

**THE FESTIVE DAYS OF THE BULGARIAN
COMMUNITY IN CHICAGO – MODELS OF CULTURAL
HERITAGE IN MIGRATION**

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Abstract: The current paper presents the main representations and forms of the Bulgarian cultural heritage that is preserved, distributed and reproduced by various traditional and newly-found Bulgarian migrant institutions and organisations in Chicago. The emphasis is on holidays and festivals that are organised by Bulgarian schools, churches, folk groups, and cultural associations in Chicago, which put in the focus of their work the Bulgarian language, traditions and history. All these can be regarded as means of spending free time and of providing entertainment on festive days, but can also be seen as indicative of maintaining links with the culture of origin and of reasserting cultural and historical identity. Based on authors' fieldwork observations of the Bulgarian institutions in Chicago in 2015 and on their continuous explorations among immigrant communities after 1989, the paper elicits some of the models through which Bulgarian cultural heritage shapes up as a consolidating factor for Bulgarians abroad.

Key words: migration, migrant community, cultural heritage, festive days

The last two decades have witnessed a wave of studies on human mobility and migration in a plentitude of research angles, political circumstances, and cultural contexts [Brettell, 2003; Curran, Saguy, 2001; Glick-Schiller et al., 1992; Held et al., 1999; Skeldon, 1997; Smith, Favell, 2006; Castles et al., 2014]. One of the major factors that influenced the migration processes since the end of the twentieth century has been the fall of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the masses of people that moved to West European countries or the United States and Canada, attracted by the opportunities to pursue new life patterns in developed countries and to escape from the economic situation in the post-communist states during the 1990s. These processes led to the appearance of new immigrant communities in many states of Western Europe and North America, which on their turn accumulated subsequent waves of migrants that used the established immigrant networks to find accommodation and jobs and to settle permanently in some of these states. The destinations of this trans-

border migration differed for the countries of Eastern Europe. For Bulgaria, it covered the majority of the West European states (with particular emphasis on Mediterranean countries, such as Spain, Italy and Greece), as well as the United States, where large masses of Bulgarians had already moved during the 1990s and continued to expand in the years afterwards. Among the cities with the largest and most compact Bulgarian immigrant community, Chicago is the one that spots out both in the US and among other countries too, as it hosts around 150-200 000¹ people of Bulgarian origin. This makes it the city with the largest concentration of Bulgarian immigrants worldwide and has led to its popular terming as a “Bulgarian city.”

The formation of such compact immigrant communities within a relatively short period of time (roughly within twenty years) poses a lot of challenges – both to the migrants and their adaptation, and to the researchers in their attempts to understand and interpret the social, economic and cultural processes in the conditions of immigration. Among the main issues that one can list in this respect are: the choice of migration destinations and the procedures of settling in a particular country and city; the cultural adjustment in the new environment and the role of social networks of co-nationals in the process of immigrants’ adaptation; the maintenance of contacts with relatives and friends in the country of origin; the continuation and reproduction of practices from the home country and their use as resources of identity in the new cultural contexts. Many of these issues have been approached in studies on Bulgarian immigrant communities abroad, which have emphasised the interrelationship between migration, identity, and construction of heritage in foreign countries [**Elchinova, 2010; Ganeva-Raycheva, 2004; Rashkova, Penchev, 2005**], the role that networks of solidarity have in cultural adaptation [**Bochkov, 2004; Ganeva-Raycheva et al., 2012; Penchev, 2001**], the different forms and institutions of maintaining cultural identity abroad [**Mihaylova 2005; Stoyanova-Boneva, 1991; Yankova, 2014**], and the input of different immigrant generations in establishing cultural adjustment and in sustaining links with the home country [**Karamihova, 2004; Maeva, Zahova, 2013; Mihaylova, 1997**]. In the recent years, special attention has been paid also to how Facebook and social networks help sustain contacts among immigrants abroad, and to how community events and festivities are reflected in social media, reaching thus a wider audience both in the places of settlement and in the home country [**Gergova, 2014; Matanova, Borisova, 2014; Slavkova, 2014**].

