2011a. Official website. *Osobeno mnenie na Nevrokopskia mitropolit Natanail. [Reservation of the Nevrocopian bishop Natanail]*. Accessed April 14th 2012. <http://bg-patriarshia.bg/news.php?id=57232>

times according to legal consultations that the Church received, various opinions of metropolitans, and an attempt of the Holy Synod to find the high protection of the President. Finally, under the threat of paying a fine of 30 000 leva (15 000 euro), the governing body of the Synod decided to provide the necessary information, however claiming that the “lies” around the Church are an attempt to transform it into a “secular” institution⁵¹. The argument is based on the claim of the Synod that, according to the Denominations Act, the Orthodox Church is not a “religious institution”, but the representative of the “traditional religion in Bulgaria”⁵². This notion is also expressed in the Constitution (Article 13, section 3), and, together with the secularist argument for the division of Church and state, serves as the basis for the most striking part of the official statement - that the extent to which the law in general is applicable to the Church is a “constitutional problem”, i.e., that the law does not apply to the Church as an institution separated from the state.

The case has various dimensions: political, legal, and, undoubtedly, moral. The denial of the Church and its vain attempt to prevent the File Commission from opening the files were immediately interpreted as an internal conflict with regard to the forthcoming election of a new Patriarch (although future is uncertain, Maxim is 97 years old)⁵³. There are, hence, many possible explanations for the conflict between the Church and the state in that case. Most of them, however, are not of any interest to the historical analysis of religious concepts.

51 Bulgarian Patriarchate. 2011b. Official website. *Izjavlenie na Svetiia Sinod na Bulgarskata Pravoslavna Tzurkva – Bulgarska Patriarshia* [Statement of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church – Bulgarian Patriarchate]. Accessed April 14th 2012. <http://bg-patriarshia.bg/news.php?id=56995>

52 Bulgarian Patriarchate. 2011c. Official website. *Stanovishte na Svetiia Sinod na BPC-BP otnosno poiskana informatsiia ot Komisiqta po dosietata*. [Statement of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church – Bulgarian Patriarchate concerning a requested from the File comission information]. Accessed April 14th 2012. <http://bg-patriarshia.bg/news.php?id=57234>

53 Ganeva, Galina 2012. "Samo trima vladici priemlivi za nov patriarh" [Only three bishops acceptable for new Patriarch]. *168 hours*, February 3, 2012, accessed April 15th 2012, <http://www.168chasa.bg/Article.asp?ArticleId=1215394>

It is possible to interpret the problem with the secret files from the perspective of the “battle for the past”⁵⁴. The redefinition of the communist history played a significant ideological role in all southeastern transitions; and the symbolic meaning of the secret files is a powerful weapon in this battle.⁵⁵

What is to my interest in this chapter, however, are not the various political interpretations of the conflict or the heritage of the transition in the state-Church affairs. Doubtlessly, these are important elements with regard to understanding the context of the case. But I am much more interested in the ideological ground that serves as a possibility for the arguments of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. How can we interpret an argument that is built on the perception of Orthodoxy as the “traditional religion” in Bulgaria, which goes together with the secular division of Church and state? How does such a division look like? What is the historical and political origin of this position? The particular case is not a *proof* for the specifics of the Bulgarian case. Its paradox, however, can serve as an illustrative example for a complex relationship. In this sense, this chapter aims at interpreting the arguments of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church from the perspective of a “local”, specific understanding of religion as a part of the Bulgarian national identity, and the very Church – as an institutional pillar of the nation-building process. The ways in which the actual role of the Church is *represented* in the historiographic discourse plays just as important role as the facts themselves in shaping the social understanding of nation and religion. Hence, I cannot

54 Deyanova, Liliana. 2009. “Bitkite za mavzoleite: 1989 (svidetelstvo) – 2006 (svidetelstvo) [The Mausoleum Battles: 1989 (testimony) – 2006 (testimony)]. In: *Ochertaniia Na Mulchanieto: Istoricheska Sotsiologiia Na Kolektivnata Pamet [Lineaments of Silence: Historical Sociology of Collective Memory]*, 113-128. Sofia: Critique & Humanism.

55 In fact, I am very much interested in this particular aspect of the case. It is related to the issues of transitional justice, and the social and political context of “public moral”, and is hence slightly peripheral to the logic of this paper and the course for which it is intended. This is why I am narrowing the topic in a way which leaves important implications of the described case undeveloped.

prove a particular form of Church-state relationship; this is why I will rather trace some basic moments of its development and later activation.

Before continuing, I would like to make an important clarification. From what I described above seems that I use the terms Church and religion as interchangeable – and this would be, doubtlessly, a huge mistake. However, I advocate for a specific connection between religion and nation which is, indeed, well reflected in the institutional relations between the Church and the state. In this sense, I do not assume that the Church is an adequate institutional representative of the Bulgarian Orthodox religion (but I also do not deny it; this is rather a tangential point with regard to my main claim). Nevertheless, I do assume that there are specifics of the Bulgarian secular model that can be related to the role of religion in the perception of the nation.

The argument of the metropolitan bishops assumes some things which are predefined in the Bulgarian legal framework and are hence correctly cited in the official position of the Synod. First, according to the Constitution, Orthodoxy is the “traditional religion” in Bulgaria which is otherwise a secular state (“Religious institutions shall be separate from the State.” - Article 13, Section 3). Second, the very law on religions gives a symbolic privilege to the Orthodox Church – but a privilege in a very particular sense: “Traditional religion in the Republic of Bulgaria is the East Orthodox. It has historic role for the Bulgarian state and actual significance for its state life⁵⁶. Although the law specifically expresses that this

56 State Gazette. 1949. *Denominations Act*. State Gazette Issue No. 48/March 01. English text available online at: http://www.cilevics.eu/minelres/NationalLegislation/Bulgaria/Bulgaria_Denominat_English.htm, accessed April 13, 2012. Bulgarian text: http://www.cilevics.eu/minelres/NationalLegislation/Bulgaria/Bulgaria_Denominat_Bulgarian.htm, accessed April 13, 2012.; Similar definition is used in the *Denominations Act* from 1949: “The Bulgarian Orthodox Church is the traditional religious denomination in Bulgaria, deeply connected with the history of the country. As such, it could be people's democratic church in form, content and spirit.” (State Gazette 1949, Article 3)

position cannot be used as a ground for privileges, it constitutes – or rather describes – a particular relationship between the state and its religion. This is not even the demographic argument that most Bulgarians belong to Orthodoxy. The presupposition is that *this* religion is a pillar of the nation itself and, consequently, of the statehood. This intimacy between religion and state is *already* a privilege itself.

On the opposite end of the line is the typical secular argument that the state should not interfere in the organizational life of religious institutions. This is, indeed, the typical Western understanding of the Church-state relationship which logically became a part of the Constitution of the newly democratic Bulgarian state in 1991⁵⁷. However, expressed in the situation of opening the secret files of the State Security, it is only perceived as a valid argument in line with the significance of Orthodoxy for the nation. Hence, a traditional Western(ist) understanding is possibly appropriate for understanding the broader legal framework of religious affairs, but it will be dysfunctional in an attempt to see relations hidden behind these artificially constructed institutional norms.

If we take into account Ghodsee's description of “symphonic secularism” - as described in the literature review - the perception of “traditional religion” is not that strange anymore – and it is, moreover, possible to combine it with the idea of constitutional rights.

From this perspective (and having in mind the political motives of the various agents) the reaction of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church with regard to the opening of the secret files does not look so strange. It is a combination of the “local” understanding of religion as a founding element of the Bulgarian nation, and an adapted secularist model which paradoxically legitimizes a claim for church independence. If we come back to the Weberian

⁵⁷ In fact, Andrey Raichev (2004, 13-14) claims that the battle of the transition was a battle for the past in a situation in which there is a consensus on the future. According to him, the Bulgarian way to European integration was an easily negotiated agenda, while the battle for the past is actually a battle for ideological legitimacy. See also Deyanova, 2009.

perspective, secularization was actually the process of limiting the influence of the Church to the private sphere. The Synod reacted by defending itself from the state – which is exactly the opposite process. In fact, the secularist claim, if fulfilled, in this case would have contributed for the already ideologically privileged position of the Orthodox Church.

