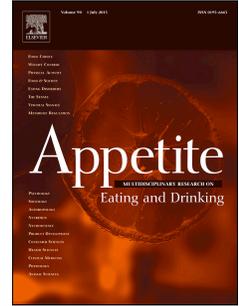


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Eating banitsa in London: Re-inventing Bulgarian foodways in the context of Inter-EU migration

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Eating Banitsa in London:

Re-inventing Bulgarian Foodways in the Context of Inter-EU Migration

Based on interviews and surveys of Bulgarians living in the UK, the article explores the changing nature of Bulgarian foodways in the UK. Using banitsa, a 'traditional' Bulgarian breakfast dish, as the starting point for the research, the article examines the relationships Bulgarians in the UK have with their host and home communities as well as with their national identity and sense of belonging and the effect these have on their foodways and food consumption. The main claim the article makes is that the context of migration and of being a migrant engenders a deliberate attempt to foster and maintain an identity that is most often expressed in national terms, and most immediately performed in the everyday through food. Migrant belonging changes in such a way that the everyday becomes a means of identity construction and expression. Attitudes towards food - the making and serving of Bulgarian banitsa - illustrate this change.

Key words: Bulgaria; foodways; national food; food consumption; Inter-EU migration; diaspora; national identity.

How and what does a Bulgarian abroad eat? This question has tortured Bulgarian intellectuals for years, since the writer Aleko Konstantinov described, in his satirical feuilletons (1895), the quintessential Bulgarian provincial type Bây Ganyo on his way to Europe: tearing a 'delicate' lump of kashkaval (a semi-hard cheese) and gulping it down noisily with a chunk of bread, his back turned to the other travellers sharing the same train car to conceal the remaining treasures hidden in his travelling saddlebag. The detached embarrassment of the fin-de-siècle intellectual and the impression the fictional Bây Ganyo left in Europe has been imprinted in the cultural psyche of Bulgarians: since the feuilletons are a required reading in the schools' curriculum, Bulgarians are all too familiar with this fictional embarrassment at representing Bulgarianness abroad. 'How do we eat in Europe?' From bringing their own 'saddlebags' across customs, through sharing meals with strangers unfamiliar with Bulgarian cuisine (Bây Ganyo proudly rubs an extra hot chilli pepper in the 'pale' soup served to him by his hosts in Prague), to preparing home-made food for family and friends, Bulgarian foodways in Europe reveal a great deal about Bulgarianness, about Bulgarian diaspora's home-making habits, as well as about ideas of Bulgarian national cuisine.

This article sets out to explore the changing nature of Bulgarian foodways in the UK in the context of intra-EU migration. As previously argued (see, for example: Oum, 2005; Rabikowska, 2010) food consumption reveals the relationship migrants have with their

home and host communities as well as with their national identity and sense of belonging. Using banitsa, a 'traditional' Bulgarian breakfast dish of layered or rolled thin sheets of pastry (normally filo pastry) with eggs and cheese, as the starting point for the research, the article explores the above-mentioned relationships and the effect they have on Bulgarian migrants' foodways, food consumption and construction of Bulgarian food and identity. While the focus here is on Bulgarian migrants in the UK and Bulgarian foodways, the issues the article raises also touch upon the search for authenticity in the tactical appropriation of everyday culture, the social construction of national food, and the impact of intra-EU migration on migrants' identities, as well as on the concept of national food and its production and consumption more generally.

Bulgarian migration, migrants and the construction of Bulgarian national identity and foodways have generally been understudied; in particular, there is little research on Bulgarian migration and Bulgarian diasporas. This is an oversight, given the wide academic attention and research into intra-EU migration and especially migration from South-Eastern and Central Europe to the old EU member states – and the implications of that. Most of the existing studies focus either on labour migration or country specific policies in relation to Bulgarian, and Bulgarian and Romanian, migration (see, for example: Balch & Balabanova, 2016; and Stanek, 2009). Likewise, there is a lacuna with regard to Bulgarian food. Most of the writing on Bulgarian food and foodways invariably focuses on Bulgarian yogurt, the science behind it, and more recently its history and relationship to Bulgarian national identity (see, for example: Nancheva, 2019; Stoilova, 2014; and Yotova, 2018). Wider questions of what is Bulgarian food, whether Bulgaria has a national cuisine, and how Bulgarian foodways have been affected by the end of Communism, EU integration and globalisation, have barely been addressed in the literature; notable recent exceptions are the writing of Maeva (2017), with regard to the preservation of Bulgarian cultural heritage, including food, in the UK and Norway, and Shkodrova (2018a, 2018b, and 2018c) on Bulgarian food culture more generally.

The context in which our study takes place is also important. Brexit – the British referendum decision to leave the EU – has been a major disruption to migrants' settled ways. This is particularly relevant in the case of Bulgarian migration to the UK because it is relatively recent (Maeva, 2017). As of December 2017 there are 87,000 Bulgarians over the age of 16 in the UK, 70,000 of which are in full time employment (ONS, 2018). Bulgarians were officially allowed to travel to the UK visa-free upon joining the EU in 2007 but restrictions on their rights, particularly employment rights, were not fully lifted until 2012. This prevented socially visible waves of migration (such as that of Poles to the UK post-2004), even as Bulgarians have gradually settled in small communities across London and the rest of the UK. Beyond Brexit's effects on Bulgarians', or for that matter EU nationals' place in the UK and their sense of belonging (Nancheva & Ranta, 2018), it also has an immediate effect on newly opened food shops and restaurants which cater for Bulgarian diasporic communities, as well as on established ways of procuring and preparing Bulgarian food.