What appears a recurrent theme in most of these studies is the role of customs and festivities as a factor contributing to community integration and facilitating the maintenance of immigrants’ historical and cultural identity. As is known, calendar and family rituals, and holidays in general have a strong integrative function in every society; they organise the calendar and life cycles

¹ See **Ivanova, 2016: 3**. In the volume “Chicago – the Bulgarian City,” published in 2014, it is specified that the Bulgarian community in the city exceeds 100 000 people [**Chicago, 2014: 73**]. Between 2014 and 2016 the number of Bulgarian immigrants certainly increased. All the mentioned data are based on unofficial information.

and provide rhythms involving repetitions across time, which have a stabilising effect on individuals and groups [**Genep, 2011 (1960); Turner, 1967; Turner 1999**]. More importantly, holidays and festive occasions provide the possibility to exit the framework of the everyday life, to enter into the realm of celebration, gathering together with friends, relatives and like-minded people, joining a group whose major impetus in the ritual moment is exactly the common experience of the celebration and the sense of belonging to a community with shared identity. Rituals and festive days contribute to the formation of communities and to their resilience across time²; they are the ones, which – no matter how prone to modifications and cultural influences are – remain among the most stable carriers of cultural identity of each group in general. What is particularly interesting is that rituals and festive days are transferred to various occasions of migrations [**Parusheva, Gergova 2014**]; they are carried by individuals and groups in contexts of human mobility and are forms of cultural heritage that are carefully safeguarded, sustained and transmitted across generations in new environments. Moreover, as eloquent examples of cultural practices that are passed on transnationally, they extend links with the communities back into the home country and testify to the sharing of traditions beyond the limitations of borders and geographical distances.

With its concentration of Bulgarian immigrants, the city of Chicago provides a good opportunity to explore these functions of festive days and customs, to reflect the significance and meaning they have for the immigrant community, and to highlight the transfer of cultural heritage abroad and its maintenance in the contexts of immigration. The goal of the current article is to present some of the festive days of the Bulgarian community in Chicago with a view of their function of revealing models of reasserting cultural heritage in a foreign country. The text will shed light on the main representations and forms of Bulgarian cultural heritage that are preserved, distributed and reproduced on festive occasions by various traditional and newly found immigrant institutions and organisations of Bulgarians in Chicago. The focus is on different calendar, traditional and official holidays and festivals organised by Bulgarian schools, folk groups, and cultural associations in this city, which have put in the centre of their work the Bulgarian language, traditions and history. All these can be regarded as means of spending free time and of providing entertainment on festive days, but can also be seen as indicative of maintaining links with the home country and of reasserting cultural and historical identity. Based on authors' fieldwork observations of the Bulgarian institutions in Chicago³ and on continuous explorations among immigrant communities after 1989, the paper elicits the models through which Bulgarian cultural heritage shapes up as a consolidating factor for Bulgarians abroad.

² One can note here Victor Turner's notion of "communitas" as formed and dependent precisely on the integrative functions of ritual actions [**Turner, 1999**].

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The first Bulgarian immigrants settled in Chicago in the end of the nineteenth century and already in the first decades after that various activities for consolidating migrants on the continent were organised [**Chicago, 2014**: 22-37]. Associations were founded (“Levski” association), newspapers were issued (“Borba – Struggle”, “Rabotnicheska zashtita – Workers’ Defense”, “Balgaran”, etc.), collections of materials were published to present the Bulgarian immigrant culture in the New World (1918, 1921, 1923-24, 1933), and vinyl records with Bulgarian marches and folklore music were recorded in US. Although not numerous at the time, the Old Bulgarian immigrant community in Chicago during the first half of the twentieth century paid special attention to develop, maintain and popularise the Bulgarian cultural heritage in the receiving society through their organisations, festivities and occasions for entertainment. These efforts continued with the arrival also of the political immigration escaping from the communist rule in Bulgaria after 1944. In 1990s – the first decade after the collapse of the communist system – a very intensive Bulgarian emigration wave (mainly due to economic purposes) could be observed to USA and particularly to Chicago. The city has turned a regular destination for Bulgarians who chose to emigrate to the United States and who settled directly there (using the existing networks and the contacts with other Bulgarians living in the city), and for immigrants who have lived in other parts of the United States and resettled in Chicago, often in view of the large community of co-nationals.

From the perspective of festive days and community celebrations, the expanding presence of Bulgarian immigrants in Chicago presents a situation, in which the festive days can serve as a strong tool for asserting the spirit of community, for integrating the newly arrived immigrants, and for maintaining cultural traditions of the home country in the new social and cultural environment. As the researcher of these processes D. Ivanova has pointed out, in its attempt to get adapted and integrated in the receiving society, the Bulgarian immigrant community combined the native “festive cultural model, which was subject of modification and transformation due to the particular environment in the host society and [...] migration social network” [**Ivanova, 2015**: 340]. The need of community formations, through which to maintain Bulgarian national identity, cultural and historical heritage, has led to the establishment of various institutions, organisations, unions and associations. Despite their different profiles and functions, they are united in the impetus to preserve the cultural traditions of the home country and in the vision that these traditions are the cornerstones of the national identity, which should not be lost within the new living environment. This is actually one of the major characteristics of cultural heritage abroad – its perception as “national identity,” as long as it “exercises a more powerful and lasting impact on the other collective identities and that is why it dominates human loyalties” [**Smit, 2000**: 236].

