The Making of Ethnicity in Southern Bessarabia:

Tracing the histories of an ambiguous concept in a contested land

Dissertation

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A note on translations and transliteration

For the romanization of Russian and Ukrainian words, the system of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names was used.[1] Place names were transliterated from Ukrainian for areas in which, according to the census of 2001, more people speak Ukrainian, and from Russian for areas where more people speak Russian.[2] For Odessa Oblast, where the field site is located, place names were accordingly transliterated from Russian. Exceptions were made for place names and names with an established spelling in English, *Moscow* instead of *Moskva*, *Perestroika* instead of *Perestroyka*, *Gogol* instead of *Gogol'*.

I refer to the Romanian language spoken in Bessarabia as "Romanian/Moldovan". Although Romanian and Moldovan can be traced back to the same roots and are easily mutually intelligible, in historical sources used for this work, it was usually referred to as the "Moldovan language". The dichotomy has become politicized since the emergence of a Romanian state beginning with the United Principalities in 1862. In the Republic of Moldova, there is today among Romanian speakers a strong preference for calling the language "Romanian", whereas Romanian speakers in the Ukrainian part of southern Bessarabia usually insist they speak "Moldovan". To underline my awareness of the dispute and of different emic conceptions I refer to both Moldovan and Romanian. Unless indicated otherwise, all translations are my own.

A note on names and pseudonyms

All informants are cited using pseudonyms. An exception was made for public figures, such as politicians and functionaries, whose identity could be retraced easily, and who have made their statements during public events, in the local media, or on the internet.

A note on archival sources

The archival sources used in this research come from the state archive in Izmail. It is a branch (filial) of the state archive in the provincial capital Odessa, which is directly subordinated to the head of the Oblast administration. Archive sources are represented with a threefold label, F, standing for *fond* (collection), whereby "Fr" codes indicate collections from the Soviet period and "F" codes indicate older collections, formed before 1944, in either tsarist Russia or

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[1] For Russian see
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/320274/Russian_Romanisation.pdf
(02.11.2015)
For Ukrainian see
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/320286/Ukrainian_Romanization.pdf
(02.11.2015)
[2] See an according map in the results section of the Ukrainian census of 2001
http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/results/nationality_population/graphic/ (02.11.2015)

Romanian times. "D" stands for *delo*, (file), and "p" stands for the pages within a file. When a file is cited for the first time in a chapter, its Russian title is also indicated. A detailed list of all quoted files can be found in the sources section

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

1. Einleitung

Die vorliegende Dissertation widmet sich der Untersuchung der historischen Entstehung und Erhaltung ethnischer Grenzen im südlichen Bessarabien. Der zentrale Teil der Forschung entstand während eines Aufenthaltes in Izmail, in der Oblast Odessa, und in vier Dörfern in ihrem Umland zwischen September 2012 und Dezember 2013. Es wurden drei hauptsächliche Forschungsansätze verfolgt: Ein historischer Ansatz soll klären, wann ethnische Grenzen in dieser Region entstanden sind und wie sie sich verändert haben. Eine sozio-ökonomische Herangehensweise soll veranschaulichen, welche Konsequenzen ethnische Grenzen zu verschieden Zeiten für die Menschen im südlichen Bessarabien hatten. Und schließlich wurden historische sowie zeitgenössische Diskurse analysiert, welche ethnische Grenzen erklären und legitimieren sollen.

Diesen drei Stoßrichtungen entsprechend wurden die Forschungsfragen formuliert. Sie richten sich also an der Entstehung ethnischer Grenzen in der Region aus, indem gefragt wird, wann solche Grenzen eine entscheidende Rolle für den Zugang zu politischer Macht und Ressourcen gespielt haben. Auch nach der Art und Weise dieses Einflusses muss gefragt werden: Wann und in welcher Weise hinderten oder förderten ethnische Grenzen individuelle Biographien im südlichen Bessarabien und wie wurde dieses Hindernis oder diese Förderung begründet? Kann eine kontinuierliche Entwicklung festgestellt werden, oder ist diese von entscheidenden Brüchen geprägt? Die soziökonomische Perspektive verlangt zudem nach der Frage, wie und wann jene Akteure, welche ethnische Grenzen geschaffen und gepflegt haben, von diesen Aktivitäten profitierten. Außerdem wird nach den Mitteln dieser Akteure gefragt, den Techniken und Narrativen mithilfe derer ethnische Grenzen gestaltet und erhalten wurden. Um auf eine diskursanalytische Ebene zu gelangen, bietet sich die Frage an, wie Widersprüchen begegnet wird, etwa zwischen der Annahme ethnische Grenzen seien trennscharf und der viel komplizierteren sozialen Umwelt.

Der Behandlung der Forschungsergebnisse wurden drei Hypothesen vorausgeschickt, die auf den Arbeiten von Fredrik Barth (1969, 2000) fußen. Diese haben gezeigt, dass ethnische Grenzen nicht als die Trennlinien zwischen kulturell unterschiedlichen Gruppen verstanden werden sollten, sondern vor allem als ein soziales Regelwerk betrachtet werden müssen, das regelt mit welchen Menschen man welchen Aktivitäten nachgehen darf. Von der Annahme ausgehend, dass es sich bei ethnischen Grenzen primär um eine Art Regelwerk handelt, wird angenommen, dass ethnische Grenzen gerade in jenen Zeiten eine große Tragweite haben, in denen der Staat in eine Legitimationskrise geraten ist, das heißt, immer dann wenn die

herrschenden politischen Eliten unfähig oder unwillig sind, Sicherheit und Wohlstand zu gewährleisten. Zweitens wird angenommen, dass der kleinste gemeinsame Nenner aller Techniken und Narrative zum Erhalten ethnischer Grenzen ein Mechanismus ist, bei dem das Verwischen von ethnischen Grenzen als Abweichung dargestellt wird und unklare ethnische Identitäten gezielt stigmatisiert und ausgeschlossen werden. Alle auftretenden Techniken und Narrative zum Erhalt ethnischer Grenzen, so die Annahme, sind eine Variante dieses Ausschlussmechanismus. Die dritte Hypothese schließlich besagt, dass wenn Widersprüche zwischen angeblich sehr deutlichen ethnischen Grenzen und der beobachtbaren Umwelt zu Tage treten, auf Beweisverfahren zurückgegriffen wird, die nur einer bestimmten Gruppe zugänglich sind. Solche Nachweise basieren auf Intuition oder privaten Gefühlen, die nachzuempfinden nur Gruppenangehörigen vergönnt ist. Auf dieser Weise können herausfordernde Zweifler, welche einen Widerspruch zu erkennen glauben, aus der Gruppe jener ausgeschlossen werden, welche eine kompetente Aussage über eine bestimmte ethnische Grenze machen können.

In der vorliegenden Arbeit wurden diese Hypothesen mit einer Kombination von Methoden der historischen und der sozialanthroplogischen Forschung untersucht. Für das 19. und frühe 20. Jahrhundert musste sich die Forschung auf Archivquellen beschränken. Ab Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts konnten die Ereignisse zusätzlich durch biographische Interviews beleuchtet werden. Für die Zeit der Feldforschung selbst stand nebst Interviews auch das Mittel der teilnehmenden Beobachtung zur Verfügung. Unter solchen Voraussetzungen besteht die Gefahr, dass die Arbeit als historische Studie beginnt und allmählich in eine ethnographische Studie übergeht. Einer solchen Zweiteilung wurde entgegengewirkt, indem gegenwärtige Verhältnisse konsequent als das Resultat historischer Prozesse untersucht wurden und indem die Darstellung der Vergangenheit als ein Ergebnis gegenwärtiger Verhältnisse aufgefasst wurde.

Die Einleitung enthält auch einen kurzen historischen Überblick, in dem die Vorgeschichte und die Rahmenbedingungen jener Periode beschrieben werden, die eigentlicher Gegenstand der Forschung ist. Eine noch weiter verkürzte Version dieses Überblicks soll hier die wichtigsten Eckdaten der Geschichte dieser Region einführen: Während der ganzen bekannten Vergangenheit zeichnete sich Bessarabien, und das südliche Bessarabien ganz besonders, durch eine ausgeprägt periphere Lage aus. Eine direkte Folge davon waren der häufige Wechsel der Staatsmacht und die späte Besiedlung mit bäuerlichen Kolonisten aus verschiedenen Herkunftsregionen. Die flache und trockene Steppe im südlichen Bessarabien wurde bis ins frühe 19. Jahrhundert vor allem nomadisch genutzt, von Gruppen wie den Nogaier, die eine Turksprache sprachen, Muslime waren und dem Osmanischen Reich Tribut zahlten. Sesshaft besiedelt waren vor allem die osmanischen Garnisonsfestungen entlang der

Donau und dem Dnjestr, unter denen Izmail die größte war. Als Russland 1812, nach mehreren früheren Anläufen, Bessarabien erobern konnte, wurden die Nomaden vertrieben und an ihrer Stelle wurden bäuerliche Siedler aus dem Balkan, aus Deutschland, aber auch aus anderen Teilen des Russischen Reiches angesiedelt. Russland war an einer schnellen Urbarmachung der Region interessiert und lockte zu diesem Zweck christliche Bauern mit Steuerprivilegien an. Nach dem Krimkrieg 1856 verlor Russland einen Teil des südlichen Bessarabiens wieder an Moldawien, das sich wenige Jahre später mit der Walachei zu den Vereinigten Fürstentümern zusammenschloss. Formell gehörte dieser Vorgängerstaat Rumäniens jedoch immer noch zum Osmanischen Reich. Erst 1878, nach dem letzten Russisch-Osmanischen Krieg, kam das gesamte Gebiet Bessarabiens wieder unter russische Herrschaft.

Nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg konnte Rumänien seine Fläche und seine Bevölkerung fast verdoppeln, und Bessarabien wurde eine der neuen Provinzen. Die neu gegründete Sowjetunion rückte aber nie von ihrem Anspruch auf die ehemals russische Provinz ab. Im Sommer 1940, gemäß dem Molotov-Ribbentrop Pakt, marschierten sowjetische Truppen in Bessarabien ein. Die Sowjets schufen die Moldawische Sowjetrepublik im zentralen und mehrheitlich rumänischsprachigen Teil Bessarabiens. Der vornehmlich ukrainischsprachige nördliche Teil, sowie das südliche Bessarabien, wo es keine eindeutige ethnische Mehrheit gab, wurden der Ukrainischen SSR zugesprochen. Entsprechend wurde das südliche Bessarabien 1991, als die Sowjetunion in ihre 15 Teilrepubliken zerfiel, zu einem Teil der Ukraine. In dieser Konstellation blieb das südliche Bessarabien ein isoliertes und abgelegenes Gebiet, das nur über eine Straße mit dem Rest der Ukraine verbunden ist. Es ist weder ethnisch noch kulturell prädestiniert für die Integration in ein ukrainischsprachiges Land, dessen Leitgedanken vor allem die Vereinigung und Unabhängigkeit aller Ukrainer ist.

Eine zentrale Begriffsklärung widmet sich dem Bedeutungsgehalt und den möglichen Übersetzungen von „Ethnizität". Die Idee, welche in dieser Arbeit durch die Geschichte zurückverfolgt wurde, ist die einer erblichen und objektiv erkennbaren ethnischen Identität. Wenn man mit Begrifflichkeiten aus zwei Jahrhunderten, vier verschiedenen Staaten und ihren jeweiligen Sprachen operieren muss, lässt sich anachronistischer Wortgebrauch nur dann vermeiden, wenn man die bezeichnete Bedeutung hinter dem Begriff verfolgt, nicht etwa die Bezeichnung dafür. Diese Bedeutung ist eben die Annahme, Ethnizität sei etwas Angeborenes, Objektives und nicht Abänderliches. Für den größten Teil der Arbeit gehen Übersetzungen vom Russischen „nacional'nost'" aus, das ich mit „Ethnizität" übersetze (und nicht etwa mit „Nationalität"), um dem essentialisierten Charakter des mit „nacional'nost'" gemeinten Merkmals Rechnung zu tragen. Diese Lösung erspart es uns aber noch nicht bei früheren Verwendungen jeweils den Begriff, von dem die Übersetzung ausging, mitanzugeben. So lässt sich auch zeigen, wie viele verschiedene Ideen der ethnischen Gemeinschaft mit wie vielen

jeweils eigenen Bezeichnungen in den vergangenen zwei Jahrhunderten gekommen und gegangen sind.

2. Die russische Verwaltung in Bessarabien und ihre Rolle bei der Bildung ethnischer Grenzen 1812-1918

Die zaristische Verwaltung in der abgelegenen Provinz Bessarabien machte in den 106 Jahren zwischen der Eroberung Bessarabiens 1812 und dem Verlust der Provinz an Rumänien 1918, eine augenfällige Metamorphose durch. Anfangs ritten die Verwalter des Reiches durch die Region und reagierten vor Ort auf Probleme und Konflikte, die sie antrafen. Was diesem grobmaschigen Netz der Verwaltung entging, wurde von den sich in dieser Zeit hier ansiedelnden Kolonisten in weitgehender Selbstverwaltung gelöst. Gegen Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts bestand hingegen bereits ein ausgeklügelter bürokratischer Apparat, der nicht nur einen genaueren Überblick über die Bevölkerung erlaubte, sondern diese auch viel effizienter zu verwalten vermochte. Ursprünglich war es Aufgabe der verschiedenen Kirchen, die Angehörigen ihrer Gemeinden zu registrieren und über ihren Zivilstand Buch zu führen. Entsprechend war die wichtigste Kategorie zur Unterteilung der Bevölkerung Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts noch die Konfession. Die zunehmende Durchdringung der Gesellschaft von bürokratischen Institutionen enthob die Kirchen ihrer einstmaligen administrativen Verantwortung. Deshalb waren Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts dann ethnische Zuschreibungen das wichtigste Unterscheidungsmerkmal für einzelne Gruppen. Die Zugehörigkeit zu dieser Kategorie konnte man theoretisch nur von seinen Eltern erben. Das Ausprägen ethnischer Kategorien war also eng an die Metamorphose der Bürokratie geknüpft. Diese Kategorien übernahmen nun viele Funktionen der früheren konfessionellen Unterteilung.

Die Unterteilung der Bevölkerung nach Glaubensbekenntnis hatte den Vorteil, dass man nur zu einer Konfession gehören konnte. Die Registrierung in einer Kirche garantierte im Prinzip, dass die betreffende Person nicht auch gleichzeitig bei einer anderen Kirche registriert war. Gesetze und Verordnungen regelten die administrative und soziale Trennung der einzelnen Konfessionen, beziehungsweise den Übertritt von einer Konfession in die andere. Mit dem Ausprägen ethnischer (und damit von Staat kontrollierter) Verwaltungskriterien trat die Schwierigkeit auf, dass die Zugehörigkeit zur einen Ethnie nicht unbedingt die gleichzeitige Zugehörigkeit zu einer anderen ethnischen Gruppe ausschloss.

Heute besteht eine weitverbreitete Meinung, interethnische Eheschließungen seien vor dem Zweiten Weltkrieg in Bessarabien kaum je vorgekommen. Bereits eine oberflächliche Sichtung des einschlägigen Archivmaterials zeigt jedoch, dass diese Annahme übertrieben ist. Es trifft zwar zu, dass es soziale Normen gab, welche die Eheschließung innerhalb des eignen

Dorfes bevorzugten. Diese Norm wurde aber so oft gebrochen, dass interethnische Eheschließungen schon Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts im südlichen Bessarabien keine Ausnahme waren.

Gegen Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts beeinflussten zwei Institutionen die Ausprägung von Ethnizität als ausschließliche Kategorie entscheidend. Das waren zum einen die Volkszählung, zum anderen die frühe ethnographische Forschung. Als 1897 das russische Innenministerium zum ersten Mal eine landesweite Volkszählung organisierte, musste festgelegt werden, wonach gefragt werden sollte und wie die ethnische Zugehörigkeit einzelner Personen ermittelt werden könne. Weil es in Russland viel zu viele Gruppen gab, welchen sich nur mit erheblichen Unstimmigkeiten eine eindeutige ethnische Zugehörigkeit zuschreiben ließen, wurde schlussendlich gar nicht nach Ethnizität gefragt. Diese wurde aber im Nachhinein oft aus der Kombination von Sprache und Konfession hergeleitet.

Mit dem Entstehen von städtischen Gelehrtengesellschaften und dem Interesse an der Lebensweise des einfachen Volkes begannen gebildete Reisende aus der Stadt ihre Aufmerksamkeit kulturellen Unterschieden zuzuwenden. Sie unternahmen Exkursionen zu Gruppen mit deren Kultur sie nicht vertraut waren, beobachteten deren alltäglichen kulturellen Formen und stellten ethnographische Fragen. Sie kombinierten die rigiden bürokratischen Kategorien der Beamtenschaft mit ihrem Einblick in kulturelle Nuancen und begannen, diese ethnographischen Erkenntnisse nach den bereits bestehenden Verwaltungskategorien zu gliedern. So entstanden ausführliche Beschreibungen, in denen kulturelle Merkmale ethnischen Unterscheidungen folgten und in denen Leute sich in einer bestimmten Weise verhielten, weil es der Verhaltensweise ihrer ethnischen Gruppe entsprach.

Als unter diesen Vorzeichen 1905 in Russland eine Revolution ausbrach, wurden zumindest in der Beamtenschaft ethnische Gruppen bereits als klar abgegrenzte Einheiten mit ureigenen kulturellen Eigenschaften wahrgenommen. Dementsprechend gab es auch vertrauenswürdige und weniger vertrauenswürdige ethnische Gruppen. In der Staatsduma, die 1906 als Konzession an die Revolutionäre ins Leben gerufen worden war, traten auch Parteien an, die mehr politische Autonomie einzelner ethnischer Gruppen forderten. Als die Duma anfing, gegen die Wünsche des Zaren abzustimmen, wurde dies der großen Zahl nicht-russischer Abgeordneter zugeschrieben. Als Gegenmaßnahme wurde ein ethnisches Quotensystem eingeführt. Mit der Idee, dass ethnische Zugehörigkeit nicht nur ganz bestimmte kulturelle Eigenheiten mit sich bringe, sondern auch die Loyalität gegenüber dem Staat bestimme, zeichnete sich bereits eine gängige Vereinfachung ab, die später unter den Rumänen und dann den Sowjets systematisiert werden sollte.

3. Von Überzeugungsarbeit zum Generalverdacht: das schwierige Verhältnis Rumäniens zu den ethnischen Minderheiten in Bessarabien 1918-44

Mit der Oktoberrevolution 1917 versank Russland in den Wirren eines brutalen Bürgerkriegs. 1918 erklärte der Sfatul Ţării, das Parlament in Chişinău, Bessarabien für unabhängig, rumänische Truppen besetzten das Land und wenige Wochen später sprachen sich die Parlamentarier für einen Zusammenschluss mit Rumänien aus. Alle nun bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg folgenden Regierungen in Bukarest versuchten das nach den Pariser Verträgen viel grösser gewordene Land hinter der Idee eines rumänischen Nationalstaates zu einen. Alle regierenden Parteien waren sich einig, dass ethnische Minderheiten (die ein gutes Drittel der Bevölkerung ausmachten) die Entwicklung des Rumänischen Staates behinderten und dass Rumänien ein kulturell homogener Nationalstaat werden müsse. In ihrer Politik unterschieden sich die verschiedenen Fraktionen allenfalls in der Frage, ob die ethnischen Minderheiten rumänisiert oder ausgewiesen werden müssten. Zu Beginn der rumänischen Herrschaft tendierte man eher zu Assimilation, während des Zweiten Weltkriegs dann schon zu ethnischer Säuberung.

Zunächst stellte die rumänische Verwaltung sicher, dass die Schlüsselpositionen in staatlichen Strukturen und in der lokalen Wirtschaft von ethnischen Rumänen besetzt waren und zwar vorzugsweise von ethnischen Rumänen aus dem „Alten Königreich", dem Teil Rumäniens, der bereits zwischen 1881 und dem Ersten Weltkrieg als unabhängiges Königreich bestanden hatte. Diese verdrängten nun sowohl Vertreter der ethnischen Minderheiten wie auch bessarabische Rumänischsprecher aus den wichtigsten Positionen. Die Neuankömmlinge bauten schnell eine sehr umfassende Bürokratie auf. Diese ließ das Verwaltungssystem, bei dem herumreitende Beamte noch aus dem Pferdesattel heraus Erlasse tätigten, nun endgültig hinter sich.

Ein Bereich in dem sich die straffe Organisation des rumänischen Staates manifestierte, waren Kulturzentren und Bildungseinrichtungen. In der Zwischenkriegszeit schaffte es Rumänien, fast überall in dem schnell gewachsenen Land Schulen zu bauen. Man war dann aber damit überfordert, diese auch im gleichen Tempo mit qualifiziertem Lehrpersonal auszustatten. Im südlichen Bessarabien waren, mit dem Ziel einer Homogenisierung der Kultur, in vielen nicht-rumänischsprachigen Dörfern Kulturzentren geschaffen worden, in denen die Dorfbevölkerung, eingerahmt von einem Unterhaltungsprogramm, über die Geschichte und das Wesen der rumänischen Nation belehrt wurde. In den 20er Jahren drückten solche Vorlesungen noch verbreitet die Erwartung aus, man könne die Angehörigen lokaler Minderheiten davon überzeugen, dass Bessarabien rumänisches Kernland sei und dass für viele von ihnen die Annahme einer rumänischen Identität eine Rückkehr zu ihren ethnischen Wurzeln bedeuten würde.

Die rumänische Verfassung garantierte, den Forderungen der Entente-Mächte entsprechend, allen rumänischen Bürgern, unabhängig von ihrer Konfession oder Ethnizität, die Gleichberechtigung. Dennoch wurde der bürokratische Apparat bald dazu benutzt, ethnische Minderheiten zu drangsalieren und polizeilich zu überwachen. Solche Untersuchungen gingen in der Regel vom Zentrum aus und basierten auf Verdächtigungen, die auf Grund von Vorfällen in anderen Landesteilen zustande gekommen waren. Im Großteil der Fälle kam aus den bessarabischen Außenposten nach nur wenigen Tagen eine Entwarnung. Im September 1924 allerdings, kam es um die kleine Stadt Tatarbunari zu einem Aufstand, nachdem Landreformen eher noch zu einer Vergrößerung der Ungleichheit zwischen Kleinbauern und Großgrundbesitzern beigetragen hatten. Der Aufstand, der binnen weniger Tage blutig niedergeschlagen wurde, war von sozialen Anliegen geprägt, nicht von einer ethno-nationalen Bewegung. Dennoch bestätigte er die Befürchtungen des rumänischen Repressionsapparates, dass die Bevölkerung an der bessarabischen Peripherie empfänglich sei für subversive Aktivitäten durch die Sowjetunion und durch nationalistische Gruppen. Aus dieser Befürchtung heraus begannen die rumänischen Behörden ab Anfang der 30er Jahre systematisch zu zählen, wie viele Angehörige den einzelnen ethnischen Minderheiten in welchen Siedlungen angehörten, über welche Organisationen diese verfügten und wie sie gegenüber dem rumänischen Staat eingestellt waren. Außerdem wurden nun staatliche Angestellte unter die Lupe genommen, welcher ethnischen Gruppe sie angehörten und ob sie allenfalls Ehepartner aus einer ethnischen Minderheit geheiratet hatten. Interessanterweise kamen solche Untersuchungen zum Ergebnis, dass es im Süden Bessarabiens kaum organisierte nationalistische Bewegungen der ethnischen Minderheiten gab und dass das Wohlwollen gegenüber dem Staat nichts mit Ethnizität zu tun habe. Dennoch setzte sich bei den Behörden die Ansicht durch, Ethnizität lasse sich direkt in Loyalität gegenüber einem bestimmten Staat übersetzen. Diese Logik prägte die behördliche Praxis zunehmend, je grösser die Gefahr eines erneuten Krieges in Europa wurde. Ab 1938 wurde das Land zunächst durch König Carol II, später durch ein Militärregime unter Ion Antonescu, autokratisch regiert. Antonescu und Carol II unterdrückten zwar die rumänische faschistische Bewegung, die „Eiserne Garde", verfolgten aber selbst auch eine stark nationalistische und antisemitische Politik. Nach dem Ausbruch des Zweiten Weltkrieges, in dem Rumänien mit Hitlerdeutschland verbündet war, übernahm man auch dessen Programm der ethnischen Säuberung zur Schaffung ethnisch homogener Gebiete.

Bessarabien war im Sommer 1940 von der Sowjetunion annektiert worden. Im Juni 1941, mit dem Angriff Nazideutschlands auf die Sowjetunion, erhielt Rumänien Bessarabien zurück und dazu weite Gebiete der südwestlichen Ukraine. Nun wurden alle Bürgerrechte auf ethnische Rumänen beschränkt. Deshalb musste auch ein Zertifikationssystem eingeführt werden, welches ethnische Rumänen offiziell als solche auswies. Das Verfahren zur Bestimmung

der ethnischen Zugehörigkeit war anfällig für Willkür und Korruption. Die Frage, wer ein Anrecht auf ein ethnisches Zertifikat hatte, konnte bis zur Rückeroberung Bessarabiens durch die Sowjetunion im Sommer 1944 nicht eindeutig geklärt werden.

Während des Zweiten Weltkriegs kamen in den besetzten Gebieten Ideen zur Anwendung, die in Europa und Rumänien seit dem Aufkommen des romantischen Nationalismus heftig debattiert worden waren. Die Nation wurde von Theoretikern wie von Politikern als Körper begriffen, in dem ethnische Minderheiten und vor allem die Juden schädliche Fremdkörper waren. Diese Form der Entmenschlichung brach sich nun während des Krieges gegen Juden und Roma im Holocaust Bahn. Für andere ethnische Minderheiten lagen 1942 bereits Deportationspläne vor, die aber durch die Rückkehr der Roten Armee 1944 nicht umgesetzt werden konnten.

4. Kulturelle Unterschiede überwinden: Ethnische Minderheiten und sowjetische Neuankömmlinge

Das im August 1944 vertriebene rumänische Regime und die nun zum zweiten Mal in Bessarabien Fuß fassende Sowjetunion hatten eine auffallende Gemeinsamkeit: Beide gingen vom Paradigma aus, Ethnizität ließe sich direkt in Loyalität gegenüber einem Staat übersetzen. Für die Sowjets war damit klar, dass diejenigen ethnischen Gruppen, welche innerhalb der Sowjetunion eine nach ihnen benannte Republik hatten, loyale Genossen des Sowjetregimes sein müssten, dass hingegen diejenigen, die außerhalb der Sowjetunion einen nach ihnen benannte Staat besaßen (etwa die Bulgaren oder Albaner), nicht vertrauenswürdig waren. So wurden zum Beispiel die Moldawier, deren Sowjetrepublik 1940 geschaffen worden war, als verlässliche sowjetische Bürger behandelt, obwohl sie noch kurz zuvor auch von den Rumänen als rumänische Mitbürger angesehen worden waren. Die bessarabischen Bulgaren und Gagauzen hingegen, die innerhalb der Sowjetunion kein nach ihnen benanntes Gebiet besaßen, wurden als potentiell Abtrünnige gesehen. Das Misstrauen wurde vertieft durch die Tatsache, dass sie mit Bulgarien in Verbindung gebracht wurden, einem Bündnispartner Hitlers. Deswegen vertraute ihnen das Kommando der Roten Armee keine Waffen an. Im Unterschied zu moldawischen, ukrainischen oder russischen Männern aus Bessarabien, wurden deshalb bulgarische und gagauzische Männer nicht in die weiter nach Westen vorrückende Rote Armee einberufen, sondern an die sogenannte „Arbeitsfront" in Bergwerke und Fabriken im Ural, Sibirien und Kasachstan geschickt.

Eine ähnliche Haltung wurde in der Sprach- und Bildungspolitik verfolgt. Das südliche Bessarabien gehörte zur Ukrainischen SSR. Daher war, zumindest theoretisch, Ukrainisch Staatssprache. In der Praxis war um diese Zeit aber bereits Russisch die dominierende Sprache

in den staatlichen Strukturen. So wurde Russisch die Unterrichts- und Verwaltungssprache für alle jene Minderheiten, die innerhalb der Sowjetunion keine Titularnation waren. Für Russen, Moldawier und Ukrainer, die alle eine eigene Republik innerhalb der UdSSR besaßen, wurde die jeweilige Titularsprache als Unterrichts- und Verwaltungssprache herbeigezogen. Allerding fehlte, für Ukrainisch und Moldawisch, oft geeignete Lehrmittel und qualifizierte Lehrkräfte, so dass diejenigen ethnischen Minderheiten, die auf Russisch unterrichtet wurden, in den ersten Jahren erfolgreicher lernten.

Ein Verwaltungsapparat, der wichtige Entscheide von Ethnizität abhängig machte, war natürlich auf umfassende Kenntnisse angewiesen, wo wie viele Vertreter welcher ethnischer Gruppen lebten. Deswegen wurde in den Identitätsdokumenten aller Bürger die Ethnizität erfasst. Für ambivalente ethnische Identitäten kannte dieses Erfassungssystem keine Lösungen. So mussten sich Sowjetbürger aus gemischt ethnischen Beziehungen für die Ethnizität eines Elternteils entscheiden.

Wie bereits nach der Übernahme Bessarabiens durch Rumänien 1918, kamen auch jetzt die neuen dörflichen Eliten, die leitenden Angestellten der neu gegründeten Kolchosen, der Schulen und der Verwaltung, aus dem alten Teil der Sowjetunion, aus Russland oder der Ukraine. Die ersten Jahre nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg waren sehr schwierig für die bessarabische Bevölkerung. Erst nach einer verheerenden Hungersnot 1947 verbesserte sich die wirtschaftliche Situation allmählich. Zum ersten Mal seit Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts trat eine ausgedehnte Periode der Sicherheit und relativen Prosperität ein. Viele Menschen in Bessarabien betrachten die Zeit zwischen den späten 50er Jahren und Mitte der 80er Jahre, rückblickend als ein goldenes Zeitalter, das den Maßstab für die Beurteilung der heutigen Zustände setzt. Der wirtschaftliche Aufschwung in dieser Zeit half auch mit, die kulturellen Unterschiede zwischen Neunankömmlingen der sowjetischen Elite und der bessarabischen Dorfbevölkerung schnell zu überwinden. Mit der Stabilisierung der wirtschaftlichen Situation verschwand auch die anfängliche Diskriminierung der Bulgaren und Gagauzen. Bildung für breite Bevölkerungsschichten führte nun zu einer auf Leistung basierenden sozialen Mobilität, welche die bessarabische Landbevölkerung davor und danach nicht kannte. Der Schlüssel zu einem möglichen sozialen Aufstieg war dabei das Beherrschen der russischen Sprache.

Das Bildungssystem und die soziale Mobilität brachten eine Nivellierung der kulturellen Unterschiede zwischen einzelnen Regionen in der UdSSR und auch zwischen den Dörfern und den ethnischen Gruppen des südlichen Bessarabiens mit sich. Dennoch wurde an der Ethnizität als bürokratischer Kategorie festgehalten. Die sowjetischen Sozialwissenschaften entwickelten Theorien, welche Ethnizität als eine erbliche, nicht veränderliche und objektiv zuschreibbare Kategorie institutionalisierten.

Als die sowjetische Wirtschaft zu stagnieren begann, als in den 80er Jahren der Wohlstand durch Mangel an Konsumgütern und durch versagende staatliche Institutionen massiv abzunehmen begann, da brach das Versprechen einer harmonischen, klassenlosen Gesellschaft als Legitimationsbasis der Machthaber weg. Mit dem Zulassen von politischen Parteien bildeten sich schnell solche, die auf der sorgfältig gehegten Kategorie der Ethnizität beruhten und die für genau diese Kategorien mehr kulturelle Autonomie oder unabhängige Staaten einforderten. In der Ukraine und auch im benachbarten Moldova gelang es der letzten Generation der lokalen Parteiführungen, diesen nationalistischen Bewegungen den Wind aus den Segeln zu nehmen, indem sie selber deren nationalistische Rhetorik übernahmen.

Die ethnischen Minderheiten des südlichen Bessarabiens lebten in Gebieten, in denen keine Gruppe in einem klar abgrenzbaren Gebiet eine ethnische Mehrheit behaupten konnte. Außerdem erstreckte sich ihr Siedlungsgebiet auf beiden Seiten der Ukrainisch-Moldawischen Grenze. Deshalb wurden Versuche, autonome Territorien oder gar unabhängige Staaten zu bilden schon schnell aufgegeben. Eine bemerkenswerte Ausnahme bildet das Gagauzische Autonomie Territorium in Moldova, das 1994 nach einem knapp verhinderten Bürgerkrieg ausgehandelt werden konnte. Die letzten Jahre der Sowjetunion und die ersten Jahre der Unabhängigkeit waren aber die Geburtsstunde von ethnischen Assoziationen, die gut in ein sich jetzt durchsetzendes politisches System passten; den Klientelismus.

5. Klientelismus, die instabile Lage nach dem Zerfall der Sowjetunion und die Beständigkeit ethnischer Grenzen

Fast alle Sicherheiten der sowjetischen Gesellschaft gerieten nach dem Zerfall der Union ins Wanken. Nicht nur Lebensmittel waren eine Zeitlang knapp, auch Institutionen, die bisher Sicherheit, Bildung, medizinische Versorgung und Freizeitaktivitäten geboten hatten, begannen zu zerfallen. Die Dienstleistungen, welche sie einst anbieten konnten, waren jetzt nur noch für Reiche erschwinglich. Die Menschen in der Ukraine erhielten zwar im Prinzip neue Rechte, hatten aber nicht die Möglichkeit, diese durchzusetzen. Es gab nun die Option, zu reisen, welche aber unter der Landbevölkerung vor allem dazu führte, dass junge Menschen in die Städte und ins Ausland abwanderten, um Arbeit zu finden. Während Institutionen, Infrastruktur und Familien auseinanderfielen, wurde die in der UdSSR kultivierte Kategorie der Ethnizität auch weiterhin mit Stabilität und Kontinuität in Verbindung gebracht.

Die von zerfallenden staatlichen Institutionen hinterlassenen Lücken wurden teilweise von Unternehmern ausgefüllt, die durch die Privatisierung ehemals staatlicher Betriebe reich geworden waren. Diese Unternehmer boten nun Dienstleistungen an, die früher der Staat bewerkstelligte. So finanzierten sie etwa wohltätige Projekte oder sponserten kulturelle

Organisationen, darunter auch ethnische Assoziationen. Als Gegenleistung erhielten sie von ihren Klienten politische Unterstützung. Die ukrainische Demokratie ist daher nicht etwa ein Wettbewerb politischer Ideen, sondern ein Kampf reicher Leute, welche vor allem mit ihrer Großzügigkeit versuchen, politische Macht zu erlangen. Eine Plattform, auf der dieses Image der Großzügigkeit besonders gut transportiert werden kann, sind öffentliche Anlässe, wie etwa Jubiläumsfeiern, Stadt- und Dorffeste oder Folklorefestivals.

In vielen anderen Orten ist Ethnizität zu einem der wichtigsten Kriterien geworden, nach denen Klienten ihre Patrons und Patrons ihre Klienten auswählen. Der Grund dafür ist, dass Ethnizität in vielen Settings als Informationsabkürzung dienen kann. Wo sich die Ethnizität eines Menschen mit einem geringen Kostenaufwand erschließen lässt, etwa durch die Sprache oder die Kleidung, wird dieses leicht zu erfahrende Kriterium gerne herbeigezogen um andere, weniger leicht zu erfahrende Charakteristiken abschätzen zu können. In der Ukraine und im südlichen Bessarabien ganz besonders, ist Ethnizität eher eine ungeeignete Informationsabkürzung. Die meisten Menschen können ein neutrales Russisch sprechen, Familiennamen werden zwar oft mit einer bestimmten Ethnizität assoziiert, kommen aber in der Regel auch unter anderen ethnischen Gruppen häufig vor. Auch die Kleidung gibt, außer bei folkloristischen Auftritten, kaum Auskunft über die Ethnizität eines Menschen. Es dienen daher andere Merkmale als Informationsabkürzung bei der Wahl, mit wem man sich auf eine Patron-Klient-Beziehung einlassen soll. Das wichtigste Merkmal ist, dass jemand überzeugend als „einer von uns" (russisch *naš*) auftritt. Um als naš zu gelten, ist es wichtig, keine Gruppe der Bevölkerung vor den Kopf zu stoßen, etwa durch schmerzhafte politische Reformen. Genauso wichtig ist es, dass man als Patron keine ethnische Gruppe gegenüber anderen bevorzugt, nur schon deshalb, weil in vielen Wahlkreisen keine der ethnischen Gruppen eine eindeutige Bevölkerungsmehrheit stellt. Wer als naš gelten will, rühmt stattdessen das trotz unterschiedlicher ethnischer Identitäten harmonische Zusammenleben in der Region.

Die politischen Strategien zweier Lokalpolitiker werden in diesem Kapitel analysiert und verglichen. In den beiden Strategien kommt Ethnizität mit unterschiedlicher Gewichtung zum Tragen. Im ersten Setting, wo keine ethnische Gruppe in der Mehrheit ist, wurden deren Organisationen zwar mit Ressourcen bedacht, es wurde aber vom betreffenden Patron genau darauf geachtet, keine Gruppe zu bevorzugen. Außerdem spielte dieser Patron seine eigene ethnische Identität nicht aus. In einem benachbarten Wahlkreis, in dem die Bulgaren eine deutliche Bevölkerungsmehrheit stellen, spielte der beschriebene Patron mit Erfolg seine bulgarische Ethnizität und sein langjähriges Engagement für diese ethnische Gruppe aus.

Grundsätzlich muss der Patron, um sich die Unterstützung einer ethnischen Gruppe und ihrer Organisationen zu sichern, keineswegs selbst der betreffenden ethnischen Gruppe angehören. Er muss sie aber mit seinen Ressourcen im gleichen Masse bedenken wie andere

Organisationen auch, und er muss Ethnizität als eine Referenzkategorie verwenden, die sich jedem Menschen zuschreiben lässt und die bestimmte Eigenschaften mit sich bringt.

Alle beobachteten politischen Strategien bevorzugen klar abgegrenzte Gruppen, welche als Empfängergruppen für die Ressourcen des Patrons dienen können. Das gilt auch für sprachliche, konfessionelle und ethnische Gruppen. Nur wenn es Organisationen gibt, welche solche Gruppen gegen außen klar abgrenzen und über eine interne Hierarchie verfügen, können die Ressourcen des Patrons effizient durch sie verteilt werden. Umgekehrt haben diejenigen Klienten, die sich nicht zu einer klar abgegrenzten ethnischen Gruppe bekennen, auch keine politische Vertretung im klientelistischen Tauschhandel. Angebote, welche es für Leute gibt, die sich klar einer Gruppe zuordnenden, fehlen für frei schwimmende Klienten: Es gibt keine Organisation für die ethnisch Gemischten, für die postsowjetischen Entwurzelten oder die Sprecher von gemischten Sprachen. Rumänien, Bulgarien und die Türkei bieten ihre Staatsbürgerschaft und auch Studienplätze denjenigen Leuten an, welche in ihre Identität als Rumänen, Bulgaren oder Gagauzen investieren. Deshalb lohnt es sich für die Klienten zu einer klar erkennbaren Gruppe zu gehören. Das ist zwar noch keine Garantie, dass man von der Großzügigkeit des Patrons profitieren kann, aber es ist auf jeden Fall eine bessere Strategie als ein frei schwimmender Klient zu sein, denn einige Mitglieder der Gruppe werden schließlich profitieren, sonst kann die Gruppe als Ganzes den Patron bei den nächsten Wahlen bestrafen. Für frei schwimmende Individuen ist es also fast unmöglich am klientelistischen Austausch teilzunehmen.

Diese bevorzugten scharfen Grenzen zwischen ethnischen Gruppen und die Annahme, die Kultur der Menschen auf verschiedenen Seiten dieser Grenzen seien grundsätzlich verschieden, gerät immer wieder in Widerspruch mit der beobachtbaren sozialen Umwelt. Solche Widersprüche können von gemischt ethnischen Identitäten stammen, von Leuten, welche ihre ethnische Identität im Laufe ihres Lebens verändert haben und von Menschen, welche die angenommenen typischen Merkmale einer bestimmten ethnischen Gruppe nicht aufweisen, obwohl sie die Zugehörigkeit zu dieser Gruppe beanspruchen. Man kann auf solche Herausforderungen reagieren, indem man behauptet, ethnische Durchmischung sei eine rezente Erscheinung. Kapitel 2 hat gezeigt, dass es ethnische Durchmischung aber bereits im 19. Jahrhundert gab. Den Widersprüchen kann auch begegnet werden, indem Kriterien festgelegt werden, welche erfüllt sein müssen, um Zugehörigkeit zu einer ethnischen Gruppe beanspruchen zu können. Eine solche Kriterienliste kann dann nach Bedarf verlängert oder verkürzt werden, je nachdem ob man mehr oder weniger Menschen in die Gruppe einschließen will. Eine weitere Form, mit Widersprüchen umzugehen, ist die Behauptung, ethnische Unterschiede könnten nur von jenen richtig beurteilt werden, welche selbst zu einer bestimmten Gruppe gehörten. Damit geht zwar der Anspruch der objektiven Zuschreibbarkeit

von Ethnizität verloren, dafür aber können private Gefühle als Beweis für die Existenz von klar unterscheidbaren ethnischen Gruppen herangezogen werden. Alle Strategien, mit Widersprüchen umzugehen, beinhalten also eine Form des Ausschlusses derjenigen, welche auf den Widerspruch hinweisen oder selber solche Widersprüche verkörpern. Sie werden ausgeschlossen von der Gruppe derjenigen, die eine qualifizierte Aussage zu einer ethnischen Grenze machen können.

6. Die Konzeptualisierung von Ethnizität nach den Bedürfnissen der sowjetischen Verwaltung

Das Konzept der Ethnizität in westlichen Ländern und das sowjetische Konzept des „Ethnos" unterscheiden sich vor allem auf Grund ihrer unterschiedlichen Vorgeschichten. Das westeuropäische Konzept des frühen Nationalismus wurde durch die Eliten in Überseekolonien in Amerika und Asien mitgeprägt. Diese hatten, um die angestrebte Unabhängigkeit ihrer Kolonien von der europäischen Kolonialmacht zu legitimieren, ein Interesse daran, ein Gemeinschaftsgefühl innerhalb der Einwohner der Kolonie zu schaffen. Dieses Gemeinschaftsgefühl sollte die Menschen dort über kulturelle Unterschiede und unterschiedliche Herkunft hinweg gegen die Kolonialmacht einen. In den kontinentalen Reichen, zu denen das Russische Zarenreich gehörte, hatten die Eliten der nicht-russischen Gruppen, um mehr Unabhängigkeit zu gewinnen, genau das entgegengesetzte Ziel: Sie mussten aufzeigen, dass die Menschen in ihrem Gebiet einzigartig seien, völlig verschieden von ihren Nachbarn und vor allem von den Russen. Nur so konnten sie für die Idee eines kulturell homogenen Nationalstaates genügend Menschen mobilisieren. Bereits vor der Oktoberrevolution gab es in Westeuropa ein Konzept der Nation, in dem Solidarität sich aus einem gemeinsamen politischen Ziel ergab. Im Gebiet des Russischen Reiches hingegen herrschte die Idee vor, Solidarität würde sich aus einer gemeinsamen Kultur ergeben.

Die Idee, dass Solidarität auf einer gemeinsamen Kultur basiere, wurde auch in der Sowjetunion übernommen. In den ersten Jahren nach der Oktoberrevolution wurde deshalb darauf geachtet, die nicht-Russen des früheren Zarenreiches in ihren jeweiligen Sprachen und in ihren kulturellen Ausdrucksformen für die Sache des Kommunismus zu gewinnen. Das bedeutete aber auch, dass der Staat wissen musste, wie viele ethnische Gruppen es gab, wo die Grenzen zwischen diesen ethnischen Gruppen verliefen und welches die kulturellen Ausdrucksformen der jeweiligen Gruppen waren.

Diese administrativen Vorgaben prägten die Konzeptualisierung von Ethnizität in den sowjetischen Sozialwissenschaften. Verbreitet wurden deren Ideen sehr effektiv durch das zentralisierte sowjetische Bildungssystem, das die Menschen in einer Intensität erreichte, wie es

weder davor noch danach der Fall war. Sowjetische Theoretiker unter der Führung des langjährigen Leiters des Institutes für Ethnographie an der sowjetischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Julian Bromlej, waren vor allem darum bemüht, zu beweisen, dass Ethnizität objektiv feststellbar sei und nicht von den Wünschen oder Entscheidungen eines Menschen abhänge. Eine so verstandene Ethnizität drückt sich in einer Reihe kultureller Ausdrucksformen aus und in einem ethnischen Charakter, welche die Angehörigen einer ethnischen Gruppe weder auswählen noch ablegen können. Eine auf diese Weise essentialisierte Kategorie kann ohne weiteres im Pass eingetragen werden, da sie, genauso wie andere Kategorien der Verwaltung, leicht festzustellen, eindeutig zuzuschreiben und nicht frei wählbar ist.

Auch außerhalb akademischer Theorien zur Ethnizität wurde die Idee übernommen, Ethnizität könne eine Erklärung für das Verhalten von Menschen sein. So führten etwa einige meiner Informanten ihr eigenes Verhalten und das Verhalten Anderer auf Ethnizität zurück. In diesem Zusammenhang populär geworden sind die Theorien eines Außenseiters der sowjetischen Sozialwissenschaften, Lev Gumilev. In seinen umfassenden historischen Werken treten ethnische Gruppen als abgeschlossene Einheiten auf, die vorherbestimmte Zyklen durchlaufen und von „Passionarität" angetrieben werden, die von Zeit zu Zeit durch Ausschüttung kosmischer Energien angefacht wird. Diese Interpretation historischer Ereignisse durch metaphysische Kräfte enthebt den Menschen der Verantwortung für sein Handeln und delegiert diese an die ethnische Gruppe als handelnde Einheit. Auch wenn sich solche Ansichten in der russischsprachigen Forschung nie durchgesetzt haben, passen sie, in der Lesart eines breiteren Publikums, gut zu dem Anspruch, Ethnizität sei wissenschaftlich feststellbar und deshalb eine entscheidende Kategorie.

Für die sowjetische Verwaltung, die mit genau definierten Plänen und Quoten alle gesellschaftlichen Bereiche zu steuern versuchte, waren eindeutige Kategorien unerlässlich. Sozialwissenschaftliche Theorien, welche Ethnizität als konstruiert und ambivalent dargestellt hätten, hätten auch die Verwaltung der sowjetischen Bürger anhand ihrer Ethnizität in Frage gestellt.

Dennoch gab es Menschen, die durch ihre Abstammung von Eltern unterschiedlicher ethnischer Herkunft oder durch ihre kulturellen Ausdrucksformen nicht eindeutig in ein ethnisches Schema passten. Daher musste sich auch die sowjetische Sozialwissenschaft damit befassen, dass ethnische Gruppen historisch gewachsen waren. Um solchen Fällen zu begegnen, welche die Konzeptualisierung von Ethnizität als angeborenes und eindeutiges Merkmal in Frage stellten, wurden immer wieder neue Kategorien gebildet, welche auch Ausnahmen unterbringen konnten. So wurde etwa neben der Kategorie „Ethnos" die eigentlich eine abgeschlossene ethnische Einheit abbilden sollte, auch noch die Kategorie „Superethnos" gebildet, die für ein Konglomerat ähnlicher, aber nicht gleicher Ethnos-Gruppen stand, oder

„Subethnos" um auf eine Untergruppe mit kulturellen Eigenheiten innerhalb des „Ethnos" zu verweisen. Bei jeder neuen Kategorienbildung musste auch die Behauptung mitgenommen werden, die betreffende Kategorie sei genauso eindeutig definiert wie „Ethnos". Außerdem musste man behaupten, auch diese neu geschaffenen Kategorien seien schon immer dagewesen und die Menschen hätten zu ihnen gehört, selbst bevor die Kategorie entdeckt worden sei. So gerieten die sowjetischen Sozialwissenschaften in einen Zugzwang, ständig neue Kategorien zu bilden und jedes Mal zu behaupten eine neue, primordiale Gruppe entdeckt zu haben. Der Nachweis für die Primordialität einer Gruppe wird also dadurch erbracht, dass neue, auch primordiale Kategorien an den ausgefransten Rändern angeblich scharf abgegrenzter Kategorien geprägt werden. Diesen Mechanismus nenne ich die „primordiale Falle". Sie ist eine theoretische Sackgasse, unter der das Ethnizitätskonzept im post-sowjetischen Raum bis heute leidet.

7. An die Vergangenheit erinnern, um die Gegenwart zu gestalten

Seit die Ukraine ein unabhängiges Land ist haben sich die verschiedenen politischen Fraktionen oft eher durch ihren Blick auf die Vergangenheit des Landes unterschieden als durch ihre Visionen für die Zukunft. Dabei sind aus der Vergangenheit der Ukraine kaum eindeutige Schlüsse zu ziehen: Die Geschichte eines ukrainischen Staates zu schreiben, ist schwierig, weil es erst nach dem 1. Weltkrieg erste Ansätze einer ukrainischen Staatlichkeit gab und ein souveräner Staat Ukraine erst durch den Zusammenbruch der Sowjetunion entstand. Die Geschichte der Ukrainer als Volk zu schreiben, hat den Nachteil, dass man die vielen anderen Gruppen, die auch die Geschichte des Territoriums der heutigen Ukraine mitgeprägt haben, vernachlässigt. Die Geschichte der Ukraine als eine Region zu zeigen, stellt die Historiker vor die Herausforderung, dass dieses Territorium im Verlauf der Geschichte zu vielen, häufig wechselnden Staaten gehört hat. Dass die Ukraine, im Unterschied zu einigen Nachbarländern, keine lange zurückreichende, staatlich geförderte Geschichtsschreibung hat, wird zuweilen damit verwechselt, dass die Ukraine überhaupt keine Geschichte habe.

Als Ersatz für politische Zukunftsvisionen dient in der Ukraine eine allgegenwärtige Erinnerungskultur. Diese transportiert verschiedene Identitätsangebote mit der Ukraine als Nation, mit einzelnen ethnischen Gruppen oder mit der vergangenen Größe des Zarenreiches und der Sowjetunion. Diese Form der Erinnerungskultur hat tiefe historische Wurzeln. Schon die rumänischen und sowjetischen Verwaltungen in Bessarabien waren sich der politischen Macht von Geschichtsbildern bewusst. Beide versuchten, ihre Präsenz in der Region damit zu festigen, ihre jeweils eigenen Erinnerungskulturen an die Landbevölkerung zu vermitteln. Dazu wurden unter beiden Staaten eigens Institutionen geschaffen, welche die meist analphabetische Bevölkerung zu erreichen versuchten, zunächst in Rumänisch, später in der Sowjetunion auf

Russisch und in einigen lokalen Sprachen. Dabei war es der rumänischen Geschichtsvermittlung zunächst ein Anliegen, die Bevölkerung davon zu überzeugen, dass Bessarabien rumänisches Kernland sei und dass die Russen, welche die Region vor dem 1. Weltkrieg regierten, nur aus unlauteren Motiven hierhin expandiert hatten. Wenn einmal alle Einwohner Rumäniens Rumänen seien, entweder durch die Rückkehr zu ihrer ursprünglichen rumänischen Identität oder durch das Ausweisen ethnischer Minderheiten, dann erwarte die Bevölkerung ein harmonisches Zeitalter.

Ein ähnliches Versprechen einer harmonischen Gesellschaft nach der Rückkehr zu einem ursprünglichen Zustand, machte auch die sowjetische Geschichtsrezeption gegenüber der bessarabischen Landbevölkerung. Hier ging es darum, eine Geschichte zu zeigen, die, angetrieben von Klassenkämpfen, unweigerlich eine Reihe historischer Stadien durchläuft, bis zum Eintritt in eine sozialistische Gesellschaft, in welcher Klassengegensätze schließlich aufgelöst werden. Wichtig war der sowjetischen Geschichtsvermittlung auch das Paradigma, dass die nicht-russischen Gruppen im Zarenreich sich freiwillig unter die Obhut Russlands begeben hatten um einer schlechteren Alternative, der Beherrschung durch eine andere Macht, zu entgehen. Dieses „kleinere-Übel-Paradigma" wurde jedoch noch zu Stalins Lebzeiten durch ein Paradigma ersetzt, in dem das Verhältnis zwischen den Russen und Nicht-Russen nicht mehr als von pragmatischen Überlegungen geprägt, sondern von brüderlicher Liebe zwischen den Völkern herbeigeführt wurde.

Dass die bessarabische Geschichte und im weitesten Sinne auch die Geschichte der Ukraine und Moldovas so leicht formbar war, und dass sich so gegensätzliche Interpretationen aus ihr ergeben konnten, hat mit dem peripheren Status dieser Region zu tun. Die Geschichtsschreibung der Peripherie ist von drei Besonderheiten geprägt. 1. Wird die Geschichte hier weniger intensiv studiert als die politischer und kultureller Zentren, 2. gibt es für die Zentren mehr und oft auch ältere Quellen, welche zu einer eindeutigeren Geschichtsschreibung beitragen können und 3. hat die Peripherie in der Vergangenheit zu vielen Staaten gehört, welche jeweils ihre eignen Quellen hinterlassen haben, in ihren jeweiligen Sprachen. Diese Quellen sind heute in den alten Zentren zu finden, und deshalb weit verstreut. Die Geschichte der Peripherie ist aus diesen Gründen lückenhaft und anfällig auf tendenziöse Interpretationen.

Einige Episoden der bessarabischen Geschichte sind jedoch sehr gut erforscht. Es handelt sich um die wenigen Perioden, in denen die bessarabische Peripherie zur Bühne historischer Ereignisse von überregionaler Bedeutung wurde. In Bessarabien ist das zum einen die Belagerung und Erstürmung der Festung Izmail durch die Truppen von General Alexander Suvorov 1791, zum anderen der Zweite Weltkrieg. Vor allem durch die sowjetische Geschichtsschreibung wurden diese Ereignissen zu den wenigen herausragenden Höhepunkten

der Geschichte erhoben, welche sehr viel mehr Aufmerksamkeit beanspruchen, als alle anderen Zeiten zusammengenommen. Zusammen teilen sich diese beiden Ereignisse fast den ganzen Platz in Museen und Gedenkstätten.

Das sowjetische Paradigma, dass jede ethnische Gruppe eine geschlossene Einheit mit eigener Handlungsmacht darstellt, hat sich auch in der Geschichtsschreibung deutlich niedergeschlagen. Jede ethnische Gruppe erhielt eine eigens auf sie zugeschnittene Geschichtsschreibung. Die Ethnogenese der einzelnen Gruppen waren ein zentraler Bestandteil der sowjetischen Forschung und sind es bis heute geblieben. Solche historischen Herleitungen sind oft politisch aufgeladen, weil sie gewisse Gruppen früher als andere entstanden sehen und früher als andere in einer gewissen Region auftauchen lassen. Daraus lassen sich, in einer Region, in der immer noch die Rechtmäßigkeit von Landesgrenzen angezweifelt wird, auch revisionistische Forderungen ableiten. Dazu kommt, dass auch der Prozess der Ethnogenese, wie die ethnische Gruppe selbst, als naturgegeben angesehen wurde, nicht als durch das Verhalten und die Ziele von Menschen gelenkt. So erhalten die aus den jeweiligen Interpretationen von Ethnogenese abgeleiteten Forderungen den Anschein, natürlichen Gegebenheiten zu entsprechen.

Klientelismus spielt auch bei der Interpretation der Vergangenheit eine entscheidende Rolle. Patrons können Klienten mobilisieren indem sie öffentlich an historische Figuren und Ereignisse erinnern, welche in ihrem Sinne identitätsstiftend wirken. Gerade weil die Geschichte der Ukraine in vielen Punkten so umstritten bleibt, ist es für die politischen Eliten wichtig, dass sie die Interpretationshoheit über historischen Ereignisse und Personen nicht aus der Hand geben. In der Sowjetunion wurde darauf geachtet, einige wenige historische Ereignisse und Personen mit sehr eindeutigen Interpretationen auszustatten. Im postsowjetischen Klientelismus, mit seiner Konkurrenz zwischen einzelnen Patrons ist es hingegen wichtig, dass es ein breiteres Angebot an Ereignissen und Personen in der Erinnerungskultur gibt. Diese müssen aber immer noch mit einer eindeutigen Interpretation reflektiert werden. Ereignisse oder Personen, die widersprüchliche Interpretationen zulassen, würden unter Umständen gleich viele Klienten abschrecken, wie sie mobilisieren könnten.

8. Techniken und Narrative, mit denen ethnische Grenzen erhalten werden

Wenn Ethnizität angeboren ist und die Angehörigen einer ethnischen Gruppe mit jeweils ganz eigenen Charakteristiken ausstattet, dann muss sie irgendwie übertragen werden. Die Substanz, welche Ethnizität ausmacht, muss sich irgendwo befinden und sich auf eine bestimmte Weise auswirken. Nach der Auswertung des Feldforschungsmaterials auf der Suche nach Narrativen über ethnische Identität und Techniken der Abgrenzung ergaben sich fünf Faktoren, die

Ethnizität auszumachen scheinen: Die Sprache, die Religion, gemeinsame historische Erfahrungen, die Folklore und die DNA. Jeder von diesen Faktoren zieht seine eignen Techniken und Narrative nach sich, mit denen ethnische Grenzen erhalten werden können.

Die Sprache kommt in den meisten Definitionen von Ethnizität als verbindendes Merkmal vor. Bei den sowjetischen Definitionen ist sie immer dabei. Die Idee, dass der ethnische Charakter in der Sprache gespeichert liege, war unter meinen Informanten weit verbreitet. Dazu gehörte auch die Idee, dass die Sprache, welche am tiefsten im Unterbewusstsein eines Menschen eingraviert ist, Auskunft über seine „wahre" ethnische Identität geben könne. Von diesen Annahmen ausgehend, leitet sich der Sprachpurismus als geeignete Strategie ab, um ethnische Grenzen aufrechtzuerhalten. Sprachpurismus ist die Forderung, all jene Menschen, die zu einer bestimmten ethnischen Gruppe gerechnet werden wollten, müssten auch eine bestimmte Sprache verwenden.

Viel schwieriger ist es, in der Ukraine die Religion als Markierung ethnischer Identitäten herbeizuziehen. Die Logik, dass religiöse Lehren Werte prägen und diese Werte dann das Verhalten der Menschen, ist zwar auch weit verbreitet, aber die konfessionelle Zugehörigkeit ist in der Ukraine nicht deckungsgleich mit der Zugehörigkeit zu ethnischen Gruppen. Im Osten und Süden der Ukraine gehören die meisten orthodoxen Kirchgemeinden, unabhängig von der Sprache, in der gepredigt wird, zum Moskauer Patriarchat. Dennoch kann die Religion in vielen Zusammenhängen eine klare Abgrenzungsfunktion haben, etwa wenn politische Patrons sich für die Kirche engagieren und sich dafür von kirchlichen Würdenträgern bei den Gläubigen zur Wahl empfehlen lassen. Die so erreichten Gruppen sind weit umfassender als die ethnischen Gruppen im südlichen Bessarabien. Das Orthodoxe Christentum eignet sich allenfalls, um sich von den vielen evangelikalen Freikirchen abzugrenzen, die in der Ukraine großen Zulauf genießen. Mit dem Betonen von Religiosität kann man sich auch von dem als zunehmend säkular empfundenen Westeuropa abgrenzen.

Auch eine gemeinsam durchlebte Geschichte und gemeinsame durch diese Geschichte geprägte Charakteristiken waren für das sowjetische Verständnis von Ethnizität zentral. Die vertraute Beobachtung, dass Menschen, die Vieles gemeinsam durchgemacht haben, ähnliche Eigenschaften entwickeln, ist auch in nicht-akademischen Erklärungen für ethnische Unterschiede vertreten. Eigenschaften wie folkloristische Melodien oder das Verhältnis zwischen Mann und Frau werden dann auf sehr lange zurückliegende historische Ereignisse zurückgeführt. Für den Erhalt ethnischer Grenzen ist es demnach wichtig, dass ethnische Gruppen auch sehr weit zurück in die Vergangenheit kontinuierlich als abgeschlossene Einheiten mit ihrer jeweils eigenen Geschichte auftreten.

Jede ethnische Gruppe kultiviert ihre eigene Folklore. Folkloristische Gruppen treten in der Öffentlichkeit immer mit einem ethnischen Label auf. Ganze Gruppen können durch ihre

Namen und ihre Kleidung als die Vertreter einer bestimmten ethnischen Gruppe auftreten, oder sie können die einzelnen Lieder und Tänze in ihrem Programm jeweils mit einem ethnischen Label versehen. Einige meiner Informanten verwendeten die Emotionen, welche die so markierten Aufführungen bei ihnen und anderen hervorriefen, als Testverfahren, um festzustellen, zu welcher ethnischen Gruppe jemand „wirklich" gehöre. Ein beliebtes Narrativ dabei ist, dass man nur auf die Folklore emotional reagiere, die dem eigenen ethnischen Kern entspreche. Das populäre Genre der „verarbeiteten Folklore" entsteht auf der Basis von ethnographisch gesammeltem und bereits ethnisch gelabeltem Material, welches dann bis zur Bühnenreife verfeinert wird. Die Wurzeln dieses Genres liegen in der Sowjetunion. Als in der Nachkriegszeit Kulturhäuser gebaut und Folklorekollektive gegründet wurden, wurde wie immer in der Sowjetunion auf einen klar abgegrenzten und unteilbaren Fundus ethnischer Charakteristiken verwiesen. Seit den 80er Jahren organisierte sich die folkloristische Bewegung neu und richtete sich stärker nationalistisch aus. Die Unterschiede in Tracht, Liedgut und Tänzen wurden stärker herangezogen um ethnische Unterschiede zu betonen.

Schließlich trifft man oft auf die Meinung, ethnische Unterschiede seien auf genetische Vererbung zurückzuführen. Ethnischer Nationalismus hat schon lange darunter gelitten, dass es sehr schwierig war, Ethnizität zu einer glaubwürdigen, wissenschaftlichen Unterscheidung zu machen. Mit dem Aufkommen der Genetik hofften viele nun ein Hilfsmittel in der Hand zu haben, mit dem die angenommene, über Generationen stabile Andersartigkeit zwischen ethnischen Gruppen bewiesen und erklärt werden konnte. Das noch relativ junge Feld der Genetik hat mitgeholfen, zu verstehen, wie sich die Menschen auf der Erde ausgebreitet haben und wann welche Regionen von wo her besiedelt wurden. In solchen Studien verwendet man vor allen Dingen, die mitochondriale DNA, die von Müttern an ihre Kinder unverändert weitervererbt wird, sowie die Y-Chromosom DNA, die von Vätern an ihre Söhne unverändert vererbt wird. Anhand der seltenen Mutationen in diesen Vererbungslinien, lassen sich Gruppen definieren, die vor sehr langer Zeit eine gemeinsame Vorfahrin oder einen gemeinsamen Vorfahr hatten. Diese stammen meist aus Zeiten lange bevor sich die Idee der Nation oder der ethnischen Gruppe historisch belegen lässt. Außerdem würde der Glaube, dass Abstammungsgruppen mit ethnischen Gruppen deckungsgleich sind, auch voraussetzen, dass innerhalb dieser Gruppen strikte Endogamie geherrscht hat. Die Feststellung eines gemeinsamen Vorfahrens vor langer Zeit, welche über das Y-Chromosom festgestellt werden kann oder einer gemeinsamen Vorfahrin, welcher über mitochondriale DNA festgestellt werden kann, besagt außerdem auch nichts über die Herkunft aller anderer Hunderter oder Tausender Vorfahren, deren DNA ebenfalls zum Genom eines Menschen beigetragen hat. Es ist deshalb wenig erstaunlich, dass es kaum eine Übereinstimmung zwischen ethnischen Gruppen und Abstammungsgruppen gibt. Dennoch sind Verweise auf die Genetik in der Ukraine sehr populär

geworden. Unter anderem in einem viel diskutierten Dokumentarfilm, der behauptete den Beweis erbracht zu haben, dass die Ukrainer genetisch gesehen keine Slawen seien, wie die Russen, sondern den Westeuropäern näher verwandt seien. Mit der Behauptung, ethnische Grenzen seien auch die Grenzen uralter, endogamer Gruppen, wird implizit auch die Forderung an diejenigen gestellt, welche ethnische Grenzen erhalten wollen, dass sie sich auch in der Gegenwart bei der Partnerwahl an ethnische Grenzen halten sollten.

Alle diese Narrative haben den gemeinsamen Nenner, dass sie Charakteristiken innerhalb ethnischer Grenzen verallgemeinern, während sie Gemeinsamkeiten über diese Grenzen hinweg ignorieren oder abstreiten. Damit wird die kulturelle Homogenität, die man innerhalb dieser Grenzen findet, übertrieben, und die kulturelle Homogenität, die sich auch über solche Grenzen hinweg findet, wird unterschlagen.

9. Fazit

Zunächst lässt sich im Rückgriff auf die Ausgangsfrage, ob die Wichtigkeit von ethnischen Grenzen kontinuierlich zunahm oder von bedeutenden Schwankungen geprägt war, feststellen, dass die Brüche in der Geschichte ethnischer Grenzen nicht unbedingt mit den Wechseln der politischen Machthaber zusammenfallen. So haben zum Beispiel die ideologisch einander entgegengesetzten Staaten Rumänien und die Sowjetunion beide Ethnizität als Indikator für Vertrauenswürdigkeit verwendet. Einige Praktiken, die unter der Herrschaft eines Staates entstanden sind, konnten also unter der Herrschaft des Nachfolgestaates durchaus fortgesetzt werden. Ethnische Grenzen wurden vor allem dann zu Hindernissen für einzelne Menschen, wenn der Staat in eine Legitimierungskrise geriet. Wenn sich also eine staatliche Elite nicht dadurch rechtfertigen konnte, dass sie Wohlstand und Sicherheit schaffte, klammerte sie sich mit Verweis auf ihre Ethnizität an die Macht. Ethnische Minderheiten wurden in solchen Zeiten vom politischen Prozess ausgeschlossen. Das war der Fall im zaristischen Russland nach der Revolution von 1905, unter den Rumänen ab Mitte der 30er Jahre, als klar wurde, dass das schnell gewachsene Land in einem sich anbahnenden europäischen Konflikt zwischen die Fronten geraten würde. Ethnizität war auch ein Hindernis in den ersten Jahren der sowjetischen Herrschaft, welche durch brutale Kollektivierung, Willkür und Hunger geprägt waren. Schließlich versuchten die Eliten, wieder politische Legitimität durch ihre Ethnizität zur erhalten, als die Sowjetunion auseinanderzubrechen begann und sich unter chaotischen wirtschaftlichen Zuständen unabhängige Staaten bildeten. Diese erste Hypothese, dass die Tragweite von Ethnizität für den Einzelnen mit der politischen Legitimität der Machthaber zusammenhängt, konnte also bestätigt werden.

Zu den Profiteuren von scharfen ethnischen Grenzen gehörten zunächst Beamte der Verwaltung, die auf klare Kategorien angewiesen waren, später politische Eliten, welche diese Kategorien zur Legitimierung ihrer politischen Macht ins Feld führen konnten.

Die zweite Hypothese, dass es einen Mechanismus der Stigmatisierung gibt für jegliches Auflösen von ethnischen Grenzen, kann vor allem für den Bereich der Sprache bestätigt werden. Hier gibt es in der Ukraine eine lange Tradition von Purismus. Im Bereich der Religion, der Erinnerungskultur, und der Folklore können Verhaltensweisen, welche etablierte ethnische Grenzen auflösen, ebenfalls stigmatisiert werden. In diesen Bereichen sind allerdings die angeblich reinen Ursprungsformen weniger klar definiert als in der Sprache, so dass mehr Spielraum besteht zwischen „rein" und „gemischt" und deswegen auch der Mechanismus der Stigmatisierung weniger gut greift.

Diese Feststellung bringt uns zu der dritten Hypothese, die besagt, dass Widersprüchen zwischen der Behauptung, ethnische Grenzen seien trennscharf und der beobachtbaren Realität, damit begegnet wird, dass denjenigen, welche auf den Widerspruch hinweisen, die Kompetenz abgesprochen wird, ein eigenes Urteil über ethnische Grenzen zu bilden. Dies geschieht häufig mit dem Verweis auf nicht überprüfbare Indikatoren wie Gefühle oder Empfindungen, die denjenigen vorbehalten sind, die den Glauben an die Trennschärfe ethnischer Grenzen teilen. Auch können Zweifler damit ausgeschlossen werden, dass ihnen unlautere Motive für ihr Infragestellen ethnischer Grenzen vorgehalten werden. In jedem Fall aber -und damit lässt sich diese letzte Hypothese bestätigen- braucht es einen Ausschlussmechanismus, welcher den Kreis derjenigen einschränkt, welche eine qualifizierte Aussage über ethnische Grenzen machen können.

1. Introduction

During research in southern Bessarabia in 2012 and 2013 I have often struggled to explain what my study was about, especially when asked, exactly which of the many ethnic groups of Bessarabia I had come to study. In fact, the very idea, which informs this question, the widespread belief that ethnic groups are self-contained units that are best studied separately, was the topic of research. More specifically, this thesis aims to tell the story of ethnic boundaries, the story of the paradigm suggesting communion occurs primarily within groups of a very specific type; ethnic groups, whereas conflicts, occur typically between such groups. This idea was in the focus of the 200-year account of a multicultural and peripheral region in southwestern Ukraine, much more than a particular ethnic group, culture, or place. How have ethnic boundaries in this region emerged and how could they be preserved over time and through perpetual political sea changes? Following Fredrik Barth's example, this work is more interested in ethnic boundaries than the "cultural stuff" which they enclose (Barth, 1969:6, 2000b:30).

Before discussing in more detail the concepts of ethnicity and nationality used in this work, a characterization of what is understood here as ethnic boundaries is appropriate at the very outset: Ethnic boundaries are the demarcation lines between social groups that are seen by their members and are recognized by outsiders as two different ethnic groups because of their diverging cultural traits (may they be real or alleged) and/or diverging geographical origins (again, real or imagined). Unlike state borders, ethnic boundaries are notoriously hard to depict on maps and even harder to "demarcate" on the ground. But very much like state borders, ethnic boundaries limit individual options. State borders set the territorial limit within which an individual can rightfully reside and enjoys civil rights. Similarly, ethnic boundaries confine a social group within which one ought to, or ought not to engage in certain activities, for instance speak a certain language, sing songs, pray in church, seek political representation, or choose marriage partners. In other words, ethnic boundaries reflect a set of rules that regulates which social realms have to be kept isolated from ethnic outsiders (Barth, 1969:16, Eriksen, 1993:25). Boundaries therefore have, as Andreas Wimmer (2008:975) reminds us, two dimensions: one that refers to classification and collective representation and one that refers to everyday networks of relationships, to individual acts of connecting and distancing. The first of this

dimensions divides the social world into social groups of "us" and "them", the other dimension informs scripts of action, how to relate to individuals classified as "us" or "them." The existence of such boundaries does not necessarily imply that groups are sharply bounded. Boundaries are often soft and individuals often trespass them by belonging to different categories (ibid.:976).

Southern Bessarabia is crisscrossed by ethnic boundaries. In some cases they run along other boundaries, such as state borders or linguistic differences, but more often these different types of boundaries cross over. The combination of an exceptionally rich "ethnic mosaic" (Lebedenko and Tychyna, 2002:3) and a history of frequently changing statehood was why this region seemed a suitable place to study how ethnic boundaries are transfigured by the tides of history. At different times, different ethnic boundaries gained in importance while others lost theirs. This study sheds some light on the nature of these ethnic boundaries and the mechanisms and rationales that drive their ongoing metamorphosis.

Most of the research was conducted in Odessa Oblast, in south-western Ukraine, in and around the town of Izmail, a river port on the Danube with roughly 72.000 inhabitants.[1] Fieldwork started in August 2012 and was completed in December 2013, covering the 16 months prior to the Maidan upheavals of late 2013. Inevitably, the events that evolved in the aftermath of the Maidan protests changed my perspective on the data gathered in this period. But the events unleashed by Maidan also changed what it means to belong to an ethnic minority in Ukraine. At the same time the Ukrainian state has redefined itself in more nationalistic terms. As so many times throughout history, new priorities were set in the political center as to how history should be remembered, what a Ukrainian identity should imply, and in which relation Ukrainian society should stand vis-à-vis other societies, above all Russia and Western Europe. History accelerated in late 2013 and throughout 2014, changing the political implications of ethnic boundaries one more time. Although I was not aware of it at the time of my research, the data collected became, in retrospect, the basis for a description of a society descending into war. When I left Ukraine in December 2013, it was clear to anyone that life could not just go on as it did, but still every political faction believed they could turn things their way.

The protests on the Maidan were originally caused by a general tiredness with the Yanukovich regime, the last in a long string of corrupt and inefficient Ukrainian governments. The trigger of the first protests was a political turnaround of president Yanukovich, who in the last minute decided not to sign, after all, an association agreement with the European Union. In the weeks running up to this moment, he and his government had advertised the agreement

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[1] Based on an estimate by the State Statistics Committee of Ukraine
http://www.citypopulation.de/php/ukraine-odesa_d.php?adm2id=51106 (02.11.2015). The last reliable census figures are from 2001 when Izmail still had about 84.800 inhabitants: http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/rus/results/general/urban-rural/odesa/ (02.11.2015)

loudly, despite secret meetings between the Yanukovich government and the Russian leadership were being held at the same time.[2] Already then, it became clear that the perspective of closer ties with international organizations, dominated by Western states, had the potential to deeply divide Ukrainian society. The decision not to sign a particular agreement eventually exposed much deeper rifts in culture, language policy, and perspective on the country's history. It was impossible to write about ethnic boundaries in Ukraine and not to ask whether these rifts ran along ethnic boundaries. Still, during fieldwork in 2012 and 2013 my focus on ethnic boundaries almost invariably produced responses stressing the harmonic interethnic relations in Ukraine. There were certainly no ethnic tensions that suggested imminent war. But many of my informants, as well as protagonists of public discourse, unequivocally expressed their frustration with the Ukrainian government and highlighted that life could not go on like this for much longer. Very little of the grievances named to exemplify such complaints were caused by cultural or ethnic differences, by language barriers, or disputes over history. Most of the trouble mentioned was centered on corruption, clientelism, mismanagement, political hypocrisy, and the resulting economic hardship. These were, I firmly believe, the deeper lying causes of the crisis starting in 2013. The significance of ethnicity and ethnic boundaries grew when violence spread in Ukraine from early 2014 on. This is not to say that ethnic boundaries are at the root of the conflict, but they are, as I intend to show, closely tied to clientelistic local politics.

For many of my older informants their frustration about social and economic decline was expressed through an omnipresent nostalgia for the Soviet Union. This nostalgia often came along with a moral discourse. In this discourse, corruption, as well as political and legal nihilism were seen as the cause of decline and poverty. One painfully felt consequence of economic hardship is massive out-migration of rural regions such as southern Bessarabia. The lack of people in working age creates a strain on family and village life. The result is a widespread perception of a declining communal spirit and a rise in egoistic individualism. The comparison between the more prosperous Soviet village and the present decline blends neatly into a long cultivated dichotomy between East and West, between a Russian-led cultural sphere and Western Europe. The latter came to stand for destructive capitalism and opportunism whereas Russia, mainly through television, maintains an image of a conservative society based on family and community values that for many seem to have disappeared from Ukraine along with the Soviet Union.

Even though, at the time of research, I did not anticipate rapid social change, the material gathered just prior to it can provide some insight on how very tangible grievances

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[2] *The Guardian* November 26, 2013, *Ukraine U-turn on Europe pact was agreed with Vladimir Putin*, available online: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/26/ukraine-u-turn-eu-pact-putin (02.11.2015)

came to be connected to concepts like ethnicity, language, and history. In Ukraine as elsewhere, these are vague and contradictory notions, receptive for political molding. So in this work, for all the periods studied, I will make a sincere attempt to understand discourses on the overriding topics; ethnicity, language, and history, by looking at the forces that drove social change in each period.

1.1. Questions and hypotheses

In this study, the process of ethnic boundary maintenance (Barth, 1969:19) will be looked at from three different angles. 1) A historical angle, meant to clarify at what times ethnic boundaries occurred and how they changed. 2) A socio-economic perspective interested in the implications ethnic boundaries had for people and their biographies. 3) It is vital for the understanding of ethnic boundaries to analyze the discourses used in justifying them.

These three perspectives result in a list of research questions that informed the research process: In a long term perspective, at what times did ethnic boundaries play a crucial role in access to resources and the political decision making process? Was the influence of ethnicity on politics a continuous one, or were there decisive ruptures? At what times and in what ways did ethnic belonging foster or impede individual life trajectories? And how was this fostering or impediment explained and justified to them and by them? Additionally, sociopolitical aspects of ethnic boundaries should be given ample attention in order to explain the motivations behind creating and maintaining ethnic boundaries: At what times and in what ways did actors who maintained ethnic boundaries gain economically or politically from this activity?

To connect the historical approach with the assumption that ethnic boundaries are culturally constructed (Barth, 1969, Gellner, 1983, Anderson, 2006, Hroch, 1998), one central question would be: What techniques and narratives proved useful-currently and in the past-to make people perceive ethnic groups as clear-cut entities and as active subjects of history?

Finally, it will be enlightening to see how narratives are adapted if they prove to be unconvincing: When contradictions between narratives about ethnic distinctions and the observable social environment become obvious, how are they confronted by those who claim ethnic distinctions are clear-cut?

The topics addressed in these questions, the varying importance of ethnic boundaries and the ways in which ethnic boundaries can be created and maintained, reappear throughout the following chapters. They can be approached with a set of three hypotheses:

(1) Concerning the question when, in the history of Bessarabia, ethnic boundaries reached their maximum potency, we can assume that their greatest potential to foster or impede individual life trajectories occurred simultaneously with legitimation crises of the state

(Beissinger, 2002:27, Brubaker, 2004:89, 100). That is, whenever the ruling political elite was unable or unwilling to provide security and economic prosperity, mistrust between the state elite and the population at the periphery soared and with it the significance of ethnic boundaries. One difficulty in testing this hypothesis is that in southern Bessarabia, since the occurrence of ethnic boundaries, times of turmoil have almost outweighed times of stability. However, stability and instability are relative, and even in bad times there were periods much more distressful than long lasting dull and oppressive periods. So there is enough ground for comparison even if it is not between two extremes stable vs. instable, but on a continuum in which instable and stable were perceived according to a particular historical context. Certainly, the relations between the members of particular ethnic groups and the quickly superseding governments changed often enough to provide testing ground for this assumption.

(2) With regard to the techniques and narratives that create and maintain ethnic boundaries, it might turn out that there is a mechanism that represents the lowest common denominator: Ethnic boundaries are kept clear-cut by stigmatizing ambivalent identities as anomalous and by denying their partial belonging to one's own identity group (Barth, 1969:18, Eriksen, 1993:67). This stigmatization is likely to come in many guises, but the underlying mechanism of exclusion and inclusion may well remain unaltered. If found true, one goal of this study will be to identify and contextualize the different forms this mechanism has taken in the past.

(3) The third hypothesis addresses the ways people deal with contradictions in narratives that portray ethnic groups as unambiguously bounded. Ethnic identities are based on the belief of an emotional bond between all the members of such a group (Anderson, 2006:6, Connor, 2011:7). Such connections can be felt, but it is hard to expose or even prove them. Ethnic identities, even if they have become common sense, are "saturated with emotion" (Suny, 2001:894) and emotions need no proof. Therefore, when it comes to contradictions between claims of distinctiveness of ethnic boundaries and observable social environment, then the claimants will most likely seek the refuge of evidence that can be tested only by group insiders and that is hidden to outsiders. These may be feelings or sensations perceptible only to those whom the claimant considers his own kind and inaccessible for those who challenge ethnic boundaries.

As the research questions and hypotheses indicate, this work is basically a search for reoccurring patterns of inclusion and exclusion through the modern history of southern Bessarabia. This endeavor requires collecting tangible instances of inclusion and exclusion, historical as well as modern ones, and subsequently analyzing these instances for their underlying patterns. Such an approach will allow some degree of comparison over time.

1.2.   History and anthropology, some methodological implications

The historic scope explored in this work starts with the year of 1812, the year Bessarabia became a part of the Russian Empire. Two hundred years is a long period to discuss by any means, but it is especially challenging to do so concerning a peripheral region, the history of which is documented scantly, controversially, and in several languages. On the other hand, the topic of this work, the creation and maintenance of ethnic boundaries, is rather narrow, merely one aspect of the much studied advent of nationalism. It can hardly be navigated without constantly digressing into adjacent fields. The result could therefore not be a meticulous social history of southern Bessarabia, but strictly the interpretation of the evidence on the emergence and change of ethnic boundaries. The rationale behind tracing ethnic boundaries – a specific but not an isolated social phenomenon – is to reveal the tirelessly working actors behind the creation and maintenance of ethnic boundaries, and the techniques they used at different times. The changing character and functions of ethnic boundaries thereby merely serve to illustrate much broader changes; the rationalization of the state, industrialization, and later the decline of the socialist economy, the advent of nationalism, and the subsequent creation of relatively uniform national cultures. More abstractly, it also touches upon the effects of mass education, of social and geographical mobility, and the spread of mass media. All these phenomena have to be discussed while proceeding through history in big steps. Ignoring these indicators of change, the social mechanisms behind the occurrence of ethnic boundaries can hardly be understood. Although the historical description in this work had to remain superficial, it was important to get its broad terms right. After all, ethnic boundaries have often been reinforced by referring to history. Therefore, it would be impossible to study ethnic boundaries without studying the changeful history of the society that produced them. Employing historical perspectives in anthropological thinking seemed therefore an appropriate procedure.

By starting in the early 19th century and ending in the present, this work ran the danger of having two parts; a historical one, relying on archive sources, and an anthropological one, relying on participant observation and interviews. I aimed to dissolve the methodical boundary between history and social anthropology by adding biographical interviews to the methods, and by looking closely at the way history is represented in the present. Thus I added emphasis on the idea that the present society and the ethnic boundaries in it are an outcome of the past and that the past, as we see it today, is shaped by present circumstances. Nevertheless, if we combine insights of history and anthropology, we should never take the methodology of the two disciplines for the same or believe they can readily be combined. In ethnography, the past cannot be seen, it inevitably has to be explained in terms of the present (Bloch, 1989:2). The people of the past leave traces - if we are lucky - but beyond these, they cannot be observed nor

questioned. The traces they left us are very selective, scattered to the four winds, and easily misinterpreted. In contrast to an interview, taken in the present, historical sources most often do not lend the actors the courtesy of speaking for themselves. Most of the sources were produced and stored by the state. Therefore, there is more emphasis on the views of state functionaries the further back this history reaches.

One traditional way of escaping the historian's problem that his subjects are no longer there to answer his questions, is to assume an archeologist's eye, and to treat certain contemporary cultural traits as relicts of the past. One would look for example at popular art and folklore and try to find out what the people in the past could have meant and thought, when they created these cultural forms that have allegedly been preserved by tradition. Soviet ethnography was institutionally tied to historiographical research institutions (Tishkov, 1992:373) and it looked at "traditional" artifacts as the remains of a pure and authentic past. Present cultural forms, in this approach, represented merely a layer of dust on the authentic. It had to be wiped off in order to see the true nature of the people underneath. But rejecting the present as a mere distortion from a once undisturbed authentic society, would again divide the two disciplines, the quests of which I aim to combine here. What unites the two fields is undoubtedly the desire to grasp the ideas of people who differ from the researcher in their mindset, be it because they lived long ago or were socialized in a different culture. The quest into the mind that thought long ago or far away is "the same adventure of the mind" as Fernand Braudel (2009:184) quoted Claude Lévi-Strauss. The metaphor of the past as a foreign country[3] was evoked in David Lowenthal's work (1985). The American anthropologist Clifford Geertz saw ethnographic research as an act of reading the culture of a foreign society. He employed the metaphor of a manuscript that needs to be read and understood, a manuscript that is, written in a foreign language, faded and full of digression, contradictions, suspicious corrections, and tendentious comments (Geertz, 1973:10). For historians, in contrast, such documents are not a metaphor but the real sources on which they base their insights. Still the cognitive process of interpreting the two sources of knowledge, observable behavior and historical sources is parallel in both disciplines and can fruitfully be combined.

This study combines a wide range of archival sources with ethnographic material. The bulk of archival materials come from the state archive in Izmail. They include a broad array of data on the relation between state and population from two centuries and three different states: tsarist Russia, Romania, and the Soviet Union. Since the archive had no collection on ethnicity, clues on the significance of ethnicity at various times had to be taken from census data, police

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[3] The phrase "the past is a foreign country: they do things differently there", has become proverbial before Lowenthal's book. It is the opening sentence of L.P Hartley's novel *The Go-Between* (1953) and became widely known when the book was made into a feature film with the same title in 1971.

reports, marriage certificates, school reports, culture house programs, minutes of village gatherings, and many other files. Most files in the Izmail archive were sorted into topical collections, each of which was headed by a descriptive file (*opis'*). Descriptions of files up to 1966 were additionally summarized in a guidebook (*putevoditel'*). Following this structure, the selection of files, which I eventually examined, began by browsing the guidebook for collections that promised data on ethnicity. Next the more detailed *opis'* could be accessed and based on the file descriptions in them specific files could be ordered. Some of the files that looked very promising in the *opis'* turned out to contain very little valuable information. For example census data from the 19th century, which were described in the Soviet-era *opis'* texts as being full of data on ethnicity, in fact contained mainly data about religious and social categories. On the other hand, files which, judging by their description, did not look as obvious candidates for information on ethnicity, turned out to be rich sources. For instance Soviet school reports from the 1940s and 1950s contained a wealth of information about the ascription of ethnic categories by educational institutions. The cycle from *putevoditel'* to *opis'* to the actual files had to be repeated every couple of weeks, each time with an enhanced sensorium for which type of file was likely to contain relevant information.

Sources from Izmail's local archive could shed some light on the historical particularities of southern Bessarabia. For the wider national context, however, the archive offered little and I had to rely on historical literature. Additional data used in this thesis stems from local newspapers. The main local periodicals since World War II are stored in Izmail's central library and are searchable by article titles thanks to a card index.

The more ethnographic part of this study included 50 interviews. These consisted of 34 in in-depth biographical interviews with mainly elderly rural inhabitants of the region, as well as 16 semi-structured interviews with local politicians, scholars, teachers, and activists. Most of these expert interviews were conducted in Izmail and Odessa during the first half of the fieldwork period. Two interviews with scholars were recorded in Chişinău. The larger part of the biographical interviews was conducted in villages, after I had gained access to informants there. Because accessing village informants acquired long preparation, most of these interviews became possible only in the second half of the fieldwork period, in summer and autumn of 2013.