The disruptive nature of Brexit has prompted re-thinking of trajectories of migration and prospects of return, and is thus conducive of identifying more clearly subtle or deliberate constructions of national identity. Our focus on national food in this context allows us to learn more about this process of re-thinking of home on a personal level and in an everyday context: a goal often empirically unattainable to studies of national identity and migration, because of the numerous methodological hurdles of studying identity (aptly addressed by Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). But a study of changing foodways is valuable as it has the potential to provide insights into our understanding of national food itself as a social construct of immediate relevance to belonging and integration (for more on the relationship between food and national identity, see: Ichijo & Ranta, 2016).

Our article is based on 19 semi-structured interviews, two focus groups (n=12) and two surveys (n=99 and n=275), which were conducted in two stages, as well as visits to three Bulgarian restaurants and five Bulgarian food shops in London (Sep-Dec 2017). The first stage of data collection took place in the period leading up to the UK referendum on leaving the EU (May-June 2016) and was part of a wider study on EU nationals living in the UK. For that study we ran a number of focus groups, two of which were comprised solely of Bulgarians. The first took place in Burgess Hill and comprised of five Bulgarians, including two couples, who all knew each other; the second focus group took place in South London and comprised of seven individuals, including two couples, who again all knew each other. The focus groups were organised through personal contacts of the two authors. The focus groups took place almost entirely in English and were recorded and later transcribed. We were primarily interested in questions relating to integration, belonging and national identity in the context of Brexit, but we generally allowed the conversation to flow. At a number of points during the conversation we used food as a mechanism for further interrogating the above questions, with reference to food shopping, cooking, bringing food from Bulgaria, gendered aspects of food, diets and eating habits. In South London, food became a major part of the initial conversation because the participants, unprompted, were talking about and preparing banitsa for us as we arrived.

In the pre-referendum period we also conducted a nation-wide survey of EU nationals in the UK (n=265). This survey did not contain questions on food; the focus was on integration, belonging and national identity in the context of Brexit. In particular we were interested in understanding how our participants positioned themselves with regard to their host and home communities. For the purpose of this research we only used the Bulgarian part of the sample (n=99).

In the post-referendum period (Sep-Dec 2017) we conducted research focused explicitly on Bulgarians living in the UK. We conducted nineteen semi-structured interviews in London and Sussex (Brighton, Burgess Hill, and Heyward's Heath), in English (there were a few instances where participants were unsure of how to explain a point in English and used Bulgarian) which were recorded and transcribed. The interviewees included three couples,

two of whom had previously participated in our pre-referendum focus groups. The interviews were conducted mostly in participants' homes and public cafes, and places of work for shop and restaurant owners, and were mostly organised through personal contacts. We asked our interviewees similar questions to those of our focus groups, in order to compare the responses. In general, we endeavoured to provide our interviewees with the time and space to tell use their stories, for many these included food elements.

After the referendum we also carried out a survey of Bulgarians living in the UK in Bulgarian (n=275). The survey was distributed through several online migrant networks of Bulgarians in the UK. The survey asked questions on integration, belonging and national identity, which we wanted to compare to our earlier survey, but also a number of specific questions on food. We asked how often people cooked Bulgarian food; who they cooked Bulgarian food for; what ingredients were used in the cooking of Bulgarian food; their use of Bulgarian food shops and restaurants; how often they brought food back from Bulgaria; the importance they attached to Bulgarian food; and about their general diet and food habits. The survey sample was not intended to be representative.¹

It is important to note that our interview respondents slightly differ from those of our surveys in that they generally have been in the UK longer and are formally educated to a higher degree. This was not intentional and was the result of the fact that the interviews were all arranged through our personal contacts.

Our data collection was greatly assisted by the position of one of the authors as a Bulgarian national living in the UK: where difficulties in expression in English were involved, where cultural references had to be identified, ad hoc interpretation or explanation by the co-author mitigated the situation. It goes without saying that the co-author positionality has had an impact on the data collection and interpretation to a certain degree.

Why banitsa?

Banitsa is one of Bulgaria's most recognisable national dishes and part of a wider family of pastries eaten in the Balkans and the Middle East (*borek*); the name banitsa (from 'gibanitsa') derives from the verb 'to fold' (гъбнѣти or гъна in the old Slavic dialects): the pastry sheets banitsa is made from are folded in elaborately to create simultaneously lightness and texture. Bulgarian banitsa is also a traditional symbol of home and home-making as it cannot be prepared on the go and is closely associated with Bulgarian family

¹ Our sample included 93 men and 182 women; 26 arrived before 2004, 18 between 2004-2007, 61 between 2008-2012, and 170 after 2013; 54 of our respondents were aged 18-29, 98 aged 30-39, 72 aged 40-49, 32 aged 50-59, and 19 aged 60+; apart from six, all were born in Bulgaria; 165 were in full time employment, 38 were self-employed and 25 owned their own business (which corresponds well with the employment figures from the ONS); 36% were married, 8% were in a civil partnership, and 22% in long term relationship; 62% had children in the UK; 258 were based in England, 14 in Scotland and 3 in Northern Ireland; within England the distribution was heavily towards the South and South East: main areas were greater London 16%, Hampshire 15%, Norfolk 9%, Kent, Surrey and Sussex 6% each, Hertfordshire 5%, all other areas were 3% and lower.