Now, I will try to focus on several important moments in history that present the formation of the Church-state relationship and, at the same time, the public and political expression of religion as a factor for national identity. This way, I will also be able to demonstrate how the two levels overlap – the institutional and the ideological.

An important starting point is the historical legitimization of religion as one of the pillars of the nation, and the Church as the institutional expression of this pillar. Here, the schism from 1860 plays a crucial role. In his book “Enlightenment, Nationalism, Orthodoxy” Paschalis Kitromilides claims that, in order to understand the nation-building processes on the Balkans, we need to see how the post-independence state narrative creates an “identification of Orthodoxy with nationality, while an unstated implication points to the recognition of the Orthodox Church as a vanguard of nationalism”⁵⁸. In this respect, the attempts for independence of the Bulgarian Orthodox clergy from the Ecumenical Patriarchate is seen in Bulgarian culture and historiography as a liberation of the Bulgarian nation from “foreign” influence⁵⁹. As the secession of the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1870 was the result of a long and complicated political process, it is typically perceived as a first

58 Kitromilides, *Enlightenment, nationalism, orthodoxy*.

59 Markova, Zina. 1976. *Bulgarskoto tsurkovno-nationalno dvijenie do Krimskata voina. [The Bulgarian church-national movement until the Crimean war]*. Sofia: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.; Zhechev, Toncho. 1995. *Bulgarskiiat velikden ili strastite bulgarski. [Bulgarian Easter, or the Bulgarian Passions]*. Sofia: Zaharii Stoyanov.; Temelski, Hristo. 1992. *Iosif, exarkh bulgarski. Dnevnik. [Iosif, the Bulgarian Exarch. Diary]*. Sofia: Kama.; The Easter Action from 1860 that started the schism is perceived as so important that its informal name - “the Bulgarian Easter” - was taken by a patriotic movement in 2000. The movement aimed at gathering Bulgarians who had “succeeded abroad” for consulting the EU accession process – a new National Revival.

successful stage in the struggle for independent nation-state. As Hopkins⁶⁰ puts it: “The Church movement had achieved its ultimate aim – the recognition of Bulgaria as a distinct *ethnos* and the establishment of religious and cultural self-determination for her people”. This perception is reinforced by the fact that the San Stefano treaty which put the end of the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878) accepted the borders of the Exarchate as Bulgarian state borders⁶¹. Nowadays, March 3rd – the date on which the San Stefano treaty was signed – is the Bulgarian national celebration day. Built in this way, “The national myth depicts the Church and Bulgarian Orthodox Christianity as synonymous with national self-consciousness, as that which saved the national and cultural identity from destruction under Ottoman Muslim rule”⁶².

This mythological relationship is then constantly re-activated by various political actors, starting, as Kitromilides describes, with the “post-independence narrative”. An important moment in which it is reinterpreted is the late 1940's, right after the communists took over the power, when the state started heavy repressive actions on the Church members⁶³. In a famous speech in 1946, the leader of the Communist Party Georgi Dimitrov pointed out the national importance of the Church by at the same time neglecting any possible affiliation with religion:

Our Orthodox Church, unlike some other Churches, has a historical merit in preserving our national feeling and self-consciousness... In the centuries of hardship, in the struggle for the independence of our people from foreign yoke the Bulgarian Church had been a custodian and a caretaker of the national spirit of the Bulgarians (...) I do not forget, of course, that the

60 Hopkins, James Lindsay. 2009. *The Bulgarian Orthodox Church*. Boulder (Colo.); New York: East European Monographs ; Distributed by Columbia University Press.: p. 128.

61 Kalkandjieva, *Bulgarskata pravoslavna curkva i “narodnata demokratiia” (1944-1953)*, 26.

62 Riis, *Religion, Politics, and Historiography in Bulgaria*, 3.

63 Metodiev, *Between faith and compromise*, p. 638.

Church has had also priests traitors, villains, Judas from the point of view of the national interests of the Bulgarian people. But, in general, it has played a very big patriotic role in our history⁶⁴.

Here, the national myth is disattached from religion and is bound to the role of the Church as a nation-builder, as this “secularity” was completely in-line with the communist ideology. Moreover, in this way the Party gave a “chance” to the Church – and also reserved the possibility to control it. This was a preamble to the official separation of Church and state that was planned already in 1944 but was formally introduced in 1948. This process started with soft measures such as replacing the compulsory religious education with optional; then, with the new Constitution from 1947, significant limitations were introduced on the Church, until finally in 1948 a budget-cut reform led to great tension among the clerics and the Synodal governing body was replaced by people close to the Party⁶⁵.

This is a crucial moment for the understanding of the contemporary situation. Although the accent is moved from religion to Church, the division of Church and State served as a tool for the Communist party to subordinate the clergy – hence, it was not a real division, but rather a change of political roles. The subordination continued with the choice of Patriarch Maxim with a decision of the Central Committee of the Party in 1971⁶⁶. At the same time, the role of the Church for the national unity was never denied by the communists. In this way, the contemporary diffusion between Church, state and religion (especially in the sense of national belonging) is to a high extent a product of the communist institutional politics. A final, albeit important remark on the Communist period concerns the relations between the state and the other forms of Christianity (other religions, such as Muslims, are by default

64 Metodiev, *Between faith and compromise*, 18. Translation mine, B.V.

65 Kalkandjieva, *Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the People's Democracy (1944-1953)*, 341-342.

66 Metodiev, *Between faith and compromise*, 263-278.

unacceptable as a part of the national model, especially in the 1980's). In the 1970's and 1980's, the State Security widely accepts the term “sects” for all protestant denominations. In this way, the Orthodox Church is preserved as the main religious agent within the country – one which is easy to control – and at the same time the relationship between religion and nation is reinforced at the expense of the concept of religion as a system of beliefs.

A final moment in the historical description of the problematic relationship between Church, state, religion and nation is the canonizing of the Batak Martyrs in 2011⁶⁷. Batak is a famous town in South Bulgaria which has a significant role in the Bulgarian national mythology. During the April Uprising, a big part of its population was murdered. Although there are different versions for the way in which this happened⁶⁸, this event is popular as the “Batak Slaughter”, and it is widely accepted that its role in the April Uprising brought the attention of the Western media to the Balkans and provoked the Russo-Turkish War. In this context, canonizing the victims of the “slaughter” is an illustration to the specificity I am describing here – on the one hand, Patriarch Maxim's speech⁶⁹ describes the sacrifice of the Batak citizens purely as one in the name of Christianity. On the other hand, the first canonization since 1964⁷⁰ is the one of the national heroes. In 2011, 22 years after the fall of the Communism, the Church does not have to present nationalist arguments for its actions;

67 Dnevnik. 2011. *Curkvata kanonizira svetci za pruv put ot 47 godini*. [The Church canonizes saints for the first time in the last 47 years], April 3rd 2011, accessed April 15th 2012, http://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2011/04/03/1069426_curkvata_kanonizira_svetci_za_pruv_put_ot_47_godini/

68 Baleva, Martina, and Ulf Brunnbauer. 2007. *Batak - Ein Bulgarischer Erinnerungsort : Ausstellung*. Sofia: Verl. Iztok-Zapad.

69 Maksim 2011. Patriarshesko i Sinodalno poslanie po povod kanonizaciata na Batashkite i Novoselskite muchenici. [Patriarchal and Synod Message on the occasion of canonization of the Batak and Novosel martyrs]. <http://www.pravoslavie.bg/Документи/Канонизацията-на-баташките-и-новоселските-мъченици>

70 In 1962 and 1964, two other historical figures were canonized – Paisii Hilendarski, the priest who wrote the first complete Bulgarian history in 1762, and Sofronii Vrachanski who made the first copy of the same book in 1765. (Dnevnik 2011).

however, its diffusive role presupposes that the Bulgarian saints should be national heroes.