When selecting the four villages in which I could take interviews, three criteria were decisive: the ethnic composition of the population, whether I was able to find a host family, and the distance from Izmail, since travelling between villages by public transport could be very time consuming. Because interviewing and archive research were conducted as parallel activities, I had to spend about half of the work week in Izmail to work in the archive and the other half of the week in one of the selected villages in order to take interviews. This mode of multitasking became my schedule between June and December 2013, when the archive study,

my study of the local press, and expert interviews were already in a progressed stage and when my initial contact network in Izmail also began to give me access to villages. I eventually sought out four villages for my interviews: Kotlovina is a predominately Gagauz village in Reni rayon with roughly 2,600 inhabitants.[4] Chervonorameyskoe in Bolgrad rayon is a village with about 6,500 inhabitants, roughly two thirds of which identify as Bulgarians and one third as Gagauz.[5] Kotlovina lies at 48 kilometers from Izmail and Chervonoarmeyskoe at 65 kilometers. Therefore in these two villages, I could only work thanks to the support of host families, who accommodated me and introduced me to possible informants. I was introduced to these host families via earlier contacts in Izmail and Odessa. In these two villages I became more deeply immersed in village life and did more participant observation activities than in the other two villages, close enough to Izmail to commute. One of them was Kislitsa, a predominately Ukrainian village only 21 kilometers from Izmail. The other one was Pershotravnevoe at 31 kilometers from Izmail. Both of these villages today are predominately Ukrainian speaking but have substantial Moldovan minorities. Kislitsa has about 2,900 inhabitants[6] and Pershotravnevoe about 2,000.[7] The archive search was modified according to the selection of villages, so that files about the villages I regularly visited were examined first. By seeking out this combination of villages, interviews with rural informants were feasible and could include people who identify with all the major ethnic groups in Izmail's environs.

All interviews were conducted in Russian, which is the most widely used language for the public sphere in the region and which the author speaks fluently. In one case, during an interview with an elderly Ukrainian man, I asked my questions in Russian but the informant responded in Ukrainian.

Research also included a participant observation study of the parliamentary elections in October 2012, of folklore festivals, and memorial events. The greatest difficulty with participant observation was hearing about relevant events before they took place. Most events were not announced publically but by word of mouth. It therefore became crucial that at the beginning of my fieldwork I spent a lot of time in Izmail's culture house, where I met well-connected people, who were regularly involved in organizing and conducting cultural events. They included the

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[4] Kotlovina on the website of the Verkhovna Rada http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/z7502/A005?rdat1=11.12.2008&rf7571=22994 (12.07.2016)

[5] Because the name Chervonoarmeyskoe means "Red Army Place" the village was renamed in May 2016 on the basis of the "De-Sovietization laws" into its pre-Soviet name "Kubey", by parliamentary decree: http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/z7502/A005?rf7571=23978 (12.07.2016)

[6] Kislitsa on the website of Verkhovna Rada http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/z7503/A005?rdat1=28.01.2015&rf7571=24162 (12.07.2016)

[7] Pershotravnevoe on the website of Verkhovna Rada http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/z7502/A005?rdat1=05.09.2008&rf7571=24181 (12.07.2016)

head of the drama theatre, the head of the Rayon Center of Ethnic Culture, as well as folklore artists and stage technicians.

In all these activities, it was important to stick to the narrow topic of ethnic boundaries. For scholars who combine historical and ethnographic approaches, it is a time tested trick to scrutinize a foreign culture via a narrowly defined aspect but with the aim of shedding light on broader terms of social change. In the French Annales School, the historiographical movement that is now widely credited with bringing historiography and the social sciences back together, this trick has often been employed. Marc Bloch, for instance, was reportedly flouted when he set out to dedicate an entire book (Bloch, 1998) to the supposedly marginal topic of a medieval popular belief in the healing powers of monarchs. But Bloch managed to show that this belief had far wider implications for social structure and political thought at the time (Burke, 1990:17). Similarly, Carlo Ginzburg's (1980, 1989) portrayal of a single man's ideas could be fruitfully used to illustrate the mindset of entire layers of society in 16th century Friuli. Looking at the narrow topic of ethnic boundary maintenance, this study envisages achieving a similar effect. Traced through a long time, the belief that ethnic boundaries are natural, real, and meaningful, can reveal a lot about the time, the nature of society and the state as a whole. The narrow subject was one ingredient to create a historical and anthropological research design. A second ingredient was looking at a fairly long stretch of time in order to create a perspective approaching the target of a *longue-durée* (Braudel, 2009:174). This stretch had to be limited sensibly in terms of the subject (the occurrence of ethnic boundaries) but also take into account the limited time and resources for research. It had to be a period of time from which sufficient sources were accessible. Southern Bessarabia as a field was chosen partly because state hegemony had changed so many times there. But one of these changes had to be chosen as a starting point in order to limit the number of states that had to be looked at to a manageable scope. The choice ultimately fell on the year 1812 as a starting point, the year, when the Russian Empire for the first time formally annexed Bessarabia. Since then, besides tsarist Russia, three more states have governed the region; Romania, the Soviet Union, and most recently Ukraine. All these states have shaped and used ethnic boundaries to their particular ends and thereby changed what it meant to belong to one or other ethnic group.

This process offers insight into how the state has changed over time, how its relation to the people has changed, and how ethnicity became the ubiquitous category it is today. A combination of methods and of theoretical concepts from both history and social anthropology was indispensable in this endeavor. Ethnic boundaries have been a major preoccupation of social Anthropology at least since Barth's pioneering studies (1969) on this subject. Slow social change, as well as shifting beliefs and practices have been the main focus of the Annales-school and its derivatives in historiography (Burke, 1990:2). So the theoretical and methodological

approaches of this study are not new and can rely on a great range of established works. Neither is there much novelty in picking a narrow region and a narrow topic in order to point out trajectories of social change in a wider field. But for Ukraine–and for this nook in particular–studying ethnicity itself, and not ethnic group by ethnic group as separate phenomena, has a certain novelty to it. It runs counter to the trend of most local social sciences, because it treats ethnic differences not as givens but as social constructs with specific social functions. And it fills a gap in the foreign literature on Ukraine, because it anchors the study of ethnic boundaries with a focus on a rural, peripheral area, often passed over by big politics. The present rapid changes in statehood and ethnicity in Ukraine make understanding the historical roots of ethnic differences and weak statehood more relevant than ever.

1.3. Locating the field site and choosing a name for it

There are many peripheral regions in Ukraine that might have qualified as field sites for this study. In fact, most scholars today agree that the national denomination *Ukrayina* is probably derived from a word with a meaning similar to "periphery" or "borderland" (Magocsi, 1996:171, Subtelny, 2000:105, Kappeler, 2000:17, Plokhy, 2006:317). However, other regions of Ukraine have at least for one period of history been at the center of events; Kyiv as the capital of Kievan Rus', the Dnepr region as the center of the Cossack states, Galicia as the center of the medieval Kingdom of Galicia-Volhynia and since the late 19th century of Ukrainian nationalism, and the Donbas as the center of Soviet industrialization. Bessarabia has remained at the periphery throughout and still has a peripheral status in Ukraine today (Kushko and Taki, 2012:18).

But before discussing the region's historical fate, it might be sensible to define its extent. Today, the name "Bessarabia" can be found only on historical maps. Since 1918, when Russia had to cease the territory of *Bessarabskaya Guberniya* to Romania, no administrative unit carried this name. But the denomination "Bessarabia" continued to be used in Russian as well as in Romanian (where it is more commonly spelled "Basarabia") to refer to the territory of the old Russian Guberniya. This province and most modern references to Bessarabia, are limited by three rivers; the Prut in the west, the Dniester in the east, the Danube and the Black Sea in the south. A string of old Ottoman fortresses runs along the Danube and up the Dniester, once a line of defense against intruders and rebellious locals. The northernmost of these fortresses, Khotyn, stands at a point where the Dniester and the Prut flow parallel, with hardly more than 30 kilometers of distance between them. Here, the old Guberniya reached its northernmost extension and the name Bessarabia is not usually used to designate territories far beyond this imaginative line between the Dniester and the Prut.

The region enclosed by these borders has not only been a political periphery, but also an ecological border zone. Here end the vast steppes stretching from central Asia, through southern Siberia and into the Ponto-Caspian plain of southern Russia and Ukraine. Beyond Bessarabia, they pass into the more forested foothills of the Carpathians. This stretch of land represented the European end of a large steppe zone, a "Eurasian highway" for peoples and cultures (Schorkowitz, 2012a:85). The three large rivers that bound Bessarabia do not usually freeze with thick ice in winter, as do most rivers further inside Eurasia. For the pastoral nomads, who once roamed these lands, they formed an obstacle and marked a boundary for their way of life. This geographical situation might be at the origin of a second name sometimes used to designate this region; "Budjak". "Budjak" refers to the flat and dry steppes in the southern third of Bessarabia. It likely was derived from "corner" or "nook" in the Turkic languages of its earlier nomadic inhabitants (Palamarchuk, 2008:219). Writing in 1850, the traveler and scholar Apollon Skal'kovskiy defined Budjak as the steppe regions in the south of Bessarabia (255). Stepan Kornilovich who, in 1899, presented a description of the Izmail area, used "Bessarabia" and "Budjak" as synonyms.[8] The term Budjak (Budziak) appears as early as 1681 on a map by Moses Pitt. Later, on a map produced by Johann Baptist Homann in Nuremberg in 1729, "Bessarabia" and "Tataria Budziacensis" refer to the same area.[9] With the addendum of "Tataria" the cartographer reminds us that this region was then still predominantly inhabited by Turkic speaking Muslims. Today the name Budjak is still extensively used in local historiography and sometimes in folklore.[10] But it is not a widely known and well-defined term that lends itself to public reference and identity formation. "I am a Budjakian" would certainly sound rather absurd, whereas "I am a Bessarabian" is a perfectly reasonable utterance still today.[11]

Indeed, the territories known as Budjak and Bessarabia might once have been more congruent than today. The term "Basarabia", probably derived from the Walachian princely Basarab dynasty that originated in the 14th century. The region for which it was used had neither clear boundaries, nor much political relevance for a long time. But it included or overlapped with the equally vaguely defined "Budjak" (King, 2000:21). Before the Russian annexation, the principality of Moldova, a vassal of the Ottoman Empire, loosely controlled this land. Its influence thinned out towards the southern Budjak region that was inhabited by Muslim pastoral nomads (Kushko and Taki, 2012:17).

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[8] He wrote that Izmail belonged to "Bessarabia that is alternatively also called Budjak" (Kornilovich, 1899:367)

[9] Both maps are reproduced in Kordan (2008:73, 83).

[10] One example is the renowned folklore group of the Gagauz village of Kotlovina. They perform under the name "Stars of the Budjak".

[11] An observation also made by Anastassova (2006:60).
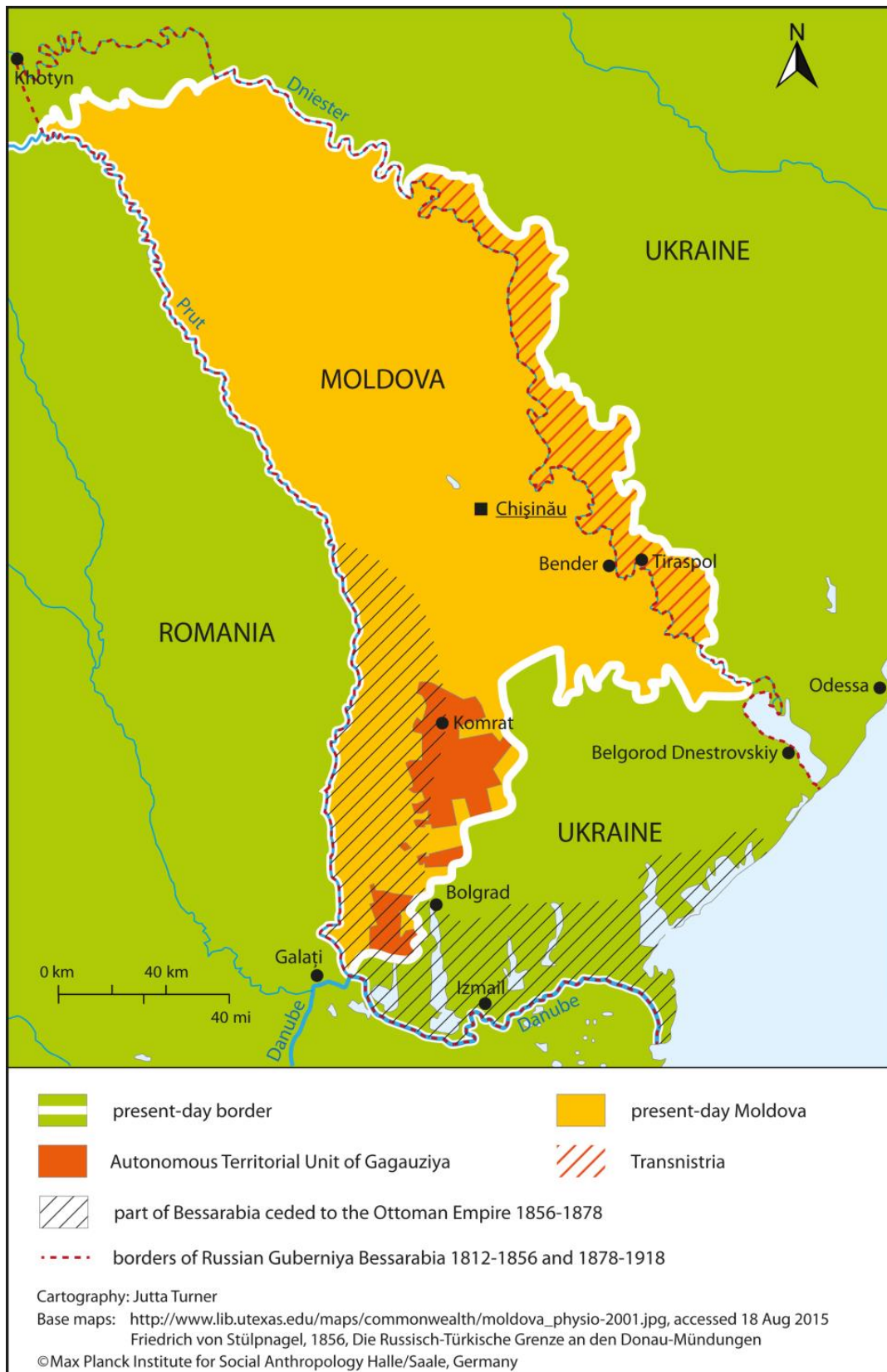
Map 1 Bessarabia's shifting state borders since 1812

Legend:

- present-day border
- present-day Moldova
- Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauziya
- Transnistria
- part of Bessarabia ceded to the Ottoman Empire 1856-1878
- borders of Russian Guberniya Bessarabia 1812-1856 and 1878-1918

Cartography: Jutta Turner
Base maps: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/moldova_physio-2001.jpg, accessed 18 Aug 2015
Friedrich von Stülpnagel, 1856, Die Russisch-Türkische Grenze an den Donau-Mündungen
©Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Halle/Saale, Germany

After the Russian Empire had annexed the area in 1812, the russified designation "Bessarabia" was extended beyond Budjak to a much wider area, reaching up to Khotyn fortress, across lands that so far had been simply the eastern half of the principality of Moldova (King, 2000:21, Palamarchuk, 2008:218, Grek and Russev, 2011:66, Kushko and Taki, 2012:71). Only after the Russian Empire had named their newest province "Bessarabia", the area, limited by the three rivers, became a conceptual entity. The territory of Bessarabia had always been culturally and linguistically diverse. There was little cultural cohesion between the Russian or Jewish urban dwellers of the small and relatively young cities and the peasant population that spoke mostly Romanian or, in the south, Bulgarian, Gagauz, Ukrainian, and Albanian. Therefore, in the late 19th century, when nationalist aspirations began to test the imperial integrity of Russia, Bessarabia was hardly considered a candidate for a new nation.

Nevertheless, the designation "Bessarabia" became a reference point in other nationalisms. In his *Historical Description of Bessarabia*, published "with the highest approval" by the Russian Ministry of the Interior, Pompey Batyushkov (1892:78) characterized Bessarabia as an old Russian land that had finally been united with its motherland in 1812. Around the time of the first Russian Revolution 1905-07, Moldovan nationalist circles in their turn referred to Bessarabia as their core land. Their newspaper that was eventually prohibited by Russian authorities was named *Basarabia* (King, 2000:29, Kushko and Taki, 2012:285). Even much later, when Bessarabia after World War II became a part of the Soviet Union, it remained an entity of reference and justification, although there was no longer an administrative unit with that name. In the *Chronological Reference Book of the Occupation 1941-44,* a staple in local libraries, Bessarabia was characterized an "age old Russian soil" and a landscape filled with the traces of "the shining glory of Russian arms".[12] Later in the Soviet Union, this territorial claim was extended from the Russians to the Slavs. In his controversially received book, Artem Lazarev (1974), rector of Chişinău's Lenin University and the Moldovan Soviet Republic's highest ranking historian, claimed Bessarabia had been a Slavic land in the Middle Ages, long before something like a Moldovan nation could have existed (Lazarev, 1974, van Meurs, 1994:250).

However, with the integration into the Soviet Union, the concept of Bessarabia as an entity began to erode. In 1940, Moscow technocrats drew borders between two Soviet Republics, the Moldovan SSR and the Ukrainian SSR. The northernmost part, the lands around Khotyn, with a Ukrainian majority population, was given to the Ukrainian SSR. The large middle part, with a Romanian speaking majority, was made into the Moldovan SSR. The southernmost part, with no clear ethnic majority, was joined with the Ukrainian SSR. These administrative Soviet borders became paralyzing state borders when the Soviet Union fell apart in 1991. The

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[12] *Khronologicheskiy spravochnik ob okkupatsii Izmail'skoy oblasti* (1941 – 1944 gg.) (1950) Izmail, Izdatel'stvo "Pridunayskaya Pravda", p. 5, 83

southern Ukrainian part of Bessarabia is now squeezed between the Danube that has no ferries or bridges here,[13] and the Moldovan border with its unreliable and corrupt border posts. Only one road connects Izmail to the provincial capital Odessa and to the rest of Ukraine. This road has been in notoriously bad shape for many years and its renovation is a perpetual concern of local politicians.[14] In heavy snowfall the road can be closed for days, literally cutting off the whole region from the rest of the country. This isolated appendix of modern Ukraine is the geographical framework of the present study. Even after the territory of Bessarabia has been divided between two countries, it apparently has not lost its identificatory potential. When, in spring 2015, rumors of a local separatism movement began to circulate, the mysterious political organization behind it was called "the People's Council of Bessarabia".[15]

But of course Bessarabia is bigger than its Ukrainian part. I therefore follow Lebedenko and Tychyna (2002:4), two local historians from the University of Izmail, in their designation of this area as "southern Bessarabia".[16] The authors alternatively use the term "Ukrainian Danube Region" (Ukrayins'ke Podunav'ya). But some of the villages studied here are located far away from the river and are not Ukrainian in terms of ethnicity or language, so that "southern Bessarabia" is the more appropriate term here. Fieldwork activities for this study were, for the most part, confined to an even smaller area, the town of Izmail and villages in Izmail Rayon, as well as neighboring Rayons Bolgrad and Reni.

In the former Soviet Union there are many ethnically mixed areas. Three main types of ethnic diversity can be distinguished: Areas where Russians are in a majority, areas where another ethnic group is in a majority, and areas where there is no clear ethnic majority (Karklins, 1986:8). Southern Bessarabia belongs to this last type. Its ethnic groups have lived in

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[13] In October 2015, it was reported that construction of a ferry connection between the Ukrainian village of Orlovka and the Romanian village of Isaccea had begun. http://bessarabiainform.com/2015/10/v-oktyabre-nachinaetsya-stroitelstvo-v-bessarabii-paromnoj-perepravy-ukraina-rumyniya/ (03.11.2015). However, similar announcements were made in the years before without materializing.

[14] Mikhail Saakashvili, the former President of Georgia and since May 2015 the governor of Odessa Oblast, on June 23, 2015 in a talk show on ICTV, explained to a Ukrainian audience the extent and problems of southern Bessarabia. He said the region was "terribly poor", and that the road that connects it to rump Ukraine was "the worst in Europe". To illustrate how neglected the region was (and therefore, in Saakashvili's view, how vulnerable to separatism) he said that Putin's government had devoted much more thought to Bessarabia than the Ukrainian government. Video available online http://svoboda.ictv.ua/ua/index/view-media/id/94042 (03.11.2015). In the days leading up to Saakashvili's talk show performance he had visited southern Bessarabia and listened to the complaints of citizens. Also, Anton Kisse, an MP for one of the region's electoral districts, in the days prior to Saakashvili's speech, made several petitions lamenting the bad condition of the Izmail-Odessa road. He published these on his various social media outlets.

[15] After the name and logo of this group appeared in April 2015, most local political and ethnic organizations quickly declared they had nothing to do with it. *Zerkalo Nedeli* April 7, 2015 http://zn.ua/UKRAINE/sbu-nazvala-ocherednoy-lozhyu-rossii-sozdanie-narodnoy-rady-bessarabii-172266_.html (03.11.2015)

[16] Administratively, this area makes up the part of Odessa Oblast south-west of the river Dniester, about half the province's territory. It consists of Rayons Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy, Sarata, Tatarbunary, Tarutino, Artsis, Kiliya, Izmail, Bolgrad, and Reni.

close interaction for two centuries. For all this time it is hard to find instances of open ethnic hatred. Harmonic interethnic relations are considered a matter of great pride in this region. The attitude many people take to ethnicity and conflict can be illustrated by an episode that occurred during a family reunion in the Gagauz village of Kotlovina in October 2013. A round of men, including the village's priest, heatedly discussed the imminent signing of the Association Agreement with the EU in Vilnius while tasting the host's new barrel of wine. When I asked them about ethnic conflicts in the region, the host raised a laugh by pointing to the barn where he stored his wine. "Ethnic conflict?" he asked, "this is where we go around here to sort out ethnic conflict."
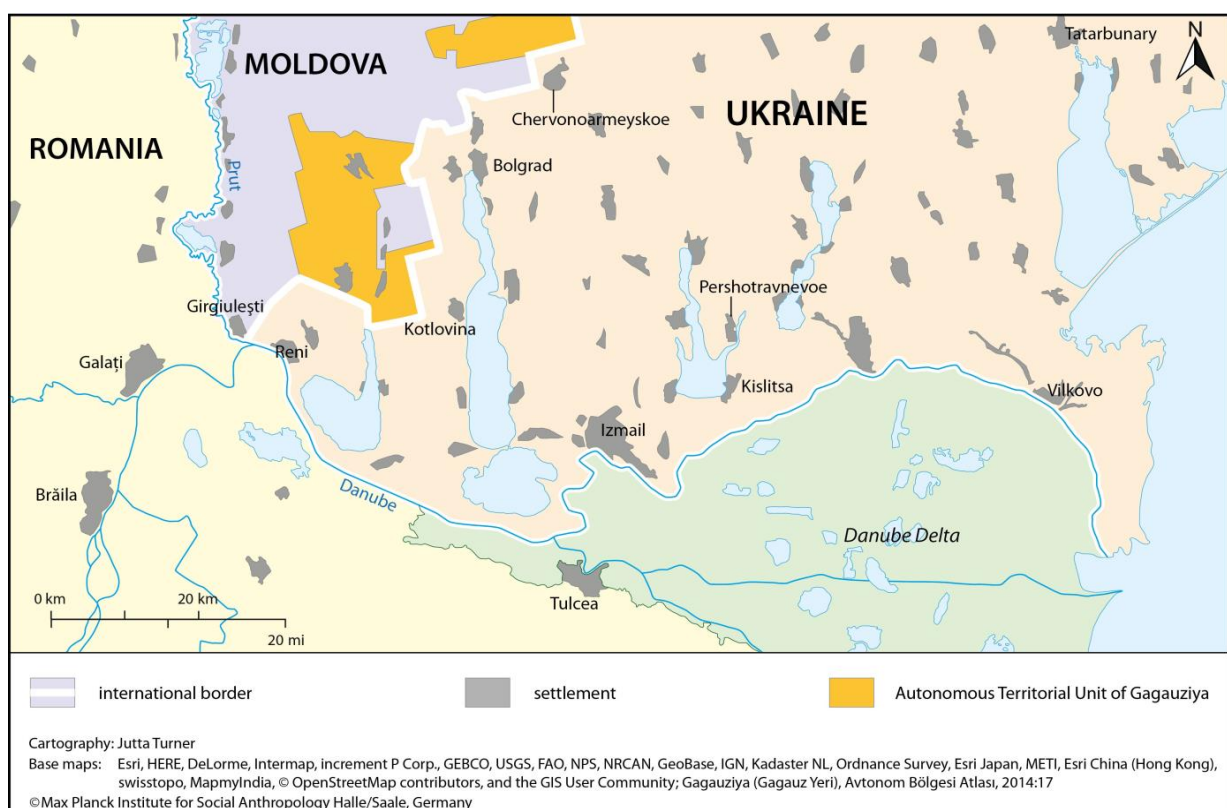
Map 2 Southern Bessarabia

The best clue of contemporary ethnic composition in this region is given by the latest available census from 2001, in which ethnic identity was recorded based on self-identification. In towns, Russians are the biggest group, as was the case for most of the time since this region was incorporated into the Russian Empire. In the city of Izmail, Russians comprise 43% of the population. But now those who identify as Ukrainians are a close second (38%). Bulgarians make up for 10% of Izmail's inhabitants. Moldovans make up around 4% and Gagauz less than 1%. Izmail is surrounded by villages-turned-suburbs that are largely Ukrainian, but the further north, the more the ethnic composition is reminiscent of the colonization of this land by settlers

from the Balkans. In Izmail Rayon with its 23 villages (the city is not part of the rayon) Ukrainians are the biggest group (29%), but there are nearly as many Moldovans (27%) and Bulgarians (25%). Russians are another substantial group (16%) many of whom live in the Old-Believer villages. Bolgrad rayon, to the north of Izmail has 60% Bulgarians and 19% Gagauz. Russians and Ukrainians each make up for only 8% here, with Albanians and Moldovans comprising the rest. In Reni rayon, bordering both Romania and Moldova, there are 49% Moldovans, 17% Ukrainians, and 15% Russians. Bulgarians make up 8%, but for this research the only Gagauz village in the rayon, Kotlovina (that largely accounts for the 7% Gagauz) was studied.[17]

Image 1 A view of Kotlovina in summer 2013

1.4. *A brief historical outline*

Bessarabia's ethnic diversity and frequently changing political powers are evidence of its long peripheral status. Since Russia expanded into the region in 1812, this territory has changed hands seven times: After the Crimean War (1853-56), which Russia lost to a coalition of France,

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[17] All figures from the Ukrainian 2001 census http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/rus/results/general/nationality/odesa/ (03.11.2015)

Britain, and the Ottoman Empire, southern Bessarabia was given to the United Principalities, a forerunner of Romania, still technically under Ottoman suzerainty. In 1878, after the last of the Russo-Turkish Wars, it was retaken by the Russian Empire. Bessarabia was now safely out of reach of the Ottoman Empire, since a buffer zone consisting of two newly independent states, Romania and Bulgaria, had been created as a consequence of the war. In 1918, after the Russian withdrawal from the First World War, Bessarabia was joined with expanding Romania, which almost doubled its territory and population as a result of World War I. In 1940, a strengthened Soviet Union annexed Bessarabia according to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Treaty, just to lose it again to an alliance of Romania and Nazi Germany that attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941. After the situation on the eastern front had changed dramatically in the winter of 1942-43, the Red Army, on its way to drive out Hitler's troops, conquered and integrated Bessarabia again in summer 1944. After belonging to the Soviet Union for 47 years, southern Bessarabia became part of independent Ukraine when the Soviet Union broke apart in 1991.

Before modern states systematically populated southern Bessarabia, human settlement was sparse. Like most of the Ponto-Caspian steppe region, southern Bessarabia did not appear enticing to early peasants. The steppes offered little water sources, large trees for construction and firewood were scant. The open land allowed big herds of game, swarms of insects, and nomadic groups to quickly travel great distances and to endanger a peasant's crop. Prairie fires and storms were an additional hazard (Sunderland, 2004:90, Moon, 2013:7,44). Along the rivers, where water and timber were abundant, so were malaria-infested mosquitos.[18] Since the 16th century, Nogai nomads were the dominant group in the Bessarabian steppe, loosely controlled by the Crimean Khans (Berg, 1918:59, Kushko and Taki, 2012:37). Under more direct Ottoman control were the fortresses along the large rivers; Izmail and Kiliya on the Danube, as well as Akkerman (today Belgorod Dnestrovskiy), Bender, and Khotyn on the Dniester. When Russia incorporated Bessarabia in 1812, these were the only places in the province with rudimentary urban structures (Kushko and Taki, 2012:198). Decades later, towards the end of the 19th century, urbanization was still very low. Of the 1.9 million inhabitants Bessarabia had at the time of the 1897 census, only about 15% lived in cities (Derzhavin, 1914:15). During Fieldwork in 2012 and 2013, many villages around Izmail celebrated the bicentennial of their foundation. Izmail's own history was traced back further (during fieldwork I could witness its alleged 422 and 423 anniversaries) but this mode of counting includes more than two centuries

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[18] In 1933, according to Romanian statistics, there were 3.079 cases of malaria in Izmail district, some 1.950 of which were new infections. Most cases occurred along the channels of the Danube Delta and its adjacent lakes. For almost 13% of malaria patients, the infection was fatal (Rossetti, 1934:36). Between the end of World War II and the early 1950s Soviet administrators installed two malaria treatment centres in southern Bessarabia, one in Izmail and one in Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy, Fr 734 (for Izmail) and Fr1723 (for Belgorod) (Putevoditel' p. 165). In the 1940s lectures were given by the Izmail lecture bureau how to avoid and treat malaria: Fr415 D15, 1947, p. 4.

in which Izmail was more a trading post growing into a fortress, than a fully-fledged town. The fact that most settlements which can now be found on the map of southern Bessarabia date back no longer than 200 years and older settlements are recognizable only to archeologists, speaks of a history full of warfare and of a dramatic change in population structure at the beginning of the 19th century.

The Russian Empire had joined the ranks of the great European powers under Peter I when it drove Sweden out of Eastern Europe in the Great Northern War (1700-21). An episode of this conflict, the so called Prut Campaign, saw the first Russian advance into Moldova in 1710-11. Although this time the Ottomans prevailed, the advance led by Peter I, had established a Russian claim to acting as the protective force for the Christian population in the Ottoman Empire. But Russia became a serious force in South Eastern Europe only when the Empire gained access to the Black Sea. In the second half of the 18th century, under the reign of Catherine II, Russia won two decisive wars in what is now southern Ukraine. The first of these was the Russo-Turkish War 1768-74, that according to the subsequent treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, gave the empire an outlet to the Sea of Azov (Hosking, 2001:231). But the fortress of Izmail, taken by General Repnin in 1770, had to be given back to the Ottomans. It was subsequently reinforced and gained the reputation to be impregnable (Lebedenko and Tychyna, 2002:77). The second decisive war was the Russo-Turkish War of 1788-92, during which the Ottoman Empire unsuccessfully attempted to regain parts of the lost territory. But the Ottomans had to redraw even further, which allowed the Russian Empire to expand as far west as the Dniester River (Sunderland, 2004:56). The 1788-92 War also proved that the Turkish fortress at Izmail was not impregnable. In December 1791, Count Suvorov sacked the fortress with his troops, a great military triumph at the time and today the single most important historical event in the historical self-consciousness of Izmail. For all its symbolic importance, Russia once more ceased Bessarabia back to the Ottoman Empire with the Treaty of Iaşi in 1792 (Lebedenko and Tychyna, 2002). It took another Russo-Turkish War (1806-12) and another stage of Russian expansion to incorporate Bessarabia into the empire. After a number of disastrous losses, the Ottoman Empire agreed in 1812, with the Treaty of Bucharest, to cease the eastern half of their vassal state the Principality of Moldova, to the Russian Empire. This area became the Oblast of Bessarabia, the last in a long line of annexed territories along the Black Sea coast. Combined, these new provinces were by that time referred to in Russia as *Novorossiya* (New Russia). This is the time from which a more detailed historical discussion starts in chapters 2 through 5. Here, it suffices to mention, that the Treaty of Bucharest allowed the Russian Empire to formalize an already ongoing influx of Christian colonists, mainly from the territory of modern day Bulgaria (later they would be termed the "Transdanubian Colonists"). The colonizers were given modest amounts of land, as well as fiscal privileges for the time they needed to build up peasant

economies (Klaus, 1869:307, Kushko and Taki, 2012:168). As the region became integrated into a state with military, trade, and transportation systems, the soil of southern Bessarabia, once spurned by early peasants, revealed its great fertility.

The oldest building now standing in Izmail is the former Ottoman mosque on the Bank of the Danube. The fortress around it, once thought to be impregnable, can vaguely be recognized on satellite images, but on the ground there is nothing left to give a clue of it. The reason for this is that a small section of southern Bessarabia, along the border with the Ottoman vassal state of Moldova, was ceded to the Ottoman Empire again in 1856 after Russia had suffered a setback in the Crimean War. The area included 40 settlements of Transdanubian Colonists who were promised the same rights and privileges as under Russian rule (Batyushkov, 1892:164). The forces that erased the once mighty fortress of Izmail were, as so often in the history of Bessarabia, unleashed far away. The Paris Peace Treaty of 1856 specified that the fortifications, before ceded to Ottoman forces, had to be torn down (Sapozhnikov, 2009:254). In 1878, after the last of the Russo-Turkish wars, according to the Berlin Treaty, 22 years after Russia had lost this narrow stretch of southern Bessarabia, she could have it back (Ryasanovsky, 2000:387).

Izmail was transformed from a garrison fortress to a river port as the region began to be integrated into the civil communication infrastructure of the Russian Empire. Industrialization remained on a low scale, but for parts of the population it offered geographical and social mobility. Now this relatively remote area for the first time drew the interest of Russian ethnographers, who provided us with the first systematic descriptions of the area's ethnic mosaic. At about the same time, Russia began to fear minorities' nationalism and began to russify the bureaucracy and the church (King, 2000:25).

Southern Bessarabia experienced a long and devastating period of violence, insecurity, and deprivation during and between the two World Wars. The loss of Bessarabia to Romania was a thorn in the flesh of the newly founded Soviet Union, and Stalin never concealed his intention to get it back. For the Romanian interwar governments the annexation of Bessarabia and other provinces was the culmination of a centuries-long struggle to unite (or as some claimed, re-unite) all Romanian lands. For them, the non-Romanian minorities in Bessarabia came under the growing suspicion of acting as the Soviet Union's fifth column (see section 3.2). The Romanian government felt confirmed after a pro-Soviet uprising of workers and peasants erupted around the town of Tatarbunary in 1924. The bloody oppression of the revolt further strained the relation of the weak Romanian state and its new Bessarabian subjects. By the time the Soviet Union acted to annex Bessarabia in 1940, far right forces had taken over in Bucharest. During the Second World War, when Bessarabia was for another three years occupied by Romania and her German ally, the hawks had their way with ethnic minorities. They unleashed

the mass murder of the Jewish and Roma population and planned to deport large swaths of other non-Romanians, plans that were thwarted only by the return of the Red Army in summer 1944 (Wedekind, 2010:65).

Bessarabia's integration process into the Soviet Union was short but not sweet (see chapter 4). Only after thousands of men had been recruited to far-away factories, and only after those who stayed home had gone through a severe man-made famine in 1946-47, the inhabitants of southern Bessarabia began to enjoy a period of prosperity and stability. During this time a Soviet education and fluency in Russian became the keys to social upward mobility. The "language of interethnic communication" was established alongside, and increasingly in the place of, local languages.

In the more ethnographic stretches of this thesis, I treat southern Bessarabia distinctly as a post-Soviet land, by emphasizing the Soviet legacy in institutions that deal with ethnicity and history. These cultural legacies link southern Bessarabia closer to far-away regions in the former Soviet Union than to Romania, which lies just across the Danube. With the preceding historical analysis of the region under the Russian Empire and the rule of Greater Romania, I give weight to underlying, historically shaped cultural layers particular to this region, as Hann (2012:22) urges us to do. Nevertheless, the lasting paradigms of thinking about ethnicity and history were shaped by Soviet institutions that were the first to have a long lasting outreach to the rural population, a condition that preceding states, tsarist Russia and Romania, never quite achieved. Therefore, even if the notion of post-socialism is an academic construct, it was shaped by reasonable assumptions that socialism was a deeply pervasive phenomenon (Humphrey, 2002:12). However, the Ukrainian crisis, starting in 2013, has raised doubt whether the post-socialist economic and political system, besides a few remaining cracks, can be researched as a newly emerged stable system, as Kürti and Skalník write (2009:2). Rather, the crisis has drawn our attention back to so many features that, as Schorkowitz (2010) has shown, retain a deep imprint of the Soviet past. Perceptions of what an ethnic group is or how history should be remembered and represented, revealed the resounding impact the Soviet Union and its institutions have had on the region's culture.

This is astonishing, because in southern Bessarabia only one generation really lived all through the Soviet period. The rules changed again when Ukraine became independent in 1991. Overwhelmingly quick for many, new regulations from Kyiv had people learn Ukrainian alongside Russian if they wanted to succeed in wider society. Isolated from rump Ukraine, neglected by big politics, with the economy and infrastructure quickly falling apart, and with only a minority of Ukrainian speakers, Bessarabians showed little enthusiasm for the nation building projects of Ukraine. The region fell prey to a new class of opportunistic local patrons who followed political trends in Odessa and Kyiv. When in late 2013 the political leadership of

Ukraine was about to sign an association agreement with the European Union, many Bessarabians viewed this with skepticism, fearing it might in time further remove them from Russia, which many see as their cultural center and historically a force of protection. With the outbreak of war in eastern Ukraine, Bessarabians began to fear a similar scenario there. The region's isolation might predestine it for separatism, but its ethnic diversity makes a unanimous separatist claim difficult. Those few people who thought aloud about adventurous attempts to break away from Ukraine were chilled in their enthusiasm by the disastrous outcomes of war in the Donbas and by the bloody end of a pro-Russian demonstration in Odessa on May 2, 2014. Most politicians depend on their Kyiv patrons and have therefore opted for Ukrainian unity.[19] Nevertheless, in the ongoing conflict southern Bessarabia, due to its history and ethnic diversity, has retained a geopolitical microclimate of which no one knows which way it would turn when push comes to shove.

1.5. Ethnicity, natsional'nost', and nationality: definitions and translations

This study deals with the history of ethnic boundaries, the boundaries between ethnic groups. Because this subject was pursued through two centuries and relying on sources from a number of academic traditions, it is necessary at this point to clarify what ethnic groups and boundaries mean in the context of this study. On first sight, the obvious English translation for Russian *natsional'nost'*, Ukrainian *natsional'nist'*, and Romanian *naționalitate*, would be simply "nationality". But a closer look to the semantic content of these orthographically similar words points to substantial differences in translation. Just as the English "nationality", the Romanian "naționalitate" can have an ethnic connotation, but more commonly is used to refer to a person's country of citizenship. In Greater Romania "naționalitate" if used in official sources, was clearly used in the sense of "citizenship" and juxtaposed with people who were also *ethnically* Romanian (de origină etnică Română) (see chapter 3.). It is this second, essentialized and inheritable category that is in the focus of research here, not the bureaucratic category of citizenship. In Russian and Ukrainian the category of "natsional'nost'/natsional'nist'" hardly has a connotation of citizenship. In Russian "grazhdanstvo" and in Ukrainian "hromadyanstvo" would be the term of choice to refer to "nationality" as used in bureaucracy. If natsional'nost' had anything to do with the state one enjoys civil rights in, it would not have been registered in Soviet passports (since it would have been on the cover anyway). The category registered in

[19] In a rare bout of attention similar observations were made in the *Economist,* January 3, 2015, in an article specially dedicated to the region. Available online http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21637415-little-known-place-interests-both-ukraine-and-russia-towards-unknown-region?fsrc=scn/fb/wl/pe/towardstheunknownregion (03.11.2015)

passports clearly referred to a person's *ethnic identity* (Kozlov, 1974:81, Baiburin, 2012:59). In many English texts the term "natsional'nost'" is nevertheless translated as "nationality", which may be permissible if the matter is not central for the argument. For our purpose however, too much of what "natsional'nost'" means would be lost in translation. Essentially, it comes down to a problem of set theory: Every natsional'nost', in translation can be called a nationality, but not every nationality would qualify as a natsional'nost'. So for example if one would take the frequently amended list of ethnic groups from which Soviet passport identities could be chosen, all of the natsional'nosti on it could sensibly be called nationalities. Some of them are currently also nationalities as in citizenship, like Russian, Ukrainian, or Kazakh. Others are nationalities with no state to themselves and therefore would not qualify as nationality meaning citizenship, but still be commonly called a nationality; Tatar, Buryat, Gagauz etc. Yet this equation does not work quite as well the other way round. Some passport nationalities, typically those that have an established language with the same name, would also be natsional'nosti, like Ukrainian, German, or Hungarian. Other passport nationalities that have no language of the same name would hardly be accepted as a natsional'nost', like Belgian, Swiss, or Canadian. If in Ukraine (or probably in most other places in the former Soviet Union) a person is asked for his or her natsional'nost' and names a passport nationality of this type, then he or she will typically be asked again for his or her natsional'nost' until he or she reveals an *ethnic* affiliation within the population of the respective country.[20] If he or she cannot or is unwilling to name an ethnic affiliation, the inquiring person might offer help by suggesting the name of a native language, the origin of a parent, or even a religious confession as ethnic affiliation. In Soviet social sciences the academic term "ethnos" was introduced partly to avoid confusion with what in English is called "nationality". "Ethnos" was the academic equivalent to what in Soviet bureaucracy and in public discourse was called "natsional'nost'", an allegedly stable core that persists across time and space, despite all changes in the group's political and economic circumstances (Gorenburg, 1999:556). The most ardent promoter of the "ethnos" term, long-time head of the department of ethnology in the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Yulian Bromley, introduced the term "politonym" (i.e. the name of a polity) for those nationalities which in his view were not ethnic groups, like the Belgian and the French (Bromley, 1983:46). "Natsional'nost'" would not have been a suitable term to describe these, because in the Soviet perception it was tied to common traits beyond mere citizenship, typically a language, a religion, and the belief in a common ancestry qualified a group a as a natsional'nost'. This category is therefore conceptually very close to what Max Weber has called an "ethnic group":

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[20] This was a common experience during fieldwork for the Swiss author and an observation shared by American political scientist Rasma Karklins (1986:29)

"We shall call 'ethnic groups' those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because similarities of physical type or of custom or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists" (Weber, 1996 [1978]:35).

The main difference, of course, between Weber's concept and the Soviet one is that the belief in common decent was *subjective* for Weber, whereas in Soviet scholarship it was treated as *objective*. More important, however, is that Weber's definition points to a form of identity that in the reading of those who have it can be inherited but not acquired. For sake of precision, I therefore translate the Russian term "natsional'nost'", the Ukrainian term "natsional'nist'", as well as their Soviet academic pendant "ethnos" as "ethnicity" where it refers to a concept and as "ethnic group" where it refers to a group of people to whose identity this concept is significant. It seems to me to be the most exact translation. There is a Russian word with the same morphology as "ethnicity"; *etnichnost'*, but it entered the lexicon of social sciences only after the end of the Soviet Union and only after a "Perestroika of terminologies" (Sokolovskiy, 2003:13).

The fact remains that most English language sources would use "nationality" rather than "ethnicity", the further back one goes the likelier. This work first and foremost traces the term "Natsional'nost'" through a local history. It is therefore crucial to stick to one translation throughout, even if the terminology of sources at the time of their creation would have been translated into English as "nationality". It is also true that terms like nation, nationality, and ethnicity have not always been used with consistent meaning (Connor, 2011:3). Stalin is a prominent example, since he wrote an influential essay on the "Nation" (natsiya) in his capacity as People's Commissars of Nationality Affairs (Narodniy Kommisar po Delam *Natsional'nostey*). One of the early promoters of the "ethnos" term in Soviet academia, Pavel Kushner, used Stalin's concept of the *nation* (natsiya) as a synonym with his definition of *ethnos* (1951:6). But the confusing histories of the terms "nation", "nationality", "ethnicity" and their translations cannot be taken as excuse for inconsistent use of these terms in the present study. Sticking to "ethnicity" can lead to anachronistic uses, when referring with "ethnic group" or "ethnicity" to times when these terms were not yet common either in English or any other language. But anachronisms could hardly be avoided by using the term ethnicity interchangeably with other terms. The terms "natsional'nost'" and "nationality" have no less been used anachronistically by the people who created the sources for this study. Therefore it is most reasonable to stick to a consistent terminology, calling all those groups that claim cultural unity, common history, and common ancestry "ethnic groups" and wherever possible offer additionally the term used at the time and place of original utterance.

1.6. Thesis structure

There are several options to structure a thesis meant to reveal how ethnic boundaries emerged and were preserved. One viable way would be to choose a strictly chronological structure, event by event, state by state. Another way would be strictly analytical, phenomenon after phenomenon, traced through the ages. During the writing process, I have come to the conclusion that neither of these ways is in itself satisfying for my purpose here. Therefore the first part of the thesis is structured chronologically into four chapters, one for each state that ruled over southern Bessarabia. The first of these (chapter 2) deals with the establishment of the tsarist bureaucracy in Bessarabia during the 19th century, a time when religious categories only very gradually gave way to ethnic categories as the main bureaucratic label. But these then gained rapidly in importance as the region entered a phase of revolutionary upheaval that made the issue of trust between the state and its subjects on the peripheries a prime concern of imperial politics. The next chapter (3) deals with the Romanian period between the world wars, a time full of insecurity and violence, and therefore a time of great mistrust between the ruling classes and those perceived as ethnic minorities. The 47 years of Soviet rule in Bessarabia are the subject of the following chapter (4). This period saw the arrival of a new group, the Soviet village elites, who came mainly from Russian speaking areas that already had belonged to the Soviet Union. They quickly merged with the local population as rapid economic growth set in after a brief and bitter period of famine and displacement directly following World War II. The Soviet decades of relative prosperity remain the measure for many today. They were characterized by the rise of the Russian language as a means of union wide communication and a precondition for social mobility. There was no ethnic conflict in this time, but nevertheless ethnicity as a concept gained in importance. The chaotic years since Ukrainian independence are the subject of the last of these chronological chapters (5). They include the return of ethnic rhetoric into local politics, the foundation of ethnic associations and the establishment of the clientelistic political system that has led to the crisis in Ukraine starting at the end of 2013.

To structure the past into sections determined by state rule is not to deny underlying tendencies of a more *longue-durée* character that do not change just because state hegemony changes. For example, the tendency of increasing rationalization of the state administration has started long before the period covered here. Structuring chapters state by state is merely a concession to practicability. Had I dedicated chapters to more general trends, such as the increasing rationalization of bureaucracy then each new chapter would require a description of the political environment. Separating chapters according to consecutive states has the advantage that the characteristics of each new state have to be introduced only once. This

compromise in structuring the dissertation should not divert our attention from social trends that survived changes in state hegemony.

The first chapter and also the second chapter about the Romanian period are almost entirely based on an archive study and historiographical literature. The third chapter about the Soviet period still heavily relies on the archive, but is also based on oral history from interviews with elderly informants as well as on newspaper archives. The last chapter of the chronological part deals with the present and is naturally the most ethnographic of all.

Can this be historical anthropology? –A work in which the readers start out by reading history and then simply in each new chapter find a little more ethnographic insight, until they find themselves reading an ethnographic account? Clearly, links between the past and the present deserve more attention, more context how contemporary practices are rooted in the past and how, on the other hand, present ethnic boundaries affect people's imaginations of the past. Therefore the second part of the thesis, with three chapters, lays out the complex interrelations of history and memory in dominant concepts of ethnicity. The first chapter of this more analytical part (chapter 6) deals with the emic concept of ethnicity and its history. It traces how and for which purposes the Soviet concept of "ethnos" was formed and how then through schools and media it became widely accepted. One special aspect, of primary interest in a quest of historical anthropology, is how Soviet and post-soviet concepts of ethnicity rely on memory. Chapter 7 therefore provides an excursus into the use of memory and the representation of history in the politics of ethnic boundary maintenance. Broadening up the focus, the final chapter (8) discusses all observed techniques and narratives, used to sharpen ethnic boundaries at different times.

2. From horseback to the office – the Russian administration in Bessarabia and its role in creating ethnic distinctions 1812-1918

In May 1812, just weeks before Napoleon's *Grande Armée* attacked Russia, Tsar Alexander I could settle his latest war with the Ottoman Empire with the treaty of Bucharest (Ryasanovsky, 2000:310). This victory enabled Russia to formally extend her hegemony over Bessarabia, a region in which her troops had made significant land gains already during the two preceding Russo-Turkish wars (1768-74 and 1787-92) but each time had to retreat again for the sake of compromise.[1] The conquest of Bessarabia was the farthest extension to the south-west the Russian Empire ever reached. In spite of the great distance to the capital, the empire, with the help of culturally very diverse colonists, managed in the course of the next century, to radically transform Bessarabia's landscape and population structure. This chapter discusses how the imperial Russian state has struggled with administrative ambiguities caused by the integration of its new subjects in Bessarabia and elsewhere. The growing social and political ambitions of the state between 1812 and 1918,[2] first lead it to colonize Bessarabia with sedentary and loyal subjects, and later demanded the creation of accurate statistical descriptions in order to administrate them efficiently. I argue that present ethnic categories in Bessarabia were a byproduct of this administrative calibration effort. It was only late in the 19th century that religious and socio-economic categories gradually gave way to more markedly ethnic categories.

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[1] These compromises led to peace treaties of Küçük Kaynarca in (1774) and Iaşi (1792) (Hosking, 2001:231, Ryasanovsky, 2000:266).

[2] For most of this time southern Bessarabia belonged to the Russian Empire. There was, however, a 22 year period when Russia's effort to push back Ottoman influence in South-Eastern Europe came to a halt. This was the time between the Crimean War (which Russia lost in 1856) and the last of the Russo-Turkish Wars (which Russia won in 1878 and which made Romania and Bulgaria into independent states). In this scantily documented period, an L-shaped strip of land along the Danube and Prut rivers belonged to the United Principalities, a forerunner-state of Romania and still formally a vassal of the Ottoman Empire (The area then was still relatively sparsely populated with only about 13.000 inhabitants (Lebedenko & Tychyna 2002:90)) The influence of the United Principalities in Bessarabia was even weaker than that of the Russian Empire. Neither the accessible literature nor the Izmail state archive give anything more than superficial hints on this period. We do know, however, that most rules concerning the colonists were left in place by the temporal Romanian rulers. A very telling document in this respect is a collection of evidence that the transdanubian colonists were granted the right to run their own school in Bolgrad by the Tsar (F312 D76 Documentele dreptilor Liceului din Bolgrad, 1923-40). This right, and many other rights connected to it were left untouched by the United Principalities in the late 1850s. The privileges of the Transdanubian Colonists were granted but could not always be enforced (Batyushkov, 1892: 164-65).

The chapter follows this transition and discusses the reasons why and how, by World War I, ethnicity had become a category familiar to most Bessarabians.

2.1. The state's hunger for tax and men

In the last decades of the 18th century, tsarist Russia established a strong influence over southern Bessarabia. During the reign of Catherine II (1762-96) *Novorossiya*, the steppe lands that nowadays comprise parts of southern Russia, southern Ukraine, and Moldova, had become a new zone of Russian imperial expansion. The land between the rivers Prut in the west, Dniester in the east and the Danube in the south became the last province of Novorossiya. These steppes along the northern shore of the Black Sea used to be inhabited by nomads, run-away serfs from Russia and Poland, and by religious splinter groups escaping persecution in Russia. Most of the northern shore of the Black Sea, including Bessarabia, had been under loose Ottoman suzerainty before Russian conquest. The region began to be dragged into the sphere of influence of the Russian Empire as the Ottoman Empire grew weaker, but not without considerable local resistance.

The new ports and cities that sprang up along the riverbanks and the sea coast of what is now southern Ukraine were not Ukrainian. They were not particularly Russian either. They were heavily dependent on foreigners willing to come to settle on the periphery (Brandes, 1986:171, Reid, 1997:58). Nevertheless, Novorossiya became the most ambitious project of imperial Russia and its success eventually cemented her status as a great European power. It is not for no reason then, that the colonial denomination "Novorossiya" has recently reentered the vocabulary of the Kremlin leadership on the background of the Ukrainian crisis of 2014.[3]

Russia's expansion to the west and south-west came along with a huge military effort against Poland, against Cossack bands, but mainly against the Ottoman Empire. The Tsar's administration started to prepare a full takeover of Bessarabia already decades before the 1812 treaty of Bucharest, when the region, at least on paper, still belonged to the Ottoman Empire. Therefore Russian policies in the decades preceding 1812 were largely war time arrangements.

A sizeable part of the modern population of southern Bessarabia are the descendants of so called "Transdanubian Colonists" (zadunayskie pereselentsy), Christians from the Ottoman Balkan provinces, who started to move to Bessarabia during the Russo-Turkish wars of the late 18th and the early 19th century. By the end of the century, in 1897 when the first empire wide census was conducted, this group consisted of about 159.000 people or 8.2% of the population

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[3] Vladimir Putin was shown lighting candles in a church on *Segodnya* news broadcast on state run "NTV" TV channel on September 10, 2014. Putin explained he had lit a candle "for those who suffered and those who gave their lives protecting the people of *Novorossiya*". Available online http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1211136/ (03.11.2015)

of the *Bessarabskaya Guberniya* (Subottina, 2011:159).[4] Moving Orthodox people from the Balkans to Bessarabia served two of Russia's goals simultaneously: First the tsarist government could prove that the expansion to the south-west really served its propagated end; the liberation of the Balkan Christians from Ottoman Muslim domination, and secondly Russia could use Bessarabia as a military deployment zone with a welcoming population (Lebedenko and Tychyna, 2002:5, Grek and Russev, 2011:71). The first significant waves of new settlers from the Balkans entered southern Bessarabia during the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-74 (Derzhavin, 1914:10, Skal'kovskiy, 1850:228). While the war was raging, Russian armed forces became the chief agent in preparing Bessarabia for an eventual full takeover. Still during this campaign, in 1769, 12.000 Nogai nomads, Turkic speaking Muslims who used to roam the area with their herds, were expelled to Crimea and the Northern Caucasus (Batyushkov, 1892:136, Berg, 1918:64). With the Bucharest Treaty in 1812 another 1892 nomad families were deported to the Ottoman Empire. Those who had migrated east to the northern Black Sea region were forced into a sedentary lifestyle (Amburger, 1966:286). Continued strife between Russia and the Ottoman Empire[5] helped to eventually turn southern Bessarabia into a nearly deserted land. During the Russo-Turkish war of 1806-12 around 20.000 people had fled or were deported from Bessarabia (Berg, 1918:64, Grek and Russev, 2011:53). When after this war Russia formally integrated Bessarabia and intended to turn it into a tax-contributing province, there was a severe lack of manpower. Also, peasant serfdom, still the rule in central Russia, tied peasants there to their master's estate. Therefore Russian peasants could not easily be resettled to the new frontier (Derzhavin, 1914:5, Kushko and Taki, 2012:203). The central Russian agricultural regions likewise suffered from a lack of working hands at the time. It would have taken much too long to colonize the periphery of the empire with what little manpower Russia could spare (Klaus, 1869:6).

Many of the new settlers from the Ottoman Balkan provinces crossed the Danube together with Russian troops, who after military campaigns there returned to Russia (Batyushkov, 1892:142). With laws, coming into effect in 1819, colonists from the other side of the Danube were granted land in Bessarabia as well as tax cuts (Derzhavin, 1914:10, Skal'kovskiy, 1850:242). These people, independently of the language they spoke, came to be referred to commonly as "Transdanubian Colonists".[6]

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[4] Since the 1897 census included no question for ethnicity (natsional'nost'), Subottina concluded from native language to ethnicity. The numbers here are the combined numbers of Bulgarians and Gagauz in all of the *Bessarabskaya Guberniya* (this includes areas that are now part of Moldova as well as areas that are now part of Ukraine). Also, these numbers do not include Albanians, who were by far the smallest group among the Transdanubian Colonists.

[5] Two more wars, 1787-92 and 1806-12, preceded the formal annexation of Bessarabia.

[6] This term was in fact used as a legal denominator in official documents as early as the 1820s. In a voluminous file from the years 1821-32 dealing with the naturalization of colonists by the Izmail authorities (gradonachal'stvo) (F56 D112, 1821–30) the colonists

This term seemed appropriate, since the Russian state looked at the new province as a colony. Appolon Skal'kovskiy, an early statistician, writing in 1850, elaborated on whether or not it was appropriate to call the country to which Bessarabia belonged *Novorossiya* (New Russia). He concluded that the land had been developed "with the help of Russian minds and with Russian work" and that therefore the name Novorossiya was no more unjust than Spanish colonies called Hispaniola, Dutch colonies called New Holland, or British colonies called Nova Scotia. What set Russian inland colonies apart from the overseas colonies of other European powers in Skal'kovskiy's eyes was that the "English and the Spanish have eradicated the native tribes of America", while "Russia has not only saved the lives and property of Greeks, Armenians, Tatars, and Romanians but even fertilized their empty land with the work and achievements of her children: noblemen, settlers, Cossacks, or invited foreigners from abroad" (Skal'kovskiy, 1850:206). The Russian state had a self-image as a good and protective colonizer on a par with other European powers. And indeed Russian authorities ruled in Bessarabia much like Western powers ruled their overseas colonies; by riding around their horses to implement imperial policies and inspect their results. Usually they based the decisions that they took on observations made right on the spot (Kushko and Taki, 2012:19). On inspection rides, administrators also counted people in order to have an idea how much tax they could raise and how many young men they could recruit for the army (Steinwedel, 2001:70).

However, during the first decade of Russian rule in Bessarabia, the influence of the imperial center was still minimal. The war against Napoleon 1812-14 and the subsequent Vienna Congress 1814-15 preoccupied the empire's administration, army, and diplomatic corps. Therefore, the Russian government paid very little attention to the newly acquired province of Bessarabia. The military governor at the time, commander of the Russian Danube Army, General Chichagov, ruled "almost without any interference of the Russian state" (Batyushkov, 1892:150). The lack of binding laws, Batyushkov goes on, led to widespread abuse of power, from which the lowest classes of society suffered most. In 1816 Tsar Alexander I saw it fit to send a special envoy to fix the Bessarabian administration. In 1818 he himself, together with his foreign minister, upon returning from Warszawa, paid a visit to the newly incorporated province. At this occasion the imperial ruler himself practiced the then dominant style of

are referred to as "new transdanubian settlers" (zadunayskie novopereselentsy) (pp. 103, 121, 123) or "Turkish subjects transdanubian colonists (Turetsko poddaniy zadunayskiy pereselentsy) (pp. 84, 96, 100, 125). Klaus (1869:294) in his description of the various colonist groups of *Novorossiya*, used the term "Transdanubian Colonists" (Zadunayskie Pereselentsy) to distinguish this group from other colonists. He defined the group as "not a particular people or even a separate tribe. Under this term our colonization legislation refers exclusively to colonies founded in the southern part of Bessarabia, beginning with the year of 1811…" Klaus (ibid.) also acknowledged that in Bessarabia the legal term subsumed many "elements", who had never seen the other bank of the Danube. In modern literature, the term is sometimes used unaltered (Grek and Russev, 2011) or with slight transformations, such as "zadunayskie poselentsy" (Transdanubian Settlers) (Kushko and Taki, 2012).

administration. He had a thorough inspection of the province that was still only superficially integrated. He then listened to the suggestions of his on-site governors, especially to Lieutenant General Ivan Inzov, since that year in charge of matters of Transdanubian Colonists in southern Bessarabia. Inzov acted as an advocate of the settlers, demanding equal rights for them as for other colonizers. His report managed to convince the Tsar's envoy. On the spot a large area of land was reserved for present and future colonists (Batyushkov, 1892:142, Skal'kovskiy, 1850:240). Also in 1818, a first set of administrative reforms was completed. It left far-reaching powers to the local governor and the high council, which he chaired (Batyushkov, 1892:151).

If at first, Russian rule had the aim to secure newly acquired land and to get profit out of it, and if this basic policy was implemented chiefly by the basic method of administrators travelling the country and reacting to what they saw, what then did the state need to know about the settlers living in Bessarabia? A helpful tool to address this question is James Scott's concept of "legibility" of societies. "Legibility" means the arrangement of the governed territory and population into "units that can be identified, observed, recorded, counted, aggregated and monitored", it is a "condition for manipulation" (Scott, 1998:183). Thereby the state's ambitions determine the degree to which it needs to make society "legible":

> If the state's goals are minimal, it may not need to know much about the society. Just as a woodsman who takes only an occasional load of firewood from a large forest need have no detailed knowledge of that forest, so a state whose demands are confined to grabbing a few carts of grain and the odd conscript may not require a very accurate or detailed map of society. If, however, the state is ambitious – if it wants to extract as much grain and manpower as it can, short of provoking a famine or a rebellion, if it wants to create a literate, skilled, and healthy population, if it wants everyone to speak the same language or worship the same god – then it will have to become both far more knowledgeable and far more intrusive (ibid.:184).

Russia in the 19th century saw a steady growth of the state's ambitions and therefore a steady growth in its need for "legibility" of society. For the early decades, the period of transdanubian settlement, a limited range of information was sufficient. It was certainly good to know whether the people arriving would be able and willing to perform the economic tasks they were designated to perform. Since most newcomers were given land to plow, the priority task they were meant to fulfill was growing crop that would generate taxable profit as soon as possible. So it was helpful to the state to know whether or not the new settlers were peasants. Since the production entity of the peasant economy on both sides of the Danube was the household, it was interesting to invite complete families rather than single men (Klaus, 1869:20). Another information required by the state was when exactly the person in concern had come to Bessarabia, because tax cuts that were granted to the colonizers ran a limited period from 3 to 6 years after their arrival (ibid.:307, Kushko and Taki, 2012:168). Tax breaks were only interesting for the state to grant for so long as the new peasant economies were still in the

build-up. Another aspect, important to know, was whether the newcomers were Christians. This in the state's eyes would ensure that in times of war against the Ottomans, the new settlers would side with the Russians (and indeed, three more wars between the two empires were to follow in the 19th century).

Many other facts about the colonists from across the Danube could have been recorded by the state, but were not. Today's ethnographers would be all too grateful if, for instance, the language of the settlers or their self-designation had been recorded in state registries. But for the state at the beginning of the 19th century such information was at best of secondary priority. Therefore ethno-cultural and linguistic features of the settlers did not enter state records. The transdanubian colonists were similar in their religion, in their economic status, and in their origin from the Ottoman Empire. But although they were later often subsumed as Bulgarians, they were probably much more ethnically diverse upon their arrival in Bessarabia:

> The settlements of the „transdanubian colonists" consisted of a motley bunch (pestroy tolpy) of Bulgarians, Moldovans, Greeks, Little- and Great Russians [i.e Ukrainians and Russians], Arnauts [i.e Albanians], Gypsies, Serbs, Nekrasov [Cossacks], Zaporoshian [Cossacks], Turks, and converted Jews (vykrestov iz evreev); these were the original ancestors (rodonachal'niki) of today's Bessarabian-Bulgarian colonists. This whole mob (sbrod) was united solely by their common Orthodox creed, their uniform homelessness and misery (Klaus, 1869:310).

The imperial decree of 1819 that regulated land property and privileges for settlers in southern Bessarabia implicitly also stressed the multicultural character of what would later be seen as simply Bulgarians. It defined the group of people concerned as: "Transdanubian Colonists by which we mean Bulgarians and other foreign newcomers from across the Danube who are our fellow believers" (Derzhavin, 1914:31).

2.2.   Colonists out of the state's sight

The established Russian system of imperial rule, whereby the local elites were lured into collaborating with the imperial government and kept control over the local population (Löwe, 2000) did not work in southern Bessarabia because there was no local elite with which to collaborate. The imperial strategists had to delegate their own representatives to ensure "legibility" of the new province and its freshly arrived inhabitants. The categories employed in this effort were not ethnic. At the beginning of the 19th century, Russian law subdivided the population by social status categories (*sostoyanie and soslovie*). People with different occupations had different rights and duties vis-à-vis the state (Haimson, 1988, Schmidt, 1990, 1991). The imperial decree on the transdanubian colonists of 1819 therefore specified the social status of the settlers before anything else. As colonists they were a social group distinct from

serfs, traders, or soldiers. They were dwellers of the countryside, not of the city. The only status category that in this time foreshadowed ethnic categorization was the status of inorodtsy (literally "of a foreign tribe").[7] This legal status was introduced in 1822 and reserved for non-Christian and non-sedentary peoples who had been incorporated by the expanding empire (Slocum, 1998:174). The Transdanubian Colonists were no inorodtsy. Therefore the language they spoke or the customs they lived by find no mentioning in any of the state's rulings concerning the settlers. What use would it have been for the state to be concerned with such features? It would only have limited the group, from which the much needed settlers could have been recruited.

Once the settlers were inside Russia and once their status, property, tax obligations, and their obligation to military service had been settled, colonists could remain out of the state's view for a very long time. There was no clear oversight of how many settlers had entered the region. The writer Pavel Svin'in, was sent to Bessarabia by the Senate in 1815, and in 1816 presented perhaps the first Russian description of the new province (Kushko and Taki, 2012:77). He lamented the fact that there was hardly any data about the region's population. For a future census he advised those who would conduct it to first gain the confidence of the population. The settlers, he asserted were very weary to be counted since they feared recruitment or even the introduction of serfdom (rabvstvo) (Svin'in, 1816:210). Living in their village and working the field, peasants hardly ever came in direct contact with a representative of the administration. Still at the turn of the 20th century, the officer and ethnographer Valentin Moshkov noted the Russian authorities had little contact to the colonists, they would "rush in like a thunderstorm and then again disappear somewhere" (1901b:36). Communal affairs were handled without state intervention inside the colony by a council of household heads and elected chairmen (Brandes, 1986:174). When the status of people changed, when they for example inherited a house or a plot of land or when they married, the state, at least theoretically, should have taken notice. Also, people came in contact with the state when they crossed its border. At least so was the official policy. In fact, however, the administrative web at the time seems to have been woven so loosely that many people might have slipped through borders without the state ever taking notice.[8] The same was very likely true for alterations in civil or property relations.

An additional source of difficulties for the Russian authorities in administering the transdanubian colonists came from their deep mistrust towards state institutions. Among the

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[7] Ustav ob upravlenie inorodtsev, from July 22, 1822, In *Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov* (PSZ), tom 38, no. 29.126, p. 394, available online http://www.nlr.ru/e-res/law_r/search.php?part=177&regim=3 (03.11.2015)

[8] In 1816 Pavel Svin'in (237) complained that the clerks in Izmail's quarantine station had no clear data how many ships had entered the city's port that year, let alone how many passengers had travelled through it.

settlers, there was apparently wide-spread skepticism, whether or not the Russian Empire would be able to hold its newly gained territories for long. Many people were reluctant to make long time arrangements and get permanently settled. In the 1816 account of Pavel Svin'in he remarked that many of the houses built by the colonists reminded him of the ones he had seen among nomadic tribes (1816:220). The inhabitants of many settlements refused to build churches because they feared the Ottomans might be back soon (Batyushkov, 1892:136). A wave of rumors in 1814 and 1815 that Russia might introduce serfdom for Bessarabian peasants led to the flight of more than 3.000 families across the river Prut into Austrian Bukovina. The mass exodus began to flatten only when the Metropolit of Chişinău and Khotyn, Gavril Banulescu-Bodoni, sent around a conciliatory circular in Romanian, (Svin'in, 1816:211, Batyushkov, 1892:137, Kushko and Taki, 2012:157). Another wave of 3.000 transdanubian settler families returned to the Balkans after a series of poor harvests between 1830 and 1834 (Skal'kovskiy, 1850:246). When in 1856, after the Crimean War, a part of southern Bessarabia came under the rule of the United Principalities, a state that formally was still under Ottoman suzerainty, this led to yet another wave of emigration of transdanubian colonists, who resettled further inside Novorossiya (Klaus, 1869:294, Derzhavin, 1914:11).

One more indication for the state's sketchy oversight over its periphery was that it lost track of whole groups of settlers. In 1832 the administration of Izmail Uezd,[9] trying to optimize its tax revenues, went to look for undocumented inhabitants who had lived in Bessarabia for many years. A circular memorandum to the outposts of the administration in Izmail brought the issue to the fore. The document stated that between 1821 and 1824 up to 700 settlers had entered Bessarabia every year. All of these settlers had gone through quarantine, where they were registered and counted. In order not to lose track of these settlers they were required to register with the quarantine station every six months. However, at least 350 of them had not been registered anywhere, had not been paying tax, and therefore did not contribute anything to the state's benefit. This was why it had been decided, in 1830, that within a year these undocumented foreigners had to either leave Russia or agree to become Russian subjects (poddannie)and therefore lose the right to leave the country. They should register in the place of their permanent residency and pay taxes including the amount they had failed to pay while unregistered. Those who were willing to leave the country should not be released to do so until

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[9] An Uezd was an administrative sub-entity to the Province which, in imperial Russia, was called "Oblast" or "Guberniya". The Bessarabskaya Oblast contained 8 Uezd. The two southernmost Uezd, Akkerman (today's Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy) and Izmail, comprised very roughly the part of Bessarabia that nowadays belongs to Ukraine. Izmail Uezd covered the southwestern corner of Bessarabia.

they would have paid their tax debt in full. Should these people neither leave the country nor register, they should be dealt with according to the law, the memorandum concluded.[10]

A year after this first memorandum, in February 1833, a similar document was circulated as a way of insistence that the outposts should no longer wait to act on this issue.[11] In addition to the original text this new circular contained also a number of examples how the problem was imperfectly dealt with in other districts, because administrators there had either not followed orders or misinterpreted them.

This episode illustrates how difficult it was for a state with a still very loose network of law enforcement structures, to keep track of who its subjects were, where they had lived and paid tax at what time. The fact that a second circular had to be sent out, emphasizing the same orders as the first, but with more and clearer explanations, also shows that outposts, in charge of enforcing orders from the center, were either not willing or not able to fulfill orders swiftly and to the center's satisfaction.

Both memorandums remind us that the language spoken by subjects at the time was no marker for a specific category. It mattered that the people concerned came from the Ottoman Empire, it mattered at what exact time they had arrived, and it mattered that now these people had accepted to be subjects of Russia. It was still not very significant however, which ethnic identity these people had.

2.3. Keep it separate, keep it simple

Although the majority of settlers in Southern Bessarabia were Orthodox, there were sizable groups of different confessions including Jews, Catholic Poles, Germans both protestant and catholic, and Old-Believers.[12] From the very beginning of Bessarabia's history within the Russian Empire there were different rules for different religious communities.

Since the reign of Peter I, at the beginning of the 18th century, people had been recorded in parish registers. Where different religious communities lived close to each other, their mixing confused the parish based registration system and therefore endangered the state's control. With the growing importance of precise registries, a trend to bar confessional groups from

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[10] F56 D112 Delo o prinyatii v russkoe poddanstvo i poselenii v izmail'skom gradonachalstve bolgar, grekov, moldavan, bezhavshikh v Rossiyu ot Turetskogo iga v 1821 – 1830 p. 1

[11] F56 D112 p. 30

[12] The Old-Believer communities along the channels of the Danube Delta were among the oldest of the settler colonies in the region. Many of them were founded soon after the Russian church reforms under Patriarch Nikon between 1652 and 1666, with which they refused to conform (Derzhavin, 1914:7, Kushnir, 1998:150). In this period the region still belonged to the Principality of Moldova, a vassal of the Ottoman Empire. Most Old Believers in Bessarabia settled near the rivers Dniester and Danube and relied on fishing (Kushnir, 1998:150).

intermarrying set in towards the end of the 18th century (Cadiot, 2005:445). In regions settled with newcomers, like southern Bessarabia, each district was initially reserved for settlers of one specific religion (Klaus, 1869:11).

One of the reasons why it was hard to administer inter-confessional mixing was that the Orthodox Church was still the only authority that kept systematic track of individuals and changes in their civic status. Confessional minorities, such as Jews, Protestants, or Catholics did not appear in metric books of Orthodox parishes. Between 1826 and 1837 a number of tsarist decrees instructed Catholic priests, Protestant pastors, and Jewish rabbis to keep their own metric books for their parishes (Steinwedel, 2001:70). In 1874, after all other religious communities, the last unrecorded groups, the Old-Believers and Baptists, were ordered to register with civil authorities in the nearest police station (ibid.:71).

What remained unacceptable to the state bureaucracy were individuals or entire families existing between established religious communities. In July 1835 the Russian interior ministry issued a decree prohibiting marriages between Orthodox Christians and Old-Believers. A copy of the decree was sent to the governor of Izmail Uezd for "precise and immediate implementation".[13] A second decree issued in October 1836, once more reveals how limited the state's control over affairs like marriages between subjects of different categories was. The document specified the exact procedure that should be followed in order to legalize a marital union of an Orthodox person with an Old-Believer: The Old-Believer partner first needed to convert to Orthodoxy and be re-baptized before they could get married. Unfortunately, the decree lamented, there were many cases in which the Old-Believer partner simply pledged not to lead the Orthodox spouse, or their common children, into deviation. This was no longer an acceptable practice, the decree ordered. Whoever gave his blessing to such an unseemly marriage, or allowed it to be registered in his church, chapel, or house, should be punished according to existing laws.[14]

Another aspect of putting religious minorities in their predefined place, were rules about who could employ people of which other categories. An 1839 circular, distributed by the Izmail military authority to local heads of the civil administration (gradonachalniki), can provide some insight, how such regulations were handled. The document was circulated in order to remind civil administrators of existing prohibitions for Christians to stand in the service of Jews.[15] This document shows how the state attempted to keep different religious

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[13] F56 D37 Tsirkulariya ITsD o zapreshchenii brakosochitaniy raskol'nikov s pravovernimi, 1837, p. 2

[14] F56 D37 p. 6

[15] It was in principle prohibited for Christians to permanently stand in the service of Jews. But the law also allowed for a whole series of exceptions, none of which seems to have been taken into consideration by military governor Feodorov reporting on his observations in Leovo. See Polozhenie o Evrejakh of April 13, 1835: PSZ tom 10 II, no 8054, § 15, p. 310, available online http://www.nlr.ru/e-res/law_r/search.php (04.11.2015)

groups separated. More importantly, it reminds us how inefficient such rules were since the state just did not have the means to enforce them. In fact the author of the circular, military governor Feodorov, started his letter with an infuriated reminder of laws that had been in effect for many years already and that were well known to the civil authorities. He then went on describing an experience from his last inspection ride:

> ..... in spite of that [laws prohibiting Jews to employ Christians in their service], during my last inspection, I had to notice that this law is not implemented everywhere as it should be by our weak police, and that Jews in some places, as if this law did not exist, continue to employ Christians in their service, especially women, who are ignorant that this is not appropriate for them, and who work under miserable conditions and for miserable salaries for Jews and lead the most ghastly life. The police officers, out of criminal intentions, let this evil happen, and even if they sometimes do press charges against this evil, they do so out of criminal intentions too.
> I discovered this evil while I was travelling in the district of Kagul, in the hamlet of Leovo, where a number of shameless women approached me to complain about the assessor Bereznitskiy, who used to allow them to work for Jews and finally prohibited it, and as a punishment for this offence (about which no one had informed them) ordered that these women should work in his own house without compensation. He let them do all conceivable tasks.[16]

The military governor then went on reporting how he sacked the culprit Bereznitskiy right on the spot, and finally expressed his hopes that this episode should serve as an example for authorities in other districts. In closing, the author repeated, that he would no longer tolerate breaches of this law. The circular then concluded with the order that all addressees in district towns[17] should confirm the reception of the circular.

The procedure of law enforcement, exemplified by this case, is very telling: A high representative of the military traveled the land and encountered the victims of an alleged abuse. He himself punished the perpetrator and then found the cause of the crime in the disregard for the separation of people belonging to different religious categories. The report of this deviation also served as a reminder to civil authorities that laws existed, that these laws were meant to prevent grievances like those reported in the circular, and that it was the civil authority's job to enforce the law. The civil authorities at the time were based in small and remote settlements and had a "weak police" to their disposal, as the circular complains. The police, however, was not only weak because it was small in number and probably poorly funded, the military governor also observed their "criminal intention" that led the police to sometimes take action on a crime and sometimes look the other way. So the weakness of law enforcement was also the

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[16] F56 D344 Tsirkulariya Bessarabskogo voennogo gubernatora o zapreshchenii khristianam postupat' v prislugu k evreyam, 1841, p. 1

[17] Bessarabian district centers in 1839 were Khotyn, Bender, Balta, Reni, Izmail, Chişinău, Akkerman (today's Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy), Soroca, Orhei, and Kagul.

consequence of serious lack in discipline and presumably deep-reaching corruption. Not for no reasons then, accounts of the already introduced Pavel Svin'in of his 1815 journey through Bessarabia (Svin'in, 1816) were rumored to be the original inspiration for Nikolai Gogol's 1836 satirical play *The Government Inspector*[18] (Kushko and Taki, 2012:132, 158). Therefore, even if there were rules that religious communities should remain separate from each other, it is doubtful whether these rules actually could keep anyone from mixing.

Rules against inter-confessional or interethnic mixing might have existed beyond the codified law, in the habitual norms of settler communities. It is not easy to establish in retrospect how isolated from one another and how endogamous among themselves confessional and ethnic groups were in fact. Several forms of endogamy are conceivable: endogamy within the village community and, if there were several ethnic groups in the community, within one of these ethnic groups. It is also conceivable that everyone in a village community, irrespective of ethnic identity, was eligible to marriage, provided of course that they were of the same religion. A third possibility is, that people, already early in the 19th century, married across village borders and across, what today would be considered ethnic boundaries. If asked today, most informants hold strong beliefs that before the advent of socialism, ethnic boundaries were a strict barrier to marriage, and that cultural exchange between ethnic groups was minimal. Tanya Boneva (2006:52) who has done ethnographic fieldwork in two Bulgarian villages of southern Bessarabia, reached a similar conclusion. The economic opportunities in villages were limited, meant to serve the state and not to encourage private initiatives. Social life was largely confined to the village community and characterized by social conservatism and cultural stability. Early ethnographies of the Gagauz suggested a situation in which Bulgarians and Gagauz, even if they lived in the same village, rarely ever married each other (Shabashov, 2012:416). In the scholarly community the paradigm that Gagauz and Bulgarians strived to remain separate is most likely based on one of the first studies of the Gagauz by a Russian General Lieutenant, member of the Geographical Society, and self-taught ethnographer Valentin Moshkov, who in 1900-02 published a series of articles about the Gagauz in the then leading ethnographic journal *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie* (Moshkov, 1900, 1901a, 1901b, 1901c, 1902a, 1902b). Based on a short stopover in the mixed Bulgarian and Gagauz village Kirsova (today in

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[18] The subject for the *Government Inspector* was given to Gogol by Aleksandr Pushkin on Gogol's request for an "authentic Russian anecdote" (Mulrine, 1999:xiv, xvii, *Russkie Pisateli* 1989:595). For exspressing his reformist ideas, Pushkin was sent to serve General Liutenant Inzov's office in Bessarabia in 1821-24 (*Russkie Pisateli*, 2007:191-93). Svin'in and Pushkin were friends since the early 1820s and still frequented the same Moscow circles in the early 1830s (*Russkie Pisateli*, 2007:519-24). Both having traveled in Bessarabia, they could have exchanged notes. However, Gogol's *Government Inspector* was set in a town with a much more Russian way of life than could have been observed in recently integrated Bessarabia. For our note here it is important that the rumor of Bessarabia being an inspiration for the *Government Inspector* was so tenacious. This fact reveals the dubious reputation such peripheral regions had among the Russian intelligentsia of the time.

Moldova), Moshkov claimed that the two groups (he used the terms "narodnost'" and "natsional'nost'" interchangeably) had always lived in hostility and mutual mistrust. In Moshkov's account even the church and the cemetery were separated into two halves in which each group stayed strictly apart. However, on the same page Moshkov described how Bulgarians and Gagauz had to collaborate to run village affairs such as night watch. He did not claim that members of the two groups could under no circumstances marry each other, but he wondered that in spite of the close cultural similarity, marriages between Gagauz and Bulgarians remained rare in Kirsova, rarer than between Gagauz and Moldovans, two groups between whom cultural differences were considerably larger (Moshkov, 1901b:34-35). Moshkov's account is contradictory when it comes to his claim of strict ethnic segregation between Bulgarians and Gagauz. In another section, he elaborates on the common practice for young men to seek employment with well-to-do farmers in order to earn enough money to set up a household and get married. Some young men went back to the same employers for many agricultural season and many did so in neighboring villages among Bulgarians and Germans. Moshkov reported that for many of the young labor migrants their years away from home were also years of apprenticeship during which they learned a trade, picked up new manners, and in some cases found a bride (Moshkov, 1901b:14-15). A later student of the region, Soviet philologist Samuil Bernshteyn also traveled through Kirsova in the summer of 1947 and en passant repeated Moshkov's claim of totally segregated ethnic communities (without referring to Moshkov). In neighboring Komrat, however, Bernshteyn noted that the Bulgarian minority had fully assimilated to the Gagauz majority and that interethnic marriages were very common (Bernshteyn, 1949:387). But the theme of ethnic segregation found broader interest among subsequent scholars. In another expression of the long cultivated belief in ethnic endogamy, Boneva (2006:53) reported her informants mentioning the bible as a source of strict endogamy rules that were observed until the Soviet period. As groups that were out of the question to marry for Bulgarians, she mentions Russians and Moldovans.

In at least two ethnically mixed villages near Izmail, the large Bulgarian and Gagauz village of Chervonoarmeyskoe[19] and the Albanian, Bulgarian and Gagauz village of Zhovtnevoe,[20] villagers still today have a narrative of a past ethnic segregation within the village. In some instances the term "Mahala"[21] for quarter or neighborhood is used in Russian, Bulgarian, Gagauz, Romanian, and Albanian to delineate such formerly existing sectors(1986). The word

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[19] In Bolgrad Rayon, called Kubey in pre-Soviet times

[20] In Bolgrad Rayon, called Karakurt in pre-Soviet times

[21] The word "Mahala", as used in Bessarabia, stems from the Arabic word *Mahalla*, meaning "a place where one makes a halt, where one settles (for a longer or shorter time)". In Persian, Urdu and Turkish (Mahalle) it took on the meaning "quarter of a town" (The Encyclopaedia of Islam, Volume V:1220) which comes very close to the modern usage in the diverse languages of Bessarabia that have, without doubt, taken it from Turkish.

Mahala however is also used to refer to neighborhoods in Izmail and in villages without a narrative of past ethnic segregation. In both abovementioned villages some people even today can show where exactly the border between the ethnically segregated Mahalas used to be. There are numerous tales of mass brawls between young men from different ethnic sectors on these borders. Opinions differ, however, as to whether these brawls were interethnic conflicts or simply caused by drunkenness and jealousy. Other villages also have a history of being ethnically mixed. The two neighboring villages Kislitsa[22] and Pershotravnevoe[23] today are both considered predominantly Ukrainian villages. In both villages there are memories of a once mixed ethnic character with a large group of Romanian speakers living among the Slav majority. However, there are no memories of ethnic segregation in these two villages.

Geographical ethnic segregation within the village seems to be a part of a widely spread narrative only in villages where ethnic groups used to have roughly equal size. In most other villages there used to be one predominant ethnic majority group with which the village came to be associated beyond its limits. Usually smaller groups of ethnic outsiders also lived in Bessarabian villages among these majorities. They were certainly too small to be endogamous both within the village and within their ethnic group.

Accessible archival materials in Izmail give only very scant insight into marriage patterns of the early and mid-19th century.[24] In rare cases certificates that proved a person's eligibility to marriage have been conserved. These documents reveal some information whom and where young men and women from Bessarabian colonies married during the tsarist period. One surviving collection of documents, certifying people's rights to marry, stems from the early 1850's. Such certificates were issued by the colonists of a settlement and composed by a scribe. They usually started with the statement "We the colonists of the colony XY testify that the below mentioned person has the right to marry". This preamble typically also contained the exact name of the local church and the name of the priest.[25] That the soon-to-be-married person was from among the colonists already suggested that he or she was an Orthodox Christian. Therefore, information concerning social estate and religious confession were often not even mentioned in such certificates. What was usually mentioned, however, was that the couple were not biological relatives (rodstvo plotskiy), nor in-laws (rodstvo duchovnyy), and in some cases that they were in no god-parenthood relation (kumstvo).[26] It was also mentioned from which settlement the bride and groom came from, which allows us to track their marriage patterns on

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[22] In Izmail Rayon, called Câşliţe-Dunăre in pre-Soviet times

[23] In Izmail Rayon, called Hasan-Aspaga in pre-Soviet times.

[24] Church registers, in which marriages, births, and deaths were recorded, so called metric books, have largely survived; alas access is granted only to information concerning proven relatives of the applicant.

[25] For example F93 D332 Svidetel'stva, vydannye kolonistam na pravo vstupleniya v brak pp. 20, 21, 22

[26] F93 D332 pp. 3, 15, 17

the map. Another information that was usually part of the testimony, was whether or not the person concerned was about to marry for the first, or for the second time. This information allows us to establish whether when married for a second time, people did so over greater geographical and social distances than in first marriages.

All surviving files in Izmail's archive concern the transdanubian colonies administered from the small town of Bolgrad. There were 38 settlements in this district, most of which are considered Bulgarian today. Others, however, are now considered Gagauz, Moldovan, or Albanian settlements.[27] From 41 marriages, registered in these colonies between November 1851 and January 1853, roughly half (20) were arranged between different colonies, alas mostly within the district reserved for transdanubian colonists, i.e. most likely with a Bulgarian or Gagauz partner. Only one marriage was arranged in a village of a neighboring district.[28] In 9 cases, at least one of the partners married for the second time, when they were in their mid-30s. Seven out of nine second marriages included partners from different villages, in one case over a distance of more than 80 kilometers. If in the 1850s only roughly half of the people married within one village, this means they most likely already had a degree of mobility and exchange between villages. One form of interaction between villages could have been the practice of young men seeking paid employment with wealthy farmers, described by Moshkov. But most marriages at the time appear to have been arranged by the parental generation (Derzhavin, 1914:126, Kushnir, 1998:192). Therefore at least ties of trust must have existed between villages. These ties connected villages that lay at considerable distances from one another and in which Bulgarian, Gagauz, Albanian and Moldovan/Romanian was spoken. Most of the southern Bessarabian villages had well under a thousand inhabitants at the time.[29] If among this small group all relatives, in-laws, and people related through god-parenthood were excluded from marriage, very likely many families had no other choice but to look for future spouses beyond village boundaries. This means that at least occasionally people chose marriage partners beyond what today would be considered ethnic boundaries.

With even greater likelihood we can draw such a conclusion for second marriages. Here partners were apparently found quite frequently outside the village. Often these partners had themselves lost a spouse from first marriage. This observation is also congruent with the early ethnographic material of Derzhavin (1914:44) who concluded that exclusions from a very strict prohibition of interethnic marriage were made only for widows and widowers. Even Valentin Moshkov, who hardly contained his fascination with apparently rigid ethnic endogamy, noted

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[27] List of settlements that belonged to the Bolgard-administered area for transdanubian colonists in the constitution of a Bolgrad gymnasium from 1884, cited in F312 D76 Documentele dreptilor Liceului din Bolgrad, 1923, p.63

[28] All cases recorded in F93 D332.