In light of Benedict Anderson’s concept of nation [**Anderson, 2006**], the Bulgarian community in Chicago can be considered as an “imagined community” with its own social and cultural life, whilst “the numerous representatives of the community do not necessarily know each other, but have the sense of unity due to the common past, common homeland, the community “agents”, the common places, festivities, sites of memory and events” [**Ivanova, 2016**]. Notwith-

standing the concrete name of each form for community consolidation, each of them represented a network that united a certain segment of the Bulgarian emigrant community on the basis of interests, professional affiliation, educational background, etc. The interest in heritage is “determined by the awareness of the symbolical capital which [...] heritage contains in contemporary world of mobile cultures and blurred cultural boundaries” [Vukov, Gergova, 2014: 82]. Heritage plays the role of an identity anchor for individuals who have got displaced from their home country, have settled in a different cultural environment, have had their life-style patterns, social networks and mindsets transformed and adjusted to the new circumstances. In these contexts of de-territorialised identities and behaviours, the cultural knowledge of heritage that immigrants carry with themselves appears as the main stabilising factor, yet one which would add to the social and cultural integration with other co-nationals abroad and would help maintaining a sense of shared identity despite the geographical distance from the home country [Innocenti, 2014; Oostindie, 2008; Singleton et al., 2013].

For the Bulgarian community of Chicago and for its immigrant formations, the function of a representative for the preservation, construction and popularisation of cultural heritage is attributed mostly to the language, festive calendar, and traditional culture. All of them are considered as key elements in maintaining Bulgarian identity in the foreign environment, as areas where families and the different community institutions should join efforts of transmitting this cultural knowledge to the following generations. Yet, these three elements are closely intertwined and are targets of joint attention within the families, schools, churches and cultural associations of Bulgarians in Chicago.



Fig. 1. A Fruit tree decorated with *martenitsi* in the yard of “St. Sofia” Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Des Plaines, a suburb of Chicago. May, 2015. Photo: N. Vukov

As regards particularly the Bulgarian festive calendar in the city, it includes both traditional and official holidays, usually accommodating the latter to the local calendar of working and festive days. Among the traditional holidays, those that are most widely celebrated are the religious holidays of Christmas and Easter, but also New Year (1st January), St. George’s Day (6th May), and the traditional holiday of Baba Marta (1st March).⁴ The latter is particularly popular with various initiatives of pre-

⁴ 1st March, known as Baba Marta (Granny Martha), marks traditionally the beginning of spring and is celebrated in Bulgaria by exchanging red and white tassels and twisted threads as a symbol of health and happiness.

paring red and white tassels in families and schools, giving them to relatives and friends (as well as to non-Bulgarians) with wishes of health and happiness, organising school celebrations on this festive day, and decorating blossoming trees with such adornments (see **Fig. 1**). The celebrations of Christmas and Easter follow the Orthodox religious calendar (involving also the preparation of special ritual breads and meals), and take place in the Bulgarian churches in Chicago, in the Bulgarian Sunday schools, in specially arranged feast halls and restaurants [**Ivanova, 2016**]. A special Bulgarian Christmas tree is decorated in the Municipality and in the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago. New Year's Day is also used recently as giving an impetus for parties involving many members of the community. As D. Ivanova points out, occasions for gatherings and joint picnics after the church services are the religious holidays on St. Peter's Day (29th June), St. Elija's Day (20th July), and the Assumption of Virgin Mary (15th August).

As for the official holidays, those most widely celebrated are the national holiday of 3rd March, the Day of the Slavonic alphabet and Bulgarian education and culture on 24th May (see **Fig. 2**), and the Day of Unification on 6th September.⁵ Other holidays, such as the Day of the national hero Vassil Levski (19th Feb-



Fig. 2. “Little Bulgarian School” in Chicago celebrates the Day of Slavonic alphabet and the Bulgarian education and culture – 24th May 2015. Photo: N. Vukov

