Roma women activism under communist rule: The cases of the USSR (the 1920s and 1930s) and Bulgaria (1960s and 1970s)

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This article presents the historical roots of Roma women's activism, using the example of two countries in different historical periods. The first part is devoted to a discussion on empowering Roma women in the early USSR. It happened in the frames of the general discourse of Soviet national policy in this period and aimed at the complete elimination of the disadvantaged position of women in various spheres (social, economic, political, cultural, educational, etc.). The second part presents the case of socialist Bulgaria, where we have an example of a process of women's empowerment at the grassroots level. There, we outline the role of the Fatherland Front's schools for women activists of minority background. In conclusion, we discuss which of the two presented patterns of the development of Roma women's activism – from top to bottom (as in the USSR in the 1920s and 1930s) or from bottom to top (as in Bulgaria in the 1960s and the 1970s) – proved to be more efficient and gave better results in terms of the socialist women's emancipation processes and the current position of Roma women in society and their community.

Keywords: Roma, women, activism, emancipation, USSR, Bulgaria

Introduction

Until recently, after the initial public sensation caused by the arrival in Western Europe in the Middle Ages of the ancestors of today's Roma (formerly known as Gypsies), they were on the margin of academic interest. The situation has changed radically in the last two or three decades, and research on Roma has become incredibly popular nowadays. Among the most "trendy" topics are the issue of Roma women (and above all, their discrimination) and Roma women's activism. However, numerous studies on this topic give the false impression that this activism originated and developed during our time, under the influence of the ideas of neoliberalism and with the support of civil society, which is not exact. Therefore, in our article, we will discuss (without

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exhausting the topic) its historical roots and the first steps in its development, using the example of two countries (the former USSR and Bulgaria) in two different historical periods.

At the birth of the Roma civic emancipation movement in the mid-nineteenth century, under the conditions of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires (Marushiakova and Popov 2021; 2022), there were no women among the first Roma activists. The sphere of realization of the Roma woman at that time was concentrated within the extended family and community. Thus, the lack of their activism is natural. At the same time, the Roma men began to look for fulfilment in the two main dimensions of Roma existence – community and society (about this, see in more detail Marushiakova and Popov 2016c: 15). Relatively soon, however, Romani women also managed to break the limited framework of the community and become actively involved in the processes of Romani civic emancipation.

The first manifestations of Roma women's activism were at the beginning of the twentieth century in Finland, then part of the Russian Empire. In 1905, a Roma school was opened in Vyborg by the Roma woman teacher Anna Sofia Schwartz. Another Roma woman, Ida Blomerus (with Roma name Cingardy-Ora) established a Roma children's home in Sortavala in 1913. In parallel with the formation of Finland as an independent state at the end of 1917, a national Roma organization was established, the Finnish Roma Civilization Society, led by Ida Blomerus (Blomster and Roman 2022: 359–97). Perhaps there is something symbolic in the fact that the first national (i.e. within a particular civic nation-state, of which the Roma are a constituent part) public Roma organization in the world turns out to be headed by a Roma woman.

When discussing the beginnings and development of Romani women's activism, one widespread misconception that is still frequently encountered in Romani Studies must be overcome. This is the claim that the Panhellenic Cultural Association of the Greek Gypsies, founded in 1939 in Athens, was initiated, created, and led by two Roma women. Since its first publication (Liégeois 1987: 166), this information has been repeated in numerous other publications (e.g. Hancock 2002: 118; Klímová-Alexander 2005: 190–1), including in the editions of the Council of Europe (Liégeois 1994: 166; 2007: 209). Moreover, while specifying that this information was "based on uncertain and speculative, secondary sources" (Kóczé 2019), all these authors have stated that this moment marks the beginning of the Roma women's civic movement. In this case, however, there is an undoubted historical mystification because there is not a single female name in the Statute of the Panhellenic Cultural Association of the Greek Gypsies (Marushiakova and Popov 2021: 259–63). The available historical evidence clearly and unequivocally shows that the real beginning of Roma women's activism as

a component of the general processes of Roma civic emancipation began de facto in the early USSR, which we will discuss here.

The USSR

With the establishment of Soviet power as a result of the October Revolution of 1917, and the creation of the USSR – formally in 1922, and the first Constitution of the new state was adopted in 1924 – the fundamental idea was that a completely new type of state should be built, in which all social ills of previous historical epochs would be eliminated. This new state marked the beginning of a new historical era in which the ultimate goal of the communist policy was to create a whole new type of society, where all previous problems of humanity would be finally and forever solved (Slezkine 2017). The national policy of the new Soviet state was subordinated to the fulfilment of this great task. The Roma (referred to at the time as "Gypsies") were an inseparable part of the general nationalities policy during this historical period, which, according to the precise definition of Terry Martin (2001), can be collectively called the policy of affirmative action. We prefer to use this term, "affirmative action policy," because to us it is more general, more precise, and more relevant to the substance of the process than the terms "korenisatsiya" and "nativization" used in recent years.

An essential aspect of this radical historical change is the complete elimination of the disadvantaged position of women, manifested in various spheres (social, economic, political, cultural, educational, etc.). This ambitious goal finds expression in the overall policy in all its aspects and, accordingly, has had a strong impact on the Roma civic emancipation movement, which is inextricably woven into the general discourse of Soviet nationalities policy in the early USSR.

In the USSR, for the first time, Roma activists (men and women) brought to the forefront the specific problem of the Gypsy woman and the issue of the need to achieve gender equality, both within the wider society and within their community. In modern terms, this is also found in present-day discussions about the double discrimination faced by Roma women. As one Gypsy male activist in the early Soviet Union writes, the Gypsy woman is a "slave" and she must earn a living for the whole family, including her husband (Звезда 1926: 2). That is why the Work Plan of All-Russian Union of Gypsies for 1926 stated that one of the goals of the Union was the need to release women "from the yoke of the family and man's supremacy," so that they could have more time for socially useful work (GARF, f. 1235, op. 1, d. 27, l. 94). In this way, the activities towards equality of the Roma woman became one of the important aims in the work of the Union. The Roma women themselves

were included in it as leading figures. Unfortunately, the available historical evidence of Roma women who have been actively involved in the civic emancipation movement (both in general and in its "female" aspect) is scarce, incomplete, and fragmentary. Still, it is possible, at least briefly, through the biographies of the most important Roma women activists, to present the birth and development of Roma women's activism in the early USSR.

Nina Dudarova

One of the leading figures in Roma civic emancipation in the early USSR was Nina Alexandrovna Dudarova (1903–1992). In her autobiography, she presents very brief information about herself and her family:

> I was born in Leningrad [St Petersburg – authors note] in 1903. My mother was a Gypsy; she sang in a Gypsy choir. I do not remember my father. When I was five years old, my mother remarried a Russian, a very good man, who treated me like a daughter. (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Нина Дударова)

From this information, her mother's surname, who her father was, or what her real surname was is not clear. Some authors point to Zakrzhevskaya as her second surname (Цветков and Махотина 2018: 477) but it is not clear whether this is her father's surname, and Dudarova is the surname of her second father, or vice versa. It is also unknown whether she was married or not and whether one of these names is the family name of her husband.

According to Nina Dudarova's autobiography, she completed her secondary education in Leningrad in 1919, after which she began working at a school. Simultaneously she obtained pedagogical education at the Institute for Raising the Qualification of Teachers (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Нина Дударова). In 1925, she moved to Moscow. At that time, the All-Russian Union of Gypsies had already been established and, with the assistance of the Narkompros (People's Commissariat of Education) and local authorities in Moscow, began organizing three Gypsy schools. Nina Dudarova was assigned to organize a school in the Rogozhsko-Simonovsky (Proletarian) rayon. She rounded the Gypsy homes and persuaded the parents to send their children to school and petitioned the authorities for funds to purchase clothes and shoes for the children as well as teaching aids (ibid.). In October 1925, the Gypsy school was opened. Egon Erwin Kisch especially noted its significance and called it "the first Gypsy school on earth" (Kisch 1992: 119).

At that time, Nina Dudarova was the only Roma woman with a relatively good education. In the conditions of an almost complete lack of trained, educated personnel among the Gypsy activists, she was naturally involved

in the leadership of the All-Russian Union of Gypsies. At the same time, her involvement was conditioned by another critical factor of high symbolic significance, namely the need for a publicly visible female presence in the leadership of the Union. Through this female presence in the leadership of the Gypsy organization, the new, equal position of the Gypsy woman was publicly demonstrated, both in Soviet society as a whole and within the Gypsy community itself. That is why the draft statute of the new organization explicitly noted: "All Gypsies can be members of the society […] without distinction of gender" (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 119, d. 9, l. 4). Still the number of women involved in the Roma civic emancipation movement was insignificant.