Starting from a situation which can be analyzed in various ways, I tried to focus on the particular form of relationship between Church and state and, respectively, nation and religion, that could possibly serve as the basis for the otherwise illogical argument of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church against the opening of the files of the State Security. Following a post-colonialist perspective, I wanted to show how a very non-Westernist perception of religion could be incorporated into a Westernist secular model, and what paradoxes (at first sight) would such a combination produce. I pointed out – although very roughly – some important points in the development of this perception of religion.

Various interpretations of the situation will follow. According to the Historian Momchil Metodiev⁷¹, for example, the Church should distance from the “national ideals” and try to establish a more intimate relationship with its Christian congregation. This will probably disappoint the broad public but will be well accepted by the orthodox believers.

I would rather argue for the allowance of different forms of religion. This role of the Bulgarian Church is not new, and it is for now the most “innocent” form of nationalism in Bulgarian society.

In the next chapter, in order to achieve the level of research transparency expected in an academic work, I will elaborate on the research process, starting from describing the methodology and ending with the specifics of the researched material.

71 Metodiev, Momchil. 2012. “*Za curkvara I neinata dvoistvena istoricheska pamet.*” [On the Church and its dual historical memory], *Kultura* 5 (2012), http://www.kultura.bg/bg/print_article/view/19339

2. Chapter Two. Method of Analysis. Description and Justification of the Data and Period of Study

This chapter explains the method of analyzing the selected data sources of the research. It clarifies the approach taken toward the data; what do the data consist of and how they were collected; a description of the particular coding scheme used for the systematization of the data; what is the period of study and what are the reasons to choose it.

In order to trace the historical origins of this complicated relationship between the church and the state and the way in which it constitutes the present understanding of secularism, I have conducted a thematic analysis⁷² of the archives of the official newspaper of the church - “Tsurkoven vestnik” (“Church newspaper”), issued weekly, in the period between 1970 and 1979.

A thematic analysis is a form of qualitative content analysis developed especially for the study of narratives. In essence, a thematic analysis allows subjective interpretation in the content of a text through identification of themes and patterns, based on a systematically developed coding scheme. The codes, identifying particular topics which appear in the text, are collected and then used to reconstruct a narrative in accordance with the initial expectations given from the theory and the research questions⁷³. The outcome of the analysis, as of any other type of qualitative content analysis, is expected to offer descriptions and/or typologies and to represent the way the subject (the creator) of the initial data views the social

⁷² Riessman, Catherine Kohler. 2008. *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. London: Sage.

⁷³ Ibid., 53-54.

order⁷⁴.

Instead of being too strictly theory-driven, this type of analysis allows the data to 'speak' in offering a balance between the (usually) theory-inspired hypotheses or initial expectations and a flexible coding scheme and coding process, where the expectations can be not only tested, but enriched and modified.

The method can be applied to various types of texts, starting from interviews, through print media content, to historical archives. This makes it particularly appropriate for the research presented in this thesis, as it allowed me to systematize the otherwise diverse information in the church newspaper, and to make sense of it. It is important to mention that in this approach the data is left to "speak for itself" - i.e., the accent is put "on "what" is said, rather than "how", to whom", and "for what purposes"⁷⁵. In this manner, it is only the additional literature on the topic that can give the context of the processes reflected in the Church newspaper. The paper itself is seen as reflecting the historical and institutional relations in which the church and the state used various strategies in order to be perceived as the legitimate agents through whom the national ideology is constructed.

2.1. Data Collection

The very newspaper was chosen among various sources from this period, because, as the official media of the Orthodox church, it represents the various patterns in which the church institution interpreted the political decisions of the communist authorities. As it is weekly, the initial information collected was quite big in volume. The diverse data in the

74 Zhang, Yan., Wildemuth, Barbara. 2009. "Qualitative analysis of content" in B. Wildemuth. ed., *Applications of Social Research Methods to Questions in Information and Library Science*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 308-319.; Mayring, Philipp. 2000. Qualitative Content Analysis. Forum: Qualitative Social Research (On-line Journal),1(2), <http://qualitative-research.net/fqs/fqs-e/2-00inhalte.htm> [Date of access: May,17 2012].

75 Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*, 54.

archive gave me the possibility to select among various topics and types of articles and to find, in accordance with the coding scheme and the theory, these parts of the information that best served the purposes of my study.

The another official periodical of the church – the monthly magazine “Spiritual Culture” was also examined, but rejected. In general, it consists of much more academic-style articles dedicated to very limited audience. Although lengthy, the articles generally repeated the topics of the Church newspaper, but with much less diversity.

2.1. Between Data Collection and Data Analysis

The coding scheme serves to systematize and order the data and to make the process of analysis easier. In this sense, it is perceived as a part of the very analysis, in which the researcher gets to know her data and through several coding cycles to manage to understand it better and to connect it to the theory.

The very developing and fulfilling of the coding scheme is in fact the first cycle of the analytical procedure⁷⁶. In the words of Johnny Saldana, “coding is not a precise science, it's a primarily an interpretative act”⁷⁷. During this process, I identified some significant quotes and on this basis managed to collect about 150 article entries, constituting approximately 400 pages.

In accordance with my theory, I wanted to reconstruct the specific discourse of the church institution; I expected this discourse to be nationalistic, and it is this expectation on whose basis I collected the 400 pages of pre-sampling material. Then I created the coding scheme, based both upon the theory and expectations, on the one hand, and upon the data, on

⁷⁶Saldaña, Johnny. 2009. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. London. Thousand Oaks, Calif., Sage., 3.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 4.

the other. This approach is described by Johnny Saldana as a “descriptive coding strategy”⁷⁸. The codes are based upon the material, but are not direct quotations from it (they are descriptive codes representing particular themes, unlike the “in-vivo” codes, taken directly from the material⁷⁹. In the second cycle – the very thematic analysis – I looked over all the coded units and collect the narrative categories. Then I analyzed the collected themes.

2.3. Justification of the Period of Study

Maria Todorova⁸⁰ traces “the articulation of Bulgarian nationalism during the 20th century – its main ideas, its goals, its style, its code words”. This is always an ambitious goal - “Of course, even a cautious replacement of the term “nationalism” with “national discourse” is not sufficient. After all, just as no nation is monolithic or homogeneous, nationalism as such does not exist; national discourse is the interplay of competing views of nationalism”⁸¹. Taking this into account, I have operationalized the term “nationalist discourse⁸²” on the basis of the selected data into basic categories of the coding scheme - “Customs and Holidays”, “History”, “Heroes and Public Figures”, and “Festivities and Commemorations”. The coding unit, which in a qualitative content analysis is not the physical text unit (“a word, sentence, or a paragraph”⁸³, but depends on the very text and the theory, in this case is a theme, operationalized in codes and in sub-codes.

The four main categories include, respectively, the practices of memorizing (“Customs and Holidays”, practices of remembering (“Festivities and Commemorations”), the

⁷⁸ Ibid., 70.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 74.

⁸⁰Todorova, “The Course and Discourse of Bulgarian Nationalism”, 70.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² While being taken into account, the differentiation between “national” and “nationalist” discourse is not important, following Todorova's articulation of the problem.

⁸³ Zhang, Yan., Wildemuth, Barbara. 2009. “Qualitative analysis of content” in B. Wildemuth. ed., *Applications of Social Research Methods to Questions in Information and Library Science*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 308-319.

legitimizing narratives (“History”), and the actors of the nationalist discourse (“Heroes and Public Figures”). The functions of these categories are well expressed in the analytical chapter, and constitute the very skeleton of the analysis. Each category includes two codes (“civic” and “religious”), except for “History”, which includes three codes (“church”, “nation”, and “party”). Every code includes three sub-codes (“nation”, “religion”, and “party/state”). The categories represent the general themes; the codes represent the two dimensions of a particular coded unit (for example, “History of the church”, and the sub-codes define the context in which the coded unit appears. The coding scheme is given in Appendix A. A sample of the coded material is included in Appendix B.