holidays (weddings, baptisms, sending off travellers or soldiers) and national holidays. Bantisa is particularly linked to Christmas and New Year's Eve when pieces of paper with written good wishes for the New Year are hidden between the pastry sheets, known in Bulgarian as kusmeti (lucky charms) (Maeva, 2017); according to Bela (female, late 30s, Brighton, homemaker, has been in the UK for ten years and is married to a British national) 'Christmas is not Christmas without kusmeti'. While readymade banitsa can be bought from street stands and fast-food shacks, or frozen from supermarkets, 'proper' banitsa must be prepared at home. Interestingly enough, of the three Bulgarian restaurants we visited only one served banitsa, which the owner Kiril (male, early 40s, London, has been in the UK for ten years) claimed: *it's just like we used to do it back home!*

There are numerous ways of making banitsa: whether you line the pastry in squares or roll them in tubes; whether you include Bulgarian yoghurt or just cheese and whisked eggs; whether you make it with spinach, or leeks, or milk. Crucial are the moisture and the baking time. If the bottom crust ends up being soggy (or burnt), the dish is ruined; with banitsa the texture is just as important as the taste. Avoiding this is further complicated by adding unfamiliar ingredients, or using a new oven, or not folding the pastry sheets properly. Discussions over the benefits of a gas oven over an electric one for the baking of banitsa are one of the eternal topics for debate between Bulgarian housewives. Another is the question of what recipe to use. Every family has a banitsa recipe passed down from mother or grandmother to daughter or granddaughter (and it is, as a rule, the matriarch who is the guardian of the family's way of baking banitsa).

For our interviewees the memory of eating banitsa has been so finely interwoven with memories of childhood, long summer breaks from school, and Christmas holidays, that it outlines in a unique way a Bulgarian's feeling of home. It is this feeling of home that links food experiences with broader questions of identity. Struggling to find expression in the everyday, identity perceptions easily attach to tastes and habits of home, thus finding exact focus and vocabulary. In many ways talking about banitsa, as a form of gustatory nostalgia (Holtzman, 2006), helped us examine our interviewees' feelings and thoughts with regard to the concepts of place and space in Bulgaria in the past, and at present in London.

Indeed, banitsa is not just part of Bulgarians' food memories, it is literally found everywhere: it is cut into small cubes at children's birthday parties; it is eaten at breakfast with yoghurt or milk; it is prepared in a ritual manner for special celebrations; it was offered to us unprompted on several occasions when we came to conduct our interviews. It is also the Bulgarian dish most of our respondents professed to preparing and eating at home. When asked what Bulgarian foods he knew how to cook, Boris (male, early 40s, Burgess Hill, business owner, has been in the UK for over twenty years and is married to a non-Bulgarian EU national) replied after a short pause: 'Banitsa, of course' (before listing a few additional dishes). It is also one of the few Bulgarian dishes UK-born children of Bulgarian

parents are used to eating. Bela told us that 'banitsa is *the only* Bulgarian food [her British born 5 year old daughter] like[d] to eat'.

For the Bulgarians we interviewed one thing was clear: banitsa was the dish most firmly associated with the homeland and the 'taste of home'. The identification and perception of banitsa as a Bulgarian national food was shared by all of our interviewees, even though, as we discuss below, national food is a problematic construction. When we initially conceived of this project we did not intend to focus on banitsa. However, it was the one dish that came up in all of our interviews and focus groups. As a result it invariably became the starting point for this article and for our attempt to understand the changing nature of Bulgarian foodways in the UK and the concept of Bulgarian and national food.

Banitsa and the Search for the National Abroad

What is particularly interesting about the banitsa Bulgarians prepare in the UK is that there are rarely, if at all, any Bulgarian products inside it! This raises a number of interesting questions about what is and what makes a national dish. Is a national dish national because of the ingredients from which it is made? Is the place of production important? Does it matter who prepares the dish? In the UK banitsa is usually prepared with Greek feta cheese, Turkish - or any - yoghurt, British eggs, and Middle Eastern filo pastry, and to which a variety of additional ingredients might be added. This is also true for most traditional dishes Bulgarians in the UK prepare: peppers stuffed with rice and mince (*palneni chuski*), dry cured spicy sausages (*lukanka*), fermented cabbage (*kiselo zele*). While most Bulgarians we surveyed claimed to eat Bulgarian food regularly - a third of respondents claimed to eat Bulgarian food everyday – only a small minority (just over 3%: 9 out of 275) said they used only Bulgarian products when cooking Bulgarian food; 22% said they used some Bulgarian products (62 out of 275); but the majority said they rarely, if at all, used Bulgarian products (they simply used whatever they could buy).

Authors: *Do you cook Bulgarian food?*

Yana (female, late 30s, Heyward's Heath, has been in the UK for fifteen years): (lists a number of dishes that her husband normally cooks) ... *I also make banitsa once a week.*

Authors: *Everyone seems to be making banitsa.*

Lenko (Yana's husband, late 30s, Heyward's Heath, has been in the UK for fifteen years): *It's easy; it's a great pastry for breakfast.*

Yana: *The kids like it, which is very important* [we were previously told that their British born kids do not like traditional Bulgarian Christmas food, which is mostly vegan].