Initially, among the ten founding members of the prototype of the All-Russian Union of Gypsies, the Society for the Organization of Proletarian Backward Gypsy Masses of the City of Moscow and the Moscow Governorate, founded on January 10, 1924, was only one woman – Yelizaveta Yurovskaya (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 119, d. 9, l. 3). After the official registration of the All-Russian Union of Gypsies by the NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs), a new presidium of the Union was elected, which included Andrey Taranov (chairman), Sergey Polyakov (deputy chairman), Ivan Lebedev (secretary), Mikhail Bezlyudskiy and Nikolay Pankov, and three candidate members, one of whom was a woman, Leontyeva (her first name is unknown). She studied at the so-called Rabfak (workers faculty – an educational institution that prepared workers for higher education) (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27, l. 83).

At the end of 1925, at a meeting of the presidium of the All-Russian Union of Gypsies, a general working plan for 1926 was adopted, in which a special place was given to the activities necessary to solve the problems of the Gypsy woman. It was planned to organize a department for work among Gypsy women at the Union which would hold agitation meetings on the relevant topics (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 120, d. 27). The problems of the Gypsy women were addressed in more detail in the working plan of the cultural department of the Union, adopted in early 1926, which stated: "A woman supports the whole family by fortune-telling […], she has no right in the family, does not have the right to vote and self-defence," and that is why the following task was set: "To free the woman from the yoke in the family and the dominance of a man over her, to achieve that she would refuse to earn a living through fortune-telling, and to using her in socially useful branches" (ibid.). There is no concrete data on which of these plans was implemented in practice. However, in any case, the topic of double discrimination (in society and in her community) against the Roma woman was on the agenda.

According to some testimonies, Nina Dudarova had been a member of the All-Russian Union of Gypsies leadership since the summer of 1925,

when the NKVD approved its statute (Иващенко 2011: 40). However, Nina Dudarova's preserved membership card shows that she was accepted as a member of the Union on April 12, 1926. This card has No. 167 (i.e. the Union had many members at that time), but the first issue of the journal *Романы зоря* (Romani Down) included a photo of the leadership of the All-Russian Union of Gypsies, namely Andrey Taranov, Ivan Lebedev, Sergey Polyakov, and Nina Dudarova (Романы зоря 1927a: 3), i.e. Dudarova had been brought to the forefront in the management of the Union. This leading position in the leadership of the Union could also be seen from the poster with the appeal *To Gypsy Inhabitants of RSFSR* issued in the same year on behalf of the All-Russian Union of the Gypsies Living on the Territory of RSFSR (the official name of the Union), which was signed by the chairman Andrey Taranov, secretary Ivan Lebedev, and board members Nikolay Pankov, Nina Dudarova, and Dmitriy Polyakov (GARF, f. P 9550, op. 2, d. 2010, l. 1; Marushiakova and Popov 2022: 578).

The overall impression from the available historical sources is that the position of Nina Dudarova in the All-Russian Union of Gypsies was rather demonstrative – to present her as a public example (to both Gypsies and the Soviet society) and to point to the equal position of a Gypsy woman. However, this does not mean that Nina Dudarova's place in developing the processes of Roma civic emancipation in the early USSR should be underestimated. On the contrary, her diligent work should be especially emphasized, namely, her contribution to the creation of the so-called Gypsy alphabet, her successful work as a teacher in the Gypsy school in Moscow, especially her published teaching materials, and her translations and editing of the Romani language texts.

After the order of Anatoliy Lunacharskiy – the head of the Narkompros of the RSFSR – *On the creation of the Gypsy alphabet* led to the establishment of the Committee for Creation of the Gypsy Language Alphabet at the Glavnauka (General Directorate of Scientific, Scholarly-Artistic and Museum Institutions) of the Narkompros. The All-Russian Union of Gypsies sent Nikolay Pankov and Nina Dudarova as its representatives to this committee (Друц & Гесслер 1990: 295). Despite the different versions of the composition of the Committee (for more details cf. Marushiakova and Popov 2022: 534), Nina Dudarova's participation in it is unquestionable (her name is present in all versions), and this is quite natural given the fact that she was the only Roma woman at that time who was a teacher in the Gypsy school and had pedagogical experience.

Immediately after the official alphabet adoption, Nina Dudarova and Nikolay Pankov began working on creating the first textbooks for learning the Romani language. In 1928, the world's first such textbook, *Нэво дром:*

Букварё ваш барэ манушэнгэ (The New Way: Primer for Adults), was published, intended for the literacy of illiterate Roma adults (Дударова & Панково 1928). However, this textbook was not just a simple primer for learning the Romani language. It contained many additional materials on various topics, e.g. about the social and political structure of the USSR, the origin and history of the Gypsies in the world, the changes in their life and their inclusion in the public life, the creation of Gypsy artels, kolkhozes, clubs, and schools, etc., the disadvantages for women in the traditional Gypsy family, and the importance of International Women's Day (March 8).

Together with Nikolay Pankov, Nina Dudarova prepared two textbooks (Панково & Дударова 1930ab) for the children who studied in the Gypsy schools – *Джиды буты: Романо букварё ваш I бэрш сыкляибэ* (The Live-work: Gypsy Primer for the First Schooling Year) and *Лолы чергэнори: Книга ваш гинэибэн прэ дуйто бэрш сыкляибэн* (The Red Little Star: A Reading Book for the Second Schooling Year) – which marked the beginning of the study of the Romani language in the Soviet educational system (and for the first time in world history). These textbooks, like the first primer, were rich in content and presented a complete picture of life in the Soviet state and the Gypsies there (of course in the spirit of Soviet ideology and mass propaganda). Subsequently, Nina Dudarova prepared another textbook for adult literacy as well as several textbooks for teaching children in Gypsy schools (Дударова 1932ab; 1933ab; 1934). In addition, she published some articles in Gypsy journals on the successes and existing problems in the education of children in the Gypsy national schools (Романы зоря 1927b: 15–18; Нэво дром 1931c: 19–20).

Nina Dudarova's activity in the field of Roma civic emancipation was far from limited to the school and educational sphere. She was a member of the board of the Central Gypsy Club *Лолы чергэн* (Red Star), and in this position, she directed many activities within the club. The club published its wall newspaper, and Nina Dudarova organized many talks on political, pedagogical, anti-religious, medical, sanitary, and other topics. An amateur group called the Blue Blouse was created, in which high school students participated, and which gave public performances, e.g. the play *Атася и ададывес* (Yesterday and Today) from the repertoire of the State Gypsy Theatre *Romen*. Nina Dudarova wrote music to her poems and adapted them for presentation on stage in the Column Hall of the House of Unions, Central House of Pioneers, factories, and other places. She took care of the artistic upbringing of children and organized their visits to the theatre, the cinema, and to art galleries. A Pioneer detachment was set up at the club, and meetings were organized with students from other national schools, which, in her words, "developed Gypsy children, brought them up in the spirit

of internationalism […] and a new Soviet generation of Gypsies grew up" (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Нина Дударова).

Like many other Gypsy activists at the time, Nina Dudarova also wrote poetry. Her poems were included in the first *Almanac of the Gypsy Poets* (Германо 1931: 25–33), one of which is a poetic address entitled *Кэ романычяй* (To the Gypsy Girls). She also published her poems in the textbooks she prepared. In addition, she actively collaborated as an editor and translator of many books published in Romani by various publishers in the early 1930s (Shapoval 2021: 159–95).

The book published in 1929 by Nina Dudarova, *Пало власть советэн* (About Soviet Power) (Дударова 1929), deserves special attention. This book, together with the book by Alexander German *Нэво джиибэн* (New Life) (Герман 1929), marked the beginning of a new genre in the emerging Roma national literature in the early USSR – political journalism.

Nina Dudarova's book has encyclopaedic qualities with a clear popularizing and agitational character, and presents a detailed political picture of the world in which Gypsies live, with special emphasis on their new social position in the USSR and the opportunities offered by the Soviet state. It is worth noting that the book includes the poem mentioned above by Nina Dudarova herself, entitled *To the Gypsy Girls*, dedicated to International Women's Day (March 8), i.e. the topic of the emancipation of the Roma woman had not been forgotten.