The choice of the investigated time period – the 1970's - was determined by the existing literature. Several authors identify the 1970's as a turning point in the communist history of Bulgaria⁸⁴. What I find especially important for my research is Maria Todorova's division into periods of the emergence of Bulgarian nationalism. She defines the 1970's as the period when the nation-building and the development of nationalism as a “full-fledged movement and ideology”⁸⁵ begins. On the one hand, Todorova talks about the whole period of communist rule (1944 – 1989) as of “communist nationalism”⁸⁶, emphasizing on the specificity of the

84 Todorova, “The Course and Discourse of Bulgarian Nationalism”; Metodiev, *Between faith and compromise*; Elenkov, Ivan. “Humanno-klasoviyat vtori Zlaten vek”. 1300 godishninata ot osnovavaneto na Bulgarskata durjava i istorizirane na oficialnata kultura v yubileinata deistvitelnost (1976-1981). [“The “Second Golden Age” of Historicisation of Official Culture in the Context of Bulgaria's 1,300th Anniversary Celebration (1976-1981)”. *Critique and Humanism* 23/1 (2007): 33-62, 2007.; Sugar, Peter. 1995. *Eastern European Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*. Lanham, Md.: American University Press.; Riis, *Religion, Politics, and Historiography in Bulgaria*; Znepolski, Ivaylo. 2008. *Bulgarskiyat Komunizum. Sociokulturni cherti I vlastova traektoriya*. [Bulgarian Communism. Socio-cultural Traits and Power trajectory]. Sofia: Ciela.; Pundeff, Marin, V. “Bulgarian Nationalism” in *Nationalism in Eastern Europe* in P. Sugar, ed., 93-165. University of Washington Press, 1969. Raikin, Spas. T. “Nationalism and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church” in *Religion and nationalism in Soviet and East European politics*, in S. P. Ramet, ed., 352-377. Durham: Duke University Press, 1989.

85 Todorova, “The Course and Discourse of Bulgarian Nationalism”, 74.

86 Ibid., 88.

Bulgarian case where the nationalist ideology, adopted in the beginning of the period, instead of transforming itself into internationalist discourse adopted the Marxist converse for the purpose of gaining legitimacy for the party leadership and elite⁸⁷. On the other hand, she explicitly points out the 1970's as the period when the nationalist discourse of the ruling party became more salient and series of politics emphasizing the uniqueness and importance of the Bulgarian nation were developed. Namely, 1970's are characterized by consecutive preparations for the massive commemoration events devoted to celebrating "1300 years Bulgaria"⁸⁸. Special institutes and commissions were created to work on the preparations, and decisions were given from the highest level. An "Institute for culture" was separated from the "Committee for art and culture" in 1972 especially for the purpose of preparations⁸⁹. For official beginning of the campaign is accepted the decision from June 1976 from the Central Committee of the Communist party. The campaign was led by Ludmila Jivkova, chairwoman of the "Committee for arts and culture" at that time, and daughter of the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the party, Todor Jivkov⁹⁰. Although the thematic center of the massive commemoration was supposed to be contemporaneity, the historian Ivan Elenkov states that the preparation campaign turned out to be a salient and systematic "historizing of the official culture"⁹¹, i.e. legitimizing the present by recollecting the past and at the same time introducing new official language and new ideological messages, "new turn in the public discourse toward the Bulgarian past"⁹². Elenkov concludes that this way the party succeeded in mobilizing the historical discourse, "mythicizing" it, and transforming the

⁸⁷ Ibid., 92

⁸⁸ In the official historiographic discourse, 681 is accepted as a year of the beginning of the Bulgarian statehood.

⁸⁹ Elenkov, "The "Second Golden Age", 35.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 33.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 38.

communist system of symbols and myths into national cult⁹³. What I find important for my work here is that this national cult, this new official discourse, designed as open enough as to include all the glorified and dignified elements from the “thousand-years old” Bulgarian cultural tradition, can include with the same logic and without contradiction the Church institution, with explicit accent on its historical and cultural contributions. Moreover, another aspect of the “climate change” in the Bulgarian political and socio-cultural scene is mentioned by Todorova - the enforcement of national feelings among the intelligentsia, and especially in the 1970s, among the writers and the professional historians. By restoring the glory and the meaning of historical figures from the Bulgarian medieval past, they were defending and popularizing the “national interests”⁹⁴ and this way, intentionally or not, became part of the official nationalist discourse. A good example for this kind of state politics is a decision, accepted on the Ninth Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party in 1966, which assigns the professional historians in the state with the mission to write a “multi-volume scientific history of Bulgaria from ancient times to the present”⁹⁵. Although the attitude appropriated by the professional historians and writers was perceived as a kind of dissident reaction to the official socioeconomic Marxist history with its emphasis on the nation, it was in fact well accepted by the communist party. The party incorporated this new narrative of the “glory past, strong centralized state and nation” into its official discourse as a model to follow. For the intelligentsia it appeared to be a way to gain legitimacy in front of the ruling party. This symbiosis emerged with the mutual agreement from the two sides – that party-state and the intelligentsia⁹⁶. By investigating Bulgarian Orthodox Church's official media I expect to reconstruct a process of similar symbiosis between the church and the state,

93 Ibid., 41.

94 Todorova, *The Course and Discourse of Bulgarian Nationalism*, 95.

95 Elenkov, “The “Second Golden Age”, 39.

96 Todorova, Maria. 1992. “Historiography of the Countries of Eastern Europe: Bulgaria”. *American Historical Review* (October): 1113.

which allows the legitimization of the official communist ideology, becoming more and more saliently nationalistic in the 1970's, to accept and appropriate the otherwise contradicting Christian Orthodox institution. I seek to find how the Church talks about the religious symbols, on one hand and the national symbols, on other, in this transitional period which aimed to prepare and legitimize in the public space the open and encompassing nationalist politics and rhetoric that followed in the 1980's and lasted till the end of the communist rule.

Another important fact which directed my attention to the 1970's is the change in the politics of the state toward the Orthodox Church, identified by Momchil Metodiev⁹⁷. In the beginning of the period, the Church is again in the spotlight of the state. A survey conducted by the Institute of Philosophy in the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and published in 1968 explains the renewed interest toward the Church. The survey, examining the religiosity of the population collected its data during the 1960's on the Marxist theoretical background presupposing the natural historical overcoming of the religion in the process of developing a communist society. The widely accepted assertion that the church struggle during the Bulgarian Revival was driven exclusively by national motives was dominating and confirmed the deep roots of the atheistic tradition and the acceptance of the religion only as a tool for achieving political goals⁹⁸. The results were considered sufficient for deriving the conclusion that in the last 20 years the communist party successfully reduced the number of religious people mainly through education and marginalized the Church's public influence to a high extent. What influenced the conclusion of the survey was an interesting juxtaposition of the data from with the data given from the official records of the Church, regarding the number of religious rituals (marriages, funerals and baptisms) for the same period. The comparison revealed interesting statistical data - a total of 35,5% of the population voluntarily

⁹⁷ Metodiev, *Between faith and compromise*.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 29-30.

declared themselves as religious, while at the same time, the religious rituals (especially funerals) were practiced by significantly more people. The religious marriages are 36,11% of all marriages for the period, the religious funerals are 80% and the baptisms are 52,42% from all newborn children. In the conclusion the identified problem appeared to be the persistence of the religious rituals in the people's way of life. Because these practices were seen as a matter of habit much more than a religious affiliation, a decision was taken that they should be replaced with new civic and non-religious rituals. A new distinction between “religious affiliation” and “popular custom” was introduced⁹⁹. This distinction became a basis upon which new politics were developed in the decade to follow precisely because it recognized the problem not in the church institution which was successfully marginalized; not even in the religion which was no longer a valid concept among the population, but in the habit and the social routine. Therefore, emphasizing on all kinds of popular traditions, rituals, festivities and commemorations was strongly recommended and from April 1969 procedures for the incorporation of civic rituals were officially released with a governmental decree¹⁰⁰. The politics of the state toward the Church during 1970's developed mainly in two directions – a campaign for religious rituals and their replacement with civic ceremonies, and religious festivities and their adaptation and replacement with socialist equivalents. In essence, two important events predetermined the direction of the church-state relations from this moment till the collapse of the regime: a plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist party in February 1974 on which the secretary Alexander Lilov framed the new attitude toward the Church; and an “Instruction for application of the regulatory acts concerning religious issues and religious denominations” prepared in 1977 by Committee for Church issues¹⁰¹.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 33.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 34-36.