Lenko: *It's all good stuff you know, cheese, eggs, you know.*

Yana: *We buy feta, which is the main thing.*

Authors: *You don't buy Bulgarian cheese (sirene)?*

Yana: *Just feta, Greek feta.*

Authors: *Isn't Greek Feta different from Bulgarian cheese?*

Yana: *It's ok, it's kinda similar, what you now get in many shops doesn't even taste like proper [Bulgarian] cheese.*

Even though Greek feta and Bulgarian sirene are similar types of soft brine-pickled cheeses (El-Salam et al. 1993), there are categorical differences in milk composition, texture and, of course, taste. Taking into account Mitnz's argument about regional cuisines (1996), both types of cheese and their numerous varieties have a shared history in the Balkans, but they have become objects of different national identity projects – and as a result of different national cuisines. Additionally, there is a debate about the place Greek food has in Balkan food culture: it is for example, the only country in the region that had not been under a communist regime, and planned economy, which has undoubtedly had an impact (Bradatan, 2003). Thus, the national denominator cannot easily be overlooked when we discuss the preparation of *national* dishes, and the need to 'make do' with what is available.

The debate over the authenticity of Bulgarian food and the need to 'make do' with what is available was clear in many other examples. Our interviewees explained that they brought some food items back from Bulgaria with them and bought everything else locally; over half of our Bulgarian survey respondents claimed to bringing back food with them when travelling to Bulgaria. Of course, it can hardly be otherwise: fetching fresh dairy, meat and vegetables from Bulgaria on a regular basis is impractical. Besides, products brought from Bulgaria may well have been imported from elsewhere; a passionate public discussion in Bulgaria about the most national of Bulgarian products - the plain yoghurt - has recently revealed that it is as a rule made from milk imported from Hungary (Georgieva, 2010 and 2017; and Volkanov, 2014). Other traditional Bulgarian products associated with home have been subject to similar transformations of taste and branding with the end of communism in Bulgaria in 1989, and Bulgaria's integration into the EU, and the re-structuring of the central economy into a market one that this entailed. Reduction of livestock, changes in subsidizing and labour regulations, privatization, and fragmentation have meant that Bulgaria has ceased to produce many of its traditional products and has begun to import substitutes for them or for the products that make them (Nancheva, 2019).

Even if Bulgarian products are explicitly sought and procured in the UK - say, yoghurt from the small Bulgarian shops in North London – they are often such that one would not have tasted back home. This is because small Bulgarian distributors have identified niches of demand in diasporic communities to market and place brands - especially dairy brands - that cannot compete with the established big brands in supermarkets and food stores at home. One such example is the Vedrare dairy brand named after the eponymous village in the district of Plovdiv. With a population of around 1,000 people, the village is little known in Bulgaria, and the dairy that it hosts is not an established brand name. Indeed, its suppliers in the UK recounted to us that to be able to sell in Bulgaria their products had to be labelled under one of the big supermarket chains (Billa). In the UK, however, the dairy brand has established itself as an up-market product range among the diaspora customers (and as an

exotic quality ethnic range among the non-Bulgarian customers who are exposed to it). The resulting consumption of Bulgarian dairy products in the UK re-creates the familiar tastes in new ways and under different labels. This illustrates the dynamics of re-inventing the national in the context of migrantness. It also highlights some of the interesting evolutions of existing foodways in Europe as a consequence of the customs union and the single market; a small national business unable to compete within its national market appeals directly to diaspora groups elsewhere in the EU.

Despite the appearance of a number of Bulgarian shops in the UK in recent years, as of Dec 2017, there were only 16 Bulgarian food shops in London, and a similar number in the rest of the country; normally one shop in each of the main counties. This might explain why few in our Bulgarian survey shopped at Bulgarian shops (34% shopped 2-3 a month and 23% once a month). However, most Bulgarians in the survey and in our interviews said that for special occasions, particularly for Easter or Christmas, they did buy specifically Bulgarian products and if possible from Bulgarian shops. Our data suggests that if there were more shops, Bulgarians would frequent these more often. As a result, most have to cook Bulgarian food using non-Bulgarian products, *make do* with what they find in local shops, in the case of banitsa this means making do with Greek feta, which is easily procured in the UK.

Upon tying up the cooking apron, the migrant looks to re-create small bits of home, of the familiar amidst the new world of migrantness (a concept originating from cultural and ethnic studies in the 1980s to describe the conditions and dynamics of being a migrant and the context within which these unfold, see for instance: Bottomley, 1997). It is the process of creation that brings in the familiar 'taste of home' and the connection to the homeland, not always the products that get used in the process. So it often does not matter if the filo pastry comes from Tesco (the leading supermarket brand in the UK), the local Turkish shop, or if it bears the familiar brand in Cyrillic. Stepping into a small Bulgarian food shop in the UK, the Bulgarian customer is looking for affirmation rather than authenticity. Whatever is found in the shop affirms Bulgarianness, even if it has never been seen or used before. This enables the discovery of Bulgarian brands and foods abroad and the re-shaping of Bulgarianness in a manner unique for the migration context; often all that is required to provide comfort is the perception of 'home'. The sought and perceived, rather than actual, link with the national recreates home abroad, and then gets described as 'traditional Bulgarian' and authentically national.