[29] See Kornilovich (1899) for village population statistics from the mid to late 1820s pp. 375 ff.

that Gagauz and Moldovans sometimes did marry each other and that this was especially likely for widows and widowers (1901b:36). Despite strong social norms against marrying culturally foreign, Derzhavin, working in the 1890s had met many couples in which one partner was Bulgarian and the other was Russian (ibid.:45), or in which one was Bulgarian and the other Greek (ibid.:47). This rather grudgingly admitted insight, combined with the marriage data from the 1850s, leads one to cautiously conclude that marriages across village boundaries were relatively common already in the mid-19th century. We can also cautiously conclude that there might have been local rules excluding marriage with Russians and possibly also Ukrainians, but that these norms were frequently ignored. We can be relatively certain that there were no marriages across confessional lines without one of the partner's conversion (usually the non-Orthodox partner). However, popular notions of strict endogamy within the limits of the village community appear exaggerated in the light of even the very modest data accessible on this topic.

Rather different marriage patterns can be seen in a second, much later, surviving collection of marriage certificates from Bolgrad, covering the first 6 months of 1918.[30] Here, still a little less than half the couples recorded (10 out of 25) married outside the village. But now one bride came from Vilnius in Lithuania, one groom from Tomsk in Siberia, one from Kursk in southern Russia, one man was a Greek from Romania, and two came from the Kingdom of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs. Certainly this new, international marriage patterns had a lot to do with World War I that had ended for Russia not long before. But it also shows that by the early 20th century endogamy, neither within the village nor the ethnic group, was a value in itself. Indeed, rigid regulations confining marriage to ethnic and confessional groups had undergone thorough criticism from within the imperial bureaucracy. Newly drafted laws accepted that new forms of interaction between ethnic groups would make interethnic mixing inevitable (Cadiot, 2005:445). So if endogamy within one colony was a frequently broken rule in the mid-19th century, by the time of the October Revolution it had ceased to be even a rule. This is much earlier than the popular notion suggests. Most people seem to believe that interethnic marriage became possible only after the Soviet Union took the region over in 1944.

If marriage between several groups of Orthodox Christians became increasingly normal in the course of the 19th century, non-Christian groups were continually considered to be best manageable if kept separate. The Jewish communities, in particular, were treated by the state according to laws specifically issued for this group. For them, geographical segregation from Christian settlements was indeed required by the law.[31] Jews had entered the region steadily, beginning with the first Partition of Poland in 1772. In 1804 a decree on the Jews regulated their

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[30] F292 D251 Zhurnal registratsiy brakov za 1918 god

[31] Polozhenie o Evreyakh May 31. 1835, PSZ Tom 10 I, no. 8054 §65, p. 316

status in Russian society.[32] It was the beginning of the attempt to centralize control over all Jewish communities through unified representation of their communities vis-à-vis the state (Löwe, 2000:60). Minority groups, such as the Jews, were integrated into imperial structures by attempting to sum them all up in a single social category that had a unified and visible body of representatives.

As with the Old-Believers, for the Jews too, the imperial administration was keen to ensure that conversion from one group to another could happen only from the minority group to the majority group. Administrative incentives such as longer military service for "unproductive elements", as which Jews were classified, made it attractive to become an Orthodox Christian. Once converted to Christianity one was prohibited to return to any former creed (Löwe, 2000:64, Cadiot, 2005:445).

Regulations about Jews in Russia also were a testing ground for imperial language policy. This effort again was closely tied to the state's need for "legibility". For instance all bookkeeping in Jewish firms had to be in Russian, Polish, or German.[33] The same regulations applied to all contracts and paychecks[34] and no Jew could be elected to the magistrate after the year of 1808, if he could not read and write one of these languages.[35] Even stricter language policies were introduced in the 1830s. The background for these stiffer policies was a militant rebellion in Poland in 1830-31, suppressed by Russia only with considerable difficulties. After crushing the rebels, the tsarist government hoped to prevent future rebellions by russifying the administration and the educatory system in Poland, but even more so in the western and south-western provinces of Russia (Ryasanovsky, 2000:332). As a consequence, for Jews too Russian was, from 1835 onwards, the only language permissible in official documents, as well as business documents.[36] Ultimately, making the Jewish community "legible" and therefore easier to administer went much further than only dictating what languages they had to read and write in. Jews were also categorized in four distinct social statuses (sostoyanie); a) agriculturalists, b) manufacturers and craftsmen, c) merchants, and d) urban bourgeoisie. Specific laws applied for each of these classes.[37] They could belong to only one of those four classes, and had to register to one of them. Nowhere in Russia would a Jew be tolerated if he was not properly registered as belonging to one of these social estates. So the legislations on the Jews were based on an

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[32] Polozhenie dlya Evreev, 1804, PSZ Tom 28, no. 21547, p. 731, available online http://www.nlr.ru/e-res/law_r/search.php (04.11.2015)

[33] Polozhenie dlya Evreev, 1804, PSZ Tom 28, no. 21547, §7 p. 731

[34] Ibid. §8

[35] Ibid. §9

[36] Polozhenie o Evreyakh May 31. 1835, PSZ Tom 10 I, no. 8054 §18, p.311

[37] Polozhenie dlya Evreev, 1804, PSZ Tom 28, no. 21547, § 11, p.732: the Russian terms are a) zemledeltsy b) fabrikanty i remesleniki, c) kupechestvo, d) meshchanstvo.

amalgamate of religious and social status categories, ingredients that later would be processed further into an ethnic distinction. Jews, who would fail to register as a representative of one social status, would be seen as "tramps" (brodyagi) and treated "with all the severity of the law".[38]

2.4. Criminalizing the undocumented

The concept of the "tramp" or "vagabond" became a crucial tool to delineate those who were still not "legible" for the state administration. Being a vagabond became increasingly criminalized. In an agrarian economy, based on the labor of serfs, there were good economic reasons to outlaw vagabondism. Bessarabia and other western peripheries of the Russian Empire had no serfdom.

The northern two thirds of Bessarabia belonged mainly to Romanian speaking noblemen, so called Boyars.[39] The peasants working their land were not serfs. They paid tribute to their landlord in crop or working days, but they were in principle free. Nobles from Russia proper who obtained arable land in Bessarabia were not allowed to bring their serfs from their Russian estates to Bessarabia (Kushko and Taki, 2012:200 ff.). In southern Bessarabia, before the expulsion of the nomads, most of the land had been used communally. It had not belonged to Moldovan Boyars and therefore became state owned land that was given to colonizers (Klaus, 1869:308). This made Bessarabia a magnet for fugitive serfs and persecuted religious zealots from central Russia (Kushko and Taki, 2012:200 ff.).

The great number of unregistered fugitives became a severe threat for feudal economy in central Russia. It diminished the already insufficient manpower on estates in the Russian heartland and it created a motley population on the periphery that was hardly controllable and even less taxable. Especially in times of war the number of people classified as tramps increased sharply. There were attempts to convince them of giving themselves up to authorities in turn for exemption from punishment (ibid.:201). In this way tramps should become registered and therefore controllable and taxable. But for all these efforts the problem of vagabondism still demanded administrative attention even decades later. At the beginning of the 1890s, when passports were already in use, being a tramp was still a legal offence.[40]

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[38] Polozhenie dlya Evreev, 1804, PSZ Tom 28, no. 21547 § 30

[39] This term was consistently used by modern writers such as Kushko and Taki (2012) as well as by writers of the time such as Svin'in (1816) to designate a specific Moldovan group of land owning nobles.

[40] An example of how people travelling without passports or with expired travel documents were dealt with is F292 D46 Pasporta i bilety, vydannye zhitelyam goroda dlya vyezda v raznye goroda i sela Rossii, 1891.

When, at the beginning of the 19th century, the state wanted to avoid the thinning out of its main workforce, the serf peasants, it now was aiming at an all-encompassing control of the whereabouts and activities of its subjects, even here at the periphery. Now at the end of the century, the offence was no longer to run away from the master's estate (serfdom had been formally abolished in 1861), but circumventing state control and therefore compromising the state's "legibility" of its population.

Passports had existed since the reign of reform-minded Peter I (1682-1725), aimed at giving the state a better control over people who traveled away from the places of permanent residence where their identity was registered in church books (metricheskie knigi). But it was not until 1894 that a formal law on passports came into effect. This law named two functions for passports; to identify its bearer and to certify the right to be in a place different from the place of permanent residence (Steinwedel, 2001:73). Passports contained the bearer's full name, estate status, date of birth or age, religious confession, and marital status. For men, passports also usually contained information on whether or not its bearer was liable to military service (ibid.:75). Information on linguistic or ethno-cultural background had no place in passports of the Russian Empire. The passports handed out during the 1890s in Bessarabia and throughout the Empire, were pre-printed forms containing the tsar's coat of arms and an abbreviated list of his titles. Into the free spaces, a local clerk could fill information about the person concerned. These specifications were so descriptive that they most probably were entered in the presence of the applicant. Height, for example, was usually described as "tall", "medium", or "short", the chin as "shaved" or "bearded", and the face as "clean" or "freckled". For inhabitants of colonies such passports did not state religious confession or social estate.[41] The only instances when information about the religious background was added were passports issued for Jews. Because there was no special line for ethnicity or religion, in some instances the line that specified a person's name contained the supplement that the person was Jewish.[42] In other cases, this seemed to be taken for granted.[43] But what was common to all passports for Jews was that they contained the explicit note that the passport was only valid for those Russian provinces where Jews were allowed to take permanent residence.

2.5. Bureaucracy evolving: the church gives way to the state

A Russian state whose representatives were mounted on horseback, travelling the land on inspection excursions, like the one to the hamlet Leovo, began to slowly transform in the mid-

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[41] F292 D46, p. 2ff. as well as F92 D47 Pasporta, vydannie zhitelyam goroda dlya vyezda v raznye goroda in sela Rossii, 1891-92

[42] F292 D48 Pasporta, vydannie zhitelyam goroda dlya vyezda v raznye goroda i sela Rossii pp. 42, 82, 100, 111

[43] Ibid. pp. 12, 16, 20, 23, 40, 51, 98, 108

19th century. A new style of administration began to take shape when, in a first step, administrative territories were carved out of the landscape and, more significantly, statistical categories to characterize imperial subjects were introduced with ever more precision. More and more decisions were based on such categories, and these decisions were increasingly taken far away in imperial centers. Along with this slow transition that took all of the second half of the 19th century, came a general enthusiasm for rationalization (Kushko and Taki, 2012:19).

At the beginning, the administrative and legal integration of Bessarabia into the Russian Empire was slow and intricate. Bessarabia Oblast, with its capital in Chişinău, was created in 1812.[44] It was structured in 8 districts, so called Uezdi. In the few towns, city councils, so called Dumas, were installed, headed by the mayor (Lebedenko and Tychyna, 2002:81). The territorial systematization only gradually led to systematization of social categories. This process began with aligning laws and later linguistic practices to the rest of the newly acquired Russian provinces. In the first years of Russian rule in Bessarabia, parts of Russian legislations were used simultaneously with parts of older legislations, stemming still from the Principality of Moldova.

Ioan Kapodistrias, a Russian foreign minister of Greek descent (in office 1815-22), was heavily involved in the legal incorporation of Bessarabia into the Russian Empire. His recommendations were to use local laws and the Romanian/Moldovan language, to administer the new province. He also urged his superiors in St. Petersburg to thoroughly study their new Bessarabian subjects before issuing new laws for them (Kushko and Taki, 2012:112). Indeed, for a long time local affairs were solved inside the colonies. The Russian state accepted that they were resolved according to local rules (Boneva, 2006:52). Notwithstanding the trend for rationalization of legal processes, a great deal of legal pluralism remained. In this characteristic Bessarabia was no exception. All over the empire local matters were solved by "legal processes fine-tuned to local practice and endowed with imperial authority" (Burbank, 2007:92).

Nevertheless, recently integrated peripheries with largely Christian populations easily built closer legal and cultural ties with the Russian core land. Russia and her foreign minister, Kapodistrias, had helped to stir the Greek Independence War against the Ottoman Empire (Kapodistrias was to become the first head of state of independent Greece 1827-31). But the Russian government became scared of the nationalist revolutionary spirit it had helped to create in Greece. There were fears this spirit could spread to other former Ottoman Provinces such as Moldova, of which Bessarabia had, until recently, been a part. Therefore St. Petersburg initiated measures to russify the Bessarabian administration and to subjugate its church under the Moscow Patriarchate (King, 2000:25). But for a start, between 1812 and 1828, when

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[44] Since 1873 it was called "Bessarabskaya Guberniya".

Bessarabia received its new legislation, the Moldovan law was used in civil cases, while the Russian penal code was used in criminal cases (Berg, 1918:72, Kushko and Taki, 2012:125). A consequence of the parallel use of two legislations was also that penal cases were held in Russian, while civil cases were debated in the Romanian/Moldovan language (ibid.:125). Only in 1828 legal arrangements for Bessarabia were ultimately aligned with those in the rest of Novorossiya. Therefore also the Romanian/Moldovan language disappeared from the courthouse. But it was not officially ruled out as a language of state affairs until 1834 (Berg, 1918:74). It is important to note that different languages were used in court because legal cases were of different nature, and not because the people involved in those cases were of different ethnic backgrounds. So even when the state started to unify legal processes and the language used in them, it had no reason for knowing ethno-cultural or linguistic background the subjects of those processes had.

Compared to state institutions, churches were far more important institutions of group building. In Izmail, for instance, the number and denomination of churches reflected the diverse composition of the settler population. In 1835, just 23 years after official Russian annexation of Bessarabia, Izmail had already 14 churches. There were 8 Orthodox churches, one of them the former Ottoman mosque in the fortress, consecrated still during the war in 1810 (Sapozhnikov, 2009:249). There were also 4 churches for Old-Believers and an Armenian as well as a Catholic church (Lebedenko and Tychyna, 2002:88). Most duties of local civil administration were handled by the parishes around these churches. The church registered births, baptisms, marriages, religious conversions, and deaths. Therefore the church books remained the most reliable and systematic data on the number and composition of the population. Like passports, the church registries had been introduced in the Russian Empire a century before the annexation of Bessarabia, under the reign of Peter I. His hunger for recruits to run large military campaigns, and for tax money to realize grand projects such as the foundation of St. Petersburg in 1703, made it more suitable to register the Russian population person by person, not by entire households as had been the custom thus far. In a decree from 1724 the Holy Synod ordered all priests in all parishes to register every birth, marriage, and death. But it was not until the 1830s that the metrical books came to be standardized (Tebarth, 1991:32). From this decade onwards candidates to enter state service were required to present excerpts from church registers, proving their identity (Steinwedel, 2001:69). Since civil status data about most people were registered in their respective churches, the data provided by parishes remained structured by confession rather than by ethnicity (Cadiot, 2005:440). Nevertheless, the church register's systematic mode of documenting the population provided the blueprint for later registration systems along ethnic lines.

2.6. The categories of the census taker and the ethnographer

Beside the state and the church, in the mid-19th century a third force in the gradual rise of ethnic categories emerged; learned societies. The more the rulers in far-away St. Petersburg came to think of themselves as enlightened monarchs, the stronger grew their desire to read scientific accounts about the newly acquired territories and the people living in them (Sunderland, 2004:64). In the depths of the Russian east, scholarly excursions had been taking place on a large scale already since the 1720s. Such excursions often included representatives of the discipline of *Völkerkunde*, evolving in Germany at the time. One of the goals of these endeavors was to study the culturally diverse subjects the empire governed (Vermeulen, 1995:43-44). Russia's expansion to the west was accompanied by an attempt to culturally "reacquire" the newly incorporated lands. With this goal in mind the tsarist government founded a new University in Kyiv in 1834 and gave it the task to research local history, geography and culture (Magocsi, 2002:48). With values of enlightenment increasingly influencing bourgeois urban circles, they showed increasing interest in the peasant societies, living in the hinterlands of their own cities. In 1845 educated urbanites founded the Russian Geographical Society which had an ethnographic department from the beginning. Its staff consisted partly of reputable German scholars attracted to the Geographical Society by excellent research conditions (Knight, 1998:108-111). In the 1850s and 1860s the ethnographers of the Geographical Society saw their task not so much as a comparative analysis of human societies, but more as the meticulous collection of artifacts belonging to different ethnic groups (that were then referred to as "narod" or "narodnost'") (ibid.:128). This added to the stock of the curiosity cabinet-turned-ethnographic museum founded as the *Kunstkamera* by Peter I already in 1714. In 1836 an ethnographic department of the Kunstkamera was officially founded, earlier than any other ethnographic museum in the world (Vermeulen, 1995:52). The frenzy with which early Russian ethnographers collected artifacts also led to the first Russian ethnographic exposition in Moscow in 1867 and eventually to the founding of an official ethnographic Museum, the conceptualization of which began in the 1890s (Cvetkovski, 2014a:214-227). Odessa was then, as it is now, the nearest and most important urban center for Bessarabians. By the mid-19th century it had become a quickly growing, cosmopolitan port city, aspiring for the status of a leading cultural center in the empire. Odessa's university was founded in 1865 as the "Imperial University of Novorossiya".

The first comprehensive description of the ecology, economy, and the population of Novorossiya was produced by the abovementioned historian and statistician Appolon Skal'kovskiy (1850). He was one of the founding members of the Odessa Society for History and Antiquity. The society, one of the first of its kind in Russia, was established in 1839 with backing

from Moscow University (Kuznetsov, 2008:22). Its members were mainly interested in excavating remains of Greek and Scythian settlements (Razgon, 1982). Skal'kovskiy, in contrast, dealt with the people of the present and their history. He described all of Bessarabia's ethnic groups one after another. The Russians and the Ukrainians he summarized in one chapter. The Bulgarians he subsumed under the chapter *Serbians and other transdanubian settlers*. The Gagauz he did not mention as a separate group at all, since at the time of his writing, the term "Gagauz" was not yet established as the denominator of a separate ethnic group (Moshkov, 1901b:29, Derzhavin, 1914:13, Grek and Russev, 2011:73). On the other hand the author discussed at length non-orthodox immigrant populations from Western Europe, that today have all but vanished from the ethnic mosaic, such as the French and the Swiss (1850:205 ff.).

Skal'kovskiy's interest in the peasant was in tune with the scholarly fashions of mid-19th century Russia. The empire, ill-prepared, stumbled into the Crimean War in 1853 and lost it in 1856. To many young intellectuals, this defeat revealed how backward Russia was and how urgently reforms were needed. The most noticeable consequence of the resulting reform drive was eventually the abolition of serfdom in 1861. In this atmosphere of transformation a new brand of young writers discovered the description of everyday culture of simple, working people as a popular new genre. They used their popularity among urban readers to address social grievances (Clay, 1995:45-50). But this bout of attention for the peasant was not meant to be a one way street. The scholars who went to live with them, the *narodniki* as they were called for their interest in the *narod*, the people, also hoped to bring enlightenment to the peasants and thereby enable them to liberate themselves (Cvetkovski, 2014a:221). But Appolon Skal'kovskiy, although interested in the local population, was not yet quite as avant-garde. Like the state servants travelling Bessarabia, he was preoccupied with counting people rather than observing them or asking them questions. His descriptions of ethnic differences remained sketchy. A later student of the region, Nikolay Derzhavin (1914:ix), referring to Skal'kovskiy's work, complained that Skal'kovskiy and other scholars have hitherto shown "hardly any interest in ethnography" and that even from the most brilliant statistical descriptions of Bessarabia, only little could be learned about the culture of the "foreigners" living there. Indeed, Skal'kovskiy's account mainly relied on state documents and parish registers. It could hardly have inspired the reader's imagination of how the *narodi*, found in Bessarabia, differed culturally from one another. To do justice to Skal'kovskiy, he might have had a hard time clearly discerning ethnic groups. When he worked in Bessarabia in the mid-19th century, several ethnic denominations still could exist parallel without raising brows. It was for instance perfectly normal that a person would identify as Russian and Little Russian, as Ukrainians were still commonly called, at the same time. Only with the spread on nationalism around the turn of the 20th century these became mutually exclusive ethnic labels (Magocsi, 2002:46).

After the Crimean War, the imperial integration of the Central Asian steppe regions and of southern Siberia became increasingly vital for the slowly industrializing economy of the empire. It was only now that for the Russian state the information about a person's social status and religion was no longer sufficient to achieve the political goals, set for the peripheral lands. With the systematic colonization of Russia's periphery, cultural differences became an important factor, mainly where they concerned modes of subsistence. Not all groups were equally suitable to settle all territories. Some groups were chiefly peasants, other were nomads or fishermen. To make colonization at this pre-industrial stage more efficient, the state needed markers for these differences. Along with religion and social estate, modes of subsistence joined the potpourri of features that would later come to define ethnic groups. Although forms of proto-ethnic categorization began to creep into the administrative process and into public discourse, there was still no systematic definition or research what an ethnicity or a nationality was (Steinwedel, 2007:132).

In 1897 the first and only empire-wide census took place in Russia. A second one was planned for 1915, but was cancelled due to World War I (Cadiot, 2005:440). "The fiction of the census", as Anderson (2006:166) observed, "is that everyone is in it and that everyone has one–and only one–extremely clear place", hence the census taker's "intolerance of multiple, politically 'transvestite', blurred, or changing identifications". To make the census worth the huge logistical effort, the categories used in it needed to be clearly defined. Since 1857 the International Statistical Congress, in which statisticians from across Europe convened to make their indicators comparable, had been struggling with questions of nationality and ethnicity. Early on, language became a widely accepted proxy for ethnicity. But disagreement remained whether to ask for *langue parleé* or *langue maternelle* to determine someone's ethnic belonging (Roth, 1991b:137-140). In both the Russian 1897 census and its unrealized 1915 successor, the Ministry of the Interior, in charge of planning and executing the census, was faced with the question how to ask for cultural differences and identity in order to get valid and comparable results. The question for ethnicity (still referred to interchangeably as *natsional'nost'* or *narodnost'*) was not included in either of the questionnaires. Instead, census takers asked the 129 million subjects of the Tsar for their social estate (soslovie), their religion, and their native language (Cadiot, 2005:442, Roth, 1991a:144-147). In some areas of the empire, respondents named their social estate almost like an ethnic identity. Russian colonizers in Siberia, for example, named their status as colonizers to differentiate themselves from other Russians in their region (Cadiot, 2005:443). Religious confession served as a proxy for ethnic identity in many regions. In Central Asia many respondents answered the question for their native language with "Muslim" (ibid.:444). Ukrainian peasants, when asked about their language up to World War I, most likely would say "the language of here", rather than use the denomination

"Ukrainian" (Boeck, 2005:39). In Lithuania, census takers were instructed that Orthodox respondents counted as Russians, Jews were to be counted separately, Lutherans were counted as Germans, but that Catholics could be both Poles or Lithuanians (Cadiot, 2005:444). For many local authorities and census takers the lack of congruence between language and ethnicity was obvious already at the time of the census. The auxiliary supplement published with the census' results advised readers to correlate native language with other categories, such as confession and territory (Roth, 1991b:144-146). But for Bessarabia even such corrective correlations would lead to more confusion than clarity. In many cases people of the same confession spoke different languages (the Ukrainians, Russians, Moldovans, Bulgarians, Albanians, and Gagauz were all Orthodox Christians) or people of the same language prayed in different churches. (In Bessarabia Russian Old-Believers and Orthodox Christians both spoke Russian but belonged to different churches). But perhaps a more important flaw of taking confession for ethnicity was that confession could be changed by conversion (and at times was actively encouraged to be changed). The imperfect congruence of confession, ethnicity, and language stood in stark contradiction to the claim for objectivity and scientifically asserted truths that statistics promised to provide (Cadiot, 2005:441).

During the first years of the 20th century, the results of the 1897 census started to trickle into the Russian public. Now that nationalist tendencies were gathering momentum in several corners of the empire, concerns about the conclusiveness of the data were voiced by many contemporaries, especially concerning ethnicity. One common critique was that an imprecise distinction between native language and spoken language contorted the picture for the benefit of Russians. Many people, whose identity was not or not only Russian, spoke that language best of all (Roth, 1991b:148). A Ukrainian nationalist newspaper, for instance, lamented that when Ukrainian respondents answered they spoke Russian, the census taker did not enquire further to find out what particular brand of Russian they identified with (at the time "Little Russian" was a synonym for "Ukrainian")(Cadiot, 2005:449). For Bessarabia, an educated guess, using the method suggested in the supplements to the census, often provides the best clue to an ethnic headcount at the end of the 19th century. In her study on the demographic development of the Gagauz, Subottina (2011:159), for instance, combined language and religion to calculated the number of Gagauz. She counted in those people who were both Orthodox Christians and native speakers of a "Turkish" language.

The flaws of defining ethnicity along religious lines became obvious already in a much smaller and much earlier statistical project. Colonel Stepan Kornilovich was in charge of a statistic survey conducted in southern Bessarabia between 1822 and 1828. The aim of the undertaking was not to understand the ethnic composition of the then still very fluid population, rather its intention was to gather reliable data based on which the land could be

distributed among colonizers. Kornilovich's work disappeared in the archives, until in the 1890s, it was rediscovered and published[45] posthumously (Kornilovich, 1899). It was a time when the definition of ethnicity and how it was to be recorded in statistics, was already heatedly debated. Therefore it is unclear whether the category of ethnicity (*natsional'nost'*) was used in the original tables by Kornilovich or whether other terms have been interpreted as ethnicity by the editor in 1899. Either way, Kornilovich's data show that in the 1820s ethnicity was conceptualized very differently from the 1890s during the empire-wide census. Kornilovich paid much attention to the social estate and confession, as was the custom in his time. In his table for the population of the city of Izmail he used categories social estate (*soslovie*) and ethnicity (*natsional'nost'*) in one column. Therefore people were counted, for example, either as military officers or as Russians (ibid.:375). For areas outside Izmail, he distinguished two kinds of state servants, two kinds of noblemen, and peasants from colonists (ibid.:369 ff.). Kornilovich divided up several groups that later came to be seen as one ethnic group. At the same time, he counted as one group what later came to be seen as different ethnic groups. Among those groups that later came to be subsumed as Ukrainians he distinguished Little Russians (*Malorrossiyan*), Zaporozhian Cossacks (*Kazakov zaporozhskie*), and Danube Cossacks (*Kazakov ust-dunayskie*). The latter two categories had more to do with geographical origin and military affiliation than with language or confession. A similar distinction was made between different groups of Old-Believers who had arrived in the region in separate waves. Here Kornilovich distinguished those who followed the old rite (*Staroobryadtsi*) from the followers of Ataman Nekrasov (*Nekrasovtsi*). Both groups later came to be counted simply as Old-Believers, as Lipovan under Romanian rule, and simply as Russians under Soviet rule.

In the case of the Old-Believers it was the time of their arrival in the region rather than language or confession that led to their registration as a different "natsional'nost'". Kornilovich did, in some cases, pay attention to language. Some groups that were Orthodox Christians were listed separately from other groups of the same confession, notably the Moldovans and the Albanians (*Arnauty*). However, other groups that spoke different languages were listed as just one group. The Bulgarians and the Gagauz were simply listed as Bulgarians in Kornilovich's work, although the languages they spoke came from entirely different linguistic families. However, both groups were Transdanubian Colonists, similar in their social status, confession, and, since they both had migrated to Bessarabia from a region called Bulgaria, they were similar in geographical origin as well. Also, their settlements were close to each other and many

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[45] By Vladimir Purishkevich, a clerk in the Bessarabian district town of Belgorod (Akkerman) who understood the value of the work. For the history of the *Statisticheskoe opisanie Bessarabii…* see *Kur'er Nedeli* September 10, 2012. Available online at http://izmail.es/article/12041/ (09.11.2015)

colonies were inhabited by both Gagauz and Bulgarians. Therefore in their case, Kornilovich's statistics ignored the linguistic difference as a potential marker for an ethnic boundary.

It is important to note, that just because the Russian Empire operated with categories, some of which became later the denominators for ethnic groups, this does not mean it recorded the ethnicity of subjects in any comprehensive and systematic way, like in later years did the Romanian state (see section 3.3), or the Soviet Union (see section 4.3). That colonists, as they passed the imperial quarantine station, went through a "thorough ethnic or religious registration" as Boneva (2006:51) observes, is only partially true. For those colonists whom the state with its loose policing structures managed to register, many kinds of ascriptions, such as "Bulgarian", "Christian", "Transdanubian Colonist", or "subject of the Ottoman Empire" (*turetskiy poddannyy*) were conceivable. Yet none of these ascriptions meant the same back then as they do today, or as they did at the time of the 1897 census. The ascription "Bulgarian" in the 1820s, as the quotation of Klaus above hints, meant a Christian person from the Balkans. It did not necessarily implicate that this person spoke Bulgarian or identified as a Bulgarian.

In 1897 a consensus among statisticians about what ethnicity was might have ripened far enough to no longer use it interchangeably with social estate, confession, or language. However, ethnicity remained a highly fluid term among scholars as well as among administrators, not to mention the wider population that in many regions had not yet gotten accustomed to identify by ethnicity (Cadiot, 2010:6).

Scholars would eventually play a key role in introducing the wider public to ethnicity as a clear-cut and essential category. For southern Bessarabia, the earliest attempt of a truly ethnographic study was a series of excursions by Russian officer and ethnographer Valentin Moshkov in the last years of the 19th century. Today's undisputed authority on the Gagauz, Mikhail Guboglo, called Moshkov's series of articles "a star of the greatest magnitude" (2012a:123). Moshkov served in Warszawa, where two of his staff came from Gagauz communities in southern Bessarabia. At least one of them accompanied Moshkov on his field trips and served as an interpreter (Moshkov, 1901b:19). In the series of articles on the Gagauz in Bendery Uezd, Moshkov published in *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie*, he covered a wide array of topics such as customs, family structure, beliefs, and their history. The unit of analysis in Moshkovs works was clearly already the "narod", the "narodnost" or the "natsional'nost'", all of which he used as synonyms. He made meticulous comparisons to other groups of the same domain, above all the Bulgarians and thereby isolated the character of the Gagauz *narod*, which despite his otherwise sympathetic portrait, was shown as incomparably inferior to the character of the Bulgarians (ibid.:31). Moshkov already belonged to a generation of scholars for which ethnic belonging was the main cause of how people behaved. He hardly contained his fascination with the exotic beliefs and practices of the Gagauz and he was perfectly content

explaining them with ethnicity alone. Talking to Gagauz and Bulgarian informants, Moshkov found a rich array of stereotypes the two groups held against each other. But he also found similar stereotypes the inhabitants of one Gagauz village held against the inhabitants of neighboring Gagauz villages (Moshkov, 1901b:25). Nevertheless, he gladly embraced the ethnic stereotypes as evidence for actual norms and practices, such as ethnic endogamy. Moshkov mostly relied on his own fieldwork data. Only when referring to Gagauz history outside of Bessarabia, he relied on the Vienna-based slavicist and historian Konstantin Jireček (Moshkov, 1900:2).[46] Later Moshkov attempted a synthesis of his ethnographic excursions as well as materials from zoology, archeology, anthropology, and geology to create a new theory of the origin of man (Moshkov, 1907). This eccentric theory, like his ethnographic account, saw ethnic groups and races as the subjects of history, not individuals. It was full of racism and anthropometric discourses and might be the main reason why Moshkov fell from favor and was hardly referred to anymore until the post-Soviet era.

Two of his contemporaries published their own ethnographic accounts of Bessarabia on the eve of World War I, without referring to Moshkov. One was philologist, historian, and future rector of Leningrad University, Nikolai Derzhavin, who in 1914 published a thorough study of Bulgarian colonies that he had conducted throughout Novorossiya. Part of his field sites were the Bulgarian and Gagauz villages north of Izmail. He did fieldwork in the expedition mode, ultimately visiting every single Bulgarian colony in Russia. His research was sponsored by the Imperial Association for Archeology, by the Academy of Science, and the Ministry of Education. The publication of his book in 1914 by the state press of Bulgaria was also sponsored by the Bulgarian Academy of Science.

The other eminent pre-Soviet scholar of Bessarabia was Lev Berg, born in 1876 to a Jewish family in Bendery and therefore a native of Bessarabia. Berg's main work concerning Bessarabia (1918) was an all-encompassing description of the region starting with its flora and fauna, then touching upon history, economy, and population. At the time of research, he had been the preserver of several fishing grounds and later also worked as a private lecturer at St Petersburg Imperial University. The two books by Derzhavin and Berg together came to shape the imagination of Bessarabia and its population for a long time. They provided rare insights into Bessarabia under the old imperial order that after the First World War was briskly altered by the advent of Romanian rule. This change in regime also meant that the works of Derzhavin and Berg remained among the very few Russian language sources on southern Bessarabia for a quarter of a century and therefore among the few works trusted in the Soviet Union. Both,

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[46] Moshkov cites him as J. Jireček, probably by Jireček's second surname Josef. Jireček was credited with popularizing historic and linguistic interest for Bulgaria in German speaking academia during the 1870s and 1880s, a time when the foundations for modern Bulgarian statehood were laid (Mijatev, 1980).

Derzhavin's ethnography of the Bulgarian colonists and Berg's ethnographic chapters about the main ethnic groups in Bessarabia followed roughly the same pattern: They provided very detailed descriptions but hardly any theorizing. Both works heavily relied on earlier descriptions of Bessarabia, such as the one by Skal'kovskiy (1850) or Klaus (1869). None of them used much foreign literature except when touching upon archeological problems. At least Berg's work relied heavily on Nikolai Mogilyanskiy, an ethnographer native from Chernigov in Ukraine, who studied in Berlin and Paris and later served in a short-lived Ukrainian government during the civil war. He had a tendency to biologize ethnic groups and insisted that ethnography should study whole groups as "ethnic individuals".[47] According to Kuznetsov (2008:34) he was an early proponent of the term "ethnos" and he coined the premise, eventually dominant in Soviet ethnography, that neither cultures nor humanity should be the subject of the discipline but its sub-units called "ethnos".

Because both Derzahvin's and Berg's works relied so heavily on statisticians, statistical thinking most likely informed their coining of ethnic categories. Berg started his discussions of each new group with the available demographic data, then discussed their language and went to great lengths explaining this ethnic group's alleged anthropological features and character. After that he discussed the more tangible aspects of each culture such as housing, handicraft, modes of subsistence, cuisine, and customs. Derzhavin devoted more space to the historic origin of the Bessarabian Bulgarians. Then he gave a detailed description of modes of subsistence, before discussing handicraft, and customs.

What was new about both books was their ascription of cultural aspects, beyond religion and language, to different groups that were categorized now along ethnic lines. No longer was it just group history, place of origin, social standing within the imperial order, and religious beliefs that set groups apart from each other. Since the time of the reforms in the 1860s it had become standard practice to study everyday culture (*byt*), necessary but unremarkable forms of behavior (Clay, 1995:50, Knight, 1998:127). Now, around the turn of the century, this mode of studying cultural differences was applied to southern Bessarabia. Tangible aspects of local *byt*, such as house construction, dresses, children's games, funeral rituals, traditional calendar etc., became markers of group boundaries. These aspects had not been of much interest to state functionaries, travelling the colonies on horseback thus far. Day-to-day culture happened out of their reach, and in languages they most likely did not understand. Therefore they could hardly have used such aspects to coin their categories. For Derzhavin and Berg, cultural differences were not only a matter of scholarly curiosity, they also became aspects they aligned along established statistical categories in order to structure their scholarly subject.

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[47] See Mogilyanskiy Nikolai Mikhailovich in *Bol'shaya Rossiyskaya Entsiklopediya* Tom 20, (2012) p. 569.

Both authors arranged their books along what were now ethnic boundaries. Most significantly however, both works claimed unique ethnic characters for each group. This character could be found within the same boundaries as differences in anthropological feature, in language, faith, cuisine and so on. A short excerpt from Berg's description of Ukrainians may serve as an illustration:

> Their height is medium, they have dark hair, their skulls are subbrachycephal. They shave their beards. By character they are just as dull and careless as generally all Ukrainians. Those who settle in Russian Bukovina are more cleanly and spruce than the ones on the Dniester River (Berg, 1918:108).

Berg, in this excerpt, spoke of ethnic groups as if speaking about different species of fresh water fish, with which he was more familiar. But it is not this generalizing and dismissive tone that was new to the style of both Derzhavin and Berg. (In fact, Derzhavin's book, amassed a lot of praise for the Bulgarians, citing over several pages the descriptions of earlier observers who characterize the Bulgarians as devout and hard-working people (Derzhavin, 1914:32ff.)). What was new about descriptions of ethnic character is that they came as a package, tied to other cultural features, and that they were presented as systematically collected ethnographic data, along with statistical tables and physical anthropological features, like "subbrachycephal" skulls. Derzhavin and Berg combined two modes of looking at the peripheral society and thereby created a new one. One mode had so far mainly been employed by the state; the meticulous collection of data and information that helped to increase the "legibility" of society for administrators and therefore make the population more controllable and taxable. The other was the insight in every-day culture that state observers largely lacked so far. These descriptions were both detailed and distinct for each ethnic group. The "ethnic character" of each group thereby became just one more aspect of observable cultural life.

The tone of describing culture and customs in Derzhavin's and Berg's ethnographies was well-suited to the aim of creating the impression that ethnographic features were similar, or even identical, *within* a specific ethnic group, but entirely different *between* different ethnic groups. When describing a custom, although in most cases the authors named the time and place where it was documented, they then used a mode of description that leaves the reader with the impression, that the observation was representative *of all* acts of the same nature within one ethnic group. From the Bulgarian village of Chesma Varuta[48] Derzhavin described an episode of a wedding that may serve as an example here:

> The custom of shaving the groom is performed on the morning of Sunday before going to church. The groom sits on a chair, on the left arm he has a towel, the barber has a towel on the right arm. In this moment the musicians appear, a violin and a drum, decorated with a cloth; the band plays

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[48] Today called Krinichnoe in Bolgrad Rayon

a melancholic tune, the groom starts to sob, along with him cries his mother (Derzhavin, 1914:145).

Nothing seems to have escaped the author's attention (in the introduction he stresses his fieldwork ethos, saying he had jolted down every observed detail (ibid.:x)), but even if one assumes that in *all* Bulgarian weddings the groom had been shaved before going to church on Sunday morning, it is probably also reasonable to assume that not in all cases the towels had been in the same place and not in each ceremony the groom and his mother started to cry simultaneously. Such descriptions stuck to the present tense and an all-knowing voice. They ran over dozens of pages and included many other rituals. Inevitably, they created the impression that the author's observations of one event were generalizable *to all Bulgarian* weddings. The way Derzhavin's book was structured, ethnic group by ethnic group, suggests that ceremonies like weddings and funerals were similar not within one village or district, but that the category that made them similar to one another was ethnicity.

Adding up the two ingredients of scientific data and their ethnographic descriptions, structured by ethnic boundaries, scholars like Derzhavin and Berg helped to create the idea of an ethnic boundary that divided groups, inherently different from one another in most aspects of their culture. These groups subsequently needed to be described as separate subjects in separate books or chapters. Both these books, already before the advent of the Soviet Union, forestalled the Soviet mode of doing ethnography. It is therefore probably no coincidence that both works helped to launch brilliant scholarly careers, up to the very zenith of Soviet academia. Derzhavin became rector of the Leningrad State University and a double laureate of the Lenin Prize.[49] Berg eventually became president of the Geographical Society of the USSR, editor of the seminal *Nature in the USSR,* and a laureate of the Stalin Prize. By the end of his career he had a volcano, glaciers and mountains, as well as several dozen species of plants and animals named in his honor.[50]

So far we have looked at the natural science and at statistics as possible sources of inspiration for the categories in this new mode of ethnographic description. One more hypothesis would be that they came from historiography, especially military historiography: Berg's overview on the history of Bessarabia claims the region for Russia. Bessarabia had fallen to Romania a few weeks before the publication of the book, a fact Berg bitterly lamented in the preface (1918:VIII). At the same time he characterized the area as an ancient cradle of Russians (ibid.:VI). The intention to retrospectively claim a territory for one of several competing groups demanded a view on history in which such groups were age-old and had remained stable over time. As a consequence, in Berg's historical narrative (ibid.:49-67) the reader gets the

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[49] Derzhavin, Nikolay Sevast'yanovich *Bol'shaya Rossiyskaya Entsiklopediya* Tom 8 (2007), p. 565.

[50] Berg, Lev Semenovich *Bol'shaya Rossiyskaya Entsiklopediya* Tom 3 (2005), p. 339.

impression that the ethnic groups of the present had acted and thought as a sovereign unit in the past. Almost as military units in the historiography of warfare, entire peoples come and go in Berg's description. They change their religion or language and engage in conflict with other groups. This paradigm, that groups have an agency of their own and even intentions and feelings, like a sovereign being, resounded well with the idea that the source of loyalty with a state was ethnic identity.

In Derzhavin's book about the Bulgarian colonists yet another new feature can be found; the ethnographer's advocacy for the people studied. Derzhavin bitterly accused local and imperial policies towards the Bulgarians, who were a people of the "same roots and faith as the Russian people" (Derzhavin, 1914:42). He made recommendations of far reaching autonomy rights for the Bulgarians and for the founding of schools with Bulgarian as language of instruction (ibid.:67). At the time of writing, during the first decade of the 20th century, these were both innovative and courageous recommendations. Without swift reforms in agricultural and language policy, Derzhavin predicted an immediate collapse of the Bulgarian community (ibid.). The advocacy in Derzhavin's work was coupled with a rigid idea of cultural purism and ethnographic authenticity. The author saw himself as the conserver of a vanishing ethnic culture. The Bulgarians, he lamented, had almost given up breeding sheep and cultivating wine, two typical modes of subsistence (ibid.:42). The author also believed that he belonged to the last generation, able to at least partially witness the "real" Bulgarian customs such as the wedding ceremony that had fallen victim to "ethnographic assimilation" (ibid.:125) . As the source of evil he named the cultural contact with other groups, mainly with Russians:

> The people give up their best treasures of all kinds, their most legitimate achievements: their mother tongue and national traditions, the firmest guarantors of popular morale, and in exchange for this they get the opportunity to adopt Russian manners from the lowest of the urban philistines, and our Bulgarian people, losing their national traditions, indeed successfully assimilate to these "Russian" manners, carrying from the bazar to their native village the Russian song, learned in the town's tavern, and along with it a fitting morale with all its companions: alcoholism, excess, crime, etc., etc. (Derzhavin, 1914:42).

With his image of a morally superior and "authentic" rural culture that becomes spoiled by the influence of ethnically different town dwellers, Derzhavin also foreshadowed one more defining feature of Soviet ethnography: a decisive distaste for ethnic mixing. This distaste was hardly ever voiced, since ethnic mixing with industrialization became all but inevitable, and regulations against it have hardly ever been suggested. However, ethnic mixing even much later, in the Soviet school of Yulian Bromley (see chapter 6), has always been portrayed as a destructive force for "real" cultures. Soviet ethnography, until the end, failed to come up with a theoretical framework that could satisfactorily accommodate ethnic mixing and the resulting cultural change. Even today, the paradigm of ethnography, initiated by works such Berg's and

Derzhavin's, remains influential. The two studies were early examples of the idea that the ethnic boundary between groups, even if they were of the "same roots and faith", should be a dividing line for the sake of each of these groups, so they could retain their culture, a culture that was seen a natural and good in and of itself.

2.7. The category of ethnicity in revolutionary minds

In 1905, after an unfortunate war against Japan, Russia experienced her first revolution of the new century. The empire saw widespread strife in the two metropolises Moscow and St. Petersburg, in the Baltic provinces, in its western periphery, and in the Caucasus. The upheavals were brutally suppressed but eventually led to a series of reforms that would remodel the political landscape of the Russian Empire for its remaining years. The tsarist elites were familiar with upheavals caused by social and economic grievances among peasants and Cossacks. Among many old demands, the revolution of 1905 also served to voice new demands the imperial elites never before had to deal with seriously; ethnic nationalism both among minorities and among Russians (Slocum, 1998:174). The ethnic argument had entered imperial policies. As a consequence of russification policies in the preceding decades, now ethnic minorities with the Revolution of 1905 formulated their own demands (Cvetkovski, 2014b:4). In Bessarabia the revolution itself was hardly felt. This was in part because Bessarabia was a very peripheral province in which both urban intellectuals and industrial workers, the two social groups teaming up for the revolution, were few in numbers (Kushko and Taki, 2012:261). At the beginning of the century the whole province of Bessarabia had only about 30.000 industrial workers, a mere 1.2% of the population (ibid.:278).

The revolution came to bear importance for Bessarabia more in the consequences it had for imperial policy than for its local mobilization (ibid.). It brought not only class issues to the fore, but also the fact, that many non-Russian and non-Christian groups in the empire were clearly discriminated against. In many realms of local and imperial politics, but also commerce and education, non-Russians were deliberately excluded or subject to opaque quota systems (Cadiot, 2010:27) Where such groups, unlike in Bessarabia, had their own urban educated elite, these ethnic grievances helped to spark the Revolution (ibid.:28).

One concession the tsarist government made after suppressing the revolution was to found a legislative body, the Duma. For the first convocation, a number of ethnically organized parties were elected to the Duma. These political groups campaigned for more individual rights, but also for more cultural autonomy, more freedom to use and teach their languages, and against the resettlement of ethnic Russians into their regions (Cadiot, 2005:446). The part of Ukraine that belonged to the Russian Empire was no exception to this trend. Between 1900 and

1905 four Ukrainian parties were founded, all of which explicitly demanded more political and cultural autonomy (Magocsi, 2002:49).

Moldovan nationalism, despite the competition of Romanian nationalism, had never been far beneath the surface among the small group of Bessarabian students who formed fraternities in far-away university towns, such as Tartu (Kushko and Taki, 2012:262). But it was not until the Revolution of 1905 that nationalist circles could print their own newspapers. In these they demanded more space for the Moldovan/Romanian language, tried to establish contacts to neighboring Romania, and mobilize the rural masses. The latter proved hard. The years of relative liberty, directly following the Revolution of 1905, were not enough to establish a Moldovan public sphere, alongside the hitherto linguistically Russian platforms. The Moldovan peasants were almost entirely illiterate. Instead of being mobilized along ethnic lines, most of them gave their votes to right-wing tsarist parties, proponents of which had been involved in organizing the anti-Semitic pogroms in Chişinău in 1903 and 1905 (ibid.:282).

Nevertheless, elections for the Duma and ethnic parties had helped to irrevocably put ethnicity on the political map. The fact that political parties represented ethnic groups in the Duma also further cemented the paradigm that ethnicity determines solidarity with one state or another. Tsar Nikolai II himself bought into this logic. The second Duma became hamstrung in 1907 amidst accusations against a number of deputies who allegedly were involved in a conspiracy against the tsar's family. Nikolai II saw the cause in an excessive number of non-Russian deputies and their lack of patriotic spirit. His reaction was to strip non-Russian delegates to the Duma of the right to vote on "purely Russian" affairs. The new electoral law was designed to reserve a number of seats for particular ethnic groups, in order to raise the number of ethnic Russians in the Duma. In this way ethnicity became a political and legal category (Cadiot, 2005:447). Thus, an ethnic quota was introduced and made it more necessary than ever before to reach a widely accepted definition of what ethnicity was.

Religion could no longer serve to separate people in clearly confined groups. The revolution of 1905 had also led to strengthen freedom of consciousness. Now, at least in theory, everyone could convert to any creed they liked. Among some provincial authorities there were fears that Jews would now en-masse convert to Christianity and thereby also obtain the rights of ethnic Russians (ibid.:450).

The question how to henceforth define ethnicity became more urgent as a new Russia-wide census, planned for 1915, approached. The results of this census were meant to determine ethnic quotas in the future. Meanwhile the results of the last census from 1897 were still being contested by different ethnic interest groups. Statisticians and authorities came to conclude that self-identification during the census would only lead to problems. Although in the last days of the empire, a consensus could not be reached, the loudest voices in this debate decided that

ethnicity was not a matter of opinion or choice. So that a russified Jew or Estonian would still not be a Russian in the "ethnographic" sense (Cadiot, 2010:113). Thus between 1905 and the outbreak of World War I, ethnicity in Russia had become not only a fully-fledged political category, but also a category that was still ill-defined but already perceived to be scientifically (ethnographically) ascertainable and ascribable.

2.8. Conclusion

To the tsarist state, two things were decisive when it got a permanent grip over Bessarabia in 1812: that the region would soon contribute taxes to the state's budget and that its southern reaches, a strategically important concentration area against the Muslim Ottoman Empire, was settled by loyal Christians. It was for a long time of secondary importance whether these Christian peasants spoke Bulgarian, Gagauz, Ukrainian, Albanian, or Romanian/Moldovan.

Until the last decades of the 19th century the state's oversight over the colonies was very hazy. Many administrative tasks were delegated to village councils and religious authorities. Religious ambiguities were therefore a problem for the administration, ethnic ambiguities were not. Accordingly, a number of legislations ensured tight boundaries between religious communities. Only after the social reforms following the unfortunate Crimean War, industrialization as well as the accompanying mobility and mass education began to be pervasive social forces. Cultural differences were studied and mapped more systematically, albeit without reaching consensus what ethnicity was and how it ought to be properly administrated. Around the turn of the century, the administrative attention to cultural differences was joined by a scholarly interest. Ethnographers paid attention to aspects of culture the state administrators hardly had time for. With sympathy and fascination they recorded *byt*, day-to-day activities and attributed the differences they observed to ethnic differences. The superficial insight of administrators, who by necessity had to rely on crude categories, was now combined with the interest of fieldworkers who attributed the observable cultural differences to the same kind of bureaucratic categories. These categories were now filled with cultural observations attributed to unique ethnic characters. Accordingly, this new category began to structure books and museums and was drawn onto maps and into statistical tables, always with the assumption that the boundaries between the specific categories were actually as clear-cut as censuses required them to be. When revolutions broke out in the empire and the tsars saw themselves under pressure, one explanation for the subject's disloyalty was found in their foreign ethnic cultures. The basis for an essentialized use of ethnicity was laid when World War I broke out.

3. Persuasion and paranoia - Romania's strained relations with Bessarabia's ethnic minorities 1918-44

On February 20, 1939 culture houses in southern Bessarabia and all over "Greater Romania" received a letter from the Bucharest based Society for the Dissemination of Culture with instructions, how to celebrate the Day of the Constitution, following a week later on February 27. This day marked the first anniversary of a new constitution, adopted in 1938. This new constitution was intended to free Romania from the political skirmish that had allegedly slowed the country's development since the introduction of multiparty democracy in 1918. It abolished the separation of powers and gave the eccentric King Carol II dictatorial powers. Therefore it is likely that most inhabitants of southern Bessarabia—now a region of ethnic minorities in a fiercely nationalistic state—saw little reason to celebrate that day. But the letter, circulated to culture houses, mentioned article 4 of the constitution and advised culture house staff to specially highlight it during celebrations.[1] Article 4 of the Romanian constitution of 1938 was not concerned with citizen's rights; it was concerned with their obligations. Among them, the article listed the obligation to be familiar with the constitution and to sacrifice oneself for the integrity, independence, and dignity of the fatherland. The addressees of this appeal in the constitution were "all Romanians, without regard to their ethnicity and religious beliefs".[2] Since obligations were the same for all these groups, rights ought to be equal too, or at least this was claimed in the subsequent article 5.[3] In fact, the constitution of 1938 opened the harshest years for ethnic minorities in southern Bessarabia and all of Greater Romania. Political instability created mistrust that could be used as a pretext to systematic ethnic discrimination and eventually to deportations and genocide. This chapter looks at how the years of Romanian rule in Bessarabia from 1918-44 further sharpened boundaries between ethnic groups and how these boundaries came to be used in order to determine whom to trust and who to oppress.

During both World Wars, Bessarabia was fiercely contested between Bucharest and Moscow. The region twice came under the rule of Romania, once after the First World War in

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[1] F1023 D4 Direktivnye ukazaniya Bukharestkogo obshchestva po rasprostraneniyu kul'tury o rabote ochaga kul'tury v sele Nerushay, p. 5

[2] Toți Românii, fără deosebire de origine etnică și credință religioasă

[3] Constituția României din 1938, published in *Monitorul Oficial*, Nr. 48/27, February 1938.

1918-40, and once during the Second World War 1941-44. Bessarabia was also twice taken by the Soviet Union, once without bloodshed following an ultimatum on June 26, 1940, based on the Molotov-Ribbentrop treaty between Nazi Germany and Stalin, and once during the Red Army's campaign to push Hitler's armies out of Eastern Europe in summer 1944. The incorporation of multicultural Bessarabia into Romania in 1918 meant that the Region for the first time became part of a nation state. Under Romania's rule, Bessarabians experienced a fierce political competition between democratic forces and authoritarianism. The latter eventually prevailed when King Carol II proclaimed martial law to install himself as autocratic ruler in February 1938 and in 1940 was replaced by a far-right military dictatorship under Ion Antonescu, an ally of Hitler.[4] Bessarabians also experienced a heated political debate over what status ethnic minorities - roughly a third of the population - should have in the Romanian nation state. As we will see in this chapter, policies swung between attempts of integration of minorities and their exclusion. By the time World War II reached Romania, those forces who championed exclusion and even ethnic cleansing, had taken the upper hand.

Romania emerged as a victor from World War I. Tsarist Russia, which had held Bessarabia for most of the preceding century, imploded amidst revolutionary upheaval. A bourgeois revolution succeeded in ousting the Tsar in February 1917, but was followed by the Bolshevik October Revolution in the same year. The country descended into a state of chaos and lost its grip over its western periphery. Bessarabia declared its independence from Russia in January 1918. Hundreds of thousands of impoverished and defeated soldiers roamed the country. Many of them had been stranded in Bessarabia marauding and causing havoc. Bessarabian authorities asked the Romanian army to restore order (Livezeanu, 1995:97). Russian troops, exhausted, divided, and engaged in a devastating civil war, were unable to secure the province. In March 1918 the parliament (*Sfatul Ţării*) in Chişinău, under a de-facto Romanian occupation, voted for union with the neighboring Kingdom of Romania (Hausleitner, 2004:363). This union was ratified in a number of Paris peace treaties in 1919-20. The victorious European powers who gave their blessings to Romanian expansion, insisted Romania would have to give equal civil rights to all her ethnic minorities, including the Jews. The Romanian government only very grudgingly accepted this condition. The country's first Prime Minister, Ion Brătianu, even lay down his office in protest against the European power's condition of non-discrimination of ethnic minorities (Livezeanu, 1995:22, 306). Brătianu argued

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[4] The question whether to classify the Antonescu regime as fascist is debated, because Romania's principal fascist movement, the Iron Guard (Garda de Fier), had been eliminated by King Carol II and Antonescu in two waves of reprisals in 1938 and 1941. I follow the description of Radu Ionaid of the regime as "totalitarian, right-wing with unmistakable fascist features" (2010:399). Another, more concise formulation would be "fascist-type dictatorship" (Calinescu, 1993:135).

that giving equal rights to ethnic minorities would compromise Romania's inner security (Hausleitner, 2004:365).

Romania, in the course of 5 years, had doubled in size and population. After the second Balkan War in 1913 she annexed southern Dobrudja from Bulgaria. In 1918, along with Bessarabia, Romania also gained Transylvania, parts of the Banat, and Bukovina from the disintegrating Habsburg Empire. Romania's spectacular territorial gains "surpassed the fondest expectations of her most extreme nationalists" (Rouček, 1932:606). The totality of this newly stitched together country is often referred to as Greater Romania (România Mare). Its indisputable political and economic core was the Old Kingdom (Vechiul Regat) that had already functioned as an independent country since 1878. This part of Greater Romania took a primus-inter-pares role in shaping the nation. The unification was led by, and formed according to the conditions of the Old Kingdom (Livezeanu, 1995:29).

Since its emergence as a unified state in 1871, Germany had vowed to gain more influence in Eastern Europe, especially in resource rich Romania. France and England on the other hand tried to drag Romania to their side. That the young state had so early come between the fronts of major European powers also shaped Romania's export oriented economy, based mainly on agrarian production. In the mid-1930s Germany's influence over Romania eventually prevailed (Verdery, 1990:83). All political factions of some weight in interwar Romania were nationalists and save for very few exceptions all major political figures were anti-Semites (Ioanid, 2010:399). In this political constellation, the main fault line ran along factions that wanted to align the country with victors England and France and those who wanted to align it with emerging Nazi Germany. England and France had permitted Romania's territorial expanse only on the condition that civil rights were extended to ethnic minorities. Germany in contrast would eventually encourage systematic discrimination of ethnic minorities (Haynes, 2007:118).

In 1918, the new Romanian government at first sight appeared progressive, at least when compared with tsarist Russia. Universal male suffrage and compulsory schooling was introduced, a swift land reform in Bessarabia in 1918 was meant to empower smallholders. Romania managed to build almost 12,000 schools between 1922 and 1938, but the frenetic expansion of the educational system left many schools without qualified teachers, and eventually had only a small impact on the low rate of literacy in Bessarabia (Livezeanu, 1995:35-39). In 1917, when Bessarabia's future belonging was still unclear and revolutionary tensions high, a swift land reform was meant to appease the peasant masses. By spring 1918 two thirds of the land formerly held by landlords had been distributed to peasants. Romanian regulations of 1920 specified that these smallholders should pay compensations to former owners, so that the land reform in the end cost many peasants more than they had gained (Hitchins, 1994:350, Sakali, 2013:139). So for most Bessarabians the spoils of Greater

Romania's short-lived reformatory zeal never materialized. Not even schooling, arguably the most urgent aspect of reforms, achieved its desired effect in Bessarabia: State sponsored school education was offered only in Romanian, a foreign language for most people in southern Bessarabia. All told Romanian bureaucracy was installed very quickly in the new provinces, too quickly perhaps to be effective, a fault that was later attempted to compensate with brutality.

The rapid growth of Romania was justified with nationalism but could not be justified by its success. Nevertheless, for many Romanian speakers, Greater Romania now appears as a Golden Age. Compared with the miserable years of late Communism in Romania, this may be not too wild an exaggeration. There were no shortages of food and consumer goods most of the time. Until February 1938, a multiparty democracy functioned and a relatively free press produced a wide range of publications. Also, unlike in communist times, people were free to travel if they had the means to do so (Livezeanu, 1995:301). But in southern Bessarabia, where collective memory is shaped by Russia-centered historiography, the time of Romanian hegemony for all its pomp and failures became remembered as a dull and oppressive age. Compared to the subsequent Soviet decades of rapid economic growth many in contemporary southern Bessarabia see the Romanian period as two lost decades.

3.1. Newcomer elites in a hostile land

The population of Greater Romania consisted roughly of two thirds Romanian speakers. Most of them lived as peasants in the countryside, while the cities were mainly inhabited by ethnic minorities. In Bessarabia just half of the population spoke Romanian. Towns and cities were few and far between. Their inhabitants were mainly Jews, Russians, or Russian speakers of other ethnic backgrounds. The Romanian language was hardly heard in Bessarabian cities. (Livezeanu, 1995:90, Mihaylova, 2006:17). Because most Romanian speakers were peasants and because urban elites, although in part from Moldovan ancestry, had been thoroughly russified, there had hardly been any Romanian nationalist movement in Bessarabia before the merger with Romania (Livezeanu, 1995:95). For the Romanian state elite in Bucharest, however, it was clear that the consolidation of rump Romania (the Old Kingdom) with the newly incorporated territories (Bessarabia, Transylvania, and Bukovina) was the culmination of an age-old struggle to unite all territories settled by Romanians. From this historical narrative the Romanian elite drew its legitimation to rule over Bessarabia (King, 2000:57). But the newly incorporated territories were very different in cultural make-up and heritage. The degree and nature of Romanian national consciousness differed starkly from the Old Kingdom (Mihaylova, 2006:9).

Among the state elite in the Old Kingdom, there was consensus that Romanian culture should be the only officially embraced cultural basis of the state. Romanian was introduced as the sole state language already in 1919. Public schools and theatres were now allowed to function only in that language (ibd.:12). The new rulers also ensured that most vital positions in state and economy were occupied by ethnic Romanians, often young staff trained in the administration of the Old Kingdom who were now sent out to the new provinces (ibd.:10). In 1918-20 when martial law was still in use, a compulsory Romanian language test for all state employees ensured that ethnic minorities had hardly any access to posts in the administration (Hausleitner, 2004:365). Bucharest was eager to replace the urban middle class and the professions in towns and cities of the new provinces (Livezeanu, 1990:167). This could be done by restricting access to higher education for ethnically Romanian students, a demand that fuelled a nationalist student movement beginning in 1922 (ibid.:177). Even without an ethnic quota system, Romanian students were privileged by affirmative means: Student dormitories enabled rural, mostly ethnic Romanian students to access higher education, while non-Romanian speaking, urban students were increasingly discriminated against (Livezeanu, 1995:299-300). Another factor in romanianizing urban populations was a land reform that did not create rural prosperity but forced many Romanian peasants to migrate to the culturally foreign cities in search of employment (Livezeanu, 1990:169).

The longer Romania had to struggle with the problem of a latently disloyal urban middle class in the new provinces, the more frequently Bucharest authorities intervened directly to influence the ethnic composition of decisive institutions. The police and secret police (Siguranţa) became accomplices in reserving the most influential positions for people from the Old Kingdom.[5]

These administrating newcomers were deeply suspicious of the population they came to rule. Many among the minorities sympathized with the Bolshevists who by then were consolidating their power in the neighboring Soviet Union. In 1920 the central government established General Secretariats in Cluj, Cernăuţi, and Chişinău, the capitals of the three new provinces. Only little power was given to these secretariats and they served strictly as outposts of ministries in Bucharest. Nevertheless, they were under constant suspicion to pursue regionalist agendas and to be too mild on ethnic minorities (Livezeanu, 1995:42).

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[5] One example from Bessarabia is a memorandum circulated between secret police offices in late 1933 (F312 D49 O nablyudenii za deyatel'nost' russkoy i ukrainskoy natsional'nosti gorodov i uezda, p. 114) in which the upcoming elections to the Bessarabian chamber of lawyers was discussed: The memorandum stated that, as a rule, lawyers from the Old Kingdom were preferable to indigenous Bessarabian lawyers. Among those there were too many doubtable characters, for example the ethnically Bulgarian attorney and political activist Petr Ganchev, or Evangelicon Antipa, who in 1922 was a member of a union that claimed sovereignty for Bessarabia, or the ethnically Russian attorney Podospiev, who was expelled in 1918 for his activism against the Romanian chief judge, or the ethnically Bulgarian attorney Rainov who had been accused of anti-Romanian propaganda.

To cope with the deep suspicion between state and periphery, the new rulers established a bureaucracy that left the model of state administrators mounted on horseback far behind. They installed a hierarchy of offices and a strict chain of command that could provide swift communication from Bucharest via Chişinău to outposts like Izmail or Bolgrad and back, within just a few days. This communications took place by means of numbered and dated letters and circulars, with letterheads, signatures, and stamps of all involved offices. What instantly increased the "legibility" of new national peripheries back then also facilitates the analysis of interwar Romanian administration today. However refined Romanian bureaucracy might have been its representatives in southern Bessarabia found themselves in remote outposts, surrounded by ethnic minorities. The majority of people there spoke little or no Romanian at the time, so that the interaction of administrators with the people was difficult.

Even more difficult was the creation of a sense of belonging to the new Romanian state among the Russian, Jewish, Ukrainian, Gagauz, Albanian, and Bulgarian minorities. Since there were many Russian speakers in the area, many looked to the Soviet Union. There, in the 1920s, the policy of *korenisatsiya* was proclaimed, the political integration into a socialist one-party state of each ethnic group by their own language and culture (Slezkine, 1994:433). Also, in the neighboring Soviet Union promises of land redistribution were beginning to materialize. Quite to the contrary, in Bessarabia previous inequalities in land property augmented social tensions. These culminated in September 1924, in a fierce peasant uprising in and around the small town of Tatarbunary, situated halfway between Izmail and Odessa. The mutiny started with a small number of peasants occupying the town hall of Tatarbunary. It then quickly spread to nearby settlements, involving thousands of aroused peasants. The Romanian government deployed large army units to the region, and within a week the uprising ended in a bloodbath that left at least 600 insurgents dead (Lebedenko and Tychyna, 2002:142). The uprising was triggered by social grievances and by Soviet subversion. No nationalist agenda was voiced by the revolutionaries, who were from various ethnic backgrounds, including speakers of Romanian (ibid.). However, administrative suspicion towards the population in Romania's borderlands grew. So did the economic hardship for the rural and industrial poor, especially since after 1929 the effects of the Great Depression could be felt in Bessarabia too. Within the first three years of the crisis, average salaries dropped by 40%, while taxes doubled. Strikes became frequent in the region's factories. The most harmful was a 10-day shutdown of Izmail's Danube river port in 1932 (ibid.:144).

3.2. Spying on minorities

It was on the background of this volatile situation that the Romanian web of bureaucratic outposts became handy to systematically spy on the population. Reasons for the Romanian secret police to tail on a person or an organization could be suspicion of subversive inspired by communism or nationalism. In most cases of surveillance, a very similar pattern repeated itself: Secret police provincial headquarters in Chişinău or Galaţi sensed a problem somewhere. They then alerted all their outposts, sometimes through an intermediary branch in Izmail. They advised the staff of these outposts to investigate the problem and report back as soon as possible. Usually the reports arrived within a couple of days, and usually it said that in the outpost's section everything was quiet and that the problem could not be located there. Most of these all-clears were followed by the assurance that local officers would keep their eyes and ears open and immediately report back, should the problem occur in the future. Mostly, these reports were very laconic and did not reveal great enthusiasm of local officers to get to the bottom of the problem. Only very rarely this attitude caused wrath from above. In June 1939, for instance, provincial police headquarters in Galaţi sent a report from Izmail back, stating it was not very informative and it would be really appreciated if the outposts could finally produce lists of suspicious Bulgarian nationalists.[6]

In many cases, however, thorough insight into ethnic minorities might just have been impossible. Take as an example a rebuke from Galaţi that arrived at the secret police office in Izmail in October 1939. The classified letter said word had gotten to the provincial police headquarters that in taverns in nearby Kiliya, Russian songs were sung boldly and anti-Romanian propaganda was widely dispersed there, without the local police even bothering to interfere. The letter referred to a bulletin from the year before, that had been on public display in the region and that clearly prohibited the singing of Russian songs in taverns. The police commander of Izmail was asked to personally travel to Kiliya and inspect the situation. He was also asked to report back within 10 days. The Izmail police inspector dutifully reported back that taverns in Kiliya were no hotbed of anti-Romanian propaganda and that taverns that owned a radio would play exclusively the Bucharest radio station. In some taverns, he reported, the accordion was played at times, for the entertainment of the guests, but Russian songs were never sung. He assured that local police and proprietors of taverns were fully aware of the content of last year's bulletin and would assure its precise implementation.[7]

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[6] F312 D139 p. 79 Nablyudatel'noe delo za deyatel'nost' bolgarskogo natsionalisticheskogo dvizhenie v Izmail'skom uezde 1937-40 gg.

[7] F312 D138 Nablyudatel'noe delo za deyatelnost' naseleniya russkoy i ukrainskoy natsional'nosti po Izmail'skomu uezdu, pp. 145, 161

This case is very typical because of the superficiality of both the suspicion and the investigation. Very often, Romanian secret police displayed frenetic activity in spotting and eliminating ostensible and easily observable expressions of disloyalty with the state, such as singing of songs in a language other than Romanian. The matter was then asked to be investigated by unsuitable methods, such as a chief inspector's visit to the taverns of a neighboring town. The nature of suspicion and the ways of investigating them could lead only to superficial insight in how the guests in Kiliya's taverns really thought about the Romanian government, and whether or not they planned to take action against it.

Other similar alerts concerned theatrical performances or Cossack horse shows which were feared to be used for Russian or Ukrainian propaganda. The trace of a band of Cossack horse acrobats can be followed through all of southern Bessarabia in the summer of 1938. They performed in Izmail, Bolgrad, and Reni with the permission of the local military commander. The shows led to different reports from police officers in these towns. In Izmail, where a crowd of 500 came to see the show, local police reported the music was only instrumental and was therefore found to be harmless. In Bolgrad the audience was described as small and consisting "of minorities". The show, according to the police report, did not spark great enthusiasm there. Only in Reni it was found to be unsuitable, because it was commented in Russian and "accompanied by Russian exclamations". The Reni police therefore prohibited a second staging of the show. To be on the safe side and as a reaction to this report from Reni, the military commander in the region prohibited all subsequent Cossack horse shows in Kiliya and Vilkovo.[8] This case shows that even if the police took action against suspected subversion, this was done on ground of piecemeal intelligence and generalized suspicions.

Two years earlier, in summer 1936, a similar fuss was caused by the theatre company of a certain Vronschi that traveled the towns of southern Bessarabia and performed Russian language plays in cinema halls. The tour had been sanctioned by the Ministry of Culture. The actors carried a letter from the ministry, proofing their right to perform.[9] But after the group had already appeared in Kiliya and Bolgrad, secret police headquarters in Chişinău sent out a classified circular to all its outposts, saying the play would "touch upon public morale" and revealed "communist tendencies".[10] All towns dutifully reported back. From Kiliya, where it was already too late to prevent the staging of the play, the local police inspector assured, his men had found the play neither morally objectionable nor could they spot communist tendencies in it.

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[8] F312 D138.: pp. 82-92

[9] F312 D49 O nablyudenii za deyatel'nost' russkoy i ukrainskoy natsional'nosti gorodov i uezda p. 279

[10] F312 D49 pp. 275-280

There were only very rare cases when more detailed intelligence from the periphery reached the center. If this happened it usually had to do with the occasional zeal of a single local officer to report a problem. One such case happened in 1935 in Vilkovo, then according to the secret police's data a town of roughly 8000, three fourths of which were Russian Old-Believers, and one fourth Ukrainians.[11] There was also a tiny Romanian minority of about 300 living in Vilkovo. The local police inspector wrote, apparently without being asked to do so, in an angry and "strictly classified" report about the language situation in his town. The report stated that there were three churches in Vilkovo, in two of which mass was held according to the old rite. The third church, the former Russian Orthodox Church, now belonged to the Romanian state church and the priest there was paid by the Romanian ministry of culture. The report reminded superiors that it was now 18 years since Bessarabia had been "united with the fatherland", and since 18 years the church had belonged to the Romanian state church. But in all these years, the report lamented, the liturgy had been read in Russian. The police officer then admitted that the bulk of churchgoers were Russian speakers, but he insisted that it was a Romanian church after all. The Romanians in town, the report complained, would give up the "custom of their ancestors" to go to church. To use a foreign language in a national church was a great obstacle for the "spiritual reunion" of the town's citizens and to the "nationalization" of the country's minorities.[12]

These were all catchphrases of the nation building policies that had begun almost two decades ago, and bore still very little fruit, at least in peripheries such as southern Bessarabia. The constant suspicion by incompetent state institutions, coupled with the constant pressure to romanianize the citizens of the new provinces, served to further alienate all of the minorities, or "other Romanians", as the government preferred to speak of them (Mihaylova, 2006:23).

3.3.   Counting and categorizing minorities

From the early 1930s onwards the suspicion against certain groups within the population has to be seen in the context of a renewed threat of war in Europe. From 1934 onwards the police and secret police compiled lists of people who in the case of an attack by a foreign nation could be armed because they did not belong to a prohibited or suspected group.[13] Since state officials feared large parts of the population for their assumed disloyalty in case of a war, it became vital to know how exactly to distribute trust and mistrust among the population. With war not

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[11] F312 D49 p. 199

[12] F312 D49 p. 267

[13] F312 Opis 'Izmail'skaya uezdnaya prefektura politsii g. Izmail s 1929 g. Izmail'skaya uezdnaya kestura politsii g. Izmail s 1939 goda, Izmail'skoe uezdnoe politseyskoe napravlenie

immediate but looming after Hitler's bid for power, the secret police and other state institutions began to compile statistics of exactly how many people belonged to which suspicious category. There was a census of the region in 1930. Florea Rosetti, author of a monograph on the city of Izmail (1934), thought the results of that survey were very doubtable, since many of the census takers had done a quick and easy job (ibid.:8). For lack of better data, she too used them in her book. No longer did statisticians follow the practice of their Russian predecessors to use proxy categories for ethnicity, such as language or religion. They directly asked for and recorded the "ethnic origin" (origină etnică) of their respondents.

An example for a more thorough enterprise to study the minorities and their attitudes towards Romania occurred in autumn 1934. In the beginning of October, the police inspectorate in Chişinău commissioned a detailed report on all the "Slavic minorities" in Izmail district (Judeţul Ismail). Interestingly "Slavic minorities" did not include the Bulgarians but only Russians, Ukrainians, and Poles. The order for the report included specific instructions. It should contain a) the number of these minorities in towns and villages, b) their occupation, cultural organizations such as schools, churches, choral groups, sport clubs, religious associations, journals, newspapers, print shops, and libraries that offer books printed in Romania or abroad, c) commercial enterprises such as banks, cooperatives, and factories ran by representatives of these groups, and finally d) the attitudes of these minorities towards the Romanian state and the extent to which they presented a threat. The order also asked for an according map of the region.[14] The reports, along with statistical tables and maps, started to trickle in during October 1934. So, on grounds of the short time between commission and completion, one can assume that previously gathered data on the number of ethnic groups had been used, very likely no better founded than the ones criticized by school headmaster Rossetti. The statistical tables included the five towns in Izmail Judeţ (Bolgrad, Reni, Kiliya, Vilkovo, and Izmail) as well as 24 settlements. Only in towns, the presence of Ukrainian and Polish minorities was documented. In villages, all Slavic speakers were counted as Russians, even in villages today considered predominantly Ukrainian.[15] The according hand drawn map[16] also dates from October 1934 (see map 3). It specifies the exact number of ethnic groups (not only Slavic speakers) in addition to a blue or red colored ring that indicates friendly or hostile attitudes towards the Romanian state. The map included more villages than the report (68), of which 21 were found hostile and 47 friendly to Romanian rule. Just the fact that "Slavic minorities" inhabited a village did not make that village necessarily hostile, as might have been the suspicion among Romanian

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[14] F312 D49 pp. 195 ff.

[15] On the Map on F312 D49 p. 218 Broska, Matroska, and Pershotravnevoe (then still called Hasan-Aspaga), today considered Ukrainian villages, are indicated as Russian villages.

[16] F312 D49 p. 218
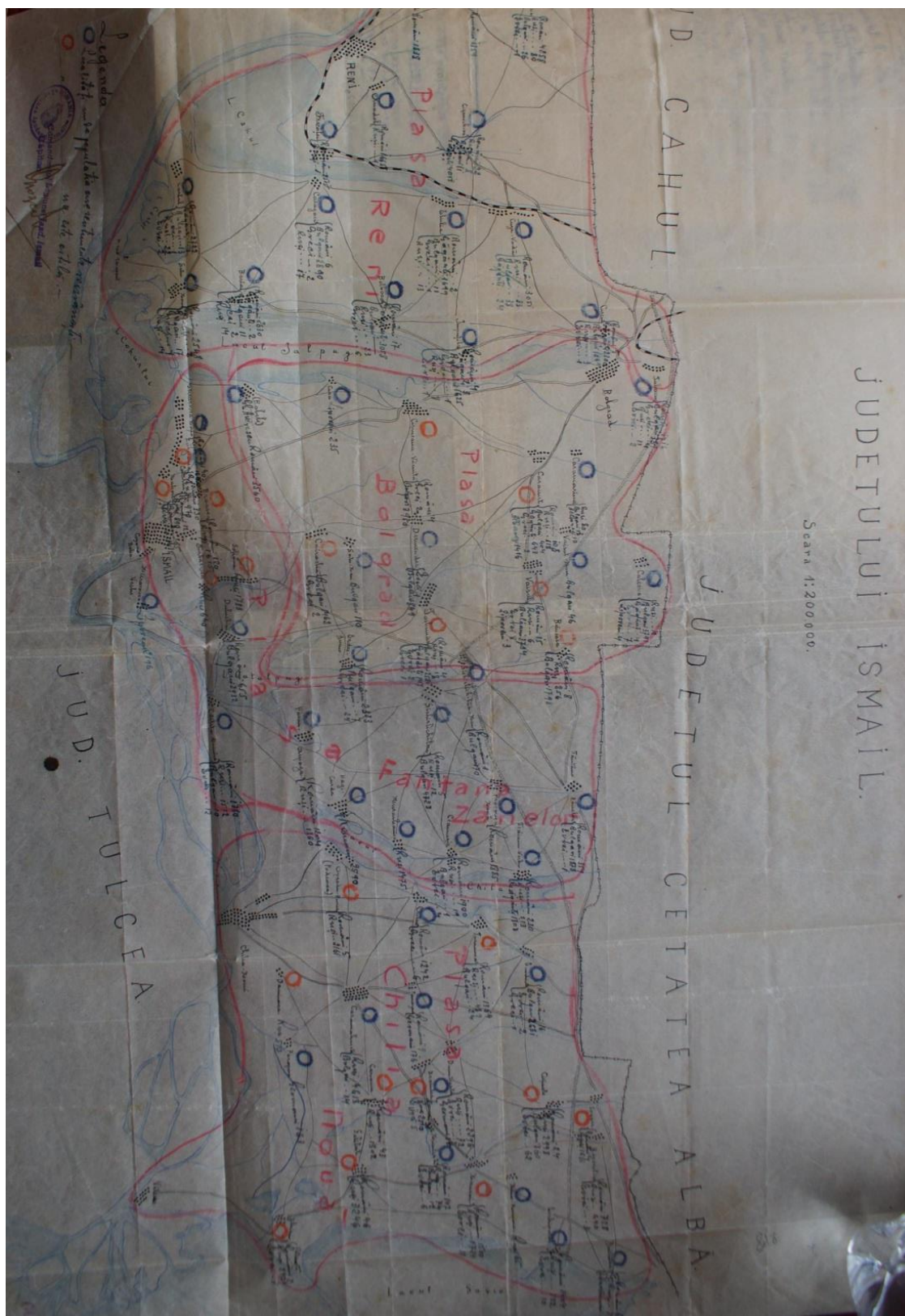
Map 3 Ethnic map of Izmail Judeţ, created by Romanian police in autumn 1934, indicating the ethnic composition of settlements as well as the population's loyalty vis-à-vis the Romanian state with a blue circle, or their disloyalty with a red circle (Izmail state archive)

authorities. The ratio between ethnic groups seems to have mattered much more. So a Slavic majority population with a sizable Romanian speaking minority seems to be a good indicator for hostility towards the Romanian state. Sixteen out of twenty one hostile villages displayed this combination. It is very likely that the Romanian police officers asked first among these Romanian speaking minorities of villagers about the general attitude towards the state. However, one village, Furmanovka, north of Kiliya (called Furmanca at the time), was hostile, although Romanian speakers were a large majority there. So all its superficiality aside, this map, the main outcome of the survey of autumn 1934, should have made it very clear to Romanian authorities, that ethnicity was an inconclusive indicator for loyalty towards the state.

The individual reports from each town confirmed, there was hardly any connection between ethnicity and state loyalty. In the report from Reni, the local police inspector wrote that the town's 210 Russians were "loyal children of the Romanian state" and posed not the slightest danger to it.[17] The reports contained numbers that are not quite congruent with those on the map and those in the summarizing tables, which likely again is a hint that the Romanian state did not have the means to precisely count and control its citizens in southern Bessarabia. But the main insight the reports offer is the apparent low degree of organization the ethnic minorities could have used against the Romanian state. The report from Kiliya,[18] where nearly 11.000 Russians lived at the time (many of them would be counted as Ukrainians today), denies the existence of cultural associations, separate schools, choral groups, sport clubs, newspapers, journals, or print shops. The report, however, mentioned evangelical prayer houses, one Adventist and four Baptist. The report from the Old-Believers town of Vilkovo[19] also mentioned only religious institutions of significance. There was an Old-Believer's association that ran two churches in which the old rites were performed. Besides that there was only the library, named after the Moldovan 15th century King Ştefan cel Mare. But the report denies the existence of bookstores or print shops that could have distributed inflammatory material.

There may be several explanations for the lack of ethnic minority organizations in these relatively remote towns. One is probably that the Romanians prohibited the work of such organizations. Therefore they might have gone hiding out of reach of the hapless Romanian police. However, in bigger centers ethnic minority organizations existed. They circulated publications, organized events, and some of them were reported to the police. Examples are a Russian nationalist journal "The Voice of Russia" edited by a fugitive Russian colonel in Chişinău and under observation by the Romanian police since 1937.[20] Another example from March 1934

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[17] F312 D49 p. 204

[18] F312 D49 p. 202

[19] F312 D49 p. 203

[20] F312 D138 pp. 41-50

was a ring of Ukrainian diaspora activists who produced propaganda material in Berlin and distributed it along the line Berlin-Prague-Bucharest-Chişinău, to Khotyn and Cernăuţi into Ukraine.[21] Therefore, a more likely explanation why the Romanian secret police could find hardly any ethnic organizations in Bessarabian towns in 1934, is that, unlike religious organizations, there were still very few of them. This reminds us that only recently religious differences had been the main marker for different categories of people who received different treatment from the state. In southern Bessarabia this appears not to have changed much up to the mid-1930s. The meager findings of the police review on the "Slavic minorities" of October 1934 seem to confirm this.

Nevertheless, the Romanian state continued to allocate trust and mistrust along ethnic lines. Suspicions grew more eccentric the greater the danger of a new war in Europe, and the more influence the fascist Iron Guard gained in Romanian politics. These trends accelerated the significance of ethnicity as a denominator of state loyalty. The short-lived government of the fierce anti-Semite Octavian Goga in 1938 introduced a quota for ethnic minorities in all institutions. Also it significantly circumvented the civil rights granted to Jews in 1918 (Livezeanu, 1995:298, Hitchins, 1994:404). Shortly thereafter, in February 1938, King Carol II, reinstalled in 1930 and since then never concealing his distaste for democracy, ousted the Goga government and installed himself as the country's interim ruler, the beginning of Romania's royal dictatorship (Hitchins, 1994:421).

The shift towards autocracy and official discrimination of ethnic minorities had its repercussions in Bessarabia. The bureaucracy's fear of minorities grew ever more hysterical. In July 1938, for example, with fresh impressions of Austria's *Anschluss* and the Sudeten crisis, provincial police headquarters in Chişinău sent a sharp warning to their outposts, concerned about Ukrainians in Poland and Czechoslovakia showing increased activity. The warning came along with an "informative note" concerning the activities of Ukrainian nationalist organizations in Romanian regions northern Bessarabia and Bukovina. The organizations, said the document, had the aim to unite all regions settled by Ukrainians into one unified Ukrainian state under a "national socialist regime". They also had the aim to prevent "assimilation to Romania" and to "block Romania's future". The note warned that such organizations often concealed themselves as commercial firms and sport clubs. It was then discussed how to avoid irredentist destabilization of Romania. Measures taken in Poland were proposed as a model practice to avoid the risk of Ukrainian irredentism. The example of the Polish province of eastern Galicia was presented as a viable way for Romania to deal with Ukrainians: In Galicia, Ukrainians would make up a sizeable part of the population. But now all ethnic Ukrainians in the state's service

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[21] F312 D49 pp. 146-149

had been replaced, the document said. In the Polish military, Ukrainians were no longer allowed to serve as instructors, and mechanized units of the army had ceased to recruit Ukrainians altogether. The note also reported that in the polish army ethnic Ukrainian draftees were trained separately for three months. After that an entry in their military identity documents was made, so that they would be given only auxiliary tasks.[22]

Apparently such measures were not put to practice at the time. One of my Ukrainian informants has served in the Romanian army during the upcoming World War II, and has even received a technical training from the army. However, the idea to register a person's ethnic belonging in personal documents foreshadowed a watershed in ethnicity policy, even more so because this information was coupled with restricted rights and restricted career opportunities, first and foremost in the military. This was clearly a step forward in mainstreaming the paradigm that ethnicity and loyalty were directly connected to one another.

A similar frenzy, in March 1938, afflicted local branches of the Ministry of Finance. On orders of the Ministry of the Interior, the Izmail finance administration was given the task to check whether among its employees there were people who had married a partner from an ethnic minority. Apparently this task was part of a much wider effort to register all interethnic marriages since 1918. The list was ordered to be completed within 24 hours. It should contain the ethnicity of the foreign partner (some of Romania's bigger ethnic minorities, Germans, Hungarians, Jews, Poles, Ruthenians, Bulgarians, were offered as examples in the instruction). The list should also provide information about the religion of both partners, and their exact professional position. In a last column of the list "observations" were to be specified ("reasons for marriage or divorce" were offered as possible entries there).[23] The lists arrived at the Ministry of the Interior swiftly, but although the instruction how to compose them had been very detailed, the resulting lists exposed considerable differences. From Izmail, a list of 32 state servants who had married ethnically non-Romanian partners arrived.[24] There were no observations made as to why these people had chosen to marry their Russian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Polish, and Greek partners. But the lists from small towns Reni and Bolgrad had been completed with more enthusiasm. In these two towns combined, 13 state servants had married across ethnic boundaries. In some cases these lists specified the reasons why they had chosen to do so. Two men claimed (with identical formulations) they had married women from ethnic

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[22] F312 D138 pp. 93 ff.

[23] F50 D64 Spiski chinovnikov po natsional'nostyam (Izmail'skaya uezdnaja finansovaya administratsiya) p. 52

[24] F50 D64 p. 51

minorities because they believed that this was the only way to create a unified nation.[25] One man laconically commented he had "married out of feelings" (căsătorit din sentiment).[26]

The inquiry into the ethnicity of state servant's spouses had not been taken very seriously by the administrative outposts. The lists were received with many blank spots especially in the columns for "religion" and "observations". Nevertheless, this inquiry of 1938 demonstrates that the effort to romanianize the state apparatus took ethnicity out of the private sphere and made it a state interest. Interethnic marriage was not punished, but it now had to be declared and justified.

3.4.   Violence, ethnicity, and trust

The question of trust and mistrust between the state and its subjects soon came to bear increased significance, with the advent of a new time of turmoil and violence. The Soviet Union never acknowledged Romanian rule over the former Russian province of Bessarabia. In 1940, Romania came under pressure from both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. In August 1939 the two powers had secretly divided Eastern Europe among themselves in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The Soviets issued an ultimatum to Romania to cease Bessarabia on June 26, 1940. The Romanian king threatened war on the Soviet Union, but was called back by Germany. There were rumors of German diplomats hinting to Romania, that the territorial loss would be only temporary (Lebedenko and Tychyna, 2002:150). Two days after the ultimatum, on June 28, 1940, the Red Army took control of Bessarabia without firing a shot. Still in the summer of 1940 soviet authorities in Moscow drew a border between the mainly Romanian speaking bulk of Bessarabia, which was made into the Moldovan SSR, and southern Bessarabia, with no clear ethnic majority, which was joined with the already existing Ukrainian SSR. The areas settled with Bulgarians and Gagauz were divided between the two Soviet republics. The northernmost tip of Bessarabia, where Ukrainians were in the majority, was also given to the Ukrainian SSR (ibid.).