It can be said that in Nina Dudarova's texts and overall activities during this period, the issue of the emancipation of the Roma woman was not mentioned separately, but was inscribed in the leading discourse of the Roma civic emancipation in the early USSR. This should in no way be interpreted as an underestimation of the "female topic"; on the contrary, she always included this problem in a more general framework. For her, the emancipation of the Roma woman in society is inevitably accompanied by her emancipation in the community. In fact, despite Nina Dudarova's multifaceted activities in the field of Roma civic emancipation, her main activity remained her work as a teacher at the Gypsy National School. It is to this activity that she devoted the most space in her autobiography, written from the distance of time, in which she noted:

> I must admit that I enjoyed great respect and even love from both adults and children, and that meant a lot. Meeting my former students now, I hear from them how important the school was for their future. […] Rumours about our school spread beyond the Soviet Union. Foreign delegations came to us, took photos of us, and wrote about the school in magazines and newspapers […]. I received a letter from a professor from Sweden. The envelope read: USSR – Moscow. The only Gypsy teacher.

And the letter arrived. Later, when Gypsy kolkhozes were organized, teachers of collective farm's Gypsy schools in the Smolensk region and the North Caucasus wrote to me. They asked for advice and help. In each issue of the journal *Nevo Drom*, I wrote about the school, our achievements, and shortcomings. […] We all worked then with great uplift and joy because our beaten, backward people grew before our eyes. Gypsies became equal citizens of our great Motherland. (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Нина Дударова)

After the first Gypsy national school, organized by Nina Dudarova, several similar new schools were established, both in Moscow and in the countryside (mainly at the established Gypsy kolkhozes). In 1935, a total of 12 Gypsy schools of the first degree and 18 Gypsy groups at mainstream education schools functioned in the RSFSR, as well as one seven-year school with a children's home (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5, l. 66–70). The number of these Gypsy national schools was volatile and changed over the years; not all were sustainable. However, they still played an important role in the education of Roma children and the literacy of adults. Nina Dudarova worked as a teacher in a Gypsy national school for 13 years until 1938, when the radical turn in Soviet national policy reflected her fate.

As already said, the Gypsy policy of the Soviet state is only a part of its general nationalities policy and can be adequately understood only in this context. The changes in the affirmative Gypsy Soviet policy, which was replaced with mainstream policy towards them as Soviet citizens in the second half of the 1930s as part of a paradigm shift in Soviet national policy (Martin 2001: 309–461), are only a part (at that, by far not the most important) of the new political course imposed on Soviet nationalities politics. Taking into account the dependence of Gypsy policy on general guidelines and particular steps in the overall Soviet national policy makes it possible to understand that the changes in the Gypsy policy of the Soviet state in the second half of the 1930s were not a manifestation of some special policy of anti-Gypsyism of the Soviet state, but were an integral part (and far from the most important) of the overall turn in Soviet national policy at the time. This was evident in the case of the shift in overall Soviet national politics, which happened in the late 1930s and which is reflected in the Decree *On the Reorganization of National Schools* of the Organizational Bureau of the Central Committee of All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), accepted on January 24, 1938 (RGASPI, f. 17, op. 114, d. 837, l. 100–1). It is worth noticing that many previous publications misrepresented the title of the decree, which is *On the Reorganization of National Schools* and not decree *About the Liquidation of National Schools and National School Departments*, which changed the meaning of the sentence (Торопов 1999: 20; Деметер et al. 2000: 207; Смирнова-Сеславинская 2013: 165–6; O'Keeffe 2013: 93).

Naturally, the shift in the general nationalities policy was also reflected in the policy towards Roma, including the existing Gypsy schools. In the decree *On the Reorganization of National Schools*, the Gypsy schools were not mentioned at all. The term "national school" referred to the "German, Finnish, Polish, Latvian, English, Greek, Estonian, Ingrian, Veps, Chinese, etc." schools (ibid. l. 100). For the first time, a mention of Gypsy schools appears only in the tables of the report of the Narkompros of July 8, 1938 (ibid., l. 108) which shows that the place of the Gypsies in the context of Soviet national policy was quite insignificant.

As a result of the decree *On the Reorganization of National Schools*, many national schools in the USSR were closed (including all existing Gypsy schools), and Nina Dudarova began working as a teacher in a mainstream school. On this occasion, she wrote:

> I also treated my work with love because I love my job and I love children, but my most joyful memory will always be the difficult years of my work in the Gypsy school. (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Нина Дударова)

After Nazi Germany attacked the USSR in 1941, some schools in Moscow were closed, including where she worked, and she began working at the Moskabel plant (a cable factory). In addition, she worked in a hospital for wounded soldiers and participated in groups that dug anti-tank trenches to protect Moscow, for which she was awarded the Medal for the Defense of Moscow. After re-opening the closed schools, she returned to work as a teacher. For her work in the field of school education, in 1949, at a ceremony in the Kremlin, she was awarded the Badge of Honour (ibid.).

Nina Dudarova died in Moscow in 1992. In her autobiography, written in the 1960s, she made a recapitulation of her work in the field of Roma civic emancipation:

> This is the whole story of my life. The work we started is not over yet. There is nothing to hide that the situation of the Gypsies is still like a dark spot against the light and joyful background of our present. You, our shift, remember that the Gypsies are also children of our great Motherland, and they should live the same way as all the people of our country and not be its stepchildren. This must be achieved, but for this, it is necessary to work a lot and hard (ibid.).

Olga Pankova

Another important figure in the field of Roma civic emancipation in the early USSR, and for the emancipation of the Roma woman in the community, is

Olga Ivanovna Pankova (1911–1991). She was born in St Petersburg and came from the great family of the Pankovs. She was left without her parents at 10, in 1921, when her father died. Her uncle Nikolay Pankov raised her, and with him, she moved to Moscow in 1922 (LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Ольга Панкова; PAVK, f. Nikolay Pankov).

In the early 1930s, Olga Pankova joined the movement for Roma civic emancipation. In 1931 she started working in the editorial office of the Gypsy journal *Нэво дром* (New Way), first as a typist, then as a proof-reader, editor, and translator into the Romani language. In addition, she was a member of the leadership of the Central Gypsy Club *Лолы чергэн* (Red Star) and the Gypsy Komsomol (All-Union Leninist Young Communist League) organization created at the club. She devoted a lot of energy and time to eliminating illiteracy among Gypsies and improving their inclusion in working life organizing various public actions, theatre performances, music, dance and choir circles, kindergartens, and camps (ibid.). At that time, the club received a new building from the local authorities, with many rooms, including a large hall and a theatre stage, and quickly became the centre of Roma's social and cultural life in the capital, Moscow.

In the 1930s, Olga Pankova developed a vivid creative activity as an author, editor, and translator of many different publications in the Romani language. Her literary heritage reveals her views on the need for the emancipation of the Roma woman in the community and society. She was a phenomenally productive translator into Romani language. This fact is remarkable because her biographical data showed she had got nothing but "primary education" (RGALI, f. 631, op. 1, d. 4777, l. 15). This is not surprising; her childhood fell in the very dramatic years of the large Pankovs family after the loss of their private house in St Petersburg. Her first steps in the field of translation are impressive. In 1931, she published two translations of the highest political status: Lenin's *The Tasks of the Youth Leagues* (Ленино 1931) and Stalin's speeches *About Komsomol* (Сталино 1931). A less than 20-year-old Komsomol member, the author of the single published poem won this honourable double order and left behind all more experienced Gypsy activists and writers. Subsequently, for a short period, she successfully translated a long list of books dealing with various topics and professions, e.g. politics, agitation, agriculture, geography, car construction, teaching materials, etc. (for more details, see Shapoval 2021). However, there was a clear focus on books for women and children.

In her authored texts, Olga Pankova served as a model for a new liberated Roma woman, a living example of what opportunities the Soviet system created for representatives of all nationalities and what is especially significant for women. When she wrote about Gypsy kindergartens, schools, and clubs,

she used her own experience as a participant in those activities (Панкова 1932: 32–5).

The first poem (without a title) by Olga Pankova was published in the magazine *Нево дром* in 1930 (Нэво дром 1930a: 10–11). It was a politically literate diptych in which the depiction of the horrors and hardships of the past nomadic life contrasted with the happy life in the Gypsy kolkhoz: *Ёв парудя гаджэнса грэн* (He was swapping horses with peasants) vs. *Ёв дро колхозо дром латхья* (He has found his way to the kolkhoz). Thus, the first appearance of the young poetess on the printed pages demonstrated her civic and political maturity and complete harmony with the state policy toward the Gypsies. This was her leading principle, reflected in her entire artistic, creative work.