⁵ 3rd March is national holiday in Bulgaria and is the date when in 1878 San Stefano Peace Treaty was signed in Tsarigrad (Istanbul) to conclude the Russian-Ottoman War of 1877-1878. As a result of this war, which was won by Russia, and of the peace treaty, Bulgaria was liberated from Ottoman rule and resurrected on the European map. 24th May is celebrated as the Day of the Slavonic alphabet and the Bulgarian education and culture. It honours the creation of the Cyrillic script by the holy brothers Sts Cyril and Methodius and, except from Bulgaria, is

ruary), the Day of the fall of the communist regime (10th November), the Day of Children (1st June), etc. are also used as convenient occasions for gathering members of the Bulgarian community, performing a set of ritual actions, and celebrating together. Noted specifically in the Bulgarian schools in the city and bringing together children and parents for concerts and performances, all of these festive days are reflected also in the calendar of activities by the other Bulgarian institutions in Chicago (churches, unions, cultural associations) and involve a range of activities – lectures, seminars, literary readings, exhibitions, cocktails, etc. They are frequently used as convenient instances to organise donation campaigns, as well as for having picnics and social gatherings. Taking place usually in the territories of the main Bulgarian institutions in the city (the churches, the schools, the General Consulate, etc.), these events encompass other locations in Chicago, such as parks, gardens, restaurants and cafés, which are related to the Bulgarian presence in the city and are focal points of meetings and communication for Bulgarian immigrants. In the following pages, we will highlight the main festive occasions and holidays in this city from the viewpoint of the main Bulgarian institutions responsible for their organisation.

The establishment of a **Bulgarian church** in Chicago was challenged by the diverse profile of Christian denominations in US, by the difference in language and in rituals.⁶ One of the specificities of Bulgarian church abroad is that it is supposed to embody the notion of Bulgarian identity, of “Bulgarianness.” It is organised as an institution and as a concrete building with the presumption that it will surpass its characteristic activities – thus, aside from developing charity work, in its space is located a memorial complex dedicated to national heroes, its antechambers act as information centres for cultural activities and various practical issues. The Bulgarian church across the Atlantic is an emblematic example of such a multifunctional approach and of the coordination and collaboration of other emigrant institutions. In Chicago, there are two Orthodox churches – “St. Sofia” (under the auspices of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church) and “St. Ivan Rilski” (affiliated with the Bulgarian diocese of the Orthodox Church in US), as well as several Protestant Churches. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church community “St. Sofia” in Chicago was established in 1938. Passing through difficult periods, after purchasing land property and building the temple building in 1970s, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church “St. Sofia” was sanctified in 2014. Nowadays the church building accommodates within its space several institutions – a temple, a Bulgarian school “St. Sofia” (see **Fig. 3**), and a hall for official celebrations, which functions also as a restaurant. In the yard, there are located also memorial plaques to Sts. Cyril and Methodius and

celebrated also in many countries, where Cyrillic is used as official alphabet (Serbia, Russia, Ukraine, Mongolia, etc.). 6th September is the Day of Bulgaria’s Unification and marks the events in 1885 when two major parts of Bulgarian territory (the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Roumelia), which had been split apart by the Berlin Congress of 1878, were joined together into one state, after a popular riot, expressing overtly the Bulgarians’ will for political unification.

⁶ About the religious aspects of the settlement of Bulgarian immigrants in the United States see **Gardev, 1992; Ivanov, 2011.**



Fig. 3. The celebration of 24th May at “St. Sofia” Bulgarian Sunday School. May, 2015. Photo: M. Borisova



Fig. 4. The celebration of 24th May at “St. Ivan Rilski” Bulgarian Sunday School. Photo: M. Borisova

to the Apostle of Freedom Vasil Levski. A memorial plaque to the Bulgarian national poet and hero Hristo Botev is about to be placed there too. The construction of a Bulgarian Orthodox temple on its own land plot turned out to be very beneficial for integrating other Bulgarian institutions – a school, a concert hall and a restaurant, Bulgarian places of memory (the memorial plaques), etc. On its part, the school organised pre-school groups for little children. This multifunctional complex gathers different groups of the migrant community – pilgrims, students, children before their starting of school, parents, etc. The situation is similar with the church “St. Ivan Rilski the Wonder-Doer,” which is affiliated with the Bulgarian diocese of the Orthodox Church in USA. The church building accommodates a Sunday school, a restaurant, which functions also as a concert hall with a stage where school celebrations are carried out (see **Fig. 4**) and plays are performed by the amateur Bulgarian theatre. Within the premises of the building, rehearsals in different periods are held by the “Horo” (“Circle dance”) ensemble for folk dances, a folk group for players of traditional folk instruments, a group for modern dances, a ballet group, etc. The green plots of land adjacent to the church include a memorial plaque to Sts. Cyril and Methodius, to the church patron St. Ivan Rilski, and an alley of heroes (the latter is temporary and involves portraits painted on wood). On 24th May 2015, a bust-monument to Vasil Levski was unveiled next to the church (see **Fig. 5 and 6**). The holiday, the unveiling of the monument and the veneration of Levski