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact also had another very significant effect on the ethnic constellation in Bessarabia. German settlers in the areas that became part of the Soviet Union were to be "evacuated" to lands occupied by Germany. This meant that Germans, who had been an integral part of the ethnic mosaic in southern Bessarabia, were all expelled within a year following Soviet takeover. From the villages around the town of Sarata alone, 651 families were deported (ibid.:152). Many Germans realized the lack of perspective of a life in prosperity and

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[25] F50 D64 pp. 60, 65, the original formulation was "A socotit, câ apropierea minorităților pentru o unitate natională se poate face numai prin căsătorii mixte."

[26] F50 D64 p. 65

security in a Soviet administered Bessarabia and they mostly took the opportunity to leave (Hausleitner, 2004:369). Their deserted villages were turned into 46 new kolkhozes and settled with people from central and northern Ukraine (Lebedenko and Tychyna, 2002:156). The resettlement of the Germans gave Bessarabia a foretaste of the Soviet nationalities policy, in which an ethnicity, ascribed by government officials, could be decisive for a person's fate.

Before such a policy could fully unfold, Bessarabia once again came under Romanian rule. Now however, Romania had turned into a fascist-type dictatorship allied with Nazi-Germany and an accomplice in the German attack on the Soviet Union. Romania's military leader, General (later Marshall) Antonescu, had managed to get rid of fascist competition in his own country, but he had also bought into Hitler's agenda of ethnic cleansing in the occupied territories. The northern part of Transylvania, in the interwar period a new territory of Romania, had now been ceased—with German blessing—to Hungary, another of Hitler's allies. As compensation the Germans granted Antonescu Bessarabia and Transnistria, which at the time referred to all the territory up to the Southern Bug River in central Ukraine. This large territory included not only land that had belonged to Greater Romania before the war, but also many places that had already developed a firm Soviet sense of belonging, such as Odessa. The Romanian occupiers were not quite as ruthless as the Germans who occupied the rest of Ukraine (Richardson, 2008:32). Maybe this was just due to the fact that Romania did not have the means for quick and thorough ethnic cleansing. However, starting from 1942, plans to expatriate Russians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, and Gagauz were developed in Bucharest. It seemed unclear, though, where these hundreds of thousands of people should have been deported to, and by what means. Those non-Romanians who had connections to the Soviet Union before the Romanian takeover or who had family ties in the Soviet Union should have been the first to be expelled (Lebedenko and Tychyna, 2002:165).

Plans for systematic discrimination or even deportation of ethnic minorities made it a necessity to introduce documents that would unambiguously proof each person's ethnic belonging. Such ethnicity certificates became a corner stone of Antonescu's policies towards minorities. The novelty about these identity documents was that they identified its bearer not only by Romanian citizenship (de naționalitate Română) but by ethnicity (de origină etnică Română).

This new policy understandingly alerted ethnic minorities, since it provided a potential administrative base for deportations and ethnic cleansing. Passive resistance became a widespread response. North of Izmail, in the predominately Bulgarian village of Kalcheva, for instance, a persistent rumor caused problems. It was apparently a widespread belief there, in 1943 that Bulgarians from Romanian held territories would soon be exchanged for ethnic Romanians living in Bulgaria. This rumor led numerous ethnic Bulgarians to try obtaining

Romanian ethnicity certificates.[27] This particular rumor was dismissed by the Romanian authorities as "counterpropaganda". But population exchanges were one of the means used by the Antonescu regime to homogenize the ethnic composition of peripheral provinces. After Romania had lost the region of southern Dobrudja to Bulgaria in 1940, 61.000 Bulgarians were deported out of Constanţa and Tulcea provinces, just across the Danube from Izmail. In exchange, 100.000 ethnic Romanians had to leave southern Dobrudja, now again a province of Bulgaria. Some of these Romanians had been sent there only just in the 1920s to reshape the ethnic composition in favor of Romania (Wedekind, 2010:57). Plans to resettle 100.000 Russians and Ukrainians as well as thousands of Roma from southern Bessarabia to southern Ukraine were on Antonescus's desk since 1941. Only the desperate military situation, in which Romania found herself by 1943, prevented the plans from materializing (Hausleitner, 2004:371, Wedekind, 2010:65).

All in all, it had become undeniable that it was now a great asset to hold an official document, stating that one was ethnically Romanian. The right to stay in one's house and yard was but the most basic one that had now become the privilege of those in possession of such a document. Other restrictions were more than just rumors, but very day-to-day matters of access to opportunities. Take for example the recruitment of trainees in the province's schools for future tractor drivers. A circular with an advertisement to join such schools was sent to local administrators from the Bessarabian branch of the Agriculture Ministry in summer 1943. Conditions for boys to join were parent's permission, to be bodily able, and to be ethnically Romanian.[28] Other regulations had an even more straightforward effect of crowding out all non-Romanians from influential positions. Already in 1934 new labor laws required 80% of employees in each enterprise to be Romanians. For many years these legislations could be circumvented (Hausleitner, 2004:368). But now during the war, enforcement of romanization laws became stricter. Also in the summer of 1943 the Governor of Bessarabia, General Olimp Stavrat, strived to monopolize the grain trade to ethnic Romanians. He issued a decree with a list of criteria one henceforth had to fulfill in order to be issued a license to trade in grain. One needed to have a registered firm, be in possession of the necessary stock and resale facilities, one needed to have reserves of at least five wagon loads of grain, and needed to hold a letter of recommendation from the chamber of trade and commerce. On top of these preconditions one needed to be ethnically Romanian and employ exclusively ethnic Romanians.[29] That meant for everyone in the grain trade they needed to get their ethnic origin certified.

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[27] Fr30 D193 Perepiska s Izmail'skoy uezdnoy prefekturoy primariyami i selvolosti ob ustanovlenii zhitelyam ruminskoy natsional'nosti p. 689, p. 1077

[28] Fr30 D196 Tsirkulariya bessarabskogo gubernatora i perepiska s izmail'skoy uezdnoy prefekturoy p. 107

[29] Fr 30 D206 Perepiska s primariyami sel o kolichestve i natsional'nom sostave naseleniya p. 240

But the areas in which it became important to be ethnically Romanian were much wider than access to training or to trade. In lists of people who applied for a certificate of Romanian ethnicity in Bolgrad, the reasons why these people applied were in some cases recorded. The 355 applicants between March and the beginning of October of 1942 requested their certificates for a variety of reasons. In order of frequency they are "registry", "service", "commerce", "studies", "marriage", "pension", "Ministry of Finance", "police", "mail", "license to run a mill", "higher education", "license to hunt", and "others".[30] Other documents reveal that it was a precondition to be ethnically Romanian in order to be accepted by the chamber of trade and commerce,[31] as well as to carry weapons.[32]

Ethnicity had become an administrative and legal category of great importance for individuals and communities. So on what grounds was the decision made whether or not someone was actually entitled to hold a certificate stating he or she was ethnically Romanian?[33] It seems Romania in the 1940s had an already time-tested regulation on citizenship. However, concerning the legal basis for handing out certificates about *ethnicity*, there was considerable confusion. For all its importance the issuing of ethnicity certificates was not based on legally enforceable legislations, but on procedures published in several issues of the official gazette (*Monitorul Oficial*) in 1939 and 1941, as well as on a number of circulars that were interpreted differently in different municipalities.

When in autumn 1941 the practice of handing out ethnicity certificates was introduced, many different kinds of justifications were used by applicants. One Ion Dandiş wrote to the municipal authorities in Bolgrad, requesting a certificate on his ethnically Romanian origins. In his reasoning he wrote that his lineage was of "Romanian blood" and that his father had been born in 1837, near Cahul, in a village called Sarge Vechii, where even today many people bore the family name Dandiş.[34] A relative of Ion Dandiş, a medical doctor called Vasile Dandiş, applied for a certificate around the same time in spring 1942. His argumentation was not based on blood ties, but on patriotic feelings. He wrote that "even in times of oppression" he had "never lost his feelings for Romania", he had stayed in Bessarabia instead of escaping, and for a number of weeks, in 1941, he had been fighting (against the Red Army) in the war.[35] In another example Alexandru Timoşencu, a native from Bolgrad who had become a successful entrepreneur in Bucharest, put forward not his own biography but that of his ancestors. In order to obtain a

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[30] Fr 35 D179a Prosheniya zhiteley o vydache im udostvereniy o rumynskom poddanstve i natsional'nosti tom II pp.394-399

[31] Fr35 D179 Prosheniya zhiteley o vydache im udostvoreniy o rumynskom poddanstve i natsional'nosti tom I p. 267

[32] Fr35 D178 Proshenya zhiteley o vydache im udostvoreniy o rumynskom poddanstve i natsional'nosti p. 200

[33] The same question also arose in the Soviet Union, where beginning in 1932, ethnicity was registered in passports. For a thorough study of petitioners who were unhappy about their ascribed nationality in the USSR, see Baiburin (2012:59-76)

[34] Fr35 D177 Proshenie zhiteley o vydache im udostvoreniy o rumynskom poddanstve i natsional'nosti p. 7

[35] Fr35 D178 p. 270

certificate about his Romanian ethnicity, he wrote to the Bolgrad municipality about his maternal grandfather who had taken part in the Romanian-Turkish War (1877-78). In Timoşencu's case the confirmation that a certificate will be issued for him has remained in the archive, so we can conclude that his argumentation was eventually successful.[36] Many applicants took their name or an ancestor's name as proof of their Romanian ethnicity. One petitioner, Nicolae Măldov, argued his mother's given name was Florea and that therefore he could be nothing but a Romanian.[37] In some cases this line of argumentation worked. In the case of Liubov Seciu, municipal authorities decided that she had convincingly proven that her father was named Mihail Floresco. This name, a municipal clerk in Blograd wrote to the mayor, could be neither Russian nor Bulgarian, and it sounded "purely Romanian" (pur românesc), save for the suffix "o" instead of the Romanian "u". But this orthographic change, the clerk explained further, had been a common practice among the preceding Russian administrators in order to systematically "slavicize" Romanian names.[38]

Most applicants for Romanian ethnicity certificates chose harder evidence than their feelings, names, blood ties, or their ancestor's heroism. The great majority of applications came along with excerpts from birth registers. People who had been born before 1918 (everybody who in 1941 was older than 23) had to rely on birth certificates issued by the church authorities of the Russian Empire. Such certificates were quite laconic. They contained the names of both parents, the name of the child, the place of birth, the parent's religion, and whether or not they had been married legitimately.[39] In rare cases, people who were born in the Old Kingdom, handed in Romanian birth certificates from the late 1800s. These were issued by the state rather than the church. They were more bureaucratic than the Russian certificates in that they specified the exact time of birth and the parent's address. They mentioned parent's religion, but, just as the Russian certificates, said nothing about ethnicity or *naţionalitate*.[40] Finally, even for people who were born under Romanian rule in the interwar period, birth certificates did not specify their ethnicity or their parent's ethnicity, because not until 1941[41] was ethnicity used as an administrative category. Now municipal authorities had to decide about applicant's ethnic belonging on the grounds of documents that specified place of birth, parent's names, their religion, and marital status, but not origin, language, or ethnicity.

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[36] Fr35 D178 p. 280

[37] Fr35 D178 p. 142

[38] Fr35 D178 p. 178

[39] For example Fr35 D177 p. 216

[40] For example Fr 35 D178 p. 383

[41] In the Izmail archive, cases of ethnicity certificates first appear from early November 1941 onwards, 5 months after the attack on the Soviet Union by German and Romanian forces: Fr35 D45.

There was understandably widespread confusion among municipal authorities. But it was not until late 1942, more than a year after the practice of certifying ethnicity had been introduced in Bessarabia, that the central authorities made an attempt to discipline the outposts. The police in Izmail uncovered a scandal in the village of Dunăreanca (modern day Zadunaevka, in Artsis Rayon). In an informative note from November 1942 the police in Izmail referred to the case of two locals, Gheorge Andonov, and Vasile Sibov, who by way of bribing witnesses, had obtained certificates confirming that they were ethnic Romanians, although they were, in the police's opinion, clearly ethnic Bulgarians. Both of them, the document reported, spoke only very little Romanian and their parents spoke "not a word of it". The authorities of the village, the report concluded, had issued these documents without even the most superficial inquiry into the two men's origins. According to the report, the ethnicity certificates enabled the two men to obtain a license to run a business. This was a clear circumvention of the laws to romanianize businesses in Bessarabia (legea de romanizarea a Basarbiei). But despite this crushing critique of the municipal authority's work, the report admitted that the certificates in question had been handed out at least partially on the basis of legal documents. In Gheorghe Andonov's case, there was a document in the files, stating that his mother had been Moldovan (and therefore, in the reading of the time, an ethnic Romanian). Still the two men were found to be clearly not the kind of Romanians the new laws on romanianization sought to empower. The report then put part of the blame on the chamber of industry and commerce in Izmail. This authority had issued the business licenses for the two men. The chamber however rejected any responsibility for background checks of their members. They would decide exclusively on the grounds of documents, issued by municipal authorities, the chamber was cited in the police report.[42]

The case of Sibov and Andonov illustrates that deciding who was Romanian by ethnicity and who was something else, was not an easy task, and that the whole procedure was vulnerable to arbitrariness and abuse. Two months after the case became public, in January 1943, the head of Bolgrad district wrote to all municipalities in his jurisdiction, saying there had been abuses in the practice of issuing ethnicity certificates.[43] The letter urged all municipalities to inquire again all the certificates issued to date and, if necessary, recollect those that were flawed. Swift answers from the villages denied any flaws.[44] All certificates had been issued on the basis of legal documents.

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[42] Fr30 D46 Perepiska s primariyami sel uezda ob annulirovanii nezakonno vydannikh udostovereniy o ruminskoy natsional'nosti p. 43

[43] Fr30 D46 pp. 41-42

[44] Fr30 D46 pp. 31-40

The confusion about who could be a certified Romanian and who could not was more than just a local problem. The central directorate of administration in Bessarabia became aware of widespread misperceptions already in September 1942. In a circular to all municipalities the provincial administration in Chişinău complained that there had been a series of regrettable confusions over who was eligible to Romanian ethnicity certificates and who was not. The circular blamed it on the fact, that an earlier newsletter from March 1942 had been misinterpreted by many municipal clerks. The text then openly admitted that, at the time, there were no laws to regulate ethnicity. Therefore, for the time being, all that municipalities could certify was that a person was "widely known" (este notoriu cunoscută) for being of Romanian ethnic origin. The circular was also quite outspoken about the aims of certifying ethnicity. This practice was meant to bridge the lack of a comprehensive legislation on ethnicity and avoid that the "Romanian elements" (elementele româneşti) were crowded out of the economic, social, and cultural life of Bessarabia, and to prevent the local minorities to occupy these "realms of national life".[45] The same communication then, "in the name of Romanian interests in Bessarabia", gave detailed instructions how to handle applications for ethnicity certificates. Generally, such certificates should be issued only in cases where Romanian ethnicity could be clearly proven with legal documents. Which documents exactly qualified as proof was not specified. As we have seen, mostly birth certificates were used, although they left it to the taste of the local clerk to decide which ethnic identity they proved. The municipalities were reminded that only people with at least one Romanian parent could be considered ethnically Romanian. If there were no such documents available because the archives had been destroyed or because of other cases of force majeure, certificates could be issued on grounds of testimony. This practice, however, should be used only in rare exceptions, strictly if the mayor knew the witness personally, and only if the witness was himself widely known to be from an ethnically Romanian family. It was specifically highlighted that witnesses who gave false testimony would be held legally responsible. In addition the circular gave instructions in which cases never to hand out ethnicity certificates. This included any case in which it was known that the person in question was of any other ethnicity than Romanian, or if there was reason to believe, or clear evidence for an "admixture of Semitic blood" (când există dubiu sau indicii certe amestecului sange semit).[46]

The aims of the Romanian policy of certifying ethnicity were much clearer than the legal procedures involved in it. It was meant to crowd out ethnic minorities from all the important realms of society, leaving much of the details involved to the judgment of local clerks in villages. It is hard to imagine that these could take well-informed and fair decisions. Let us get back to

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[45] Fr35 D179a Prosheniya zhiteley o vydache im udostvereniy o rumynskom poddanstve i natsional'nosti tom II p. 307
[46] Fr35 D179a p. 307

the case of Andonov and Sibov who had allegedly bribed the authorities in the predominately Bulgarian village of Dunăreanca (Zadunaevka) to become certified Romanians. It is reasonable to believe that the local clerks belonged to the very few native Romanian speakers among the village population. Very likely they had arrived there only the year before (1941) as representatives of a hostile and invading government. They knew probably very little about social relations and culture in the village, and they most probably had no way of knowing which family claimed which ethnic identity. In fact it is reasonable to believe that the very notion of ethnicity was quite new for most of the village's population. So far, authorities might have counted how many people belonged to which ethnic group, but they had never issued personal documents containing such information. The combination of a lacking legal basis for, and a high value of Romanian ethnicity, could result only in arbitrary decision-making and corruption. Ethnicity had become not only an administrative category, but also an economic asset.

In the last months of 1943 and in winter 1944, when the tide of war started to turn after the Soviet victory in Stalingrad, applications for Romanian ethnicity certificates diminished sharply. This of course might be simply because everyone likely to get a certificate had already applied. Probably it was also more attractive being a certified Romanian as long as the Romanians seemed to stay for good. Now it became likely that the Red Army would be back anytime soon.

Along with their ethnicity certificates, many applicants also sought to change, or rather to romanianize, their family names. During World War II the official gazette *Monitorul Oficial* in each issue published dozens of pages of changed family names. In the small and ethnically predominantly Bulgarian town of Bolgrad, 408 people, nearly 4% of the town's population, applied to change their names between March and October 1942.[47] Name changes were usually permitted only once the person concerned had obtained a certificate of being ethnically Romanian. There were different ways to romanianize a family name. The most common one was to simply alter its spelling, usually in the suffix (Gavriliuc became Gavriliu, Bratov became Bratu, and Dobrev became Dobrea). In rarer cases the meaning behind the name was translated (Melnicov became Moraru, with the core in both names meaning "miller", or Cruşcov became Roată, the root of both words referring to a circle or a wheel).[48] In many cases there was no apparent connection between the hitherto Slavic and the new Romanian family name. Nonetheless, for the Romanian authorities it seemed very clear that when they were changing names, they were changing them back and thereby reinstalled justice to history. In a circular of September 1942 from the Bessarabian provincial administration to rural municipalities, authorities there were reminded that the laws on name changes were to protect the rights of

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[47] As can be seen from the applications collected in Fr35 D179a

[48] All examples taken from name changing lists from the town of Bolgrad 1942, Fr35 D179a pp. 400-403.

those Romanians who have not yet lost their ethnic consciousness even though they had suffered Russian oppression and the forced slavization of their family names.[49] In the registry of changed family names, the romanianized names appear in a column called "name that the applicant wishes to regain"(numele ce doreşte a-l redobândi).[50] At least civil servants seemed to have deeply internalized the notion, that this territory and its people would still be Romanian, had they only be left in their natural state.

3.5. Correcting history's gaffes

The narrative that places and people, which at the time appeared foreign, had once been Romanian was a frequently reoccurring one in Greater Romania. Already in the 1920s during a school reform that banned the use of Ukrainian from schools in Bukovina, this was justified by the claim that the Ukrainians there were actually Romanians who had forgotten how to speak Romanian (Subtelny, 2000:447). In the mid-1930s the Hungarian speaking Székelys of Eastern Transylvania became the center of attention of a campaign run by the Cluj-based Institute of Hygiene and Social Hygiene. This institution was concerned with eugenics and anthropometrics. Using blood tests, apparently regarded a valid scientific method at the time, the institute's scientists claimed to have proven that the Székelys were but magyarized Romanians (Wedekind, 2010:33). The scholars in charge of the study believed that the blood, unlike language or culture, remained unaltered by the vicissitudes of time (Turda, 2007:428). If once, back in the Middle Ages, the Székelys had been Romanians, and the qualities of this nation could still be found in their blood, then there was no reason why now they should not be turned back into Romanians.

The theme of giving back to Romanians what had belonged to them already, also became the chief justification of Romanian hegemony over Bessarabia. Through a network of schools and culture houses, established in the mid-1920s, Bucharest propagandists tried to convince Bessarabian villagers that only the Romanian state could have a legitimate claim over the region. By 1927 there were 16 culture centers in the villages around Izmail, most of them in villages, where at least part of the population spoke Romanian.[51] Monthly lectures there were attended by sometimes 40, sometimes up to 250 people.[52]

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[49] Fr35 D179a, p. 307

[50] Fr35 D179a pp.400-403

[51] F1139 D1 Postanovleniya Ministerstva prosvyashcheniya o sozdanii i funktsionirovanii kul´turnikh tsentrov, p. 5. The proceedings of the culture houses in Nerushay and Galileşti (now called Desantnoe), two predominantly Ukrainian speaking villages near Kiliya, have survived. These culture houses were instructed in letters from the Ministry of Education on what themes they should lecture and by which folkloristic elements lectures should be accompanied. The administration of culture houses sent their programs to a

Behind the idea of reinstalling "historical justice" was the concept of continuity, or put more dramatically, the survival of the Romanian people. This assumption was one of three pillars of Romanian nationalist historiography, along with the idea of an ancient symbiosis of Romans and Dacians, and the unity of the Romanian people in their age old strife for an independent state (van Meurs, 1994:224). In a suggested lecture for a national holiday, the staff of one culture house was instructed to make their audience "remember night and day" that the Romanian people settled this area almost 2000 years ago, without ever having been weakened or broken up, no matter how its enemies tried, it remained brave and united.[53] In a lesson titled *the beauty and the riches of Greater Romania* the lecturer started with the remark that now, after many sacrifices, Romania had finally found her place within her "age old borders". The lecture ended with the call: "May the King live, may Romania live, may the Romanian nation live and prosper, so that she forever rules the age old soil of the Dacians, from Border to Border".[54]

The huge territorial gains of Romania were sealed in the Versailles treaty of 1920. But this treaty came under heavy pressure after Germany started to openly deny its validity and breach its rulings. Under these circumstances Romanian authorities increasingly looked for narratives of a naturally shaped and age-old Romanian territory in order to justify the huge territorial gains of 1918 (Wedekind, 2010:55). The colonists of southern Bessarabia, the descendants of which must have been a significant share of the audience, were characterized as vagabonds and deserters, drifting to Bessarabia in order to evade conscription in their homelands. Because the Russian administration did not care for education, the local population had allegedly lost the ability to speak Romanian.[55] This flaw should now be corrected.

The audiences of these lectures could hardly be considered Romanians on first sight. The village of Galileşti (today called Desantnoe), where the abovementioned lecture was held in December 1927, had, according to the secret police's data, only 46 Romanian inhabitants, against 3246 Russians.[56] (Today the village is considered predominantly Ukrainian). A culture house report from earlier the same year lamented that the lecture had not been a full success since the village population consisted of Ukrainians who could hardly understand Romanian.[57] Nevertheless, both the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education took quite some effort

branch of the ministry of education in Izmail to have them approved. After each event the culture house staff sent a detailed report to their superiors in the ministry.

[52] F1044 D1 Otchet deyatel'nosti tsentra i doklady sdelannye uchitelyami, pp, 7, 16, 15, 38, 47, 48

[53] F1023 D4 Direktivnye ukazaniya Bukharestkogo obshchestva po rasprostraneniyu kul'tury o rabote ochaga kul'tury v sele Nerushay, p. 4

[54] F1044 D1, pp. 29-33

[55] Dovadă că pământul Basarabiei este românesc şi că străinii de aci au venit în urma noastră, in F1044 D1, pp. 5-7

[56] Information contained in the ethnic map of southern Bessarabia commissioned in 1934 F312 D49, p. 218

[57] Report on the lecture of March 20 1927, F1044 D1, p. 47

to persuade ethnic minorities, like the Ukrainians in Galileşti, of a new, nationalist Romanian imagination of their region's past.

3.6. Ethnicity and purity - metaphors from medicine

In the mid-1920s, on the height of Greater Romania's democratic experiment, fascist rhetoric could still mobilize only on the fringes of the political spectrum. Apart from Jews and Roma who had faced considerable hostility for many years already, orthodox ethnic minorities were still treated as past and future Romanians, or at least Romanian citizens. To discriminate too harshly against Russians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, or, in other regions of Greater Romanian, against Hungarians and Germans, would only have spurred revisionist tendencies (Wedekind, 2010:28, Hitchins, 1994:423). Neighboring states Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Soviet Union had all lost large chunks of land to Greater Romania and could hardly wait for a good excuse to get them back. Therefore alienating minorities too much could have triggered coordinated acts between neighboring states and their Diasporas within Romania, which might have well lead to the breakup of the not-yet-consolidated Romanian state.

So these other ethnic minorities were told that they were in fact just Romanians who had fallen prey to the propaganda of foreign states that by historical accident, and out of low motives, had ruled over the area. This argument presupposed a primordial conception of ethnicity. If ethnicity did not change when people changed their culture and the language they spoke, than it had to be tied to the blood and the soil, both of which had purportedly once been part of a glorious Romanian past. This past and its heroes, in the reading of Romanian nationalists, had been betrayed by letting their glory degenerate. Long before fascism became a dominant political voice in Romania, there was a widespread belief that society was in a state of constant degeneration. That many Romanians had allegedly accepted foreign ethnic identities was just the most visible sign of this degeneration. Partly the theme of degeneration was borrowed from German mentors of fascism, particularly Oswald Spengler's *Downfall of the Occident* (Hitchins, 1994:308). Such ideas suggested that now as Romania ruled over all the territories inhabited by Romanians, this degeneration could be halted using scientific knowledge and means of social engineering (Turda, 2011:329). Romanian right-wing forces romanticized the peasant community void of urban, modern, or ethnically foreign influence. Most theoreticians who contributed to Romanian fascism had a deep suspicion for everything modern and urban. Their sources of inspiration were the Romanian peasantry and the Orthodox Church (Livezeanu, 1990:169ff., Ioanid, 2005:132,148). The only exclusion to this rule was a tendency to exploit scientific rhetoric in order to prepare the grounds for ethnic cleansing.

After the "unification of the nation", stopping the alleged degeneration of Romanian society was the next step in reinstalling historical justice. Correcting the past was turned into a project of correcting the country's ethnic composition. The political right demanded that this endeavor was given priority in Romanian politics and that modern methods of grand-scheme planning should be applied. In this way the language of natural science, especially medicine and biology, crept into the debate about ethnic minorities and paved the way for fascism and ethnic cleansing.

By the mid-1930s Romanian politics had turned into a race of escalating demands to ethnically "purify" the nation. The fascist Iron Guard competed for power wiiittth the violently anti-Semitic National Christian Party. Both movements had made their political capital by mobilizing against ethnic minorities, first and foremost against Jews. Since 1918, the electorate of these two parties had been obsessed with the alleged degeneration of the Romanian nation and the question how to strengthen the "national body" (Turda, 2011:347). The language of hygiene and health had accompanied this debate since World War I. Eventually in the 1920s a wave of eugenic publications openly discussed measures such as sterilization, abortion, and marriage control to free Romanian society from "unwanted elements". In the mindset of those who wanted to purify the nation the idea of an organic unit, and actual body had become more than just a metaphor. One of the pioneers of Romanian eugenics, Iuliu Moldovan, saw the nation as a living organism and his concept of "bio-politics" as the means to regulate the relation between the state, the nation and individuals (Turda, 2007:413). In the speeches of Iron Guard leader Corneliu Codreanu the nation appeared as a being of flesh and blood, animated by the spirit of all living Romanians, as well as all Romanians who were no longer among the living, and those yet to be born (Ioanid, 2010:403). But in the 1920s, eugenics was still seen as a tool to prevent hereditarily ill or disabled individuals from procreating, whereas in the early 1940s it came to be seen as a tool to cure the "body of the nation" (Turda, 2011:349). The state came to be seen as inseparably tied to one ethnic group. All the other people living there were perceived more and more as a potential wartime hazard and therefore, in the language of national hygiene, were to be cleaned away.

Biological concepts of ethnicity had been around well before fascism. As in other European countries, in the last decades of the 19th centuries Romanian nationalist thinkers sought to take on some of science's prestige by adopting racial theories. Usually these theories assumed that a group of people who lived by a certain culture would also exhibit a certain set of physical and psychological characteristics (Pârâianu, 2007:353). Following the idea that culture and biologically determined characteristics were congruent, the metaphor of the nation as an organism was not far-fetched. This organism was perceived as healthy in and of itself, but by

way of social degeneration it had contracted various diseases. Eugenics was one of the cures suggested.

The figurehead of Romanian eugenics, Iuliu Moldovan, published his *Hygiene of the Nation* in 1925 in which he described the Romanian nation as a "biological reality, a human structure with its own biology and pathology" (Turda, 2011:331). The more the idea of the ethnic group was turned from an ancestral group that shared age-old blood ties, into a living organism, the less likely it became that those who did not feel they were part of this organism, would soon accept assimilation. It was even less likely that they would be talked into it by rereading history to them.

That ethnic minorities were not part of the imagined Romanian national organism became ultimately apparent in 1940, when Romania lost again much of the territorial gains of 1918, including Bessarabia. Many representatives of ethnic minorities showed little nostalgia for their 22 years under Romanian rule. In light of this new situation, Antonescu's military regime openly considered eugenic measures and ethnic cleansing in order to "rescue the nation" (Turda, 2011:343). To register people by ethnicity was a first step in putting such plans to action. The strategy of persuasion was dropped in favor of planned ethnic cleansing. Along with the strategy, the notion behind it was dropped; the idea that ethnic minorities at the fringes had once been Romanians and could choose to revive this identity. Measures of ethnic cleansing during World War II hit the Jews and Roma hardest. For other ethnic minorities living in southern Bessarabia the reinstallation of Romanian rule in 1941 meant first and foremost legal discrimination and an uncertain future that could be made much more reassuring by holding a piece of paper stating that one was ethnically Romanian.

3.7.   Conclusion

The years of inter-bellum Romania exposed ethnic minorities to a dangerous cocktail of nationalist frenzy, mythical historiography, and semi-scientific methods of social engineering. Historiography was by far the most harmless of these. It implied that some ethnic minorities living in Romania could still be converted (or rather reconverted) into passable Romanians. In the mid- and late 1920s ethnic minorities in Bessarabia were therefore exposed to a well-meaning but lukewarm educatory campaign. But at the same time suspicion against ethnic minorities constantly grew, especially within the police. At first folklore artists and assumed activists were targeted, but soon unfounded rumors about disloyalty became sufficient to trigger frenetic if inefficient activism within the security apparatus. When the Romanian leadership started to realize that the country might soon be caught in crossfire between the Soviet Union and Nazi-Germany, suspicion against ethnic minorities grew even further.

Systematic counting and categorizing of ethnic minorities was the response starting from the mid-1930s.

A largely agrarian country, Romania had only a very small social base for working class ideologies. When democratic mechanisms started to fail, the Romanian leadership quickly turned to Nazi Germany as an ally, rather than to the Soviet Union, with which Romania had an unresolved territorial dispute over Bessarabia. The dictatorship of Ion Antonescu shared the Nazi's anti-Semitism and primordial, even biological concept of ethnicity. Its mission was no longer to keep the activists among ethnic minorities in check and convince the rest that they were actually Romanians. Instead, the regime began—on shaky legal grounds—to hand out certificates concerning people's ethnicity. These served systematic ethnic discrimination against all minorities and prepared the grounds for deportation and ethnic cleansing.

4. Ethnic minorities and Soviet newcomers: overcoming cultural differences

Ekaterina Chekal was 20 in 1953, when she left her native city in southern Ukraine for Bessarabia to become a school teacher in the Gagauz village of Kotlovina. Some of the 46 students in her first cohort of pupils were only two years her junior and none of them spoke any Russian. Nevertheless the newcomer teacher and the village population, which had just gone through three decades of violence and deprivation, eventually got to understand each other. In the years to come, Ekaterina instructed six year olds in Russian and from their chatter she quickly learned Gagauz. Until very recently, Gagauz ethnicity could have brought a man to the "labor front" into a coal shaft in the Ural, in Kazakhstan, or the Kuzbas industrial region. Ekaterina remembered people pointing out the uninhabited houses of those sent away. Now, education had become a highway to social mobility. Collaboration with Soviet newcomers, like school teachers, kolkhoz bosses, and army recruiters, was rewarded with stability and relative welfare. Under such circumstances cultural differences were overcome quickly. Yet, ethnic boundaries were not forgotten. Quite to the contrary, they were a crucial instrument to turn the peasantry on the periphery into loyal Soviet citizens. The paradox that in the Soviet period cultural differences between ethnic groups were leveled, yet ethnic boundaries became more pronounced, is the subject of this chapter.

The Soviet period in southern Bessarabia lasted from August 1944 until December 1991, at which time the Soviet Union disintegrated and the region became part of independent Ukraine. The Soviet Union at the time of World War II had an already time-honored ethnicity policy that, compared with the Romanian ad-hoc policies, appeared downright fine-tuned. The USSR was the first state that ascribed one ethnicity to each and every of its citizens and made certain rights in certain places dependent on this category (Slezkine, 1994:415). However, the 47 year period of Soviet rule should not be portrayed as a monolith, even though it seems to be perceived as such by many in retrospect. There was a huge difference in standards of living between the beginning and the end of this period. The years of Stalinism until 1953 were rigged by famine and deportations. Under the reign of Nikita Khrushchev (1953-64) Bessarabians began to enjoy the fruits of collectivization, mechanization, and education, benefits they had paid for dearly. Soviet citizens also began to perceive themselves as contemporaries of- and participants in the construction of an ideal society, a society that found itself in conflict with foreign powers, trying to hamper the success of socialism. The long reign of Leonid Brezhnev

(1964-82) and the short reign of his two geriatric successors, Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko (between 1982 and 1985) brought less innovation but in retrospect a kind of stability unknown to Bessarabians before or after. What is remembered now in Bessarabia as lost stability was by many perceived rather as stagnation (Zastoy) at the time. Radical reforms by the last Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, should have revived the already moribund Soviet economy, but only accelerated the country's disintegration. The volatile times that followed from the late 1980s onwards are often remembered in sharp contrast to the years of stability in which the now mature generation entered adulthood. The category of ethnicity accordingly experienced changing significance throughout the Soviet period. It was also the formative period for a concept of ethnicity that remains meaningful for most people today.

4.1. Fateful ethnicity

There are a few very striking parallels between the Romanian military regime (1941-44) and the Soviet state. One such parallel was that both states were dominated by an ethnic group that was in the minority in southern Bessarabia. Romanian speakers and Russian speakers both had been living here for many generations. The Romanian speakers, commonly called Moldovans, were a rural minority. The Russian speakers, who dominated the Soviet Union, were mostly urban dwellers, save for the secluded Old-Believers in their villages along the channels of the Danube Delta.

Both states have tried to use minorities that were ethnically, culturally, and linguistically similar to their elites, as a justification for their presence in the region. Ethnic statistics produced by the local Romanian administration in August 1941 reveal that in the district of Bolgrad, where Bulgarians and Gagauz made up the bulk of the population, Russians and Romanians were both a tiny minority; they both represented roughly 2.4% of the Population.[1] In the city of Izmail, Romanians, again by their own statistics of 1941, accounted for 14% of the population, while Russians made up 18% of the city's inhabitants.[2] So the elites of both states were locally an ethnic minority at roughly the same ratio.

There was another parallel between the two powers that replaced each other during the 1940s: Elites in both those states believed that they could and should know how many representatives of which ethnic group lived in their jurisdiction. They were eager to acquire this kind of information because they believed some ethnic groups could be trusted, while others could not. This parallel meant that both states, nationalist Romania and the socialist USSR, in

[1] Fr30 D5 Spravki o kolichestve, natsional'nom i professional'nom sostave naseleniya po selam volosti

[2] Fr37 D26 Svedenie o kolichestve, polevom, natsional'nom sostave naseleniya goroda za 1940-41 gg. pp. 8-9

their ethnicity policy followed two basic axioms: (1) that the ethnicity of a person could be objectively determined and (2) that this ethnic identity would inevitably lead a person to identify with and be loyal towards one particular state. Following these two axioms the Soviet administration, like the preceding Antonescu regime, found it necessary to register ethnicity in personal documents. Soviet passports were introduced in 1932 as an instrument to control people's fluctuations, not just across state borders, but in and out of cities, where the rapid industrialization of the 1930s brought huge overpopulation (Ahlberg, 1991). The internal passports in interplay with a system of registration lead to a maximal "legibility" of Soviet society. It enabled the state to keep people where the centrally planned labor market needed them and it also allowed to carefully engineer a city's population according to economical or ethnic criteria.

Soviet passports were introduced in southern Bessarabia in 1956 (Boneva, 2006:53). But the ethnicity criterion was used in registries well before. The Soviet use of ethnicity as an administrative category demanded that ethnic groups were clearly and exclusively bounded vis-à-vis other such groups (Suny, 2001:867). Belonging to an ethnic group in the Soviet Union could mean to profit from collective ethnic rights or to suffer from collective ethnic punishment. Therefore, in certain situations, very tangible and serious aspects of an individual biography could depend on one's belonging to an ethnic category. The most prominent historical example in the case of Bessarabia was the so called "labor front". When, with Romanian and German troops retreating, Bessarabia was again under firm Soviet control by late August 1944, lists of all men in the newly Soviet lands were produced very quickly. They served as the basis for conscription. Although the war against Germany was at that time far from over, not all able-bodied men were recruited to fight at the front. Some were sent to toil in mines and smokestack industries in the Ural, in the Donbas, in Siberia, and Kazakhstan. It seems, the decisive criteria by which a man was sent either west to fight, or east to work on the labor front, was ethnicity. Most men whose ethnicity was registered as Gagauz or as Bulgarian were sent to the labor front. Most men whose ethnicity was Russian, Ukrainian, or Moldovan were recruited into the Red Army.

In order to understand what happened to the Gagauz and Bulgarian villages in the first weeks after Soviet takeover, two contextual factors have to be taken into account. One is the wider Soviet practice of the *trudarmiya* (labor army), a euphemism for forced labor during World War II. It affected mainly people who were seen as representatives of enemy nations, Germans, Finns, Hungarians, and Bulgarians. They were forced to labor in industries and construction.[3] (However, my Bessarabian informants never used the term "trudarmiya",

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[3] Lexikon der Vertreibungen - Deportation, Zwangsaussiedlung und ethnische Säuberung im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts (2010: 41-44, 281)

referring instead to *trudovoy front* "labor front").The other factor that must be taken into account was the famine of 1946-47. A dry summer, a war devastated economy, and excessive grain exports were among the factors to cause this catastrophe. Although wide regions in southern Ukraine and Russia experienced food shortages in 1946-47, the village of Kotlovina, where all the factors causing the famine occurred simultaneously, was affected especially hard (Lebedenko and Tychyna, 2002:176-177). Some of the following examples indicate that the impact of famine in the first post-war years locally changed the meaning of forced labor. In the face of famine it was often not so much worse a fate to be far away from Bessarabia on the labor front, where food supplies were sufficient.

The case of Kotlovina,[4] a predominantly Gagauz village on the right bank of lake Yalpug, sheds some light on the Soviet practice of recruiting soldiers and laborers by ethnic identity. Soviet administration of the village and the rayon of Reni in which it is located began in September 1944. The first local authorities were appointed (not elected) by army commanders. Soon thereafter a letter from the districts commander to the local authorities initiated recruitment among the male population.[5] The letter explained that every male citizen, born before 1927, was obliged to serve in the army and had to be sent to Reni, the rayon's administrative center, for basic training. Detailed lists, produced by municipal authorities, reveal that there were 649 men in Kotlovina who fulfilled these criteria. However, two different lists were produced. The first one lists only 13 names.[6] All these men were between ages 18 and 36, and they were all ethnic Russians. According to the list, they were recruited to the 57th army to fight against Hitler on the 3rd Ukrainian Front. All the other 636 men of conscription age were registered in a separate list.[7] The list revealed their complete names, the time and place of their birth, their social status (sotsial'noe polozhenie),[8] their marital status and number of children, their civil profession, whether or not they had relatives abroad, and their ethnicity. All these men were registered as ethnic Gagauz. This list reveals no information about the fate of the men registered in it. Only interviews with some of the men still alive could clarify why there were two separate lists.

Dmitri Petrovich Uzun, born in 1926, was sent to the labor front in 1944.[9] He was the son of a relatively well-to-do farmer, who was considered rich by the Romanians, but a "Kulak",

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[4] Kotlovina was until December 1944 still called by its pre-Soviet Name Bolboka, Fr367 D3 Protokoly obshchikh sobraniy krest'yan sela za 1944-1945 god.

[5] Fr367 D5 Spisok voennoobyazannykh po sel'skomu sovetu za 1944 god p. 9

[6] Ibid.: pp. 6-7

[7] Ibid.: pp 12 ff.

[8] Sotsial'noe polozhenie was another ascribed passport category in the Soviet Union since 1932, but it was dropped as a consequence of a passport reform in 1974 (Karklins, 1986:32)

[9] Interview in Kotlovina on July 12, 2013

a class enemy, by the Soviets. His father was deported for being a Kulak in 1944. Dmitri Petrovich, however, was brought away with many other men, rich and poor, to eventually end up in the Ural. Although they were brought there in box cars and without knowing where they were going, he never thought of it as a deportation. In 1946 he was granted a leave and returned to Kotlovina. He found the family house occupied by strangers and the village descending into famine. He applied for a job at the village's newly founded kolkhoz, but was rejected for being a Kulak's son. Because of the famine looming over the village, Dmitri Petrovich easily persuaded his younger brother to follow him back to the labor front, where working hands were needed and where those who worked well ate well. He learned to speak Russian while working in the Ural and married his wife, also a native from Kotlovina, who had preferred to wait out the famine with relatives on the labor front.

It is now common knowledge in villages like Kotlovina that recruitment for the labor front had something to do with ethnicity. When asked why the Gagauz were not sent to fight on the front, like most other men, Dmitri Petrovich and two of his sons who attended the interview, recollected a story that had happened before the Soviets retook the region. The story was widely told in the village and appeared in different versions. Apparently a team of Soviet paratroopers were given the task to explore the southern bank of the nearby Danube River. They mistook longish Lake Yalpug that stands rectangular to the river, for the Danube and parachuted into Kotlovina instead of the Romanian bank of the Danube. One of the villagers betrayed them when, at night, they came to the village to find out where they had actually landed. The Romanian military captured them. The further fate of these paratroopers is debated, but for Dmitri Petrovich and his family it was clear that this episode had made the Gagauz look like traitors and therefore unsuitable to fight at the front.

Even if this story serves as an explanation for the exclusion of the Gagauz from the military, it concerned only the village of Kotlovina. But Gagauz and Bulgarians across southern Bessarabia were sent to the labor front instead of the Red Army (Grek and Russev, 2011:98). And apparently some Bulgarians managed to join the army by pretending they were Russians or Ukrainians (Bachinskiy, 1995).

In local terms the labor front was a form of conscription, not a form of punishment. Men did not go there in chains, but neither did they go voluntarily. They were not told the reason why they had to toil, while men from neighboring villages had to fight, and they were never tried for treason or disloyalty. Ethnicity itself was a judgment. In exceptional cases men could be freed from their labor front obligations. So it happened in April 1945 when the Kisyani family in Kotlovina suffered the death of their mother who left behind several young children. The village council acknowledged the family's severe situation and decided to write to the authorities in Chelyabinsk Oblast, where the family father was serving on the labor front. In the letter, the

village council pleaded to release Kisyani from the labor front so he could take care of his children.[10] In another incident, an informant's grandfather, a Gagauz from the village of Chervonoarmeyskoe, was released for a month from his labor front duties near Lugansk, in order to bury his deceased father. He never returned, but hid in the village until things blew over.[11]

Another labor front draftee, Valeriy Stepanovich Fuchedzhi, was born in 1928, just a few weeks too early to dodge recruitment in 1944.[12] He too was brought to Chelyabinsk Oblast in a box car and without knowing where he was going. He named the number of 600 men who were brought away together with him, which fits the archived list of 636 men quite well. Valeriy Stepanovich stayed at the labor front until 1954, working in a coal mine. In the meantime he returned to Kotlovina twice for a leave. The first time he recruited his entire family to come to the Ural with him. In times of famine, they did not hesitate to leave behind their house and home. In the Ural industrial regions there was also a severe shortage of workers after the war. Therefore, recruiting his kin, gained Valeriy Stepanovich a bonus that allowed the family to buy a milk cow and fodder for a year, a major contribution to the family's diet. On his second leave to Kotlovina, Valeriy Stepanovich chose a wife and married within a matter of days. He was 23 years old and wanted to marry a Russian girl in Chelyabinsk. But his mother, fearing that like many of his compatriots, he would never return to Kotlovina, insisted he married a girl from his native village. The marriage with then 19 years old Maria Profimovna was arranged by an aunt during the two weeks of his second stay in the village. Their first date took place under the surveillance of the aunt in a mobile cinema, a vanguard institution of Soviet culture. The newly wed then returned to the labor front for another three years. Valeriy Stepanovich took pride in being a good laborer during his time in Chelyabinsk. He proudly recounted that he and his comrades, for over-fulfillment of their quotas, were called "Stakhanovtsi", after Aleksey Stakhanov, a "hero of socialist labor" with his own personality cult. On the labor front, both Valeriy Stepanovich and his wife Maria Profimovna, learned Russian. On their trip from Kotlovina back to the labor front, during a stay-over in Moscow, they were taken to see the Lenin Mausoleum, a pilgrimage site for Soviet citizens. They were also shown the Kremlin walls, behind which, they were told, Stalin sat at work.

They, like many others, became thoroughly sovietized through the experience of the labor front. Some of those on the labor front not only learned Russian there but also received training in specialized work (Sakali, 2013:193). Speaking Russian and having good credentials in the process of socialist labor was a prerequisite for social mobility now. Those who had

[10] Fr367 D6 Protokoly zasedaniya ispolkoma sel'skogo soveta za 1945 god p. 13

[11] Interview in Izmail, October 14, 2013

[12] Interview in Kotlovina, July 13, 2013

stayed in Kotlovina and survived the famine had not had such a thorough crash-course of Soviet culture. In Kotlovina most people spoke Gagauz. Only some 150 men had gone to Russian language school back in tsarist times.[13] Most of them had completed no more than two classes and those who were able-bodied were brought away to the labor front anyway. Nevertheless, meetings of the village council and village gatherings were held in Russian from the first day of Soviet rule. The minutes were taken by men with a long-past basic education in tsarist Russia. Their orthography reveals that they were schooled before the orthography reform of 1917.[14]

4.2.   The stewards of a new model state

On September 17, 1944, not even a month after the Red Army had retaken Bessarabia, the first Soviet village gathering was held in Kotlovina.[15] It was attended by 1100 people. The only item on the agenda was to write a letter to Comrade Stalin. The letter was written "in the Name of the Ukrainian people" and spoke of the heroic deeds and the patriotic spirit of the Ukrainians that had finally been rewarded with the liberation from the fascist occupiers. It continued with a pledge that "we the peasants of the village Bolboka (Kotlovina's pre-Soviet name) place ourselves at the disposal of the leader of nations". The villagers then agreed to a whole list of pledges that they made to Stalin personally, such as to use fertilizer on their fields, send all their children to school, and delegate the village's nine finest people to a village soviet.

The "promises" made by the villagers to their new leader were at the root of a catastrophe still to come. Villagers in Kotlovina and other settlements in the region "agreed" in a very similar manner to almost unbearable quotas of crop that they would deliver to the state for a fixed price. In Chervonoarmeyskoe, (then still called by its pre-Soviet name; Kubey), villagers also gathered in 1944 to promise that "we the citizens of the village Kubey,…, will honestly fulfill our obligation vis-à-vis the beloved fatherland, the Red Army, and Comrade Stalin. We are obliged to fulfill successfully before October 20th the state plan for grain harvest".[16] The Soviet Union exported huge quantities of grain during the following years in order to cement political alliances (to France, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia) even though the country was nowhere near recovering from war (Lebedenko and Tychyna, 2002:177). This practice coincided with an unusually dry summer in 1946 (Tel'pis, 2000:12, Lebedenko and Tychyna, 2002:176). The drought affected many parts of southern and eastern Ukraine, as well a

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[13] Fr367 D5 pp. 12 ff.

[14] For example in Fr367 D3 Protokoly obshchikh sobraniy krest'yan sela za 1944-1945 god, where the person taking the minutes used the old form of genitive suffix –ago, instead of post-reform –ogo.

[15] Fr367 D3 pp.3-4

[16] Fr262 D3 Protokoly obshchikh sobraniy zhiteley sela za 1944 god p. 10

southern Russia. But only in Bessarabia it coincided with forced land collectivization, an experience, other regions in the old Soviet Union, had already painfully gone through in the early 1930s. In many villages, especially where men had been recruited for the labor front, there was a severe lack of labor force (Tel'pis, 2000:15). In 1947 the crisis turned into a devastating famine. Many people in mature age now remember the famine vividly and most of them suffered losses in their families and communities. Although the stewards of the new state claimed they would respect all ethnic groups equally, villagers in southern Bessarabia had a very high price to pay before the benefits of this new state began to reach them.

But let us return once more to the village gathering in Kotlovina in September 1944. What does this procedure reveal about the state's relation to ethnic minorities? First of all it is a matter of language. Even though it was probably a wide spread practice to write such letters of subjugation, in most other villages, these would at least have been in a language the villagers actually understood. Not that in other villages, say in Russia or central Ukraine, the inhabitants could have written such a letter themselves and not that they would have had the choice to vote it down. But they were aware of what the content of the decisions they voted for meant. People in southern Bessarabia were already used to the state approaching them in a foreign language. However, this state was different because it claimed to empower laborers and peasants such as the ones in Kotlovina. They were called to meetings, asked to send their children to school, form kolkhozes, and delegate village soviets. All these ways to participate in the new state required learning Russian.

The village gathering also reveals aspects of ethnic ascription. Apparently, at this moment everybody who lived in Soviet Ukraine could be represented as part of the Ukrainian people. Although the administrative category "Gagauz" existed already, it would probably not have rang a bell in the Kremlin. For the purpose of writing to Stalin it was better to stick with an ethnic denomination that could actually be found on an administrative map.

The village gathering in Kotlovina, where the letter to Comrade Stalin was drafted, also illustrates relations between two groups that came to form the alliance that would shape social relations in villages for the decades to come: the native peasants and the Soviet administrators. For a start, the latter were to dictate political decisions. The peasants then were called in to rubber-stamp them in public votes. Right after 1944, newcomers from Russia and Ukraine filled the most influential positions in Bessarabian settlements: the heads of village councils, the directors of kolkhozes, the school headmasters, as well as the first generation of teachers, doctors, veterinaries, and agricultural managers. They were predominately people, who had proven themselves in the old Soviet Union, many of them fighting on the front. Not quite as close to the state but in a secure second rank were locals who had lived in the old Soviet Union for

various reasons. They were soon joined by those who in 1944 had been brought to the labor front.

Later in the Soviet period, villagers sent their own children to institutions of higher education in Odessa and Chişinău. And those children returned to the village as a second, a native generation of Soviet administrators. In comparison to Romanian rule this arrangement was a progress. Under Romanian administration ethnic minorities were increasingly marginalized and discriminated against. Under Soviet rule their opportunities of social mobility came with time and at the cost of a thorough sovietization.

But the two groups now cohabiting in Bessarabian villages were not separate castes, nor did cultural influence go only one direction from the Soviet newcomers to the native population. The already introduced teacher, Ekaterina Chekal arrived in 1953 from Ukraine's Azov Sea coast, just after having completed her education in a pedagogical institute.[17] Ekaterina had fond memories of her first time in the village. She reported to have been welcomed very warmly. In her fifth month in the village she married a Gagauz who later became an acclaimed painter. Neither her mother in Melitopol, nor her husband's parents, nor the village authorities had any objections against an interethnic marriage. Rather, there were concerns about the form of the marriage ceremony. Representatives of the modern and secular Soviet state were not supposed to take part in traditional rituals. The school's headmaster boycotted the wedding because the newly-wed would sleep in a room with an Orthodox icon and an eternal light. But Ekaterina felt she had no right to change customs in her in-law's house. The phenomenon that older generations forced the younger to make compromises between their progressive Soviet attitudes and the native traditions was widely and regretfully observed by Soviet ethnographers at the time (Kushner, 1974:206). Even though Ekaterina would have enjoyed an old-style Gagauz wedding, she agreed to the school headmaster's demand of replacing the traditional white veil of Gagauz brides with the attributes of a modern, Soviet woman; a pink wedding dress embroidered with flowers.

Beginning in the first half of the 1950s, Gagauz and Bulgarian men were drafted to the army, just like men of any other ethnic group. Ekaterina's husband had served three years near Leningrad and learned to speak Russian there. The couple belonged to the class of village *intelligentsiya*, the rural vanguard of a socialist society. As a young teacher, Ekaterina, notwithstanding her status as a newcomer, enjoyed great authority in the village. Many evenings she spent talking to her pupil's families. Especially for those who studied well, she made a great effort to convince parents to send their children to town for higher education.

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[17] Interview in Izmail, July 9, 2013

Ethnicity, now in the absence of warfare and violence, was apparently no longer a day-to-day concern, and it was no longer fateful as it had been under the Romanian regime and at the time of the labor front. The newcomers drew their power not from their ethnicity, but from their origin in the old Soviet Union, from their education and their position in Soviet bureaucracy. They came not to make the ethnic minorities into Russians or into Ukrainians but to turn them into Soviet *kolkhozniki*.

Another newcomer teacher, Margarita Mikhailovna,[18] came to Bessarabia in 1969 freshly from the pedagogical institute in the central Russian city of Nizhnyy Novgorod and eventually put down roots in the large village of Chervonoarmeyskoe, where the population is mixed Bulgarian and Gagauz. Together with 41 other young teachers she was assigned to the neighboring rayon of Ceadir Lunga, now a part of Moldova. When she left her home, she had only a very vague idea where she was going. The reason why so many young teachers were sent to this rural rayon was that earlier newcomers had left again at the first opportunity to live and work closer to their homes. But Margarita Mikhailovna was determined to stay and to tough it out. She came with a strong sense of serving the fatherland and with the idea to "prop up the virgin soil" (podnimat' tselinu), a household phrase of the Soviet 1960s. When her traveling companions changed trains in the city of Bender, now in Transnistria, it dawned on her that she had arrived among culturally different people. She remembered that all the other passengers on the train were dressed entirely in black, that men wore a type of black lamb fur hats she had never seen before, and that they chatted in foreign languages. Margarita changed schools a few times. She married Nikolai, a music teacher, an ethnic Bulgarian who was part of the first native generation of Soviet educated professionals. Eventually they moved to his native village of Chervonoarmeyskoe, where she became deputy headmaster of one of the village's schools. Although Margarita never ceased to miss her native Russia and although she envied her sister, also a teacher, for the much higher pension she received there, she never planned to go back. "Women have no fatherland," her husband quipped on the issue, "they have husbands." But Margarita did not remember having been treated as an alien. When she married Nikolai, their different ethnic backgrounds were not even grounds for discussion. As a teacher, she had always been held in respect and her voice had authority in the village. She saw her mission of spreading Soviet culture on the periphery as her contribution to the common good.

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[18] Interview in Chervonoarmeyskoe, October 26, 2013

4.3. Ethnicity performed in public

Even though by the 1960s ethnic differences had relatively little relevance for a single person's standing within the village community, the category of ethnicity was constantly present, be it in public discourse on the village level or in wider society. Most villagers by that time had a passport, in the fifth line (pyataya grafa) of which, their ethnic identity was registered. When they engaged in public functions, this feature was used in their introduction to the public sphere. Elections to municipal executive positions took place in so called "assemblies of the working population". Each village district delegated its own candidates that then were elected by the assembled village population. By the 1970s preprinted blanks were used as election reports. These blanks, among other details, already contained the result of the election. The bottom line of the form read "the candidate has been elected concordantly".[19] There were no alternative candidates. In such blanks the candidate's ethnicity came right behind the candidate's name and date of birth. Further information revealed the candidate's level of education, military or academic rank, place of work, and whether or not the candidate was a member or an aspired member of the Party. In Kotlovina, in the elections of 1959 the ratio between the elect who were natives and those who belonged to the group of Soviet newcomers, were about 1:1. Of the 21 deputies delegated to the village council, 11 were Gagauz and 10 were either Russian or Ukrainian.[20] By 1971, the elected Gagauz had become a majority: 33 deputies were elected, 26 of them were ethnically Gagauz, 3 were Russians, 3 Ukrainians, and 1 was a Bulgarian. This might still not have accurately reflected the ethnic composition of the village population, but the ethnic majority now held the majority of seats. Also, by that time, the elected Gagauz deputies on average were no longer less educated than their Soviet newcomer colleagues. The only feature where ethnicity still had an effect was party membership. While five out of the six deputies that represented the Soviet newcomers were members of the Communist Party, only 12 out of 27 locals held party membership cards.[21] But ethnicity was no longer a conclusive indicator for social status within the village.

Ethnicity might not have hindered one group or the other from access to resources and power, but it was a constantly present category. Even in a much wider discourse, ethnicity had a stable place in the public sphere. Take for example the official congratulations to the cosmonaut German Titov for his achievement of the first ever completed 24-hour space flight in 1961. On the front page of Soviet newspapers, including the Bessarabian local daily *Pridunayskaya Pravda*, Titov was introduced to the Soviet public by the following characteristics: "Comrade Titov German Stepanovich, born 1935, ethnicity: Russian, a candidate to join the Party since

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[19] For example Fr367 D210 Protokoly sobraniy o kandidatov v deputaty sel'soveta

[20] Fr367 D95 Protokoly obshchikh sobraniy rabochikh, sluzhashchikh i kolkhoznikov za 1959 god

[21] Fr367 D210

April 1961".[22] Mentioning ethnicity so high up in the list of people's characteristics has helped to produce a perception of ethnicity as an unchangeable, tangible, and unambiguously detectable human characteristic. In the Soviet Union ethnicity was a "pervasive reality" to most people (Karklins, 1986:43). Terry Martin (2000:168) called it a "constant routine of ethnic labeling" that "inadvertently indoctrinated the Soviet population in the belief that ethnicity was an inherent, fundamental, and crucially important characteristic of all individuals".

For all that, Soviet officials made it clear very early on, that no ethnic group in Bessarabia was superior to any other. Certainly the public insistence that all ethnic groups were equal and that they all deeply respected each other, still allowed discrimination on a more subtle level, when it served the powerful. But publically ethnic diversity became a cause for celebration. This became a lasting tradition in Bessarabia that began with the advent of Soviet rule. Even today hardly a political speech fails to mention how ethnically diverse Bessarabians are and how well they nevertheless get along with each other. This reoccurring theme implicitly also invokes that it is an achievement to retain peaceful interethnic relations, because according to expectations, ethnic differences should routinely lead to conflict. Already in 1949, when being an ethnic Bulgarian or Gagauz still meant that one was likely to toil at the labor front, the New Year's editorial in the *Pridunayskaya Pravda* ran:

> In our province, on the very periphery of the Soviet Union, on the south-western border of the immense Soviet territories, just like anywhere else in the country, those who build up communism, Russians and Ukrainians, Bulgarians and Moldovans, Albanians and Gagauz, brick by brick assemble the majestic building of the new communist society.[23]

It was made very clear that political participation, as well as patriotic support for the Soviet state, were expected to come from all ethnic groups equally. Announcing elections for people's courts, also in January 1949, the paper declared:

> In these [electoral] lists appear people of various ages and professions, Russians and Ukrainians, Bulgarians and Moldovans, members of the Party and unaffiliated [candidates]. They are all united by a boundless love for the fatherland, by their devotion to the great cause of Lenin-Stalin, the cause of communism.[24]

With time, the fact that several ethnic groups lived peacefully together in Bessarabia became the single most important feature for the representation of the region. In the seminal reference book *The History of Towns and Villages of the Ukrainian SSR,*[25] the section about Izmail rayon began with the note that it was a multi-ethnic, but nevertheless very peaceful region.

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[22] *Pridunayskaya Pravda*, Izmail, 1961, August 10 p. 1

[23] *Pridunayskaya Pravda*, Izmail, 1949, January 1 p. 1

[24] *Pridunayskaya Pravda*, Izmail, 1949, January 8 p. 1

[25] *Istoriya gorodov i sel Ukrainskoy SSR – Odesskaya Oblast'*. (1978) Kiev: Institut akademii nauk USSR.

Folklore was another realm of public life where ethnicity and harmonic interethnic relations could be represented. It was less politicized than education, but eventually folklore began to profit from a network of institutions that had been founded with the primary goal of educating the population; schools, clubs, culture houses, and local newspapers. From early on in the Soviet Union, folklore became the single niche where ethnic particularism was allowed, even encouraged. Performing ethnicity on stage demanded to form folklore collectives that specialized in the song and dance of one particular ethnic group. Folklore amateur musicians formed in clubs and culture houses that were founded in villages once schools and kolkhozes were established. Mostly, folklore was performed along with acts of other genres such as political poems and Soviet battle songs commemorating World War II, and eventually *estrada*, a Soviet form of pop music. Folklore collectives sometimes had songs and dances of several origins in their repertoires, but each song and dance was labeled as belonging to one ethnic group.[26] For a long time, Soviet folklore was committed mainly to entertainment with stereotyped references to ethnicity. Eventually, in the 1980s the folkloric movement grew and began to aspire more authenticity (Cash, 2011:164). But in the 1950s it was sufficient to have a variety of ethnic representations on stage. The revival of old Bulgarian and Gagauz songs in Soviet folklore groups was also praised as a sign that these peoples had defied the oppression of the Romanian occupants and maintained their national traditions.[27] New compositions for folklore groups often had political content. They treated topics such as the Tatarbunary Uprising, gratefulness towards the Communist Party, or as expressed in a rare dissolving of ethnic boundaries, a fusion folk dance to demonstrate the "unbreakable friendship between the Russian and the Ukrainian peoples".[28] Folklore was a genre of performing arts that allowed ethnic groups to be bounded by particular styles of songs, dances, and dresses. At the same time it could be used to transport political messages in an entertaining and cheerful manner. In many ways this form of folklore was preserved even after the break-up of the Soviet Union.

In the second half of the 1980s the region's celebrated harmonic communion of different ethnic groups came under strain in the face of a severe economic crisis and an uncertain political future of the USSR. In many areas, especially along its periphery, ethnic nationalism came to be celebrated rather than multi-ethnicity. In southern Bessarabia however, ethnicity retained an inclusive rather than an exclusive function. None of the groups living there formed a clear majority in a clearly distinguishable area. Therefore the theme of interethnic harmony remained a strong public discourse. When in 1989 Ukrainian was made the sole state language

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[26] An early example of Soviet folklore in southern Bessarabia are reports on the assembly of culture house collectives in *Pridunayskaya Pravda*, Izmail, November 18, 20, and 28, 1953.

[27] Ibid.: November 28, 1953

[28] Ibid.: November 18, 1953

in the Ukrainian SSR, one local repercussion of this event was a dispute that broke out among the staff of the Izmail sewing factory. What language should be the working language henceforth? The local daily *Sovetskiy Izmail* reported that women with over 25 different ethnicities worked in the factory, and that therefore it was indispensable that Russian was kept as the working language. A local "propagandist" was sent to a worker's assembly at the factory. He reminded the staff that Perestroika was initiated to democratize the Soviet Union, not to break it up. He explained that raw materials, with which the factory worked, came from Russia, Kazakhstan, and the Baltic states, which he used as an illustration that only a united country could be economically strong. The factory staff subsequently discussed the matter and concluded that ethnic conflict could not be in their interest and that it was much more important to find a way out of the economic crisis.[29]

Because ethnicity was so ubiquitous in Soviet society, it made sense to most Soviet citizens that their ethnicity was registered in the passport. Soviet citizens received their passports at age 16. In the "fifth line" of the passport they inherited their parent's ethnic identity. There was no category in the Soviet passport for mixed ethnic descent. Children of mixed ethnic couples therefore had to make a choice between the two ethnic groups their parents were registered as (Tishkov, 1997:10, Ahlberg, 1991:806). Once ethnicity was registered in the passport, it was hard to change it. If it was indispensable for a party career however, a solution was usually found (Karklins, 1986:34, Gorenburg, 2006b:295). For those ethnic groups that faced a lingering hostile environment, such as the Jews or as the Armenians in Azerbaijan, it became common to change their ethnicity into one that caused them less trouble (Karklins, 1986:36, Tishkov, 1997:111). In some cases the decision about ethnic belonging was made by a clerk rather than by the citizen. A scholar from Chişinău showed me the marriage documents of his grandparents who married in 1950 near Kotovsk, a small town in the north of Odessa Oblast. The village where they lived was in the Ukrainian SSR but right next to the border with the Moldovan SSR. On the couple's birth certificates that had been issued on the basis of Romanian documents, the fifth line had been manipulated on the occasion of the wedding. The word "Moldovan" was crossed out and the word "Ukrainian" was added in handwriting. A handwritten instruction on the flipside of the documents read: "change of ethnicity valid, trust!"[30] The informant described his grandparents as "simple people who would hardly protest to a Soviet state servant". In retrospect it is hard to judge how many and which people had their ethnicity ascribed in similar ways. Those of my informants, who remembered the procedure of choosing an ethnicity when getting a passport, mostly went through it considerably later. Lidiya Mikhailovna Nikoglo was born in the late 1940s in the ethnically

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[29] *Sovetskiy Izmail* October 10, 1989

[30] Interview in Chişinău, December 8, 2012

mixed village of Chervonoarmeyskoe.[31] Her family identified as Bulgarian, although there were Gagauz ancestors too. When Lidiya received her first passport she registered as Gagauz, without the objection of the municipal clerk in charge. When asked why she had chosen to register as Gagauz, her ethnically Gagauz husband, who also attended the interview, interrupted laughing, "She knew that she was going to marry a Gagauz, and she made herself Gagauz". But Lidiya had a different explanation:

> "My father is a Gagauz by the grandfather's lineage, but my Mum is Bulgarian..., purely Bulgarian. And we live on the Gagauz side [of the village]. And I was born on the Gagauz side. Out on the street, I spoke Gagauz with all my friends. That's why I decided that I am more Gagauz than Bulgarian. Even though in our house we spoke Bulgarian because my mother was Bulgarian and spoke to us in her language."

Especially where two groups lived in close proximity, like Gagauz and Bulgarians in Chervonoarmeyskoe, such ambivalent identities are quite frequent. Among small minorities such as Gagauz or Bulgarian neither of them offered better opportunities in the Soviet education system or state service. Whether one was Bulgarian or Gagauz, mattered much less than whether one was Gagauz or Russian or Jewish. Therefore people could guide their decision by individual preferences as in Lidiya's case.

In some regions of the Soviet Union prestige and privilege attached to a certain ethnic identity led a majority of those who had to choose one of their parent's ethnicities to follow a particular pattern. If one parent belonged to the titular nation and the other did not, their offspring were more likely to choose the titular nation as their ethnicity. Generally, if one parent was Russian and the other was not, children tended to choose Russian as their ethnicity (Gorenburg, 2006b:295). There were exceptions with mixed ethnic marriages involving a representative of one of the "small peoples of the north". To be registered as a representative of these peoples offered privileges in education and taxes and was therefore gladly chosen, even over Russian (Gorenburg, 2006a:150). In southern Bessarabia, once times of the labor front were over, none of the ethnic communities offered tangible privileges over others. People could choose ethnicity as they saw fit. A later Soviet generation took equality between ethnic groups for granted and saw little significance in the process of choosing a passport ethnicity. Lidiya's nephew, Evgeniy,[32] born in 1974, was registered Bulgarian in a passport he received shortly before the Soviet Union disintegrated. He felt:

> "In the Soviet period one could choose ethnicity... I think that, had I said I was African, they would have registered me as African in my passport. I.., they simply asked me, how should we register you by passport. And I said Bulgarian. That was that. They registered me Bulgarian. I

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[31] Interview in Chervonoarmeyskoe April 28, 2013

[32] Interview in Chervonoarmeyskoe April 28, 2013

think that, had I written French, they would have registered me as French or anything else. They wouldn't have asked: 'do you know that language at all…' Or Chinese (laughs) they would have registered me a Chinese."

As this example illustrates, towards the Soviet Union's end, officially ascribed ethnicity gradually lost its importance. At the same time ethnicity became dramatically more important as a justification for political power. For the Soviet state, ethnicity had all but lost its role as an indicator whom to trust and whom to mistrust. It had, however, gained great importance for those challenging the state. The mistrust was now directed against the state by people who argued ethnically foreign elites could not run local matters efficiently. The tables might have turned, but the essentialist logic behind the concept of ethnicity was well preserved through systematic ethnic ascription by Soviet bureaucrats.

4.4. Soviet education and the friendship of peoples

One realm where the administrative category of ethnicity mattered throughout the Soviet period was education. In a large scale campaign that lasted from the 1960s to the late 1980s, by way of ethnic quotas, the ratio of people with university degrees was raised among the small and peripheral ethnic groups in the Union, while it stagnated among Russians and in the Russian heartland (Tishkov, 1997:39). In the older parts of the Soviet Union, from the mid-1920s to the end of the decade, Soviet nationalities policy experimented with *korenisatsiya,* the concept of "indigenization" or "nativization". This policy aimed at making ethnic differences in the non-Russian regions serve Soviet ends by using privileges and repression to make elites of ethnic minorities collaborate with the Bolshevists (Tishkov, 1997:35, Beissinger, 2002:50, Bilaniuk, 2005:16). Ethnic groups were counted and categorized according to the Stalinist definition of ethnicity that put primacy on a common language. Between the first Soviet census in 1926 and the second in 1939 the number of ethnic groups, from which respondents could choose to belong to, was significantly reduced. This reduction was justified by declaring that some ethnic groups were, according to new findings, merely sub groups (subetnos) of others (Tishkov, 1997:31).

All the 192 languages registered on the territory of the USSR in 1926 were declared official languages of a delineated area and all of them were standardized (Fowkes, 2002:72). However, during the 1930s, privileges for those local languages that did not have an administrative body with its name to it were slashed. The titular languages of Soviet republics became privileged over other languages (Ibid.:74). For the Ukrainian SSR, the period of *korenisatsiya* saw the Ukrainian language developed into a language of school instruction and integrated into a standardized educational system (Hrycak, 2006:73). By the time the Soviet

educational system was introduced in Bessarabia in 1944, only languages that served as the titular language somewhere in the Soviet Union could be used as languages of instruction. Only these languages had been developed as school languages by Soviet linguists. Accordingly, there were teaching materials as well as pedagogical colleges only for these titular languages. Among the languages spoken in southern Bessarabia, this was the Russian language (that served as titular language in the RSFSR), the Ukrainian language (that served as titular language in the Ukrainian SSR), and the Moldovan language (that served as titular language in the newly founded Moldovan SSR). In the immediate surroundings of Izmail several languages were used in village administrations and schools. In the two Old-Believer villages Staraya Nekrasovka and Novaya Nekrasovka, Russian was used. In the predominantly Ukrainian villages Broska, Matroska, and Safyani Ukrainian was used in schools and also occasionally in administrative proceedings. In Ozernoe and Utkonosovka the Moldovan/Romanian language was used. In contrast to the Romanian period it now had to be written in Cyrillic letters.

Languages that served as titular languages in foreign countries, such as Bulgarian or Albanian, were not supposed to serve as languages of instruction in Soviet schools, nor were languages that did not have an official status anywhere, like Gagauz. Therefore, in the Gagauz and Bulgarian speaking villages of southern Bessarabia, as well as in Zhovtnevoe, the one predominantly Albanian speaking village, the "language of interethnic communication", i.e. Russian, was introduced as the language of instruction. Since children there could not speak the language of instruction when they entered school, these village schools held "preparation classes" (podgotovitel'nie klassy) for six year olds[33] that came to be known as "zero grade" (nulevoy klass). According to informants who themselves have learned Russian by going to the zero grade, children there learned mainly by repeating after their teachers. One teacher, who taught zero grade classes in a Gagauz village, said children who completed it were at no disadvantage compared to children from a Russian speaking environment.

In comparison to Ukrainian or Moldovan, Russian was much better established as a language of instruction in the late 1940s. There were more teaching materials and better expertise. In fact children who went to the zero grade and subsequently to a village school with Russian as language of instruction performed better in initial years than children who were instructed in their native languages.[34] The Ukrainian language that should have been taught as a

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[33] Details on preparation classes were documented in rayon school reports, for example Fr445 D128 Godovye otchety gorodskikh i rayonnykh otdelov narodnogo obrazovaniya o rabote shkol za 1948/1949 uchebnyy god, p. 76. The ethnographer Valentin Moshkov observed similar practices already in the few schools that existed in Gagauz villages around the turn of the century. Teaching Russian to 5 or 6 year old children started by taking them by the hand and telling them, "this is a hand" and then pointing to their nose and telling them, "this is a nose". Then they would be asked, "what is this?" –"a nose", etc. (Moshkov, 1901b:38).

[34] For example Fr445 D184 Godovoy otchet Suvorovskogo rayonnogo otdela narodnogo obrazovaniya za 1950-1951 godov, p. 18, that reports on how many students in each village school had to repeat one grade over. Nowhere more than 12% of students had to

second language in all schools often fell short of time and resources. Because of a lack of qualified teachers who could have taught Ukrainian in Reni rayon, during the academic year of 1951-52, neither Ukrainian nor Ukrainian literature was taught up to grade 10.[35] In Bolgrad rayon, where the vast majority of pupils were of Bulgarian and Gagauz descent, learning Ukrainian was abandoned all together in 1950. The ministry of education had acknowledged the exceptional linguistic situation there and allowed an exemption.[36]

Most of the teachers in the region had come here just very recently from older parts of the Soviet Union. Of the 218 teachers that worked in 1948 in Bolgrad rayon, 93 were Ukrainians, 33 were Russian, 4 were Jewish, and 88 were "others".[37] Many of the teachers of this first generation apparently were only poorly qualified. On average they had less than five years of work experience. Annual school reports were full of complaints about individual teachers and about whole teams. Complaints especially concerned those teachers whose native language was not Russian and who had gained their qualifications outside the Soviet Union.[38] Some teachers were criticized individually for the poor performances of their pupils. Often such complaints were explained by bad language skills of the teachers or by blaming teachers for mixing several languages and passing such a language on to their students.[39]

But Russian language schools were still better off than schools with Moldovan as language of instruction. The Moldovan Soviet Republic had only just been founded during World War II. Institutions such as publishing houses for text books or higher education facilities operating in the Moldovan/Romanian language were still very new. This resulted in a severe lack of teachers and teaching materials for village schools in Moldovan speaking villages.[40] The shortage in education resources resulted "in a lack of love of the students for their own language", as a school report lamented.[41] But teachers and text books were not the only problem. In Artsis rayon, where there was only one Moldovan village school, an annual school report complained that after having created schools according to the "principles of the Leninist-Stalinist ethnicity policies" there were now no Moldovan speaking school inspectors who could evaluate the work of teachers and students in their Moldovan language school.[42]

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repeat one grade, but the highest percentages came from villages where Ukrainian or Moldovan was used as language of instruction and children did not go to "zero grade" preparation classes.

[35] Fr445 D209 Godovye otchety gorodskikh i rayonnych otdelov narodnogo obrazovaniya o rabote shkol za 1951 god p. 70

[36] Fr445 D186 Godovye otchety rayonnykh i gorodskikh otdelov narodnogo obrazovaniya za 1950-1951 uchebnyy god p. 126

[37] Fr445 D128 Godovye otchety gorodskikh i rayonnykh otdelov narodnogo obrazovaniya o rabote shkol za 1948/1949 uchebnyy god, p. 78

[38] For example Fr445 D128, p. 82

[39] Fr445 D156 Godovye otchety rayonnykh otdelov narodnogo obrazovaniya za 1949-1950 god. p. 142

[40] Fr445 D128, p. 177, Fr445 D209, p. 120

[41] Fr445 D184, p. 6

[42] Fr445 D156, p. 156

In the second half of the 1950s, after the gravest economic problems had been brought under control, in an attempt to tackle this unsatisfying situation in the pedagogical system, an experiment was launched. The Odessa Oblast Central Committee commissioned a report on the linguistic situation of the ethnic minorities in the Region in 1957. It revealed that 24.400 Gagauz, 79.650 Moldovans, and 132.800 Bulgarians in the Oblast had not sufficient access to schooling and media in their native languages (Guboglo, 2011:115). One of the responses to this situation was the revival of a project, set aside in 1949, the creation of a standardized Gagauz language. The Academy of Sciences of the Moldovan SSR in Chişinău was tasked with the development of a suitable curriculum to teach Gagauz to schoolchildren in the Gagauz villages of the Moldovan SSR. In 1958, 38 village schools held native language courses for 14.500 Gagauz children. But problems soon became apparent. The workload on children became greater and teachers no longer had sufficient time to instruct children in Russian. To have a good written command of Russian was much more decisive for educational and professional careers than the written command of a Gagauz standard language that just had been developed and that offered no career paths whatsoever. In the end, parental assemblies in Gagauz villages voted to end the experiment in 1961 (ibid.:115-117). As was the custom in Soviet village gatherings, this outcome was reached by unanimous voting and Guboglo (ibid.:117) suspects with some well dosed pressure from Chişinău. Nonetheless, even today Gagauz language instruction in schools is sometimes subject of parental skepticism for the same reason: It puts workload on students without providing them with additional educational or professional opportunities.[43]

Back in the 1950s education in the Soviet Union was by no means an effort confined to schoolchildren. Adult *kolkhozniki* and workers were expected to go to evening classes. The chief goal of these was giving basic literacy to the illiterate.[44] There were classes for everybody, aimed at the liquidation not only of illiteracy but also of what was seen by Soviet administrators as rural backwardness. In the second half of the 1940s, the Izmail bureau of lecturers started an evening school program in surrounding villages, with lectures in Russian and Ukrainian. Even in 1947, in the middle of a devastating famine, two dozen lecturers traveled the villages of Izmail Oblast[45] attempting to fulfill a plan of 500 lessons a month. Some of these were aimed especially at peasants, workers, women, or young people. Village *intelligentsiya*; teachers, doctors, and

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[43] This has changed somewhat since Ukrainian citizens can travel to Turkey in search of employment and since some Gagauz language courses are available at Komrat University in the ATU Gagauziya of Moldova.

[44] To get a clue of the degree of illiteracy among the population of none-Russian speaking villages, the recruitment lists of 1944 provide some insight. For example in Kotlovina among the Gagauz men who were recruited in 1944, 40% had never been to school. Among those who had gone to school, about half did so during Romanian reign, when Romanian was used as language of instruction. The other half had gone to school in tsarist times, more than 20 years earlier. Among the men with basic school education, 7% had gone to school for just one year, 20% for two years, 16% for three years, 10% for 4 years. In total, among the entire male population between the age of 17 and 56 (636 men), only 36 individuals had completed 5 or more grades. Fr367 D5, pp. 12 ff.

[45] An administrative entity that existed between 1944 and 1954, when it was merged with Odessa Oblast

agronomists were expected to attend.[46] Villagers were gathered to hear lectures in topics as diverse as *Was there a beginning of the earth and will there be an end?*, *The natural resources of the Ukrainian SSR*, *How did life occur on earth?*, *Charles Darwin and his teachings*, or *The Stalinist constitution, the most democratic constitution in the world.*[47] Many lessons were meant to attune village audiences to ethnicity as a household category, but also to convince them of what they likely already knew; that living in a multiethnic society was nothing bad. Ethnicity was always presented in combination with the Soviet catchphrase "friendship of peoples" (druzhba narodov). One standard lecture was *The Leninist-Stalinist friendship of peoples.*[48] In the lesson *The Soviet state, a state of a new and higher order,* villagers were told that:

> The Soviet state is the model of a multiethnic state. The multiethnic state is based on equal rights and the friendship of peoples. The Soviet state is the organizer of friendship between peoples, of mutual assistance between peoples, the organizer of equal rights for these peoples, and their moral and political unity.[49]

From lectures like these it became clear that ethnicity was real and had to be managed. Interethnic relations, in order to be peaceful and friendly had to be organized by a patronizing state. This state, in village lectures, appeared in the guise of the Ukrainian SSR. Accordingly, many talks dealt with the Ukrainian people: *The emergence of the Ukrainian people* was an essential lesson, and so was *The Kievan Rus', the cradle of the three Slavic peoples, Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians*, or *The development of a socialist Ukrainian culture.*[50] But lectures also took a fierce stand against Ukrainian aspirations of independence and against ethnic nationalism: the lecture curriculum of 1947 offered *Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism, the worst enemy of the Ukrainian people*, as well as *the struggle of Lenin and Stalin against bourgeois Ukrainian nationalism*, and *the destruction of the bourgeois nationalist counterrevolution during the civil war.*[51] The fact that the words "bourgeois" and "nationalism" appeared exclusively in combination with each other, will have made it clear to even the most illiterate *kolkhoznik*, that ethnicity was only good as in "friendship of the peoples". True, there was one friendship that was more important than the others, the one with the Russian people, the *outstanding nation and leading force of the Soviet Union* as one lecture was titled.[52] The lecture program left absolutely no doubt that the Russian people had a special standing in the multiethnic fabric of Soviet society. There was *the historical role of Russia in the struggle of the Slavic peoples for their*

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[46] Fr415 D10 Temy lektsii dlya sel'skikh i kolkhoznykh klubov na 1947 god, pp. 19-21

[47] Fr415 D15 Plany lektsii po istorii i literature, pp. 1-7

[48] Fr415 D15, p. 10

[49] Fr415 D22 Metodicheskie razrabotki v pomoshch' lektoram, p. 50

[50] Fr415 D15, p. 14

[51] Fr415 D15, pp. 10, 14

[52] Fr415 D15, p. 12

independence.[53] But it was also made very clear that the Ukrainian and the Russian peoples had a special relation that went beyond mere "friendship of peoples": *The great historical act of unification of Ukraine and Russia in the year 1654*, or *the historical connection between the Russian and the Ukrainian culture*, or *the assistance by the great Russian people to Soviet Ukraine and her economic and cultural development*, as well as *the Leninist-Stalinist friendship between Russia and Ukraine,*[54] were all lectures meant to cement the idea of an age-old and eternal brotherly relationship between the two groups. Locally, this kind of enacted harmony, projected back into the past, must have seemed the concern of others. The centrally planned lectures said next to nothing about the Bulgarians, Gagauz, or Albanians, let alone did the lecturers speak to these groups in their respective languages. But the celebration of a multiethnic society, which became a self-congratulatory trade mark of Soviet public discourse, was certainly a well-meant attempt to give a sense of belonging even to these peripheral minorities.

Soviet education for children and adults quickly bore fruits. The generation that was born after 1950 would eventually be employed mainly in the village kolkhozes and sovkhozes. But not all of them remained rank and file *kolkhozniki*. Success in school could be rewarded with the opportunity to study on in Odessa or Chişinău. For the select few it even was Leningrad or Moscow. Provincial youth was not sent there to become urbanites or intellectuals, but to become teachers, doctors, engineers, agronomists, and then return to their native villages to contribute to the fulfillment of the quota. The generation born in the late 1940s and the 1950s was the first and the last in Bessarabia to be involved in Soviet structures from kindergarten until the pinnacle of their professional careers. Another common experience of this generation was the obligation of all able-bodied men to serve the Soviet military for two to three years. Both for civil and military education, villagers left behind an environment where their ethnicity was known and acknowledged. They entered the even more multiethnic environment of the student dormitory in the city or the military barracks, where many of their peers and superiors had never heard that there were Bulgarians and Gagauz living in the Soviet Union.

This generation was reminded of ethnicity mainly when they interacted with state institutions such as the army or the university. Ethnicity had a peculiar double nature: On the one hand it was an ascribed feature of everyone's identity. It appeared in most important identity documents and was constantly referred to in public discourse. On the other hand, most of my informants, no matter their ethnic background, in retrospect felt that ethnicity at the time did not have an impact on one's opportunities. Compared to post-Soviet Ukraine, in the later Soviet decades it was, at least for most of my informants, exclusively merits that could provide social mobility.

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[53] Fr415 D15, p. 11

[54] Fr415 D15, p. 14

Lidiya Mikhailovna and Mikhail Stepanovich Nikoglo are a Gagauz couple from the ethnically mixed village of Chervonoarmeyskoe. They both shared the experience of studying in Odessa, Lidiya Mikhailovna to become a school teacher, Mikhail Stepanovich to become an agronomist. Both of them were born in the late 1940s. They were part of the first and only Bessarabian generation that made it from "zero grade" preparation classes to a higher education in Odessa. When Lidiya, after having completed 12 grades in the village school, departed to Odessa to enroll in the pedagogical institute, it was her very first trip to the city.[55] She felt that her rural or ethnically different background had no effect on her opportunities there:

> "Maybe it's us, we who grew up and were educated in the Soviet time, and maybe it's just us who have this impression that....we had stability, we had work, our children could study, they could enter any institution without having money. No matter what disease you get, you get the treatment you need, you didn't have to pay for any operation, nor for any drug, everything was free, it was really for free. We ourselves, the children of kolkhozniki, studied for free, just for our merits, and no money whatsoever.... My father didn't know where Odessa *was.* I for example, I studied in Odessa. He didn't know where Odessa was and what this [pedagogical] institute was and through which door to enter and through which to exit. Only with your brains... you have knowledge – you enter, no knowledge – that's it, you can't enter. It was the same at work. If you work well that means they promote you, put you on the 'wall of fame', bonuses, appreciation, holiday trips..."

When asked whether ethnicity was an issue among students in Odessa or between them and teachers, her husband, Mikhail, answered that he had studied with representatives of very different ethnic groups and, again, all that mattered was their merits. When asked, whether later on, in the village kolkhoz, where Mikhail became a senior planner, ethnicity was ever a question, his answer was very similar:

> "No, no, no! There the thing was that you need to work. There they don't ask your ethnicity, who you are. You need to work. If you appeared there, if you are a specialist, if you graduated from the institute, what do you need ethnicity for? You have to work! You show how you work. There, ethnicity meant nothing" (laughs).

Interestingly, it was this perceived meritocratic Soviet society that insisted on recording and ascribing ethnicity. For some ethnic groups this continued to be fateful, especially for Jews, whom the state increasingly saw as potential emigrants to Israel (Friedberg, 1991:10,75). Ethnicity also remained problematic for ethnic groups that had been collectively accused and deported as traitors during World War II, such as the Chechens (Wanner, 1998:14) or the Crimean Tatars (Katchanovski, 2005:889).