The next chapter – the analysis of the collected data – will present the implementation of these decisions and their effects.

3. Chapter Three. Analysis of the Data

With the broad introduction of various nationalist policies in the 1970's, the Bulgarian Communist party had one particular competitor on the nationalist field – the Bulgarian Orthodox church. The church is, and has long since been, accepted as the holder of the Bulgarian community, basis of the Bulgarian national Revival in the 19th century with its twofold function¹⁰²– communal and cultural, and as a protector of the Bulgarian cultural symbols abroad after the new state was created in 1878. This competition is the key to understanding the change of the relations between church and state. While the first period of strong oppressions can be explained by the wish of the party to dismiss an ideological enemy, the second period in the context of the nationalist mobilization of the state indicates the will of the regime to “mythologize”¹⁰³ its historical presence by finding place in a narrative which is already occupied. Spas Raikin¹⁰⁴ emphasizes another, more practical aspect of this “domestication” of the church institution, namely the justification of the position of the authorities in the field of international relations – this is very visible from the rhetoric of the Church newspaper, which manages to implement the ideas of world peace in various contexts, including purely religious articles¹⁰⁵. Below, I will present the mechanism through which the Communist party finds its place in the nationalist discourse as presented by the Church. This happens with the development of two dominant processes which can be traced in the newspaper – the enormous widening and “civilizing” of the nationalist talk which starts to dominate all topics, and the introduction of the Communist party as the “saver” of the

102 Raikin, “Nationalism and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church”; also Ghodsee, “Symphonic Secularism”.

103 See Elenkov. “The “Second Golden Age”.

104 Raikin, *Nationalism and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church*, 370.

105 *Church Newspaper [Tsurkoven Vestnik]*. 1970. 71/6, 4.

long-standing holder of the nation.

In the following analysis, rarely a particular agent of the action is recognized. While the church newspaper represents the “official” positions of the church institution and can hence be understood from the perspective of its own actions, I believe the relationship between church and state constituted of various smaller, internal conflicts which helped the development of the discourse without the possibility to understand “who's talking”. Sometimes, it is probably more appropriate to analyze the paper as the perspective of “the party”, and very rarely, from the perspective of “the believers”. However, only a much deeper historical investigation of the context can give fairly the information needed in order to follow the agency in the discourse. I recognize this significant weakness of this analysis and I accept it as its limitation.

3.1. Early period (1970-1973)

In the beginning of the 1970's, the Orthodox church has the self-confidence of the dominant actor who holds the nation. In years of heavy repression, the newspaper – as the official media of the institution - is one of the possible channels through which this role can be constantly emphasized in order to give public legitimacy to the Church. The newspaper has a circulation of five thousand copies (weekly), being read mostly by the clergy and by party officials (and, not to forget, the secret police), but also by a limited number of “regular” readers. In this context, when the Church had no other official channels through which to promote itself, the newspaper acted as a real tribune.¹⁰⁶ Hence, understanding the publications as “manipulated”, “censored”, or just written especially in order to fit the official discourse of the party is completely legitimate, but not sufficient.

¹⁰⁶ A claim that the Church newspaper has been any kind of free media in these years would

The topics which the Church newspaper discusses remain generally the same, but within the course of the 1970's they are fulfilled with different content. The paper publishes articles about various customs and holidays, history, theology; articles commemorating historical events and particular figures – saints, national heroes, and other public figures. Attention is also paid to social values, such as love, the family, and labor; the political push toward a more “scientific” view of the world results in regular reports of the role of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in society.

The general change in the topics is strongly toward subjects which would more successfully incorporate the nationalist ideology. The content of the newspaper is generally divided into thematic fields which suffer significant changes in the 1970's. In 1970, a significant section of the newspaper is devoted to the “Arts” theme – 132 publications were issued in this sector. These are mainly religious songs, poems, short stories, and parables. The topic “Introductory articles with theological, church-social, and church-historical character” has 79 publications, structured in a more academic style. The third section, “Ambon” (religious discussions on values and holidays), has 50 publications, and the “Official” sector has only 11. Six years later, the situation is rather different. The “Official sector consists of 28 publications, while the “Church Ambon” section is limited to 22 articles. The biggest change is in “Arts” - 32 publications. The section “Introductory articles” is renamed to “Church-historical, social-political articles, statements, speeches, reports, greetings, jubilees, honorary persons, memories, celebrations, and others” (no theological) and has 102 publications. Two news sections appear - “Along our heroic past” (including both civic historical heroes and saints) and “In protection of Peace”, respectively with 28 and 29 publications. The nationalist talk received not only more attention in the traditional sections, but also a whole new field to be developed on.

In the early years of the period, the church constantly represents itself as the main agent of the nation-building process in the end of the 19th century. This role is expressed with pathos and pride. The very process is always called “fight for church-national liberation”, thereby explicitly emphasizing the connection between the two (church and nation), even when the fight has already “ended”. The communist period is usually mentioned as a short, insignificant reference with the present times, in contrast with the religious institution. An illustrative example is an article dedicated to the centennial celebration of the Exarchate from 1970. In it, the Party is never mentioned, although the Patriarchate is seen as a logical continuation of the institutional tradition of the Church, whose role was one of¹⁰⁷ “a real national – surely not state! - church [which] became ethnically, territorially and spiritually a unifier, keeper, and leader of the Bulgarian people...”¹⁰⁸. Other articles in the same tone relate the church to various national heroes and public figures from Revival times. According to another article, the Church was the “spiritual breeder” of Vassil Levski, a mythologized symbol of these times who spent several years of his youth in a monastery.¹⁰⁹ The language of the articles, as expected, often refers to the Bulgarian nation as “democratic” and they never forget to mention that the national heroes were a “product of their times” (in accordance with the Marxist ideology). At the same time, the different periods in the history of Bulgarian Orthodoxy are always referred to as to the different periods of a long continuum to which the Bulgarian Patriarchate is a natural ending. This narrative, however, never includes explicitly the role of the party – the Patriarchate fits the continuum because it was “pleasing to God

107 *Church Newspaper [Tsurkoven Vestnik]*. 1970. 71/6, 3.

108 The translation of all citations is mine, B.V.

109 *Church Newspaper [Tsurkoven Vestnik]*. 1970. 71/5, 2.; On the “mythologization” of national heroes, see Daskalov, Roumen. “The Revival as a National Myth” in Baleva and Brunnbauer, *Batak - Ein Bulgarischer Erinnerungsort: Ausstellung*; On the mythologization of Levski, see the brilliant book of Maria Todorova - Todorova, Maria. 2009. *Bones of Contention. The Living Archive of Vasil Levski and the Making of Bulgaria's National Hero*. Budapest; New York: Central European University Press.

(....) to restore the deprived patriarchal dignity of our Holy Own Church and the scepter of Patriarch Evtimii¹¹⁰ to be entrusted in the deserving hands of His Holiness Patriarch Kiril”¹¹¹.

At the same time, the other most often expressed role of the Church is the one of a cultural institution – again, often with association to the Revival times, when the main activities of the clergy included the educational and cultural “awakening” of the new-born nation. Justifying the already mentioned continuum, the history of the church, according to academic articles published in the early 1970's, always refers to the saints Cyril and Methodius, Kliment of Ohrid, Paisii and Sofronii, and Ivan of Rila – emblematic figures in the Bulgarian historical narrative. An article from 1970 presents the creation of the Cyrillic alphabet as the “first in time in Europe real “renaissance” act in its deepest and broadest sense”¹¹².