Fig. 5. The unveiling of the bust monument to Bulgarian national hero Vasil Levski in Chicago. 24th May 2015. Photo: M. Borisova



Fig. 6. The unveiling of the bust monument to Bulgarian national hero Vasil Levski in Chicago, 24th May 2015. Photo: M. Borisova

as a Bulgarian national hero gathered many Bulgarians. Some of the memorial initiatives in both Bulgarian churches are supported also by the patriotic motor club “Hayduti” (“Rebels”) in Chicago.

The formation of the Bulgarian churches and of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church community as institutions and as buildings located outside the Bulgarian state presupposes also the carrying out of various activities external to the religious practice. Despite their main religious functions, they are dedicated also to the maintenance of Bulgarian historical and cultural identity and are targeted at maintaining broad social functions, among which educational and cultural activities, donation campaigns, social gatherings, etc. The two Bulgarian Orthodox churches in Chicago have a rich festive calendar (including both religious and secular holidays), with priests and church boards of trustees, who are actively engaged in the social life of the migrant community. In immigration, the church is more open to lay people and uses its social resource in a better way. It is an integrative centre for the immigrant community, which despite the perseverance in religious practices of the different families and individuals, perceives churches as the main centres and promoters of Bulgarian cultural heritage abroad. Aside from the festive days that it hosts and organises, representatives of the church take part in different communal initiatives and festive events organised by other immigrant institutions. It is indicative also that many of the religious holidays and celebrations are accompanied by additional cultural events and activities that build upon the secular aspects and on the idea of shared national identity.

Another set of institutions that holds a central importance for the Bulgarian immigrant communities includes the **Bulgarian Sunday schools**. Their activities are related primarily to learning of Bulgarian language in written and spoken way, as well as of gaining basic competencies about Bulgarian history, literature and traditions. The Bulgarian Sunday schools first appeared as non-licensed ones (i.e. without offering a certificate for the training carried out in them), or as licensed by the Ministry of Education and Science in Bulgaria – organising education of Bulgarian language, literature, history and geography. The non-licensed schools are self-financed, whereas the licensed schools can apply and can receive subsidies by the Bulgarian state under the National program “Native Language and Culture Abroad” of the Ministry of Education and Science, or under Order № 334 of the Ministry Council. All Bulgarian Sunday schools in US are registered as organisations with non-for-profit purposes. The first such schools in Chicago were founded as parts of the churches – in “St. Ivan Rilski,” “St. Sofia,” and in “New Life” Evangelist church. Gradually, these initial schools created branches separate from the church institutions and many new Bulgarian schools were developed in different neighbourhoods of Chicago.

During the summer of 2015, when our team visited Chicago, the Bulgarian Sunday schools there were 11 in number. They popularise the cultural and historical heritage through education and extra-curricular forms, such as folk dance groups, singing groups, workshops for making *martenitsi*, *survachki* and *kukeri* masks.⁷ The schools celebrate official and traditional holidays – Christmas, 3rd March, 1st May, Easter, 24th May. The team had the possibility to be present at the celebration of 24th May – the Day of the Slavonic alphabet and the Bulgarian education and culture – in several schools: “St. Sofia” Little Bulgarian School, “St. Ivan Rilski,” “Rodna rech” (“Native Language”), “Rodolyubie” (“Patriotism”), at the Bulgarian educational centre “Znanie” (“Knowledge”), “John Atanasov” school [see **Fig. 7**], etc. Organised primarily by school administration, teachers and parents, these celebrations of 24th May in the Bulgarian Sunday schools are carried out in collaboration with the other immigrant institutions in the city and are a focal event of asserting the unity of the Bulgarian community and its fervour in maintaining Bulgarian cultural traditions. For Bulgarians, 24th May is considered as the most significant school holiday.⁸ It is particularly exciting to observe how in such a transnational and transcontinental setting, the efforts of children of Bulgarian origin to learn the Bulgarian language, history and culture are so clearly outlined. The celebrations of this day in the Bulgarian Sunday schools in Chicago included songs, recitals, theatre adaptations, processions, dances. For children, this was also the holiday that marks

⁷ *Martenitsi*, *martenichki* – red and white tassels and twisted threads prepared for the feast of Baba Marta (1st March); *survachki* – tree branches decorated with coloured wool, dried fruit and popcorn, and used for ritual patting at the back that takes place in the beginning of New Year and that is accompanied with wishes of health and prosperity; *kukeri* – people dressed up in ritual masks made of fur and wearing huge bells around their waists who play different dances and produce noise to expel the evil spirits of winter in the weeks before Easter Lent.