Similarly, the Bulgarian restaurants and cafes in the UK, which have appeared after Bulgaria's EU accession, seek to re-create a vision of the traditional that is aimed specifically at migrant audiences. Their decor is based on ethno-national imaginaries which are not seen often in Bulgaria proper: at least not any more. In one restaurant we noticed a wall map of Greater Bulgaria depicting a nationalist dream of unification of all lands claimed as Bulgarian in the early years of modern Bulgarian statehood. If such imaginaries are at all re-created in Bulgaria, it is to showcase a vision of the traditional to foreign tourists or as an expression of

romantic nationalism. Beyond the decor, and despite the claims for authenticity and traditionality, these restaurants do not have exclusively ethno-national menus. To the contrary, they feature eclectic collections of what can be found across the food high street in Bulgaria: from pizzas and pastas, to Caesar salad and grills. One of the restaurants we visited served 'English Breakfast' alongside 'Bulgarian' breakfast', which looked surprisingly similar to the continental variety. When Bulgarian dishes are listed, they are not necessarily prepared with any compliance to the traditional: the Shopska salad is as a rule grated over with Greek feta or a mid- or lower range quality cheese (depending on the premises) rather than the sheep's cheese in brine that features in the traditional dish. The Bulgarian restaurants' patrons may notice the difference ('it does not taste like home!') but this does not diminish the experience of dining at a 'Bulgarian' restaurant.

A similar experience is recreated in the home preparation of 'Bulgarian' foods, such as banitsa. The cook's expertise and emotion, often the only national ingredients in the making of banitsa, are intrinsically linked to memories that carry with them the feeling and taste of home. Regardless of the exact recipe - traditional or not - the making and serving of banitsa itself creates homeliness through the conversations it engenders, and the claims to insider knowledge, authenticity and gender relations that it is an expression of (the following conversation took place as we were about to conduct our interview):

Eva (Female, early 40s, London, has been in the UK for nine years and is married to a fellow Bulgarian): *Did you make the banitsa?*

Svetla (Female, late 30s, London, has been in the UK for just under a year, she moved to the UK with her Bulgarian husband): *Yes. The only thing I can make.*

Eva: *It is not soft. Does not have that distinctive fluffiness.*

Lia (Female, early 30s, London, has been in the UK for six year): *This fluffiness comes with 30 years of practice in the kitchen!*

Eva: *I don't put yoghurt in the pastry myself, just cheese and eggs.*

Svetla: *Really? So how is it?*

Lia: *It's tasty! Just more crispy. My grandmother used to make banitsa like that.*

This special bonding effect of banitsa is what we observed in the making and serving of other Bulgarian national dishes (and beverages): pickled vegetables (*turshia*), dried sausages (*sudzuk*), rakia. It is not so much their actual 'national' quality that is significant for the cook and the guests at the table. Rather, it is the claim to national expertise and the attached emotion of bringing this expertise into the practice of re-creating the national that are significant here. Through the preparation and the serving of national dishes the cook and the guests stake a claim of belonging amidst the foreign, and thus carve a space for themselves (almost without exception our interviewees, and respondents to our Bulgarian survey, told us that they prepared Bulgarian food mostly for their families and Bulgarian guests). This is, indeed, the essence of home-making: of eating banitsa in London.

Performing the Nation in the UK

With the Bây Ganyo awkwardness in the back of their minds, Bulgarians' immediate impulse abroad may be to fit in: hide the saddlebags brought from home, do as others do. But the rules of intra-EU migration have meant that Bulgarians travel as Europeans and are allowed to settle without having to 'prove' their deservingness (on the 'deserving migrant', see: Dhaliwal & Forkert, 2016). Thus, migration has become more a trajectory of social mobility, self-exploration and self-identification than a legal process (see Pennings and Seeleib-Keiser 2018, also Rechi 2015), a point that emerged very clearly in our interviews. As a result, and within the rule of intra-EU migration, national distinctiveness and heritage become a value rather than a disadvantage (see: Risse, 2010 on the significance of national diversity in the construction of European collective identity). Our interviewees spoke, on the one hand, about the fact that they felt comfortable living in the UK, and did not face any particular discrimination,² and about the importance of making sure their children learn about their culture and speak the Bulgarian language (these results were similar in our Bulgarian survey: 76% of respondents to our Bulgarian survey said they spoke Bulgarian to their children daily and 45% said they visited Bulgarian/Orthodox churches during religious festivals and holidays). Food is one of the most immediate cultural elements which everybody partakes in, so it is unsurprising that it is foregrounded in everyday manifestations of identity in the context of migration. This focus on food is occasionally reinforced through a mainstreaming foodie culture that transforms what we eat into cultural experiences in their own right (Johnston and Baumann, 2015). These two trends capture both migrants who are simply carving a space for themselves in their new context of migrantness, and those who are actively seeking to showcase their own cultural identity from a perspective of cultural superiority (Rabikowska, 2010). Thus we see foodways being resurrected in the context of migrantness which have not been part of modern lifestyles in Bulgaria for quite some time now. The desire to taste home, in conjunction with the right to free movement and the ease of travel within the context of EU integration, has facilitated this drive to re-invent tradition and has opened the door for small Bulgarian food suppliers targeting the Bulgarian diasporic communities in the UK.