This “high” nationalist rhetoric goes hand in hand with various articles discussing Christian celebrations of saints, traditions, and popular Christian holidays. The “Ambon” section constitutes of historical and teleological articles giving overview of religious feasts celebrated by the Bulgarians. The large sector of the newspaper responsible for “art” publications presents art exhibitions, , descriptions of medieval art, poems, and short stories, often on religious thematic, praising these celebrations both in their religiousness and in their “everyday” understanding of Christian values.¹¹³ These “more religious” sections, together

110Evtimii was the last Patriarch of the second Bulgarian kingdom, another mythologized figure in Bulgarian history, famous for his defense of one of the last fortresses (1393) before the Ottomans took over the kingdom in 1396.

111Church Newspaper [Tsurkoven Vestnik]. 1970. 71/20, 4.

112Church Newspaper [Tsurkoven Vestnik]. 1970. 71/10, 5.

113“To God”, “To our Most Holy Lady”, “To the Monastery” - short poems from Church Newspaper [Tsurkoven Vestnik]. 1972. 73/20-21, 32.

with the “cultural” orientation of a lot of the publications, represents a second discursive level which turns to the “everyday” Christian, introducing the values of Orthodoxy through the practices of collective celebration. As an illustration, Momchil Metodiev¹¹⁴ quotes notes of the Committee for Religious Affairs (the party organization responsible for the problems of religion and for the relations with the church) which express dissatisfaction with the fact that Easter and Palm Sunday have become the most interesting massive event for the youth. Another example is the difficulty that the Church experienced when it changed its calendar in 1968, accepting the Revised Julian calendar. The state continued the celebration of three holidays due to their “civil significance”¹¹⁵.

Co-existing in this way, the two discursive levels form the basis of an everyday religious collectivity, popularly perceived as having deep roots in history. The church appears as the dominant actor in two parallel worlds – one of high, ancient historical tradition of a nation which had its roots in Slavic and Asian tribes, and one of Orthodox Christians held together by the same church in their everyday practices – celebrating “Christian” traditions and holidays. As Herzfeld¹¹⁶ shows, such a two-fold understanding, in which the high categories of the “national” coexist with low categories of values described as “typical” for a particular social group, not only does not create confusion and contradiction, but helps “absorbing” the high ideology of the national and thereby legitimizes the authority which represents this ideology. However, the image of contemporary Bulgarian secularism, as described by Kristen Ghodsee, lies on an even more “everyday” relationship between the “people” and the church” in which Christian traditions are perceived entirely as manifestations of collectivity rather than religious affiliations. While this thesis cannot illustrate particularly the understandings of religiousness of Bulgarians in the 1970's, it can

114 Metodiev, *Between faith and compromise*, 55.

115 *Church Newspaper [Tsurkoven Vestnik]*. 1977. 78/2, 2.

116 Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy*.

show and contextualize the significant change in the church official talk about this connection of religion and nation through the changed relations between the religious institution and the state. The policies introduced by the party in this period managed to strengthen significantly the role of the state in these understandings.

3.2. Late period (1975 - 1979)

The “unquestionable” authority of the church as a nation-builder and cultural provider was well understood by the party, which, based on the survey from 1968, realized that the problem with “religious affiliations” was to a high extent a problem of the respect which society paid to the Church and its earlier role in the communal life. While the historicized image of the church can hardly be substituted in the consciousness of the people, it can be used as an instrument to legitimize the official ideology. The communist party took steps in order to attack both discursive levels and find its place in the “mythicized” national-historical discourse. While other similar examples from communist time, such as the case of Poland, are considered unsuccessful¹¹⁷, Bulgaria was not such a case. Although, in the description of contemporary Bulgarian understanding of secularism, as shown by Ghodsee, the Communist party is not a constantly present image, the relationship between the church and the state highly reflects the close connection of Orthodox religion and national identity.

As a result from the survey, a decision was taken for active policies on the replacement of religious holidays and ceremonies with their civil substitutes, such as marriages, funerals, and even baptizing (giving a name of the child). Projects are developed “for the very

¹¹⁷ Buzalka, Juraj. 2007. *Nation and Religion: the Politics of Commemorations in South-east Poland*. Lit. ; Hann, C. 1994. “After Communism: Reflections on East European Anthropology and the “Transition”. *Social Anthropology* 2 (3), 229-249.

dramatical part (emphasis mine – B.V.) of the customs and celebrations...) ¹¹⁸. The party introduced full instructions for the civil rituals and differentiated special areas in which these rituals should take place. At the same time, the believers had to be drawn into “cultural, touristic, physical, and other positive enterprises which should naturally divert them from the influence of the religious anachronisms” ¹¹⁹. Concerning the interest toward Easter, a campaign starts with the purpose to encourage the substitution of red Easter eggs with more colorful or eggs with sticking pictures which would deprive the tradition from its symbolic meaning. ¹²⁰

In the other field in which the Church was seen as having strong influence – culture – the organization of the massive campaign dedicated to the celebration of “1300 years of Bulgaria” started at the same time (1972). As Elenkov explains, the campaign was seen by the party as a strong legitimizing tool, similar to campaigns such as Iran and Poland. In the case of the first, when 2500 years of the founding of the Iranian campaign were celebrated, rulers' intention was to build an image of the monarchy as the institution which helped preserving the Iranian state in the millenia. Poland's 1000th celebration served to “activate the constructive forces of the nation in order to achieve the goals from the program of the Polish United Workers' Party” ¹²¹. The Bulgarian campaign included both massive celebrations and manifestations and various cultural events all around Bulgaria; building dozens of new monuments dedicated to historic heroes; and other similar events.

In 2001, Patriarch Kiril deceased, and a new patriarch was chosen. The position was taken by Maxim Metropolitan Maxim who was proposed with a decision of Politburo. ¹²² This

¹¹⁸ Metodiev, *Between faith and compromise*, 34.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 35.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 55; *Church Newspaper [Tsurkoven Vestnik]*. 1973. 74/6, 13.

¹²¹ Elenkov, “The “Second Golden Age”, 37.

¹²² Kalkandjieva, *Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the People's Democracy*; Riis, *Religion, Politics, and Historiography in Bulgaria*; Pundeff, “Bulgarian Nationalism”.

change resulted in much closer relationship between the church and the party.

In this context, the content of the Church newspaper started changing significantly. The “art” section and the “Ambon” section are considerably smaller, and the historical-political section becomes much bigger. At the same time, the discourse of “celebration” and “commemoration” starts dominating the newspaper. While in the beginning of the decade national heroes and saints were the main figures to be “celebrated” with articles, and only major political events had their place in the paper, in the later years (from 1975 on) one can see the names of Michelangelo and Mrkvička¹²³; jubilees of international organizations; and other individuals and events. The celebration becomes a norm, and is moved away from its religious context into a new, more “civil” one. The “cultural” sphere should obviously be dominated by the official party discourse – especially in accordance with the preparations for the 1300th anniversary of Bulgaria. Religion is capsulized in the small section of the “Ambon”, isolated both from the “high” and “low” symbols of national identity. The section, which previously paid significant attention to the descriptions and historical articles dedicated to religious holidays, is limited to the most popular civil holidays, such as Christmas Eve and New Year's Day (St. Basil of Caesarea)¹²⁴.

The nationalist discourse increases significantly, as a new section is introduced - “Along our heroic past”. In 1976, the paper celebrates 100 years from the April Uprising, and in 1978 – the creation of the new state. In accordance not only with these celebrations, but with the general trend of increasing nationalist discourse, the articles which present historical figures and saints with significance for the Bulgarian history are more and longer. However, the most significant change is the appearance of the image of the party-state as a legitimate

123 *Church Newspaper [Tsurkoven Vestnik]*. 1975. 76/4, 9.; *Church Newspaper [Tsurkoven Vestnik]*. 1976. 77/4, 8

124 *Church Newspaper [Tsurkoven Vestnik]*. 1977. 78/32, 6.; *Church Newspaper [Tsurkoven Vestnik]*. 1975. 76/2, 1.

continuation of the national history. While in 1970-1971 the nationalist rhetoric is an instrument for legitimization of the church in the glorious history of the nation-building, the later articles represent two strategies which identify the significance of the communist ideology and the party-state for the evolution of the national narrative. The first strategy is to identify the role of the church as one of an institution implementing the communist ideology as the most appropriate for its values:

In the time of Ottoman Yoke, the Bulgarian spiritual-educational deed was conducted in a reviving spirit (...) From the Liberation of Bulgaria to the Socialist Revolution this deed was in the spirit of the existing struggle for social justice, for preserving the Orthodoxy against the attacks from various propaganda (...) In the last thirty years, the spiritual-educational deed here is being conducted in accordance with the new goal of the church schools: to prepare staff who are able to serve competently, truly, and fairly both to the people's church and to the people's state (...) to the whole socialist Bulgarian people.¹²⁵

The second strategy is to emphasize the role of the communist party in the history of the “ever-surviving” national church. Accentuating the significance of the newly created patriarchate, the party appears as the “savior” of the continuity of the church institution which was undeservingly deprived from its statute for five centuries. At the same time, in this way the role of the church-liberation struggle is belittled:

On May 10, 1953, in Sofia, the third church-people assembly, with the precious aid of the people's power¹²⁶, restored the ancient Bulgarian Patriarchate and chose for its leader the Elder Patriarch Kiril.”¹²⁷

3.3. Preliminary Conclusion

¹²⁵ *Church Newspaper [Tsurkoven Vestnik]*. 1974. 75/30, 8.