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[55] Interview in Chervonoarmeyskoe April 28, 2013

4.5.   Stagnation and revived ethnic consciousness

Unlike for Jews, Crimean Tatars, or Chechens, for most ethnic groups in southern Bessarabia, ethnicity had ever less the function of allocating trust and suspicion and even less to allocate rights and duties. It was further used as an administrative category mainly because Soviet ideas about the essentiality of ethnicity had never been thoroughly revised. Revision of such dearly held premises had become even less likely in the time often referred to as "stagnation" (Zastoy), between Brezhnev's grab for power in 1964 and the advent of Perestroika in 1985. During these years, many practices, not just ascribing ethnicity, gained a repetitive character. Life in the late Soviet Union became a collage of bits and pieces of earlier, already approved practices, cited and rearranged in a way so they would conform to a common, well-established Soviet script of doing things (Yurchak, 2006:50ff.). The term Yurchak uses to describe the way people talked, wrote, and represented practices in the late Soviet Union is "authoritative discourse", a term borrowed from the literary theoretician Mikhail Bakhtin. In this way of speaking and writing, the author disappeared from the text. Everything said was expressed in a tone as if it was an unquestionable, well-known truth, in no demand of any further explanation (ibid.:70). Ethnicity and its significance in the symbolic representation of individuals and groups had become such a truth. The presence of ethnicity in every deliberation about society, be it near or far, in the recent or the distant past, the explanatory power of ethnicity and its conceptual stability in time and space was neither discussed nor contradicted. This becomes evident if one looks how ethnicity was projected into the region's past. For instance, the Soviet archivists who, in the 1960s and 70s filed documents on the Romanian and tsarist periods, gave many of the documents headings containing the term "ethnicity" (natsional'nost'). After examining such files the researcher, with some disappointment, would find that most of them were actually about confessional groups or social estates. The Soviet archivists took these earlier categories quite naturally as ethnicity. In one case, a Romanian file about an organization that defended the interests of the *Transdanubian Colonists*, the Soviet archivists in retrospect had decided that this was a *Bulgarian* organization. Therefore in all translations into Russian this ethnic denomination was added to the organization's name. However, neither in the proceedings of the organization nor in the secret police reports about it, does the word "Bulgarian" ever appear. In fact nothing reminiscent of ethnicity, nationality, language, or even religion seems to have left a trace in the whole voluminous file. Some of the delegates in this organization would have been identified as Bulgarians by Soviet bureaucrats, but others might have been Gagauz, Albanian or Moldovan.[56] In a local census from 1895 for the town of Vilkovo, the archivists decided it was a

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[56] F312 D76 Nablyudatel'noe delo deyatel'nost'i "Soyuza obshchestv bolgarskikh kolonistov" Izmail'skogo i Kagul'skogo uezdov, 1932-1940

about the "ethnic composition of the population". The document itself reveals religious categories and counted people by their professional affiliations, but it contains no ethnic or linguistic categories.[57] Ethnicity had come to be taken so much for granted as the chief denominator of social differences that it seemed to be a natural translation for all earlier forms of structuring society.

Soviet Society of the *Zastoy* period was full of practices that had become meaningless but were continuously performed to keep up the façade of an integrated and content society. In some cases there was a degree of complicity between those in charge of the thankless task to enact façade and those who had to play along (Friedberg, 1991:116). Take the example of participation in demonstrations or elections. Compulsory participation in parades was not a nuisance to many Soviet citizens, they enjoyed having a day off from work with their friends and colleagues, but hardly anyone paid attention to the slogans and the speeches (Yurchak, 2006:121). Like so many Soviet practices the ubiquitous reference to ethnicity had become a category of everyday life without much meaning attached to it. Not only did ethnicity no longer have any effect on the rights and duties of most ethnic groups (save the abovementioned exceptions), also the communist future anticipated a socially engineered, hard-working, non-ethnic citizen (Fitzguh et al., 1996:1), for which cultural differences between ethnic groups became less and less perceptible. More and more people spoke Russian in many situations and used a wide range of union-wide Soviet terms to talk about their day-to-day activities. This generation was schooled in Soviet schools. Its more ambitious members could join the Komsomol, the Party youth organization. The large majority worked in a mode of production that could increasingly be found across the Union. The leader of the Ukrainian Communist Party, Petr Simonenko, during a campaign speech in Izmail in September 2012 spoke to an audience of mainly this generation. He made a sweeping movement with his arm around Izmail's Soviet era main square, where the rally was held, and reminded the audience that everything within sight had been built by this "Golden Generation". This claim was certainly true, but truth might have been added to it by saying that Izmail's main square with its Stalin era polyclinic, its Brezhnev era town hall, its soldier's monument and bronze Lenin looked very much like any other small town square that was built by the same Golden Generation anywhere else in the Soviet Union. In many ways, then, Bessarabians of this generation became culturally much more similar to other people of the same generation, living elsewhere in the Soviet Union, than to their parent's generation, that once found itself as a culturally foreign peripheral minority in the expanding Soviet state. Ethnicity stuck with them as the fifth line in their passports and as a specific "authoritative discourse".

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[57] F4 D59 Svedenie o kolichestvennom i natsional'nom sostave naseleniya, 1895, p. 8

After becoming a category almost void of meaning in the dull *Zastoy* years, ethnicity had a spectacular comeback as a meaningful category, when Perestroika and Glasnost reforms allowed for political parties to be founded. Across Eastern Europe, many new parties that would become influential during the last years of the Soviet Union were founded along ethnic lines. Especially in federative states, such as the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia, ethnicity became the chief category for political mobilization, once socialist structures started to dwindle away (Beissinger, 2002:77). Indeed it was very hard for leaders of political movements, other than nationalistic ones, to establish political parties along ideological lines. For generations, Soviet citizens had been exposed to and educated in only one ideology, while all other conceivable ideologies were deemed bourgeois, imperialistic, or fascist.

In the Perestroika years with their widespread corruption, mismanagement, and food shortages, the rhetoric of a superior socialist way of life in a classless society became empty and meaningless to most Soviet citizens. The estrangement of the citizens from the ideology of the Communist Party became a severe threat to the power and the privileges of socialist elites who had, for the past decades, justified their status with the pledge of a harmonic and just society soon to come. Ethnicity, so the dominant narrative, would become obsolete once this harmonic stage was achieved. Now the vision of an ideal society had become obsolete instead. The only refuge for elites, so far promising a bright future, was to turn to ethnic nationalism. Ethnicity had been cherished as an important and ever-present feature of each person. It was used to characterize each person along with achievements in socialist labor and education, military rank, or party hierarchy. Now that these officially recorded features became a burden rather than an asset, ethnicity was the only category left that could justify holding power over others (Verdery, 1993b:190, Verdery, 1993a:175, Slezkine, 1994:451, Schorkowitz, 2010:100).

In the Soviet republics of Moldova and Ukraine that shared Bessarabia between them, nationalist movements began to gain momentum during Perestroika years. In both countries they posed a serious threat to the ruling party elites. Party bosses became aware of the power of nationalist mobilization through the experience of other elites that had been swept away by ethnic mobilization in Baltic republics as well as in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Both in Moldova and in Ukraine party leaderships dealt with the threat by taking the wind out of the sails of nationalist movements and adopting their rhetoric of national revival (Kappeler, 2000:249, Fane, 1993:124). In Ukraine the mildly nationalist Rukh movement gained hardly a fourth of parliamentary seats in the first multiparty elections. Nevertheless the parliament started to pass bills, privileging Ukrainian language and stressing nationalist perspectives on Ukrainian history. The members of parliament had remained roughly the same before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Only now, that nationalism was the latest craze, they had taken it up as their new

legitimizing ideology (Reid, 1997:218). So even if the people in power remained the same, they "switched the we-groups" (Elwert, 1997:253) they referred to.

At about the same time, local ethnic minorities in southern Bessarabia started their own movements based on mobilization along ethnic lines. In the late 1980s ethnicity again came to be seen as a trait that could make a difference between people but also between potential paths for the region's future. Ethnic movements that had been formed clandestinely now came out of the shadow. In many ways they were a reaction to calls for homogenization of national cultures by nationalist movements in the capitals of former Soviet republics. In the Ukrainian part of Bessarabia these movements eventually restrained from territorial claims and were turned into ethnic associations that exist until today. In contrast, neighboring Moldova was ripped apart by nationalist demands. A pro-Russian movement in Transnistria and the Gagauz autonomy movement in southern Bessarabia turned violent and insisted on territorial autonomy. Both movements emerged as reactions to revived Moldovan nationalism (Demirdirek, 2008b:125, Shornikov, 2012:782). In 1989 the communist leaders of Moldova gave in to pressure from the street and promised to create an elevated status for the Moldovan/Romanian language. In the largely Russian-speaking eastern region of Transnistria, people feared they could become second rate citizens because social mobility in Moldova would soon require fluent knowledge of Moldovan/Romanian. For the Gagauz and Bulgarian regions in the south of Moldova it could mean that they soon would have to be fluent in two foreign languages, Russian and Moldovan/Romanian, in order to stand a chance of social enhancement (Crowther, 1991:194). In 1990 the Popular Front of Moldova, a spearhead movement of nationalist mobilization, was elected to the national parliament. Their radical demands in educational politics and their rhetoric of unification with neighboring Romania, caused outright panic among Russian speakers and other minorities (King, 2000:151, Demirdirek, 2008a:95). At the same time with the Popular Front of Moldova, in 1989 a Gagauz movement was founded, "Gagauz Halkı" (the Gagauz people), that initially collaborated with the Popular Front. Once pan-Romanian ideas became common among Popular Front members, the two organizations turned against each other and radicalized (Troebst, 2001:76, King, 1997:744). "Gagauz Halkı" began working on plans to separate from Moldova in 1989. The Gagauz twice declared their independence, once in November 1989 as an autonomous part of the Moldovan SSR, and once after relations had further deteriorated in August 1990 as independent from the Moldovan SSR but still a part of the Soviet Union (Guboglo, 2012b:795). Parliamentary elections, held in February 1990 further aggravated the situation. The ballot brought many of Moldova's Popular Front candidates into powerful positions, and the new nationalist and pan-Romanian Prime Minister Mircea Druc repeatedly condemned the Gagauz leadership. In August 1990 another proclamation of a separate Gagauz republic followed. Gagauz parliamentary elections were scheduled for October

of that year. The government in Chişinău declared Gagauz Halkı an illegal organization and urged Moldovan citizens to take up arms against Gagauz separatists. So called volunteer combatants were bused in from different regions of Moldova to crush the Gagauz separatist movement. In the Gagauz region, road blocks were set up and trenches dug out. Only the intervention of Soviet troops prevented major bloodshed (King, 1997:744, Hatłas, 2011:196, Fane, 1993:144). The Izmail paper *Sovetskiy Izmail* was not shy to compare the intervention to 1944. Many among the relieved Gagauz remembered the merry mood in June 1944, the paper wrote, when the Soviet liberators were greeted with salt and bread.[58] After a three year stalemate in the conflict an autonomy status for three mainly Gagauz rayons was agreed with the Moldovan government. Inhabitants of the mainly Bulgarian rayon of Tarakliya preferred to stay in rump Moldova. This led to the discontinuous territory of the autonomous Gagauz area today. The government of this new territorial unit was granted far-reaching autonomy rights. Only foreign policy, defense issues, the right to naturalize new Moldovan citizens, and currency politics remained under Chişinău's direct control (King, 1997:750).

In contrast, on the Ukrainian side of the border, neither the Gagauz nor the Bulgarians came even close to such an agreement. The perspective of shifting republic boundaries and creating an autonomous unit comprising all Gagauz and Bulgarian settlements seemed slightly ambitious and dangerous from the start. However, a leader of the Bulgarian Cyril and Methodius Society, Vladimir Petrov,[59] pushed such plans when he thought the opportunity had come. An ethnic Bulgarian from Izmail, Petrov won his degree in jurisdiction from Lomonosov University in Moscow in 1988. In the same year he helped to legalize a Bulgarian organization that had already been operating in the region clandestinely for a couple of years. The organization promoted the idea of creating an autonomous Bulgarian entity in southern Bessarabia that included all areas where Bulgarians "live compactly", be they in Moldova or in Ukraine. The idea behind this risky effort was to have resources for the development of Bulgarian culture and language that would not have to be asked for from the Ukrainian or the Moldovan authorities. But the new Ukrainian state allowed only one region, the Crimean peninsula, to have territorial autonomy. For all other regions in which minorities lived, only modes of cultural autonomy were allowed. For Petrov and his colleagues, this was inacceptable, because they knew that a Ukrainian state would not provide the resources necessary to develop Bulgarian culture and language in the region. Also, Petrov's organization took the position that Bulgarians and Gagauz, since they both came as Transdanubian Colonists and were both Orthodox Christians, were ethnically and culturally the same, just linguistically different. Therefore for them it made sense to aspire a territorial unit for all Bulgarian and Gagauz with an area in mind that stretched

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[58] *Sovetskiy Izmail* November 11, 1990, Ot protivostoyanie k dialogu – Miting v Bolgrade

[59] Interview in Izmail on April 21, 2013

across the Moldovan-Ukrainian border. An earlier project to create a Bulgarian-Gagauz autonomous Soviet Republic in 1989 had already been halted by the opposition from within Bulgarian associations in Moldova. The Organization Vozrozhdenie (Renaissance), based in Chişinău, dismissed the project as "absurd". The statement made clear that the Bulgarians already had a state; Bulgaria (Shornikov, 2012:784). In Ukraine, a similar legal project, based on the plans of Petrov's Cyril and Methodius Society was drafted in 1991 by Petrov and members of the Bolgrad rayon council. It was sent to Kyiv without ever being honored with an answer.

But government officials in Kyiv were not the only ones to shrug their shoulders on autonomy ambitions in southern Bessarabia. When Gagauz villages in Moldova were on the brink of civil war there were also calls to arms across the border to their ethnic brethren in Ukraine. But to little effect. Elizaveta Derkach,[60] a history teacher in the predominantly Gagauz village of Kotlovina, remembered a truckload of guns sent to the village in 1990 from Vulcaneşti, the nearest Gagauz town in Moldova. No one in the village agreed to take up arms for the adventurous sake of a Gagauz independent state. Separatism from the Ukrainian SSR found no popular support. In Bolgrad there was a rally of solidarity against the politics of Chişinău, organized by the Cyril and Methodius Society in November 1990.[61] Among the speakers were the leaders of the then still unrecognized Gagauz Autonomous Territory. One of them opted to leave Moldova and join Russia as an autonomous republic instead. Another said that the government in Chişinău was to blame for the violence. It treated the Gagauz as second rate citizens and had permitted "pogroms" in Cahul (a nearby Romania/Moldovan speaking district center) where a drunken mob had vandalized the Communist Party headquarters and a Lenin monument. The representatives of the Gagauz used the formulation "Moldovan-Romanian-neofascism" which captured the uncertainty and fear among the Gagauz in Moldova at the time. On paper, both newly independent countries, Moldova and Ukraine, granted equal citizenship rights to all residents irrespective of ethnicity, language, or duration of residence. In both countries potential distress for ethnic minorities came not from the law but from nation building projects and reinterpretations of the region's history (Kaneff and Heintz, 2006:9). Nevertheless, the Gagauz in Moldova were without doubt under much more severe pressure (and therefore quicker in attempts of separatism) than the Bulgarian or Gagauz in Ukraine. The Gagauz in Moldova were now the most notable ethnic minority in the country after the pro-Russian Transnistrian region had broken away to declare independence. Also, many among ethnic minorities in Moldova feared then, as they still fear now, that Moldova might eventually unite with Romania. In such a scenario the Gagauz would become a tiny minority on the impoverished periphery of a foreign country, with hardly any political weight to negotiate their

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[60] Interview in Kotlovina July 31, 2013

[61] Again according to the article in *Sovetskiy Izmail* November 11, 1990

minority rights. In contrast to the Gagauz in Moldova, the Ukrainian Gagauz were less threatened to become second class citizens. Large parts of the population in Ukraine's south and east would be with them in the struggle against nationalizing projects from Kyiv, such as an elevated status for the Ukrainian language or a nationalist perspective on Ukraine's history. There were intact chances to preserve the habitual way of life without grabbing guns.

Apart from the creation of a Gagauz autonomous unit (*ATU Gagauziya*) in southern Moldova, there were no attempts to redraw borders along ethnic boundaries in southern Bessarabia.[62] None of the ethnic groups that can be found here have a convincing claim for a discrete area in which they form a clear majority. Even using history as an argument, as could be observed across the Soviet Union, none of the ethnic groups that inhabit southern Bessarabia today, could credibly claim to have been here before all the others. Given the nature of the ethnic mosaic in the region with its overlapping settlement areas of ethnic groups, its fuzzy boundaries between them, and often ambiguous individual ethnic identities, the hitherto low degree of zeal to shift borders once more, can be asserted only with relief.

At the time the Soviet Union collapsed, rural Bessarabia provided neither the resources that could have served as incentives to an insurgency nor the social groups or communication networks that could have served as breeding grounds for an armed campaign. Meanwhile other attempts to redraw borders in the former Soviet Union, notably in nearby Transnistria, but also in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno Karabakh and later in Chechnya, had turned into nightmares for the local populations there. These hapless attempts to create new republics along ethnic boundaries served those few who ever seriously thought of a Gagauz or Bulgarian state in Bessarabia as a warning.

4.6. Conclusion

The administrative category of ethnicity, introduced by the preceding Romanian government, stayed with Bessarabians after the region had become a part of the Soviet Union. The category was henceforth ascribed to each person and recorded in personal documents. Over the years its significance for the lives of people varied greatly. While in the 1940s one's ethnicity could decide over such fateful questions as whether one was recruited into the army or taken to the labor front, from the early 1950s onwards it had mostly consequences for a person's school career. Schools, along with other institutions, were swiftly introduced, alas not without some teething problems. The newcomers who initially ran Soviet institutions quite quickly overcame

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[62] In spring 2015 rumors of separatist underground activity in southern Bessarabia resumed, but as of late 2015 did not substantiate.

ethnic boundaries and language bars, with the tailwind of unprecedented economic growth. As cultural differences were gradually leveled, ethnicity remained a meaningful analytical category both in Soviet social sciences and in everyday discourse. When the Perestroika reforms got out of hand in the late 1980s, ethnicity experienced a spectacular comeback as the main argument to demand political power. Ukraine and Moldova both were shaken up by nationalist movements that had local repercussions in southern Bessarabia, when Gagauz and Bulgarians felt threatened and formed their own ethnic movements. Some in those organizations toyed with the idea of separatism, but their call fell on deaf ears both with central governments and with the local population. Yet, even without armed conflict, the collapse of the Soviet Union left Bessarabians in a new world order in which power was distributed largely along ethnic lines. Ethnicity had become the category to provide the framework for all rhetoric to justify political power in the decades to come.

5. Clientelism, post-soviet instability, and the persistence of ethnic boundaries

On a Sunday in early summer 2013, I hitchhiked from the Ukrainian border town of Reni back to my main field site Izmail. The road out of town passes Reni's large Danube river port with its dozens of cranes, storage houses, and silos. This scenery offers a sinister picture of decline. None of the cranes were moving. There were hardly any people to be seen, let alone ships on the vast river. I occasionally pointed to one of the decaying buildings to ask the driver what they once were. "The former cannery, the former winery, the former passenger port, the former Sailor's Club", he answered. "As you can see, most things here are 'former'". Reni is a sad example even in southern Bessarabia. Situated directly on the former Soviet border with Romania, it was once an important transportation hub. Reni was hit especially hard by the breakaway of the state, the outpost of which it once was (Kaneff and Heintz, 2006:12). However, stories of decline can be found in every single town and village, in every factory, and every family. In fact, the dominant theme of most biographical interviews with respondents, rural or urban, was the experience of decline. The present state of decline is measured against the Soviet period, perceived as having been more optimistic, even by people too young to experience it.

Decline is by no means an abstract notion in post-independence Ukraine. People in Izmail and the villages in its environs can tell uncountable stories about it. Usually they do not have to go far for examples. Most of their stories concerned informants themselves or people close to them. Some separate realms in which decline was felt to be particularly harsh can be distinguished: Many people report a loss of ideas to live for. This loss is often connected to an overall loss in morale and ethics (usually subsumed under the Russian term "dukhovnost'"). Politics is often seen as no longer governed by ideologies, but by the pursuit of personal interests. In this chapter, I will argue that the experience of socio-economic decline and the importance of ethnicity reinforce one another. Ethnicity provides a sense of stability and continuity, which makes it a prized political currency in the post-Soviet patron-client networks dominant in local politics. I will also argue that in clientelistic politics clear-cut ethnic categories are preferable to fuzzy ones. In this way, ethnicity not only retains its importance as a social category but also has its boundaries constantly mended by politicians and interest groups.

After the break-up of the Soviet Union many institutions, on the national as well as on the local level, have ceased to fulfill their purposes or have vanished altogether. These institutions used to provide security, income, services, or as the former Sailor's Club in Reni, leisure activities. They were once funded by the state and accessible more or less equally for all citizens. Now, services such as medical care or education are accessible in satisfying quality only for the rich. The decay of infrastructure is more visible and therefore often used as a metaphor for wider social decay. Again, those parts of infrastructure that serve the common good were the first to fall apart, while other parts, that exclusively serve the private interests of a few, such as luxury housing projects, experience a boom.

In villages especially, many people reported a decline in communal spirit. Whereas in the past people are remembered to have helped each other and were mutually obliged through reciprocal exchange in resources and support, now the dominant way to mobilize manpower is money. One common memory among villagers that illustrated bygone communal support networks was house construction. Most village homes were built in the 1960s and 70s. The land and some construction materials were provided by the kolkhoz, the labor by the joint efforts of several households linked to each other through kinship and friendship.[1] Not only were such communal undertakings remembered as pleasant, they also provided the capacity to build houses practically without money. The observation that nowadays one cannot achieve anything without money has become a conventional wisdom. Today, hardly any new houses are being built in villages. The main reason for this is a decline in the socio-economic standing of many families. The heavily mechanized and export-oriented agriculture in former kolkhoz villages fails to offer jobs for young people. Most of them leave their villages in search for employment in cities or abroad. Compared with Soviet times, there are less children growing up in villages. Many village school houses, built in the Brezhnev period, appear oversized now. Houses were constructed to accommodate three generations under one roof. Nowadays such households have become a rarity. Therefore, not only are there no new houses built, many of those built for children who moved away, are now falling apart. Dmitri Petrovich Uzun,[2] a resident of Kotlovina, born in 1926, said he remembered only two periods in his life, when houses were destroyed, not built; the Second World War, and the post-socialist period. This comparison of the present with the worst years in reach of memory seems to have been fairly widespread, even before spring 2014, when violence returned to Ukraine.

Among this all embracing decline of ideological and social certainties, institutions, infrastructure, communities, and even families, one category, now familiar to literally everyone,

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[1] This observation was also made by Boneva (2006:55) in two Bulgarian villages in southern Bessarabia.

[2] Interview in Kotlovina July 12, 2013

seems to remain firm as a rock: Ethnicity. Let us remember the latest Soviet definition of "ethnos" by Yulian Bromley:

> Ethnos is a historically *stable* entity of people developed on a certain territory and possessing common, relatively *stable* features of culture (including language) and psyche as well as a consciousness of their unity and of their difference from other similar entities (self-awareness) *fixed* in a self-name (cited in Tishkov, 1997:3, emphasis added).

Whether or not in reality ethnicity was a stable category, in its academic and popular conceptualization stability (ustoichivost') over time was the feature that set ethnicity apart from other, more volatile institutions such as citizenship or religion (Bromley, 1983:46). In times of political chaos and economic volatility, stability has become a value in and of itself. Besides ethnicity, the only other concept that provided a similar assurance of stability was religion. Both these concepts came to replace many of the functions the Marxist-Leninist ideology and its state-funded institutions had fulfilled during the decades of Soviet rule (Slezkine, 1994:451, Verdery, 1993a:190). This new set of functions that ethnicity came to fulfill, also meant that it ceased to fulfill its old, Soviet function as an administrative category. Instead, the reference to an ethnic community preserving unique and age-old values became strongly associated with continuity and stability, the one quality so many voters longed for and so many politicians claimed to provide.[3]

Many of my informants clearly expressed their longing for stability in the near future. But they also had a way of remembering the past as much more stable than it likely could have been. It has become common to associate the years of Brezhnev's rule with security, predictability, and stability (Raleigh, 2012:237). Literature on post-socialism describes many early symptoms of the decay of one-party-communism, such as an economy of shortage, nepotism, corruption, as well as pro-forma compliance in worn out rituals.[4] In stark contrast, most of my informants described the Soviet period as monolithic and almost void of social change. Many had great difficulties to remember symptoms of imminent collapse. To Soviet citizens, the disintegration of their country was just as surprising as to most experts (Beissinger, 2002:3). Symptoms of chaos during the last decade of the USSR, or traces of stability and continuity in the post-socialist era, are hardly remembered. Many people during interviews differentiated simply between two periods: "those times" (te vremena) and now. Within "those times" only minimal differentiations seem to be remembered.

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[3] One of the campaign slogans for the dominant Party of the Regions during the 2012 parliamentary election campaign in Odessa Oblast was "from stability to prosperity".

[4] For economy of shortage, nepotism, corruption see for example Kornai (1980), Verdery (1996), Stefes (2006), Willerton (1992), Fairbanks (1999), Eisenstadt and Roniger (1984), Kotkin (1991), for pro-forma compliance in worn out rituals see for example. Yurchak (2006), Friedberg (1991).

Thus the mode of imagining history and the mode of imagining ethnicity are strikingly similar: Characteristics are seen as stable and alike within one epoch or one ethnic group, but they are seen as entirely different between two epochs or two ethnic groups. Differences *within* one epoch or ethnic group and similarities *between* them are easily omitted or forgotten. The opposition between "te vremena" and now is akin to the opposition between "us" and "them". This mechanism of thought is instrumental in politicizing both the past and ethnic boundaries.

5.1. The Power of benefaction

One big contrast to Soviet times is that now, with multi-party elections, politicians have to court people for their political support. During the Soviet Union, politicians belonged to a vanguard party. They drew their power from their party membership and their supposedly superior insight in Marxist-Leninist teachings. After the demise of the Soviet Union, the Communist Party lost its appeal and the ideological competence of its leaders lost the function of legitimizing political power. Nowadays, politicians draw their power from their role as benefactors who offer support and understanding thanks to their generosity. In the 2012 parliamentary election campaign, the Party of the Regions, then still ruling Odessa Oblast and most of Ukraine, chose the campaign motto "the power of benefaction".[5] All along the Odessa ring road, uniform billboards appeared listing the Party's good services to the population, from repairing roads to free medical examination for the province's children. Politicians are no longer elected and esteemed because they represent and exemplify an ideology, but because they understand the people's needs and have the means to satisfy them. Ideology has all but lost its importance in Ukrainian political debates. Its place was taken by a discourse of generosity and morality.

Piattoni (2001:193) observed that in real democracies (as opposed to ideal democracies) voters expectations for the politicians they elect are not so much the implementation of a party program that would serve the common good, but policies that improve the voter's own personal lot. For Ukraine, far from being an ideal democracy, this observation certainly holds true. What may set Ukraine apart from her western neighbors is the boldness with which the powerful offer personal gains instead of political visions. The benefactor who offers wholeheartedly to his voters has become the archetype of the politician. One of southern Bessarabia's most successful political patrons, member of the national parliament Anton Kisse, described his attitude to benefaction while commenting on a power struggle between two of his subordinates:

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[5] The Russian original of the slogan was "Sila dobrykh del", which can also be translated as "the *force* of benefaction".

> In this matter my position as a politician and a citizen is very clear: For political power one should fight only with legal means. For this purpose, there are electoral processes regulated by the law. Once official elections are announced, well then one has to fight for the trust of the voter by way of tangible good deeds (konkretnymi dobrymi delami).[6]

Several examples of such "tangible good deeds" will be described in the course of this chapter. The purest and maybe most tangible form is to hand out money and presents to a crowd. A freshly elected deputy to the Oblast parliament, Yuri Dimchoglo, has done so on several occasions during my fieldwork. At a village festival in Chervonoarmeyskoe he used a break in the football game to announce via megaphone he wanted to give a handsome sum of money to the captain of the local football team "for the development of sport".[7] The handing over of the money was followed by a short speech in which Dimchoglo said how deeply he cared about the fate of the village. He announced further gifts; air-conditioning for the village's culture house and broadband internet for the school. Even more publically, at a village celebration in Kotlovina, Dimchoglo appeared on stage with two laptops, one for the culture house and one for the school. He also donated an icon to the local church that he had bought during a recent pilgrimage to Jerusalem. It is very doubtful that this young politician could have made a similarly flattering impression among his voters, had he elaborated on his political ideas there. Nevertheless, not only the material value of the gifts but also the content of speeches, expressing affection and care for the village communities, are crucial in building the image of a patron. One way of demonstrating attention is to publish congratulatory ads on the frontage of local newspapers, and increasingly in social media. Such ads are due several dozen times a year on very diverse occasions such as professional holidays, religious festivals, and anniversaries of historical events. Congratulatory ads typically show members of parliament, mayors, running candidates, and the local representatives of political parties. Usually higher ranking or more influential politicians have bigger ads and longer texts there, in which they express their affection and support for the particular group in question; the inhabitants of Izmail on the city's anniversary day, the soldiers and veterans on the day of the defender of the fatherland, the teachers on teacher's day, and the sailors on sailor's day. Influential politicians might also include in their congratulatory address the "tangible good deeds" they have recently committed for this particular group.

Mobilizing political support through generosity, politicians and their electorate have entered a relationship of patron and client. This relationship shapes a political system commonly called *clientelism*. Clientelism can be defined as „the proffering of material goods in

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[6] Anton Kisse on his homepage July 31, 2014, commenting on a power struggle for the post of mayor in Bolgrad http://antonkisse.com/anton-kisse-prokommentiroval-zhurnalistam-situatsiyu-v-bolgrade/ (16.11.2015)

[7] The gift was announced as 1,000 UAH, approximately 90 Euro at the time.

return for electoral support, where the criterion of distribution that the patron uses is simply: did you (will you) support me?" (Stokes, 2009:649). The ideological parameters of such a system are hard to pin down. Clientelism is occupied with achieving and maintaining political power for those who work in it, and it is judged by what it achieves, not by what it stands for (Scott, 1969:1144). Local politics in Ukraine is a very thinly disguised exchange of resources and political loyalty. In Ukraine rent-seeking structures are a symptom of the state's under-development. They bear witness to underdeveloped legal institutions, a broken welfare state, and a badly constrained civil society. The state's main function is that of a redistributor. At the receiving end of this redistribution individuals, institutions, and regions are heavily dependent on the center (Grama.zki, 2002:256). Politicians, such as Kisse or Dimchoglo, are wealthy entrepreneurs who distribute their wealth and in exchange get elected to lucrative bureaucratic positions. Once they are elected, they continue to distribute their personal fortune (Dimchoglo, when asked who paid for his gifts, insisted he bought them from his private money), but when they hold political offices, patrons can add to their private fortune the state resources over which they have leverage and the income they make from rent seeking activities. The most basic of voter's needs are usually resources and jobs that politicians attempt to provide. Next in line is the need for stability. As the Soviet Union slithered into disintegration, patron-client networks became a crucial source of security and direction for both sides of the relationship (Willerton, 1992:6). So besides piecemeal gifts on village celebrations, patrons offer the image of men who, in the long run, will stand behind their clients.

Because ethnicity is so strongly associated with stability, it has become a powerful political tool. By way of its primordial conceptualization it refers to a long bygone time, when things were still done as they had been done always. The use of ethnicity in politics always comes along with narratives of history and tradition. This is usually exemplified by the use of folklore performances to refer to ethnicity in public gatherings, where political support is mobilized. As Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983:2) observed, the wish to structure at least some parts of social life in our constantly changing, modern world as unchanging and invariant makes the "invention of tradition" so tempting. In festive occasions, in which political support is to be mobilized, the conserving of traditional aspects of culture (invented or not) is a frequently recurring element. In modern local politics in Ukraine, conserving traditional elements of culture is boasted louder and more proudly than innovation.

Image 2 A Bulgarian folklore group performing in front of a World War II memorial in Izmail during city day celebrations, September 2012

Folklore happenings illustrate this phenomenon most vividly. In a large gathering of Bulgarian folklore groups in August 2013, a veteran activist from a Bulgarian ethnic organization in Ukraine proudly announced in his celebratory address that Bulgarians in Ukraine had proven their ability to conserve their language and spirit (dukhovnost'). "It is not for no reason", he said, referring to the picturesque local dialect of Bulgarian "that people in Bulgaria ask me, why I speak like an old granny. It is because we are the ones who conserve our language!" This example suggests that the desire for stability in social structures seems to translate into a desire of stability in cultural traits. Wherever such stability can be found (real or imagined) it becomes a matter of celebration. Ethnicity and an imaginary stability of ethnic features offer themselves as topics for political patrons advertising themselves as the harbingers of stability.

The interface between the process of defining ethnic culture and political clientelism is mediated by ethnic associations. In southern Bessarabia they have become the prime mover of ethnic representation in public. All established ethnic groups, even those encompassing very small shares of the population, have their own association, often even several competing ones. Depending on the group represented, such associations have ties to different centers inside and outside Ukraine. Russian associations have ties to Moscow as well as to Crimea and the Donbas, where Russian Nationalism has been a force in politics since Ukraine's independence. Bulgarian ethnic associations usually have links to organizations in Bulgaria. Gagauz organizations are linked to the Gagauz autonomous area in Moldova but often also to Bulgaria and Turkey.

Associations of smaller minority groups such as Germans, Poles, Jews, and Armenians, typically have connections to organizations in the respective countries. On top of that, many regional ethnic organizations team up with organizations from other regions in Ukraine, where they are also represented. Some form interregional umbrella organizations, based in Kyiv, such as the All Ukrainian Congress of Bulgarians, the All Ukrainian Association of Bulgarians, or the Union of Gagauz in Ukraine. Some ethnic organizations run as political parties in elections, like the Russkiy Blok did in Izmail, but most just use their resources to support individual candidates. Most organizations have their own constitutions in which they specify their purpose. Some organizations have narrower purposes such as language courses or folklore, but many are all-rounders, offering political representation and the fostering of folklore and language training, as well as purely social or leisurely activities.

Maintaining what is perceived as ethnic uniqueness is certainly one function ethnic associations embrace. On the other hand, a frequently highlighted purpose of ethnic associations is also to maintain good relations with other such organizations. When one organization celebrates an anniversary, usually other such organizations, representing other ethnic groups, are invited to the festivities. The speeches of representatives of other ethnic associations in such occasions often enthusiastically celebrate harmonious interethnic relations.

On rare occasions, however, ethnic associations might enter into conflict with the state. Mostly, the reason for such conflicts is not the state's attitude towards ethnic minorities and their languages, but disputes over resources and property.[8] In Izmail, the Bulgarian Cyril and Methodius Society was in a row with city authorities over a building they had renovated and used for 20 years before the municipality wanted to sell it.[9] In a similar incident in March 2013, Ukrainian ethnic association Prosvita and Greek organization Ellada, teamed up to publically lament the municipality of Izmail's handling of the property the two organizations shared for their office spaces. The old house lacked basic sanitation and a city official used parts of the space rented by these organizations as a private apartment. In a bitter letter to the Izmail weekly *Kur'er Nedeli*, the head of Ellada, Tatyana Mitaki, expressed the suspicion that "someone had decided to drive the Greeks out",[10] thereby equating her organization's difficulties with oppression of the Greeks as an ethnic group. These conflicts in Izmail reflected a similar incident in the provincial capital Odessa. In 2008 the city attempted to drive the regional cultural center of Bulgarians out of a building it had been using for many years. A representative of the association hinted that the building, a historic cinema in the heart of the old town, had gained in

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[8] For a detailed study of how disputes over property can lead to reinforced ethnic distinctions in a post-socialist context see Kaneff's (1998) study of a village in northern Bulgaria.

[9] Personal communication from the organization's chair, Vladimir Petrov, April 21, 2013.

[10] *Kur'er Nedeli*, March 8, 2013.

value after it had been renovated with financial support from Bulgaria. Therefore "business structures" (allegedly businesses connected to the city officials in charge) were interested in the property. The organization, with support from mayors of Bulgarian villages in southern Bessarabia, wrote to the Parliamentary Commission for Human Rights and Protection of Minorities, stating that the incident had harmed interethnic relations in Ukraine, and Ukraine's reputation in Europe.[11] So property related conflicts between the state and ethnic associations are very likely to be framed as ethnic conflicts, reinforcing thereby the claim of ethnic associations to be the representatives of entire ethnic communities. Yet, mostly ethnic associations and the state work together closely, and in public events representatives of the state and of ethnic associations regularly exchange pleasantries.

5.2. The award as a currency of clientelistic exchange

Patronage and clientelism are the same type of relation, whereby the former is seen from the angle of the patron and the latter from the angle of the client. The relation is a vertical one whereby the patron has power, opportunities, leverage, and wealth which allow him to favor a client. For this favor he expects a reward (Mühlmann and Llaryora, 1968:1-4). Clientelism in its purest form can be observed in a wide range of ceremonies that involve public staging of the patron-client relationship. Such ceremonies can be celebratory or serious, they can involve men, women, or children, they can be political in nature or not, they can be on the scale of a classroom or a stadium, but what connects them all is the exchange of awards, arguably one of the currencies of clientelistic exchange. Showing off one's riches is not enough to attract clients. Because each client also propagates his patron among potential new clients (ibid.:5), it is equally important for patrons to show their prospective clients not only that they already have attracted many clients, but also that these are reputable people. The award is one way of doing so. The analysis of awarding ceremony that is to follow does not aim to be an exhaustive analysis of clientelism in Ukraine or even just in southern Bessarabia. Rather it is meant to lay the foundation for the subsequent discussion of strategies in local politics and why the public display of ethnicity matters in a political structure in which symbolic exchange, such as the exchange of awards, needs publicity, whereas resources exchanged for political support is preferably done in the dark. Looking at awarding ceremonies is therefore a bit like looking at the tip of a clientelistic iceberg.

It can hardly be overlooked by an outsider who visits a number of offices and waiting rooms in post-Soviet countries; the walls are often covered in awards and diplomas for all kinds

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[11] *Pridunayskie Vesti*, February 7, 2008.

of achievements. If one discusses awards with the person they were granted to, they may well reveal that their walls can impossibly host all of them and that they have stacks more in their drawers. Often just the most recent and valued awards are actually displayed on walls. Awards and diplomas have been described from the point of view of official display of gratitude and social recognition (Habeck, 2011:55,62). How do functionaries and ordinary people in post-Soviet countries earn so much social recognition? Where do all these awards come from?

Awards mostly come in the form of an elaborately decorated diploma (gramota). Sometimes they take the form of medals, which has the benefit that they can not only be sported on one's wall but also on one's chest in public events. A tradition of awarding loyal clients and granting titles to compliant functionaries, scientists, and state-sanctioned artists, dates back far into the Soviet period. According to Yurchak (2006:94) diplomas and awards in Soviet times were actually cherished as signs of recognition for an achievement. Diplomas were handed out more restrictively then and they were contrasted with harsh public criticism for those who did not live up to expectations. Therefore, the Soviet version of the awarding ceremony also involved shaming those who have fulfilled their tasks inefficiently or showed little commitment.[12] In the Soviet ceremony the award was an instrument to stimulate production by honoring outstanding achievements and measure it against mediocre performance. Today, public shaming in an awarding ceremony would be unthinkable. Even folklore collectives that earn themselves the silent scorn of the audience are politely applauded. They may not receive many prices in competitions, but they are just as likely to be given a *gramota*, as anyone else. Although I argue that awarding during ceremonies is a deeply political act, political dispute has no place in them. In private, people are often very explicit about the shortcomings of local politics. But such criticism is hardly ever voiced during a ceremony. That the award in post-Soviet society is assigned without the counterweight of public criticism indicates that it has adopted a new function in the post-Soviet clientelistc state. Today, it seems, awards are no longer a stimulus to excel, but a symbol of mutual trust between patron and client, the public performance of a reciprocal relationship.

Awards today, as in Soviet times, are issued by a person or an institution that claims the authority to judge the value of someone's achievements. The award links the awarding and the awarded. Not unlike a contract, it contains the names of both parties. This procedure's impact is greatest if conducted publically. Awarding institutions can be state related and base their

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[12] One example is a series of reports about a big folklore group gathering in an Izmail theatre in the newspaper *Pridunayskaya Pravda* November 18-20, 1953. In the event, 150 folklore collectives from the region were honored with an award. But one group from Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy was publically criticized because its singers knew their lyrics so poorly. The management of the according culture house was publically told to improve their work. Another collective from Sarata was also publically frowned upon. There, the management of the culture house was just not committed enough, the newspaper commented. Public awarding and shaming was also observed by Caroline Humphrey (1998:376) in kolkhoz gatherings in Siberia.

authority on their official status. Very often however, awards are handed out by institutions not directly linked to the state, such as ethnic associations. In those cases, their authority to judge whose achievements to distinguish, stems from their role as representatives of a group they themselves help to shape and limit.

There are at least two different types of such public exchanges. In the simpler of the two varieties, the patron awards his clients for their work, support, loyalty or some other achievement. In the more complex type, awards are exchanged from the patron to the client for their support, loyalty etc. and are subsequently answered by a client who awards the patron for sponsorship, political patronage, or simply his or her presence in the ceremony. In some cases patrons are awarded in absentia, by their clients. In such a case it is often patrons of a lower level who attend the ceremony and are asked by their clients to pass on the award to their own patron. So if given from a patron to a client, an award means a sign of attention and gratefulness for loyalty and support. If it is given from a client to a patron, an award is a sign of gratefulness for sponsorship and patronage and therefore also a sign of loyalty.

Since awards seem to be a currency in clientelistic exchange, they are handed out in especially rich quantities at occasions where two levels of the exchange pattern get together in one room. One such occasion was the annual meeting of folklore groups of Izmail rayon in the culture house of the village Loshchinovka, in August 2013. There, rayon authorities had an opportunity to publically demonstrate their patronage for municipal functionaries and culture house staff. Most of the 23 villages in the rayon were represented with at least one folklore group and a delegation of the municipal council. The large hall of the Loshchinovka culture house was jam-packed, mostly with people belonging to one of these delegations. Before the performances could begin, there was an official ceremony. This official part included celebratory speeches and the distribution of awards. It was formally opened and closed by the event's host. Both at the ceremony's opening and closing the entire audience sprang to their feet to sing the Ukrainian anthem. A representative of the rayon authorities then gave a speech pointing out the local administration's successes during the last year. He praised the initiatives taken by his own superiors in the Odessa Oblast government. He said that initiatives by the Odessa governor were backed by the president in Kyiv. These initiatives had led to better education, improved infrastructure and medical care. He also explained that the rich harvest anticipated in the weeks to come would not have been possible without the support of the government. The rayon authority's representative then thanked all the people present and especially the veterans of war and labor for their achievements. He praised the region for its harmonious multi-ethnic relations and tolerance.

Then the handing out of awards, the centerpiece of the formal part of the ceremony, started. It was conducted by the deputy head of the rayon administration. She called out each of

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the awarded with their name, function, and municipality they work for. Most of those awarded were mayors, heads of municipal culture departments, directors of culture houses, or leaders of folklore groups. One award was for a "private entrepreneur" for the sponsorship of his village's folklore group. Each of the awarded rushed to the stage when their names were announced, accompanied by a fanfare from a tape. The award was then handed over quickly and the awarded was cheered, especially, of course, by his or her delegation.

There were more than 40 awards handed out. That makes an average of almost two awards per village delegation. But three awards were different from all the others. They were announced not by the deputy head of the rayon administration, but by the rayon officer for culture. He said that these awards bore the signature of the governor in Odessa and were for special achievements.

This was an example for a ceremony when patrons served their clients with recognition for their work, and thereby ensured that they will continue their support for the kinds of activities that were honored with an award. This happened both very publically and very formally, surrounded by flags, national dress, fanfare, and framed by ceremonial opening and closing including the singing of the national anthem. Hierarchy was a carefully stressed aspect of the ceremony, referring specifically to the governor and through the governor to the president.

Another event, in which awards were used in a similar way, was the "Day of Gagauz Culture" that in 2013 took place in Odessa's Spartak Stadium on a Saturday in September. The order of business was opposite to the folklore festival in Loshchinovka, starting with the informal part of singing and dancing and only later, when all the guests of honor had arrived, the formal part began. The informal part contained the performances of culture house collectives from seven Gagauz villages in southern Bessarabia. After each performance the mayor of the respective village was called to the stage with a fanfare from tape. The mayors then found some words to praise their villages. All of them expressed their gratitude to the chief organizer of the event, member of the Oblast parliament Yuri Dimchoglo. The mayor of the village Krasnoe also praised Dimchoglo for his visit and his promise of help to the village, after it had suffered from a disastrous thunderstorm earlier that summer.

During the two hour informal part, the ranks of the stadium filled up gradually, and so did the VIP lounge. A delegation from Bulgaria arrived and later a delegation from the Autonomous Gagauz Unit in Moldova. Also, a deputy of Oblast governor Matviychuk arrived there, and finally Member of Parliament Anton Kisse, the political patron of the event's organizer Dimchoglo. The appearance of the latter caused quite a stir in the stadium. Dimchoglo climbed down from the VIP lounge to greet Kisse on the field, for everybody to see. Then he led him up, arm in arm, to his place of honor in the VIP lounge.
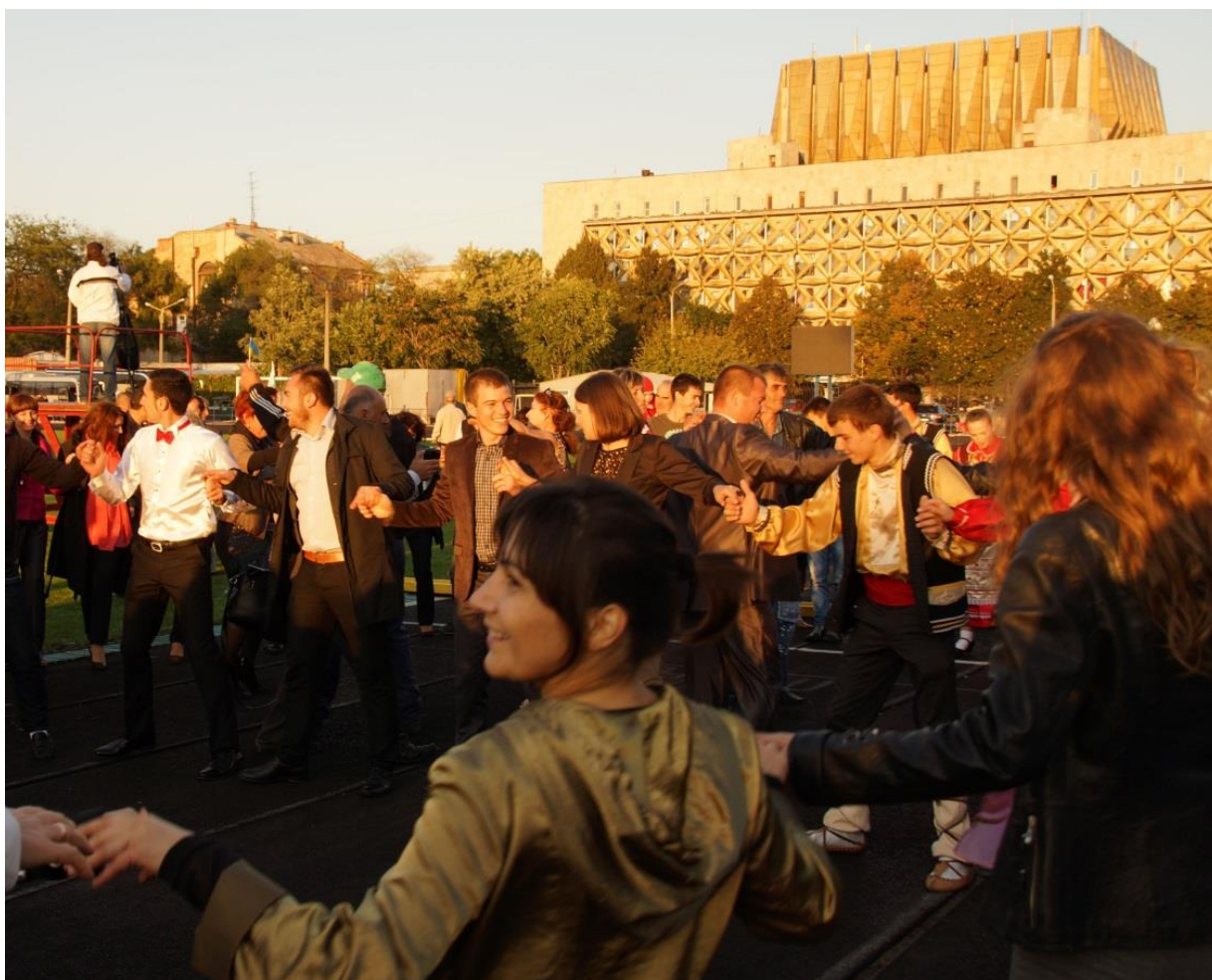
Image 3 Gagauz from southern Bessarabia celebrating the Day of Gagauz Culture in Odessa, September 2013

The transition from the informal part to the formal part of ceremony was marked very clearly. The team of hosts that had led through the singing and dancing was exchanged. The children's group from the delegation of the village of Kotlovina formed a crescent around the stairs leading to the stage to provide an honorary cordon for those who would be called on stage to receive an award. The new hosts declared that now the ceremonial part of the event was open. The Ukrainian anthem was played from a tape and everybody got up from their seats. Dimchoglo in his speech thanked the Oblast government for their support, without which the event would not have been possible. He also promised that from now on, the festival was to take place annually. The deputy governor of Odessa Oblast, who spoke next, praised the Gagauz people for their ability to work hard and party hard. He then had a number of awards to hand out in the name of the Ministry of Education. The laudations were read by the team of hosts.

Unlike the rest of the ceremony they did not speak Russian, but Ukrainian to mark the official character of this part and to emphasize these awards were issued in Kyiv. Most of the awarded were heads of folklore collectives and educators.

The representatives of the ATU Gagauziya in Moldova handed out awards. These bore the signature of the Bashkan, the political head of the ATU Gagauziya. They were handed out by one of the Bashkan's deputies. Dimchoglo was among the awarded. The deputy governor also was awarded and on top of that given a barrel of wine from Gagauziya. Besides this official delegation from Gagauziya, an ethnic association based there, handed out their own awards. The deputy governor of Odessa again was awarded and again the gesture was accompanied by a gift of wine. Next spoke Aleksey Goncharenko, a young member of the Oblast parliament and the son of Odessa's mayor. He praised his colleague Dimchoglo, cordially calling him by his first name. The appearance of Member of Parliament Anton Kisse on stage marked the apex of the series of official figures who took part in the ceremony. Kisse (an ethnic Bulgarian) spent a lot of time celebrating the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic groups in Bessarabia. As an illustration, he called a Gagauz law professor to the stage, whom he credited with having helped founding one of the now influential Bulgarian associations. He then also praised his young colleague Dimchoglo for his youth and activism. Dimchoglo responded to this praise by honoring Kisse with an award. After that, several representatives of established Gagauz ethnic associations, based in Odessa and Kyiv, had their own turn in speaking and awarding. Among the awarded were educators and artists but also representatives of political structures in Ukraine, in the ATU Gagauziya, and in Bulgaria. Again, the laudations were read out in Ukrainian in order to mark their official character.

Both ceremonies described above, contained the exchange of awards between patrons and clients. Why is it that this exchange of a commodity that itself bears very little material value is so central to public ceremonies? This question is more significant even if one thinks of the huge material value of other commodities that are also exchanged between patrons and clients, albeit less publically. The reason why the material side of the exchange happens clandestinely (and therefore out of the ethnographer's sight) is of course that it is much harder to legitimize the exchange of valuable resources for political support. Its sufficient to just imagine how outrageous it would be if a patron on a festival stage would hand out jobs and licenses instead of awards. Handing out licenses, or positions in the state bureaucracy to only those clients who politically support the patron, is often an inefficient allocation of resources and therefore ethically doubtful. This side of the exchange cannot be paraded. The legitimacy of exchanging awards, however, is hardly questionable. Instead of an exchange of material goods it is an exchange of symbols that indicate mutual trust. It is essential to patrons to demonstrate trust towards others, a demonstration that strengthens their own trustworthiness. Patrons and

clients are, after all, not necessarily similar to each other in terms of ideology or ethnicity. All the more they need to stress their *personal* loyalty to each other. The award is a powerful symbol of mutual appreciation. The ceremonial reinforcement of trust is usually framed in speeches in which patrons have a chance to recommend themselves to more clients. Some of these achievements, such as the visit of Yuri Dimchoglo in the disaster-affected village of Krasnoe, explicitly recommend one person as a caring and esteemed patron.

5.3. The roots of post-soviet clientelism in ethnic and non-ethnic networks

Clientelism was not new to this part of the world when the Soviet Union collapsed. The phenomenon has been described for pre-modern societies by historians (see for example Kettering, 1988). In feudal Russia clientelism was a driving force in political alliance building (see for example Hosking, 2000, and Shlapentokh, 1996 for a comparision between feudal and post-soviet Russia). During the Soviet Union as well, many a party career depended on the goodwill of a political mentor (for a thourough study see Fairbanks, 1978, 1999). In a political system as secretive and opaque as the one-party Soviet state, obscure reciprocal alliances between politicians and bureaucrats thrived (Willerton, 1992:9). But during the Soviet Union, political power had to be justified, at least seemingly, with achievements in institutions like the Party, the military, or a state enterprise. Clientelism could exist only clandestinely. Although most party careers depended on the secret patronage of higher officials, in public the powerful needed to advertise their competence (by achieving planned outcomes) not their *personal* generosity. Now, boasting gifts and favors as publically as possible is not only desirable, but necessary to become, and to remain a patron. The change from a clandestine form of clientelism towards a more attention-seeking form has started during the years of the Perestroika. Clientelism has been described both as cause for and effect of the collapse of the Soviet system. I agree with Stefes (2006:1) that clientelism was not a mere side effect of the USSR's break-up, but rather its main cause. Also the unwritten rules, by which clientelism works, have hindered the growth of institutions, vital for the emergence of democracy and market economy. Rule of law, allocation of resources, entitlement of rights and duties, all came to be affected by clientelistic exchange. The roots of clientelism in the later years of the Soviet Union lay in what Kornai (1980) described as an "economy of shortage". Unlike in the market economy where production of resources and services is restrained by demand, the Soviet command economy was usually restrained by scarce supply of resources. Whereas in the capitalist economy, miscalculating demand would force an enterprise out of business, in the planned economy not producing sufficient output would still leave an enterprise in the market, especially if its

managers had the necessary connections to the political leadership. So in command economy miscalculations in the production process did not lead to bankruptcy but rather to an allocation of more resources, provided managers and political planners had a good personal relationship (Kornai, 1980:27). The way of getting access to scarce goods and services through personal relations, came to be known as "blat" in Russian. To do things *po blatu* (using one's connections) often was the only way to get things done at all. And since everybody did it, those who missed out just punished themselves (Raleigh, 2012:228). Alena Ledeneva (1998:3) described blat' as "the 'reverse side' of an overcontrolling center, a reaction of ordinary people to the structural constraints of the socialist system of distribution – a series of practices which enabled the Soviet system to function and made it tolerable, but also subverted it."

In the "economy of shortage", the scarcest resource was always the limiting factor to the volume of output, and therefore it depended on this resource whether or not the planned output goal could be reached. To obtain such resources at the time needed, personal *blat* relations between managers and bureaucrats were crucial. If one crucial resource could not be obtained in time it was substituted with another to still fulfill the plan. So for example if qualified workers were not at hand, they were substituted with less qualified workers, or if a durable material was not available it was substitute with one of lower quality. Kornai (1980:37) called this mode of production "do-it-your-self at an industrial scale". This system produced not what was in the plan, but what could actually be produced with the available resources. It eventually led to an even less reliable supply of processed goods. A vicious circle of deficit was the outcome. Thus barter economy, commodity for commodity, emerged as the most reliable way to obtain the resources needed at the time needed.

This puzzling, semi-legal market chimes with Clifford Geertz's (1978:29) observation about the bazaar economy, where information is the name of the game. In the bazaar, spatial localization and ethnic specialization help reduce the effort of information gathering. Not unlike in a bazaar, finding adequate information was the key to survival in the unforgiving post-Soviet barter economy. Some people at the source of information or in positions to control the flow of resources began to use the situation for their private gain and to deliver scarce resources and information first to those who could pay more (Eisenstadt and Roniger, 1984:158). These private profits could then be reinvested in building patron client relations. In Ukraine, the Kuchma government (1994 – 2005) firmly established such patron-client relations between the President and Oligarchs. Their political loyalty was rewarded by privileged access to the booty of privatization. Political disloyalty was punished by a closer look from the prosecutor, who was an instrument of power rather than the law (Schneider-Deters, 2008:262-264) Political loyalty for people, who did business "po-blatu", served as protection from the law, as a "roof" (krysha) that protected one's operations from state interference. State officials could provide such a

protection for a share in the business. The more important the operation was, the higher the *krysha* had to be (Varese, 2001:59). When, as a consequence of such schemes, the Soviet Union collapsed, barter trade became the dominant form of economy amidst heavy inflation and an insecure financial sector (Verdery, 1996:207). In this new situation, where only possession of valued goods, information, and contacts (not membership in a party or visionary political leadership) could attract clients, it became useful to show off one's own riches and the riches of one's clients as publically as possible.

Mutual trust was a crucial precondition to do things "po blatu". If one obtained information on which to base a risky deal, one needed to be sure the informant was trustworthy. Also, one could pass on valuable information only to trusted allies. Such secure connections were often built on family ties, among old friends, neighbors, party colleagues, or military comrades. In many areas of the former socialist bloc, such ties most likely occurred within one ethnic group. Catherine Verdery has demonstrated this mechanism in Transylvania (1993b:176), Webb showed a similar tendency for the north Caucasus (1994:252). In Ukraine however, where interethnic ties had been tight and most people were thoroughly sovietized, ethnicity mattered much less than in these areas (Wanner, 1998:51).

If in other regions of the socialist bloc common ethnicity was often a ground for preferred choice in trusted relationships, there should be a good explanation why in Ukraine this phenomenon was less marked. One possible explanation comes from the idea that ethnicity in many settings can be used as an information-shortcut. In most Ukrainian settings ethnicity provides a poor information-shortcut. An information-shortcut allows clients to better predict how a potential patron might act in the future. Whereas costless information about an individual's ethnic identity is readily available in most settings (appearance, speech, name, dress, etc.), information about other, non-ethnic characteristics (class, profession, income, etc.) are much harder to come by (Chandra, 2004:33). But in post-Soviet Ukraine, including southern Bessarabia, ethnicity provides a poor information-shortcut. Here appearance and dress hardly purvey information about ethnic backgrounds. Speech may provide a clue, but most people can conceal their native language at will by speaking standard Russian, thereby increasing the cost of inquiry. Family names are commonly believed to carry information about a person's

ethnicity, but are in fact hopelessly inconclusive indicators.[13] To learn about a person's ethnic identity in southern Bessarabia is by no means costless, except if people parade their ethnicity in public events. Therefore, in southern Bessarabia, and other areas of the former Soviet Union where people's ethnicity is not easily recognizable, another type of information-shortcut has evolved. There, not a person's appearance or speech are decisive factors, but a person's behavior. It was important that through one's behavior a person was recognizable as "one's own kind" (*svoy*) or "one of us" (*nash*) (Wanner, 1998:56). Being "svoy" means that one would very likely not cause problems and act in a predictable, comprehensible way (Yurchak, 2006:109). Whereas bribery is strictly illegal and can occur without a lasting trusted relationship, doing things "po-blatu" usually happens between people, who see each other as "svoy" and therefore count on each other in the long run (Ledeneva, 1998:39-40). Being "svoy" and behaving like "svoy" helped both patrons and clients to shape realistic expectations how their counterpart would act. Referring constantly to ethnicity and different ethnic characters became one way of performing "svoy" in Bessarabia. Another way is to proudly refer to ethnic diversity and interethnic tolerance in the region. On the other hand, stirring up ethnic conflict would not be seen as the behavior one expects from "one's own kind". This would cause trouble for one group of potential clients and is therefore less likely to mobilize a big and well-connected group of clients. A patron, who is "svoy", cherishes ethnic particularities and never excludes potential clients for exhibiting them. He showers his benefactions as broadly as possible. Yet, although ethnic boundaries do not restrict the groups from which clients can choose their patrons and patrons recruit their clients, they still serve to structure the exchange of favors and political support between clients and patrons.

5.4.   *Ethnicity in local politics: some strategies*

After voters have given away their vote to a particular patron, they need to maximize the value of their electoral investment by pressuring the patron to deliver on his pre-electoral promises

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[13] Family names considered very typical for one ethnic group are often just as likely to be found among members of other ethnic groups. Take the example of a Gagauz informant whose maiden name is the allegedly typical Bulgarian Kurteva and who obtained her equally typical Gagauz family name Khadshioglo by marrying a Bulgarian. The same is true for suffixes considered typical among one group, such as –oglo indicating a Gagauz name, -ov, -ev, –in indicating a Russian name, or –ko indicating a Ukrainian name. Many Russians have family names ending on –ko, as many Bulgarian names end on –ev or –ov etc. Not even family names that contain an ethnonym are reliable indicators of ethnicity. (In Bessarabia perfectly common family names are Bulgar, Gagauz, Moldovan, Moldavskiy, Arnaut, Russu, Grek, Unguryan, Moskalenko, Tsiganenko, Kozak, and others). One ethnically Ukrainian informant was called Moldavskiy, the Kyiv-based head of one Ukraine-wide Gagauz ethnic association is called Dora Arnaut (i.e. Albanian), the association of Gagauz writers is headed by a man called Stepan Bulgar, etc. Even the heavily essentializing Valentin Moshkov, in his ethnography on the Gagauz in Benderi Uezd of 1901 had to admit that family names are an inconclusive key to a person's ethnicity (1901b:5).

and by making sure that a share of the patron's favors reaches them *personally*. The patron, on the other hand, faces the problem that he can serve his clients with political favors, but then does not know whether or not they will really support him at the ballot box. Also, the patron is interested in recruiting as many clients as possible, while disseminating as little of his limited resources as possible (Chandra, 2004:54-56). Both these problems can be solved by forming groups with internal hierarchies and by sharpening group boundaries. In the following section, I will argue that ethnic groups are a category that can help solve these structural problems of clientelism.

Whether or not, and how ethnic boundaries can be beneficially used in clientelistic politics, depends on ethnic group consciousness, interethnic relations, and the ethnic composition of the region. Let me illustrate this point by referring to the example of the Ukrainian parliamentary election campaign in autumn 2012, in which two different patrons employed two different strategies to win a parliamentary mandate: in electoral district 143, represented by Yuri Kruk since 1994,[14] there are no clear ethnic majorities. The district includes the city of Izmail, where Russians are the biggest group (43%) closely followed by Ukrainians (38%). In the rural areas of this electoral district Moldovans, Bulgarians, and Ukrainians each make up roughly a fourth of the population, while Russians and other groups comprise the last fourth.[15] In such a setting it is hard to play on the ethnic identity of voters. Yuri Kruk, the incumbent candidate, neither during election campaign nor on his official website[16] revealed his own ethnic identity. He was very visible in the region in the weeks running up to the election. He served numerous patron-client networks with real or promised resources during September and October 2012. Most visibly he inaugurated a freshly repaved road in Izmail during city-day celebrations, he promised better perspectives to the workers of Izmail's Danube river port, he had playground facilities repainted all over Izmail and put a sign with his name on each, he sponsored the renovation of several churches in the area, for which he was granted a high religious award just days before the election.[17] None of this prevented Kruk from using ethnic networks additionally. He, for instance, also sponsored a trip of a group of local Bulgarians to a village in eastern Ukraine, to which they trace historic kin ties.[18]

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[14] Kruk represented a different electoral district for a five year period. In 2014, after the Maidan upheaval has swept the Party of the Regions out of power, Kruk lost his seat in parliament.

[15] Electoral district 143 comprises the city of Izmail, Rayons Izmail and Reni, and parts of Bolgrad Rayon. All of these Rayons are part of Odessa Oblast'. For ethnic census Data of these areas see the Ukrainian census of 2001 http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/rus/results/general/nationality/odesa/ (16.11.2015)

[16] http://kruk.org.ua/obo-mne/ (16.11.2015)

[17] *Kur'er Nedeli*, October 20, 2012, p. 1

[18] http://kruk.org.ua/Yuri-kruk-pomog-bolgaram-bessarabii-vstretitsya-s-zemlyakami-v-zaporozhskoj-oblasti/ (16.11.2015)

A strategy that was much more visibly ethnic in character than Yuri Kruk's, worked out in neighboring electoral district 142, where Anton Kisse won the parliamentary seat in 2012. Because in this electoral district Bulgarians are the majority,[19] Kisse could wholeheartedly use his Bulgarian ethnicity during the election campaign. Not only does Kisse often mention his ethnic belonging, he is also the prominent head of the Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine. He had already proven his firm Bulgarian identity by authoring the widely distributed book *The Renaissance of the Ukrainian Bulgarians.*[20] One week before the election, hundreds of people came to Bolgrad, the main Bulgarian town in the region, to see Mr. Kisse inaugurate a monument, the construction of which he had organized and sponsored. The monument stands in memory of volunteer Bulgarian militias (opolchentsy) who supported the Russian army in the Russo-Turkish war 1877-78, the war that led to Bulgarian independence from the Ottoman Empire. The spectators who had gathered around the monument on the square in front of Bolgrad's church could listen for several hours to countless speakers from local politics, from the Orthodox Church, from the military, from the provincial capital, from neighboring Moldova, and not least from Bulgaria. They all praised the Bulgarian freedom fighters, in whose memory the monument was erected, and the patriotic spirit of the candidate, Anton Kisse. The week after, he was elected with a

Image 4 Inauguration of a monument commemorating Bulgarian fighters in the Russo-Turkish War 1877-78, Bolgrad, October 2012

[19] Electoral district 142 comprises Rayons Artsis, Tarutino, Sarata, parts of Bolgrad Rayon, and parts of Kiliya Rayon. For ethnic census Data of these areas see the Ukrainian census of 2001 http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/rus/results/general/nationality/odesa/ (16.11.2015)

[20] Kisse, A. I. (2006). *Vozrozhdenie bolgar Ukrainy*. Odessa: Optimum

comfortable margin, even against an incumbent candidate from the powerful Party of the Regions.

The municipal council of the city of Izmail has yet another strategy to address ethnic diversity. Careful not to side with one ethnic group, city officials have for many years put "interethnic harmonization" in the focus of their activities. In a special program dedicated to the city's "more than 80 ethnic groups" the municipal administration offered financial and administrative resources for a number of ethnic groups. These include the Poles, Greeks, Ukrainians, Jews, Russians, Germans, and Bulgarians, who each have ethnic associations based in Izmail. Each of these associations organizes their "day of national culture" over the course of the year. It is an explicit goal of the program to "preserve the ethnic uniqueness" of these groups and to "ensure their harmonic relations by way of supporting their officially registered ethno-cultural societies."[21]

The diversity of political strategies in dealing with ethnicity illustrates that ethnicity is an important group denominator, even in a region where there are many ethnic groups to satisfy. Supporting one group does not automatically mean to be renounced by other groups. Quite the opposite may be true. The more visibly a patron supports one ethnic group, the more attractive he becomes for other groups as a potential patron. Anton Kisse also supports a Gagauz association, who form the second largest ethnic group in his electoral district. One of his more visible protégés is Yuri Dimchoglo, the organizer of the "Day of Gagauz culture" and head of a Gagauz ethnic association. So serving several ethnic groups can be a useful strategy for patrons, in such an ethnically diverse setting as southern Bessarabia. But none of these political strategies would work if ethnic boundaries dissolved.

In contrast to Soviet times, no political figure in independent Ukraine claimed that ethnicity was not important, or that it will one day go away, or that ethnic boundaries are not congruent with significant cultural boundaries. Even after ethnicity as an official, passport-registered category was dropped (in Ukraine in 1995) a new, more fluid conception of being Ukrainian based on civil society did not emerge (Kappeler, 2000:274). Soviet scholarly paradigms on ethnicity remained influential (Sokolovskiy, 2012:36). Some Ukrainian politicians recently have even expressed their nostalgia for the "fifth line" in the Soviet passport, the line that specified ethnicity. In 2009, Vladimir Litvin, then the speaker of the Ukrainian Parliament, was cited saying "I want the fifth line to be reintroduced. We need it, so we know who our forefathers were. Why would anyone be ashamed of that?"[22] The far-right Svoboda Party

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[21] The 2015 budget for the "Program of harmonization of interethnic relations on the territory of Izmail and support of the ethno-cultural societies" was granted by the city council with decision Nr. 4871-VI on January 16, 2015, as published on the municipal council's homepage http://www.izmail-rada.gov.ua/2010-05-05-12-39-15 (16.11.2015)

[22] *Ukrainskaya Pravda* April 24, 2009 http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2009/04/24/4482170/ (16.11.2015)

demands the reintroduction of a person's ethnicity in identity documents high up in their party program.[23]

One reason for such nostalgic recollection of unambiguous prescription may be the relationship between ethnic groups and the clientelistic state with its need to cater to clearly identifiable groups. Popular imagination of ethnic groups and their boundaries seems to rely on a metaphor in which the state, as something tangible and perceptible, stands for the more abstract concept of ethnicity. States, particularly in the former USSR, carry the name of the ethnic majority group, often called the "titular" group. They comprise the territory of- and provide the political guidance for the titular ethnic group. Also, they are seen as acting subjects. They arrange treaties with other states, they engage in trade and warfare. Similarly, ethnic groups are often portrayed as clearly bounded and steerable entities. They come into contact with other ethnic groups, subjugate them or assimilate to them, move from one place to another, take on new lifestyles, faiths, and languages, fight for their independence and, ultimately, establish states of their own. Using the state as a metaphor for the ethnic group helps imagining the ethnic group as clear-cut. The state after all is bounded by a clearly demarcated state border. State borders are a very common experience, especially in places like southern Bessarabia, where people live in its proximity. State borders are guarded and present a perceptible obstacle. This feature often seems to be taken as self-evident for ethnic boundaries too. They somehow must present an obstacle. They cannot just be trespassed without justification.

5.5. Political representation and the urge to choose a clear-cut ethnic identity

People do not fail to see the contradiction between the conceptualization of ethnic boundaries as perfectly unambiguous facts of life and the frequent experience of their fuzziness and permeability. The urge to keep one's ethnic identity clearly defined, and ultimately the ethnic group sharply bounded, does not stem from some kind of enthusiasm for exclusive ethnic identities. It is rather caused by a lack of imaginable alternatives. During all the years of independence, Ukraine has never developed a concept of a multiethnic state that goes beyond the mere tolerance of ethnic minorities. The idea that these ethnic minorities might mix with the majority of Ukrainians, and thereby change what it means to be Ukrainian, seems to be undesirable to both the minorities and the majority group. Although the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic groups is often hailed, their intermixing and thereby the gradual leveling of ethnic differences, is seen as a loss, a threat even, to Ukraine's future. This fear resonates well

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[23] See item 7 in Svoboda's party program http://www.svoboda.org.ua/pro_partiyu/prohrama/ (16.11.2015)

with Yulian Bromley's ideas about organism-like ethnos, with an agency of its own (Bromley, 1983:36). A state disappears when its borders dissolve. Likewise an ethnic group without a clear boundary ceases to exist (ibid.:49). The idea, that features of one particular ethnic group together with the features of other ethnic groups would form something new, so far seems to be unacceptable. Many ethnic groups hold on to a narrative of such a merger between two or several groups in their theory of origin (the Dacians and Romans into Romanians, the Thracians, Slavs, and Bulgars into the Bulgarians). That is, such mixing, in the dominant post-Soviet perspective, occurs before an ethnic group takes on its present identity, and it means irretrievable loss of the identities prior to the mixing. So ethnic intermixing is seen as something that belongs into a mythical past but that becomes a threat once ethnic groups have formed their present identities. The identities offered by the Ukrainian state are either a Ukrainian ethnic identity or a civil Ukrainian identity, combined with an ethnic identity of one of the many ethnic minorities. The basic contradiction in which Ukrainian ethnicity policy is stuck is that on the one hand it still uses Soviet imaginations of ethnicity (that even back then stood in stark contrast to the social reality), on the other hand it lacks a prospect that promises to resolve current contradictions in the future. There is no vision for a future community without current ethnic distinctions, nothing comparable to the once anticipated "Soviet People" that would one day emerge from currently existing ethnic groups, when the country will have reached its aspired final level of development.

I believe there are two political mechanisms that help explain the persistence of established ethnic categories. The first of these mechanisms is caused by political elites who base their power on ethnic categories (as many do increasingly since the break-up of the Soviet Union). If the "people" is sovereign and entitled to delegate political power, it needs to be limited in some way. Since the French Revolution this once cosmopolitan community, within which *fraternité* was the basis for political consent, was increasingly defined as an ethno-national community (Rothschild, 1981:11-12). The elites who draw their power from representing such communities cannot have a meltdown of its boundaries. Would this category disappear, or worse even, merge with the category of their political rivals, they would have to find yet another way to justify their power (as if the recent break-away of the Marxist-Leninist ideology had not been trouble enough). Therefore there needs to be a mechanism to discipline those who dissolve the border between ethnic groups. Barth observed that one such way was reprimanding people of unclear ethnic identity:

> ...Just as both sexes ridicule the male who is feminine, and all classes punish the proletarian who puts on airs, so also can members of all ethnic groups in a poly-ethnic society act to maintain dichotomies and differences (1969:18).

In post-soviet Ukraine, such disciplinary measures are reported regularly. A notorious example is the story about a member of an Oblast parliament, Iryna Farion, visiting a kindergarten in L'viv in 2010. The parliamentarian of the far right Svoboda Party was filmed instructing toddlers how to properly call each other in order to avoid unpatriotic (i.e. Russian) nicknames. In one scene, Farion tells the children never to use the name Masha (the Russian nickname for Mariya). If anyone wanted to be called Masha (instead of Marychka, the Ukrainian equivalent) they should "go where those Mashas live."[24] A video of the incident was aired on a popular program of Russia's state owned first channel and therefore reached millions of viewers throughout the former Soviet Union and went viral on the internet. It was widely scandalized and some of my informants presented it as an example, why they despised Ukrainian nationalists. The episode was seen as an epitomization of what one woman expressed as her feeling that people in western Ukraine (where Iryna Farion is based) seemed to believe everybody not quite as Ukrainian owed them something. When asked about ethnic conflict, some informants blamed this attitude, strongly associated with western Ukraine, for many of the country's faults. In some instances nationalist attitude was contrasted to the harmonic interethnic relations in southern Bessarabia. Indeed, the situation there offers very different political preconditions. Local politicians, representing a multiethnic electorate, have no business telling people with which ethnic group or language to identify. It would clearly hurt their political standing. Nevertheless, local politicians do actively help to reinforce ethnic boundaries. This, however, happens not because they base their power on a particular ethnic group they serve, but because they need to structure the large group of their clients into well-arranged subgroups for efficiency's sake.

This brings us to the second political mechanism, the more significant one for ethnic boundary maintenance in southern Bessarabia. This mechanism affects patrons and clients equally. For clients it starts with the notion that those unattached to existing categories often lack political representation. For patrons this mechanism is significant, because those who do not firmly belong to one group are harder to serve efficiently. Besides ethnic groups, many other types of groups also qualify for clientelistic exchange, as long as they have an internal hierarchy and it is clear who belongs to them and who does not. Most notably, these are churches, trade unions, or the workers of state institutions. With ethnic groups it is a bit trickier. They do not necessarily have internal hierarchies and since the fifth line in the passport was dropped, there is no longer such a thing as an ethnic "membership card". Ethnic associations can help to solve this structural problem. They provide a hierarchy and by performing ethnicity in public they demarcate the line of those who belong and those who do not. Those who do not belong,

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[24] Broadcasted most notably by state-run *Perviy Kanal* of Russia on February 24, 2010, http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/149194 (16.11.2015)

because they do not expose the defined membership criteria, have no organizations and no figureheads to speak for them. There are no institutionalized links between ethnically or religiously unattached people that could create a sense of community.

A good illustration for the situation of those with ambiguous ethnic identities can perhaps be found in the speakers of mixed languages. In Ukraine, such language varieties that dissolve the boundary between the Ukrainian and the Russian standard languages are pejoratively deemed "Surzhyk"[25] (Bernsand, 2001:38). Standard languages are often portrayed as per se pure and good. The speakers of standard Ukrainian or standard Russian in Ukraine both have several zealous organizations for the advancement of these languages. Unlike that, the speakers of Surzhyk varieties, lack not only such organizations, but even the *concept of a speaker community* that would be the basis to form a representative organization. This is also true for other sub-standard varieties of Russian, such as Prostorechie.[26.] This can be illustrated by the impossibility to correct other speakers of sub-standard language varieties, and therefore to limit and reproduce the speaker-community (Marszk, 1999:632). It is absurd to say „in Surzhyk we actually say…", or "in Prostorechie this would correctly be called…" Although millions of people make all kinds of utterances in these language varieties, neither one refers to a set of poems or songs, the common knowledge of which could create a *sense of community*. Just as absurd as correcting speakers of Surzhyk or Prostorechie it would be to say, "We, the speakers of Surzhyk have a beautiful song that goes like this…" or, "In Surzhyk there is an old saying that reminds us of…" Established languages, in contrast, have such a common stock of cultural references. The learning of songs and poems, the reading of novels, the citing of proverbs and catchphrases, the singing of songs all contribute to an "imagined community" (Anderson, 2006:145), a group that is much larger than the circle of people one individual could possibly be acquainted with. Nevertheless, in the mind of each group member lives the image of communion with all the other members of that group (ibid.:6).

As the speakers of language varieties on the blurred boundaries of standard languages do not have representation (and do not see the need for it), so people who find themselves between established ethnic communities are out of the focus of ethno-politicians who are

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[25] Surzhyk literally means a mixture of rye and wheat used in times of poor harvest to bake low-quality bread. It is used to pejoratively refer to mixed languages and occasionally to children of mixed ethnic ancestry (Flier 1998:115). Surzhyk comes in many guises (for an exhaustive analysis see Bilaniuk (2005). Surzhyk should not be confused with a pidgin or a creole. A pidgin is an auxiliary language with strongly reduced grammar, used to bridge a linguistic boundary between two mutually unintelligible languages. A creole is a pidgin that develops into a mother tongue with its own grammatical rules (Grosjean, 1982:41). Surzhyk can be learned as a mother tongue or it can occur spontaneously. It can be used by people who have no problem understanding Ukrainian or Russian or both and it is not necessarily simpler in its grammar than these standard languages. (Bilaniuk, 2005:121)

[26] Prostorechie, freely translated, means „simple speak". It refers to a widely spoken sub-standard variety of Russian, spoken by people who never learned to fully master the standard Russian language. One of its main features is the ignorance of irregular grammatical forms (Marszk 1999:630).

looking out for a following. For nationalist politicians, like Iryna Farion, it would be impossible to tell them how to behave, because they do not claim to belong to a community with a shared cultural code. But more significantly for the case of southern Bessarabia, is that ethnically unattached people lack representation. Just imagine the absurdity of an association for the ethnically mixed or a club that represents the interests of the unaffiliated or a museum for the folklore of the sovietized masses. No such organizations exist and no one claims *common characteristics* or a *common culture* for the people who have no clear ethnic affiliation.

It is useful to recollect at this point the structural problems clients and patrons face when they exchange resources for political support. Clients need to form groups in order to ensure that their patrons will deliver. If a client becomes a member of a recognizable group, there is still no guarantee that he or she *personally* will receive favors from the patron. But it significantly increases his or her chances because *some members* of the group will be served, otherwise the group as a whole can punish the uncooperative patron by shunning him the next time he needs support. Therefore, to be part of a group is in any case more beneficiary than being a free-floating client (Chandra, 2004:54).

For the patron, on the other hand, it is not easy to ensure the political support of free-floating clients. In secret ballots the political decision of an individual voter can only be established at great cost. If the patron relies on a group, and its hierarchical structures, the actual voting behavior of single group members can be controlled much more efficiently through intermediaries (for example big employers or the representatives of ethnic associations). If hard-to-control, free floating individuals still manage to profit from the patron's favors, they also become free riders on the patron's expense. The patron is probably unable to serve all individuals evenly. But even if he would serve individual clients, then every neglected client would likely vote against him. If he chooses whole groups, those group members who end up empty handed, at least see that other group members had been served as promised, and they will count on their personal gain the next time their group is served. Therefore many voters will probably still support the patron even if they personally do not gain at each round of favors (ibid.:56).

Ethnic associations in Bessarabia, along with many other organizations like churches, or worker's unions, serve as facilitators for the clientelistic exchange between local patrons and their clients. They are receivers of favors and resources, but through their internal hierarchies they also help the patron ensure compliance of the voters among the ethnic group they claim to represent. Yet their most crucial task in the clientelistic system is to define who is a member of a particular ethnic group and who is not. Thereby they shape the concept of what it means to be Bulgarian, Gagauz, Russian, Ukrainian, or Moldovan, but they also ensure for the patron that he

does not have to deal with free-floating individuals somewhere at the frayed margins of a poorly defined group.

5.6. Dealing with the contradiction: when clear-cut boundaries encounter fuzzy identities

For those who build their political following on the assumption that ethnicity is objective and unambiguous, it is unavoidable to run into contradiction. This can come from dealing with people of mixed ethnic ancestry, people who have changed their identity in the course of their lives, or people who do not expose the allegedly typical features of a particular ethnic group, but claim to belong to it. Another source of confusion can come from comparison with other countries, where ethnicity is defined and used differently, or where it plays hardly any role at all. In the following paragraphs each of these sources of contradiction will be discussed and some observed ways to deal with them will be offered.

Mixed ethnic ancestry is the most common challenge to essentializing concepts of ethnicity in southern Bessarabia. Interethnic marriage was never barred or even actively discouraged in the Soviet Union. None of the interviewed, who have married a partner from a different ethnic group, reported hostile reactions by the state and only very few reported antagonism from their families. Interestingly, many people, who have not married a partner from another ethnic group, told me they could never have done so, or their parents would never have let them. The diverging judgment of those who have actually made the experience of interethnic marriage and those who have not, suggests that if one starts to build an intimate relationship to a person from another ethnic group, prejudice towards this group might be revised. Some informants also named a number of ethnic groups from which they could marry a partner and another number from which they would not. Two informants, one Moldovan and one Bulgarian, said that people from their ethnic group could never marry a Gagauz. Both informants reasoned this was because their ethnic group had been oppressed by the Turks for so long. But of course the Gagauz also emphasize their suffering of Turkish (Ottoman) oppression. And in spite of the reservation against "Turks", in Bolgrad rayon, where Gagauz and Bulgarians live in close proximity, marriages between them are very common. Official functionaries and official policies carefully avoid judging or ranking ethnic groups by their eligibility to marry. In the late Soviet period interethnic couples were even portrayed as a harbinger of progressive Soviet values (Gorenburg, 2006a:149).

Nevertheless, children of mixed ethnic families pose a challenge to the assumption that ethnicity is essential and unambiguous. One response to this challenge is the idea of an established mechanism, how ethnicity is passed on from one generation to another. A local

history teacher, for instance, insisted only women could pass on their ethnicity. Another way is assuming that children with mixed ethnic ancestry do not mix their identities, but keep them inside themselves as separate entities. One woman with an ethnically mixed identity, who married a man with several ethnic backgrounds, explained that in her children there were five ethnicities. She could also name her children's personal traits that were caused by one or the other ethnic disposition. The assumption of clearly defined ethnic characteristics lives on in this conceptualization, albeit within an individual instead of a society.

Another way to dodge contradiction stemming from interethnic marriage and resulting mixed ethnic identities is to assume that they are a very recent phenomenon. To many informants it seemed perfectly obvious that before World War II, people had married exclusively within their ethnic group. As I have demonstrated in section 2.3, interethnic marriages were not uncommon even in the mid-19th century. The persistent assumption that interethnic marriage became possible only recently, at least acknowledges the trend towards greater rates of ethnic mixing caused by increasing social and geographical mobility. Although this assumption does not solve the contradiction, it restricts it to a more recent past. Therefore the emic concept of ethnicity remains applicable for earlier decades.

People who change their ethnic identity at some point in their lives also pose a contradiction to established concepts of ethnicity. It is a well-studied fact that ethnic statistics in the former Soviet Union fluctuate not only because many who resettled during Soviet times returned to their historic homeland, but also because many people changed their ethnic affiliation, when political circumstances changed. In Ukraine the share of Russians between the censuses of 1989 and 2001 fell by 5%, without an according exodus of Russians. This probably means that people of mixed ethnic origin, who preferred the prestigious Russian ethnicity in the fifth line of their Soviet passport, have reconsidered their identity since Ukraine's independence (Rjabtschuk, 2005:25, Simon, 2007:7). Studies of people who changed their ethnic identity have been presented among others by Bilaniuk for Ukraine (2005:37 ff.), Karklins for Soviet Germans (1986:34), and Gorenburg (1999) for Bashkortostan. The mechanism behind ethnic identity change in post-Soviet countries have been described by Laitin (1998:21-24) and Beissinger (2002:24).

To people who consider ethnicity an essential and unchangeable trait, adapting ethnic identity to political circumstance reeks of opportunism. One young man told me that every honest person ought to know which ethnic group he or she belongs to. Presented with examples of people from his village, who had changed their ethnic identity, he replied they had changed merely their *passport-ethnicity* and that the passport was but a piece of paper. A young woman, who for herself chose her father's Ukrainian ethnicity over her mother's Bulgarian, discussed the ethnic identities of (German-born) Tsaritsa Catherine II. She said that maybe Catherine had

become a *citizen* of Russia, but one could not *become* a real Russian, just because one chose to. Asked about her own choice of ethnicity, she said that now, after she had firmly chosen Ukrainian as her ethnicity, she could never reconsider. So separating ascribed or chosen ethnicity from the concept of inner and inherited ethnicity is another strategy to avoid contradiction.

Occasionally, conflicts and contradictions in the conceptualization of ethnicity occur because someone does not, in the opinion of others, exhibit the characteristics of the ethnic group he or she claims to be part of. The most common case of this conflict is that someone has forgotten or never learned the language associated with the ethnicity he or she feels to belong to. Those who sharpen ethnic boundaries in southern Bessarabia are fond of repeating that if the language disappears, the ethnic group will disappear too.[27] The head of the Bulgarian Cyril and Methodius Society told me that if someone does not speak Bulgarian, there was no reason to identify as Bulgarian.[28] The Bulgarian ethnicity has recently experienced increased popularity, since the opportunity to get a Bulgarian passport offers chances on the European labor market (Demirdirek, 2008a:100). Therefore, suspicion of opportunism is never far for those who have only just discovered their Bulgarianess. It is then easy to simply exclude those considered unworthy of an ethnic label by restricting the list of membership criteria. One ethnically Bulgarian school teacher reported a dispute he had on an organized tourist trip to Bulgaria. He had overheard a local man talking on the phone about the busload of "Russian pigs" along with which the informant had arrived. This apparent exclusion from those worthy of being Bulgarians, provoked the Bessarabian Bulgarian school teacher to explain to the offender that *he* had long ceased to be Bulgarian by joining the EU and by drudgingly enduring 500 years of Turkish yoke. His own forefathers, the teacher informed his opponent, had at least taken their fate in their hands, leaving for Bessarabia in search for a better life. In this dispute, the two men clearly had different criteria of what it takes to be a Bulgarian. In such a case it is not the situative choice of ethnic identity that liberates one from contradiction, but the situative choice of characteristics one needs to expose in order to belong.