One example which illustrates the above mentioned trend is the growing interest in home-made Bulgarian yoghurt with starter cultures bought, mostly online, or brought from Bulgaria. Yoghurt is one of the most quintessentially Bulgarian foods as the lactic acid producing bacteria *Lactobacillus Bulgaricus* are named after the nationality of their 1905 discoverer Dr Stamen Grigorov (Stoilova 2018). Yet, yoghurt making has, since the 1950s, been entirely industrialised in then communist Bulgaria (Stoilova, 2014) and the practice of making yoghurt at home - relegated to remote rural areas and older generations. Now

² In both of our surveys a majority of respondents claimed they did not face discrimination (EU nationals' survey 63%; Bulgarian survey 71%). These responses should be viewed within the context of Brexit and the debates in the British media regarding the rights of EU citizens in the UK. The difference between the surveys might be explained by the fact that our EU nationals' survey took place before the Brexit vote.

entire online businesses have emerged, and informal networks been established, for the selling, growing and exchanging of certified yoghurt cultures, especially aimed at diasporic communities. The renewed interest in home-made Bulgarian yoghurt signifies as much an interest in the specific qualities of yoghurt as a food staple, as it does the rekindling of a tradition linked with Bulgarianness and a vision of home. Of course the importance attached in British national media (and elsewhere) to the health benefits of yogurt and its association with a healthier life style and to vegetarianism also support this activity. The fact that such a vision of home may have never been a reality before, for the particular migrants looking to resurrect it, is a further illustration of the active search for homeliness in the context of migrantness. The two Bulgarian men we introduced earlier Boris and Lenko have been making Bulgarian yoghurt in the UK for a number of years.

Lenko: *The main thing with Bulgarian yoghurt is the two bacteria [one of which is Lactobacillus Bulgaricus], it should taste tart and sour, but most of the stuff you buy in the shops [in Bulgaria] isn't ... you can make the real Bulgarian yoghurt anywhere if you have the bacteria, and we have it here!*

Authors: *Do you have it here?*

Lenko: *Yes, we [with his wife] have it here, we make it every few months.*

Authors: *How did you get it?*

Lenko: *We either buy it in Bulgaria when we go back or through a website.*

According to Lenko, there are many Bulgarian yoghurt aficionados around the world and many small sellers of live cultures in Bulgaria. Boris and other interviewees confirmed that 'many Bulgarians bring back Bulgarian yoghurt from their parents and relatives and use it here' to make 'the proper Bulgarian yoghurt.' In an interesting take on De Certeau's 'making do' (2009), our participants thought that 'home made' yogurt was a more authentic Bulgarian yogurt than the brands sold in Bulgarian supermarkets – and studies of the technologization of yoghurt production give credence to this perception (Stoilova, 2014). It might also be that several of our participants no longer associate traditional food and tastes with what is often sold in Bulgaria:

Authors: (as part of a discussion on Bulgarian yogurt) *Do you buy Bulgarian dairy products? Like cheese and yogurt?*

Devrim (late 30's, single, Brighton, has been in the UK for six years): *if I can buy or bring [back from Bulgaria] the real stuff. I used to buy cheese [in Bulgaria] from those who make it, that's the good stuff. Now in the shops [in Bulgaria] it isn't great. Some of it doesn't even have milk in it. Don't get me started on it [food] in Bulgaria and what it has inside it. In the last few years the quality of food has dropped, it's so bad!*

What is particularly important to note here is that the existing economic and political structures, which relate to the fact that Britain and Bulgaria are both members of the EU, make it easy for Bulgarians to travel home frequently (and most significantly - cheaply) and bring back food products with them. This is not permitted when travelling from countries outside the EU, so clearly the legal framework of European integration plays a significant

role in the 'home-making' tactics of Bulgarians in the UK. In our Bulgarian survey 63% said they travel to Bulgaria at least once a year and 32% said they travelled several times a year. As a result of UK's membership of the EU, the single market and the customs' union, the ease of traveling in Europe and the lack of customs checks mean that many Bulgarians bring over foodstuff (including plant, dairy and meat products) with them after each visit: 37% of our Bulgarian survey respondents claimed they occasionally brought back food with them and another 18% said they always brought back food (mostly cheese and dried meat). The importance of the EU was also clear in our interviews with several Bulgarian food shop owners. We were told that they pool together their orders and these are delivered once or twice a week by lorries from Bulgaria.