Olga Pankova's poetry includes three books of poems – *Амарэ дывэса* (Our Days), *Ростасадо джиибэн* (A Crushed Life), and *Гиля* (Poems) (Панково 1933; Панкова 1936; 1938). The themes of her poetry are very diverse, and the author's personality shows behind her poetic lines and images. This author was a young Roma woman of that time. She expressed a specific feminine point of view of often silent women, which is the additional value of her poetic messages.

In the plan of the Roma (and especially women's) civic emancipation, we are interested in, without any doubt, the first published book by Olga Pankova with journalistic essays *Комсомоло дрэ марибэ поло нэво джиибэ* (Komsomol in the struggle for new life) (Панкова 1932) is of special value. While the other individual parts of the book largely repeat the basic facts and interpretations contained in many other similar publications, the part dedicated to the Roma woman is undoubtedly original. It is one of the relatively few texts devoted to the problems of emancipation of the Roma woman in the community and society.

Generally speaking, the literary work and public activities of Olga Pankova showed the combination of two aspects of civic emancipation, both popular in that historical period. It appears to be very symbolic. On the one hand, she acted as a representative of an entire small Gypsy nationality, which for a long time, for many reasons, did not have the opportunity to enter the public arena to present its position and declare interests and needs in the public sphere. On the other hand, as a representative of Roma women, she also revealed a specific feminist agenda, acknowledging the problems and demands of this part of the nationality. Roma women found themselves, as one might say, under double oppression, both under the pressure of the surrounding majority society and under the pressure of social restrictions determined by internal norms and customs. The latter rules, in turn, were formed inside the community. However, those patterns of strict gender-based division of duties

and behavioural control in a woman's everyday life started to be redundant and regressive in the new socialistic conditions, as Roma activists believed.

In the public activities of Olga Pankova, the emancipation of the Roma nationality and the emancipation of the women were combined quite organically. At that very time, the circle of new opportunities that opened up for the active and competent Roma woman, in comparison with the previous historical period, was incomparably broader and more attractive. The ideas of feminist emancipation offered to Soviet society were extraordinarily diverse. They covered the broadest spectrum, from highly bold and shocking concepts of freedom to the rigoristic and ascetic behavioural models of selfless service to the revolution and socialism. In this spectrum, there was also a place for the choice of an intermediate and rational position, which does not conflict sharply with the principles of the parent's generation.

Olga Pankova was a successful and suitable candidate for overcoming both sets of problems of Roma women, perhaps for several important reasons. She represented a relatively small group of trading and choral Ruska Roma, who lived in St Petersburg and later in Moscow. Therefore, she belonged to those cultural mediators who had the social experience and intellectual resources necessary for orientation in urban life and, essentially, in the public sphere of interaction between citizens. This experience of multiculturalism was significant for successful communication with the authorities and the diverse Roma communities. The position of a woman in different Roma groups varied, sometimes quite significantly. Comparing the position of women in the families of sedentary choral Gypsies (in general representatives of Ruska Roma) with their position, for example, among former nomadic Kelderari that had recently settled in Moscow, observers noted the great archaism and the behavioural restrictions that existed in the latter Roma groups (O'Keeffe 2001: 69–71).

In the background of this complex picture, Olga Pankova's work naturally turns out to be closely related to the Soviet concept of the "liberation of a woman" as an equal member of a collective, a worker, and a mother. As soon as Roma women achieved civic equality, she was, like all other working women, able to use the measures offered by the state for the protection and support of motherhood and the upbringing of the children. She not only shared and supported the Soviet concept of women but expressed it clearly in her publications, particularly when portraying the tragic fate of the Gypsy women before the 1917 Revolution and in descriptions of the new prospects they received in the Soviet state. In her texts on the situation with the Roma woman in the conditions of the Soviet state, Olga Pankova adhered to a straightforward scheme. Firstly, she described how under capitalist rule, in the conditions of Tsarist Russia, Gypsies were generally discriminated against

and persecuted by the state. Secondly, their unequal position in society was reflected in the relations in the community, where the Roma woman was deprived of any rights and was treated as the property of her father, and after marriage, she became obedient to her husband, without having any rights. In her words:

> In many small nations that the Tsar oppressed before the revolution, the woman was not a human being. The man did not reckon with her. The way of our Gypsy women was under the whip. Until she was married, her master was her father. If the father liked some guy, he would give him the girl as a wife. Nobody cares whether she wants to marry him or not. And then her husband is already her master. How much suffering does she endure in her life? In the cold and the heat of the summer day, she trudges with her bag over her shoulder, at windows, asking for bread. Coming home, she has many works to do. The children were dirty, ragged, and asking for food. Furthermore, the husband either is lying on a feather bed like a panther, and if not lying, he is playing cards. He is her master. He is even yelling at her. If the husband starts to drink, she, the poor one, does not know how to please him.
>
> Moreover, he has nothing but rudeness toward her. He makes his wife stand on her knees, sing songs and beat her. She, the poor thing, trembles with fear and is afraid to utter a word. (Панкова 1932: 30–1)

Olga Pankova's scheme then follows a description of a bright future. The October Revolution of 1917, and the creation of the USSR as a new type of state, radically changed the position of Gypsies in society. They became equal citizens of the Soviet state with all civil rights, and that state took comprehensive care of them. Along with this, the Soviet state changed the place of women in society as a whole. They received civic equality for the first time in world history. All this is naturally reflected in the position of the Roma woman in the community, or in the words of Pankova herself:

> However, the October revolution put the woman's shoulder by the man's shoulder. We know that a woman can take any job a man can. And we see that the woman does not lag behind the man. They say that women have long hair but small mind. And we say it's not true. […] But, Gypsy sisters! Gone are the years when your husbands were your masters. Now it is another order. Now there are no masters here. The October revolution took the conceit of your husbands. A husband has to be a comrade to his wife. (Панкова 1932: 31)

Olga Pankova confessed that the changes did not come so quickly and easily. There were still some unresolved issues and problems with the position of the Roma woman in the community, so much more work was needed. As she underlined, leading positions in this struggle to achieve full equality of

the Roma woman, not only in society, but also within her community, must be taken by the young generation, united by the Soviet ideology and within the Komsomol organization:

> However, I must say that among our Gypsies, there are still such "heroes." Not every Gypsy woman has reached the consciousness that her husband is not her master. This former depravity should not be allowed into our new socialist life. It is necessary to fight the old days' customs. And this struggle should be carried out by young people. It is her task. Young people are building a new life. They are the fastest and the best for it. Our Komsomol must realise and fulfil this task. Now a Gypsy woman is doing work in the workplace, studying. Literacy opens the eyes of a formerly ignorant woman. She now sees a lot of good things. And everything is new for her. (Панкова 1932: 31–2)

Of course, in real life (and even in the life of Olga Pankova herself), things were not as simple as presented by her, both in the Roma community and in the Soviet state. In this case, for us, however, her vision for the emancipation of the Roma woman is more important. For Olga Pankova, the emancipation of the Roma woman is inextricably linked to her community. It is a de facto part of the overall Roma civic emancipation processes in Soviet society. In other words, her views, in general, did not differ in essence from the views of Nina Dudarova, or even from the modern principles of the emancipation of the Roma woman today.

The radical turn in Soviet national politics in the second half of the 1930s and the ensuing Second World War interrupted Olga Pankova's civic and creative activity. In the late 1940s, she left the Theatre *Romen* and worked for many years as a typist (PAVK; LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Ольга Панкова). In 1971, she was the editor of the book of Gypsy songs collected by composer Semyon Bugachevskiy (Бугачевский 1971). Olga Pankova died in Moscow in 1991.

In her autobiography, written in 1964, Olga Pankova gave a comprehensive assessment of her civic and creative activity (as well as of the activity of her entire generation of Gypsy activists) and the problems of Roma in the USSR in the post-war realities, part of which deserves to be brought here:

> After the hurricane of the war of 1941, no trace remained of the work that was carried out by those who are no longer among us. […] But we have people, new cultural Gypsies, who are striving to revive what was cast into the dust by the war. They are looking for ways to start working again among the Gypsies. And if this is achieved, the Gypsies will show that they are able to live and work in step with the century. […] The thought that there should be an opportunity to work for my people does not leave me. And despite my rather advanced age, I will fulfil my duty to [my] people. (PAVK; LANB, f. Николай Саткевич, d. Ольга Панкова)

Other Roma women activists

The participation of Roma women in the processes of Roma civic emancipation in the early USSR is not limited to the leading activists (Nina Dudarova and Olga Pankova). In various forms, many other Roma women were involved in these processes, about whom it is worth saying at least a few words, no matter how incomplete the information about them is.