One more source of confusion is the comparison of an emic ethnicity concept with groups and countries which either lay less stress on ethnicity or conceptualize ethnicity differently. These include the countries with a civil (not an ethnic) conceptualization of nationhood, such as France, Belgium, or Switzerland, as well as the nations that grew out of settler colonies in the New World. For these countries, which claim nationhood without

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[27] This theme is repeated for the Ukrainians in Serbens'ka's and Terlak's (1999) Ukrainian reader for russophone beginners. Yuri Dimchoglo, the Gagauz local politician who organized and sponsored the "Day of Gagauz Culture" on this occasion reminded the audience (in Russian) that the disappearance of the Gagauz language would mean the disappearance of the Gagauz people.

[28] Interview in Izmail, April 21, 2013

providing a consolidated ethnic genealogy, it is hard to bring them into accord with the essentializing Soviet concept of ethnicity. In his ethnos theory (see next chapter), Yulian Bromley called identities such as French or Belgian "politonyms", stressing their political rather than ethnic character. Unlike ethnic identities, these forms of identification would disappear, as soon as the person ceases to live in the respective polity (Bromley, 1983:46). For this concept it is similarly difficult to accommodate national identities, the ethnic basis of which is akin to neighboring nations. Soviet concepts of ethnicity are at odds with an Austrian national identity or with south-Tyroleans who self-identify as Italians. One informant, a trained geographer who has lived and worked in Austria, was convinced no Austrian could sincerely feel different from a German. He explained the prevalence of what he believed was an artificial identity with historical ignorance and the suppression of a pan-German identity out of political correctness. Many among Moldova's nationalists, especially those who would like to see their country merged with neighboring Romania, are fond of the Austrian analogy. One history student from Chişinău, who wants the "artificial" border between the two countries removed, told me that in Austria there was a similar situation like in Moldova; those people who had learned their history knew that they were in fact Germans. Interestingly, those who oppose a Moldovan merger with Romania do not rely on the idea of a political or civil Moldovan national identity, but more likely cling to the Soviet doctrine that Romanians and Moldovans are two different ethnic groups that speak two different languages. With this insistence they seemingly prove the point of Moldovan nationalists, that two different countries must contain two different ethnic groups in order not to be "artificial".

If ethnicity is objectively ascertainable, as Bromley insists (1980:151, 1983:48), then those who fail to recognize it are simply wrong. Therefore, Soviet ethnography resented the "bourgeois" reduction of ethnicity to self-identification, thereby denying hereditary membership of the group one "objectively" belongs to (Bromley, 1983:49). This brings us to the last technique to eliminate contradiction between the conceptualization of ethnicity and the frequently confusing practices of self-identification: one can simply exclude those who hold confusing identities from the number of people who have authority to speak about it. Following this strategy of exclusion, those who do not subscribe to an essentialized conceptualization of ethnicity are simply accused of overlooking (intentionally or not) the objective existence of ethnic characteristics. By excluding the opposition of people who dissolve ethnic boundaries because they simply have no say in the matter, clear-cut ethnic boundaries are made into something real (Suny, 2001:865).

All the mechanisms to avoid contradiction between concepts of ethnicity and contradicting observations rely on exclusion. People who have chosen between several

potential ethnic identities can be excluded from the real members of an ethnic group,[29] or one of their potential identities can be dismissed as a "paper identity", chosen for opportunistic reasons. If the criteria for membership between two people who identify with the same ethnic group are vastly different, then one's own list can be declared the definitive and exclusive list. And if someone holds an ethnic identity that contradicts essential and primordial concepts of ethnicity, then he or she may just be excluded from those able to see the objective reality.

5.7. Conclusion

In times of economic and political instability, both the concept of primordial ethnicity and generous political patrons, provide a sense of anchorage. The two concepts are most markedly combined in folklore festivals. Such festivals reinforce ethnic boundaries and provide a stage for public exchange of gifts and awards, thereby publically emphasizing a trusted relationship between patrons and clients. Political patrons in southern Bessarabia use ethnicity in a variety of political strategies. In some cases it makes sense to emphasize the patron's ethnicity, in others it is more beneficiary to conceal it. But both patrons and clients shape and sharpen ethnic boundaries for their own ends. The dissolution of ethnic boundaries would hamper the patron's ability to overlook the distribution of his resources to specific groups of clients. For the client, the dissolution of ethnic boundaries would mean the loss of one important form of political representation. Therefore, clientelism creates an urge to sharpen ethnic boundaries and lends itself to an essentialized conceptualization of ethnicity. If this conceptualization runs into contradiction the reaction of those who defend it is usually an act of exclusion. By excluding a person from eligibility to belong into a certain ethnic group or by excluding him or her from those with the authority to assess membership in an ethnic community, most contradictions can be neutralized.

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[29] A mechanism observed by Grigor Suny for the case of Armenia (2001:865).

6. The conceptualization of ethnicity according to the needs of Soviet administrators

Ethnic boundaries in southern Bessarabia appeared not so long ago, in the later decades of the 19th century and were molded according to the needs of the different power holders at various times ever since. In previous chapters I have argued that present ethnic boundaries are neither very old nor carved in stone. However, most of the informants to this work, with or without a special interest in the topic of ethnic boundaries, would most probably not agree with such a conclusion. The ethnic boundaries I have described as an outcome of socio-political processes, they would more likely see as a natural and essential feature of the human condition. Those whom I have credited with producing and maintaining ethnic boundaries, they would merely credit with revealing what had been there since times immemorial. This is more than a simple misunderstanding between Western and formerly Soviet paradigms. The assumption that ethnicity is a crucial and essential part of every person's identity and that it is there whether or not the person recognizes and accepts it, is crucial for the conservancy of ethnic boundaries.

In this chapter I want to raise the question, why in multi-ethnic regions of the former Soviet Union, such as southern Bessarabia, ethnic boundaries did not just wither away. Contrary to what one would expect under circumstances of long cohabitation and increased cultural likeness, ethnic boundaries in southern Bessarabia are perceived as tenaciously persisting. Why does Bessarabia appear as a "salad bowl" rather than a "melting pot"?

There are, in my view, two lines of possible explanation; (1) as argued in the previous chapter there are indeed social mechanisms, such as clientelism, that create an incentive to preserve ethnic group identity and a marked boundary towards other groups. But we have also seen that these allegedly clear-cut ethnic boundaries are consistently contradicted by social practice. Therefore, a second strand of explanation for the prevalence of ethnic boundaries is merely imagined and lies on a more conceptual level. (2) For this chapter I assume that the predominant conception of ethnicity fails to adequately describe the actual processes of frequent mixing and mutual influence between different ethnic groups that settle in southern Bessarabia.

If this second assumption proves to be valid, this would mean that the answer why ethnic boundaries (seemingly) persist should be sought in the conception of ethnicity. In this

case we should start to think about where to find more suitable concepts of ethnicity, which can satisfactorily address dynamic and multi-ethnic societies as found in southern Bessarabia. But if we content ourselves with scrutinizing Bessarabia's ethnic kaleidoscope through the lens of Western Anthropology, two conceptual frameworks are bound to clash, the Soviet concept of "ethnos", and the Western concept of "ethnicity". The Soviet (and to a large extent post-soviet) strand of explanation includes very clear ideas what an ethnos (or more popularly "natsional'nost'") is, what criteria it needs to fulfill in order to be counted as one, how it emerges and how it disappears.

Adding to the historical insights of previous chapters, I will argue that the prevalent concept of ethnicity, as it can be found among Bessarabians today, is a relic of Soviet ethnicity theory, tailored to the needs of Soviet administration. As I will show in this chapter, this theory was disseminated with great pervasiveness through the Soviet educatory system. Ethnic groups tended to be taken for granted and were imagined with some kind of *essence* that has hardly ever been described or explained in any detail. In essentialist visions of ethnicity, every individual is part of an ethnos-type group, ideally of one and only one such group, even if he or she is not aware of it. As a consequence of decades of ethnographic research guided by this paradigm, ethnic belonging is often treated as an objective fact of life. It can be determined by just observing what language people speak, what kind of clothes they wear, what god they pray to, or who they think their ancestors were (Kushner, 1951:10). Soviet scholars described the phenomenon of interethnic marriage with great demographic detail (for an overview see Gorenburg, 2006a), but never questioned ethnicity as a valid census category, let alone came up with a concept of ethnicity that allowed ambiguous ethnic identities. In Ukraine and other post-soviet countries, such essentialist concepts of ethnicity stick to academia quite tenaciously (Kuznetsov, 2008:21). One good way to assess whether or not a paradigm shift has taken place is to look at introductory readers, recommended for use in university classes by the Ministry of Education, where Soviet concepts and definitions can still be readily found.[1]

The dominant Western perspectives on ethnicity provide quite a pronounced contrast. In the post-war era, most Western scholars began to see ethnic identity, merely as an idea, constructed in the 19th and 20th centuries in order to structure social environments and to exercise power (Fowkes, 2002:6). Rigid definitions of ethnicity and nationality, with a range of criteria that need to be fulfilled (as they were used in varying forms in the Soviet Union) have had a hard time being accepted in Western academia. This is for one because if we look at groups defined by certain "trait inventories" we look at cultural groups, and these are not necessarily congruent with ethnic groups (Barth, 1969:12). Criteria lists to define ethnic

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[1] A recent example is a reader on the ethnography of Ukraine (Makarchuk 2008) that introduces Soviet definitions for "ethnos", "super-ethnos", "sub-ethnos", "race", "sub-races", and describes the anthropometric features of Ukrainians.

belonging are also problematic because for each of the definitions of ethnicity that uses a finite list of criteria, exceptions can readily be found (Hobsbawm, 1990:16). Another weakness of inventory list definitions is that they do not pay attention to the complex interrelations of the individual items on the list (Hroch, 1968:13). These items can be shared but not owned by one group. Depending of the needs of elites, such lists can be expanded or shortened and thereby inclusion or exclusion into the group can be steered (Elwert, 1997:257, 2002:38). So if a common language is taken as a criterion to form an ethnic group or nation of the type that would qualify as *natsional'nost'*, then the Belgians, the Irish, or the Swiss do not fit into the definition. If a common territory is a precondition the Armenians, the Jews, or the Roma are at odds with it. If common religion is what counts, the Lebanese, the Albanians, or the Ukrainians fall short. If common ancestry is assumed, the Brazilians, the Americans, and many others are excluded. If it is assumed that a *natsional'nost'* can only be counted as such if inside and outside that group it is seen as different from other such groups, then the Moldovans and the Romanians, the Serbs and the Croats are out, because debates about their ethnic sovereignty are far from resolved. This list of exclusive criteria could be continued endlessly because virtually every set of common features and differences can, under the right circumstances, be used to mark ethnic boundaries, as Max Weber (1990 [1921]:237) observed. Therefore it is worth to repeat his definition, which left the list of criteria for inclusion and exclusion not to social sciences (as in the Soviet Union), but to the people concerned:

> We shall call 'ethnic groups' those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of custom or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists (Weber, 1996 [1978]:35).

But this view on ethnicity runs into trouble in Bessarabia. If an ethnographer, trained in the West, asks an informant in Bessarabia (or probably anywhere else in the former Soviet Union) "what ethnic group do you belong to?", then only one of the participants in this conversation will likely have a concept similar to the one cited above in mind. The Bessarabian (or otherwise post-soviet) informant will probably understand that he or she is asked about his or her *actual* ancestry, and it will probably matter to them whether this ancestry is real or not. Therefore most post-soviet informants have an essentialist view of ethnicity in mind, one in which ethnicity is obtained by birth and cannot credibly be obtained by choice. One could assume that such a conception is simply the product of folk-intuition, a genre in which ethnicity is likely to be essentialized (Gil-White, 2001). But in this chapter I will argue that Soviet ethnicity theory (and much of what remains of it) has done a good deal to give an air of scientific credibility to what folk wisdom allegedly concludes intuitively. Another aim of the following sections will be to show that such theories were shaped primarily by the Soviet need for clearly bounded social

categories that could be addressed with separate policies, very much akin to James Scott's (1998) notion of "legibility".

If we cannot find adequate translations for the central set of terminology in the two schools, only misunderstandings can be the result. Although most ethno-political movements are based on essentialist views of ethnicity and although most ordinary people have never heard of constructivist theories, social scientists have pretended essentialism was nothing to take seriously. Just for its importance and prevalence constructivist should try to understand essentialism (Gil-White, 2001:515). One way to reach such an understanding in the post-soviet region would be to look for a suitable translation of "natsional'nost'" and its connotations. In order to approach such a translation it will be indispensable to have a closer look at the historical context in which Soviet and post-soviet ideas about ethnicity emerged, both popular and academic ones.

6.1. Ethnicity and ethnos: differing paradigms and the historical preconditions giving rise to them

In regions where people of different origins settled land that was previously deserted or emptied out forcefully, we can often observe the gradual formation of new cultural identities out of people with very diverse ethnic backgrounds. This development was, of course, most prominent among the settlers of the Americas. After the link to their colonizing power had become a burden, rather than a benefit, colonial "creole elites" based their struggles for independence on newly formed national identities. In some cases they even integrated the aboriginals of the country they had conquered into this new identity (Anderson, 2006:50). While the colonizing states extracted more and more resources from their overseas colonies, they hardly left a share of it to the local elites. They prohibited the colonies from trading among each other and systematically discriminated those born there against newcomers from the mother country (ibid.:50-57).

A different process took place on the fringes of the Russian continental empire with its continuous territory. Whenever the Russian Empire, in its long history of expansion, conquered and settled new territories, it did so directly beyond its established borders. One of Russia's tactics to control the newly won land and its inhabitants was to integrate the local ruling class into imperial structures and to secure their local power and freedom of action (Löwe, 2000, Manz, 2003:91, Sunderland, 2004:41). If the elite in this newly conquered land was not Russian by origin, it became russified in time, often not even by force but in order to be socially upward mobile in the structures of the Russian state (Kappeler, 2000:96). In contrast, the new elite in the overseas empires was dependent on their European metropole. They owed taxes to the

King, but neither their needs were politically represented in their respective capitals, nor did they have a chance to rise up the social ladder of the colonizing states. They were trapped in dependence in their colonial outposts. Although local elites might have been used to keep up stability in the colony, they were never even considered for a career in the empire's metropolis. This made it very intriguing for local elites to call for the creation of a new, local identity that would justify the creation of new, independent states (Anderson, 2006:48-50).

With the rise of capitalism and the accompanying need for a standardized education, the careers of young elites began to be channeled inevitably through centers of learning and administration. Anderson calls these journeys of future elites "pilgrimages" (ibid.:121). In these "pilgrimages" rests the crucial difference between the overseas empires of Western European powers and the continental empires of Central and Eastern Europe. The elites of Peru or Indonesia for their qualifications traveled from the far ends of these colonies to Batavia or Lima, but never to Amsterdam or Madrid. In the destinations of their pilgrimages they met their peers from the same colony who might have been culturally very different from them, but who received the same education through the same (standardized) language and eventually joined the same colonial elite. Their common interest was the formation of an all-embracing Peruvian or Indonesian identity on which they could base their struggle for independence from an exploitative colonial center. In the continental empires of the 19th century, in contrast, access to the imperial elite for young socially upward mobiles from the provinces was granted by travelling to the imperial center, to Moscow and St. Petersburg or to Vienna, and by receiving an education in the language dominant there. Their journey (their *pilgrimage*) is maybe best described by Ernest Gellner's (1983:58-63) "lads from Ruritania" who receive their education in the capital of Megalomania, the imaginative empire of which Ruritania is an obscure and linguistically foreign periphery. If they had wanted, they could have assimilated to the culture of Megalomania, as many of their compatriots did. Unlike the young lads in Batavia or Lima, the Ruritanians who became teachers and journalists in the capital of Megalomania did not recognize their *commonality* with other lads from other peripheries who had come to the capital with the same goals. Instead they discovered how *different* their Ruritanian background made them. Aside all their heartfelt sympathy with the simple Ruritanian culture (the *Narodniki* of Russia come to mind), the few educated Ruriatnians eventually understood that in an independent Ruritania they would be able to secure much better posts than most of them could hope for in Greater Megalomania, where they had to compete with scholastically more developed ethnic groups (ibid.:61). This was when the Ruritanian intellectuals[2] and their peers

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[2] For a comparative analysis of this social group in Bohemia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland, Norway, Belgium, and Slovakia see Hroch (1968).

from other peripheral areas in the empire started to mobilize the masses, along cultural *differences.*

So already before ethnicity became the dominant criterion for the allocation of power, there were big differences between the territories of overseas empires and those of continental empires such as Russia: The emerging elites in overseas colonies had to stress commonality in order to gain momentum for an independence movement (Anderson, 2006:47-67) the emerging elites from the fringes of continental empires had to stress how different they were from the imperial center and from the inhabitants of other peripheral areas (Gellner, 1983:58-62). The argument, put forward here assumes that it is the diverging interests of emerging 19th century elites that we can still trace in the differing conceptions of ethnicity in Western Europe and in the former Soviet Union.

In overseas colonies and in the New World especially, linguistic differences disappeared, not instantly, but as a gradual concession to social mobility. New arrivals had to learn and pass on the lingua franca of the region, simply in order to have a chance to participate in the newly formed society. The lingua franca was usually the language of the former colonizers. When revolutions hit the aristocratic states in Western Europe, the concept of a civic nation that paid little attention to cultural difference, served as a model. A similar concept had already proven victorious in the American Revolution. In France, the nation came to be understood as a group of people who, even if there were cultural differences between them, expressed the will to live in a community and draw their identity from shared struggles and common achievements (Renan, 2006 [1881]). In this conception of the nation, cultural differences, as they existed between Paris and its peripheries, were not necessarily an obstacle to a sense of national community. However, most inhabitants of France in the late 19th century had hardly any historical education or consciousness and therefore no idea of common achievements or struggles, which, according to Renan, hold the nation together. Awareness for history and the awareness that society had evolved and will evolve in the future, had first to be popularized, before it could serve identity building (Tonkin, 1992:10). National identity had to be brought to the masses in a slow but steady didactic campaign, possible only with the advent of compulsory public schooling (Weber, 1976:110). This same process contributed to the withering away of cultural and especially linguistic differences. Around 1870, Eugene Weber (ibid.) estimates, every fifth Frenchman did not understand the French standard language. Public schooling helped them to pick up some French, but as soon as they left school they would switch back into their local *patois*. The French state of the 19th and early 20th century worked on diminishing cultural difference and to create a culturally relatively homogenous national community, as which France, and most of her neighbors, appear today.

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The Russian Empire, for most of its existence, has put some effort in russifying the elites of its non-Russian territories. What concerns the masses, however, the assimilatory force of the empire often failed to reach villagers. In Bessarabia, for instance, the presence of the state in the 19ᵗʰ century was simply too weak to create public schools and impose its ideas on the rural population (Grek and Russev, 2011:86).

Ethnic differences as something wider than confessional differences came to the attention of the imperial authorities when the idea of nationalism intruded all the big imperial states of Europe. Now the imperial elites, themselves multi-ethnic conglomerates, had to deal with national aspirations of their subject peoples. These were based on the cultural differences which many within the established imperial elite had given up in order to join this class. In contrast to confessional groups and their champions, these new ethno-national movements demanded not just the freedom to exercise their specific way of life, they also demanded that their ethnic group should be the one to delegate the ruling class within a country regarded as the ancestral ethnic homeland. A distinction to be made here is between the ethnic groups with their own historic aristocracy, which eventually took on a decisive role in the nationalistic avant-garde, and the "peoples without history" who had no aristocracy of their own (Hroch, 1968:120). In such cases, well-educated groups like the "lads from Ruritania" were the main force behind nationalist mobilization. This latter category would include the Ukrainians. For an empire, their demands of political and cultural autonomy could only mean break-up into sovereign nation states. This demand, from the perspective of the imperial center, could not be just administered like religious diversity. It was a direct challenge to the legitimacy of the empire and therefore needed to be repressed. Advocates of national self-determination were directly targeted, and the existence of the ethnic groups aspiring nationhood was simply denied.

When, in this situation, the Bolshevik revolutionaries took power in Russia in October 1917, there was immediate danger that the country would be fragmented into an unclear number of aspiring nations. Whoever wanted to rule the former empire as a whole needed to make concessions to those who had their priorities set on the self-determination of their ethnic group. Therefore, the Bolsheviks, from the very moment of their coming into power, advocated the principle of national self-determination. Even though most communist theoreticians saw nationalism as a bourgeoisie ideology, they appealed to a sense of national solidarity in order to mobilize a following (Connor, 2011:8). This did not mean they shied away from ruthless oppression of those national leaders who demanded more self-determination than served the purpose of the Soviet government (Tishkov, 1997:35). But in the first two decades of Soviet power, national languages and national symbols were used to firmly establish the rule of the Communist Party in most areas of the former Russian Empire (Wanner, 1998:16, Spolsky, 2004:116, Popov and Kuznetsov, 2008:226).

In Central and Eastern Europe, the Entente's victory in World War I entailed the redrawing of state borders on the territories of Germany, the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires. Although the Entente was dominated by civic nations, their governments declared the ideology of national self-determination the guiding principle in reshaping the map of Central and Eastern Europe. But national aspirations in the disintegrating Habsburg and Ottoman Empires were based on ethnic nationalism that stressed the periphery's difference from the former imperial centers and that included or excluded people not by their will to belong to a nation, but by their cultural traits, above all the language they spoke. Specially in those linguistic groups, which prior to World War I had been divided between several states, the linguistic principle dominated nationalist rhetoric (Barbour, 2000:15). State boundaries, according to nationalist movements, should correspond as closely as possible to linguistic and cultural boundaries (Gellner, 1983:1). It took another two and a half decades and millions of deaths in war and genocide to come to the painful conclusion that cultural boundaries cannot be turned into clear-cut state-border-type boundaries except by the use of massive violence. It was this devastating experience that made civic nationalism the favored concept in Western Europe. Even in nations such as Germany or Italy, once claimed to be held together by their ethnic unity, a civic concept of inclusion eventually prevailed after the experience of World War II.

From the late 1960s onwards it became increasingly clear within the social sciences that ethnicity, even outside the civic nations of Western Europe, was a fluid and constantly changing concept. Anthropologists and historians became more interested how this concept was used than what it actually was. The social *function* and not the cultural *content* of ethnicity became the focus of scholarly inquiries. As a consequence of this shift of attention the process of maintaining ethnic boundaries, also became an interest. In 1969 Fredrik Barth showed that even though ethnic groups were perceived as discrete entities, their boundaries were very permeable and did not necessarily correspond closely to cultural traits. But in the post-war Soviet Union ethnicity was used as an administrative category, a function for which it was essential that it was considered objectively ascribable. Barth's notion of the permeability of ethnic boundaries would have been highly corrosive for ethnicity's bureaucratic functions. Therefore, the political and administrative function that ethnicity fulfilled in the multi-ethnic Soviet Union, can partly explain, why it came to be seen as a firmly bounded and tangible entity by Soviet scholars. I will return to the administrative function of ethnicity after briefly discussing if and how ethnicity can be objectively ascribed.

6.2. Who and what determines ethnic affiliation?

In Bessarabia, most people can unambiguously answer the question which ethnic group they belong to. This is surprising, because according to the way ethnicity is studied by most local specialists, ethnicity is something that is inherited by every person from his or her parents. Yet many inhabitants of Bessarabia have parents of different ethnic backgrounds, and often these parents themselves were born already into mixed ethnic families. Also, some people change their ethnic identity during the course of their lives. For instance in Izmail, the share of those who identify as Ukrainians instead of Russians has increased by 7% between the two censuses of 1989 and 2001, without disproportional migration or growing birth rates of one group.[3] Even much greater fluctuations have been documented elsewhere in the former Soviet Union (Gorenburg, 1999:557). But if most people can unambiguously name their ethnic belonging, there must be a procedure by which it is determined. The choice for many seems to come from a range of possible ethnic identities. After some deliberation, one of those is singled out as the prime ethnic identity. Sometimes, people switch among different ethnic labels in different situations, so that ethnicity as an essential and unambiguously fixed category, expressed through unchanging cultural characteristics, seems an unsuitable concept. Ethnicity becomes a fluid and fuzzy category that can dynamically be changed by individuals.

If we tenaciously perceive ethnicity as a scientific category that every individual belongs to by birth, we can then simply claim that those people, who actively chose their ethnic belonging, are just ignorant about what they *really* are or ought to be by scientific standards. The paradigm of objective verifiability of ethnic belonging in case of doubt favors ascription from the outside over free (and possibly wrong) self-identification. Francisco Gil-White (2001:517) uses the metaphor of the ugly duckling to analyze the assumption that ethnicity is *inside* everyone. In the tale of the ugly duckling, a swan's egg by accident occurs in a duck's nest. The young swan is raised among ducks who are, like the hackling himself, ignorant about his true nature. Everyone takes him for a duck, if an ugly one. Only when he grows up he reveals his true nature as a swan (supposedly superior to a duck) exposing everyone's mistake. Neither the fact that the swan talked and walked like a duck, nor everyone's belief in him being a duck turned him into one. When we essentialize ethnic identity we run the danger of retelling the fairy tale of the ugly duckling. If we, as social scientists, ascribe ethnic belonging in the believe of a scientifically determinable essence of ethnicity, if we claim the right to tell people what ethnic group they *actually* belong to, we lose two of our crucial arguments: One is the "native's point of view", which to grasp has been the goal of ethnographic research since Malinovski (1932:25).

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[3] Ukrainian census of 2001, results published online:
http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/rus/results/nationality_population/nationality_popul1/select_51/?botton=cens_db&box=5.1W&k_t=51&p=25&rz=1_1&rz_b=2_1%20&n_page=2 (17.11.2015)

This notion would forbid social scientists to decide by their own standards what group their informants actually belong to. Ironically, the other argument we lose, is the self-identification of people as a crucial ingredient in most Soviet definitions of ethnos (Kozlov, 1974).[4]

Although ethnic identity in many cases seems to be chosen from a range of possible ethnic identities, many informants in Bessarabia seem to think of ethnic belonging as something quite obvious. This interpretation may stem less from individual experience than from an academic tradition that sees ethnicity as a clearly defined scientific category, the existence of which demands no further proof. It is rather objectively derivable from a list of traits every person exposes. In Shirokogorov's 1922 definition of ethnos these criteria were a common language, an awareness of commonality, a shared complex of social mores, modes of life, and traditions (cited in Tishkov, 1997:2). Stalin in his definition of a nation used a very similar list but added long cohabitation in a common territory that he thought resulted in a common psychological make-up (Stalin, 1994 [1973]:20). Kushner in his 1951 definition of ethnos added religious beliefs and specified the common culture must be visible in everyday-culture (*byt*) which he also believed to be a result of long cohabitation (ibid.:6). Bromley's influential definition (1980:154) added an ethnonym as a compulsory ingredient. He stressed that traits needed to be stable and that their unity needed to be commonly recognized.

Many of these traits occurring in the fluctuating inventory lists have become rather ambiguous in recent decades. Now many people, independently of their ethnic origin, speak Russian from their early childhood on. Also, many people do not practice any religion at all, or they practice a recently adopted religion, such as Baptism or Adventism. Furthermore, many people do not live in the place they or their ancestors were born, and they might feel a stronger sense of community towards their ethnically mixed neighbors, colleagues, or politically likeminded, than they do towards their ethnic brethren. As discussed above inventory list definitions of ethnicity fail when taken to different places. But if the traits on the inventory list wither away over time, we also have to conclude that such ethnicity definitions fail when followed back in time. It is evident that in most places inventory lists have ceased to work today, but it is also doubtful whether they have ever worked at all. Each of the above phenomena; linguistic assimilation, religious conversion, migration, and cross cutting ties, have accelerated in recent decades, but they are by no means entirely new. It is not just since two or three generations that some people speak different languages than their ancestors did, that they change the ways in which they practice religion, that they migrate over great distances and across all kind of borders to find better lives, that they marry people from other ethnic groups and live among them. In other words, ethnicity was probably never objectively derivable from a

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[4] All Soviet definitions of 'Ethnos', mentioned in this chapter rely on the self-identification criterion see Bromley (1980:153), Bromley and Podol'niy (1990:17), as well as Shirokogorov's 1922 definition, cited in Tishkov (1997:3).

list of cultural traits a person exposed. Therefore, inventory list type definitions of ethnicity neither work on the spatial, nor on the temporal axis of analysis.

But then again, for most informants in Bessarabia a conception of ethnicity as an unambiguous category does not seem to be a contradiction to the rather ethnically heterogeneous environment they live in (and that they of course fully perceive as such). Nor does it seem to be a contradiction to their own biography in which many have made conscious decisions for one ethnic identity out of several possible ones. For Western ethnographers, a precondition to translate ideas of nationality and ethnicity correctly, would therefore be, to understand the "native's point of view".

6.3.   How to grasp the inside perspective

This may be the right place to employ a by now classic instrument of social anthropology to interpret observed behavior; the emic/etic distinction, first used by Kenneth Pike (1967). This method helps distinguishing behavior that is meaningful to a cultural insider, from behavior that is insignificant for them (Duranti, 1997:172). Or in other words, if two people describe the same behavioral act, one of them an insider, intimately familiar with the culture of the acting people, and the other one an interested outsider (an ethnographer perhaps), then the two people might reach very contrasting descriptions of what they observed. In order not to confuse the two perspectives or take them for the same, the emic/etic distinction has been found useful in the social sciences (Harris, 1976:340).

Pike's coining of the two understandings of a behavioral act is based on the linguistic distinction between phon*etic* and phon*emic*. Phon*etics* is a sub-discipline of linguistics dedicated to the study of the physical production of sounds; the organs involved in it and the acoustic waves that effect from an utterance. Such a process is observable and measurable. Phon*emics*, in contrast, is the study of *meaning* carried by acoustic differences in speech acts. One needs to have the *knowledge of a native speaker* to grasp the full meaning encoded in a series of different consecutive sounds (Harris, 1976:331).

In the context that we deal with here, the observed acts are mainly acts of speaking and writing. Every person who speaks about ethnic identity uses this concept in a new context and therefore slightly modifies the meaning behind the concept. This is also true for a special category of words, those that refer to ethnic groups; ethnonyms. Ethnonyms change their meaning over time and space. For instance it is likely that the Gagauz were not always seen as a separate ethnic group but as some sort of Bulgarians who speak a different language (Grek and Russev, 2011:73). So the speech-act of saying "I am Gagauz" or "I am Ukrainian" changes its meaning if uttered by different speakers at different times in different places. In fact, each of

these speech acts occurs in a new context and therefore theoretically never twice means the exact same thing. They certainly mean very different things to the cultural insider and to the cultural outsider. But even among cultural insiders the meaning of such a sentence might differ substantially. Take just for example a Bulgarian from Bessarabia and a Bulgarian from Sofia or Plovdiv and let them both say, "I am Bulgarian". In the *etic* perspective these are apparently identical speech-acts. However, in an *emic* perspective the inhabitant of Bessarabia very likely implicates in his or her speech-act the awareness that he or she is a descendant of settlers who came here from a region that is now a part of Bulgaria, that he or she can speak the Bulgarian language along with Russian, that he or she at least nominally is an Orthodox Christian, etc. In contrast, a Bulgarian from Sofia or Plovdiv would very likely also include in the statement "I am a Bulgarian" that he or she considers the territory of the modern Bulgarian state his or her homeland, that he or she is entitled to Bulgarian citizenship, that most of his or her ancestors lived in Bulgaria, that he or she went to a Bulgarian school, etc.

Difference in meaning of such a simple sentence grows bigger if we add the temporal dimension. The sentence "I am Gagauz" means a very different thing today than it meant a hundred years ago. What is being said today is not the same as what historians in a hundred years from now will write about it. In order not to take the meaning of the two speech-acts as the same, we should attempt to also observe an emic/etic distinction on the temporal axis just as much as anthropologists have gotten used to on the spatial axis. This would be a step further from the already common, strict distinction between the interpretation of an action by a historian and by a contemporary witness. It would be to grasp what the action *meant* to the witness at the moment when it took place. But unlike an ethnographer, a historian usually does not have the opportunity to ask cultural insiders of the time he studies about the exact meaning of their actions to them. Historians must rifle through archive files. These are, as the aphorism goes, more patient informants than living people, but on the other hand they are very hard to squeeze for the emic meaning of what they represent. With flesh-and blood informants it is hard enough to unravel the complexities of ethnic identities. One common frustration is that inquiry likely deepens complexities rather than reduce them, for instance when informants reveal that they have ambivalent ethnic identities, that they have changed their ethnic identity at a particular point in their lifetime, or that they use different ethnic identities in different social situations. These complexities are often concealed in archive documents, where information about ethnicity appears mostly as boxes in tables and lists. As a rule, state documents attempt to root out ambiguities and thereby hide most of the emic meaning inherent in the social situation that originally produced the document. In historical anthropology we should therefore first and foremost look for the *function* of behavior to understand its *meaning*. For the remainder of this chapter, the term *emic* means a time-sensitive perspective suitable to grasp the social *function*

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an ethnic label had at the time of utterance for the person speaking. So what function did the phrase "I am Russian" or "I am Gagauz" or "my neighbor is Ukrainian" fulfill at different times in Bessarabia? One conceivable answer would be that this speech-act was meant exclusively to transport the information which language the specified person spoke. It is also conceivable that this speech-act was meant to entitle a person with rights or duties that others did not have. Let us remember, for instance, that "I am Gagauz", said in 1944, would have brought a man to the labor front while "I am Russian" meant one would be recruited to the Red Army. It is further conceivable that such a speech-act, at times carried information about whom the speaker was permitted to marry or not, where he or she could obtain an education, where one was permitted to travel or to live. In the previous chapter I have argued that the function of ethnic labels changed radically after the collapse of the Soviet Union: Whereas in Soviet times it was used to administer people, it is used in post-soviet times to mobilize a political following. We can trace the concept of ethnicity from the one emic to Soviet scholars and bureaucrats to the concept emic to contemporary Bessarabians, as seen from a combination of interviewing and participant observation. This comparison should deepen our understanding of what ethnicity meant when it was the subject of Soviet education and what it came to mean after the institutions that created the concept vanished. The best way to start is to understand how the Soviet concept of ethnicity evolved.

6.4. State-approved concepts of ethnicity in post-war Soviet academia

Soviet academia managed to create influential studies of ethnicity and pervasive theories of what ethnicity is, how it occurred and what it brought about. The influence of these theories, however remained largely limited to the Soviet and post-soviet region (with the notable exception of China (Gorenburg, 1999:556) and a limited impact on German ethno-history in the 1970s (Wernhart, 1998)). Sergey Sokolovskiy (2012:30-31) identifies two reasons for this curtailed influence: For one, the Marxist focus on 'objective realities' devaluated everything subjective and individual and sternly stuck to phenomena believed to be 'universal' and 'independent of observation', which often impeded realistic descriptions. On the other hand, Soviet ethnography, isolated from new paradigms developed in the West, was also repeatedly diagnosed with absence of critical debate and therefore uncritical acceptance of received wisdoms (Skalnik and Krjukov, 1990:158, Tishkov, 1992:371, Sokolovskiy, 2012:31). This academic climate that preferred "objective reality" and despised its critique, was liable to produce essentializing and primordial ideas of ethnicity. The outcome should, however, not be confused with the intention. Neither the founders of the Soviet Union nor its pioneering social

scientists wanted to essentialize ethnicity. Ironically, the ultimate essentializing of ethnicity was an effect of a conscious approach the pre-war Soviet governments took to develop tailor-made policies towards every single ethnic group within its premises. To avoid the reproach of an imperial russifying campaign among the Soviet Union's non-Russians, Soviet nationality policy before Stalin's return to russification in the late 1930s, ascribed ethnic identities to everyone along with the according language and culture. The rigid primordialism among social scientists of the later Soviet Union was one of the legacies of the (at the time very progressive) early Soviet nationalities policy (Martin, 2000:168).

Outside academia, in a broader public sphere, Soviet ethnicity theories took roots easily because essentializing ethnicity is a rather intuitive train of thought. It is similar to our well-exercised categorization of species and substances that we also essentialize according to their hidden properties. These are usually generalizable of other items of the same category or substance (i.e. all birds lay eggs, ceramic breaks easily, no matter whether it comes as a plate or a jar) (Gil-White, 2001:524ff.). Therefore, essentailizing theories such as those dominant in the Soviet Union are much easier received in a non-academic environment than counter-intuitive constructivist theories.

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the partial opening of the field to paradigm shifts, few new ideas on the nature of ethnicity have been put forward in Russian speaking academia, let alone in the public discourse. Social anthropology in post-soviet countries has been diagnosed with a severe crisis, mainly for the tenacious preference of primordialism, for a lack of critical examination of authoritative Soviet theories, and for a persistent indifference for the present, while desperately seeking to document vanishing traditional societies (Tishkov, 1992, 2003:30-33, Sokolovskiy, 2003:4). But the discipline was also compared with a city after a firestorm which eventually led to its beautification (Tishkov, 2003:29). This cathartic renewal, however, was very insular within the discipline and it almost completely failed to spread the word to a broader public.

The crisis of the Soviet social sciences was not caused by progressing scholarly concepts, but by the radical change of the ideological environment after the disintegration of the Soviet Union (Sokolovskiy, 2003:4). Along with Perestroika came a rearrangement of the terminology of social sciences. Some terms were dropped altogether because they had become anachronisms (the Soviet people, proletarian internationalism), some were reinterpreted (social class, assimilation, race) and others newly entered the scholarly vocabulary (ethnicity, discourse, habitus, deconstruction, narrative) (ibid.:13). But the renewal of the discipline is a slow process that has progressed furthest in academic centers of Moscow and St. Petersburg, but has had limited effect in provincial centers of learning. There, by and large, Soviet ethnicity theories still appear to be widely in use. Therefore, this is perhaps a good place to have a closer look at them.

Doing so, my attention will be directed at the connection of the Soviet state as an aggregate of planning institution, relying on clearly defined categories, and the liability of Marxist-Leninist social theories to be interpreted in an essentialized way.

Soviet social sciences have gone into academic isolation during late Stalinism, and missed many paradigm shifts in the English and French literature of the post-war decades. But before this isolation took effect, the German *Völkerkunde* was the most influential school in Russia (Vermeulen, 1995:48). Ethnography was chiefly concerned with folk culture and customary life in Soviet society and secondary to that with the culture of non-writing peoples (Sokolovskiy, 2003:4). Ethnography in the Soviet Union never emerged as a discipline in its own right. It was a sub-discipline of history (Kuznetsov, 2008:30), the task of which was to describe the different stages of development through which human societies pass (Petrova-Averkieva, 1980:19). This disciplinary arrangement has hardly changed since the Soviet Union's end (Tishkov, 2003:32).

After World War II, Soviet ethnography was modeled after the art genre of Soviet Realism. It should provide descriptions of how the people of the Soviet Union, even in the most remote corners of the country, overcome obstacles and collaborate in order to build communism (Haber, 2014:194). Leading Soviet ethnographers saw themselves as the builders of communist society rather than its chroniclers (ibid.:211). Soviet ethnography studied ethnic group by ethnic group. The ethnic group (ethnos) was the very subject of the discipline's scholarly endeavors (Tokarew, 1954:7, Bromley, 1980:152). Specialists emerged for each such group. So ethnic groups were not merely conceptualized as clearly bounded entities, also the discipline that studied them became structured by ethnic boundaries. The relation, in which the discipline stood to the studied subject, could lead only to circular definitions: The academic discipline of *Etnografiya*, was busy defining and redefining the category of ethnos, while the discipline itself was defined as the study of ethnos (Skalnik and Krjukov, 1990:184). In the ethnographic museum, different showcases with different ethnic groups structured the exhibitions. Ethnographic encyclopedias, atlases, and library catalogues followed the same structure, in short:

> "In the Soviet social sciences, ethnicity is viewed as absolutely „natural", an „independent variable" and a primary cause of phenomena. The emergence and existence of ethnic groups is a crude social fact, and such groups are classified as "ethnosocial organisms" or "biosocial communities" (Tishkov, 1992:380)

During the peak of its influence in the 1970s and 80s two figureheads of Soviet social science can be singled out as the ones shaping ideas of ethnicity that still retain a deep influence in academia as well as in wider society: Yulian Bromley (1921-1990), director of the institute of ethnography at the Soviet Academy of Sciences from 1966-89, and Lev Gumilev (1912-1992),

the theoretician behind the *impassionedness theory of ethnogenesis*. While Bromley reached the heights of Soviet academia, Gumilev was widely popular among readers, but never got a firm foothold in a Soviet university (Naarden, 1996:54). This was certainly in part because Gumilev preferred his own form of social Darwinism over the dominant paradigm of Soviet historiography; historical materialism (Mühlfried and Sokolovskiy, 2011:12). Both scholars remain influential but controversial among social scientists in Russian speaking countries. Part of the controversy around them is doubtless that their theories can be read and indeed often are read to anchor primordial or even racist concepts of ethnic groups. Therefore both theoreticians can be easily used and indeed often are used to justify nationalist sentiment.

The two men and their theories were connected by the central concept of "ethnos". "Ethnos" can be translated as "ethnic group" but not without partial loss of its meaning. So exploring the two theories and their liability to primordialism should be commenced with an attempt to give a more adequate translation of what the concept of "ethnos" contains, the *emic* understanding of "ethnos". The term has been in use in Soviet ethnography since the beginning of the 20th century. The Ukrainian ethnographer Nikolai Mohilyanskiy, already in 1909, defined ethnos as the "object of ethnographic research" (cited in Bromley, 1983:10). Early attempts to create an all-encompassing definition for ethnos as a category were undertaken by Sorbonne-trained ethnographer Sergey Shirokogorov in the first years after the October Revolution. He worked in the Far East of the newly founded Soviet Union. Shirokogorov attempted to create a typology of different kinds of ethnos (ibid.), an endeavor that after World War II might have well suited Soviet social science. But Shirokogorov fell from grace and had to escape to China. There, he continued to publish, but lost his influence on Soviet academia. The definition for ethnos that he came up with in 1922, became influential in Russian speaking academia only after it resurfaced in Bromley's works. For Shirokogorov an ethnos was:

> A group of people speaking the same language, who recognize their shared heritage, and have a shared complex of social mores, modes of life, retained and sanctified traditions which differentiate them from other such groups (cited in Tishkov, 1997:2).

The influence of this ethnos-definition lies not so much in the first part, where the author specifies which traits group members must share to count as an ethnos, it lies in the second part, where the author names the properties these shared traits must have, so that they can define an ethnos-type group. Traditions that hold an ethnos together and notably differentiate them from other groups should be *retained and sanctified*.

Another very influential definition, very similar to Shirokogorov's ethnos definition, was Joseph Stalin's definition of the nation (natsiya), a term that has been used interchangeably with "natsional'nost'" and "ethnos" (see for example Tokarew, 1954:16, Kushner, 1951:6). Stalin

formulated it while he held the office of People's Commissar of Nationalities Affaires, not long before Shirokogorov fell from grace.

> A nation is a historical constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture (Stalin, 1994 [1973]:20).

Stalin's definition is certainly more materialistic and his is not a *sanctified set of traditions* but a *psychological make-up.* However, the similarity between Stalin's concept of a nation and Shirokogorov's idea of ethnos lies in the stressing of *stability*. Both concepts rely on the idea that a group can only be recognized as an entity if it has been such for a long time. This assumption also makes it difficult to imagine the formation of new groups of the same quality in the present.

Yulian Bromley, the long-time highest ranking ethnographer in the USSR, did not refer to Stalin's nation-definition, and Shirokogorov's he criticized sharply, saying Shirokogorov confused an ethnos with a biological population, a flaw that could, as he complained, be found frequently among Soviet scholars (Bromley, 1983:20). For biologically interrelated groups of people he therefore alternatively suggested the term "population" (Bromley and Podol'niy, 1990:16). Behind the formation and maintenance of an ethnos he in contrast saw socialization in the family and in institutions (Ibid.:30). What connects Bromley and his followers to the tradition of Shirokogorov and Stalin is again their insistence on stability. What singles out an ethnos from other human communities such as political nations, confessional groups, or language groups, is the stability (ustoychivost') of their self-designation (Bromley, 1983:46). A member of an ethnos would not lose his or her sense of belonging to this ethnos, even after many generations, after political circumstances have changed, or after an individual had moved to another place. Members of political nations (Bromley names France and Belgium as examples) would lose their sense of belonging after the political entities that bear the same name would have disappeared. Also, the second generation of French or Belgian emigrants would lose their sense of belonging to what Bromley saw as the purely political community of the French or the Belgians. The same was true, he argued, for confessional groups and for language communities. After people lose their faith or no longer speak a particular language, they lose their sense of belonging to these communities. This would not happen to communities of the ethnos-type, Bromley insisted. So the litmus-test to differentiate an ethnos from other forms of human communion is whether the self-designation can remain even after people have changed their whereabouts, their faith, the language they speak, or after the political situation around them has changed (ibd:47). In the Soviet interpretation of ethnos, a Russian who experienced the transformation from Russia to the Soviet Union, who moved from Russia to Estonia, started to speak Estonian there, and replaced his Orthodox Christianity with Bolshevist atheism, still remained a Russian. The same was true for a Ukrainian, a Jew, an Armenian, or a

Georgian who left their native region, became atheists or Baptists or Buddhists, and started to speak Russian, Ukrainian, or English. Such a concept, a trait that sticks with a person no matter what, perfectly justified the inscription of the category in a person's passport. To register an ethnos-type identity, however, also entailed the assumption that people everywhere would naturally self-identify with one (and preferably only one) stable, ethnos-type category. The prerequisite of self-identification is perhaps the major hitch to the theory. Only with a common self-identification a group of people could become a "social organism" such as an ethnos. Historically, argued Bromley and his followers, this self-identification derived from kinship ties, however distant they might have grown over time (Kozlov, 1974:85-89). The present identification with a territory was seen as having grown out of an earlier identification with a common ancestor. Once perceived as the natural environment of one's kin, the territory assumed a more important place in ethnic identification as kinship ties grew more distant (Kozlov, 1971:93). This notion prevents us from expanding the concept of ethnos to the French and Belgians, the Americans and Brazilian, and many others who have a nationality, with which they self-identify, but no unambiguous ethnic identity and no claim for a common ancestry. The ethnos concept also presupposes that such people have an ethnic identity even if they do not know or care about it.

But more significantly, Bromley's theory of ethnos had trouble dealing with the gradual mixing and transformation of ethnic identities, and therefore also with the aspired Soviet identity. Bromley admitted that a person could have more than one ethnos-type identity (Bromley and Podol'niy, 1990:18). A person could for example be Russian as well as Ukrainian if he or she exhibits traits typical for both these ethnos. He however thought that this could be the case not without a special justification and that a person could have no more than two ethnic identities, (Bromley, 1983:48). Ethnic identity was seen as a trait of personality that emerged together with it and was formed independently of the person's will by the environment, the ethnic belonging of parents, neighbors, and friends, ethnic traditions, and political circumstances (Kozlov, 1974:87). Bromley also argued that endogamy within the ethnos was the rule and reinforced the uniformity of people within the ethnos (1990:21). In endogamy Bromley saw not merely a social phenomenon bot also a biological one which ultimately led to genetic similarity of the ethnos' members (Wernhart, 1998:83). In other writings, where Bromley experimented with the metaphor of an organism that grows and gathers strength and becomes ill and dies, endogamy within the ethnos became a "survival strategy" for the ethnic organism (Tishkov, 1997:9). The instinct to follow this survival strategy was presupposed by other Soviet ethnographers too. Even if people in the group were not aware of it, they still strived for its survival (Arutyunyan, 1974:93).

If ethnos-type belonging was seen as an ancient and inherited trait, one that was objectively determinable, and stuck with a person, if interethnic marriage was seen as an exception from the rule, a rule that ensured survival of the ethnos, then consequently, inside the ethnos, some traits were shared between all members and passed on from one generation to the next. One such trait that Bromley treated with exceptional attention was the "ethnic character". An ethnic character was thought to be more than just the sum of cultural traits. It was a whole system of psychological properties that interacted with one another to create traits, unique to each ethnos (Bromley and Podol'niy, 1990:106). The authors considered the fact that a psyche cannot exist outside the individual and that therefore a group of people, such as an ethnos, cannot host a psyche or a character like a human being. They insisted, however, that the "social collective" of the ethnos acted to stress certain characteristic traits while it disguised others. The result was the observable ethnic character of an ethnos (ibd.). Bromley, as did his rival Gumilev, traced differences in ethnic characters to the environment in which the ethnos was formed once upon a time (ibd.:108).

6.5. Gut feeling and folk theories of ethnicity

Lev Gumilev, the second theoretician who wrote extensively about ethnos, became a best-seller after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Naarden, 1996:54, Bassin, 2016:2). His theories were also widely introduced in school and university curricula, broadly discussed in the media, and constantly cited by politicians (Shnirel'man, 2006:8,16). Gumilev was predominantly interested in the occurrence and disappearance of ethnos-type groups throughout the course of history. This interest already suggested that entities that came to shape history, such as the "Romans", the "Greeks", or the "Tatar-Mongols" were all of the ethnos-type. An assumption that exposed Gumilev's theories to an obvious critique; that he used the modern concept of ethnos and insinuated that ancient peoples fitted that concept. Gumilev used to sweep such criticism away by stating that so far science knew next to nothing about ethnos and the nature of this phenomenon (Gumilev, 2002:31). Therefore, lack of evidence that such a type of social communion has existed for a very long time was not a hint that it was a modern phenomenon. Rather, this lack of evidence, for Gumilev, illustrated how scrappy our knowledge about ancient peoples was. He himself defined ethnos as a phenomenon on the boundary between the social sphere and the biological sphere that played a crucial role in the texture of the biosphere of the earth (ibd.:38). Gumilev believed that an ethnos of such kind was a living being that ran on "geo-bio-chemical energy" and that obeyed "the second law of thermodynamics" (cited in Shnirel'man, 2006:8). Instances of rapid expansion of an ethnos at a particular time in history, Gumilev attributed to outpourings of cosmic energy (Naarden, 1996:76).

So part of the popularity Gumilev enjoyed after his death in 1992 may be due to his effort to answer in one sweep some of the most difficult questions of the humanities, using concepts of natural sciences (Shnirel'man, 2006:8). Gumilev's writings were also appealing for Russians because he described the ethnic groups of the Soviet Union and the former Russian Empire as ethnically unique but at the same time held together by a fundamental cohesion (Bassin, 2016:4). Another part of the fascination of the Russian speaking audience with Lev Gumilev is certainly his family background and his tragic biography. Lev Gumilev was born in 1912 to parents who were both renowned poets, Nikolai Gumilev and Anna Akhmatova. His father Nikolai was executed by the Soviet secret police in 1922, his mother Anna struggled with repression and censorship for the rest of her life. Lev Gumilev spent decades in prisons and in Siberian Gulags for the sake of his family background (Naarden, 1996:54-59). In the Gulag he lived among representatives of Turkic speaking peoples of the Soviet Union. These cellmates triggered a special interest in theoretical works on why, at some times, small and obscure groups would quickly develop into the rulers of whole continents. Gumilev's quest for explanations to such questions also led him to turn away from the humanities and to natural science (Gumilev, 2002:29). Concepts borrowed from physics and biology throughout his theory mostly serve as metaphors, but in part as actual explanations. The most famous concept that Gumilev came up with he called "impassionedness" (passionarnost'), coined on the base of the Latin root for "passion". Gumilev used this concept to explain why some groups at times develop quickly, seemingly out of nothing, and why at other times they decline. He saw it as the "factor X", that social sciences ignored so far, and therefore failed to explain the occurrence and decline of ethnos-type groups (ibd.:302). Impassionedness, Gumilev thought, was tied to the amount of energy an ethnos can absorb. He believed that there are individuals and ethnos-type groups that at times become driven by impassionedness. They then experienced a higher degree of energy and inspiration that allowed them to commit heroic deeds. Other people however, according to Gumilev exhibited a phenomenon he named "subimpassionedness" (subpassionarnost'). They allegedly dragged energy from others and through decadence and parasitism led whole civilizations into decline. Rise and fall of an ethnos formed a repeating life cycle for each ethnos that reoccurs mechanically, steered more by the forces of nature, than by human ideas and actions. All these assumptions made Gumilevs theories vulnerable for criticism as eugenics, favoring apartheid, and even fascism (Naarden, 1996:77).

The concept of impassionedness remained inconclusive, not despite but because Gumilev wanted to tie it to science. The idea of a physical or biological force that drives people and with them the ethnos to which they belong, stood in stark contrast to the historic materialism that formed the basis of all Soviet historiography. In Soviet social science, social change could be explained only through the lens of class struggle. People reformed the societies

they lived in out of the desire to free themselves from the oppression of the ruling classes. In Soviet historiography, this struggle too led to a regular succession of stages of social evolution (a characteristic shared by Gumilev's theories (ibid.:72)). Only in historic materialism of the Soviet school, these phases did not amount to a circle but to a progressive line that found its destination when a society reached the final stage of communism. Therefore, a theory that explained social change by forces of nature and social evolution as a reoccurring cycle was clearly at odds with the established social sciences in the Soviet Union. Gumilev, even in times he spent out of prison, had trouble finding employment, working many years as a librarian. He completed two doctoral theses, none of which was ever accepted by Leningrad State University and he was allowed to teach only in the department of geography rather than in his preferred discipline, history (ibid.:54-55).

His relation with Yulian Bromley was strained. Bromley's main critique of Gumilev's work was that he failed, as before him did Shirokogorov, to differentiate between ethnos and biological populations (Bromley, 1983:20). Bromley and his followers saw a flawed geographical determinism in Gumilev's theories. One of the more outspoken among them, V.I. Kozlov, wrote that Gumilev put all his focus on how the environment shapes people, but neglected how people shape the environment (Kozlov, 1971:96). Another major difference between the two approaches was that unlike Bromley, Gumilev saw the ethnic self-designation of people who belong to one ethnos, the ethnonym, as something secondary. For him endogamy was a far more important marker for the ethnos-type community (Shnirel'man, 2006:12). He warned that if contact between several ethnos became too frequent and if one ethnos would intermingle into the "ethnosphere" of others, the outcome would be a "Chimera", a perverted and uprooted hybrid being, bound for decline (Naarden, 1996:61, Shnirel'man, 2006:11). With his views on endogamy, Gumilev exposed himself to another strand of fierce critique. He disregarded the basic distinction between norms and practices. For Gumilev, the existence of a norm for ethnic endogamy was sufficient to assume that people would actually largely follow this norm. In this matter, according to Shnirel'man, he relied on "stereotypes and anecdotes" instead of data (ibd.:13). For Bromley, in contrast, endogamy within the ethnos was not a prerequisite, but a mere "survival strategy" of the ethnos. Regardless of their differences, both figureheads contributed to an idea of ethnos, as a discrete organism, a phenomenon of nature that existed objectively and independently of the opinions and desires of people (Bromley, 1983:49). But that Bromley's theory became accepted in Soviet academia and Gumilev's did not, was due to their contrasting ideas about the forces that drive social change. In Bromley's theory, this force was class struggle, in Gumilev's it was impassionedness.

The esoteric idea of impassionedness very likely helped to propel the immense popularity of Gumilev's books after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. To post-soviet

readers, the impassionedness motive must have been a great comfort in uncertain times. It helped to interpret the current state of decline as a phenomenon of nature, rather than of human mismanagement. According to Gumilev's cyclical theory at the time of Perestroika, Western Europe was on its last legs, whereas the Russian ethnos could expect a renaissance (Naarden, 1996:79). The idea that the ethnos is at any time going through a certain phase, whether or not the individuals within the ethnos like it, has something deeply fatalistic to it (Shnirel'man, 2006:17). It frees the individual from responsibility in the development of society. A resurrection of the ethnos would come in its time, independently of the actual behavior of people. Gumilev's thinking also posed the Russian ethnos in a less humiliating position vis-à-vis the West. Russia had lost the Cold War due to the West's economic prowess. But Gumilev's theory stated that money cannot buy impassionedness. While the West had a culture corrupted by the quest for profit, Russia had a new chance to recollect its cultural roots, and gather new impassionedness.

The motive of impassionedness that strikes like a force of nature suits the ethnic revival in southern Bessarabia quite well. It denies that ethno nationalist revivals are the political agendas of rational actors. In some instances representatives of ethnic organizations referred directly to Gumilev. In an interview with a counselor of the Moldovan Academy of Sciences, herself a Gagauz and a prolific writer about the Gagauz people in southern Bessarabia, when asked about her motivation to do research on that particular ethnic group, she replied

> "….my work here let's say in the realm of science and culture… Well, naturally the future belongs to this ethnos too, and naturally the soul aches, and one wants to do one's own share, by researching something, by presenting something, and there is indeed a need for books, because on something we need to educate the kids after all, and in the university too, so people will know their customs and traditions. If we don't work that out, like we do now, then people will ask for it, there is an urge. In my point of view that is the essential stimulus, that is, the stimulus is…, well, probably ethnic… That the ethnos is now in a stage of rise (pod'em) and this ethnic rise it is, it exists in every one of us and in the whole ethnos and we want to move it in order to achieve certain results.
>
> > *I:* So the ethnos is like…. living?
> >
> > *R:* A living organism.
> >
> > *I:* A living organism?
> >
> > *R:* I think so yes, absolutely. Yes. I think that the ethnos is a living organism, as said Lev Gumilev, it has predefined stages, eeeeh… birth, growth, old age, and so on, and I think that the Gagauz today are in a stage, how to say, in a stormy, active stage, and they achieve many results."[5]

The idea of the ethnos as a living organism, for this informant seems to be more than just a metaphor. The motivation to invest energy and time in making the ethnos of the Gagauz and its

[5] Interview in Chişinău, December 6, 2012

history better known, for her stems from the urge to do it while it is worth doing so, while the ethnos is in a certain phase that will allow it to progress.

Another idea that surfaces in this informant's explanation is that there exists a link between all the members of the ethnos, whether or not they are aware of it. They all at the same time feel an urge to raise the ethnos onto a higher level and even if the informant herself would not take the initiative to find out more about the customs and traditions, the people of the ethnos would start asking for it. So again, belonging to an ethnos and rising or declining along with it, is not seen as a matter of individual choice.

One obvious question that needs to be dealt with, then, is how people with multi-ethnic ancestry and ambiguous ethnic identities still can hold the idea that ethnic identities are primordial and unchangeable. After all, most people who grew up in mixed ethnic families, at some point in their life, either made a (rational) choice to identify with one or other of their ancestral ethnicities, or they remain undecided and choose their ethnic identity according to the situation. If these people still hold to the idea that ethnic belonging is primordial, then ethnic identity should manifest itself naturally, instead of being an outcome of deliberation and choice. Such an experience was revealed in an interview with an Izmail arts teacher, a woman of mixed Ukrainian and Russian ancestry who grew up in Izmail. She struggled with her ambiguous identity until a decisive moment in her childhood at 13 or 14, when she traveled to Russia proper with her family. There, she instantly felt at home, because people, although not always friendly, were always honest, "None of these dodges, none of this diplomatic veiling, none of this craftiness!" Therefore, for the first time she felt she had come to her fitting environment: "You feel it simply. I felt so relaxed. I felt as if I had breathed…, this burden…., and this is because it is in me, in the blood, in the genes." She then sharply contrasted this experience of relief with annual visits to her Ukrainian relatives, whose hypocrisy she blamed on their being Ukrainian. There she felt foreign:

> "*I:* This is the side of your…?
>
> *R:* Mum, my Mum. And we traveled there practically every year, to Mum's relatives. And I felt as if…, well maybe from the age of 5…, that I am, as if not of that sort. Well, like a white crow. And, you know, this somehow makes you feel tense.
>
> *I:* Did they speak a different language there than in your home?
>
> *R:* No. No other language. We spoke Russian. I understood Ukrainian. It's not Chinese after all. It can be understood. But the mentality itself…, this is what it is about! It makes one tense, very much. When I traveled to Russia I was just astonished!"[6]

In this woman's memory it was clearly a matter of feeling rather than deliberation that led her to identify as Russian and not Ukrainian. The different mentality between the honest Russian

[6] Interview in Izmail, January 25, 2013

and the crafty Ukrainians may be a stereotype, but in the informant's recollection they correspond to a tangible experience. Such experiences become instrumental in the choice of ethnic identity which is not a choice for the informant but a discovery of what is already there in "the genes", "the blood", "the records". The same woman at an earlier occasion already had explained to me that she and others can simply feel that she is Russian. She used the expression that Russia was "where my blood calls me". Then she said that although she had hardly been to Russia, if people from Russia saw her, she would not even have to say a word, they could say right away, "ah one of us (nasha)! You must be Russian".[7]

Arguing with a personal feeling also can be found in the writings of an influential patron of a Bulgarian ethnic association, Anton Kisse. In his 2006 book *The Renaissance of the Ukrainian Bulgarians* he (unlike some of my informants) admits that villages with different ethnic populations nowadays look too much alike to tell ethnic differences: "Hardly someone can precisely say in what the Bulgarian settlements in Ukraine differ from those of our neighbors...", but then he goes on arguing he senses what one cannot see: "I simply feel this difference intuitively, I sense and emotionally react to 'our own' area" (Kisse, 2006:35). A Bulgarian Policeman and a Ukrainian history teacher also both told me that they could easily spot their ethnic brethren in a crowd. Both these informants independently from one another insisted that one had to belong to the ethnic group to be blessed with this intuition. This assumption of course excludes all ethnic outsiders from the sensation and therefore cannot be proven or disproven. The notion of a personal feeling that tells a person where he or she belongs, rules out any objection by outsiders that ethnic groups are constructed. In line with the mechanisms of exclusion, described in the previous chapter, an insider, then, can just cite a feeling that he or she and their ethnic in-group perceive, whereas the outsider can never even hope to experience it. Systematic and scientifically verifiable ethnic differences, as purported in theories of Bromley and Gumilev would demand that these can be verified by different observers at different times. Referring to a subjective feeling that tells one to which ethnic group one belongs and where one is at odds, excludes scientific procedures such as intersubjective verification.

6.6.   *Grand scheme planning and the "primordial trap"*

The "primordial trap" is a phrase I use here to describe a theoretical dead-end all arguments which essentialize ethnicity are imperiled to get stuck in. Soviet social sciences and most subsequent schools in post-soviet countries are stuck there and have not yet found a viable way out. This is not only the fault of an academic discipline, but also of a political environment that

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[7] Interview in Izmail, January 21, 2013

has put heavy pressure on it (Tishkov, 1992:371). During the Soviet Union the political environment demanded a theoretical framework that justified the use of ethnicity as an administrative category. Later, after the Soviet Union had disintegrated, the political environment in the former republics demanded a theoretical framework that justified ethnic nationalism. Theories stipulating an ethnic character that stuck to every person along with an ethnic identity, not only neatly justified the entry of ethnicity into a person's passport, they also facilitated the question how to approach ethnic diversity in the Soviet Union. Members of one ethnic group appeared to be united by a common origin and led by one motivation (Solonari, 2003:418). If one ethnic group was deemed, for instance unreliable for some reason or other, like the Gagauz and the Bulgarians during World War II, then everyone whose personal documents depicted this category could be treated in exactly the same way. Each ethnic group was perceived as a learning organism during the long evolutionary process that ends with communist society and each is said to have developed a distinct character that makes it unique in the community of Soviet peoples (Bromley and Podol'niy, 1990:106, Shnirelman, 2009:114, Schorkowitz, 2012b:45). Grand-scheme planning, the preferred mode of governance in the Soviet Union, would be infinitely more complex if state authorities would have to look whether each individual in fact exhibited a particular character or not. The proxy of ethnicity for reliability reduced decision making complexity. This seemed especially helpful during the war, when many decisions entailed substantial risks. Categorization by ethnicity and other features may not have made Soviet administration fairer, but it certainly made it easier and cheaper.

The metaphor of a trap is appropriate to discuss these theories, because they did not intentionally claim ethnicity was primordial or essential. One indication that there was no such intention is that Soviet ethnicity theories heavily rely on the concept of ethnogenesis. Soviet ethnographers closely collaborated with archaeologists and linguists to track down the history, the origins, and in some cases the disappearance and fusion of entities called "ethnos" (Bromley, 1980:160). For many ethnic groups, Soviet social sciences provided elaborate histories and precise indication at which point of time this particular group came into being. Soviet ethnography did therefore not claim ethnic groups had existed since times immemorial, or they were immune to change. It looked for explanations of why and when ethnic groups occurred. However, social sciences merely held an auxiliary position in the structure of institutions serving the state. One of the main tasks of Soviet ethnography was to delimit groups from one another and to ascribe a hierarchical status such as "ethnos" or "sub-ethnos" to each delimited group (Tishkov, 1992:373). This status then could be significant for the standing of the people who were registered as members of that group. In an authoritarian state, which built part of its power on such categories, to deconstruct them (as was meanwhile happening in the West), would have put the discipline at odds with party elites. Therefore Soviet social sciences worked

on constructing concepts of ethnicity that never explicitly named their essence, but implicitly assumed one.

The use of ethnicity as an administrative category not only allowed treating people of the same ethnicity in the same way, it also enabled the administration to treat people of different ethnicities in different ways. In Bessarabia, ethnic discrimination has occurred mainly during or directly following World War II. Justification for such unequal treatment only holds if these differences in character are congruent with ethnic boundaries. This is why Soviet ethnicity theories came along with a strong, however unvoiced, reservation against the blending of ethnic groups. There was an equally strong distaste for the idea that people individually chose their ethnicity from a menu of possible ethnic identities. Bureaucratic categories are typically introduced so that people with certain givens can be treated in certain ways. Most such categories are not for choice, because state policies towards certain categories of subjects are meant to manipulate those subjects, they are not meant to *be manipulated by the subjects*. This is why typically people are not allowed to individually choose their age, gender, or tax class. By using ethnicity as a bureaucratic category it was implicitly also imagined as something that people should not be allowed to choose or change themselves.

Post-soviet countries inherited the ideas created and disseminated during a short but very intensive pedagogical campaign that took off after World War II, but had passed its zenith in the Brezhnev years. The Soviet state that orchestrated this campaign had no incentive to disseminate concepts of ethnicity that would challenge its policies towards ethnic minorities or its bureaucratic practices.

What is more, besides some metaphysical polemics between the top shots of Soviet and Western social sciences there was little spirited exchange of ideas. Those Western scholars who seriously engaged with the findings of Soviet social research (for good examples see the edited volumes by Dunn and Dunn, 1974, and Gellner, 1980) were often hampered by difficulties in gaining access to original Soviet data (Karklins, 1986:176). Without a serious impact of contrasting ideas from elsewhere, the highly centralized Soviet social sciences began ruminating their habitual concept of ethnicity. The only event that eventually shook up this circle of self-reference was the demise of the Soviet economy and with it the Soviet state. This point seems obvious, but it is important, because the Soviet concept of ethnicity was so closely linked to the one-party government and command economy.

Besides serving the ideology of the Communist Party, the social sciences were themselves tied to grand scheme planning. Soviet ethnographers considered themselves social engineers dedicated to creating a communist society (Haber, 2014:197), and the work of ethnographers was scheduled in five year plans (as Kushner, 1974:212 indicates, lamenting ill-chosen research priorities in the projects planned for the five years to come).

Clear-cut categories were one of the most basic needs for a society engineered to fulfill centrally planned outcomes. Reading Soviet theoreticians, such as Kushner or Bromley, one sometimes gets the impression that their scholarly priority was the coining and delimitation of new categories. Although there was certainly no quota for producing new categories, each new category gave the discipline a claim to better understand society and to be able to offer finer tuned planning solutions. The concept of "legibility" of society comes to mind again. Because most states are a lot younger than the societies they administer, they need to introduce categories that enable them to "read" and eventually manipulate society (Scott, 1998:183). Programmatic thinkers in Soviet ethnography saw the discipline as an auxiliary data generating machine to social engineering (Tokarew, 1954, Kushner, 1974). With the help of ethnicity statistics Kushner (1951:18-19) wrote, administrative borders could be drawn more efficiently and school curricula developed according to local needs. Soviet scholars of ethnicity knew they catered to the state's need of "legibility" and they saw nothing wrong in it. Most prominently they did so by creating hierarchically ordered categories of ethnic groups such as "superethnos", "ethnos", "sub-ethnos", "ethnikos", "ethnographic group", that were used along with other group categories such as "population" and "race" (split into three main subgroups, that were themselves split into 20 smaller groups that then branched into different "anthropological types"). All these categories were carefully defined by a list of characteristics attached to them (Bromley, 1983:14-43). This social dimension of category building was paired by similarly bounded temporal categories such as the development stages "archaic", "slavery", "feudalism", "capitalism", and "socialism" (ibid.:36). Together these categories laid a grid plan of social theory over time and space. Each group at all times fitted into this grid in a specific way. Giving theoretical meaning to these categories enabled Soviet social sciences with a practical response to any problem of social engineering.

Soviet approaches, especially in the early years, strongly advocated a specific policy approach to each ethnic group in its particular environment (Sergeyev, 1964:487). Without the "legibility" created by social and historical categories the sheer complexity of administering a huge and diverse country towards very ambitious goals, would have simply been overwhelming. Soviet scholars like Sergeyev (ibid.:492) freely admitted that categories had to be coined in order to be able to administer people. The problem in Soviet administration was not the creation and use of categories (no state can do without). The problem rather was the low degree of critical reflection upon these categories. In a state where criticism of official theories was punished, the theoretical model was increasingly taken for reality (Scott, 1998:196). If reality did not fit the theory, a new sub-category could be invented, or the contradiction could simply be denied. All ethnic groups somehow fit into the Soviet Union's grid plan, at least those inside the Soviet Union. For groups that claimed a similar status for themselves but did not fulfill the

list of criteria set by the rule book, new categories substituted a discussion about the validity of established categories. The terms "ethnographic group"[8] and "sub-ethnos" were introduced to designate groups that were culturally different from an established ethnic category, but where it was inconvenient to establish a separate political approach.[9] Instead of revisiting established categories each case that did not fit created a new category. The Soviet social sciences thereby became a *category coining machine* and its theories became self-fulfilling prophecies. Leading theoreticians like Bromley understood the pitfalls of essentializing ethnicity and he denied to believe in an essential quality that was innate to all members of one ethnos (Bromley and Podol'niy, 1990:106). But the need for clear-cut categories in the grand scheme planning of the Soviet Union led to an academic preference of supposedly "objective realities". Whenever this objectivity was challenged, Soviet scholars hurriedly invented new, allegedly clear-cut categories, and thereby renewed the claim they had found something that had already been there "independent of observation" and long before anyone realized. It is this reoccurring claim that lets the primordial trap snap shut. From the isolated Soviet academia, every theoretical attempt to deal with ethnic identities ended up here, sometimes more sometimes less apologetic.

6.7.   Conclusion

The first objective of this chapter was to argue that the term "ethnicity" refers to two different concepts in the Western and in the post-soviet discourse. The second objective was to offer an explanation for these different conceptualizations. In order to provide such an explanation, a look at the different histories of the two concepts was undertaken. This revealed the different paths nationalism took in the peripheries of over-seas colonies (from where Western Europe borrowed its early concepts of national solidarity) and the peripheries of continental empires, such as Russia. The select few from the peripheries with access to education had different incentives in overseas colonies where their careers were limited by the boundaries of their respective colony and in continental colonies, where their "pilgrimages" could lead right into the center of the colonial power. There, unlike their peers in overseas colonies, they could have assimilated to the dominant group of the empire, but eventually saw their chance of gaining

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[8] Still used a census category in 2001:

http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/rus/regions/select_reg5/?box=5.5W&data1=1&rz=1_1&rz_b=2_1&botton=cens_db&k_t=51

(18.11.2015)

[9] In Carpathian Ukraine the groups Boyko, Lemkos, and Hutsuls were sometimes described as "ethnographic groups", thereby acknowledging their cultural distinctness but denying them the status of a fully sovereign ethnos (Makarchuk, 2008:19). In Russia the Don Cossacks or the Pomori of the White Sea Coast have been described as "subethnos" of the Russian ethnos (Bromley and Podol'niy, 1984:19).

more power by stressing their difference from the dominant group and from other peripheral groups. The aspiring elites of overseas colonies, quite to the contrary, had to stress their commonality if they wanted to gain an effective ideological basis to mobilize against the colonial power. Both movements needed to claim cultural and ethnic commonality within an entity over which they claimed power. The difference between the aspiring elites in the overseas colonies and their peer in continental empires was that the former needed to *extend* the boundaries of this entity, while the latter needed to *restrict* membership in the entity they claimed was culturally so different from the center. Therefore, for the aspiring elites in overseas colonies it was crucial to keep the list of membership criteria for their group *limited* so everyone who lived in their colony would fit in. For aspiring elites in the disintegrating continental empires, on the other hand, it was crucial to *expand* the list of membership criteria in their group to include very specific features of language and culture. For both groups it was crucial to maintain control over these respective lists. So even before ethnic identity became crucial in access to political power, in the eyes of the elites it ceased to be a matter of choice and became a characteristic ascribable by educated ethnic champions.

Once these diverging evolutions of the concept ethnicity have been retraced, the emic/etic distinction can usefully be applied to avoid misunderstandings and confusion of the two different concepts that underlie the term ethnicity. The understanding of the ethnicity concept as it is used today can be deepened if one looks at its use during the Soviet Union. Ethnicity was adopted as an administrative category for Soviet bureaucracy. In order to legitimize administrative ascription of ethnicity, Soviet social sciences, on the height of their influence in the Brezhnev years, further worked on refining theories meant to prove that ethnicity was objectively ascribable. This was done by creating lists of criteria a social group had to fulfill in order to be seen as an ethnic group, or as an "ethnos", as groups of inherited ethnic identity came to be called in Soviet terminology. Every time a group did not fit this list of criteria, a new category was created in order to save the allegedly objective category of "ethnos". Each time a new category was invented, the claim that the distinction had been there already, even before its academic description, reinforced the underlying claim that ethnic categories were essential and primordial. This was a side-effect of the coining of categories rather than its intended effect. I described this mechanism therefore as a "primordial trap". Lack of critical reflection during the Soviet period and the subsequent lack of resources to engage with and popularize alternative conceptualizations of ethnicity, have led to still widely held perceptions that ethnic categories are natural, objective, and unambiguous.

7. Representing the past, shaping the present

Since Ukrainian independence in 1991, the main rifts in the country's political landscape ran along two topics that have often completely drowned day-to-day politics: the polemicized use of the Russian versus the Ukrainian language and the vastly different perspectives on history among different political factions. Setting aside the issues of language policy and linguistic purism until the next chapter, this chapter discusses how representations of the past are used in present day politics, and how this political utilization of history has evolved over the preceding decades. Linking up with the pervious chapter, which looked at how the concept of ethnicity was spread, this chapter studies how a similar set of institutions shaped ideas about history and how these ideas became an integral part of ethnic identities. In this approach, historiography becomes an instrument of politics, remembering and representing the past becomes a commemorative culture governed by its own rules. For those influential enough to shape and use these rules, commemorative culture can be a powerful political tool, easily adaptable if political circumstances change. Images of the past are much less limited by social constraints than the present or the actual past (Halbwachs, 1992:50). In Ukraine, a peripheral land contested throughout history and to this day, this freedom of scope in shaping historical narratives has often been used to its fullest extent. It is therefore instrumental to first look at some specific problems of Ukrainian historiography. Because historiography is most powerful when it reaches many people, one section of this chapter parallels the previous chapter's discussion of pedagogy's role in cementing ethnicity concepts and is dedicated to the development of historical education. The chapter then returns to the core topic of this study, ethnic boundaries, by looking at the historiography of group and group boundaries. Finally it will be necessary to have a closer look at the lessons drawn from depictions of history in contemporary local politics.

7.1. Ukraine's past vs. Ukraine's history

Historiography in present-day Ukraine is characterized by a ubiquitous narrative about an age old struggle of the Ukrainian people against the dominance of neighboring nations, such as the Russians or the Poles. Especially when it comes to the role of Russia and the Russians in

Ukraine, the discussion becomes also relevant to contemporary power relations and ethnic identities. This is of course also true for Ukraine's historic relations to Central and Western Europe, but no other aspect of Ukrainian history has been remembered as polemically as the relation to Russia. There are two main reasons for this: On the one hand, Ukraine has a substantial Russian minority that has time and time again reacted sensitively to reinterpretations of history if they make Russians look like intruders. On the other hand, the Russian Federation is an influential player in Ukrainian politics and even more so in the Ukrainian economy. But increasingly Western institutions such as the EU, the NATO, and the IMF have had a heavy influence on Ukrainian politics as well, much to the dissatisfaction of those political factions, which traditionally look to Moscow for guidance. Putting forward different versions of history, allows political factions to claim ownership over territories, groups, and symbols, ultimately forming a basis for their political agendas. The symbolic policies over history are so heatedly debated, because many interpret them as a tool box of present-day realpolitik.

Ukrainian history is so vulnerable to claims from neighboring states, because Ukraine, as a fully-fledged, sovereign state had no history until the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. Most European countries have established historic narratives starting with early state formations that forestalled nation states. Such narratives usually continue with the dynasties of rulers, military campaigns, rebellions, and with treaties that shaped the relation to other states. This classic way of producing national histories was discarded as mere *histoire événementielle* by representatives of the Annales School (Braudel, 2009:175). For Ukrainian historiography it never really worked anyway. It is not only the lack of continuity of a sovereign state that complicates the narration of Ukrainian history, but also the debated genealogy and extent of the Ukrainian people as an ethnic community. Their cultural and linguistic similarity with neighboring Eastern Slavs and their largely accepted common origin in medieval Kievan Rus have frequently tempted Russian historians to portray the Ukrainians as merely a rustic brand of Russians. One possible way to deal with such claims and to reconcile Ukrainian history with the genre of traditional national histories is to blank out, as far as possible, the role of neighboring states. But most documents that can serve as the basis of such a history have been produced precisely by representatives of these states. Because a Ukrainian state emerged so late, Ukraine's historiographers wrote their history for a state yet to emerge. They did so from their far-away exiles, or under the aegis of Soviet censorship. State-sponsored Ukrainian historiography was virtually nonexistent. To many observers it appeared therefore that Ukraine had no history of her own. Mark von Hagen (1995:658) cautions us to carefully discern between not having a long recorded history, and not having a past.

Not having a long recorded and state-sponsored history would be half as bad if this lack was widely acknowledged, and if the reasons for this lack became themselves a subject of historiography. Yet, the Ukrainian declaration of independence from 1991 claims a thousand year old Ukrainian statehood (Kappeler, 2000:9). But the documents produced over the course of these thousand years history on the territory of Ukraine, were produced by representatives of other states. Some historians have therefore resorted to narrating the history, not of a Ukrainian state, but of the Ukrainian people. This approach often overlooks other groups living in what is now Ukraine, such as Poles, Russians, or Jews, even though these groups have often figured as elites and urban middle classes (ibid.:9). Another questionable way of narrating history as the history of a discrete group, is to put stress on the perpetual oppression of the Ukrainians and their rebellions against the empires that divided Ukraine between them (Plokhy, 1995:711). But this approach leaves the historian with the thankless task of piecing together from scattered and contested sources, the history of an allegedly coherent and continuous group. In the state-sanctioned historical narrative of independent Ukraine, this allegedly unified group was not only traced far beyond times when the idea of a Ukrainian state and the ideology of nationalism emerged, but also endowed with the staunch will to fight for the eventual creation of a Ukrainian state. So the narrative that reemerged as the dominant way of depicting history in independent Ukraine is one that presents the current power relations as a natural and fortunate outcome of what people have lived and died for in the past.[1]

This endeavor has turned out to be vulnerable to all sorts of criticism, from being patchy to being overtly idealistic to relying on anachronisms. Clearly, there are better ways of narrating Ukrainian history: Andreas Kappeler contents himself with writing the history of the area in which Ukrainians lived in substantial numbers (2000:10), Paul Robert Magocsi makes the Ukrainians the protagonists of his historic account but directs ample attention to the many other ethnic groups in the area (1996:viii), Anna Reid studies Ukraine as a cultural continuum of complex and mixed identities (1997:16), Andrew Wilson studies Ukrainian history as one of an "unexpected Nation", but one that has no less a right to our getting used to it than any other nation, old or young (2002:xi), Orest Subtelny makes the topics of statelessness and rapid modernization from outside the leitmotifs of his account (2000:xv), Serhii Plokhy insists modern identities should be studied as such and not ascribed to medieval groups in Kievan Rus (2006:3).

But all these histories have trouble being acknowledged as "true" Ukrainian historiography. Like with the concept of ethnicity, discussed in the previous chapter, the Soviet and post-soviet idea of historiography is part of the problem. Just like ethnography,

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[1] The undisputed master of this grand narrative was Mikhailo Hrushevs'ky with his 10 volume *History of Ukraine-Rus*.

historiography too was closely monitored by the Soviet state and evolved under conditions of almost total isolation from Western historiographical developments (Banerji, 2006:826). History consisted, in the dominant Soviet and post-soviet view, of facts found in documents or reported by witnesses. The historian's job was therefore to establish these facts and put them into the right chronological order for everyone to recognize the "truth" about the past (Brunnbauer, 2004:18). So as long as no one concealed the "truth", it could be established and proven. Once the facts have been found and confirmed, the subject under concern no longer needed to be debated. Leading historians of post-soviet Ukraine seemed to have stuck to the belief that one only needed to ask a sufficient number of truthful witnesses to make the subjective element in memory disappear (Marples, 2007:2). Those historians, who for themselves claim such objective visions of the past, tend to overlook the political dimension of historiography. The idea that where truth is objectively observable, politics cease to be important is inherent both in Soviet concepts of history and in Soviet concepts of ethnicity. If objective observation can rule out the difference between ethnic self-identification and ethnic belonging, then it should also rule out the difference between memory and history. But it is exactly the confusion of memory and history that permits us to use the past as a political instrument. History is produced with the claim to stand for itself, to represent the one "truth", whereas "memory is blind to all but the group it binds" (Nora, 1989:9). The group creating the memory is crucial to the memory itself, because what is remembered as a community is conserved better than what is remembered by unconnected individuals (Halbwachs, 1980:30). Ukraine, as a sovereign state, is so young that many people have gained their dearest memories still during the Soviet Union, when a radically different perspective (a much more Russia-centered perspective) on Ukrainian history was en vogue. Also, many people remember those who have sacrificed their lives or health for the Soviet Union, in World War II, in Afghanistan, and in Chernobyl. Exclusively Ukrainian causes, such as the independence movement of Perestroika period or the Maidan protests of 2004 and 2013-14 have not yet been canonized nearly as thoroughly as the common experience of Soviet struggles. And the more present-day historical representation occupies these topics, the more they become disputed.

Although the representation of the past has recently changed quite radically, some of its aspects tenaciously remained the same. Not only have most institutional settings remained in place, also post-socialist historiography has not changed its central subject; the nation (Brunnbauer, 2004:12). With regard to the concept of ethnicity I have shown that the influence of the Soviet Union's educatory system is still very strong. It was the first mass educatory system that thoroughly permeated Ukrainian society and the last one to genuinely offer personal advancement for academic achievement. Along with this influence also came a specific culture of remembrance that, at least in southern and eastern Ukraine, still remains very visible,

both in the public space and in commemorative practices. All these factors have made it hard to change the historical perspective on what went right and what went wrong, who was a hero and who a villain.

The periods in Ukrainian history that are contested most ferociously are those that saw antagonisms between groups and events that were hailed by Soviet historiography and are damned by post-independence historiography. Most pointedly, such debates concern conflicts between groups that fought for an independent Ukrainian state and groups that fought for the Soviet Union. These phases include the years of the Civil War (1917-22), the man-made famine of 1932-33, as well as the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) during and after World War II. In Soviet years, all these topics were taboo. Therefore, no national consensus on their interpretation could grow, which makes these topics especially hard to teach in schools (Richardson, 2004:110). Since independence, the main political factions in Ukraine, it seems, differ more in their imaginations of these past periods than in their visions for the future (Osipian and Osipian, 2012:616).

Pursuing the "truth", historians must admit they choose certain facets of history over others and thereby help produce new ways of looking at history (Tonkin, 1990:29). Since in Ukraine the "truth" that was meant to be uncovered by historians, varied greatly over time, so did the range of facets studied by them. Also, the circle of people, who had access to historical knowledge transformed constantly. All told, the ways of studying and narrating history changed frequently.

For people in southern Bessarabia, whose identity is often not or not only Ukrainian, the recent trend of state-sanctioned historiography to concentrate on the history of the Ukrainian people and state, is especially unsatisfactory. This mode of history, that dominates school curricula, historical museums, and televised documentaries, remains almost silent about the history of small ethnic minorities. Ukrainian historiography today risks to be blamed for the same fault it laments in the once dominant Russian historiography: neglecting the periphery and the minorities living there. For southern Bessarabia, as for other ethnically mixed regions in Ukraine, there are no national academies of science that could produce their own historiographies. Therefore, the historical accounts produced about this region always heavily depended on the political center from where Bessarabian history was studied.

Systematic histories on the steppe lands of *Novorossiya* began to appear in the late 19th century, that is around the same time when ethnicity became an established scholarly category. By that time the Russian Empire already had a fine-tuned system of censorship. Combined with a growing fear of nationalist mobilization on the Empire's fringes, censorship ensured that historical descriptions of Bessarabia left no doubt that this was a Russian land. So since the very beginning of academic historiographical descriptions of Bessarabia, they were preoccupied with

ethnicity. In his *Historical Description of Bessarabia,* Pompey Batyushkov is careful to outline that Russians (not just Slavs) had inhabited Bessarabia long before, in the 14th century, it became a part of any Romanian principality (1892:87,101). In Aleksandr Klaus' historical account of the colonization of the steppe, the periphery was still clearly depicted as a non-Russian land. But this portrayal all the more invites his description of a deserted land in need of development by the Russian state (1869:4-6). Both perspectives highlight Russia as the driving force of history in the periphery, be it through the continuous presence of the Russian people or the continuous civilizing force of the Russian state.

When Romanian historians took the pedestal after World War I, knowledge and study about history was still very much confined to urban intellectuals and politicians who often played both these roles alternatingly (Verdery, 1995:106). In Romanian historiography, ethnic continuity was no less a central problem as in Ukrainian or Russian historiography. Two antagonistic schools of narrating Romanian history had developed by the time of World War I. The ambition of the Latinist school of Romanian historiography was to demonstrate that there was a continuous presence of a population that qualified as Romanian since antiquity. Such theories emerged already in the middle of the 19th century. Occasionally they simply equated the Romans with Romanians (Boia, 2001:46). A strong antithesis to the Latinist paradigm grew out of the autochthonous school that saw the origins of the Romanian nation in the Dacians. The autochthonous school assumed that it was the Daccians, not the Romans, who provided the specifically Romanian national essence. This essence had to be defended against the influences of ethnic minorities as well as the materialistic values of Western Europe (Verdery, 1995:111, Boia, 2001:59). The different brands of nationalisms that followed in sequence in interwar Romania, all in their own way despised the largely non-Romanian cities and in turn idealized the peasant masses as the true bearer of the Romanian national spirit (Verdery, 1995:115, Hitchins, 1994:404, Livezeanu, 1995:10, Ioanid, 2005:148). Even among professional historians in the country's intellectual centers, there was a tendency to cultural protectionism, restricting the historical focus to purely peasant and ethnicity related topics (Verdery, 1995:120). Therefore, in Bessarabia as elsewhere, the peasants for the first time became subjects of large scale historical attention. Soon enough they should also be instructed in history.