Romantic Notions of Home

Another example of the dynamics of re-inventing the national abroad is the production of home-made foods which were traditionally prepared in the households for storage in winter during pre-industrial times (*zimnina*). Our interviewees revealed a strong interest in this additional staple of homeliness, resuscitated from the memories of childhood and home: the making of pickled salads (*turshia*) and barrelled fermented cabbage (*kiselo zele*) for the winter. Following exactly the same dynamics as the making of yoghurt, these traditional foods are not, as a matter of custom, prepared in the average modern household in Bulgaria, since they are too readily available off the shelf (Kaneva-Johnson, 1994). The same applies for Bulgarian communities abroad: if not specialized Bulgarian shops, Turkish shops (and, increasingly, mainstream supermarket chains such as Sainsbury's and Tesco) offer an array of pickled salads and cabbage at acceptable prices. The interest in preparing these foods at home in the context of migration, despite the considerable investment of time and effort (and quite often - the increase in total price for the final product) indicates a desire not necessarily for the particular food but for something that only the process of preparation can bring into the kitchen: homeliness and the nostalgic attempt to recreate the 'taste of home'. What is also of interest here is that this desire for traditional food making among the Bulgarians we interviewed is mostly limited to Bulgarian food; in other words, and regardless of the strength of their formal national identification, their 'foodie' interest is mostly limited to foods and tastes they grew up and are familiar with. While this is not unusual, as it is linked to personal familiarity and collective memory, it does take on a new dimension within the context of migration and is linked to the search for home in the host community and for belonging amidst the new and unfamiliar (Rabikowska, 2010). According to Maeva (2017), this is part of a process of creating a Bulgarian home abroad (2017). Examples of food items that are seen as traditional are *liutenitsa* (a spicy vegetable dip), dried sausages, pastry leaves, even the home-brewed plum alcohol *rakia*. With the rapid processes of urbanization and industrialization in Bulgaria of the 20th century, the utility of such home-made productions was undermined: the same products could be bought in the supermarkets for modest prices and without the significant investment of time and effort. Modern urban households (the majority of present day population in Bulgaria) are

unaccustomed to the preparation and tastes of these products at home. Abroad, however, the urge to bring home the familiar – or to simply engage in creative ways with their own collective culinary memories - has driven many modern migrants, especially once they set up families (there was a noticeable difference in our survey and interviews between those with and without children, though this could also be a product of other factors, such as time spent in the UK, disposable income, home ownership and stability), to re-create these home-made traditions in new and inventive ways. Thus, our participants report, spices are brought from Bulgaria to cure London-made sausages. Peppers and aubergines are roasted and minced with Spanish tomatoes into *liutenitsa*. British cabbage is pickled in a month-long laborious process of daily turnabout of the brine. The process of preparing these foods, which are all closely identified as Bulgarian by the migrants, should be seen as a form of everyday nationalism (Fox & Miller Idriss, 2008). While not always consciously appreciated as such by the participants (few of our interviewees discussed these practices in national terms), this interest in re-creating traditional culinary experiences is part of larger narratives and practices of imagining the national. Together with common language, familiar history and shared culture, they are inherently linked to sustaining national identity in the everyday.

A surprising by-effect of re-creating the culinary tradition is resuscitating with it some outdated gendered roles. The preparing of pickles for winter is often a gendered practice (it is traditionally the women in the family who do this). In the search for performing national distinctiveness abroad, some of these traditionally gendered practices were re-created in the context of migrantness. It appeared that, while pickles and cabbage may have lost their traditional gendered character (both men and women expressed interest in the practice), the curing and storing of meat for the winter has remained highly gendered. Linked to messier - and more demanding - activities, such as the preparation of an animal's carcass, traditionally, the curing and storing of the traditional Bulgarian dried spicy sausages has sparked interest among some of the male members of the Bulgarian diaspora in the UK whom we interviewed. Obviously a much lengthier and more time consuming process (one of our participants had an outdoors air cupboard especially built for the purpose), the practice of curing sausages for winter also appears to be linked to the search for identity and authenticity in the foreign space: all Bulgarian shops we visited boasted a rich display of specially selected dry sausages as a matter of pride.

What is interesting here is that the above mentioned practices are often taken up by migrants who would consciously describe themselves as well educated and cosmopolitan. This means that it is unlikely they had engaged in these culinary traditions themselves in their pre-migration trajectories: most of Bulgaria's population is concentrated in the urban areas where such practices are seen as outdated. If familiar at all, they would be associated with childhood and what 'grandmother used to do'. This indicates an effort to re-create a tradition which may not necessarily have been experienced personally, thus opening the realm of the collective and the national as sources of that tradition. Furthermore, much of

the hard work invested into food preparation of this sort is channelled into the preparation of Bulgarian food, rather than food in general. This suggests a drive beyond the general foodie culture into a personalised tradition which is firmly associated with the national, either as nostalgia or as an identity claim. The making and serving of banitsa seems to fall into the same order. Albeit much less time consuming, the baking of banitsa involves a certain investment of effort and focus which is justified with an interest as much in the food as such ('it is healthy for the children'), as in what the food represents: the Bulgarian home tradition, authenticity and personal distinctiveness amidst the foreign. This is the reason why banitsa appears at multi-national children's parties hosted by Bulgarian parents in the UK, or why it appeared on the table at the informal gathering of Bulgarians.

This suggested need to recreate tradition, authenticity and distinctiveness is supported by the quantitative data we gathered. In our EU nationals' survey, Bulgarians attached visibly high importance to maintaining Bulgarian culture (4.09 out of 5 on a likert scale). Indeed, when asked about the reason why they migrated in the first place, Bulgarians predominantly pointed to work opportunities (4.37 out of 5). Many of our interviewees spoke about how Bulgaria has changed over the past few decades, and not for the better (in terms of food there are clear similarities with other post-Communist states: Caldwell, 2009). Several of our interviewees also spoke about how their own concepts of home and belonging have also changed:

Lia: ...I mean every time I go to Bulgaria I refer to, 'Yes, I'm going home.' Then when I'm there kind of like I start to realise, well, actually, home maybe it's more here [the UK], because here is where I came to live for most of my time and most of my life.