¹²⁶ Untranslatable: the party-state was often referred to as the people's power. In Bulgarian, one word, “власт” (“vlast”) is used both for “power” and “authorities”.

¹²⁷ *Church Newspaper [Tsurkoven Vestnik]*. 1976. 77/16, 2.

Through the various policies introduced during the decade, the party-state managed to implement itself in the continuity of the historical national discourse and in this way to create the strong, mythologized perception of the relationship between the church and the “people's power”. It attacked both discursive levels at which the church was the dominant agent seen as a unifier of the national community.

At the “higher” discursive level, where the nation is related to long historical tradition of culture, art and education, and glorious victories and struggles against the “enslavers”, the party appeared as the “restorer” of the Bulgarian Patriarchate, thereby positioning itself in the time line of the historical development of the church institution. At the same time, the very church institution incorporated the ideology of the party and represented its values as a “new way” to follow. The saints were slowly substituted by the national heroes, which gives these heroes additional “sacredness” to the one they already possessed.

At the “lower” discursive level, where the connection between the church and the nation is built through cultural symbols, such as traditions, rituals, and collective celebrations, the party applied strategies of “de-sacralization” and “civilization” of the everyday practices. In this way, the religious was pushed out to a closed, limited field in the official talk of the church, which was also “civilized”.

In Pierre Nora's perspective¹²⁸, the historical memory – the memory of the professional historians - is opposed to the collective memory of the group, which is able to filter, capitalize, and rearrange events in order to constitute a general picture. What the two discursive levels illustrate, however, should be understood as a symbolic violence of the historical memory over the collective one – the political struggles around identity construction indeed reflect upon the individual levels of the perception of this identity. The official discourse of the institutions focuses on the mechanisms of influencing collective

128 Nora, *Mémoire collective*.

memory by mythologizing the symbols of identity at the level of everyday life. The historians, intelligentsia, and the church have the legitimate power to officialize this mythologization. This is why the church appears to be particularly appropriate for the overall inclusion of the party in the nationalist discourse.

Nowadays, the Bulgarian perception of religion as a mechanism of self-identification of the nation does not (always) include the communist party in the continuity of the historical narrative. However, it is important to understand the role of the cultural-historical communist narrative for the development of the contemporary nationalist perspective. The specific symbiosis between the church and the state, created along the lines of communist cultural nationalism, is the very basis of this perspective. The party did not substitute the church as the legitimate holder of the nation; it just temporarily found its place next to it. However, through its cultural policies, it de-sacralized the symbols of its legitimacy, thereby de-sacralizing the very image of the church and limiting it to the field of national identity.

Concluding Remarks

The current thesis illustrated how the Communist party tried to fit in the overall nationalist discourse in Bulgaria, altogether dominated by the image of Orthodox Christianity. In order to do this, the party introduced various cultural and communal policies which aimed at substituting the rituals of religious communal life. As a result, a symbiosis was built between the state and the Church, unified by the strength of the nationalist talk, which, although weakening the religious arguments of the Church, fixed its role in a new, more “civic” way.

The thematic analysis of the Church newspaper showed two discursive levels on which the nationalist debate is developed. The first level is the “high” nationalist talk, in which the glorious past is unquestionably related to the glorious present, thereby creating the untouchable, mythologized historical continuum in which nation; Church and statehood are always one whole. In the beginning of the 1970's, this image was a monopoly of the church institution, which introduced it by emphasizing its role for the historical preservation of the Bulgarian people. The national heroes appeared together with the saints, justifying the role of the Church as a cultural leader of the Bulgarian Orthodox community.

In the latter period, the image of the party appeared as the “savior” of the Church, thereby trying to occupy the already discussed mythologized narrative. Instead, it founds its “natural” place in this debate, contributing for the institutional symbiosis between Church and state. In the context of a massive cultural campaign, the discourse of the newspaper became significantly more nationalistic. As the Communist parties all around Eastern Europe realized, the nationalist ideology can include various patterns, and can serve altogether as a strong legitimizing tool of various positions and policies. In this sense, it is reasonable to

assume that the strengthening the nationalist discourse has not led to the marginalization of the Church, but rather to its more “civic” role in society.

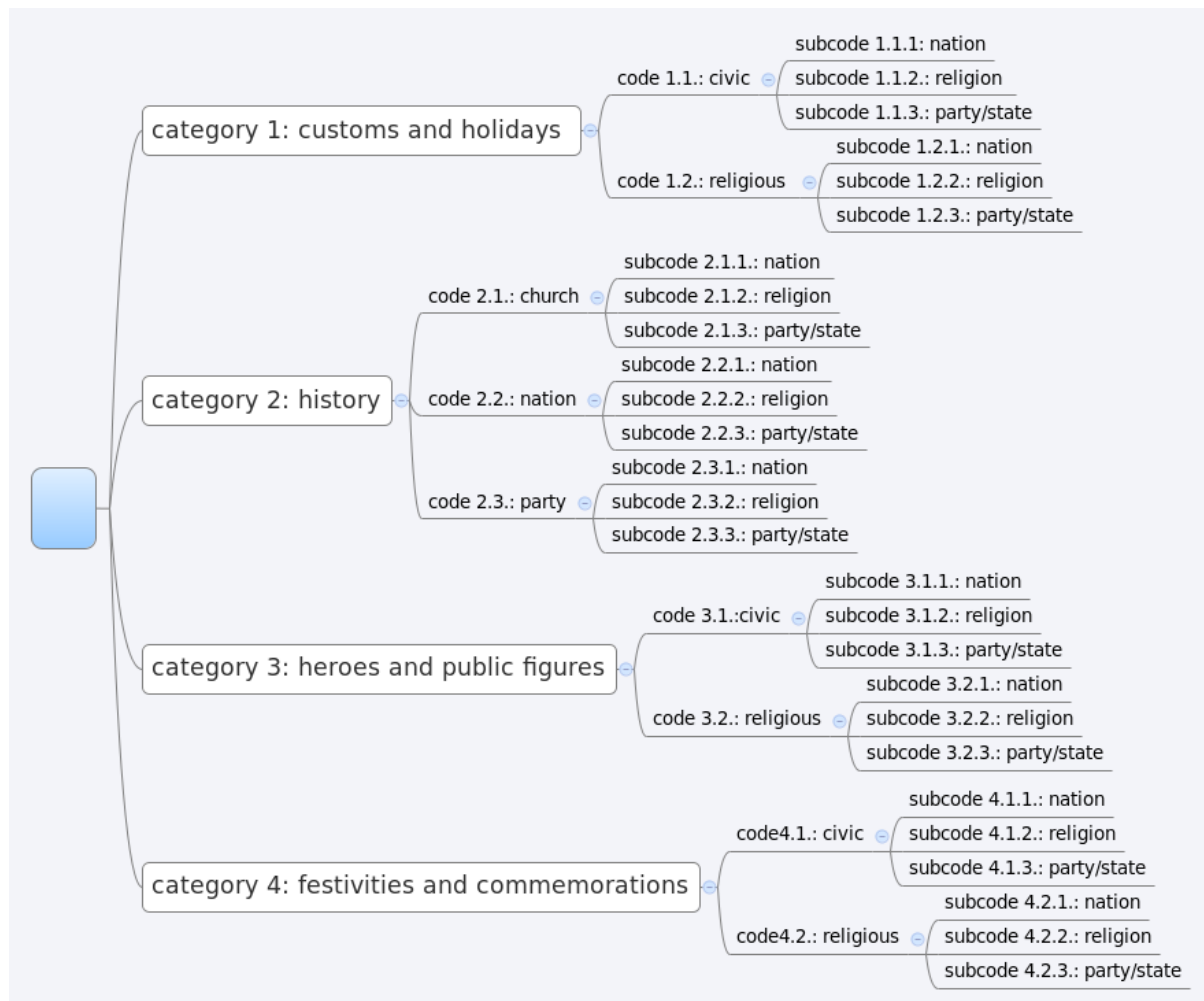
This moves us to the second, “low” level, which includes various mechanisms of holding together the communal life of the nation – celebrations, manifestations, and holidays. Here, the religious rituals were substituted by civil ones – both in real life and at the discursive level. This way, the Church is withdrawn from its religious role in communal celebrations. However, as the most popular holidays continue to be religious, the Church is nothing but placed in a new ideological framework in which it continues to represent the backbone of national identity, but appears already in a state-dominated framework in which it can strengthen its legitimacy not by being opposition to the communist regime, but by insisting on its place in the national discourse which already includes the party-state.