In the Gypsy journals (*Романы зоря* and *Нэво дром*), as well as in the published collections of poetry (Германо 1931; 1934), other Roma women also participated as authors of poems, among whom in our field of interest (the emancipation of the Roma woman) of special significance are the works of P. Voinova-Masalskaya, who presents herself as a student in the theatre studio at the Theatre *Romen*. In the 1931 issue of the journal *Нево дром*, her poem *Women's Da*y was published (Нэво дром, 1931a: 21), as well as a short note entitled *About the Women's Day* (meaning March 8), which repeats in prosaic form the content of the poem:

> Under the Tsar, I sang in restaurants for fat-rich gadže, and they threw money to me for my songs and dance. They did not understand how hard it was for me. I was very young, and night performance was very exhausting; however, those fat pigs did not understand it; they looked at the Gypsy girl as an attraction; I was obliged to perform everything, whatever the gentleman would order, and if I had not done what the customer wishes, they would kick me out of the choir. Such bitter was our life under the Tsar. Now, under the workers' power, my life has changed; they respect me as well as all people; now, I have just realized where real life is, not slavery. I am currently studying in the theatre studio, and I will be a true actress. […] I will perform all these things not for drunk rich men, but for all people. (Нэво дром 1931b: 21)

In this case, it is clear that, due to her age, the author herself cannot have memories of the era of Tsarist Russia, which she describes, i.e. there is an art that very accurately reflects the spirit of the era, and in particular the prevailing pattern for the representation of the civic emancipation of the Roma women in the conditions of the Soviet state.

The participation of Roma women in the general processes of Roma civic emancipation in the early USSR was not limited to the capital, Moscow, where most Gypsy activists were concentrated, although to a lesser extent, similar processes took place in the countryside (at least in some places). Such was the case with the Roma woman with dramatic fate, Yefrosynya (Ruzya) Tumashevich (1908–1993), from the Smolensk region (actually, Smolensk was the second centre of the Roma civic emancipation movement in the early USSR). She was called by her contemporaries the "Gypsy Ibarruri," referring to the legendary Isidora Dolores Ibarruri Gomez, known as *La Pasionaria*, a

Spanish communist and hero of the Spanish Civil War. Ruzya Tumashevich was the chairman of the Gypsy kolkhoz *Svoboda* (Liberty) in the village of Kardimovo (Нэво дром 1930b: 9–10), worked at a Gypsy school with a children's home in the village of Serebryanka, and during the Second World War was a participant in the partisan movement (for more details see Kalinin 2021: 174–5).

Some of the examples of Roma women's participation in Gypsy activism in the early USSR were reflected in the press at that time. Such was, for example, the case of the kolkhoz shock worker Yevgenia Tsigunenko from the Gypsy kolkhoz *Trud Romen* (Gypsy Labour), who took part in the Second All-Union Congress of Kolkhoz-Shock Workers in Moscow in 1935, where she met Lenin's widow, Nadezhda Krupskaya (Второй Всесоюзный съезд 1935). Similar were the cases of published photographs taken in 1936 of V. Yarysheva – from the Gypsy kolkhoz *Nevo drom* (Novo-Velichkovsky rayon of the Azov-Black Sea krai) – who drove a tractor (RGAKFD, d. 99274, sn. 4-99274 ч/б), or of the Gypsy teacher N. P. Pedanova, who in 1938 in the Stalingrad oblast conducted classes for a group of Gypsy kolkhoz workers in the field, where she introduced them to the rules for holding elections to the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR (GTsMSIR). There also was Z. I. Lebedeva, a Komsomol member from the kolkhoz *Trud Romen*, who originated from a Gypsy nomadic community, graduated from law school, and worked as a judge in Rostov-on-Don in 1937 (Известия 1937: 4; Иващенко 2011: 66). It is beyond any doubt that these photographs were taken and published for propaganda reasons, but, nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that they represent real people, and they reflect actual processes of civic emancipation of the Roma woman that flowered at that time in Soviet society.

Of course, the process of emancipation of the Roma woman did not proceed without any problems within the community, where the established traditional gender patterns and relationships continued to maintain more or less leading positions. For example, it is no coincidence that in all the preserved photographs of Roma women from the time of the early USSR, only two of the photographed activists (N. P. Pedanova and Z. I. Lebedeva) have short haircuts, which was considered a drastic violation of the established traditional norms. As a matter of fact, these norms turn out to be highly stable, and even today, in the post-Soviet space, long hair continues to be a crucial ethnic marker for the Roma woman.

Perhaps the potentially most dangerous area in which conflict situations related to the emancipation of the Roma woman were possible (and arose) was the training of young Roma girls in the higher education system. The Soviet state, true to its principles of supporting the civic emancipation of women in Soviet society, facilitated women's participation in these educational

initiatives in various ways. This principle also applied to Roma, e.g. in 1934, a total of 32 people were admitted for training in preliminary courses (so-called Rabfak - workers faculty) to the Smolensk medical faculty, 20 of them men and 12 women (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28). In 1932, at the opening of the Gypsy Department at the Pedagogical College of the Krasno Presnensky District named after Timiryazev – which in 1935–1936 was transformed into the Gypsy Pedagogical College – 25 students aged 17 to 30 were enrolled, of whom 13 were men and 12 women (GARF, f. P 1235, op. 127, d. 8), and this practice continued over time.

The separation of young Roma girls from their families, who traditionally exercised control over their pre-marital behaviour, created preconditions for violation of traditional norms in the new social environment. In 1935, the Department of Nationalities of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee initiated an investigation into the case of a student at Gypsy Pedagogical College N. G. (born in 1918) after a complaint to the prosecutor's office that she had been raped by a fellow student and then insulted by her fellow women students and subjected to sexual harassment by fellow man students. The investigation lasted a long time and went through many twists and turns (N.G. withdrew her testimony and complaints, then obtained a certificate from a doctor that she was still a virgin). Finally, the investigation was terminated, and N.G. went back to her parents in Western Region (ibid.). However, the case shows that the emancipation of the Roma woman in some cases did not pass painlessly for herself and without upheavals in the community.

The processes of Romani women's civic emancipation encounter problems not only in the circles of their community but also in the surrounding society, in other ways. In this regard, there is a riveting historical testimony worth quoting here. It is about the letter written by Lyuba Mikholazhina (who had graduated from the Gypsy Pedagogical College in Moscow) to her teacher Nikolay Pankov, who went to work in a local (non-Gypsy) school in the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. What makes this letter interesting are the thoughts of the newly created Roma intelligentsia and their social positions within the Soviet realities, as well as the attitude of the local population towards the Gypsies:

> I strongly dislike those […] who not only do not help their nation but also give it up. I managed to reach the level of the Russians and prove that we do have abilities too. Now I am working in the Caucasus and not among my Gypsies. […] What made me come here is that I wanted to learn about the life of the Caucasian people. It is very difficult and dangerous to live here. For example, an inspector was murdered today up in the mountains on his way to our regional centre Vedeno. There are many such

occurrences here: murders, robberies, raped girls thrown down from the high banks into the river. Going out in the yard at night […] is dangerous because somebody may hit you on the head with a stone. They [the Chechens – authors' note] hate the Russians and treat us as conquerors. They have no idea about the existence of Gypsies and think that I am Russian. (Друц and Гесслер 1990: 301–2)

This letter is also interesting from another point of view. It can look strange at first glance, but, in some cases, Roma could be on the other side of the barricade, the side of the "invaders" seen in post-colonial discourse. This is not unique in history: it would be enough to think of the Calon slave traders of the eighteenth century in Brazil (Fotta 2018).

Gypsy women activists in Central Asia

We should say a few words about the situation of women's emancipation among the so-called Gypsies in Central Asia. In this region of the USSR, their picture is even more complicated. Apart from a relatively small number of Roma who are new migrants to the region, here live many communities who in the Russian language are called, including in the official documentation from the time of the Russian Empire and USSR, "цыгане" (Gypsies). They settled at different times in the region, are ethnically heterogeneous, and use different self-appellations (the majority are Mughat, but there are also smaller communities of Mazang, Tavoktarosh, Agha, Kavol, Multoni, Chistoni, Parya, etc.). The local population collectively call them Dzhugi (in the Tajik language) or Lyuli (in the Turkic local languages). Most of them are native to the Tajik language (see Marushiakova and Popov 2016a).