They spoke in an idealised manner about how things were in the past (and how much better the food tasted). Many mentioned buying property in the countryside (in our Bulgarian survey 51% owned property in Bulgaria), perhaps in an attempt to acquire and preserve for themselves precisely this idealised vision of a past that is for now out of reach. There are clear parallels here with romantic and sentimental notions of national identity which are at odds with modernity (on the nostalgia for life and food under communism, Caldwell, 2009; and for the broader context of the phenomenon, Todorova & Gille 2010). The Bulgarian import of milk for the making of Bulgarian yogurt, and the depiction of yoghurt around the world as emanating from the beautiful and pre-modern Bulgarian rural life struck a relevant chord here (on the image of Bulgarian yoghurt globally, see: Yotova, 2018). However, despite the importance attached to national identity and the romantic notions of home many shared, few of our interviewees spoke in definite terms about going back home. Even those who professed to wanting to go back, referred to a distant time in the future when their financial situation and conditions in Bulgaria would be better, and they would be able to enjoy the countryside property they invested in while abroad. In the meantime, however, what is left is the vision of Bulgaria away from home: and the search for authenticity abroad.

Varo (male, mid 30s, Burgess Hill, has been in the UK for two years, but has previously lived for a number of years in Ireland), [in answer to whether he is contemplating going back to Bulgaria]: *‘Yes, maybe. It’s my opinion, maybe she [his wife] doesn’t agree with me. I hope [interrupted by his wife].*

Vesela (female, mid 30s, Varo’s wife, has been in the UK for several months, came over because of her husband): *This is not so!’.*

Most of our interviewees spoke about the idea of going back in a similar manner:

Authors: *Are you planning to move back to Bulgaria?*

Andrey: (male, mid 30s, highly skilled, married to a Bulgarian national Eva, mentioned above) *I think it’s the eternal question. I think once – it’s like we [together with his wife] always talks about it.*

Authors: *But do you see yourselves moving back?*

Andrey: *Not now. I think it’s possible.*

Later in the conversation Eva, his wife, adds: *we’re open to the idea [of going back], but as Andre says, every now and then we have this conversation and we decide to stay here for now. So, we’ll see.*

"It tastes like home..."

Based on interviews and surveys of Bulgarians living in the UK, we explored the changing nature of Bulgarian foodways in the UK. Using banitsa as our starting points for the research, we used food to examine the relationship Bulgarians in the UK have with their host and home communities. One of the most fascinating aspects of studying migrant foodways is their embeddedness in everyday claims of identity and belonging. These are often based on personal memories and experiences but also on what is remembered collectively within customs and traditions. These memories, experiences and knowledge are not necessarily seen by the migrants themselves as national. They often help construct identity claims that are embedded into avowedly cosmopolitan or transnational worldviews. Nevertheless, they form part of an implicit national discourse that constructs national identities in invisible everyday ways. Thus, they provide insights into the transformations of national identities in the context of migration – and the meaning of Bulgarian abroad – in unique and unmediated fashion.

One of these insights concerns the vision of home that gets recreated in the context of migration. More often than not, that vision does not reflect lived or current realities at home, but an idea of Bulgarianness that no longer exists – or never fully existed. In order to construct this idea, migrants rely primarily on their own emotional imaginaries. This is particularly obvious in the procurement, preparation and serving of Bulgarian food. Interestingly, we observe migrants engaging with traditional practices of food preparation that are both outdated and unfamiliar. They are not driven by a mere interest in food culture (at least not primarily) but the preparation of foods seen as traditionally Bulgarian. What we conclude is that these food practices would not have been undertaken by these

particular migrants, were it not for the context of migration. It is migration and the need to belong amidst the foreign, together with the immediacy of food culture that prompts interest in traditional Bulgarian foodways. Migration can thus be seen as a trajectory to a particular type of nationalism characteristic to diasporic communities – something that has been observed in contexts beyond food and foodways.

Furthermore, this process has been enabled and facilitated by membership of the EU: Bulgarians (as other EU citizens) are free to move and settle in the UK (and anywhere else in the EU) without the formal requirements of proving they are ‘desirable migrants’, willing to integrate and assimilate. The freedom of movement secures migrants’ right to live, work and settle in the UK, and thus, provides legitimacy to their right to belong. This is something that Brexit threatens, destabilising migrants’ claims to belonging.

With the UK scheduled to leave the EU, new custom checks and changes in regulations regarding the importing of food might make the recent Bulgarian food shops and restaurants untenable. The owners we spoke with appeared optimistic about the future of their businesses and their ability to overcome possible obstacles. However, many also expressed concern with how Brexit might impact their customers. Additionally, Brexit might have an impact on the number, regularity and prices of the many daily flights connecting British and Bulgarian cities. This will make it harder and more costly to fly back as often, and with possible future custom checks make it harder to bring back food, particularly of the perishable type.

Finally, the article raises a wider question of what national food is. This is particularly important in the context of the EU and outside of the nation-state where people are detached from their established communities of belonging and exposed to alternative national and transnational projects. What our study of Bulgarian foodways in the UK suggests is that national food could be anything that foregrounds belonging and identity in a specific and distinct way, regardless of whether it is authentic or not, so long as it is perceived as such. Whether the same applies to constructions of national food within the nation is the subject of a different study. But if we take this argument even further, we could ask the same question of what the meaning of authentic and traditional food is and how it gets constructed.

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