In this context, it is easier to understand the claims of the Bulgarian high clergy that the state tried to “discredit” them by opening the secret files of its agents. It is this specific symbiosis of Church and state in which the two coexist in the common framework of the nation, in which the “opening of the files” is a violation of the contract which excludes the one side from the so achieved “symphonic secularism”.

An important continuation of the present research would be an attempt to understand the potential of symphonic secularism to exclude “non-belonging” groups. Although Ghodsee presupposes that this concept can contribute to religious pluralism at the local level¹²⁹, I believe it is more reasonable to see it as a mechanism of exclusion through differentiation between “our” and “their” tradition. Seeing them as enemies of the thus achieved consensus upon the national narrative can be a major problem in the context of rising national populism, both in Bulgaria and in Europe.

129 Ghodsee, “Symphonic Secularism”, 240-241.

Appendix A. Coding Scheme



CEU eTD Collection



Работният комитет е съгласен с това, че започналите преговори между Съветския съюз и Китай могат да доведат до разрешение на възникналите проблеми между двете социалистически държави.

Голямо внимание бе отделено на докладите за миротворческите инициативи на другите секуларизирани и религиозни институции: както на световната среща за мир в Берлин, към апела на която Работният комитет се присъедини, така и на конференцията за мир на представителите на всички религии в СССР. Работният комитет приветствува и одобрява резултатите на тези конференции.

На вътрешната проблематика на движението и за подобряване работата на ХМК бяха посветени обстоян

обсъждания, а във връзка с дейността на Учебния отдел бяха запланирани комисии и консултации на различни равнища с многобройни партньори и в много части на света.

Работният комитет бе приветстван от епископ Шьонхер, който извърши и богослужението при откриване на заседанието.

Държавният секретар по църковните въпроси в ГДР Зайгевасер даде прием на Работния комитет, където взеха участие епископ д-р Митценхайм, представители на други държавни учреждения, обществени организации и църкви в ГДР.

Превод от немски: Антон ХУБАНЧЕВ

Сто години Българска академия на науките

Пробудено и културно-творчески и освободително-борчески раздвижено от основоположниците на нашето възраждане преп. Паисий Хилендарски и сетне св. Софроний Врачански българското тлеещо църковно и национално-патриотично съзнание още при първото поколение възрожденци като Неофит Ризов, Неофит Попов и др. потърсило разнообразие. От името на българския народ Неофит Ризов, както е известно, изложил до турско-българското духовенство и служене на славянски език в българските църкви, основаване на български училища с български учители, издаване на български вестници и списания, създаване на официално пряко представителство на българите пред султана (без вмешателство на гърците) и пр. Но търсенето да се узаконят във всебългарски мащаб тези форми на народното свестяване, изявяване и организиране дошло на основата на спонтанно възникнала сред народа по места потреба, подхранвана и от опита на други борещи се за национална култура и независимост славянски и не славянски народи като гърците, хърватите, чехите, поляците и пр.

Една от формите на народно пробуждане и тласване напред националните освободителни борби било създаването на различни места из българските земи на народни читалища като огнища на многостранна народна просвета. Създава се в Цариград и сп. „Читалище“, не още като формален централен печатен орган на българските читалища, но като паод на всенародната книголюбност и като израз на порасналото съзнание на просветително всеединство на всички българи.

Но ако училищата и читалищата са средище за популяризиране на готови всечовешки придобити знания в областта на науките, изкуствата, морала и пр., места за правене знанията достойни на целия български народ, порасналото чрез придобитите знания народно самосъзнание и самочувствие още в първата половина на XIX в. заговарва ту тук ту там за собствени български научно-изследователски институции, научно-изследователски институции, научно-изследователски институции.

За да отбележи всенародна наука, изкуство, морал и началото на октомври 1869 г. в румънския град Браила се създава първото Българско книжовно дружество, преименувано и превърнато по-късно в Българска академия на науките. Това дружество си поставя, разбира се, и училищни и читалищни задачи, т. е. задачи за разпространяване сред народа по различни начини народополезни знания, но не спира тук, а по устава си предвижда да развива същинска научно-изследователска дейност, „тъй като без наука народите не могат направят нито една крачка напред в развитието и усъвършенстването си“.

Най-съществени области, в които се предвиждало да се прояви дейността, били: обработването, изследването и усъвършенстването на българския език; изучаването на българската история и словесност; разпространяването на всеобщо полезни знания за всеобщия духовен и материален напредък на народа; всестранно възпитание („благонравие, отхрана“) в духа и традициите на народа, но с привнесение високи примери от „славни и прочути лица особено из просветения мир“ и при изрично подчертани „грижи за образованието на народното българско духовенство, като се посочват за служители на това духовенство за нашата народност и нашата черква“ (Михаил Арнаудов).

Тия последни особени грижи не ще ни изненадат, ако имаме предвид, че избраният за председател на Дружеството Марин Дринов тъкмо в годината на основаването му излязъл с две много високо оценени в учения свят тогава изследвания — едно от 100 страници върху произхода на българския народ, и друго, двойно по-голямо — „Исторически преглед на Българската църква от самото ѝ начало до днес“, в които задълбочено са изтъкнати патриотичната роля на Българската православна църква и църковното високо съзнание на българския народ, който е имал религията като основна сила и опора на своя живот. Другият пък действителен член на Дружеството, Васил Друмев, бъдещият Бранишки епископ и Търновски митрополит Климент, като дава отзив за Пространния християнски катехизис, дава израз на своето дълбоко убеждение, че „нравствеността е яка основа на един най-добродетелен живот не само на отделните лица, ами и на целите общини, на целите народи“. Всеки, който наистина мисли доброто на себе си, на близките си, на народа си, е длъжен според Друмев да се погрижи, щото тази истина да се осъзнае от всички, да прокликне в целия живот, да стане съдържание на тоя живот.

Основните религиозно-нравствени и научни убеждения, залегнали в дейността на Българското книжовно дружество, ще ни станат още по-ясни, ако не забравяме, че основаването на Дружеството станало не случайно в годината, когато от целия славянски свят се чествувала тържествено 1000-годишнината от смъртта на основоположника на славянската писменост, литература и култура — св. Кирил Солунски и станало под неговата егидна на велик всеславянски християнски апостол. Основало се Дружеството, като далечен духовен приемник и продължител на делото на Преславската, Охридската и Търновската български, славянски, християнски школи. Основа-

4.1.3.ban i curkvata, oshte ot suzdavaneto mu.

religiozno-nravstveni i nauchi unejdeniq v osnovata na ban

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