7.2. *Historical knowledge to the rural masses*

It was not until after World War I, when the new Romanian government founded village schools and culture organizations in Bessarabia, that history came to be lectured to the rural masses. The range of historical topics, taught to villagers, was very narrow and strictly confined to topics suitable to justify Romanian reign in Bessarabia. Several cultural organizations, financed

through the Ministry of Education, opened culture centers in 14 villages and towns in Izmail Judeţ.[2] In the two predominantly Ukrainian speaking villages Nerushay, and in neighboring Galileşti (today Desantnoe), a lecture with the title *the proof that the territory of Bessarabia is ours and that the local foreigners came only after us* was given in 1927. The text of this lecture is very insightful as to how history was narrated.[3] The story of Bessarabia began with the *formation of the Romanian People*. It then went on telling about the achievements of different Romanian rulers in Bessarabia. A number of landmarks that still bear testimony to these achievements were pointed out. A harmonious Romanian society then, according to the lecture, was disrupted by the first Russian advances into the area. The first Russian military expedition to Bessarabia was the ill-fated Prut Campaign in 1710-11 under the command of Peter I. It ultimately led to a more direct control of the principality of Moldova by the Ottoman Empire (Berg, 1918:62). In the Romanian village lectures, this campaign was characterized as a thinly disguised attempt to seize territory. Russia justified her military expeditions to the Balkans with the liberation of the Christian peoples from Ottoman oppression, and the liberation of Constantinople from the heathens. In the Romanian lectures these justifications were scornfully described as a "mask". Tsar Alexander I, who reigned in 1812 when Russia gained control over Bessarabia, was deemed "the most repressive Russian ruler", a merciless oppressor of the Romanian people. One motive that repeatedly appeared in the lecture was the banning of the Romanian language from churches and schools. That there were only very few schools in this rural area, even in 1927 when the lecture was held, was not mentioned. The Russian church authorities were accused of closing all Romanian churches and burning Romanian books. The new settlers, who came to Bessarabia after 1812 and whose descendants at the time probably formed part of the audience, were portrayed as deserters, who had come here in order to avoid recruitment in their homelands. Some others, the lecture went on, were simply vagabonds. All of these people were given land, while the Romanian native population was slowly crowded out, or even "deported to Vladivostok". This was said to be the reason why a fourth of the Bessarabian population were "foreigners". The lecturer then claimed that the Russian annexation of Bessarabia in 1812 was never accepted by Romania (which at the time did not exist as a state yet). Russian domination of Bessarabia in the 19th century was blamed for the current poverty of this land and for the widespread ignorance towards the Romanian language and traditions. In 1918, the lecture concluded, Bessarabia at last achieved independence and joined Romania by democratic vote at the very first opportunity.

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[2] F1139 D1 Postanovleniya Ministerstva prosveshcheniya o sozdanii i funktsionirovanii kul'turnikh tsentrov, 1927, p. 5

[3] F1044 D1 Tsentr kul'tury v sele Galilesht' Izmail'skogo Uezda, 1927, pp. 5-7. According to the reports on (in F1139 D1, pp. 43-70) the average lecture in Nerushay drew an audience of 106 villagers.

For Romanian historians of the interwar years, the history of a nation and its inevitable outcome, the nation state, stood at the center of narrating history. In the discussion how exactly the essence of the Romanian ethnicity was to be described, Romanian historians debated vividly, but the existence of an old and continuous Romanian ethnicity was by the interwar years seen and treated as a given (Verdery, 1995:104). The outcome of all the events of the past was portrayed as a desirable, necessary, and harmonious final stage of history, a state in which one nation, the Romanians, would thrive undisturbed by "foreigners".

Quite similarly, during the Soviet period, following World War II, a pledge of a soon-to-come harmonious final stage of history stood at the center of all historical education. In the Soviet discourse, it was the elimination of class differences, not of ethnic differences, that was portrayed as the path to a prosperous and harmonious society. Once this was accomplished, nothing could be in the way of "friendship of peoples".

Unlike with Romanian historical education, it was not the nation's striving for freedom that drove social change in the new Soviet narrative, but the perpetual class conflicts. A 1951 school report for a rural Bessarabian school district stated that teachers would go to great lengths explaining to their pupils that "in history, one form of social organization replaces the other, which is a principle of mass society. The driving force behind this process is class struggle".[4] And since class struggle was projected to terminate shortly, unending social change would soon make way for a state of communist equilibrium. What this perspective on history had in common with the Romanian one, was the idea of a predetermined trajectory of social change, driven by a single mechanism. The goal of mass rural education was to make villagers buy into this mechanistic view of history.

Because the Soviet Union was already more than a quarter of a century old when it took over Bessarabia, there had already been ample time to experiment with history curricula for mass education. The Central Committee of the Communist Party dealt with the issue in spring 1934. The commission for new textbooks and the Central Committee followed Stalin in appealing to history teachers to abjure "abstract sociological schemes" for a "chronological historical sequence in the exposition of historical events", and to emphasize "important events, personages, and dates" (Karlsson, 1993:215, Banerji, 2006:828).

This mode of historical education was applied not only to schoolchildren. Like the Romanians, the Soviet Union had a lecture program in which workers, soldiers, and peasants should be made familiar with the Soviet views on politics, economy, science, art, history, and ethnography (see section 4.4). In a series of lectures on the history of Ukraine, held in villages throughout Izmail Oblast,[5] the history of Ukraine, according to Soviet historiographical

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[4] Fr445 D209 Godovye otchety gorodskikh i rayonikh otdelov narodnogo obrazovaniya o rabote shkol za 1951 god, p. 181.

[5] An administrative entity that was disestablished in 1954, when southern Bessarabia was joined with Odessa Oblast.

doctrines, was depicted as a single, centuries-long class struggle.[6] For early modern Ukraine, peasant and Cossack uprisings were the dominating theme. One lecture argued that Ukraine has had a revolutionary potential early on and an unusually active labor movement. Another lecture also directly attacked particularistic Ukrainian ways of writing history; *the bourgeois nationalist pseudo-history of M. Hrushevs'kiy and his "school"*. Nevertheless, the lectures were also clearly divided between general history, the history of the Soviet Union, and the history of Ukraine. The protagonists of historical events were always ethnically labeled.[7] The division into a history of the world and a history of the nation is a Soviet legacy that survives in modern school and university curricula in Ukraine.[8]

A second prominent topic of lecturing history was the relations between single ethnic groups. These relations were described as guided by a mechanistic logic with predetermined outcomes. The relations between peoples that belonged to the Soviet Union were portrayed as having been by and large friendly. Conversely, relations to groups outside of the Soviet Union tended to be portrayed as hostile.

Already before Soviet education could be established in southern Bessarabia, the Soviet government had thoroughly subordinated historiography under its ideological premises and centralized historiographical research. No other item characterized this subordination better than the exalted status of history textbooks that, once approved by central authorities, served as the framework of conformity for all other historical writing (Banerji, 2006:828). By the end of World War II, when southern Bessarabia became a part of the Ukrainian SSR, this centralized historiography went through a decisive paradigm shift regarding the history of Ukraine. Until recently, the Cossack pledge of allegiance to the Russian Tsar in 1654, the beginning of the end of Cossack independence, was presented as a wise step by Cossack Hetman Khmel'nitskiy, proving his stature as an eminent leader. This portrayal had the undertone of a lesser evil; it could easily be interpreted to the effect that Khmel'nitskiy had chosen allegiance with the Russians for lack of better options. The lesser evil formula was a paradigm used not only for Ukraine but for Moldova and other former subjects of the Russian Empire as well. It essentially stated that the lands that had come under Russian imperial hegemony had been lucky not to have been annexed by rivaling empires that might have treated them even worse. Stalin and his

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[6] Fr415 D15 Plany lektsii po istorii i literature, 1947, pp. 14-18.

[7] Ibid.: pp. 11-14.

[8] According to a history teacher in an Izmail vocational school, all institutions of higher education teach Ukrainian history as a compulsory subject whereas students only are instructed in general history if they study history as their major. The same distinction can also be found in library catalogues. In neighboring Moldova the issue of naming school subjects became very politicized during the independence movements 1988-91, when the partition "History of the USSR" and "History of the Moldovan SSR" was given up for "World History" and "History of the Romanians". When a communist government was voted into power in 2001 it attempted to reinstitute the "history of Moldova", but was confronted with harsh street protests in early 2002 (Musteata, 2008).

leading propagandist, Andrey Zhdanov, had favored this formula to justify the integration of the ethnically non-Russian territories of the former Russian Empire into the Soviet Union. Still in Stalin's lifetime the formula fell from grace. A party decree issued in 1952 had it replaced with a new paradigm according to which the non-Russian groups of the Soviet Union had long sought close ties to Russia (van Meurs, 1994:14). For Ukrainian historiography this paradigm shift had taken place already during the war. Khmel'nitskiy's choice of the lesser evil was replaced with a more deterministic reading of the event. In this new reading Khmel'nitskiy's pledge of allegiance to the Tsar in 1645 simply united what belonged together anyway (Yekelchyk, 2002:71). It was this version that was purveyed by the Izmail lecture bureau to the new Soviet citizens of southern Bessarabia. And compared to other topics, the relation between Russia and Ukraine received a lot of extra attention. Many village lectures stressed the common history and the age-old friendship, even brotherhood, between Russia and Ukraine.[9]

The friendship and help, with which Russia assisted Ukraine throughout history, remained a staple ingredient for historiography in Soviet Ukraine. The theme was also interwoven with a more local history. The seminal reference book *The History of Towns and Villages of Soviet Ukraine,* which can be found in every school library, has a similar account on the local history of Russians and Ukrainians. It reports that Ukrainian Cossacks made many futile attempts to "liberate" Bessarabia from the Turks. But because Ukrainians were also under oppression from "szlakhtian Poland" they needed the support of the Russian people. Only through the Russian army campaign to expand to the northern Black Sea coast, could the Ukrainian people be liberated.[10]

With the same pointedness the allegedly age old conflict between the Slavs and the Germans was discussed in the programmed lectures. This genre also attracted a scholar who had earned his spurs in Bessarabia: Nikolai Derzhavin, the chronicler of the Bulgarian colonies in Novorossiya (see section 2.6), already as a well-established philologist, authored a book in 1943 with the title *The Age Old Struggle of the Slavs against German Occupants.* In the lectures of the Izmail lecturer bureau, the historical perspective on this conflict reached right back to the middle ages: *The annihilation of the German-Swedish Occupants in the 12th and 13th century by Alexander Nevskiy, the German aggression in the middle ages and the struggle against it,* and,

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[9] Lectures of this genre included: *The great historic act, the unification of Russia and Ukraine in 1654, the common struggle of the Russian and the Ukrainian peasantry against feudal oppression in the 17th and 18th century, the common struggle of the Russian and the Ukrainian people against the Swedish occupants in the beginning of the 18th century, the struggle of Russia and Ukraine against Turk-Tatar aggression in the 16th-18th centuries,* and *the participation of Ukrainian Cossacks in the campaign of the Russian army against Prussia during the 7-year War.* Fr415 D15, pp. 14-18

[10] Istoriya gorodov i sel Ukrainskoy SSR – Odesskaya Oblast' (1978) Kiev: Institut akademii nauk USSR, p. 428.

remarkably similar to Derzhavin's book title, *the centuries long struggle of the Slavs against German occupants.*[11]

Another enemy, cultivated in a lecture series created especially for Izmail Oblast, were the Romanians, who had been driven out just recently by the Red Army. One approach to establish trust in the new government was comparison with the past Romanian regime: *How were elections conducted under the rule of the Romanian Boyars, and how are they conducted now?*[12] *The exposure of the reactionary and fascist ideologies of Romanian parties in Izmail region.*[13] All in all the comparison with Romania was but a late manifestation of the already obsolete lesser evil formula.

The heroes and the villains were marked very clearly throughout Soviet history education. In 1986 Mikhail Gorbachev in a speech demanded new ways of teaching and examining history, ways that would foster independent judgment and creative thinking (Banerji, 2006:832). But this was too late to ever have a real impact on how history was brought to the masses in the Soviet Union. The lasting imprint of Soviet history didactics was the constant effort to convince the population of its legitimacy; the comparison with the "imperialistic", "fascist", or at least "bourgeois" other. That state representatives from Romania, the Soviet Union, and now Ukraine have all felt such an urge to justify their presence in Bessarabia is largely a consequence of the region's peripheral status.

7.3. The periphery gets its own history

The history of Bessarabia, with its frequent change of state hegemony, is a good example to scrutinize the characteristics of peripheral region's historiography. Peripheries are often contested lands between different centers all of which lie far away. It is no wonder then that the histories of such regions are no less contested than their territory itself. It is in such disputes that the use of history as a political instrument can be observed at its best. Seen from a postcolonial angle, one important step to cut the cord with the former colonial power is to (re)claim authority over history from the center (Kuzio, 2002:241). For Bessarabians this meant to deny, at different times, the authority of the historical perspectives from Moscow, Bucharest, and Kyiv. The emancipation of peripheral historiography may render it more provincial, but it provided local intellectuals with the opportunity to choose from a rich selection of potential symbolic alliances by representing history in different ways.

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[11] Fr415 D15, pp. 11-14.

[12] Fr415 D10 Temy lektsiidlya sel'skikh i kolkhoznykh klubov na 1947 god, p. 17.

[13] Fr415 D15, p. 25.

Most historiographies of the centers, such as former imperial capitals or hotspots of industrialization, at some point reach a level, when many of its aspects are agreed between established historians (before, of course, being fiercely attacked by a new generation of historians). Perhaps the most evident manifestation of this cycle is the American "consensus history", dominant in the 1950s and 60s. It was preoccupied with finding shared values and continuity rather than conflict and change (Singal, 1984). Such consensus usually provides the stories that enter the textbook and become part of general education. The histories of peripheries, in contrast, hardly ever reach such a level of agreement. There are three crucial reasons for this: (1) the histories of peripheral lands are a less studied topic than the histories of centers. It is certainly a safer way to establish oneself as a historian with widely read publications if one studies and writes about political, cultural, and economic centers. (2) There are more and usually older sources concerning centers than peripheries. More sources eventually lead to more clarity. (3) The periphery has belonged to many states in the past. The sources that reveal information about peripheral regions (if available at all) are scattered in archives, museums, and libraries of many different centers. In each of these centers historians with their particular educational and ideological backgrounds are at work. Therefore, even if they would work on the same sources, these diverting backgrounds might lead to opposite conclusions. But their sources stem from different periods and are often written in several languages. So even if everyone works to the best of their knowledge and belief, there is a good chance that historians from different centers end up writing contradicting historical narratives.

All of these factors make historiography of the periphery so fragmentary and murky. No historian is eager to admit knowledge gaps. Therefore, blank spots in historical knowledge about the periphery invite speculation and stimulate imagination. Both, territories and ethnic groups are subject to this imagination. This is especially momentous in Central and Eastern Europe, where most states once claimed territories and populations beyond their present borders. Historiographical traditions in most of these countries are oriented to writing the histories of ethnic and national formations. Because on the periphery such formations very often overlap with neighboring groups and states, many locally produced historic works retain an irredentist undertone (Brunnbauer, 2004:14).

The practice of using history to push boundaries has a long tradition. In Ukraine for instance, long before the country gained any form of sovereignty, a Ukrainian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 presented a map of an aspired state that by far exceeded today's territory, stretching from the Tisza river in the Pannonian Plain to the foothills of the Caucasus.[14] Radical factions in Ukraine and her neighbor states continue to make such claims

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[14] Catalogue of Paris Peace Conference Ukrainian Delegation, the Hoover War Library, p 18.

and every now and then, high ranking politicians and mainstream media join them in doing so.[15] Only in rare instances such as the Russian seizure of Crimea in March 2014, such claims are actually put to practice. Vladimir Putin, in his address to the nation on December 4, 2014, claimed Crimea was a sacred site for the Russians since it was the place where Eastern Slavs first came in contact with Byzantine Christianity that subsequently became a unifying force for the Russians.[16] This example illustrates that commanding a territory militarily is not enough, even where the seizure was hardly met by local resistance. Possession of territory must always be justified. The more recent the seizure, the more urgent is a legitimizing historical narrative. In the present example, the fact that long ago, in the early middle ages, an event allegedly formative for a modern identity, happened in a certain place, seems to entitle the people who claim this identity to rule over this place.

Apart from Russia's move into Crimea in spring 2014, most state borders in Eastern Europe have long been mutually agreed upon, at least on an official level. In many cases over those years, state borders have come to be taken for granted. Many narratives sketching out territories of a state or a group use natural landmarks such as rivers or mountains as reference points. But in many cases it suffices that borders have existed for a long time to be seen as a part of nature (Baud and Van Schendel, 1997:224). The French *hexagon* is probably the most famous example for a narrative of borders shaped by nature. Eugene Weber deconstructed this narrative in his 1976 *Peasants into Frenchmen* by showing that the lands that today lie within the hexagon were subject to a century-long painstaking integration process, not the outcome of natural selection (Weber, 1976:485). In late 19th century Romania, such formulas referring to topography were also readily used. Romania at that time ruled only over a part of the regions inhabited by Romanian speakers, an unnatural condition in the eyes of many. The idea that Romanians inhabited lands limited by topographical obstacles, rivers in this case, gave land claims beyond actual borders an air of nature. These ostensibly natural borders were the Danube, the Dniester (in the east) and the Tisza (to which Ukrainian nationalists referred as *their* western Border). The Dniester-Tisza formula figured in a patriotic poem by Mihai Eminescu and was soon referred to routinely (Boia, 2001:179). Bessarabia too, is almost always described as limited by rivers Prut, Dniester, and Danube, and therefore as if this territory had been carved out by nature. Today this limitation of Bessarabia is commonplace and the state borders that were eventually drawn along the same lines, have come to be accepted by many as

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[15] For instance on January 1, 2014 Romanian president Traian Băsescu aroused the anger of many Moldovans by stating in his New Year's address, that he knew, it was not the time now for Romania and Moldova to unite, but that it will happen sooner or later, because blood is thicker than water. Moldova.org January 1, 2014 http://www.moldova.org/traian-basescu-we-must-say-honestly-and-openly-that-moldova-is-romanian-land-240927-eng/ (18.11.2015)

[16] An official English translation of the speech can be found on the Kremlin's English language homepage: http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/23341 (18.11.2015)

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natural too. In contrast, the Ukrainian-Moldovan border runs across open fields and is often portrayed, especially by pan-Romanianists, as artificial.

But territories are not the only aspect the histories of peripheries often leave disputed: In a comparable train of thought, ethnic groups seem to have acquired an air of nature. The alleged characteristics of ethnic groups are routinely explained and justified with factors beyond the control of (contemporary) people. Unlike in the historiography of centers, where individual biographies are better documented and the impact of individual actions is much better understood, here at the periphery, for lack of precise sources, historians have often generalized traits for entire ethnic groups, and explained such generalizations with common origin and experience.

But Bessarabian history has its well-studied periods too. Most of these, however, are connected to events when the centers fought their wars on Bessarabian soil. In Izmail there are two such periods that get significantly more historiographical attention than all other times combined. The first phase is the siege of Izmail fortress in 1790, the second one is the Great Patriotic War, as the conflict following the German attack in June 1941 is commonly called. The discussion of both events reduced the periphery to a mere stage for the center's triumphs.

Concerning the siege of Izmail, it is even less the event itself that gets historical attention, it is more the commander of the victorious operation, General Alexander Vasilevich Suvorov. Izmail has four public Museums, two of which are entirely dedicated to Suvorov and the siege of the fortress. In the other two museums, Suvorov is also prominently represented. The tall Suvorov monument in front of Izmail's cathedral, erected in 1945, shows the General mounted on a horse waving his hat and calling his men to battle. It is one of Izmail's more famous landmarks. Coach buses running between Odessa and Izmail use a silhouette of the iconic statue as a trademark, so that Izmailers can spot their home-bound buses easily in the jumble of Odessa's bus station. Suvorov was a central figure in his time. He was honored in the center as well as in the periphery. But the periphery in Izmail and elsewhere became the stage for his military successes. The short moment of glory, when the very center of a European great power achieved its triumphs on the soils of the periphery are now so overrepresented in local historiography that many other aspects of local history, where data is harder to come by with, remain largely neglected. To the people in the centers, Suvorov and his victories ring a bell. Smaller, lesser known events might be less controversial, but they could hardly be used as a trademark in far-away cities.

Rare historical moments of a clear and direct link to the center became especially crucial when the center's hegemony over the periphery was threatened. Before the German attack on the Soviet Union, this threat loomed over the western periphery more frightening than ever. In 1940, when Bessarabia was annexed by the Soviet Union, the danger of war was already high.

Under such circumstances Soviet propaganda began to use figureheads of Russian and East Slavic military successes, even if they had fought for despised feudal predecessor regimes. The Soviet Union as of yet had no history fighting Western European enemies. Therefore, the Red Army during World War II introduced military awards named in honor of Alexander Nevskiy, a mediaeval Grand Prince of Kyiv who backed off German and Swedish attacks, Mikhail Kutuzov, a General who triumphed over Napoleon, Pavel Nakhimov, a commander in the Siege of Sevastopol during the Crimean War, and Feodor Ushakov, who won the battle of Kerch Strait against the Ottoman fleet in 1790. Suvorov lent his name to one of the highest military awards for land forces. Under Stalin the glorification of Suvorov was promoted outside the military too: In 1940 an epic film was produced. Several novels with Suvorov as their protagonist were published and Suvorov's exploits entered the school curriculum (Nachtigal, 2015:592). In 1944, after the Soviet Union had driven out the Germans and Romanians, Kutuzov and Nakhimov each had one of Izmail's street named in their honor, but the central street, the Boulevard with its representative buildings, was of course named in the honor of Suvorov.

In this way, World War II was clearly classified into one long historical line of military glory and therefore deserved ample room in public space, in school readers, as well as in the media. World War II, for the Soviet Union was both a great tragedy and its greatest triumph. It was eventually followed by three decades of optimism and relative prosperity. During this time, while the actors in the historic events were still in influential positions, the Second World War came to dominate all aspects of historiography. Everything that happened before or after it came to be compared with it. The number of works that appeared on the topic soon overshadowed every other historical topic. Historical data, both oral and written, was readily available. When the Soviet Union began to experience stagnation and later disintegration, new acts of heroism were hard to come by with, let alone such that could give people in the periphery the feeling that they took part in historical events of global significance. Least of all a case for heroic representation was the Soviet Union's catastrophic war in Afghanistan. The monuments erected in the honor of the Afghanistan "Internationalists" were humble in their aesthetic and had a commemorative rather than a celebratory character. Fresh heroes could at best be found among civil representatives of technological progress (Karlsson, 1993:218). Therefore, up until now the memory of World War II has had to share only very little of the attention it got with new interpretations of history. These new interpretations mainly concern Ukrainian national heroes that remain controversial in the south and east of Ukraine, much more controversial than the Soviet interpretation of World War II.

Many popular accounts of the Second World War, in TV or in local newspapers, deal with the biographies of veterans, especially decorated veterans. The same is true for local museums. There is usually one room reserved for portraits and stories of participants of the

war. These stories are used to provide schoolchildren, the main audience for such museums, with positive role-models. Like in the case of the Suvorov cult, the history of World War II binds the region's past to a far-away center, Russia, and has provided the region's elite with role-models for generations of Bessarabians. World War II era role-models have not yet been replaced by anything that a majority of Bessarabians could agree upon. This significantly also means, that the new center ruling the area, Kyiv, was not able, as of yet, to equip its peripheral regions with a dominant historical narrative that ties the peripheries to their new Ukrainian center.

7.4.   The genesis of groups and group identities

Similar and in many ways related to the question as to whether or not a particular group can rightfully claim a territory, are questions as to where and out of which constituents modern ethnic groups emerged, which territory they have occupied at what time, and when they have reached which stage of development. All these questions were zealously studied in Soviet social sciences and, as a result, still dominate research agendas in many institutions. The question of ethnogenesis, i.e. the study of the origin of ethnic groups, was very central to Soviet ethnography and was studied jointly with archeologists, anthropologists, and linguists (Bromley, 1980:160). Groups on the periphery of the Soviet Union had little control over accounts of their own *ethnogenesis.* Relevant theory was provided for them by researchers trained in the center. Like questions of territory, questions of *ethnogenesis* were highly contested then and have become even more contested after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, when the political relations between academic institutions and the people they studied changed. Additionally, the concepts of ethnos and ethnogenesis were challenged by suddenly fashionable constructivist perspectives on ethnicity. As with other realms of history, there seems to be a strong belief among many scholars and their audiences that the formation of ethnic groups can be addressed with scientific methods, and once all the facts are on the table, debates about when, where, and how today's ethnic groups emerged, could be settled for good.

In Soviet ethnography, theories about the ethnogenesis of one's own and other groups often had far-reaching political implications, some of which remained valid in the post-Soviet years. The insurgency in the Donbas, just to name the most obvious example, revived the idea of *Novorossiya* (New Russia) as a Russian territorial claim for parts of Ukraine. This claim is

naturally coupled with the assumption that Ukrainians and Russians emerged from the same ethnogenesis process in medieval Rus.[17]

Those who side with Ukraine and those who side with Russia tend to stress different aspects of what they see as the formation process of ethnic identity and later nation building processes. One can put historical emphasis on features that apply to many Russians and many Ukrainians equally; eastern Slavic languages, Orthodox Christianity, late industrialization, or the struggle against Nazi Germany. If these features are seen as central to ethnogenesis and nation building then Russians and Ukrainians can indeed be reasonably described as one group. It is, however, also easy to put historical emphasis on differences between Russians and Ukrainians, such as that beside the Orthodox Church, many Ukrainians belong to the Greek Catholic Church, or that many modern Ukrainians look to Galicia and Volhynia for their historical roots or to the Cossack bands of the steppe regions, who only grudgingly subordinated their arms to the Russian tsars. It is the choice of aspects in the study of ethnogenesis and nation building that makes it as much a political, as a scholarly endeavor.

In Bessarabia, no other group history is so full of alluring knowledge gaps as the history of the Gagauz. There are more than a dozen competing theories of their ethnogenesis (Ageeva, 2000:89, King, 2000:210). Very few written sources can clarify their origins. The oldest among them date back no further than the mid-17th century (Grek and Russev, 2011:59). But only in the second half of the 19th century a widespread local use of the denominator "Gagauz" emerged to distinguish speakers of the Gagauz language from Bulgarians (ibid.:73). Since the history of an entire ethnic group is concerned, the lack of data and probably more so the lack of old sources has invited speculation. The haziness of the origins of the Gagauz people is often addressed publically. Like the large number of nationalities in Bessarabia, the large number of existing theories on the origin of the Gagauz has become a cliché in popular knowledge.

Of course, differing ideas about the political status of the Gagauz today, lead to different ideas about the kind of group they might have been in the past. Knowledge about the origin of the Gagauz people is so thin that in the great majority of cases a person's identity and political conviction is more likely to shape his or her historical beliefs than the other way round. Therefore, there is no getting away from the fact that some of the differences are politically loaded. This is especially true for the notion, prevalent in some of these theories, that the Gagauz once identified as Bulgarians but then adopted a Turkic language to be on better terms with their Ottoman overlords (whereas the Bulgarians, in this view, always resisted the seductions of making peace with their Muslim oppressors). Other nuances in competing

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[17] See for example the Website novorus.info, an information site covering mainly war related news in south eastern Ukraine. The website's second category, right after "News" is "History", where the cultural unity of Russia and Ukraine is emphasized in most articles: http://novorus.info/news/history/ (18.11.2015)

theories of ethnogenesis have more subtle implications, and often one version is tied to one scholar and his or her "school". Some theories of ethnogenesis already existed in the Soviet Union, others followed only after independence, when versions hitherto taboo, experienced a boom.

A theory of ethnogenesis could be taboo because it portrayed a certain group as opposed to Russia. The ethnogenesis of the Moldovans is a case in point: During the Soviet Union only those versions were accepted that concluded the Moldovans were ethnically, culturally, and linguistically different from Romanians. This restriction has now disappeared. Together with the adoption of pan-Romanian symbols, such as the Romanian tricolor as the new state flag, previously taboo versions of the Moldovan ethnogenesis came to fashion. In Chişinău monuments of the Capitoline Wolf and Stephen the Great were erected in 1990 to underline Moldova's belonging to the Romanian cultural and historical realm (Schorkowitz, 2010:131-132). Different political blocs publically subscribed to competing versions of the Moldovan ethnogenesis. While the nationalist People's Front supported the re-writing of Moldova's history, the opposing Agrarian Party, accommodating mainly former Soviet civil servants, revived theories of a separated Moldovan ethnogenesis and a unique Moldovan language (King, 2000:151-155).

It is hard to imagine a way to study ethnogenesis without political implications. The questions at the outset of ethnogenesis leave a lot of room for interpretations and therefore for political exploitation: When does ethnogenesis start, and when does a group that has previously not been an ethnic group, become one? How do we distinguish different stages of development? At what time does a group have to reach which level of development in order to have a claim over a territory? What if several groups developed in the same region at different stages of history (this is almost inevitable)? Which of these groups then earns the right to govern the territory? And if there can be scientific proof for territorial claims on grounds of ethnogenesis, what kind of evidence is acceptable to sort out competing claims? Scholars in the field of ethnogenesis have provided their research results, without silencing their rivals or solving the conflicts that result from competing territorial claims. Archeological and linguistic findings have been accepted as proof for past existence of a certain ethnic group and its presence in a particular region. The existence of Slavic toponyms for example has been employed by both Russians and Ukrainians as proof that they once inhabited a region.[18]

To understand the concept of ethnogenesis as it was seen by Soviet historians and ethnographers, it is important to free oneself of the notion of social construction of human groups and categories. Ethnic groups, for the membership in which ancestry was a central

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[18] This argument was for example used to justify why Bessarabia was an "ancient Russian soil" in the widely used *Chronological Reference Book about the Occupation of Izmail Oblast 1941-1944* (1950), p. 83

criterion, were distinguished from other forms of communion precisely by their purportedly natural formation. Other types of groups appeared as designed by individuals and collectives, such as parties, clubs, or states. Ethnic groups were formed, in this perspective, without the will or even the consciousness of man, in "essentially historical processes" (estestvennoistoricheskie protsessy) (Bromley, 1983:39). Bearing this force-of-nature-character in mind, it becomes much easier to understand why claims drawn from the study of ethnogenesis were seen as sufficient evidence for territorial claims. The outcomes of ethnogenesis could be seen as a key to understand nature's plans for human societies.

Although this process occurs without the agency of people, its endpoint, the moment when a group becomes an "ethnos", is closely tied to the consciousness of the group. The most important feature of such a group is that the group's members recognize themselves as such and be recognized by others as belonging together. The group will then assume a stable name and be called by others by that name. The features that lead to this allegedly objective distinction as a discrete group also need to stabilize before the process of ethnogenesis can be considered complete (Bromley and Podol'niy, 1984:17-18). Comparing the Bulgarians and the Gagauz, Grek and Rusev (2011:59) reach the conclusion that this process was completed by the Bulgarians long before the Gagauz reached any degree of self-awareness as a group. Willy-nilly the idea that some people assumed the status of sovereign actor of history earlier than others, also presupposes a hierarchy between them, at least when it comes to claiming territory.

Notwithstanding the rigid concepts applied in the study of ethnogenesis, and despite the competing theories being politically charged, ethnogenesis is a meaningful and important concept in the identity formation of many people and particularly so in in southern Bessarabia. When, in the predominantly Gagauz village of Kotlovina, annual village day was celebrated in late August 2013, references to the roots of the Gagauz people were part of the celebratory program. It started with a report on a recent trip by the village's famed folklore group to north-eastern Bulgaria. At the village festivities the group's leader, a music teacher, gave an enthusiastic account of this journey. She praised the hospitality of their Bulgarian hosts and how host families had treated the children from Kotlovina like their own. The music teacher's report was followed by the speech of a representative from the Bulgarian region where the folklore group had traveled to. The man addressed the assembled village in Russian, saying he was from Dobrudja region in Bulgaria, "the home region of our ancestors". He mentioned the Bulgarian Black Sea resort of Albena, near Varna, and said that the name of this town was of Gagauz origin, not as many Romanians claim, of Latin origin. He then mentioned Tsar Dobrotic, a ruler of the area in the mid-14th century, from whose name the modern denomination "Dobrudja" is probably derived. He said that Dobrotic was a direct ancestor of the Gagauz. He continued by saying that where he was from "the Bulgarian soil smells of Gagauzia." This was no

wonder, he said, since archeologists had recently found out that the Gagauz at one time had a Kingdom there, which "lived on one level with Venice and Genoa." The man, who had been introduced only by his given name, continued by saying, that when he had driven here, he felt he "saw familiar faces everywhere". He then invited the villagers to come to his home region in Bulgaria and he promised that they would feel the same there, because "we are of one blood." This earned the speaker much applause.

This episode brought up many of the aspects of ethnogenesis and many of the features of peripheral historiography. The claim that origins of ethnic groups and the ethnicity of an ancient ruler, such as Dobrotic, are entirely different from popular knowledge suggests, is certainly more likely to be heard for peripheral regions, such as Dobrudja or Bessarabia, than for well-studied centers. Few of the Gagauz villagers will have heard about Dobrotic and the late middle ages on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. The history they learned in school, and the one that prevails in TV documentaries, is much more concerned with Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Kyiv. Yet the haziness of ethnogenesis in this case leaves room for claims. Such was the reference to the Bulgarian soil that "smells" of Gagauzia (a quote from a well-known Pushkin poem).[19] What the underlying meaning here might have been is that the "actual" or "natural" property of this territory was Gagauz and neither Bulgarian nor Romanian (this part of Dobrudja has been contested between the two countries). Also, the claim that a Gagauz state has once been on one developmental level with Mediterranean powers Genoa and Venice, owes its appeal to the dubiety of the origin of the Gagauz. Would there be any solid evidence for such a theory, this would entirely rearrange the history of 14th century South-Eastern Europe. Only in peripheral history can such crass claims go unchallenged since the lack of solid data leaves much room for speculation. Finally, the idea of a kinship relation, a blood tie, between people separated by state borders, is another frequent derivation of ethnogenesis. If an ethnic group is born at a certain time and place, there must be related groups there. The impression described by the man from Dobrudja, that he sees familiar faces everywhere in the Gagauz villages of Bessarabia, also suggests a claim for a homeland beyond the state that happens to dominate the area now. Ethnogenesis with its claim to being a natural process has the power to challenge the legitimacy of "artificial" state borders. For minorities at the edge of a relatively new state that cares little about them, it is therefore especially appealing to put forward and adjust the narrative of their ethnogenesis.

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[19] From the prolog of Pushkin's poem *Ruslan and Ludmila*, 1820. Pushkin, however, refers to the "Russian spirit" and the "scent of Rus".

7.5. Controlling images of the past

Remembering the past hardly ever goes without thinking of the present. It is hard to even describe the past without making comparisons to other times, usually to the most familiar, the present. Such comparisons may be purely illustrative; if we compare the number of people who lived in an area at some time in the past with the number of people living there presently, we get an idea of a demographic development. If we compare the beliefs of the past with those of today, we better understand cultural change. But often historians and their audiences do not restrict themselves to such factual illustrations. Comparison invites judgment. And judgment over those who can no longer defend themselves is easy. Their errors and crimes can serve as a warning. The values historiography ascribes to them can serve as the antithesis to modern ideals and thereby point out how far we have progressed since. But it is equally easy to idealize those who no longer have to prove themselves. Their actions and intentions can be seen as formative for the things we appreciate about the present. The values of people no longer in danger of contradicting themselves can easily be portrayed as pure and noble.

Clearly, the history of any region offers figures and actors more likely to be judged as villains, and others more likely to be presented as role models. But the fact that some figures are presented as heroes by one tradition of historiography and as villains by another, suggests that there is quite some scope over which moral lessons to conclude from history. Ukraine's past is rich in personalities that invite opposing interpretations. Perhaps the most prominent is that of Stepan Bandera, a leader of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) who fought against the Red Army for an independent Ukraine during and after World War II. Bandera collaborated with Nazi occupiers and in this way his troops became accomplices in the mass murder of Jews and Poles. But Bandera's forces also attacked these minorities autonomously (Rossolinski-Liebe, 2011, Marples, 2007:23). When the Nazis grew tired of Bandera's demands for an independent Ukraine, they arrested him (Magocsi, 1996:626). In 1959, when the Ukrainian insurgence had been suppressed for several years already, he was poisoned by a KGB agent in his Munich exile (Subtelny, 2000:566). His ambivalent historical role offers numerous possible interpretations. His collaboration with Nazi occupiers and his campaign against the Red Army made him a traitor in the eyes of Soviet historiography. His brutal attempts to expulse Poles and Jews from Ukraine, for some serve as a warning of the potential dangers with post-independence Ukrainian nationalism. During the Ukrainian crisis in 2014 the pejorative term "Banderovtsy" and "Banderogly", referring to Bandera the villain, became the preferred Russian etiquette for Ukrainian nationalists.[20] This insult is no new invention. It was already used in the

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[20] RFE, September 17, 2014 *Ukraine's Cryptic, Clever (And Always Insulting) Lexicon Of War,* available online http://www.rferl.org/content/ukraine-lexicon-of-war/26590324.html (18.11.2015)

Soviet Union to disparage allegedly nationalist Ukrainians (Cybenko, 1998:117). The association of present-day Ukrainian nationalists with a historical figure of dubious reputation clearly conveys a judgment, that the actors of today are no better than the villains of the past.

But the same figure, portrayed in a different light, also served to convey quite a different message. In 2010 the then president Viktor Yushchenko gave the honorary title "hero of Ukraine" to Bandera, pleasing nationalist factions from whom he drew part of his political support.[21] In 2011, under the aegis of a new president, Viktor Yanukovich, whose stronghold was in the Russian-speaking Donbas, the title was stripped from Bandera by the rule of a court in Donetsk.[22] Courts are meant to rule about the law, not interpretations of history. Therefore the case of Stepan Bandera's glorification and subsequent demonization neatly illustrates how closely the lessons, drawn from history, are tied to political power.

In spring 2015, the post-Maidan Poroshenko government adopted sweeping new laws concerning the representation of history. The bulk of these laws were drafted by the fiercely nationalistic Radical Party of Oleh Lyashko. These new legislations explicitly concentrate on the most disputed periods in Ukrainian history, the time of the famine of 1932-33, the militant Ukrainian independence movements, and World War II. Although they are meant to be primarily a symbolic gesture to "further the consolidation and development of the Ukrainian nation",[23] they have far reaching implications in fields of law as diverse as criminal law, press law, and municipal law. In Press law, the new legislations mean that editors of mass media, who "deny or justify the criminal character of the totalitarian communist regime of 1917-91", could face prison terms of up to 10 years.[24] Amendments of municipal law are meant to wash Ukraine clean from all kinds of monuments and place names reminiscent of the communist past.[25] Two of the villages studied during fieldwork, Chervonoarmeyskoe (Red Army Place) and Pershotravnevoe (May Day Place) have names clearly reminiscent of the communist past and under the new laws must be renamed swiftly.[26] Some towns and municipalities preferred to

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[21] *Lenta.ru* January 22, 2010, available online http://lenta.ru/news/2010/01/22/bandera/ (18.11.2015)

[22] *BBC Russkaya sluzhba*, August 2, 2011, available online
 http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/russia/2011/08/110802_bandera_shukhevich_court.shtml (18.11.2015)

[23] See preamble of the *law on the condemnation of the communist and national socialist (nazi) totalitarian regimes in Ukraine and the prohibition of the propagation of their symbols*, published on the homepage of Verkhovna Rada, April 3, 2015:
http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_1?pf3511=54670 (18.11.2015)

[24] Ibid. § 4, 6

[25] Ibid. § 11

[26] The renaming procedure is complicated and can take months. If the municipal council misses the deadline, the task is transferred to the mayor, if the mayor misses his or her deadline the task is transferred to the oblast parliament, and from there in case of failure it is transferred to the governor etc. An explanation of this procedure is provided in an article by BBC Ukraine, May 29, 2015, available online http://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/ukraine_in_russian/2015/05/150529_ru_s_zubko_ie_decommunisation_plans (18.11.2015)

react to such new laws by changing the eponym behind their name instead of the name itself.[27] This trick, reported in several places during 2015, betrays the superficiality and purely symbolic effect of such laws.

But political elites must remain in charge of decisions whom to hail and whom to shun. Once a historical figure has gained a baggage of either positive or negative symbolism, he or she easily gathers a life of its own, triggering hard-to-control discourses. This happened to Bandera and other leaders of the Ukrainian nationalist movement, who were revived as icons for post-soviet nationalism.

Other historical figures had not to be dug up from obscurity; their message merely had to be reinterpreted. Taras Shevchenko, the eminent Ukrainian poet, for instance, served as a national icon already during the time of romantic nationalism in Ukraine around the end of the 19th century. Out of Shevchenko Society, concerned with the dissemination of Ukrainian publications and linguistic education, very soon grew a militant movement protesting Russian and later Polish dominance of Ukrainian lands (Hutchinson, 1994:126). During the Soviet Union, at the time when history was lectured to the peasant masses in southern Bessarabia, Shevchenko gained a very different kind of aura. Instead of his nationalist voice, cherished by the Ukrainian national avant-garde, now the social revolutionary aspect of his work was emphasized; the willpower needed to break free, as Shevchenko managed, from the status of a serf and gain a reputation as a poet. In Kiliya rayon a village was renamed after him under Soviet rule,[28] and many more villages across Ukraine bear his name, as do kolkhozes, factories, streets, squares, schools, and universities. In the lectures held to kolkhoz peasants he appeared as a *great popular poet and democratic revolutionary.*[29] His role as a nationalist revolutionary was revived as soon as it became possible, during the Perestroika (Wanner, 1998:148). Therefore, places and institutions named in his honor had not to be renamed after socialism's demise, but they began to carry a very different message with the reinterpretation of Shevchenko.

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[27] In Kharkiv, two urban rayons, one named after founder of the Soviet Secret Services Feliks Dzerzhinkiy, the other named after revolutionary and Civil War commander Mikhail Frunze, both might retain their names after the de-communism process. In Dzerzhinskiy's case the Iron Felik's own brother serves as the new eponym. He was a neurologist who studied and practiced in the city. In Frunze's case a heroic pilot, born in Kharkiv, will replace his more famous namesake. *Komsomol'skaya Pravda v Ukraine* November 17, 2015, available online: http://kp.ua/politics/519307-dekommunyzatsyia-sovetskye-nazvanyia-poluchyly-novyi-smysl (18.11.2015). Also, in the district town Kotovsk in the north of Odessa Oblast, named in honor of the Bolshevik Civil War commander Grigoriy Kotovskiy, it was suggested to avoid the renaming procedure by changing the town's eponym. A cleric by the fitting name of Vasiliy Kotovich, was found suitable for this purpose. *Trassa E 95*, July 6, 2015, available online http://trassae95.com/all/news/2015/07/06/kotovsk-nashel-sposob-sohranitj-svoe-nazvanie-i-soblyusti-zakon-o-dekommunizacii-23977.html (18.11.2015)

[28] Under tsarist rule the village was called Karamagmed, in Romanian maps it appears as Damianovca, today it retains its Soviet name Shevchenkove.

[29] Title of a lecture held by the Izmail lecture bureau in 1947, Fr415 D15, p.18.

Shevchenko's revival as a standard bearer of nationalism was initiated by intellectuals who managed to connect new political connotations with old historical figures. But it was the moral implications of clientelistc politics that put the power holders on the spot. When the Taras Shevchenko Society was revived in the mid-1980s, its representatives could rub the nose of the Ukrainian party leadership in the moral standards that Shevchenko was said to have set. At the time, many Ukrainians felt that the Soviet government no longer lived up to these standards. Perestroika was a period when the communist party leadership gradually lost its grip over the representation of history and the lessons drawn from it. Some politicians, most notably Leonid Kravchuk, the chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian SSR and independent Ukraine's first president, were able to save their own standing by quickly revising their views on history and subscribing to newly raised political claims (Motyl, 1995). Due to the pressure of groups, such as the Taras Shevchenko Society, the government of the Ukrainian SSR adopted Ukrainian as the sole state language already in 1989 (Wanner 1998:xxiii).

It became a new standard that the administrators of a republic should speak the language that appeared in the republic's name. This standard was not set by the political leaders themselves. They were forced to give in to the pressure of groups, which interpreted history differently and which had managed to gather more credibility than the government. In 1990, the mildly nationalist Rukh (the movement) gained hardly a fourth of parliamentary seats in the first multiparty elections. Nevertheless the parliament started to pass bills, stressing nationalist perspectives on Ukrainian history. Otherwise they might soon have been outrivaled by the nationalist's promise of a fresh start. The members of parliament had remained roughly the same before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Only now, that nationalism was the latest craze, they had taken it up as their legitimizing discourse (Reid, 1997:218).

In neighboring Moldova too, party secretary Petr Lucinski found himself forced to take the wind out of the sails of the nationalist People's Front (Frontul Popular din Moldova). He did so by making symbolic concessions to their claims. He adopted Romanian (not Moldovan) as the state language and the Romanian tricolor as the republic's flag (Fane, 1993:124). This was a clear repositioning vis-à-vis Moldova's history that in Communist times had been narrated as entirely different from the history of Romania.

The elites of newly independent countries had learned their lessons quickly. They took care not to be embarrassed by their rival's versions of history again. They began to jealously guard their hegemony over interpretations of the past. Therefore Yushchenko put Bandera on the pedestal and Yanukovich took him down again. But in 2014 when Ukrainian politics became more volatile, public representation of the lessons learned from history again changed quickly.

Most visibly this was manifested in vandalizing Lenin statues all over Ukraine.[30] The rapidly changing political climate after the ousting of the Yanukovich regime led to boisterous local reactions, such as the tearing down of small and large Lenin statues in Kharkiv, Mariupol, and other places. That this became possible so quickly after previous power holders had defended statues of Lenin, alienated and frightened many, who had been brought up to see a role model in Lenin. This was clearly a time when once more hegemony over historical interpretation and the decisions whom to hail and whom to condemn escape the political leadership.

Such historical feuds over the conclusions from the lives of dead people have been reserved for the centers of learning, where people in universities, libraries, archives, national academies, and publishing houses interact to form the dominant perspectives on the past. But at least for the present, there is also a distinctly local feature of how the local elites influence the interpretation of local histories. In chapter 5 I have argued that the political decision making process in southern Bessarabia is based on extensive patron-client networks. These include a wealthy patron who takes on the role of the benefactor for one or several groups within the population. The members of these groups in turn vote for the patron in elections. Visible group representatives, such as heads of ethnic associations or clerical figures, use their prominence to openly support their benefactors. Remembering history selectively, but very publicly, is a key strategy in the interaction of such patrons with their clients. The practice of generously sponsoring research and the remembrance of a particular past by political elites is a continuation of the Soviet practice of a strictly state-crafted portrayal of the past that justifies the power of the presently ruling elite (Wanner, 1998:xix). The Soviet way of writing and representing history suits patron-client networks quite well. Some of the features of Soviet historiography, as described by Solonari (2003:412), were a limited number of historical figures that incorporated either positive or negative characteristics, a limited number of symbols that together created a rigid formal symbolic language and conveyed an unambiguous message easily comprehensible to the masses and suitable for the ruling elite. Most citizens of the Soviet Union had been influenced by such depictions of history, because this style of narrating history has hardly changed since the 1930s. Especially the strict limitation of actors and events that seem worthwhile remembering, as well as their unambiguous connection with positive or negative features, helps patrons to choose the historical topics that can be publicly remembered with the desired effect. The list of limited actors and events may have changed since the demise of the Soviet Union, but many of the then widely studied topics have remained in the focus, above all the omnipresent World War II.

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[30] The term "Leninopad" became customary to refer to this phenomenon, reminiscent of the word "Listopad", meaning "November", or more literally "the fall of the leaves".

In Izmail, one hero stands head and shoulders above all the others: Alexander Suvorov, the General who stormed the allegedly invincible Izmail fortress in 1790. Many people in Izmail know a lot more about Suvorov than about any other aspect of Izmail's history. It is almost inevitable to pick up stories about Suvorov, when you live in Izmail, and as a rule these stories portray the General as an ideal role model. The local Suvorov Museum and the Diorama of the Siege of Izmail are staple excursions in every school career. Every other year, there are "Suvorov-lectures" also attended by high school students. These lectures are a mix of celebrating and studying the General. They attract Suvorov connoisseurs from all over the post-Soviet region. Celebrations like these are usually accompanied by the "Young Suvorovs" a group

Image 5 Members of the student group "Young Suvorovs" guarding Izmail's monument for General A. V. Suvorov on the city's 423rd anniversary celebration, September 2013

of school children from Izmail's top rated school Nr. 1. This youth group wears cadet's uniforms in their performances. As a mother of a second grader explained, in order to be initiated into the group, children are asked to swear an oath that is printed on their membership certificates for them to remember:

> We, the second graders of specialized primary school number 1, named in the honor of A.V. Suvorov, in joining the ranks of the school club "Young Suvorovs", solemnly promise to passionately love our fatherland, to study and know the history of our home region, to be honest and just, to be good and considerate, to respect the elder and never harm the younger, to show

charity towards the ill and lonely, to study well, to love our school and contribute to its traditions, we swear it, we swear it, we swear it![31]

All the values listed here are attached to a historical figure, and children are asked to abide by them in Suvorov's name. This is only possible because Suvorov is an uncontested figure in Izmail. His role is characterized exclusively in positive terms. In Turkish historiography, I assume, he is portrayed in a dimmer light (if at all), but in Izmail, his legacy is above all a matter of pride. Because Suvorov's image as a role model has hardly ever been contested in russophone historiography, he is the ideal ambassador for the values, the "Young Suvorovs" subscribe to.

Not every historical figure enjoys such broad and uncontroversial favor in the representation of the past. Partly because of its long peripheral status, Bessarabia is rich in more controversial historical figures. But contested histories, such as the role of Stepan Bandera, do not serve political patrons very well, because their public remembrance will potentially alienate as many people as they attract.

An illustrative episode took place in Ozernoe, a lakeside Moldovan/Romanian speaking village to the north-west of Izmail. In the year 2000 the municipal council of Ozernoe discussed whether to erect a monument for the Romanian Marshal Alexandru Averescu, who was born in the village in 1859 (then still known as Babel or Babele). Averescu gained popularity as a commander in the First World War, and used his reputation to become a politician in the interwar period, when Bessarabia belonged to Romania. He served as Prime Minister three times between 1918 and 1926. The initiative for the construction of a monument in his honor came from the head of an organization called Christian-Democratic Alliance of Romanians in Ukraine. People in Moldovan/Romanian speaking villages in southern Bessarabia only very rarely identify themselves as Romanian, and even more rarely they identify with Romania. The depiction of Romania in Soviet and post-soviet historiography is almost unanimously negative. Romania is shown in textbooks and museums to have been an unjustified aggressor that ruthlessly exploited Bessarabia and its population. Before World War I, Ozernoe native Averescu served as Romania's Chief of General Staff. In this role, he encouraged Austria's moves against Serbia and her ally Russia by reassuring Austria, that in case of war, Romania would deploy troops in Vienna's support (Hitchins, 1994:151). Also, Averescu was the commanding officer behind the brutal crackdown of a Romanian peasant revolt in 1907 (ibid.:178). Soviet historiography, with its gusto for peasant uprisings, highlighted this aspect of Averescu's military career. The inhabitants of Ozernoe were, although schooled in the Moldovan/Romanian language, exposed to the Soviet history curriculum. One of the overriding themes in the regional history curriculum was explaining why Moldovans were not Romanians. Averescu's career of growing up in a Moldovan village and becoming a national hero of Romania, mocked this

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[31] As depicted on membership certificates in the school museum of School Nr. 1 in Izmail

narrative. After independence, when the school curriculum was revised, heroes of Ukrainian nationalism were given prominence. Averescu however remained a controversial figure. For the commemorative culture of southern Bessarabia he and the message his memory conveyed were disruptive. Figures like him, belonging to a foreign and competing commemorative culture, were not given a historical face lift. The monument for Averescu in his now Ukrainian birth place Ozernoe was never built. The municipal council turned it down. Most inhabitants of the village, according to the Izmail newspaper that dug the story up in 2010, strongly opposed the monument.[32]

This episode shows how unsuccessful the promotion of contested historical figures can be. For the head of the "Christian-Democratic Alliance of Romanians in Ukraine" the episode was a fiasco, because the person chosen for the monument represented a history highly controversial among the municipal council and the villagers.

A much safer way to attention and popularity is to choose historical events or figures which popular history agrees upon. This implies that patrons, who use representations of history to recruit clients, have a clear interest in making as many historical events and figures uncontested, and morally uplifting. According to Solonari's (2003:412) description of Soviet historiography, a limited number of figures with either clearly good or clearly bad attributes served the interest of the ruling party elite best. Now, under the conditions of post-Soviet clientelism, a growing number of figures and events with the potential for glorification serve patrons best. Restricted numbers of such events and figures only limit a patron's opportunities in publicly representing them. It remains crucial however, that the discretion, how to interpret the past, remains in the hands of patrons.

The growing numbers of historical events and figures worth remembering eases competition among patrons. This mechanism has driven historic exploration into realms that during Soviet times were underexplored or even taboo. Take the histories of ethnic minority groups, church history, aspects of Ukrainian history that were previously deemed "bourgeois nationalism", or the biographies of the regional power-holders during tsarist times. This of course does not mean that events or figures hailed by Soviet historiography have been piled off from the pantheon, but they certainly have gotten some competition.

7.6. Conclusion

This chapter discussed how images of the past can be used to create political legitimation as well as to challenge the legitimacy of political rivals. Images of the past can be employed to

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[32] *Pridunayskie Vesti*, March 20, 2010 *Nasha sila – v edinstve.*

convince people that the presently ruling elite is the rightful heir of earlier states and the only legitimate outcome of history. But in order to make such narratives produce their desired effect, they had to be conveyed to the popular masses, even on the periphery, or perhaps especially there. Therefore, the power of history as a political tool grew, when mass education was introduced. The Romanian and the Soviet states did so both mainly by lecturing the rural population of this region in institutions specially created for this purpose. The naming and renaming of streets, squares and all kinds of institutions, from ships to cemeteries, was another instrument in creating a collective memory around a hand-picked pantheon of suitable historical figures.

The peripheral status of Bessarabia complicated the establishment of a solid canon of local historical knowledge that would serve to justify one (and only one) political elite to rule over the area. History here was rewritten more often than in the center, confusing the collective memory and leaving some historical figures with contradictory images. Like the territory of the periphery, history there is claimed by several factions, each of which draws their own narrative from different historical sources found in different places and recorded in different languages.

The contested nature of history has led many historians, who firmly take the view of one or the other side, to believe that there was objective truth in history, and that this truth could be proven once all the facts about the past were on the table.[33] After each change of statehood, new facts were put on the table and old ones were arranged in new ways. Even after Soviet and Romanian censorship was lifted, history did not become uncontested. The very selection of topics that historians choose to study reveals in which light they portray the past of the region.

The origin of particular ethnic groups is a case in point. In southern Bessarabia, the genesis of ethnic groups matters a lot because none of the local groups has a convincing claim in being the one that arrived first. Political claims of Bessarabia being an ancient Slavic or entirely Romanian land can therefore be put forward with according theories of ethnogenesis. What could be brushed aside as populist polemics until recently, gained a new sense of urgency since Russia seized Crimea from Ukraine in March 2014 and justified this move with historical narratives.

Although less dramatic, in Bessarabia arguments over the lessons drawn from historical events and figures are instrumental in local politics. Clientelism favors unambiguous judgment of history. Patrons help to shape uncontested images and try to present themselves as representative of a set of values epitomized by one or other historical figure. Controversial figures, associated with incongruous or complex behavior, are not well suited for this kind of moral exchange, because they might alienate as many potential clients as they attract.

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[33] For a discussion of this attitude as manifested in Ukrainian history readers see Richardson (2004:129)

8. The narratives and techniques that maintain ethnic boundaries

If ethnic belonging is essential and an undeniable characteristic of each person (as most of my informants would unhesitatingly agree), this means that every person's ethnic identity is somehow predefined and located somewhere. And if the foreign anthropologist cannot, with his unschooled eye, recognize this essence that creates ethnic differences, then there must be techniques to reveal it, and there must be narratives that explain how this essence affects the way people behave. This chapter is meant to list and discuss such narratives and techniques, as they are employed by people in southern Bessarabia.

The idea that there is something within a person that encodes information about ethnic identity lends an air of science to essentialist concepts of ethnicity. If such features are encoded within each person, making predictions how these act out, would indeed require some degree of specialized knowledge. In fact, even to understand relatively trivial but non-obvious facts of life, such as that glass chips are not diamonds or that dolphins are not fish, we need a degree of learned expertise about qualities inside the object we look at (Gelman and Wellman, 1991:214). Simply because these qualities are invisible to the naked eye: "An essence is the unique, typically hidden property of an object that makes it what it is, without which it would have a different identity (e.g., the chemical composition of water, the DNA structure of an elephant)" (ibid.:215). So the very concept of essence, requires a narrative to demonstrate or explain it, and if we want to make it visible (which is not always possible), a technique is needed in order to bring out into the open what is otherwise disclosed inside. In contrast to the natural sciences, narratives about ethnic belonging are not easily tested and techniques not easily replicated. They rely on cultural practices determined by a locality and its history. The following analysis of fieldwork materials is an attempt to lump together the suggestions made to me during fieldwork, as to what the essence of ethnicity might consist of, where and how it might be found.

There seem to be quite diverse assumptions as to what defines ethnic groups and what qualifies a person as a member of one ethnic group or other. These different assumptions then suggest different procedures to safeguard and maintain ethnic boundaries. In the field, I have come across a number of assumptions, where the essence of ethnic identity is to be found. The chapter's structure follows their listing: ethnic essence seems to be assumed in language, in religious beliefs, in common historical experience, in folklore, and in DNA. Each section will deal

with one of these items and discuss the techniques and narratives of ethnic boundary maintenance they imply. In a second step, every section discusses how, in the region's history, the relevant techniques and narratives have evolved and how they were shaped by changing political priorities in the respective center.

Narratives, as I use the term here, means a story that is "… attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual, to intersubjective networks or institutions, however local or grand, micro- or macro- stories. (…) Public narratives range from the narratives of one's family, to those of the workplace (organizational myths), church, government, and nation" (Somers, 1994:619). Narratives, as they manifest themselves in ethnographic fieldwork are retold in similar or identical versions by different people and at different times with the aim of bringing across the same or similar arguments. These narratives can be based wholly or partly on true stories, they can be ad-hoc collages of earlier narratives, or they can be deliberate lies, in other words any illustrative tale that reoccurs similarly in form and intention.

Techniques to make ethnic markers seen and thereby to maintain ethnic boundaries are more subtle. They can be any reoccurring patterns of behavior that marks ethnic boundaries. They can be intentional or unintentional, explicit or implicit. Such techniques are tied to social norms that people imply on themselves or demand compliance from others. Because such norms usually exist outside the codified law, they can be employed as it best fits the respective situation. Since ideas about the essence of ethnicity and about ethnic authenticity are so varied, it is only natural that ideas about how and why ethnic boundaries should be maintained differ substantially. Many people have no manifest desire to maintain ethnic boundaries but do so unintentionally. Others loudly champion ideas of ethnic boundary maintenance but may still sometimes act otherwise.

That the intention to maintain ethnic boundaries is not always there, and not every time it is indeed there, it is openly declared, makes exploring maintenance techniques a tricky endeavor. A good starting point is to look at the possible locus where the essence of ethnicity is believed to reside. Once these are identified, it becomes easier to analyze the measures employed to keep this essence in place and protected from dilution.

8.1.   Pure and impure language

The most significant marker of ethnic boundaries in southern Bessarabia, and throughout the former Soviet Union, seems to be language. Linguistic differences in many cases were directly translated into ethnic boundaries in Soviet nationalities policy. A common language was a decisive criterion in the definitions of what a nation or an ethnos is, including Shirokogorov's

definition in the 1920s, Stalin's in the 1930s, Kushner's in the 1950s, and Bromley's in the last decades of the Soviet Union (see their definitions in section 6.4). On the other hand, language is a viable candidate to be the bearer of the ethnic essence, because anything we do can be thought and discussed only using language. Because thoughts are encoded in a language and behavior is based on thoughts, it can be influenced by the language they use, the metaphors and wisdoms engraved in a linguistic tradition. If two groups of people use different languages and are perceived to behave differently, one obvious explanation is that the different languages they use are at the roots of their differing behavioral patterns. The Bulgarian language teacher Valeriya Plachkova for instance, explained alleged behavioral differences between Bulgarians and Gagauz with this train of thought.[1] She is of mixed Bulgarian and Gagauz descent but inclined to call Gagauz her native language. The only difference between Bulgarians and Gagauz, in her opinion, lies in their different languages and psychology. The latter, she explained, derived from language directly. The Gagauz were slightly more aggressive than the Bulgarians, given the large amount of words for fighting and warfare in their lexicon. The Bulgarians had more words for love and tenderness in their vocabulary and therefore behaved accordingly. Because we do what we think, she argued, the language, in which our thoughts are thought, has an effect on the way we act. In the informant's perception, the language learned first determines how people act, and therefore people who speak different languages will act differently. This explanation for ethnic differences however, still does not explain how one ethnic belonging becomes dominant over another in the case of mixed ethnic origin and bilingual upbringing (like in the case of the informant herself).

In several instances one technique to detect in which language the real identity of a person is engraved into his or her mind was suggested: One can look at moments of unconscious speech. One man of Bulgarian and Gagauz descent, who runs a Bulgarian language Sunday school in Chervonoarmeyskoe, said he knew for sure that he was a real Bulgarian after a stay in hospital, during which his roommate overheard him speak Bulgarian in his delirious sleep.[2] At another episode of the interview this man named drunkenness or great pain as conditions in which the "true" ethnic nature of a person reveals itself. In these situations a person no longer can deliberately choose a linguistic code but uses the one that was engraved in his or her mind deepest. The informant here specifically referred to a scene in the popular Soviet spy-vs.-spy TV series *Seventeen Moments of Spring* (1973), in which a female Soviet spy in Nazi Germany is uncovered while giving birth, because her agonized screams betray her native language. Consequently, no matter how many languages a person learns to speak and how fluent they

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[1] Interview in Izmail, November 14, 2012

[2] Interview in Chervonoarmeyskoe, September 19, 2013

become in them, the language learnt first, remains the one formative for their "true" identity, the one people fall back on when they lose the ability to obstruct their "real" identity.

Following from the assumption that ethnic identity is engraved in a language, the arguably most basic and most obvious of all forms to keep ethnic boundaries clear-cut is to demand, from all those willing to be identified with a particular ethnic denominator, to use a pure form of one particular linguistic code in all social spheres and situations. The Ukrainian and Russian languages have long traditions, both of linguistic mixing and of linguistic purism. The language varieties that dissolve the boundary between Russian and Ukrainian are most commonly called Surzhyk. To demarcate the linguistic boundary between the Russian and the Ukrainian standard languages there is a time-honored practice to shame language mixing (Bernsand, 2006, Bilaniuk, 2005). The starting point for this technique is the assumption that there are pure and authentic ethnic communities that speak pure and authentic languages. These languages are seen to be better suited for the ethnic group in question than any other language. So language purists build their activism on the assumption of a hierarchy, in which pure language varieties are at the top and all other varieties can be measured against them. If there is a hierarchy of differently valued language varieties, pure language varieties index high social values (Bilaniuk, 2005:2). With language mixing, the notion of dirt or impurity is never far. Most informants name "clean language" (*chistiy yazyk*) as the opposite of Surzhyk, meaning the standardized varieties of either Ukrainian or Russian. One Odessa language teacher said speaking Surzhyk was like walking around in untidy clothes. Other Odessa informants said that hearing Surzhyk "hurts in my ears" or "bangs my psyche". The abhorrence for language mixing is a very real sensation to many people in Ukraine. Many of my informants believed that speaking Surzhyk was a sign of low social status and of rural origin.[3]

Yet, the degree of impurity is often in the eye of the beholder. People are sometimes quick to classify the language of others as impure and mark it with the term Surzhyk. At the same time, many people admit that their own language is not perfectly pure, but overwhelmingly reject the etiquette of Surzhyk. In two Ukrainian villages in the vicinity of Izmail, most people are aware that the language they speak is not standard Ukrainian. Still many reject the label of Surzhyk, while others accept it laughingly or grudgingly.

But it is not peasants in villages who most often are targeted by language purists. People from whom it is expected that they should embody the attributes of Ukrainian ethnicity are much more likely to be targeted by purists; public national figures and representatives of the state. Former presidents Yushchenko and Yanukovich were often criticized for speaking Surzhyk in public (Bilaniuk, 2005:197). Many figures in the cabinet of Yanukovich had linguistic habits particularly disturbing to purists. Yanukovich recruited most of his entourage from his

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[3] Bernsand (2001:41) also locates Surzhyk where rural life and city life meet.

home region, the largely Russian-speaking Donbas. Language policy had been a dominating topic of his presidency, culminating in the reform of Ukrainian language policy in 2012, giving Russian an enhanced status on the regional level. Yanukovich himself learned to speak proper Ukrainian only when already in office. His language was a frequent subject of ridicule. The popular comedy show *Vecherniy Kvartal*[4] had one actor, Alexander Pikalov, specializing almost exclusively in parodying Yanukovich's brand of speaking Surzhyk.

One criticism often accompanying ridicule of high-ranking Surzhyk-speakers is that their hapless attempt to speak Ukrainian is also an attempt to conceal their true nature as Russian-speakers: With this attempt they make their way into the ruling class of Ukraine that in the opinion of many should be reserved for people who speak "pure" Ukrainian.

Public ridicule, naming and shaming of prominent Surzhyk speakers, the association of language mixing with dirtiness, with rural-urban migration, and poor education are all mechanisms that force people to either deny that they speak Surzhyk, or (very rarely) to actually purify their language. If people do so, they also have to decide for one out of two possible "pure" languages. This choice forces people to take sides in the never-ending debate about the appropriate language in Ukraine. So shaming impure language in effect forces people to choose the quintessential ethnic marker, and not stand in-between established linguistic and ethnic categories.

Although mixing of Russian and Ukrainian is often portrayed as a serious danger to the existence of the Ukrainian language, other regional languages are much more endangered. The Gagauz language has been standardized only after the Second World War and is systematically taught in schools only from a decade ago. Linguistic purism is therefore largely a top-down concern. As with Ukrainian, the Russian language is the main competitor to the Gagauz language. But Russia and the Russians have much more the image of a protector and civilizing force among Gagauz than among Ukrainians. Therefore linguistic interference is hardly ever problematized as an aspect of forced cultural assimilation. Yet linguistic mixing is still perceived as a threat to Gagauz ethnic identity.

Margarita Tanasoglo is a Gagauz language teacher in the primary school of Kotlovina. She studied in Komrat, the administrative center of the Gagauz Autonomous Territory in Moldova. There, she thinks, the Gagauz language was less influenced by Bulgarian, Romanian/Moldovan, and Russian than in Gagauz villages on the Ukrainian side of the border. Kotlovina, like most other villages in southern Bessarabia, adjoins ethnically different villages. Although there is no demeaning term, like Surzhyk, to designate Gagauz with admixtures of other languages, Margarita Tanasoglo also used the metaphor of dirt and impurity to refer to

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[4] The show's hard to translate name derives from the name of the founding comedy troupe "95-y Kvartal" (the 95th district) an area in their hometown Kriviy Rih. See the show's website http://www.kvartal95.com/new/history.html (20.11.2015)

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mixed language. She insisted people should refrain from using Russian loanwords in their Gagauz, especially if there is a Gagauz equivalent for the term. She told her pupils in school to be attentive, but also asked them to tell their parents at home that a Gagauz expression existed and that there was no need to use a Russian word in its place. If she overheard a linguistically mixed conversation she had a hard time to contain the urge to meddle in the conversation and correct the speakers.[5]

Because language seems to be perceived as one of the most essential markers of ethnic identity, linguistic purity has become a major concern of those who use language as an ethnic marker. Linguistic purism was initially an instrument to discipline the huge masses of yet-to-be-schooled children and adults, who became subjects of educatory campaigns, first on a very modest scale by Romania, later to a much greater extent in the Soviet Union.

Certainly, a decisive threshold in the transformation of ideas on linguistic purity was the advent of compulsory schooling after 1944. Prior to schools, improper language may have been the subject of ridicule, but there were no formal institutions to enforce linguistic purity. Institutionalized enforcement of linguistic purity typically occurs at times of rapid social change and at times of national consolidation (Jernudd, 1989:3). But efficient purification of linguistic behavior presupposes powerful and intrusive institutions. In rural Bessarabia of the tsarist period, such institutions did not exist. For more urban areas, we can at least assume that speaking decent Russian, the sort that could be obtained only in state institutions of higher education, was a precondition to enter state service. The mixed language variety Surzhyk is probably as old as the linguistic contact between Ukrainian village dwellers with the Russian-speakers in the cities of southern and eastern Ukraine that were founded mostly in the late 18th century (Bernsand, 2001:41).

During the Romanian phase of Bessarabian history, rudimentary educatory institutions began to take shape. Romania had vastly expanded her system of public schooling between 1920 and 1938, without reaching deep into the population (see chapter 3). So rather than purifying the language of the newly acquired Romanian citizens, the Romanian government needed to teach many of them to speak Romanian in the first place.

In the same period, in 1936, in what today is western Ukraine, but at that time belonged to Poland, Ivan Ohienko, a cleric, linguist, translator of the Bible into Ukrainian, and a member of the Ukrainian exile government, published his *ten commandments of the native language*. In the 1990s they were included in the Ukrainian school curriculum (Bernsand, 2001:42). The "commandments" read like a nationalist's guide to linguistic purism. The fourth of Ohienko's rules was, "the use in literature only of dialects strongly damages the cultural unity of the

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[5] Interview in Kotlovina, July 30, 2013.

nation". The sixth commandment was, "Every nation can have but one standard language, one pronunciation, and one orthography". According to Ohienko's ideas, the state of the national language revealed the state of the nation itself and an individual's degree of sophistication could be judged best from how he or she spoke the national language. Therefore, his commandment was, "every conscious citizen has to know in practice his united standard language, its pronunciation, and united orthography, as well as recognize and fulfill the native language obligations to his nation" (cited in Bernsand, 2001:42). Keeping language pure in this paradigm became an obligation of each member of the national community. The emergence of such discourses among the intellectual elite, paved the way to exclude those who spoke deviating language varieties from the nation or ethnic group altogether.

In southern Bessarabia linguistic purism was introduced less as a means of exclusion and more of a means of disciplining people to stick to administrative categories used by the Soviet school system. When Soviet schools were established in Bessarabia after 1944, one problem for the authorities was to find teachers that were fluent in Ukrainian and Russian standard varieties. Many of the newcomer teachers had graduated from institutions in the Ukrainian SSR that taught mainly in Ukrainian. According to an annual school report from 1949, many in the first cohort of Soviet teachers spoke very poor Russian.[6] The Russian language of a teacher in the village of Voznesenka-Pervaya was so "interspersed with Ukrainian words" that 31 of her fifth graders did not make it to the next grade.[7]

Some linguistic confusion was caused by the policy of using Russian as a language of communication with ethnic minorities in the post-war Ukrainian SSR, where theoretically Ukrainian was used as a language of administration. Some official reports in the early 1950s were still typed in Ukrainian, a practice largely abandoned in later years. Village gatherings were usually held in Russian, although in the early years of Soviet rule, the bulk of the population could not have been fluent in that language. In Ukrainian speaking villages, administrative documents remained inconsistent in their language.[8] So the legal and practical ambiguity around the use of languages combined with a lack of resources made purified linguistic behavior a distant goal.

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[6] Fr445 D128 Godovye otchety gorodskikh i rayonnykh otdelov narodnogo obrazovanie o rabote shkol za 1948/1949 uchebnyy god, pp. 78, 82

[7] Fr445 D156, Godovye otchety rayonnykh otdelov narodnogo obrazovaniya za 1949-1950 god p. 142. This village is situated in Artsiz Rayon. The practice of naming and shaming bad teachers as well as culture house workers was rather common in annual school reports of the 1940s and 50s.

[8] For example the files in Fr1807 Ispolnitel'niy komitet Gasan-Aspagskogo sel'skogo soveta 1947-1985, or in F 445 D156, pp. 21 ff. Where the Soviet administration only owned a typewriter with a Russian keyboard layout, and where Ukrainian "i's" therefore had to be replaced with the number "1".

In Soviet days, there was a clear hierarchy of languages: the Russian language as the "medium of interethnic communication" on the top, Ukrainian as the language of the republic a distant second, and the local language, reserved almost exclusively for informal communication. A new form of linguistic impurity, and an according panicky response by purists, came when this hierarchy of languages collapsed with the new status of Ukrainian as the only state language in Ukraine in 1989. Now Ukrainian, the language of the nation, claimed a status on a level playing field or even above Russian. This claim shaped Ukrainian politics through all the years since independence and it has turned upside down linguistic strategies of upward social mobility. By rights, if one wanted to join the ruling class, one no longer needed to speak just spotless Russian but preferably also a refined variety of Ukrainian. Many of those who were already in the upper echelons of power had no intention of leaving, just out of a newly felt linguistic incompetence. They started to speak their own version of Surzhyk in order to still be eligible as members of the elite. This variety, produced by people well educated in Russian, who picked up Ukrainian late in their lives in order to enhance their credibility as good Ukrainians, can be used most purposefully to demarcate ethnic boundaries. Bilaniuk (2005:134) christened this variety "post-independence Surzhyk". Surzhyk that once was the city dweller's stigma for the peasant migrant had now been turned against the post-Soviet elites, still rooted in a Russian-speaking state, and it pointed to what many saw as not only linguistic, but ethnic impurity.

8.2. Religion's ambiguous role in marking ethnicity

Not quite so simple to grasp are the techniques of ethnic boundary demarcation that evolve around religion. This is partly because religion no longer is a reliable marker of ethnic boundaries. Before World War II the Jews and the Bessarabian Germans were two local groups whose ethnic difference from the rest of the population was primarily marked by religious practice. The overwhelming majority of all the other groups settling southern Bessarabia were Orthodox Christians, with the Old-Believers as a fiercely independent subgroup. Among the Orthodox groups, a sizable number of believers, urban as well as rural, have in recent years turned to evangelical congregations or to Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses. In many villages, the old Orthodox churches have been destroyed under Soviet administration, and were never rebuilt. After the iron curtain fell, prayer houses, financed by foreign churches, were built in

most villages. Often there is more than just one prayer house per village, and as a rule they are the most lavish buildings there.[9]

Nevertheless, like language, religious beliefs and practices are perceived to leave an imprint on a person's nature. Some informants also suggested that a psychological makeup remains within a person descended from a specific religious community, even after conversion to a different creed. In a discussion of two young market traders in Izmail, one of whom said he was Orthodox while the other had converted to a New-Age practice, the Orthodox man said that even if one converted one would remain Orthodox by ethno-psychology. This was something that every person had and that could not be denied no matter how hard one pretended. Therefore, descent from one religious group can be essentialized and sometimes people do so, but the boundaries marked in this way are wider than the ethnic boundaries between local ethnic groups in southern Bessarabia.

In the late Soviet Union, with its atheist state ideology, publically practicing religion was a similar statement of opposition as insisting on speaking Ukrainian in public (Knudson Gee, 1995:386). But nowadays almost all forms of ethnic nationalism, in Ukraine as well as in Russia and Romania, come along with calls for religious revival. Therefore, displaying one's religiosity in public can no longer serve as a statement of opposition against a state, nor can it serve to take sides for or against a particular ethnic group.

If Orthodoxy alone cannot mark local ethnic boundaries, it is certainly suited to mark a series of other boundaries. These are for example religious institutions, associated with different political camps in Ukrainian politics. In 1992 a Kyiv Patriarchate branched off from the Moscow Patriarchate, in order to give the newly independent polity of Ukraine an independent religious hierarchy. Most parishes in southern and eastern Ukraine remained with the Moscow Patriarchate, which in some instances led to fierce conflicts over church property and doctrine. One quarrel between the two patriarchates was over the language used in liturgy. The Moscow Patriarchate sees Church Slavonic as the appropriate language, while the Kyiv patriarchate insists on using the language of the people (i.e. Ukrainian), pointing to the examples of the Georgian, Cypriot, or Greek Orthodox Churches (Wilson, 2002:243). In Southern Bessarabia practically all parishes belong to the Moscow Patriarchate. Most priests, independently of the predominant ethnicity of their parish, use Church Slavonic for the liturgy, while the language used in the (usually short) sermons can differ. In the village church of Kotlovina, a predominantly Gagauz village, the liturgy is performed in Church Slavonic and Russian by the

[9] Some Baptist prayer houses were established before Soviet rule and have survived. For instance, the Baptist congregation in the village of Pershotravnevoe, according to the head of the village council, had continuously existed since 1918. Another example are the four Baptist and one Adventist prayer houses in the town of Kiliya, mentioned in a Romanian police report from autumn 1934: F312 D49, O nablyudenii za deyatel'nost' russkoy i ukrainskoy natsional'nosti gorodov i uezda, p. 202.

Gagauz priest. The only Gagauz language element in mass is the "Our Father" which is recited in Gagauz. The exact linguistic arrangements of ceremonies in village parishes seem to depend on the preferences of the local priest and parish. The Moscow Patriarchate does not prohibit the use of local languages in liturgy. Differences between village parishes of the Moscow Patriarchate may be just as big as differences between parishes belonging to different Patriarchates. So belonging to different branches of the Orthodox Church may be a viable technique to mark ethnic boundaries on the national Ukrainian level, but not on the local Bessarabian level.

Politicians use the church and its representatives to enhance their own credibility and reputation. In election campaigns, church authorities sometimes make direct recommendations whom to vote for.[10] Rich patrons often recommend themselves to the support of the church and believers by building churches on their expense or by organizing the restoration of dilapidated church buildings. If such projects are sufficiently tied to the name of one patron, they can help delimit a certain district as this patron's realm of influence. One example of marking a political realm with the help of the church is Sergey Kivalov, one of Odessa's most powerful patrons, a former member of parliament, once chairman of the national electoral committee, and the rector of Odessa law school. He built St. Tatyana Church right on the law school's campus. There, each year on Tatyana's Day, Kivalov after church offers free lunch to students and church goers.[11]

Another example is Vladimir Bodelan, the Oblast chief of emergency services, son of a former Mayor of Odessa, and unsuccessful candidate for parliament in 2012. He built a small chapel on a highway junction outside Odessa. In his blog, Bodelan wrote about the sanctification of the church in June 2012, "From all entry roads into Odessa, this one was the only one without a sign that Odessa is an Orthodox Christian city".[12] Odessa, of course is an Orthodox city among many other things. But by being the one to provide the chapel that marks Odessa as an Orthodox city, Bodelan not only recommended himself to religious voters, he also marked a particular territory as belonging to one sort of people, Orthodox believers.

Rather than referring to ethnicity, the stressing of one's religious belonging identifies one with a community of values that are informed by religious beliefs and practices. But

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[10] See section 5.4 for an example how the church in Izmail awarded Yuri Kruk, the local Party of the Regions incumbent candidate for parliamentary elections, with a religious award just days before the elections in October 2012. Another example involving Vladimir Bodelan, an unsuccessful challenger of Yuri Kruk, was reported in Izmail weekly *New City* on September 14, 2012. In this case the Metropolitan of Odessa and Izmail (at the time himself a member of the Oblast Parliament and of the Party of the Regions) directly recommended voting for Bodelan. Available online: http://www.izmacity.com/novosti/politika/3834-mitropolit-agafangel-lvo-vlasti-nuzhny-molodye-energichnye-i-gramotnye-lyudir (20.11.2015)

[11] See *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine* on January 26. 2012, available online: http://odessa.kp.ua/odessa/321841-v-tatianyn-den-v-yurakademyy-uhoschaly-ryboi-y-barankamy (20.11.2015)

[12] For Bodelan's blog see http://bodelanvladimir.blogspot.de/2012_06_01_archive.html (20.11.2015)

ultimately being an Orthodox Christian in southern Bessarabia is rather a denominator of a wider Orthodox and conservative community. That the Moscow Patriarchate stands for a supra-ethnic community of believers is manifested for example in the Patriarch's title, Patriarch of Moscow and all of Rus (Patriarch moskovskiy i vseya rusi) or more profanely in the title of the Patriarchat's women's magazine *Slavyanka*. Such denominations clearly refer to a group bigger than the Russians or the inhabitants of the Russian Federation. This reference is more suitable to differentiate oneself from evangelical Christians and, more importantly, to delimit the border to nonbelievers who reject religion as a source of moral guidance and who are often associated with Western materialism.

Through the course of history, religious institutions changed their role in demarcating ethnic boundaries, usually very abruptly. They were accessible for the peasant population long before institutions of education. On the other hand, during the Soviet period, churches of all religious communities were quickly and violently replaced by schools and other institutions that promoted rationalism and scientific atheism. Therefore, religious ties underwent a very rapid transformation from one of the most important marker of identity during the tsarist and the Romanian time, to a marker that could, at best, be displayed in private. The spectacular rise of language as the most important marker of ethnic identity was to a large part caused by the spectacular fall that religious institutions experienced in the middle of the 20th century. Like with language, the Soviet newcomers insisted on a pure form of atheism.

In 1951, 7 years after the Soviets had taken power in Bessarabia, a school report from Kiliya Rayon lamented that on church holidays up to 70% of school pupils remained absent from school and attended church instead. This situation was blamed on a lack of anti-religious education.[13] Another school report from the early 1950s demanded agitation be intensified among parents in the town of Vilkovo, with its substantial Old-Believer population, since the town's population was overtly religious and uncultivated.[14] This form of atheistic purity could not demarcate ethnic boundaries, but it did divide those who were on a promising path to Soviet integration from those who needed harsher enforcement of Soviet culture.

The intensity with which religion resurfaced after the fall of Soviet power is all the more surprising. In many families religious practices had survived. Most people who started to regularly attend church after 1991 were no raw recruits to religion. However, amidst a huge inflow of evangelical congregations, not all of them joined an Orthodox parish. This fact is sometimes polemically debated by those who see Orthodox Christianity as a key ingredient of ethnic authenticity. To underline such a position, adherents of evangelical prayer houses can be lumped together under the label "sectarians" (sektanty). This is as much a pariah-etiquette as

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[13] Fr445 D186 Godovye otchety rayonnykh i gorodskikh otdelov narodnogo obrazovaniya za 1950-1951 uchebnyy god, p. 212

[14] Fr445 D209 Godovye otchety gorodskich i rayonikh otdelov narodnogo obrazovaniya o rabote shkol za 1951 god, p. 59

that of Surzhyk. In some cases, people who are not Orthodox are implicitly excluded from the "real members" of an ethnic group. To delineate the Gagauz ethnicity, for instance, Orthodox Christianity is frequently cited as one of the pillars of Gagauz identity, even by Gagauz who themselves are not religious (Anikin, 2009:23). An example of this idea was the lecture of a scholar from the Gagauz University at Komrat during the World Congress of the Gagauz in November 2012. In a talk entitled *the cultural code of the Gagauz,* the speaker said that this code was made up of the Gagauz language, the strong influence of the Russian language, the Gagauz traditions, and Orthodox Christianity. The latter had now come under pressure due to the "dictate from European bureaucrats" and "liberal European ideas". Implicitly this also means that a weakening of religion would ultimately dissolve ethnic boundaries. This fear has also been voiced by a clergyman speaking on the same congress. The fear that if a group loses its traditional faith it would also lose its identity, parallels the same fear about language, that is voiced more often.

Most explicit about being Orthodox as a precondition to take on an ethnicity-like identity are the various Cossack associations. In order to join the Izmail branch of the Ukrainian Registered Cossacks one needs to pledge allegiance in Izmail's Cathedral, swearing that one "will serve God and the people of Ukraine to the final breath".[15] In order to join the ranks of the Bessarabian Cossack Regiment one needs to be of age and baptized in an Orthodox Church.[16]

Religion, one can conclude, has come to serve not to distinguish the members of one ethnic group from another, instead, for some people, the degree of a person's religiosity helps to distinguish the "real" members of an ethnic group from all the rest.

8.3. *Common historical experience and collective memory*

It is a familiar observation that people who have been through a lot together adopt similar characteristics and a spirit of communality. In a classic definition of the nation by Ernest Renan, national unity was produced, among other things, by the shared memory of struggles lived through together (Renan, 1994 [1882]:17). In the former Soviet Union too, a common historical experience was seen as one of the preconditions to call a group a nation (see the definitions for nation by Joseph Stalin, 1994 [1973]:19) and later for an "ethnos" by Yulian Bromley (1980:155). As with other criteria in Soviet definitions of ethnic groups, common historical experience too is widely perceived as an origin of ethnic ties. Since history has become a focus of national politics and a matter of passionate debate in Ukraine, knowledge of an official

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[15] *Uezdniy Telegraf* October 16, 2013, Za veru, Ukrainu i kazachestvo

[16] *Kur'er Nedeli* November 10, 2012, O kazakakh vchera i segodnya

historical narrative has also become a condition of belonging to the nation (Richardson, 2004:116).

When asked for the locus of the ethnic essence, some people stress common historical experience first of all. Such experiences are thought to be conserved in people over many generations and to shape people's characters, even within large groups in which group members do not directly interact. One narrative derived from this belief is that the historic experience of living in a particular environment predestines people of one ethnic group for a particular economic niche. Bulgarians in Bessarabia, for instance, have long been associated with growing vegetables and wine (Kushnir, 1998:169). During fieldwork, several of my informants associated tomato growing with Moldovans. Thereby ethnicity and the economic niche associated with it determine each other. Moldovans grow tomato because that is what Moldovans do. Soviet ethnography has ascribed ethnic arsenals of skills to an ethnic character that in turn was shaped by the environment in which the ethnos originated (Bromley and Podol'niy, 1990:46,106-110). An application of this theory is the idea that the frugality, sometimes ascribed to Bulgarians, stems from their century-long oppression by the Ottoman Empire (Kushnir, 1998:177). The idea that the experience of living under Ottoman rule was deeply engraved in the behavior of contemporary Bessarabians is fairly widespread. For instance, one frequently mentioned particularity of Bulgarians is their allegedly specific attitude towards women. The leader of the League of Bulgarian Families, a Bulgarian ethnic association in Izmail, called what in her view is the typical Bulgarian attitude towards women, a "cult of the mother and the mother-in-law". She explained the emergence of this specific trait with the century long struggle against the Ottomans:

> "Because the men..., well five centuries, 500 years, the men are fighting and the women are in the house, and therefore, naturally, the mother held the whole family together".[17]

Two more informants, both with mixed Gagauz and Bulgarian ancestry, pointed out that the often alleged ethnic endogamy of Bessarabian Bulgarians was a direct consequence of their experience of oppression in the Ottoman Empire. A Bulgarian schoolteacher saw this experience as the reason why Bulgarians had been reluctant to marry the Turkic speaking Gagauz. The narrative of still perceptible consequences of Ottoman oppression are also present in the Gagauz collective memory. The director of the Kotlovina culture house, when explaining the differences between Gagauz and Bulgarian folk songs, said the Gagauz songs were even more melancholic than the Bulgarian ones, because the Gagauz had been even lower in the pecking order of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman oppression appeared in the context of other ethnic groups too: A Ukrainian history teacher explained what he perceived as hatred between

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[17] Interview in Izmail April 4, 2013

Moldovans and Gagauz with the fact that the Moldovans too had been subjects of the Ottoman Empire and Gagauz were speakers of a Turkic language.