In USSR conditions, in the 1920s and 1930s, all these communities became subjected to Soviet power affirmative policy towards Gypsies. The local authorities were responsible for its implementation. However, they did not make special efforts in this direction, and only a few Gypsy collective farms and artels were created (ibid.). In most cases, the policy towards them was mainstream, i.e. the same as towards the local population. In Central Asia, one of the essential policies directed at women was the so-called "liberation of women of the East." It included public campaigns of Soviet power to remove the *paranja* (known as *burqa* in Arabic), which was used by "Women of the East" to cover themselves completely. This, however, did not target Gypsy women (Northrop 2004: 51), because the paranja (traditional Central Asian robe for women and girls that covers the head and body) was rarely used by them; instead, they wore a "softer" form of veiling, with an uncovered face. Instead of fighting against the paranja, another movement for the liberation of Gypsy women arose in Samarkand – the fight against the begging bag. For

the Gypsy women, it symbolized their unequal position in the community, as with it, they were obliged to feed their entire families. Female Gypsy activists Koromat Dzhalilova and Dzhumakikh Norbaeva were especially active in this regard. They repeatedly took action to persuade women to burn their begging bags and go to work in local factories. Koromat Dzhalilova became a member of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks). She joined an agitation unit that travelled around the region and propagated the ideas of Soviet power; in one such public event, she was attacked and received seven knife strikes, but survived and died many years later as an honorary retiree (Назаров 1969: 116). As a sidenote, the stereotype about the begging bag turned out to be extremely strong. The Mughat still preserved a wedding custom when the groom hides under the bed, and the bride begs him to go out and swears that she will sustain him and the whole family with her begging bag (for more details, see Marushiakova and Popov 2016a).

General notes

The examples here clearly show the model of the Soviet state-guided policy, which developed the processes of civic emancipation of Roma women in the early USSR. The leading line in this direction is the elevation of their chosen representatives (Roma women activists) to leading positions in the Roma movement, especially the public promotion of chosen Roma women activists. In this way, the authorities created new Roma women's elite, as the goal and expectations were their examples to be followed by other Roma women. The processes of civic emancipation of Romani women were organized and controlled by the Soviet state. The idea was that the processes would be moved from the top down and passed from the female elite to the broad female masses.

It should not be surprising that the concept of the doubly discriminated-against Roma woman and the need for her emancipation (in the community and society) was created and developed into practical actions (albeit relatively limited) in the conditions of the early USSR. This is not a historical paradox but rather a regularity. Such is the case with the concept of anti-Gypsyism, which is particularly popular these days, but was formulated firstly by Alexander German in his article *The Gypsies* (Безбожник 1928: 11–3). The press popularized it further through the article by Georgiy Lebedev and Alexander German *What To Do with Gypsies?*, in which the authors devoted a separate section to "The Roots of anti-Gypsyism" (Комсомольская правда 1929: 4). After the rediscovery of this theory at the end of the twentieth century, in a new, modified shape (Hancock 1987; 1996; for more details, see Holler 2014: 82–92), anti-Gypsyism is not only one of the leading concepts in

the field of Romani Studies, but it even defines the European policy towards the Roma, which is expressed in the European Parliament as Resolution on the Need for a Strengthened Post-2020 Strategic EU Framework for National Roma Inclusion Strategies and Stepping Up the Fight Against Anti-Gypsyism (2019/2509).

Bulgaria

The development of Roma women's activism in Bulgaria after the Second World War was quite different from that in the early USSR. The goal was the same (the civic emancipation of the Roma woman), but the ways for its realization in Bulgaria were significantly different.

After the entry of the Red Army into Bulgaria on September 9, 1944, a communist regime was established in Bulgaria. Even before the end of the Second World War, on March 6, 1945, the United Common-Cultural and Educational Organization of the Gypsy Minorities Ekhipe (Unity) was established in Sofia, headed by Shakir Pashov, a long-time Roma activist (about him, see Marushiakova and Popov 2022: 45–77). With the new government's support, dozens of divisions of the new organization were created in the country. The Gypsy newspapers *Романо еси* (Romani Voice) with editor-in-chief Shakir Pashov (published in the period 1946–1949) and *Нево дром* (New Way) with editor-in-chief Mustafa/Lyubomir Aliyev (the future Manush Romanov), began to be published in 1950. Shakir Pashov was elected a deputy in the Great National Assembly, which drew up the country's new Constitution in 1947. Its Art. 36 proclaims: "Woman and man in the People's Republic of Bulgaria have equal rights."

In the United Common-Cultural and Educational Organization of the Gypsy Minorities Ekhipe, however, the problem of the civil emancipation of the Roma women is practically absent. In the very Statute of the organization, Art. 2 is briefly stated that "in [the organization] all Gypsies who have reached the age of 18 are members, individually, regardless of gender and social status" (CDA, f. 1 Б, op. 8, a.e. 596, l. 50–2; Marushiakova and Popov 2021: 103–11). There were no women in the organization's leadership, no women's divisions were created, and no events dedicated to the problems of Roma women were held. Also, in the published Gypsy newspapers *Романо еси* and *Нево дром*, the female theme is generally absent.

At the end of the 1940s, the United Common-Cultural and Educational Organization of the Gypsy Minorities Ekhipe ceased to exist. Shakir Pashov was sent for almost two years to the concentration camp on Belene Island, in the Danube River (Marushiakova and Popov 2022: 45–77). In 1957 there was a short period during which the newspaper *Нове ромá* (New Roma) was

published by the Gypsy National Community Centre "9th September". Still, after a year, the newspaper was stopped, and Shakir Pashov was interned for three years (1959–1962) in Dobruja (ibid.).

In the *Нове ромá* newspaper, the topic of Roma women appeared for the first time, albeit in minimal dimensions. In 1957, the newspaper published a message signed by a Roma woman, Budinka Selimova, from the village of Dalgo Pole, Belogradchik region, for the first time (Нове ромá 1957b: 1). The official Bulgarian delegation sent to participate in the Sixth World Youth Festival, held in Moscow, included two Roma men (musicians) and one Roma woman, the singer Shevka Aliyeva. The publication covering this event, especially emphasized that for the first time a Roma woman participated in such an important event (Нове ромá 1957a: 1).

The real beginning of the civic emancipation of Roma women can be said to have started from the 1960s onwards when the authorities began a proactive policy in this direction. We should note that this policy is general, aimed at the Muslim minorities considered problematic in the composition of the Bulgarian nation – Turks, Muslim Bulgarians, and Gypsies (the majority of Roma in Bulgaria at that time are, or were several generations ago, Muslims). It should be noted that this approach is not a new creation of the communist regime; this has actually been the leading discourse ever since the creation of the new Bulgarian state in 1878, and it has not changed during the various historical periods, regardless of socio-political changes (Marushiakova and Popov 2004).

The primary executor of state policy towards these minorities, perceived as a threat (even if only potential) to the unity of the Bulgarian nation, was the Fatherland Front – a mass socio-political organization, a satellite of the ruling Bulgarian Communist Party. At the same time, we should remember that the Fatherland Front was entrusted with the work (not only with minorities but in general) at a lower level, in the field among the broad masses of the people. The training of senior party, state, and business management personnel was a prerogative of the Bulgarian Communist Party. The inclusion of Roma representatives in this sphere in Bulgaria was symbolic and limited to low levels, unlike, for example, Czechoslovakia at that time, where one Roma from Slovakia, Emil Rigo, reached the top of the party nomenclature hierarchy and for more than two decades was a member of the presidium of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.

Already in the 1950s, a special commission for work with minorities was created at the National Council of the Fatherland Front. This commission had to coordinate its activities among the ethnic and religious communities according to their residence, which it justifies as follows.

What is our general line of work among the Turkish and Gypsy populations. It is not to pursue a policy of singling out this population on the basis of ethnicity, but to include it, to make it feel like an integral part of the Bulgarian people. But together with this, work must also be done among the Bulgarians to overcome outdated ideas, concepts, and prejudices regarding these groups – Turks, Gypsies, Bulgarian-Mohammedans. (Петрова 2012: 123–4)

The idea of organizing special courses for minority women came from the District Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party in Smolyan, which proposed to the National Council of the Fatherland Front to undertake the organization and conduct of such courses. The first four of these 45-day courses were held in 1960 in Chepelare, and Bulgarian Muslim women from Smolyan, Blagoevgrad, Pazardzhik, and Kardzhali districts were trained in them (Петрова 2012: 125–6). Soon after, a special training centre was established in Velingrad, where the schools for female activists of the Fatherland Front were to be held (although, in practice, they were also held in many other places). In 1962, schools for Turkish women also began to be organized. The first such school was held in 1962 in Ardino, followed by other such schools in Razgrad and Shumen (ibid.).