⁸ About the “mass” and “institutional” perception of the feast of Cyril and Methodius see **Borisova, 2010**, and **Anastasova et al., 2015**.



Fig. 7. Celebrating the Day of the holy brothers Sts. Cyril and Methodius at “John Atanasov” Bulgarian Sunday School. 24th May 2015. Photo: N. Vukov

the end of the school year and a day to receive their certificates for accomplishing a period of education. All the schools had special celebrations, which involved as guests parents, relatives, representatives of the Bulgarian institutions in Chicago, journalists from the Bulgarian media in the city, etc. Kindergartens at some of the respective schools also joined the festivities – as was the case with the Little Children’s Academy “Mecho Puh” (“Winnie the Pooh”) at the Little Bulgarian School. Particularly grand was the celebration organised by the biggest Bulgarian school in Chicago – “Little Bulgarian School” (with around 350 Bulgarian students [**Malko balgarsko uchilishte**]). After a ceremonial opening with a festive parade of the teachers with their classes, there was a big concert with performances of students from different grades and a big traditional Bulgarian dance in the hall, at the sounds of live music performed by a group of amateur instrumentalists. In the evening the research team paid a guest visit to the teachers’ party of the Little Bulgarian School, which was marked again by Bulgarian music and vivid folk dances.

Folklore dance groups in immigration are also an important centre for attracting the immigrant community. Enabling the connection with the Bulgarian identity through the musical and dance folklore, such institutions demonstrate a high level of creativity: they establish an international network of Bulgarian folklore festivals, organise joint events, competitions, and collective circle dances on festive days for the Bulgarian community and in conspicuous places in the respective cities of immigration. Often initiated by graduates of choreography and music schools in Bulgaria, these institutions are particularly active in the

Bulgarian migrant festive calendar and are very well received by the local audiences too. Their repertoires are different depending on the preferences of their organisers and managers, but they usually involve a wide range of traditional folk dances, some of which specially choreographed for performance on stage. The rehearsals of these groups take place on weekly basis and are considered as convenient occasions of meeting friends and co-nationals and of maintaining social contacts among families and individuals. The knowledge of traditional dances that comes out of these practices is impressive and often surpasses what ordinary Bulgarians have as skills in performing traditional dances. Both the rehearsals and the various performances of such groups combine the maintenance of folklore traditions with entertainment: they demonstrate the enthusiasm and elevated spirit in performing Bulgarian folk dances, getting in contact with a world of tradition which is not only distant in time, but also geographically remote. Through the dances, these groups throw a palpable link with the culture of the home country, attracting also the audiences present and involving them in the realm of what they all have as a shared cultural background.

In Chicago, the most prominent folklore groups are those of “Vereya” and “Horo.” The first by year of origin is the folk ensemble “Horo” (“Round Dance”), which was created in 2003 by Irina and Todor Gochevi, who had a successful career in Bulgaria as folk dancers and choreographers. Their decision of immigration and permanent settlement in the United States was a difficult one and passed through several critical moments, but three years after their arrival when they decided to found a folk dance group and to continue as a hobby what they did before as their profession. Starting from a small group of interested people, their group grew to around forty and holds regular performances in Chicago and other cities in the United States. In recent years, the group has been invited several times to organise weddings according to the traditional Bulgarian custom and this has appeared very successful both among Bulgarians, and in cases of mixed marriages. The other major folk dance group is “Vereya,” named after a Bulgarian football club based in the city of Stara Zagora. It was founded in 2010 by the Konstantin Marinov – Kotseto, who had also practiced traditional folk dances in Bulgaria. Involving a group of 30 dancers, “Vereya” attracts also many external dancers in its activities – both in concerts and in dance competition performances that take place in the hall of “St. Sofia” Church after major festive days. In 2015 “Vereya” folklore club marked organised for a second consecutive year the festival “Folklore is Magic” (24-25.04.2015), which gathered together 500 participants from 35 Bulgarian folklore groups in North America.⁹ Konstantin Marinov, initiator of these events and leader of “Vereya” folklore club, holds also folk dancing courses for children, as well as a small orchestra that accompanies live concerts [News Business Policy, 2015]. Almost all the festive events of the Bulgarian immigrant communities in Chicago are accompanied and conclude with performances of traditional music and dances, marked with the participation of these two folk dance groups, “Vereya” and “Horo.”