In all these explanations, a long gone social order has become an allegedly stable characteristic of Bulgarians, Gagauz, Moldovans, and of the relations between them. By simplifying and generalizing a trait for a whole group of people all the ingredients of a stereotype are provided by a historical narrative (Jaworski, 1978:63). In this view, the relations between ethnic groups appear like relations between individual people. These are, after all, formed by personal experiences. In this perception, it seems there is a mechanism that engraves certain cultural traits in the minds of everyone within an ethnic community, even if the formative experience was made by distant ancestors. If common historical experience is really formative for contemporary ethnic cultures, then it must have been passed down the generations by constant and profound practices of memory, which enabled later generations to relive the experiences of their ancestors. Any technique to maintain an ethnic boundary created by common historical experience would therefore include some form or remembrance rituals, part of what has been described as commemorative culture (*Erinnerungskultur)* a lose set of practices that are resistant against the findings of academic historiography (Troebst, 2006:69).

We can trace such rituals of commemorative culture at least since the Romanian period. In order to instill locals into identifying with Romania, the most obvious common struggle was the War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire 1877-78. To honor the heroes of this war, a pillar with the figure of an eagle sitting on top, was erected on Izmail's river front in 1929 (Rossetti, 1934:56). Such a monument had very little to do with the collective memory of Izmail's inhabitants. The city's population had experienced this war as a hinterland position for the Russian troops and finally as a price for Russia (not Romania). The city's Russian-speaking population was therefore hardly very passionate about Romanian independence and hardly saw the struggle for it as a common endeavor uniting them with the rest of Romania. The Romanians also renamed most streets in central Izmail to give them the names of medieval rulers in Moldova and Walachia, names of the princely family of Romania's recently established monarchy, or leaders of the national awakening campaign (Rossetti, 1934:27). In this case, the alleged common struggle was merely an ascription of commonality to people who first needed to be taught that these were the struggles they had gone through together. Random conglomerates of people, as the Romanian periphery appeared at the time, often become subject to the "invention of traditions" in the hope to create social cohesion between them (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983:9).

In the Soviet Union, practices of commemorative culture became steered by a centrally planning state. There were two hierarchically structured realms in which solidarity needed to be created by way of remembering common historical experience; the ethnically unspecified

Soviet people and the ethnically essentialized constitutive nations of the Union. Therefore memorization of commonly experienced struggles was used to mark civil as well as ethnic ties. This became possible by giving different ethnic groups in the Soviet Union their own historiography and thus their own particular history. The struggles stressed most in these histories could be remembered publically in events or around monuments, provided of course, that the struggle had not been against the Russians or the Soviet Union. These places were *lieux de mémoire* in that they were functional places of ritual laden with a symbolic aura (Nora, 1989:19). This symbolism could refer to a particular ethnic community if there was an established narrative how it connected the ethnic group to the rest of the Soviet people. In Soviet Ukraine, for example, monuments and place names remembering Cossack Hetman Bogdan Khmel'nitskiy (1595-1657) were frequent. Khmel'nitskiy led the Zaporoshian Cossacks against Poland-Lithuania and into Union with Muscovy. Therefore, his legacy did not contradict the Soviet tale of an age-old aspiration for unity of the Eastern Slavs. However, another influential Cossack Hetman, Ivan Mazepa (1639-1709) who changed sides in the Northern War, turning away from Russia to align his troops with Sweden instead, was remembered nowhere in Soviet Ukraine. This changed after the break-up of the Soviet Union when Khmel'nitskiy and Mazepa both were displayed on banknotes of the new Ukrainian currency.

Most prominently remembered in the public sphere of the Soviet Union were historic events experienced by the entire Soviet population. The one outstanding event, the memory of which remains omnipresent even in small villages, is World War II (or the "Great Patriotic War" as the period of the Soviet Union's involvement in the conflict, from June 1941 to May 1945 is commonly called in most successor states). But other defining moments, such as the October Revolution, the Civil War, the first manned space flight, or the War in Afghanistan, were also very common points of reference. They helped to prepare the grounds for an anticipated, post-ethnic Soviet identity.

After the disintegration of the USSR, independent Ukraine followed a more markedly ethnic paradigm to rename places, shift state holidays, and alter the school curriculum. (Locally, however, many Soviet street names and monuments remained in place). In this Ukrainian campaign to rearrange practices of commemorative culture, the one event that took more attention and debate than any other was the devastating man-made famine of 1932-33. In order to make this event and its memory into an ethnic marker for Ukrainians, one had to deal with it not so much as a crime against humanity, but as a crime committed by ethnic Russians against ethnic Ukrainians. This also involved playing down the role of local representatives of the Soviet state, often ethnic Ukrainians, who did the dirty work of confiscating food stocks and punishing those who had hidden theirs. When Ukraine became independent, the hitherto omitted famine was reintroduced to public memory by adding a couple of pages to Soviet history books. There,

the blame was put entirely on the commanders in Moscow while local actors were portrayed as will-less cogs in the wheel (Wanner, 1998:95). Another step in making the famine into an exclusively Ukrainian trauma was to recognize it officially as genocide. A parliamentary commission reached such a conclusion in 1993. Subsequent governments introduced a nationwide commemoration day (in 1998) and a bill that prohibited the denial of the fact that the famine had been genocide (2007). The bill itself was never finally adopted, but its reading in parliament was accompanied by an explanation that it would help to unite the Ukrainian people and to tackle intolerance (Kasianov, 2010:621-629). In many largely Russian-speaking regions the presidential order to publically remember the famine each November, was widely ignored and so was the order to tear down all monuments for communist functionaries associated with the famine. But the Yushchenko government (2005-10) was very eager to spread the custom of a regular common ritual commemorating a shared struggle (ibid.:632-639).

In 2015, the nationalist Radical Party of Oleh Lyashko introduced sweeping laws on the commemoration of history. These were approved by parliament in their substance. The new laws reinstituted the famine of 1932-33 to the status of genocide of the Ukrainian people, committed by the totalitarian regime of the USSR, "which led to the deaths of Millions, destroyed the social basis of the Ukrainian people, ruined its age old traditions and spiritual culture, and destroyed its ethnic uniqueness."[18] Although the fact of the trauma of Holodomor is now largely beyond controversy, these new legislation declare it the trauma of one specific ethnic group.

Bessarabia suffered its own trauma of a man-made famine. At the time of the Holodomor the region belonged to Romania, and therefore, together with western Ukraine that belonged to Poland and Czechoslovakia, was spared from the 1932-33 famine. After Bessarabia had become a part of the Soviet Union, the region became exposed to the same forces that had provoked the famine of 1932-33. All arable land was collectivized, and in 1946 an unusually dry summer, combined with the impossibly accomplishable production quotas imposed on peasants, caused a famine that ultimately cost some villages a third of their population (Tel'pis, 2000). This famine, that in attenuated form also affected other agricultural areas of the USSR, has no commemoration day. There are commemorative monuments on some village graveyards and the nation-wide commemoration day on the fourth Saturday in November officially also includes the victims of the famine of 1946-47. But the symbols, speeches, TV-specials, and newspaper columns that reoccur each year in late November, clearly focus on the large famine of 1932-33, the one that hit vast areas of Ukraine and is politically much more loaded. Institutions in Bessarabia, such as libraries, schools, municipalities, local newspapers,

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[18] See preamble of the *law on the condemnation of the communist and national socialist (nazi) totalitarian regimes in Ukraine and the prohibition of the propagation of their symbols*, published on the homepage of Verkhovna Rada, April 3, 2015: http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_1?pf3511=54670 (20.11.2015)

commemorate the victims of all famines each year. But because many of the speeches and pamphlets are blueprints from Kyiv, they often end up commemorating a famine that past the region by and neglect the famine that devastated southern Bessarabia. In this way, by centralizing commemorative culture, the periphery's history gets overshadowed by the narratives of the center. Whoever lives in the periphery has to subscribe to the center's historical priorities in order to belong. Practices of commemorating the man-made famines in the first half of the 20th century illustrate how selecting certain events for collective memory and omitting others, can turn historiography into a tool of group boundary maintenance. In the case of the Holodomor these group boundaries have increasingly been died in ethnic terms. Ethnic boundaries, in this way are drawn according to who sincerely commemorates a certain historical portrayal of a particular event and who does not.

The notion of common historical experience as the essence of ethnic belonging is another marker closely tied to an all-encompassing educatory system. All scholars associated with the deconstruction of national and ethnic identities, in some way or another point to the significance of mass education. In the revised edition of *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson (2006:163-185) singled out the census, the map, and the museum as the three most powerful institutions creating a sense of communion. An idea of common historical experience is hardly imaginable without at least the latter two, the map (on the class room wall) and the museum.

The map experienced a rapid career from an instrument of orientation to an emblematic icon for a group claiming sovereignty over a territory represented by a shape and a color among other territories on the map (ibid.:122,175). Classroom maps were used already as a tool to impress schoolchildren with the grandeur of the Russian Empire. One famous example, the illustrated map of Tomasik and Usurov (1903) depicted not only geographical features, but was decorated with tables illustrating key events of Russia's history, from the formation of Kievan Rus late in the 9th century to the coronation of the then Tsar, Nikolai II in May 1896.[19]

More formal maps of the time included the first attempts to represent ethnic diversity in areas like Bessarabia. Ethnic maps clearly discerned certain areas for one group by dying them in one color. This technique suggested that each of these groups had territories, however discontinuous, reserved to them. Therefore it appeared evident that the history of this territory was the common history of an ethnic group.[20] The similarity of depiction of ethnic groups and

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[19] *Nagladnaya karta Evropeyskoy Rossii, sostavlena M.I Tomasikom pod redaktsiey V.V Usurova*, Published in Warsaw, 1903, by S. Orgelbrand, the map was presented at the Nizhnyy Novgorod fair in 1896, where it won a prize, and passed censorship in 1901. A copy of the map is depicted in the regional Museum of Bolgrad.

[20] Lev Berg, whose work was discussed in detail in section 2.6, produced an ethnic map of Bessarabia in 1907 using this technique. *Etnograficheskaya Karta Sel'skogo Naseleniya Bessarabii*. It was published by the commission for the scientific investigation of the ethnic composition of Russia at the Russian Academy of Science.

sovereign states on the map also facilitated the idea of ethnic groups as entities similar to states, with a centralized mechanism of decision making and dominant figures, powerful enough to unite and guide the entire ethnic group. With this image in mind it is coherent to assume that ethnic groups have a common history.

The Museum, in many cases, seems to be just a continuation of the classroom. As history lessons in school, the museum usually also employs the division of the past into the history of one's own group and the history of others. Since schools were established in the Region, a "history museum" was often a part of the didactic equipment. During the 1930s, under Romanian reign, Izmail's leading middle school, the St. Dmitry Gymnasium for boys, offered such a history museum. (Rossetti, 1934:110). In Soviet Schools, while the exhibits were replaced, the form and function of such museums remained remarkably similar. In southern Bessarabia terrifying depictions of the "Turkish Yoke" in school museums left no doubt that living under Russia and the Soviet Union was preferable to whatever might have been the outcome of Turkish victory in 1812. A harbinger of the end of Ottoman rule in the region was the storm of Izmail fortress by Suvorov's troops in December 1790. This event is colorfully depicted on murals in Izmail's most elaborate school museum, in the town's leading school Nr 1.

Image 6 School mural in Izmail depicting the Siege of Izmail fortress in 1790

Murals that hail the triumphs of tsarist Russia in Ukrainian schools have not necessarily been painted over since Ukrainian independence, but many new classroom murals have since been added. They usually show more peaceful, even overtly idyllic scenes of village life in Ukraine. The usual markers of Ukrainianess are peasants in embroidered shirts, women wearing wreaths of flowers and braids wrapped around their heads, or horsemen with Cossack hairstyles. In classroom murals, Ukrainian history differs from Russian history in that it is not referred to as a string of military triumphs, but an unspecified paradisiacal time in the past that was shared by people recognizably Ukrainian.

Image 7 School mural in Izmail depicting an idyllic Ukrainian past

8.4. *Taste for song and dance*

One reoccurring narrative is that people of different ethnic identities show different emotional responses to folkloric performances. A history lecturer from the University of Izmail, Artem Kravchenko, told me a story about an experiment he said he has conducted.[21] The story was about an infant boy born to a Russian father and a Gagauz mother. In order to determine the boy's "true" ethnic nature, Artem played different brands of folklore music to him. The boy, according to Artem, did not show any reactions neither to Russian nor Ukrainian songs, but when a Gagauz song was played, "his mother had difficulties holding him." This story might well be a cliché, especially because it is a version of a scene from Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, in which protagonist Nataliya Rostova cannot resist to dance to a Russian folk tune, although she was brought up to French manners (Figes, 2002:17). Even if this was just an old story, retold in what

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might have been an ad-hoc tale, this does not change the fact that Artem actually believed that the essence of ethnic belonging could be determined by looking at folkloric taste. Similarly, a Ukrainian friend with whom I visited a Bulgarian folklore festival in Odessa said that the songs and national dress of the dancers and singers clearly made him feel foreign. When asked how the songs and dresses differed from the ones that make him feel at home, he pointed to his heart and said that the main difference was there, inside.

One more example comes from a middle-aged Bulgarian teacher and entrepreneur from the Bulgarian and Gagauz village of Chervonoarmeyskoe. He told me, his father was Gagauz and his mother Bulgarian. He had, however, decided that his "true nature" was Bulgarian. When asked how he had reached this conclusion, he explained:

> "...I am drawn more towards the Bulgarian culture, because it agitates my blood more when there is Bulgarian folklore, music, dances! ....More than the Gagauz ones. That means, in me, there is more of the Bulgarian. I can feel it. It acts out in the blood."[22]

So taste in folklore is sometimes believed to expose the "true ethnic nature" of people, be they of mixed ethnic origin or not. Since what exactly is the essential core of an ethnic group can hardly be explained rationally, the emotional realm of music is often believed to reflect a specific past and the genius of an ethnic group (Connor, 2011:14). Taste itself can act only as a litmus-test to expose what is believed to be a hidden quality "inside", where it seems, the essence of ethnicity can be found according to wide-spread assumptions. In this perception, ethnic essence is carried by the values and morals put across in the folklore of different ethnic groups, and allegedly these values and morals are different for each ethnic group.

One technique to mark the border between different forms of folklore is labeling folkloric performance with an ethnic marker. Today, folklore is a vital part of representing ethnicity in public. The folkloric movement is well organized around clubs and culture houses. Folkloric groups in the Izmail area usually perform a genre sometimes called "processed folklore" (obrabotanniy fol'klor). Processed folklore brings pre-modern traditions to the stage in a modern and appealing form. It consists mostly of dances and songs, performed in replicas of historic dresses, shinier and more becoming than they likely were in the time referred to, and to the background of synthesized, prerecorded music. The performance on stage therefore can be called "artificial" because it is so detached from the "real" life, but also because it is artistic, designed to show the talent and creativity of the performers rather than claiming ethnic "authenticity" (Habeck, 2011:67). Gregoriy Chilik, the head of the Izmail Center of Ethnic Cultures, who organizes many of the region's folklore festivals, explained where the raw material for processed folklore comes from:

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[22] Interview in Chervonoarmeyskoe, September 19, 2013. In the last cited sentence, the informant used the Bulgarian word for "blood", (krav).

"Among other things we also do folkloric expeditions. We travel...., well let's say, in this year we have planned to do this in two villages, in one Moldovan, and in one Bulgarian, in Bogatoe. We go to old people. There are 90-year-olds there, Grandmas and Grandpas, and we ask them folkloristic questions. 'How were those customs back then, marriage, baptisms, all kinds of..., how did this go, how did that go', and they don't only tell, but some of them also have..., they know a lot of songs. And we collect this material and that's it, one after another. After that, we do a bit of..., we process the material and we keep it here. One of the folklore collectives needs it – 'Aha! Please here we have songs and what you want from the people'. One can look and listen to that Grandma. They can make a modern adaptation of it, or it can be purely ethnographic like she herself had sung it. Feel free, do as you like."[23]

Image 8 Members of Bulgarian folklore groups gathering in Odessa for the annual Day of Bulgarian Culture, September 2013

This method for collecting the ethnographic raw material of processed folklore seems to be fairly wide-spread. A detailed account of a folkloric expedition to a number of villages in the south of Moldova was provided by Jennifer Cash (2011:110 ff.). It is notable that already in the process of collecting the material it becomes clearly ethnically labeled. Expeditions take place to a Moldovan and a Bulgarian village, where then material representative of these groups is

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[23] Interview in Izmail, April 10, 2013, a very similar procedure was described by a Gagauz folklore performer from the village of Kotlovina and graduate from the Kyiv academy of music in an interview on October 7, 2013 in Izmail.

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collected. Solo artists and groups who perform processed folklore usually specialize in the repertoires of one ethnic group. If a collective or a solo artist is announced on stage, usually it will also be announced from which town or village they are and which ethnic group they represent. Therefore, the genre is structured and organized along ethnic boundaries. This does not mean that the people belonging to one or other folklore group necessarily need to identify privately with the ethnic group in question. It is more important to stay faithful to the rigid format of the genre (Habeck, 2011:66-67).

Cash (2011:115-118) also describes some of the ways in which songs and dances can be adapted between an excursion and their performance on stage. In some instances the instrumentation of a piece of music was adapted,[24] in some cases the choreography of a dance, sometimes the gender and age of the performer were altered according to an ensemble's options. But maybe a more significant aspect of processing folklore was labeling songs and dances with the name of a village and an ethnic group. Even in cases where the village, with which a song was associated, was unclear, folklore ensembles chose one of the available options (ibid.:115). The same was true if the ethnic group, from which a dance originated, remained unclear. The processed and performed version of a song or dance may often erase many of the subtleties in its ethnic origins (ibid.:121). Still, usually, one ethnic label is chosen for it.

Hence, processed folklore is also a way to process ethnic boundaries from their subtle and complex expressions found in villager's songs, dances, dresses, and jokes, to the clear and shiny form in which they appear on a stage. This processing does not keep folklore groups with different ethnic labels from sharing one stage or one festival, or from collaborating with each other. Even after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the rise to prominence of ethnic nationalism, folklore performances could still be used to promote ethnic pluralism (ibid.:12). But each group has its ethnic label attached to their performance.

In rare cases a folklore ensemble can perform songs attributed to different ethnic groups. In such a case, however, each new song would be announced with the information with which ethnic group it is associated. This mode of performance could be witnessed during the summer months in Izmail's Art Gallery. Every second day, groups of German tourists arrived on Danube cruise boats. Their short, guided land trip inevitably ended with a visit to the gallery, including a concert by the folklore group Kob'zarska Duma (the bard's song). This group specialized in the celebration of ethnic pluralism. They performed explicitly as a "Bessarabian" ensemble, singing Russian Cossack songs, Ukrainian folk tunes, a Jewish wedding song, and

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[24] In my own fieldwork, I witnessed almost exclusively synthesized music as accompaniment of folklore song and dance, which, needless to say, alters the nature of a piece of music.

finally the German *Lorelei-song*.[25] Importantly, however, this group too introduced each of their songs with an ethnic label.

There are, as one would expect in a multiethnic region, instances of one song being performed in several languages,[26] but I have never witnessed in public performances, someone introducing a song or dance as belonging to several ethnic groups. In a folkloric culture that is so strictly structured by ethnicity, the conclusion that each ethnic culture is essentially different from the others is not a far leap, and from there it is only logical that these essentially different cultures would cause different reactions from people who themselves are inherently different by their ethnic disposition.

State-organized folklore performances that served as public reminders for ethnic unity or ethnic diversity can be traced back to the time of Romanian rule. The culture centers in the villages around Izmail held frequent lectures to convince the ethnically non-Romanian population that they should identify with Romania as their motherland (see section 3.5). Such lectures often could not be fully understood by the local population, since many of them spoke little or no Romanian. In order to ease the frustration of unintelligible patriotic agitation and ultimately to attract bigger audiences, lectures were usually accompanied by amusements, such as comical plays, acrobatic performances, and singing. Since those children who went to school were often among the few Romanian speakers in the village, they also often featured in the folkloristic framework program.[27] At the same time as Romania educated the children of ethnic minorities in Romanian folklore, state institutions were terrified of public performances of other ethnic group's folklore. A main concern was Cossack horseshows, a popular entertainment in the 1930s. The Romanian secret police saw the travelling Cossack artists as a threat because they might have a subversive effect on the audience. Therefore they were prohibited at will.[28] In any case, police kept a close eye on them, sometimes by sending undercover police to folklore shows.[29] So we can assume that in southern Bessarabia folklore performances already in the 1930s were a tool to mark ethnic boundaries. Therefore they were a potential medium to

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[25] With this last song the folklore group included the Germans as one of the constituent groups of the Bessarabian ethnic mosaic. This usually caused a grateful and emotional response from the German tourists, many of which came to Bessarabia on a root-finding-mission as the descendants of expulsed Bessarabian Germans.

[26] A song best known in its Ukrainian version *ti zh mene pidmanula* was sung in Albanian by a group of elderly women in the predominantly Albanian-speaking village of Zhovtnevoe, Bolgrad Rayon.

[27] An illustrative example is the documentation about the culture center in Galileşti (today Desantnoe in Kiliya Rayon) for the year of 1927: F1044 D1 Tsentr kul'tury v sele Galilesht' Izmail'skogo Uezda pp. 12, 38, 42, 48.

[28] For example in March 1937, F312 D138 Nablyudatel'noe delo za deyatelnost' naseleniya russkoy i ukrainskoy natsional'nosti po Izmail'skomu uezdu pp. 8-11, or in May and June 1938, ibid. pp. 88-92.

[29] In October 1934, the Romanian police station in the Danube port of Reni sent undercover police to a guest performance of the Cossack choir "Gusari". The local police station also sent tickets for the concert to the captain of the Soviet ship "Nikolai Balasaev", anchoring in Reni that night. This was to make sure the captain attended the performance, and police could observe his reaction. Reportedly, the captain was delighted to hear songs that reminded him of his military service back in tsarist times. F312 D49 p. 220.

express the grievances of ethnic minorities and to promote minority concerns and more self-determination.

The celebration of ethnic pluralism using folklore goes back at least to the early years of Soviet rule in Bessarabia. Singing and dancing in folklore groups became a leisure time activity since the foundation of clubs and culture houses from the mid-1950's onwards. A 1953 article in *Pridunayskaya Pravda*, the Izmail local edition of the party newspaper, reported that there were already over 300 clubs in the Oblast in which 13,000 people engaged in singing and dancing.[30] The article cited one *kolkhoznik* from the village of Ogorodnoe, saying that he was so well-off that he wanted to sing and dance all the time. Therefore he joined the local folklore collective. The article said that in the area around Ogorodnoe, Bulgarian Songs and dances had survived the oppression of the "Romanian-Boyar Occupation". Now the Bulgarian folklore groups there had the opportunity to bring the great songs they had collected onto the stage. The Soviet Union also institutionalized musical education. Folklore traditions were studied and taught in music academies. Many songs were arranged for professionally trained orchestras and recorded for a wide public. This process of academization also went strictly along ethnic boundaries. Folklore shows and exhibitions were organized all over the country in order to strengthen ties between the different peoples in the Soviet Union (Slezkine, 1994:447). But friendship between peoples did not mean dissolving the boundaries between them. Quite the contrary the Soviet principle of national in form socialist in content increasingly became a "cult of form" (Slezkine, 1994:451, Szporluk, 1998). The show of interethnic harmony, remarks Habeck (2011:66), silenced a critical discussion of ethnic stereotypes and in fact might even have helped reinforce them.

The roots of the folkloric movement lie in this time, when culture houses were built and later equipped with stage prop and electronic sound systems. So the birth of this particular genre fell into a period when ethnic identities were already officially ascribed and used for administrative purposes. Therefore it made sense for state funded culture houses to organize folklore collectives along ethnic boundaries.

8.5. *A new biological code for ethnic belonging*

A more powerful and potentially more harmful argument is that the essence of ethnicity is biological and enclosed in the genome. In the late Soviet years, the time when Lev Gumilev disseminated his theory that the ethnos was a discrete organism (see section 6.5), it remained mysterious which substance connected the members of one ethnos to each other. Soviet ethnographers already operated with the term "gene" and used it as an explanation for ethnic

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[30] *Pridunayskaya Pravda* November 28, 1953 Rastsvetayut narodnye talanty Izmail'shchiny

differences (see for example Arutyunyan, 1974:95), but to wider audiences the insights of genetics and the nature of DNA were yet completely unfamiliar. Since then the field of human genetics has made huge progress and the concept of DNA is widely used (which does not necessarily mean it is also widely understood). The appearance of DNA in the vocabulary of those delimiting ethnic boundaries seemed to provide the missing link between hard science and theories like Gumilev's. He had come up with "impassionedness" as the "X-factor", the force that allegedly drives ethnos-type groups. Gumilev used scientific terminology freely and closely followed developments in Soviet genetics. He believed that every ethnic group was shaped by a gene pool *(genafond)* unique to its members (Bassin, 2016:30). With the technology to detect a person's DNA, a new scientific tool emerged that allowed to decode a person's inherited traits. For many it seemed thus instantly clear that characteristic ethnic features must be found somewhere in the genome.

Also, certain ways of behavior that are believed to be found particularly within one ethnic group are associated with genetics. Such ideas often come along with a very common misunderstanding about DNA; that the cultural behavior of the ancestors was comprehensively recorded in their DNA and therefore the ancestor's acquired qualities would be reflected in their offspring's DNA. One commonly held belief springing from this misinterpretation is the idea that a language can be learned more easily if it was spoken by an ancestor. One informant, a researcher at the Izmail local Museum, told me that Bulgarians and Moldovans find it easier to learn Russian than Ukrainian. She explained that this was because their ancestors had been used to the Russian language as a state language for centuries, but to the Ukrainian language only since a decade or two. Therefore, she explained, the ability to learn Russian was already "engraved in their genes". A fellow researcher in Izmail's archive was convinced I had Russian ancestors somewhere deep down the line, otherwise how could I have learned to speak Russian?

Modern technology and genetic knowhow can indeed provide some information about a person's ancestry.[31] Recently, big-number studies such as the National Geographic Society's Genographic Project profit from the curiosity of individuals who send in samples of their DNA in

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[31] There are two widely accepted procedures to trace ancestry through many generations and to reveal common ancestors of large groups of people that have lived many generations ago. For individuals of both sexes the maternal line can be traced using mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA), which is inherited from the mother and is much shorter and therefore easier to analyze than nuclear DNA (Willermet, 2006:876-878). For men, there is also the possibility to trace the paternal line along the DNA in the Y-chromosome, which is passed on from fathers to sons (Lavender, 2006:2355-2356). The DNA in all other chromosomes is inherited in a random mix of equal proportions from mother and father; therefore, it is virtually impossible to trace one lineage. But mtDNA and Y-chromosomal DNA can be traced back along patterns of mutations for many thousands of years. As a result, statistics and maps can be produced that illustrate the pattern of human settlement on the planet. Coupled with archeological findings and linguistic research, these insights can reveal hitherto unknown pages of the human story.

order to learn about their own ancestry.[32] Other projects that sample large quantities of human DNA put their focus more on research of inheritable disease, such as the Harvard-based Personal Genome Project.[33] The company DeCode Genetics concentrates on the research of genetic disorder, but has produced a small number of publications about the genetic particularities of the population of Iceland, where the company is based.[34] Our knowledge about early settlement patterns of humans clearly profited from genetics and large scale research projects. The Genographic project can, with some justification, promise to reveal "which branch of the human family tree" an individual belongs to. However, no serious study claims to reveal a person's ethnic or national identity. One rather obvious reason for this restriction is that the genetic mutations that structure the ancestral patterns revealed through genetic tests, are much older than even the most pretentious nationalists would claim their nations to be. Even if an individual combines both ways of ethnic ancestry tracing (mitochondrial and Y-chromosomal DNA), this still reveals next to nothing about the ethnic identity of the vast majority of his or her ancestors: Combined mitochondrial DNA and Y-chromosomal DNA contain information only about two direct lines of ancestors, since the mitochondrial DNA was passed on exclusively from mothers to their children, and the Y-chromosomal DNA was passed on only from fathers to sons. If one goes back only to the fifth generation, there are 32 ancestors in it, 16 female and 16 male. However, mitochondrial DNA was inherited only from one of these female ancestors and Y-chromosomal DNA only from one of the male ancestors, while all the other 30 individuals have equally contributed to the overall genome (Brodwin, 2002:328). Therefore, the belief that ethnicity can be determined by looking at a person's genome presupposes that the person's ancestors were strictly endogamous within an ethnic group.

Despite all these complexities, identity builders have been seduced by genetics because they offer the "cachet of science as the ultimate guarantor of truth" and they appear to be "more stable over time than more putatively accidental aspects of identity" (ibid.). Therefore, DNA as a concept has been used wrongly or confusingly not only on the local level to explain everything inexplicable so far, but also in the nation-wide discourse about the origin of Ukrainians and the origin of differences between Ukrainians and Russians. A very telling example for the uninformed use of DNA as a determinant of ethnicity was a documentary aired on November 9, 2012 on privately owned network *Ukrayina*. It was called *DNA Portrait of a Nation* and announced days ahead as the "scientific sensation of the century".[35] The filmmakers collected hundreds of DNA samples from Ukrainian celebrities and people with allegedly ancient

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[32] See the Genographic Project homepage https://genographic.nationalgeographic.com/about/ (20.11.2015)

[33] See the Personal Genome Project homepage http://www.personalgenomes.org/organization/why-participate (20.11.2015)

[34] See the homepage of deCODE genetics http://www.decode.com/publications/ (20.11.2015)

[35] The documentary is available in *Ukrayina's* web archive: http://kanalukraina.tv/ru/programs/p/396#episode/ (20.11.2015)

Ukrainian family names (which, in the Slavic convention, are inherited from the father and thereby, just like the Y-chromosome, carry information about only one line of male ancestors). The documentary claimed, without explanation, that "like most other ethnicities, Ukrainian ethnicity is passed on by the father to his children." Therefore when choosing candidates with ancient Ukrainian family ties, the male lineage was decisive. The choice of the DNA specimens was justified by saying these were especially authentic Ukrainians, since their great grandfathers had already identified as Ukrainians. The collected specimens were analyzed by "the best geneticists in the world." Based on this analysis the documentary did away with the "Soviet propaganda" that all three Eastern Slavic nations, Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, had their roots in mediaeval Kievan Rus. Instead, the documentary claimed that Ukrainians were not Slavs at all. Rather, the film asserted, they were the most ancient branch of Arians, a people that, according to the film, originated from Ukraine and spread from there to other parts of Eurasia. The documentary also included reenacted scenes from a bronze-age Ukraine. These showed the dramatic encounters of the different peoples that would come to form the modern Ukrainian people. The film neither stated that there was no country called Ukraine in the bronze-age, nor that the people living in its territory would not call themselves Ukrainians for another 5000 years. The four peoples that allegedly teamed up to form the Ukrainians were represented by actors, each dressed up in the array of one particular bronze-age people and each representing one virtue that can allegedly be found in modern Ukrainians.

A talk-show that followed the airing of the film[36] was attended not by scientists, but by politicians and by some of the arch-Ukrainian TV-personalities who had their DNA analyzed. The talk-show was accompanied by screened charts, statistics, and maps meant to reinforce the claim of scientific validity that pervaded the entire broadcast. One politician, who took part in the talk-show and eventually stormed out angrily, doubted the connection between DNA and ethnic identity. He justly criticized that the geneticists in the movie had been translated and cited misleadingly. The host shouted him down calling "so you deny the validity of genetics, so you don't believe in science?" One of the maps screened during the talk-show explained the distribution of the genetic traces of one common ancestor (again, one out of many) within parts of the population (by no means all of the population). These traces were spread more or less evenly across Eastern Europe but thinned out (but by no means disappeared) in Russia. One of the guests, Dmitriy Korchinskiy, a representative of the far right party UNA-UNSO,[37] jubilantly

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[36] The talk-show is available at *Ukrayina's* web archive:

http://kanalukraina.tv/ru/programs/p/396#episode/ (20.11.2015)

[37] An abbreviation standing for "Ukrayins'ka Natsyonal'na Asambleya — Ukrayins'ka Narodna Samooborona" (Ukrainian National Assembly — Ukrainian People's Self-Defense)

concluded that now, finally there was scientific proof that Ukrainians were "a people of great ancestry" and that Russians were of different origin.

The broadcast's content and conclusions may not have been assumed to be factual by the better part of the audience. For instance, the staff of Izmail's local museum watched the film together and according to one of the employees had "a good laugh on it". Certainly it was also understood that the guests invited for the subsequent talk-show were there not for their expertise but for their polemics. However, the spirit, in which genetics and ethnicity are discussed, clearly reinforces the idea that ethnicity is a category of natural science that can be determined using genetic analysis.

Along with this idea comes the belief that each ethnic group has a fund of genetic material that, like cultural traditions, is unique to this group and that comprises a value in and of itself. One example for this paradigm stems from a heated discussion about same sex marriage, in which a young history teacher in one of Izmail's vocational schools asked how one could stop the decline of the "gene pool of the nation" (*genafond natsii*) if same sex marriage came to be legalized. A similar idea was expressed in a column in Izmail's weekly *Uezdniy Telegraf*: The columnist, Andrei Potylko, made his point against what he thought was exaggerated spending on social benefits. He argued that the social spending program to increase the birth rate did nothing to the quality of new Ukrainians: "Is it not a tragedy that in order to get these payments, the most miserable people started to give birth to more children, drunkards and socially degenerated families who hardly can improve the *gene pool [genafond] of the Ukrainian nation*…" (emphasis added).[38]

The ease with which lay people, politicians, and journalists talk about genetics in present day Ukraine points to an observation made by Brodwin (2002:326) that references to genetics can be used freely to prove or disprove old wisdoms about one's own ethnic identity and the identities of others. The very complexity of genetics is an invitation for ethnic entrepreneurs to pick the proof they need to support their own narrative and to undermine the narratives of others.

Genetics is a young scientific field. Before it took its place among the established disciplines, ethnic boundaries were marked with more basic biological rhetoric. Anthropometric studies of large groups with the intention to distinguish ethnic groups and races on the bases of scientific data were common already in tsarist times. The study of Dmitriy Anuchin (1889) attempted to find physiognomic differences between Great Russians, Belarusians, and Little Russians (Ukrainians) by measuring their skulls. In 1908 Fedir Vovk presented an anthropometric study about the features of different ethnic groups in western Ukraine which

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[38] *Uezdniy Telegraf* April 10, 2013

concentrated on the pigmentation of skin and hair (for a discussion of the two studies see Makarchuk, 2008:334-335).

In the 1930s, under Romanian rule, scientists in a fiercely nationalistic academia believed they could determine a person's ethnicity by analyzing their blood. In 1935, a study that analyzed the blood of the Hungarian speaking Szekler minority argued that only the blood could reveal true ethnic origin since it was the one "source untouched by the vicissitudes of time" (cited in Turda, 2007:428).

Still in Soviet times, there was a plethora of aspiring sciences that sought to explain the link between heredity and the characteristics of a person. The last generation of Soviet anthropologists, still very much read today, operated with the ideas of race as well as ethnic characters. They looked at the concept of ethnos as a "phenomenon on the fringes of the social and the biological sphere" (Gumilev, 2002:38). Nikolai Gumilev, who is still a very influential theoretician, believed in geo-bio-chemical energy that drives the ethnos through its life-stages (cited in Shnirel'man, 2006:8).

Genetics would have been both a relief and a disappointment to all these pseudo-scientific predecessors. It demonstrated that DNA was indeed the stuff on which human characteristics were encoded. It also made it possible to trace back common origins of large groups of people. However, the disappointment would have been in the fact that the boundaries of these ancestry groups hardly correspond to ethnic boundaries (Brodwin, 2002:328), let alone to modern state borders.

	function	manifestation	mechanism of enclosing ethnic essence	mode of acquisition	mode of reproduction	mode of maintenance
language	communication, Identification	speech, especially when uncontrolled	The matter of thought is language; language is the basis of behavior.	from linguistic environment during childhood	teaching, insisting on one language	linguistic purism
religion	spiritual, social	observance	Religion informs values, values inform behavior.	conversion, initiation	mission	church politics
common historical experience	Intergenerational connection	practices of commemoration	Values derived from a common experience inform behavior	learned from specialists, media, and lay	commemorative culture	regulating commemorative culture
folklore	Recreation, Identification	performance	Values engraved in song, dance, and tale inform behavior.	learned from cultural insiders	popularization	ethnic labeling of folkloric performances
genes	biological	phenotype	Genes shape character.	inherited from parents	sexual	endogamy within the ethnic group

Summing up the 5 markers of ethnic boundaries as they appear in the narratives of informants in southern Bessarabia (see table), one can conclude that despite the different

functions language, religion, commemorative culture, folklore, and biology fulfill, each of these markers eventually was complemented with elaborate folk theories, how they can be detected, how they act out, how they can be acquired and reproduced, and finally how ethnic boundaries can be maintained with a separate technique for each ethnic marker.

8.6. Generalizing the inside, omitting the outside

The one technique of ethnic boundary maintenance that reappears in all the above mentioned narratives is to claim a certain characteristic as very typical for inside an ethnic group, while omitting that it is similarly typical outside an ethnic boundary. Fredrik Barth found this mechanism typical of ethnic boundaries:

> "The boundary schema (…) constructs an assumption of shared homogeneity within the group and cultural difference between groups, with great potential consequences for the social life of larger communities and regions" (Barth, 2000a:30)

This may be done with a characteristic seen as a positive feature of one particular ethnic group, such as passion, industriousness, or generosity. But perfectly banal practices can just as well serve as ethnic markers with this technique. An example could be the use of hand towels. Hand towels are used in many cultures around the world in similar ways. Without even denying this trivial observation, it is possible to elevate the use of the hand towel as a marker of ethnic identity if one wishes to do so. All one needs to do is to claim that inside an ethnic group everyone uses hand towels in a specific way (or at least traditionally did so, in an unspecified past, when people still used to behave according to principles unique to their ethnic group). At the same time one can just remain silent about identical or similar practices outside the ethnic group. This technique, applied on the hand-towel-example, was used by Oleksandra Serbens'ka, a prominent Ukrainian educator[39] in a Ukrainian language reader designed for Russian-speakers (Serbens'ka and Terlak, 1999). Most grammar exercises in this volume contain patriotic motives or are based on poetry from the era of romantic nationalism.[40] One particularly interesting exercise on the use of participles employs a text entitled *the Ukrainian hand towel*. While on the lookout for participles the Russian-speaking student reads:

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[39] Serbens'ka made a name for herself as an ardent language purist. She wrote *Antisurzhyk*, a book opposing the common practice of mixing Russian and Ukrainian into Surzhyk. This book was published by the Ukrainian Ministry of Education in 1994. Here, Serbens'ka described Russian loanwords in the Ukrainian language as a virus that worked after a Soviet plan to commit "linguizide" on the Ukrainian language (cited in Flier 1998:114).

[40] The technique of sneaking ideological content into grammatical exercises was not new to independent Ukraine. In the early 1950s many of the Russian grammar exercises, used to teach Bessarabian elementary school pupils, contained unveiled Cold War Soviet propaganda slogans. Fr445, D184 Godovoy otchet suvorovskogo rayonnogo otdela narodnogo obrazovaniya za 1950-1951 godov, p. 35

> "A sign of cleanliness and industriousness of every housewife is a tidy house and a clean hand
> towel. It is a custom all over Ukraine to cover bread on the table with a hand towel." (ibid.:152)

None of the practices in this excerpt are particularly Ukrainian. In fact, everywhere where people use hand towels, their cleanliness can be interpreted as an index for a tidy house. Also the familiar fact that a loaf of bread remains fresh longer under a piece of cloth makes hand towels likely to cover bread wherever the two items occur together. But in this use as an ethnic marker the hand towel, its cleanliness, and use to keep bread fresh, become charged with a meaning beyond the material function of the item. This meaning, the author then claims, exists "all over Ukraine." Whether it also exists beyond Ukraine we do not know from the cited text, but the neglect of everything outside the realm of Ukraine, creates the impression that caring about the tidiness of hand towels or using them to cover bread, stops at the Ukrainian border.

If a laudable characteristic, like cleanliness, is chosen for this technique, it has the additional effect of marking the ethnic boundary with an advantage the ethnic in-group allegedly has over the ethnic out-group. If a more doubtful quality, like impulsiveness, is chosen it can be reinterpreted by the other group as a positive quality, say passion. Similarly, tenacity can be reinterpreted as stubbornness, industriousness as pushiness etc. Often the auto-stereotype of the group informs the stereotype that outsiders ascribe to the group, with the only difference that from the inside the stereotypical qualities of the group are painted in a more positive light. This mechanism lends a lot to the tenacity of stereotypes; they are flexible enough to fit almost any need (Jaworski, 1978:72).

Since the early ethnographic descriptions of Berg and Derzhavin (see section 2.6), Bessarabian Bulgarians are renowned for, and pride themselves on their industriousness. Abstract qualities like industriousness or hot-bloodedness (a quality often ascribed to the Gagauz, who in some cases proudly accept the ascription) are hard to substantiate or measure and therefore do not usually have to be proven. It is sufficient to prove that everyone *knows* about these characteristics among different ethnic groups. Qualities with a double nature, that can be used in stereotype and auto-stereotype equally, are especially suitable for the technique of internal generalization and external omission in order to mark an ethnic boundary. One more example comes from the leader of the Association of the Bulgarians of Ukraine, MP Anton Kisse. He uses this technique in his widely disseminated book *The Renaissance of the Bulgarians in Ukraine*. In the chapter *the Father's House and the Homeland* he refers to the industriousness of the Bulgarians:

> As long as I can think, the [father's] house was constantly upgraded and renovated. Later, I
> learned from reading one of the explorers that house construction is a distinguishing feature of
> the Bulgarians. Ask any Bulgarian how many rooms there are in his house. As a rule, he will
> answer with a delay, trying to think of all the rooms he ought to know about. But then he names

> the number... it is often more than 10. And all that because renovations and extensions are going on almost constantly (Kisse, 2006:31).

It is true that houses in Bessarabian villages are big. There are often more rooms than people can afford to heat. But it is certainly false that the many rooms are a distinguishing feature of the Bulgarians and therefore mark an ethnic boundary. By omitting that most village houses in Bessarabia -built from mud bricks and rush mats- require constant mending, no matter the ethnicity of their tenants, the author reinforces a stereotype and helps to maintain an ethnic boundary between Bulgarians and the unnamed other. No one will likely systematically conduct the experiment suggested in the excerpt, to ask a large sample of Bulgarians the number of rooms in their houses. But if someone would, the resulting statistic would certainly prove that the size of houses or the hours spent renovating, hardly correspond to ethnic boundaries. But stereotypes are not meant to be examined. Not because the result would be considered uninteresting, but because what everybody knows, needs no proof.

8.7. Conclusion

Fieldwork data from southern Bessarabia suggests five realms in which people assume the essence of ethnic identity: language, religion, common historical experience, folklore, and genes. What they all have in common is that they allow the construction of narratives in which a specific trait is generalized for the inside of a group and omitted for the outside. The selective ascription of characteristics is the main mechanism of inclusion and exclusion in ethnic groups.

Historically, all five realms could be effectively used for the construction and maintenance of ethnic boundaries only after they were institutionalized. Without standardized education there could have been no linguistic purism. Without the establishment of national patriarchates there could be no church politics. Without an academy of sciences, that sets the agenda for historical education, there could be no selective teaching of history. Without the organizations that create "processed folklore" there could be no ethnic labeling of song and dance. Without large number DNA samples and mass media there could be no public discourse about the purported genetic uniformity of ethnic groups.

During the Romanian and Soviet periods the relevant institutions were under tight state control. The Soviet Union was in the end more intrusive in southern Bessarabian society. This is the main reason why the Soviet state proved more effective in marking ethnic boundaries by ascribing standardized languages, historical experiences, and folkloric repertoires to ethnic groups. Each of the latter was associated with a set of unique traits, passed down through the generations by a then yet to be determined substance, for which later DNA was happily and mistakenly embraced. Now, in independent Ukraine, mass media is relatively free, and people

can freely choose their religious affiliation. But the state still claims sovereignty over language policy and the public depiction of history.

Although steadily growing institutions eventually helped to reinforce ethnic categories, we should not necessarily conclude that this was their original intention. As often in evolutionary processes, what evolves does not only change its form, but also its function. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that the techniques and narratives, which we today know have helped to maintain ethnic boundaries, have acquired this function especially at times when it was useful to sharpen ethnic boundaries in order to create political legitimacy.

9. Conclusions

This work has both profited and suffered from an abundance of reporting and new publications coming from the rapid socio-political change in Ukraine since November 2013. The recent bout of interest in Ukraine and the flood of studies about it made it hard to come to any final conclusions. Inevitably, data that may prove or complicate my point had to be left out and ongoing impetuous developments in Ukraine will have to be neglected. With the hope that these shortcomings remain the gravest in this work, I return to the research questions from which this study has departed in order to summarize the most important answers and to identify the consistencies and fluctuations in the history of ethnic boundaries in southern Bessarabia.

9.1. The importance of ethnicity: continuities and ruptures

The first and most general research question was meant to clarify at what times ethnic boundaries played a crucial role in access to resources and political power: Was the impact of ethnicity a continuous one, or were there decisive ruptures?

Structuring a historical work, by the periods of alternating state rule, as I have done here, tempts one to draw the conclusion that accelerated social change occurred simultaneously with the changes in state hegemony. Yet, after looking at how ethnicity was used in statecraft of the successive governments ruling over Bessarabia, one has to assert that oscillation in ethnicity's importance were by no means congruent with changes in statehood. Administrators in late imperial Russia used ethnicity as a crude tool of administration, very much unlike bureaucrats of the same state five decades earlier, but very similarly to bureaucrats of a new, Romanian state after the Empire's collapse. Romanians refined the use of ethnicity in their bureaucracy, and when, in 1938, the Romanian constitutional monarchy was replaced by a royal dictatorship, ethnicity gradually was turned into an officially ascribed category that determined a person's rights and duties. This practice was not abandoned when an ideologically opposed state, the USSR, came to rule the area after World War II. Contrary to intuition, the practices attached to ethnicity and ethnic boundaries remained strikingly similar in both these states. The practice to register ethnicity in everyone's personal documents in Bessarabia was initiated by

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Romania but sustained and refined under Soviet rule. The practice became increasingly unnecessary as cultural differences were gradually leveled in Soviet society, but it survived until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Although the social consequences of belonging to one or the other ethnic group became less articulated in the four and a half decades of Soviet rule, it continuously served to uphold Soviet administrative routines organized along ascribed social categories, including ethnicity. The collapse of the Soviet system was accelerated by wide-spread clientelism and corruption in Soviet political and economic institutions. While the state broke to pieces, politicians started to patronize ethnic groups, making political capital out of ethnic differences. This form of clientelistic mobilization has its roots in the Soviet state but has survived its collapse by a quarter of a century now.

It was not changes in statehood that led to changes in the use of ethnicity as a tool of statecraft. Rather states improved and adjusted their use of ethnicity to changes in the economic and social structures they administered. These changing circumstances demanded different forms of legitimizing political power. In an agrarian empire, such as Russia in the 19th century, ensuring productivity and taxability of peasants was more important than knowing what language they spoke or with which group they privately identified. It was assumed that they would side with the Tsar rather than with a neighboring ruler because they prayed to the same god. Another more materialistic train of thought was that the tsarist government had invited these people as tax contributing peasants and therefore was interested in their prosperity. Only in the last decades of the Russian Empire and especially after the revolution of 1905, the imperial government grew suspicious of people who identified as anything else than Russian. Although initially vague and full of inconsistencies, state institutions gradually began to develop a concept of ethnicity that could first be used as an analytical category, later as an administrative category. Increasingly, ethnicity came to be seen as a source of loyalty or disloyalty vis-à-vis the state.

Romanian authorities followed suit after World War I. As leaders of a nation state, they drew the legitimation for their power from the idea of unifying all Romanians and all Romanian lands in one state. They needed to convince part of the non-Romanians to "rediscover" their Romanian ethnic core and exclude other parts, mainly the Jews, from political power and eventually from basic civil rights. In the first years of Romanian rule in Bessarabia, attempts to convince ethnic minorities prevailed. The Entente governments had, during the Paris peace conferences, grudgingly allowed Romania to double her territory after 1918. In the first years the leaders of the newly stitched together country were therefore still eager to convince the Entente powers that they could live up to the terms of the enlargement, that included equal rights for all inhabitants irrespective of their ethnicity or religion. The closer the military dictatorship of Ion Antonescu came, the more the country's policies followed those in Hitler's

Germany. In the tumult of the war years, ethnicity came to be seen as a direct indicator of trustworthiness and loyalty vis-à-vis the state. Both Romania and the Soviet Union, which ruled over Bessarabia for one year in 1940-41, mistrusted members of some ethnic groups. In Romania this was because creating an ethnically homogenous population and, more importantly, an ethnically homogenous elite was an explicit goal. In the Soviet Union, in contrast, the political elite was not ethnically homogenous. But some ethnic groups were in practice excluded from joining the Soviet Union's upper echelons, because they had no titular administrative body inside the Union. This was true for the Bulgarians and the Gagauz. In southern Bessarabia these were the ethnic groups most vulnerable to the suspicion of functioning as a fifth column of Bulgaria.

After the war, the need to control people, to integrate them in a new socialist mode of agricultural production, and to educate them made it advantageous to ascribe an ethnic attribute to every individual. This was accompanied and fostered by the advent of ethnicity as a scientific category based on large-scale research projects and theorized as an objectively ascertainable characteristic of each individual. Ascribing exclusive ethnic categories to everyone prepared the ground for the next stage of using ethnicity; late Soviet and post-soviet clientelism. The idea that every person had to have an ethnicity and could have only one, helped to shape ethnic groups as clearly bounded entities. Such groups could easily be represented, efficiently be served and held accountable for their political partisanship.

9.2.   When ethnic boundaries become obstacles

Closely linked to the question whether the importance of ethnicity and ethnic boundaries grew continuously or in a staggered manner was the second research question: At what times, and in what ways, did ethnic belonging foster or impede the life trajectories of people? And, how was this fostering or impediment explained and justified to them and by them?

Historically, this question became relevant when ethnicity became connected to trust and mistrust between governments and the population. These were the periods when ethnic boundaries were made into obstacles for some and hindered whole groups of people in their social mobility, while privileging others. Even though it is hard to establish when exactly ethnic boundaries first became an obstacle in southern Bessarabia, we can safely say that this happened after 1812, the year Russia took control of the region. One could of course argue that the settlers, who came to establish the ethnic mosaic of the region, left their homes because an ethnic boundary impeded their development there. This however would dilute the term "ethnic boundary" as I have used it in this study. I have tried to clearly distinguish ethnic groups from confessional groups, linguistic communities, people inhabiting a common territory, social class,

and geographical origin. All these groups exceed what has come to be conceived as ethnic boundaries. In this region, people who adhere to the same religion, inhabit the same region, belong to one social class, and have similar geographical origins, might still identify with different ethnic groups. They might in fact, as some researchers claim for the Bulgarian and the Gagauz, one day have been seen as a single ethnic group, yet in the eyes of modern states they were seen as two ethnically different groups. In the still influential Soviet tradition, language is the most significant marker of ethnicity. But now that many people in Bessarabia have lost the ability to speak their ancestral languages, they have not necessarily lost their ethnic identity. Moreover, some groups that speak traditionally the same language, like the Old-Believers and the Russians or the Moldovans and the Romanians, are considered different ethnic groups by most. Therefore using the term "ethnic boundary" makes sense only starting with the period when the concept of ethnicity could be used to demarcate them. I have argued that in southern Bessarabia this happened in the last decades of the 19th century with the arrival of field ethnographers who interpreted cultural differences as a direct consequence of ethnicity. Different ethnic groups, in their portrayal, did not only have different names and usually spoke different languages, they had essentially different ways of doing things, different cultures, the observable indicators of different inner dispositions. Essentialized in such a way, ethnicity entered into the use of bureaucracy of the Russian Empire, and it was then that ethnic boundaries could become an obstacle, even if they were not congruent with linguistic, religious, or class boundaries.

The first period when this became evident was the aftermath of the Revolution of 1905. The state Duma, founded as a concession to revolutionary demands, entailed the legalization of ethno-political parties. When the Duma fell out with Tsar Nikolai II, he blamed it on the excessive number of non-Russians represented in it, an early expression of equating ethnicity with loyalty towards the state. The subsequently introduced ethnic quota was certainly a case of ethnic boundaries as an obstacle. It did not affect Bessarabian peasants but it foreshadowed ethnic exclusionism as it became common in the region throughout the first half of the 20th century.

The tsarist state, until its very demise, never managed to coin a unified definition of ethnicity, let alone a consistent practice for its use in administrating ethnic minorities. The same task was failed by the Romanian state that annexed Bessarabia in 1918. Although this administration accelerated the use of ethnicity as a bureaucratic category and although towards the end of Romanian rule, ethnicity could be very fateful, its definition kept changing, and a coherent legal basis was never established. The issue of trust and mistrust, however, faded into the background for a number of years. Although ethnic boundaries kept non-Romanians from many jobs in the administration and in commerce, the new rulers initially had the aim to

convince some of their ethnically non-Romanian subjects of their underlying Romania ethnicity. Exempted from this integrative effort were the Jews. All Romanian interwar governments coupled their respective brand of nationalism with fierce Anti-Semitism. No other group was so severely affected by the Romanian-German occupation of Bessarabia. While the Jewish communities were all but wiped out, many Bulgarians, Gagauz, Ukrainians, and Russians feared a similar fate. Their fear was not unfounded: When World War II loomed over the not-yet-consolidated Romanian state, mistrust against ethnic minorities became momentous again. Romanian ethnicity became a precondition not just to hold state offices, but for basic civil rights. Plans to deport non Romanians out of Bessarabia were thwarted only by the return of the Red Army in summer 1944. The German colonies of southern Bessarabia also ceased to exist in 1940 when the Germans were "evacuated", a measure Germany had agreed on in an addenda to the Molotov-Ribbentrop treaty. This policy fitted the *zeitgeist* of the 1940s both in Germany and the USSR: ethnically homogenous nations were preferable to mixed ones: Their inhabitants were hoped to reliably be on the side of the country in which their own ethnic group dominated.

Interestingly, the ideologically so opposed Soviet Union also mistrusted its citizens and its mistrust was ultimately founded on the same train of thought. It was during the last year of the war and in the immediate post-war years when ethnic boundaries kept Gagauz and Bulgarian men in coal mines rather than in Red Army trenches, to where their Moldovan, Ukrainian, and Russian neighbors were sent. From the late 1950s onwards ethnic boundaries were still cultivated in Soviet public discourse, in folklore and in the social sciences, but they ceased to be a substantial hindrance for social mobility.

Only when the cherished stability of the Soviet years gave way to post-Perestroika chaos, ethnicity became a potential obstacle again. Now elites were not necessarily replaced, but they again started to carefully stress their ethnic identity and target political adversaries for their unfitting ethnic identity and foreign linguistic habits. This was a defining theme of politics in independent Ukraine. It affected the upper echelons of Ukrainian politics more than local politics in southern Bessarabia, although there too, patrons sometimes employed markedly ethnic strategies when they catered to an ethnically homogenous group of clients. As Ukraine slithered into war in 2014, many people, and public figures especially, found themselves forced to take sides. This again led to a tightening of ethnic boundaries. Anyone who stressed his or her Russianness now had a hard time to appear as an integer public figure.

One can therefore conclude that the degree to which ethnic boundaries became obstacles to people depended not so much on the ideology of the state as on the stability of its reign. Whenever it was felt in state capitals, that the government lost its grip over peripheral regions, local and regional elites desperately clung to ethnic boundaries which helped them separating the allegedly trustworthy from the potentially dangerous. The peaks of this

phenomenon can be seen between the Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, before and during World War II, when the Soviet Union consolidated its reign over newly acquired regions in the second half of the 1940s, when economic crisis eroded state power such as in the late 1980s and again since the devastating financial crisis of 2008.

The widespread idea, that ethnicity and loyalty determine one another, addresses the second part of the question; how ethnic discrimination was justified and explained. Interestingly, the reasoning that loyalty and ethnicity were linked became internalized by large parts of the population. This is especially evident in explanations of why men of some ethnicities were not permitted to fight in World War II. To many people who were affected by this policy, it appeared as a sensible precaution to keep those who had ethnic ties to a country allied with the enemy, away from arms. The reasoning may not have been as clear at the time, when Bulgarian and Gagauz men got their first taste of Soviet authoritarianism and were transported out of their villages into mines and factories. But in time they also became subjects to Soviet education. This included to be exposed to a specific concept of ethnicity still influential today. As I have attempted to show in section 6.4 this concept became emic to most Soviet and post-Soviet scholars and deeply rooted with the wider public. It is a clearly essentialized concept in which ethnic origin determines character and ultimately to behavior.

This finding brings us back to the first hypothesis: Ethnic boundaries reach their greatest potential to foster or impede individual life trajectories simultaneously with legitimation crises of the state. That is, whenever the ruling political elite was unable or unwilling to provide security and prosperity, mistrust between the state elite and the population at the periphery soared and with it the momentousness of ethnic boundaries. In the light of the evidence from some of the periods discussed here, this hypothesis seems to hold true. Ethnic boundaries became especially troublesome when the legitimacy of governments was severely challenged. Usually not all ethnic groups were hindered by their group boundaries to the same extent. In late imperial Russia, ethnic Russians seemed more trustworthy than all ethnic minorities. But more importantly for the case of Bessarabia, those ethnic minorities which had been privileged because of their status as colonizers, seemed more trustworthy than Ukrainians and Moldovans. The latter two groups both formed ethnic majorities in adjacent regions, Ukraine and Moldova. Both were candidates to become fully-fledged nations at the beginning of the 20th century. This could have resulted in claims over the territory of southern Bessarabia. During the interwar reign of Romania, speakers of Romanian were privileged compared to speakers of ethnic minority languages. But local Romanian speakers were considered less reliable than Romanians from the Old Kingdom. During the Soviet Union, Russians had a primus inter pares status, but in Bessarabia being a Ukrainian or a Moldovan, two groups with their own republic, was nearly just as good. After the time of the labor front,

Bulgarians and Gagauz were no longer discriminated against and most of them became loyal Soviet citizens. Some of them even retrospectively justified the hardship of the labor front with the logic of trust and mistrust. During the nationalist frenzy of the late Perestroika years, many discovered or rediscovered their Ukrainianess and Moldovaness because these ethnic groups promised to become the foundations of new, independent, and legitimate states. The Russians, the dominant group of this crumbling state, found themselves struggling for their status and some of them would escape this struggle by crossing an ethnic boundary and becoming Ukrainian or Moldovan.

9.3.   Ethnic boundaries, whom do they serve?

The political use of ethnic boundaries for state elites, whose legitimacy is in question, brings us to the third research question: At what times and in what ways did actors who created and maintained ethnic boundaries gain economically or politically from this activity?

The formulation of the question contains two presuppositions; that ethnic boundaries were in fact created and maintained (instead of evolving and conserving naturally), and that maintenance of ethnic boundaries did actually serve someone's ends. After having analyzed the history of ethnic boundaries in southern Bessarabia, it became clear that ethnic boundaries evolved through political processes and changed their function with changing social environments. It has been convincingly shown in the literature that ethnic boundaries are an outcome of activities by people who have an interest in them (Barth, 2000b:12, Brubaker, 2004:10). Studying ethnic boundaries in southern Bessarabia confirmed this assumption. Ethnic boundaries were maintained for a reason and there were people who profited from it. Therefore, to ask the question how and why these actors profited seemed sensible.

However, the nature of both the profit and the profiteers varied considerably over time. At large, ethnicity evolved from being an auxiliary category to describe and study people, to a category used to predict people's loyalty. Later the use of ethnicity as an administrative category was refined and largely stripped of its function to allocate trust and mistrust. It became a category to allocate rights and duties instead. Eventually, ethnicity became a category to claim political power. Therefore the first to profit from allegedly clear ethnic boundaries were those who attempted giving comprehensive descriptions of the region, above all census takers. Then gradually, weary administrators, in charge of distributing state resources, used ethnic boundaries to facilitate their task, and finally political entrepreneurs delineated their clientele along ethnic boundaries. Put more subtly, the emergence of ethnic boundaries was assisted by the need to make sense of cultural (above all linguistic) differences. Until the last decades of the 19th century, most administrative tasks that involved actually talking to the rural population had

been delegated to village councils, and religious authorities. These institutions counted the households and later the individuals in their parishes. Therefore, if representatives of the state needed data about their subjects, they turned to church registries. The data they used was structured by religious differences. Only as the state penetrated deeper into rural settlements, other cultural differences became significant. The first to structure people along ethnic boundaries were ethnographers who had a more direct record of linguistic differences, and variances in day-to-day culture. For them, ethnic boundaries were helpful to make sense of cultural diversity. One handy explanation was to treat ethnicity as a cause of cultural diversity. This explanation also allowed generalizing cultural features within ethnic boundaries.

From there it was a small step to also generalize behavior vis-à-vis the state for entire ethnic groups. This facilitated the work of administrators in the last years of imperial Russia, in interwar Romania, and in the Soviet Union, during and directly after World War II. The idea of ethnic quotas for the state Duma, the discrimination of ethnic minorities in Romania and the selective spying on their activities by the Romanian police, as well as the Soviet decision not to recruit Gagauz and Bulgarian men to the front, all were shortcuts for administrators. It facilitated their work, but it complicated or even threatened the lives of people seen as potential traitors. This suspicion is part of the price paid for "legibility", James Scott's (1998) term to describe the state's fine-tuning of categories as its institutions grow more ambitious and more pervasive. But the state's pursuit of "legibility" entails more dangers: It also leads elites to take the categories they created for reality. They thereby enter a cycle of self-fulfilling prophecies to which they respond with ill-informed planning solutions (ibid.:196). The perception of "legibility" leads to overtly high expectations and ambitions that were at the root of the Soviet Union's collapse.

Although, after Stalin's death, the fateful implications of ethnicity gradually disappeared, the state insisted on cultivating ethnic boundaries in administration, in social science, and in folklore. One of the reasons was that the Soviet Union had painstakingly created its own logic of territorial subdivision along ethnic lines. Some of these ethnic lines, such as the one between Moldovans and Romanians had been created specially to fit the Soviet administrative map. To challenge carefully crafted ethnic boundaries would have put at stake not only the territorial subdivision of the country but also the theories of Soviet leaders and scholars. In the time of *Zastoy*, many basic assumptions of Soviet society, including conventions about ethnicity, were no longer open for debate or questioning, but repeated to the point when they lost any contestable meaning.

The Perestroika reforms in the second half of the 1980s, initially meant to democratize Soviet society, eventually led to a triumph of clientelism. The now firmly established category of ethnicity and the thoroughly demarcated ethnic boundaries served both patrons and clients.

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Whereas in many regions of the former Soviet Union, political entrepreneurs profited from exclusive nationalism, in southern Bessarabia, where the population is ethnically very diverse, the benefits of ethnic boundaries for clientelism were more subtle. For most political patrons in southern Bessarabia, catering to just one ethnic group would alienate members of all remaining groups and therefore not recruited enough political followers. More successful patrons redistribute resources to different ethnic groups, which are often represented through their respective associations. Maintaining group boundaries helps patrons to allocate their limited resources more efficiently, and to ensure these groups' political support. The clients for their part have an interest in joining a clearly bounded receiver-group to enhance their chance of actually profiting from the patron's handouts. Therefore having no clear ethnic (but also religious, linguistic, professional, etc.) affiliation leaves a person politically unrepresented and empty-handed in the clientelistic exchange. We can therefore conclude that in post-Soviet Bessarabian society, patrons as well as their clients can profit from sharpening ethnic boundaries.

9.4. Narratives and techniques

If the maintenance of ethnic boundaries is so profitable, then how can it be effectively accomplished? To focus a bit closer on the process of crafting ethnic boundaries, we have to return to another initial research question: What techniques and narratives are used-now and in the past-to make people perceive ethnic groups as clear-cut entities and as active subjects of history?

Again, the question includes the presupposition that ethnic boundaries *are in fact* produced and maintained by people and do not evolve naturally or automatically. Only if this presupposition is accepted, can we actually look at *how* people produce ethnic boundaries. While most of the authors cited in the more theoretical stretches of this thesis would certainly agree to this constructivist presupposition, most of my informants probably would not. For many who use ethnic boundaries themselves, the narratives and techniques I have described are not unknown. Yet they think of them as practices that *reveal* something that is already there, rather than *producing* something new. I have extensively discussed therefore the differences between the emic view on ethnicity as an essential feature of every human being and the dominant etic view of ethnicity as a relatively recent phenomenon, the outcome of social construction, closely tied to industrialization, the centralization of bureaucracies and the advent of mass eductaion. This discussion has led to the conclusion that the emic view on ethnic boundaries is rooted deeply in the Soviet paradigm on the nature of ethnicity. Both history and ethnography have put ethnic groups, not society, not cultures, and least of all individuals at the

focus of their inquiries. Groups of the "ethnos"-type were the object matter of ethnographic research (Bromley, 1980:152). Would our scholarly discipline become obsolete if its objects turned out to be just social constructions (as I was challenged once in a heated discussion with a local colleague)? I have attempted to show, that it is just as interesting to look at *how* exactly people produced what they believe had evolved all by itself.

The techniques and narratives I have listed in chapter 8 are an integral part of this production process. They too suffer from a paradox: I believe to have observed them because they *were in fact there*, whereas others, presumably the people who apply them, would claim they are but my subjective *interpretation*. In their view the creators of ethnic boundaries do what they have to do; they delimit and preserve something natural and good. This view also rejects the suspicion that the creators of ethnic boundaries follow their own personal interests. In helping to preserve what had been there anyway, they altruistically serve the common good. But what is it that makes people create and maintain ethnic boundaries? Some of the narratives actually address this question and provide an answer, as to what forces create ethnic boundaries (once people and their interests are excluded). The narratives I have listed, all in their own way, hold that people have an inner disposition that forces them to act in an ethnically specific manner. Language, religion, common historical experience, and DNA are mentioned as the forces that create these inner dispositions. Taste in folkloric performances was one of the indicators mentioned, that can reveal which inner ethnic disposition is prevalent in a particular person. All these narratives tell us that ethnicity is *within* a person and can therefore not be disposed of or changed.

What all these cognate narratives have in common is that they all stress homogeneity within the ethnic boundary and difference across ethnic boundaries. If a certain cultural trait expands beyond the ethnic boundary, it must be ignored or denied. Also, if cultural differences are observable within the ethnic boundaries, they need to be overlooked or played down. In such a way cultural unity within the ethnic group becomes exaggerated and essentialized, and cultural difference between the in-group and the out-group appears as the natural consequence of ethnic difference. This technique comes in different guises and it has been applied ever since ethnicity was used as a determinant of loyalty towards the state. The technique of unifying the inside of an ethnic group while denying commonalities with the outside was especially likely to be used when relations between the state and its subjects on the periphery became disturbed by mutual mistrust.

By identifying and listing the narratives and techniques that maintain ethnic boundaries I have addressed hypothesis (2): There is a mechanism that can be recognized as the lowest common denominator: Ethnic boundaries are kept clear-cut by stigmatizing ambivalent identities as anomalous and by denying their partial belonging to one's own identity group. In

Ukraine this mechanism is manifested most clearly in the stigmatization of impure language. The titular language in Ukraine is so akin to Russian that small differences matter a lot and small amounts of admixture are often portrayed as a threat to the Ukrainian and less acutely to the Russian language. Therefore the country has a long history of linguistic purism highlighting the superior value of standard languages over mixed linguistic varieties. With religious behavior as a second powerful marker of social group ties (but not necessarily ethnic identity) it is harder to stigmatize those who do not fully belong but at the same time do not fully exclude themselves. Church authorities might mark those patrons who have dedicated attention and resources to their church so as to make them recognizable for religious voters. They also may condemn those who behave ungodly in their view. But unlike in linguistic purity, the line between practices approved and disapproved by religious institutions is neither sharp nor congruent with ethnic boundaries.

The commemoration of historic events and figures is charged with similar difficulties: patrons recommend themselves to one particular group (again, not necessarily an ethnic group) by sponsoring and organizing rituals that commemorate particular events. But commemorative practices can unite elements that at the time commemorated would have mutually excluded each other. One example could be the role clerical figures take in remembering the watersheds of Soviet history. In memorial ceremonies for World War II and the war in Afghanistan it is not uncommon nowadays that priests play a part. Another example of such a blend would be Ukrainian symbolism in the celebration of Russian imperial figures. On city day celebrations in Izmail for example, municipal authorities, clerics, and military officers lay down wraths and flowers on the monuments of General Suvorov, the conqueror of Izmail fortress and of General Lieutenant Tuchkov, the city's first governor. Such ceremonies are usually flanked with Ukrainian flags and ribbons and with the singing of the Ukrainian anthem. Practices that use the symbolisms of two once antagonistic entities are not necessarily recognized as "mixing" and are therefore not necessarily punished by the stigma of mixing. Only if a particular historic event was conceptualized radically different among two ethnic groups and only if for one of these ethnic groups a particular way of memorizing is an important ingredient in group identity, such a stigmatization might be applied. In Ukrainian nationalism, for example, the famine of 1932-33 is strongly conceptualized as a Russian attempt to ethnically cleanse parts of Ukraine. If a nationalist Ukrainian politician would avoid events, where this version of history is commemorated or if a Russian nationalist would take part in an event where the famine is publically remembered, this would probably incur the wrath of his voters. Only if historical events are exclusively claimed by one particular ethnic group, does this mode of stigmatization work. In many other events, especially those around World War II, members of many ethnic groups are concerned. Remembering the shared Soviet victory and the hardships that led to it is

therefore better suited to stress interethnic harmony and challenge ethnically particular versions of history.

Similarly in folklore, it is more important to praise and attend folkloric performances in order to appear as a true representative of a group, than to show preference for one particular ethnic style. Most events include folkloric performances associated with more than one ethnic group, and many of them are actually celebrations of harmonic interethnic relations. Because folkloric particularities are hardly common knowledge, stigmatization in this realm cannot readily be supported with allegedly dreadful examples of distortion, as is common in linguistic purism. Nevertheless, all folkloric performances are clearly ethnically labeled. The differences between performances attributed to different ethnic groups might be rather subtle, and it might well be that elements deemed typical for one group appear in the performances of another. In folklore it is therefore not the mixing of the "cultural stuff" that is stigmatized, but the omission of a clear ethnic label. This confirms Barth's observation (2000b:30) that in ethnic discourse, cultural differences are vastly overstated. Ethnic boundaries serve to sustain a social organization of differences, not as descriptions of the actual distribution of "cultural stuff".

The last realm where the hypothesized stigmatization could occur is genetics. Narratives of ethnic essence encoded in the genes are strongly linked to the belief that interethnic marriage was a very rare exception at least until recently. Interethnic marriage is sometimes privately loathed, but also often praised. A closer look at interethnic marriage reveals that it probably has been quite common, at least since the time ethnicity became a meaningful category in Bessarabia. Between members of different religious groups it was forbidden in tsarist times, but hardly ever actively opposed between members of linguistically different groups. The demeaning term "Surzhyk" has been reported to designate children from mixed ethnic parents (Flier, 1998:115), but in my own fieldwork I never came across this usage. Some people very consciously choose a partner from their own ethnic group, and sometimes claim they could not live with someone from another ethnic group. It remains hard to assess how, in the face of alternative choices, such principles are modified. It has become fashionable in recent years to use DNA as a substitute for other loci where ethnic essence might be located, such as the blood or the heart. Genetics is not a good guide to stigma, because phenotypes in the Bessarabian setting hardly give direct clues about ethnicity. But the belief that every ethnic group commands a unique collection of genomes implies the idea that this collection can be diluted by ethnically mixed families or, if guarded carefully, be passed down the generations.

To sum up the findings on the validity of hypothesis (2), it can be said that the mechanism of stigmatizing the in-between or the mixed most readily applies to languages, where it certainly holds true. In other realms that regularly help to sharpen ethnic boundaries the respective "cultural stuff" that is supposed to remain unmixed is less clearly defined and

therefore offers more scope. It is more difficult to stigmatize mixing of religious practices, practices of commemorative culture, folkloristic practices, or genetic pools, because the characteristics and symbols involved in these realms are not as clearly ethnically marked as language. In these realms it is more important to clearly attach ethnic labels to practices than to avoid the mixing of their content.

9.5. The trouble with fuzzy boundaries

Since ethnic boundaries are frequently fuzzy in southern Bessarabia (just as in many other regions) their conceptualization as clear-cut and objectively ascertainable phenomena frequently runs into contradiction. Dedicated to the handling of these contradictions was the last research question: When contradictions between narratives about clear-cut ethnic distinctions and the observable social life become obvious, how are they confronted by those who claim ethnic distinctions are clear-cut?

There are several possible constellations that can produce such contradictions. One instance when a contradiction occurs is when there are only unclear ethnic markers, such as in people with ambiguous ethnic identities, in villages with mixed ethnic population, in folklore performances with elements claimed typical by different ethnic groups, or in linguistic behavior that dissolves the boundaries between standard languages. Hypothesis (3) assumed that when it comes to contradictions between claims of distinctiveness of ethnic boundaries and observable social environment, then those claimants will most likely seek the refuge of evidence that can be tested only by group insiders and that are hidden to outsiders. I have named observations of people referring to feelings *within* as a way out of this contradiction. The environment wherein the contradiction occurs then is to blame for it, while hidden from sight, inside the clearly structured "true" relations remain free of contradiction. Private feelings are hard to observe and document and therefore it is hard to prove or disprove them. So claiming that what one cannot see can be felt, and that this feeling can distinguish the pure from the diluted, makes any argument obsolete. These sensations can be claimed to be perceptible only to those whom the claimant considers his own kind and inaccessible for those who challenge or dissolve ethnic boundaries. It can then be claimed that if ethnic boundaries seem fuzzy, this was only due to the blindness of the ethnic other, or to the confusion brought about by careless ignoramuses who themselves have lost the right to consider themselves members of the ethnic group in concern. It seems all handling of contradiction in ethnic boundary maintenance functions through some type of exclusion. In this way, those who are admitted the right to include and exclude other people can be limited at will. If a dispute occurs who is within and who is outside a certain ethnic boundary, a change of the list of membership criteria can shift

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the ethnic boundary, excluding the allegedly unjustified claimant. The inventory list of symbols can be shared but not owned. By selecting more or less criteria, group boundaries can be widened or narrowed (Elwert, 2002:38). This technique that can be observed quite frequently confirms hypothesis (3), at least on an individual level. In a dispute between individuals, ethnic boundaries can therefore be drawn quite arbitrarily. On a more collective level, disputes take place more publically and therefore face more constraints. There, accepted knowledge and established experts have set more narrow frameworks from which markers of ethnic identity can be chosen.

It is another common strategy to discredit the group or individual who doubts the validity of ethnic boundaries. If someone claims, for instance, the ethnic boundary between Ukrainians or Russians or between Romanians and Moldovans was artificial and modern, those who believe these ethnic boundaries are ancient and natural can blame dishonest motives behind their opponent's claims. So the underlying mechanism of ethnic boundary maintenance can be identified as exclusion, either on the ground of the doubter's inability to perceive clearly bounded ethnic group, or because the doubters are portrayed untrustworthy due to their questionable incentives.

9.6. Declining economy, stable ethnicity

Most Bessarabians, when asked to sketch the recent history of their region, draw a sinister picture of steady decline. This decline is felt in economy, because it is hard to find a reasonably paid job. A decline is felt in state institutions; because of endemic corruption in schools, courts, and hospitals. The quality of these institution's services erodes while costs rise. Culture too, is often described as declining, because locally produced culture has an ever harder standing against more powerful cultural forms, produced far away and transported via TV and internet. With the virulent destabilization of Ukraine, beginning in late 2013, even the last cautious optimists were ready to believe it could get only worse. The war in Ukraine's east between Kyiv forces and Russian-backed separatists even called into question the prided friendship of peoples in the region. That ethnicity has come to be considered a potential source of conflict is in itself a sign of decline. Most people very decidedly rejected the notion that there had been ethnic conflict in this region before. The very notion, that Bessarabians should get into a fight over their different ethnic origins appeared absurd to most of my informants.

Nevertheless, anyone could see in 2013 that Ukraine - and southern Bessarabia with it - were in a precarious economic situation. The revival of the local economy, promised time and time again by officials in Odessa and Kyiv, never materialized. Pot-holes in the road, the embodiment of decline for many, were busily filled up before parliamentary elections, but they

also quickly reappeared. There was no writing on the wall that a war was imminent, but in late 2013, when the Yanukovich government was about to sign the Vilnius association agreement with the EU, people began to realize that the politically loaded question whether to build closer ties with the EU or with Russia, was to be addressed more urgently than ever before. That this question even came up was seen as a sign of decline by those who thought that the cultural and historical ties to Russia should stand above any deliberation of economic prosperity. Others may have seen a great progress in the mere fact that they had a choice between different politicians, with different answers to these questions. That these politicians then cared so little about the rights and needs of their electorate was all the more disappointing. The disappointment was so deep that many people used "democracy" as a swearword. "Rights we have really plenty now", said one woman, "but they are merely a piece of paper". If she would raise her voice against those who stole and sold the kolkhoz's property, she thinks retaliations would start from a stone thrown in her window, but they might quickly escalate from there.

In light of this disappointment, the Soviet past, which offered little rights and freedoms, seemed not so bad after all. The build-up years of the Soviet Union with their famine and deportations came to be seen as a time of unprecedented progress, guided by an idealistic vision for the future. The dull years of Brezhnevian stagnation now appear to many as a time of social security and affluence. Add the idealized representation of Soviet history, still felt today, and it is little wonder that the Soviet Union appears as the Golden Age from which decline started. This view seems to be shared by many people, both from generations who lived to see the Soviet period as well as those who know about it only from hearsay. Given the present state of Ukraine and its Bessarabian periphery, this interpretation is certainly not altogether implausible. The Golden Age against which a rather bleak present is measured, is not so much a particular period in the past, but an amalgamate of yearnings the present fails to satisfy; political stability, economic prosperity, and widely accepted cultural values.

Ethnicity is often characterized as a source of exactly these qualities. It is seen as an entity stable over many centuries within which a collection of unique cultural values is passed down the generations. People of each ethnic group can rely on these specific values for moral guidance. The assessment of the history of interethnic relations in Bessarabia must be seen against this background. The projection of unambiguous ethnic boundaries into this past is best comprehensible with the current insecurity in mind. The supposedly pure and consistent moral guidelines engraved in the traditions of sovereign ethnic groups, are a product of the current absence of credible ethic principles. The yearning for greatness that members of all ethnic groups project into their own people's past, has a lot to do with the bitter experience of decline, a decline that started from nothing less than what was propagated to be the greatest country in the world.

The memory of this former greatness lives on in street names and monuments. It has been modified and come under political pressure but has never been abandoned. It also lives on in real memory of people and their tales. These are often told in comparative terms; the number of children that attended village school then and now, the number of workers that came to the cannery at every shift changeover before it was closed, the headcount of cattle the kolkhoz possessed before it shut down, the passenger airplane that served as a lift to town, where now there is not even a reliable bus service. The comparison of prices then and now is often employed to illustrate economic decline. People remember the cost of a kilo of good sausage or the bedroom suite bought at marriage, and they are stunned at how little this money can buy today. It is not surprising that people who could afford good sausage for special occasions and who could build and furnish a house at the time of their marriage, must sense something has gone terribly wrong if their children are hardly able to find a job that pays. One can hardly blame people who have been disappointed by history for wanting former greatness back. And greatness meant not only the stability and security it provided, but the promise to live and work for the sake of an ideal future society.

The bitterness, with which many people describe decline, brings us to its perceived causes. Again, these causes are often held to parallel the causes for ethnic conflict. Most people, if asked whether they could remember when they first thought that things were going wrong, named the disintegration of the Soviet Union. When asked whether they had observed any signs of decay before that, most informants denied that. One elderly couple in Kotlovina repeatedly mentioned Khrushchev's policy to export food supplies at the people's expense, as an anomaly of the Soviet state. However, the subsequent ousting of Khrushchev was seen as proof that the Soviet system actually worked. The deep structural problems of the Soviet Union described by economists (Kornai, 1980), the epidemic nepotism and corruption plaguing the USSR in its last years (Eisenstadt and Roniger, 1984, Willerton, 1992, Fairbanks, 1999, Stefes, 2006) or the widespread practices of stealing state property and evading state control (Friedberg, 1991, Kotkin, 1991, Raleigh, 2012) were not remembered as forbearers of an imminent crash, or they were so thoroughly relativized by the subsequent post-Soviet chaos that in retrospect they seemed hardly worth mentioning. This seems to be a striking parallel between the imagination of history and the imagination of ethnicity: The entities that people discern within history, the periods of the past, in this region most conveniently structured by different states that ruled the area, are imagined as clearly bounded, almost uniform within and entirely different from one another. Therefore, if the post-Soviet period was characterized by corruption and disorder, the Soviet period is imagined exaggeratedly integer and orderly. The origin of something as big as the collapse of the Soviet state is sought in big politics and hardly ever in something as small as the corruption, embezzlement, and mismanagement in one's own environment. The decline of

social norms, and with it the occurrence of ethnic conflict, is seen as an effect of geopolitical machination rather than one of its causes. In Bessarabia, most of my informants thought the protesters on Maidan were naïve since they attempted to change political realities that were created somewhere far away from Kyiv. Or else they blamed the people who turned out on Kyiv's streets to be paid agents of these particular foreign forces. Exactly which outside force is to blame usually depends on a person's political taste.

These new outside forces, be they suspected in Western Europe, or North America, appear to only demand and refuse to offer tangible benefits in return. Their goals remain unclear and sometimes appear deliberately obscured. The most viable strategy with which people answered the challenges of market economy are largely based on labor migration. This strategy has devastated village communities and can therefore hardly be a suitable alternative for those who keep the villages going.

Sharply contrasting with predominant local interpretations, most Western comments on the Maidan upheaval saw the problems that drove people to the streets rooted in local kleptocracy with strong ties to the Russian elite. Western accomplice in the plundering of post-Soviet Ukraine was denied, if mentioned at all. The EU's arrogance towards Ukraine manifested itself in a lopsided deal whereby the EU had a long list of demands in exchange for a short list of vague promises.

Skepticism of Western demands has deep roots in the experience of decline. The economic supremacy of the West mocked the spirit of glory and victory cultivated in Soviet culture. Still many in Bessarabia admire the riches and orderliness they identify with Western Europe. However, they have a hard time seeing a cultural role-model in liberal individualistic societies. Things that have miniscule effects on the lives of people in Bessarabia, like gay pride marches in European cities, have been grossly inflated and have become representative of an artificial dichotomy between a decadent individualistic culture in the rich West vs. a natural culture, based on traditional values in post-Soviet societies. Ethnicity is often portrayed as a part of this bygone organic culture, in which people knew their place. In retrospect it seems, there was no need to find one's ethnic identity in this natural order, just as there was no need to choose one's gender or to find a job. These identities were givens in what appears in hindsight as a pristine human community that stands as a glaring contrast to contemporary uncertainties.

This dichotomy, however frequently reenacted, is certainly open for compromise. Because of the vagueness of the EU's advances, the Ukrainian public never had a spirited debate about what the real implication of an EU membership would be (Schneider-Deters, 2008:370). Had the EU ever presented tangible prospects of socio-economic enhancement, most instances of cultural uneasiness could surely have been overcome. In countries that border Ukraine to the West, however different they may be in their historical and cultural presuppositions, similar

antagonisms have partly been resolved, prompted by the prospect for economic development. But towards Ukraine, the EU chose the exact opposite approach; it demanded first a cultural rapprochement and the taming of a kleptocratic elite (with which European enterprises never had qualms to do business). Part of the Ukrainian elite chose to go for such a deal. It would have allowed them to legalize their fortunes and make profitable investments. On the other hand, building closer ties with the West gave the elite little solid benefits to serve their electorate, besides the by now scorned promise of democracy and rule of law. This is why another part of the elite was frightened to lose their status. They stressed the cultural differences to the West and turned to Russia, where there is a similarly kleptocratic elite, alas firmly centralized under the Kremlin's guidance and without a real perspective of ever profiting from the EU's expansion. This is where the Western oriented elite could profit from portraying the conflict as one between Russians and Ukrainians and link it up with the region's past conflicts. These too became reinterpreted as conflicts between ethnic Russians and the non-Russian groups in the empire's periphery. Whenever conflict between ethnic groups becomes the focus of historiography, many events of the past offer themselves for reinterpretation through an ethnic lens. But for most people in Bessarabia there is little to profit from interethnic conflict. Therefore, it is reasonable to interpret it as imposed upon the region from outside. Just like with economic decline, Bessarabians did, as a consequence of the region's peripheral status, often not have the means to make their own rules. Instead, they needed to side with one or another outside force, with Russia or the Ottoman Empire, with the Soviet Union or Romania, and most recently with Russia or Ukraine. This tricky game of taking sides has had its local profiteers and therefore the periphery is no realm of innocence, but most of those who can hope to profit from sharpening ethnic dichotomies will do so far away from Bessarabia.

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COLLECTION F4 *Vilkovskaya possadskaya uprava* [Vilkovo settler's council]

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F50 D64 (1937 – 1939) *Spiski chinovnikov po natsional'nostyam (Izmail'skaya uezdnaja finansovaya administratsiya)* [Lists of state servants by ethnicity (Izmail Uezd financial administration)]

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F56 D37 (1835 - 1837) *Tsirkulariya ITsD o zapreshchenii brakosochitaniy raskol'nikov s pravovernimi* [Circular letter by the ITsD(?) about the prohibition of marriages between Razkolniki (i.e Old-Believers) and Orthodox][1]

F56 D112 (1821 – 1830) *Delo o prinyatii v russkoe poddanstvo i poselenii v izmail'skom gradonachalstve bolgar, grekov, moldavan, bezhavshikh v Rossiyu ot Turetskogo iga v 1821 – 1830* [File about the acceptance of Bulgarians, Greeks, Moldovans who have fled the Turkish Yoke as Russian subjects and their settlement in the city-municipality of Izmail for the years of 1821 - 1830].

F56 D344 (1839 – 1841) *Raporty gradskikch politsiy o vypolnenii tsirkulariya Bessarabskogo voennogo gubernatora o zapreshchenii khristianam postupat' v prislugu k evreyam* [Rapports of municipal police about the implementation of the circular letter of the Military Govenor of Bessarabia about the prohbition for Christians to stand in the service of Jews]

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[1] The acronym in this file's title does not correspond to its content. The circular letter was sent by the Ministry of the Interior, the acronym for which is not ITsD but MVD (*Ministertsvo Vnutrenikh Del'*).

COLLECTION F93 *Bolgradskiy sel'skiy prikaz* [Bolgrad rural councils]

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[2] The village was called *Desantnoe* after 1944.

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