On December 7, 1967, a permanent school for training Gypsy women, activists of the Patriotic Front, was opened in Velingrad. The participants were selected from all over the country, with two representatives per district (at that time, there were 30 districts in Bulgaria). The respective district committees of the Fatherland Front were responsible for their recruitment (see, e.g. DA Blagoevgrad, f. 628, op. 4, a.e. 28, l. 300). Initially, the schools were differentiated according to ethnicity (Bulgarian Muslim women, Turkish women, Roma women). It gradually moved to mixed-type schools, with representatives of the three communities, plus a mandatory 10–15 percent ethnic Bulgarian women (Петрова 2012: 145–6). The schools were boarding type, i.e. with their separate buildings with bedrooms, kitchens, dining rooms, study rooms, etc.

Initially, the duration of training in the schools was 45 days, but since 1971, they have been for three months. Their regulation is further corrected and detailed by special Decree No. 95 of the Council of Ministers of August 26, 1975 About Expanding the Activity Regarding the Training of Women Activists of the Fatherland Front. This decree envisages the expansion of the already existing school network and determines their duration (105 days) and the number of students (100 women per school). Female trainees in the schools received during their studies the wages they received before; those of them who were not employed received a monthly stipend of BGN 60; the time of their participation in the schools was considered as work experience upon

retirement. Subsequently, with a particular Order of the Council of Ministers No. 63 of November 14, 1980, in addition to the two study courses of 105 days each, an accelerated course of 45 days was introduced in one academic year (ibid.: 141, 146).

The schools for the training of Bulgarian Muslim, Turkish, and Gypsy women activists of the Fatherland Front existed until the fall of the communist regime in 1989. However, their activity was limited from the mid-1980s, directly connected to the so-called Revival process (the forced replacement of the Turkish-Arabic names of all Muslims in Bulgaria with Bulgarian-Orthodox names). A total of 14 such schools functioned: in Burgas (held in Sunny Beach resort during the winter), Velingrad, Gotse Delchev, Kardzhali, Mihailovgrad (now Montana), Pleven, Plovdiv (held in Asenovgrad), Razgrad, Ruse, Sliven, Smolyan, Sofia, Tolbukhin (today Dobrich) and Shumen (ibid.: 146).

In the process of work, the courses of the trainees were differentiated according to their composition, with the leading criteria now being age and education. On the one hand, two types of courses were distinguished – for girls and women up to 40 years old and women over 40 years old; on the other hand, these two categories were respectively divided into two, in the first of which the participants had primary education, and in the second one with secondary education (ibid.).

The central part of the training of the students was in the course of the so-called socio-political Education and Civic Culture. Three hundred study hours were planned (108 lectures for 216 hours and 80 hours of self-training and conversations-interviews). The task was to acquire knowledge: on socio-political and economic problems; legal culture, legality and civil responsibility; on historical overviews; on matters of family and upbringing; popular scientific knowledge; for a new way of life and culture in the family; health and medicine; organizational skills; language culture and literary speech; additional lectures at the request of the students and the suggestion of the supervisors; and interest activities (ibid.: 148).

In addition, classes were held to acquire some practical skills, such as courses in sewing and tailoring (in some cases leading to vocational qualifications for entry into work), cooking, housekeeping, etc., as well as many non-professional performing arts activities (mainly songs and dances). In summary, during the entire existence of the schools for women activists of the Fatherland Front, more than 50,000 women were trained in them (ibid.: 147). How many of them were Romani women is very difficult to calculate with precision, but considering the balance observed between the different ethnic and religious communities in the selection of the participants, the realistic figure seems to us to be around 12,000, in any case, a minimum of 10,000.

When talking about the influences of the training in the schools for women activists of the Fatherland Front on the civic emancipation processes of Roma women, we must consider one crucial circumstance. The Roma women participating in these schools were primarily recruited from the detached Roma neighbourhoods in the cities, where this population has been settled for centuries (since the Ottoman Empire). In the Ottoman Empire, a basic principle of urban planning was dividing the population into ethnically distinct neighbourhoods (called mahala), and Gypsies are no exception to this rule (Marushiakova and Popov 2001). This urban principle was preserved after the emergence of the independent Bulgarian state in 1878. The modernization of the country led to the growth of cities, and the Roma settlements were gradually pushed to their outskirts. For example, in the capital Sofia, after the liberation from Ottoman rule, there were several Gypsy settlements scattered in different places, which were quickly evicted, and a new Gypsy mahala was created (around today's Central Station). In the first decade of the twentieth century, they began to be pushed from there to today's Konyovitsa and Tatarli mahalas, which were included in the urban regulation after the First World War. On the eve of the Second World War, part of the population in these neighbourhoods began to move to the free areas where the Fakulteta mahala is located today. This process continued under the conditions of the communist regime, and together with this, another part of the old Gypsy neighbourhood was relocated to newly built dwellings in the village of Filipovtsi (on the outskirts of Sofia). In the first years of the twentieth-first century, the Sofia Municipality began the preparations (accompanied by a public campaign in the media) for evicting the Gypsies living in the Batalova Vodenitsa district (without making provision for alternative housing). Human rights and Roma organizations took the issue to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg in 2012. After the court decision, the eviction was stopped (at least for now). Similar processes are taking place in other larger cities of the country. According to the tradition established since the Ottoman Empire, the local authorities appoint a representative, called Muhtar (in more recent times, mayor's deputy), for contacts with the Gypsy neighbourhoods. Initially, the inhabitants of the Gypsy mahalas elected this representative. From the 1920s he began to be determined by the authorities (Marushiakova and Popov 2021: 78–9), and this practice still exists.

As already said at the beginning, the civic emancipation of Roma women takes place in two main dimensions according to the two main dimensions of the existence of Roma – as an ethnic community and as part of society in the composition of a corresponding civil nation. From the point of view of this scheme, it is very difficult to assess to what extent the training of Roma women activists contributes to the civic emancipation of Roma women as

a whole within the framework of Bulgarian society because many other factors of a different order, common to all women, are also at work here in the country (e.g. compulsory education, de facto compulsory employment, etc.). Moreover, the very civic emancipation of women in Bulgaria under the conditions of the communist regime is a complex and contradictory process, for which there are different assessments (cf. Ghodsee 2009; 2018; Todorova 2021).

What is undoubted, however, is that Roma women activists trained in the schools of the Fatherland Front had a powerful impact on the development of the processes of emancipation of Roma women within the Roma community itself. Of course, within the framework of one article, these processes cannot be studied in detail, so here we will limit ourselves to presenting only a few curious (at least for us) examples in this direction.

One such example is the breaking of endogamous boundaries in the Roma community. Roma, in general, are a heterogeneous community with internal subdivisions at different levels within which endogamy is maintained (Marushiakova and Popov 2016c). As a matter of fact, as with all endogamous communities, there have always been cases of mixed marriages. With the modern tendency (even to a small extent), exceptions become general rules. Still, all this should not lead to the denial of the common historical origin of individual communities. Especially in the Balkans, where Roma settled since at least the fifteenth century (Marushiakova and Popov 2001), within large urban neighbourhoods where representatives of different Roma groups live side by side, the marital boundaries between them gradually disappear. Endogamy becomes territorial (due to the practically limited opportunities for Roma from other cities to contact in their settled way of life). Roma women's education in the Fatherland Front schools breaks the boundaries of their territorially limited contacts. There were indeed only women at the schools, but they all had relatives and neighbours of marriageable age, i.e. opportunities for connection between young people significantly increased. Moreover, it has often been (and continues to be) a practice among the emerging new, civil Roma elite (different from the traditional one) to purposefully seek out young men or women with better education, more modern thinking, etc., from other Roma communities for acquaintance and possible future marriage. The schools of the Fatherland Front turn out to be one such opportunity (at least, we are aware of several dozen such cases, and probably there have been many more).

Another specific area of social life within the community, on which female graduates of the schools of the Fatherland Front had (at least to some extent) influence, is the development of the so-called *londzhi*. In certain places (more specifically in the capital Sofia), Roma women gradually became the

main driving (and guiding) force of the londzhis. The roots of this unique phenomenon can be found in ethnically detached Gypsy guilds (*esnaf*). Such guilds appeared in the Ottoman Empire, which legally regulated the activities of the guilds only in 1773. Still, the historical data (such as the list of esnafs in Istanbul, made on the orders of Sultan Murad IV (1623–1640) shows that many Gypsies living in Istanbul were members of different guilds already in the previous century (Çelebi 1967: 207–336). The ethnicization of the guilds in the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century was directly related to general processes of ethnicization in the Empire, and ethnically detached esnafs were part of the national movements of the Balkan peoples (Marushiakova and Popov 2016b: 76–89). The Gypsy esnaf's organizations did not disappear with the end of the Ottoman Empire. They also continued to exist in the newly independent states in the Balkans that arose during the nineteenth century after the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire. In the new conditions, the esnafs transformed and modernized but continued to occupy an important place in the community's life and determine its position in society. The independent Bulgarian state required their registration as professional associations. Thus, some transformed directly into an association. Such was the case with Porter's Esnaf in Lom in 1896. In other cases, professional communities created new associations, which even made their own flags, often resembling old guild flags. One such was the Porter's Association *Trud* (Labour), founded in Kyustendil in 1901 (they still preserve their old flag), the first Sofia flower-selling association *Badeshte* (Future), founded in Sofia in 1909, etc. In the capital Sofia alone, in 1932, there were 26 Gypsy professional associations, and new ones continued to be created (Marushiakova and Popov 2021: 134). These professional associations gradually expanded their social functions and some transformed into mutual aid associations. To a large extent, they were the basis of the development of the Roma civic emancipation movement in the 1920s and 1930s in Bulgaria (Marushiakova and Popov 2021: 52–3).