⁹ The folklore festival has got its equivalents in Bulgaria too, gathering Bulgarian folk groups from abroad in Stara Zagora, Bulgaria in the beginning of August (1-3.08.2015).

The Bulgarian **restaurants and cafés** can also be perceived as consolidating forms gathering representatives of the Bulgarian community in Chicago for festive occasions. They appear often as a reaction against the nostalgia for the Bulgarian cultural environment, cuisine, and atmosphere. In Chicago – a city with very palpable Bulgarian migration – there function several Bulgarian food stores that offer food items from Bulgaria – e.g. “Mladost” (“Youth”), “Malincho” (“Raspberry Boy”), “Serdica” (after the old name of the Bulgarian capital, Sofia), and a number of Bulgarian restaurants and cafés: “Select,” “Mirage,” “Balkanika,” “Avenue BG,” “Mehanata” (“The Tavern”), “Balgarski orel” (“Bulgarian Eagle”), “Vkusen svyat” (“Tasty World”), “Escape,” as well as the restaurants at the two Bulgarian Orthodox churches. All these are destinations of meetings and social contacts of the Bulgarian community in Chicago, the restaurants and cafés being the regular choice of ending a festive celebration with informal conversations and entertainment among co-nationals. Aside from the cultural program that some of the restaurants have (such as evenings of playing traditional Bulgarian music or concert visits of singers from Bulgaria), and the usual presence of Bulgarian food items in the menus, most of these restaurants partner actively in the organisation of festivities of the Bulgarian community and also present a different model of maintaining cultural heritage abroad – one through the food code and the culture of entertainment. To the extent that most of the festive days (even those related to an official holiday) end around a feast table in such restaurants and cafés, this aspect of heritage related to food and entertainment obviously proves to be a firm and resilient marker of the Bulgarian cultural identity.

The par excellence institutions of Bulgarians in each respective state are the Bulgarian **embassies and consulates** as official state representatives. In 2004, with a decision of the Ministry Council, the Bulgarian General Consulate Office in Chicago was founded. The Consulate got involved in the network of forms for consolidating migrants and providing them with assistance and support. Already in 1960s, before the existence of the Bulgarian General Consulate Office, a tradition was developed of raising the Bulgarian flag in front of the Municipality Building in Chicago on the national holiday of Bulgaria, 3rd March. The gesture was a sign of gratitude and respect to the Bulgarian emigrants who contributed to the development of the city. Nowadays the day of 3rd March in the centre of Chicago is particularly festive – the General Council, joined by the Governor, Mayor and the District Attorney, delivers a greeting speech to the Bulgarians in the city and the Bulgarian schools and folklore groups present a festive program, which is attended by the local population. A strong consolidating factor, the Bulgarian national holiday in Chicago gathers a growing number of Bulgarian participants, organisers, and audience. In 2016, 3rd March was celebrated again in front of the Municipality of Chicago, but this took place on 27th February, which was Saturday and this permitted more Bulgarians to attend the celebration. The ceremony included the raising of the Bulgarian flag, the playing of the national anthem, pronouncements of sober speeches, a festive concert, round dances and entertainments [**BG-VOICE, 2016; BIT, Chicago, 2016**]. The event gathered around 400 Bulgarians. An important detail testifying of the conspicuous presence

of the Bulgarian community in the city is the fact that the celebrations on 3rd March are included officially in the festive calendar of Chicago [Ivanova, 2016]. On the occasion of this holiday, concerts, exhibitions and other cultural events are held in different parts of the city.

A new tradition that has been established by the current General Council Simeon Stoilov in 2014, is the celebration of the Day of Bulgaria (which actually coincides with a day off in the beginning of June), in the Botanical garden in Chicago. The celebration is paralleled with various entertaining activities for children and adults, and it attracts both the Bulgarian community and the American audience alike and makes Bulgaria recognisable in the receiving society. As in other festive occasions, here again one can witness the collaboration of various institutions of Bulgarian immigrants – the Bulgarian Sunday schools who make singing and dancing performances, artists prepare exhibitions, writers present their books, etc. The event is organised with the active participation of the Union of Bulgarian writers and artists in Chicago, and attracts the involvement of Bulgarian media in the city, the Bulgarian-American Association, the Center of Bulgarian-American Cultural Heritage, the Association “Bulgarian Museum – Chicago,” folk groups, etc. Despite their different missions and interests, they all consolidate their efforts in making this day a noticeable event for the population in Chicago and in promoting Bulgarian culture in its diverse dimensions – traditional and contemporary, linked with the country of origin and re-enacted in the new cultural environment, specific for the Bulgarian immigrant community, but also open for expression and sharing to other communities and groups in this multicultural city.