After the Second World War, under the conditions of the communist regime, these professional and mutual aid associations transformed again into informal (not officially registered) associations of families. They were most often denoted by the names of the former guilds. There are summarizing designations, the most widely known is the notion used by Roma from Sofia, namely *londzhi* ("londzha" – singular, "londzhi" – plural). Similar to esnaf, londzha is also a term from the times of the Ottoman Empire – that was the term for the designation of the general meetings of the individual guilds. Such londzhis existed in Sofia and other cities of Western Bulgaria, such as Kyustendil, Mihailovgrad (today Montana), etc. and only men, heads of families, were members. These associations functioned in two directions. They were mutual aid funds for their members (collecting membership fees

and giving out loans to members in urgent need). They also maintained and controlled observance of the established community's moral and ethical norms. The secret services of the regime (state security) repeatedly alerted the authorities about the potential dangers that the existence of such "unofficial" (i.e. not controlled by the state power) associations among the Roma could lead to (Държавна сигурност 2015: 439). The authorities, however, did not take repressive measures against them. Instead, they created conditions that essentially rendered their existence meaningless, such as advertising the possibilities of obtaining loans from the state savings banks in Gypsy neighbourhoods, the creation of mutual aid funds in workplaces, and the establishment of "comrade courts" in neighbourhoods, where domestic conflicts were discussed and resolved, etc. Thus, men's londzhi gradually died out on their own in the 1960s and 1970s, but in Sofia especially in the Fakulteta and Filipovtsi mahalas (i.e. the neighbourhoods that arose from the old Konyovitsa and Tatarli neighbourhoods, remnants of which still exist) the londzhi transformed again and were taken over by the women. In the 1970s and 1980s, women's londzhis not only continued to develop actively but also expanded their functions, e.g. organizing outings and excursions in the country for their members and their families, shared celebrations, etc. (Кметова 1992: 68–73). The londzhi did not cease to exist after the fall of the communist regime in 1989, but increasingly intertwined their activities with the new evangelical churches (Славкова 2007). The londzhi continue to be one of the main channels through which the ideology and practices of Roma women's emancipation work within the community.

Another example of the irreversibility of the processes of civic emancipation of Roma women is the celebration of March 8. During the communist regime in Bulgaria, this day was an official public holiday (Women's Day). Since the end of communist rule in 1989, this holiday is not officially celebrated anymore. Nowadays, this day is an occasion for public campaigns in the media, which are renewed every year by pro-Western liberal ideologues. The holiday is declared (and refuted) as a "communist legacy." However, the holiday continues to be celebrated by large parts of the country's population in various forms (even just as a nostalgic memory) at the family level. However, the situation with the Roma is very different, especially in large urban neighbourhoods. In many places (mainly in Western Bulgaria), on this day (practically on the nearest Saturday or Sunday) large public celebrations are held, which turn into a general celebration for the entire neighbourhood, with lots of music and dancing, and that is precisely under the name Women's Day. In this way, it turns out that the holiday, which was official and institutionally organized in the past, has transformed and has already become part of the community's festive traditions.

We should especially note that this celebration of March 8 by the Roma in Bulgaria is entirely a deed of the community itself, without any initiation or financial support from the state, local authorities, or the non-governmental sector. The comparison with another holiday, International Roma Day (April 8), is interesting. After the end of the communist regime, with the support of international donors, this holiday – through the Roma NGO sector – entered the Roma communities and is celebrated with several public events (processions, concerts, etc.), especially actively until Bulgaria acceded to the European Union. After Bulgaria was internationally recognized as a democratic state, international donors withdrew, and, gradually, this holiday is celebrated less and less often, mostly with the sporadic support of local municipal authorities (however, it continues to be noted by Roma activists on the Internet). This development, compared to the celebration of March 8, clearly shows that the power of money alone cannot change the "normal" social development in life and customs. The results of social engineering can be transferred easily only to the virtual space but cannot have a sustainable impact on the communities. Moving reality to the virtual world is the leading trend in our contemporary post-normal society, and only the future will show how lasting it will be.

Conclusion

In this article, we did not discuss the goals pursued by the communist authorities in the USSR and Bulgaria when supporting the development of Roma civic emancipation in general and women's part in particular. Profiting from the distance of time, we looked at the overall results of the communist policy towards Roma women. In this sense, the specific and strategic goals pursued and their ideological "packaging" are irrelevant to us. The main question here is which of the two presented models of state policies for the development of Roma women's activism – from the top down (as in the USSR in the 1920s and 1930s) or from the bottom up (as in Bulgaria in the 1960s and 1970s) – turned out to be more efficient and gives better results from the point of view of the current position of the Roma woman in society and her community. Of course, it would be naive to expect that we could reach such a broad conclusion within a single article, and this can (and should) be the subject of new, much more extensive and comprehensive studies. We will allow ourselves to give only one example in this direction, without pretending to be representative. It is about present-day Roma women who are getting a higher university education. Accurate data in this regard are, for understandable reasons, lacking. However, we can generally say that in today's Russia (and the post-Soviet space as a whole), the number of Roma

with university education can be calculated in tens, as female graduates are, in most cases, exceptions (and they are mainly descendants of mixed marriages, de facto living outside the community). In Bulgaria, we can calculate the number of Roma with higher education in the thousands, and women definitely predominate among them.

We cannot refrain from narrating a case in this direction. Ten or fifteen years ago, we were part of a commission, mainly including representatives of the Roma NGO sector, which had to approve proposals for scholarship holders of one of the subsidiary organizations of the Open Society network. In her speech, the representative of the Bulgarian state repeated all the ideologically correct clichés about the need to support the doubly discriminated Roma woman and called for preferences for female candidates. The committee's reaction (perhaps not very politely) was a roar of laughter – in practice, the overwhelming part of the applicants were already women. As other speakers explained, the problem is finding young Roma men who want to study at a university. Unfortunately, there is a lack of public data on the total number and distribution by gender of all previous Roma grantees (probably the donors have reasons for this). Still, there is every reason to assume that the situation is more or less similar in the entire region of Central, Southeast, and Eastern Europe (i.e. in the countries of the former so-called socialist camp).

When talking about the contemporary situation and the problems of Roma women in Central, South-Eastern, and Eastern Europe, the influence of Roma women's activism during the communist regimes is far from the only, nor the most critical factor for understanding and explaining the processes taking place in our days. Nevertheless, this factor still has its own, not insignificant, importance, and modern researchers should not neglect it.

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DA. Държавен архив – Благоевград (State Archive – Blagoevgrad): f. 628, op. 4, a.e. 28.

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GARF. Государственный архив Российской Федерации (State Archive of the Russian Federation): f. 1235, op. 1, d. 27; f. P 393, op. 43 A, d. 1763; f. P 1235, op. 119, d. 9; f. P 1235, op. 123, d. 28; f. P 1235, op. 127, d. 8; f. P 1235, op. 130, d. 5; f. P 9550, op. 2, d. 2010.

GTsMSIR. Государственный центральный музей современной истории России (State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia).
LANB. Личный Архив Николая Бессонова (Personal Archive of Nikolay Bessonov): f. Николай Саткевич, d. Нина Дударова; f. Николай Саткевич, d. Ольга Панкова.
PAVK. Personal Archive of Valdemar Kalinin: f. Nikolay Pankov.
RGALI. Российский государственный архив литературы и искусства (Russian State Archive of Literature and Art): f. 675 op. 2, d. 464; f. 656, op. 3, d. 4759, l. 36-360б.
RGAKFD. Российский государственный архив кинофотодокументов (Russian State Archive of Film and Photo Documents): d. 99274, сн. 4-99274 ч/б.
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