Conclusions

The reflections on the festive days of the Bulgarian community in Chicago through the involvement of the various immigrants’ educational, cultural and religious institutions permit drawing several major conclusions. Firstly, the larger the Bulgarian migrant community, the more numerous and more diverse are the consolidating forms and holidays that it initiates! No matter the long geographical distance from the home country, the Bulgarian community in this city demonstrates a broad variety of immigrant institutions and a plenitude of functions they perform in the foreign environment. Among those institutions, we can outline particularly the schools, the Orthodox churches, the folklore groups, and the cultural associations as most active and recognisable in the public space, and as having the most palpable contribution to maintaining Bulgarian cultural heritage abroad. They all attract different ages and social strata of the immigrant community and ensure festive spirit through the presentation of Bulgarian literary and folklore examples – verbal, musical, and ritual ones. Among the holidays that unite the Bulgarian community in Chicago, the following ones are outlined: the national one – 3rd March, the official holidays – the Day of the Slavonic alphabet and the Bulgarian education and culture – 24th May, and traditional holidays, such as Christmas, Easter, New Year, Baba Marta, etc. On the other side, the family celebrations gather a smaller circle of

Bulgarians – the family and friends, in home settings or in a Bulgarian restaurant in the city. These holidays, perceived as an expression of Bulgarianness and celebrated in a Bulgarian manner, are forms that facilitate the maintaining the cultural identity of the Bulgarians abroad, ways of achieving a cozy atmosphere, as well as nostalgic gestures to the home country.

A second conclusion is the one related to the social functions of festive days and the involved ritual actions. As already noted, these play an important role as stabilising factors for the immigrants and serve as psychological anchors in the processes of cultural adjustment in the new environment. Regardless of their being of religious, traditional, or official and secular character, holidays and the related customs of celebration help the immigrants to position themselves better within the existing community of co-nationals, to get involved in participating and sharing of cultural practices that they all carry and have in common. Holidays are convenient occasions of becoming included in a collective practice, thus overcoming the danger of social exclusion and isolation. They are also a good opportunity for enabling the communication with the local population and other immigrant groups, which are observers to some of these celebrations, but also participants, as in the cases of larger events, such as the noting of 3rd March, or on the Day of Bulgaria. Involving in different ways members of the Bulgarian community, festive days and the accompanying ritual actions contribute decisively for developing a sense of group belonging, of being part of a social network that is together not only by its formal identity marker, but also by its capacity to gather and celebrate together on occasions of shared importance. Functioning as interruptions in the immigrants' working rhythm and in most cases showing their distinction from the festive calendars of other cultural groups in the city, festive days are occasions where the community can feel itself as one whole, as a distant fragment of the national community back in the home country. This feeling is strengthened in many of the ritual actions, when according to V. Turner the sense of "communitas" gets formed, but it is further developed in the various cultural activities that accompany each celebration, in the social gatherings and feasts that conclude them, as well as in the social networks and virtual platforms that reflect these occasions and share information about them worldwide.

Lastly, the analysis of the festive days celebrated by the Bulgarian community in Chicago outlines the specific meanings and functions of cultural heritage in a foreign country. This heritage is moveable and mobile; it is carried by immigrants across state boundaries and is transferred and enacted within new cultural settings. It is heritage that is not confined to material forms and firm territorialisation, but is special, namely in its ability to be a part of people's cultural backgrounds and to be able to get reproduced and transferred to descendants in different cultural contexts. In conditions of migration, this heritage takes additional values and importance, as it is in most cases the only heritage that immigrants can take with themselves in the new country. It helps sustain the links that immigrants have with the home country and this, for the majority of those who settle in a new state, continues to hold importance, despite the length of stay or the visions of permanent settlement. Depending on the circumstances of its formation, its size and the surrounding cultural context, each migrant

community develops a specific approach to this cultural heritage and promotes it through different agents, institutions and forms. However, each immigrant group maintains special sensitivity in its safeguarding and promotion, as it is the major resource of identity in nowadays' world of transgressed borders and mobile cultures. Beyond doubt, for the Bulgarian community in Chicago, the sensitivity of maintaining this heritage and its reenactment in different festive occasions and cultural initiatives will continue in the future.

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