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## SPATIAL SEGREGATION AND THE ETHNICISATION OF POVERTY IN BULGARIA

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### Abstract

The distribution of social space mirrors social hierarchies and carries symbolic implications regarding the connection between attitudinal and spatial arrangement patterns in society. The paper aims to study the historical development of Roma neighbourhoods in Bulgaria and link them to contemporary processes of widening social distances, marginalization, spatial segregation and social exclusion of the minority. A growing tendency towards the ethnicisation of poverty will be discussed and debates on the formation of a Roma *underclass*. Three contemporary examples will be presented in relation to the distribution of *material space*, *representations of space* and *representational space* in processes of boundary maintenance. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn concerning spatial segregation and the maintenance of trust in society, as well as comments on the National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria, drafted in 2012.

**Key words:** Roma, spatial segregation, ethnicisation of poverty, underclass, social exclusion.

“Real cities are both material constructions with human strength and weaknesses and symbolic projects developed by social representations [...]” (1)

“The societies in which our cities exist are, and have been for centuries, hierarchical. The inequalities among their residents are reflected in the inequalities in the spaces they occupy” (2)

### I. Introduction

A study of the city may resemble the work of a geologist. As a product of human agency, civilization reflects the careful storing of different historical layers and remaining human artifacts. Spatial distribution and arrangement can be revealing of existing attitudinal and interactional patterns in society. Urban planning

is a power resource. The distribution of space mirrors symbolically social hierarchies in terms of class, ethnicity / “race”, gender, or disability. Reading the physical and cultural map of the city is an interpretative act. It presupposes the need to account for the fact that the interplay of different discourses takes an integral part in shaping the image of the city. An image, the deconstruction of which can unravel power strategies of including in, marginalizing or excluding certain groups from society and of producing social distances that remain reflected in the symbolic distribution of space.

The aim of this paper is to study spatial segregation as represented by the historically and contextually constructed image of the Roma neighbourhood in Bulgaria, preconditioning policies targeted at Roma, and link it to contemporary processes of growing social distances, marginalization, impoverishment and social exclusion of the Roma. My argument is that the social exclusion of the Roma, as reflected in spatial segregation, can be perceived as discursively and

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ideologically constructed, inscribed in official practices, such as urban planning, regional or state policies, depending on their different treatment of problems, regarding ethnic identity, poverty and minority-majority relations. The paper seeks to answer several questions: first, the extent to which we can consider the existence of Roma neighbourhoods as the result of historical processes, typical of the Balkans, a voluntary choice to maintain ethnic traditions and integrity in opposition to a hostile society; or second, as the result of larger macrostructural processes related to historically perpetuated social constraints, influencing the socio-economic status of the Roma and producing widening social gaps and distances along ethnic lines.

Much scholarly attention has been paid in recent years to the study of the Roma in the wider context of the existing tradition in terms of race, ethnicity, underclass formation and ghettoization. A lot of scholarly arguments have been posed analyzing processes of the ethnicisation of poverty and the formation of an urban *underclass* among the Roma (3) (4) (5) (6). Therefore, a third question to be posed is to what extent it is possible to adopt the term *underclass* from western theoretical discourses to account for growing poverty and spatial segregation, so that we can adopt relevant integrational policies.

The proliferation of discourses on Roma and spatial segregation will be illustrated by the distribution of *material space*, *representations of space* and *representational space*, providing an example of the historical development of Roma neighbourhoods and interaction with Roma in the town of Stara Zagora (7). Finally, spatial segregation will be connected to processes of social interaction, integration and the (im)possibility of building trust in society (8). Such conclusions may turn useful in providing some recommendations to the National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria, drafted in 2012 (9).

## II. The Roma in Bulgaria: Historical and Demographic Data

The Roma started settling in the Balkans around the 9<sup>th</sup> century A. D. (10), establishing their own neighbourhoods (*mahallas*) (11:155). Roma nomadic way of life was partly discontinued

during the Ottoman rule, when many Roma settled down, and was finally terminated in 1957 and 1958 by two official decrees of the Council of Ministers. In demographic terms, empirical data on Roma population vary considerably. According to different sources, the present population of Roma in Bulgaria is between 700, 000 and 800, 000 (12:36). Roma leaders point out even higher estimates - between 1, 5 - 2 million people<sup>i</sup>. Official state policy, especially in the 70s and 80s, aimed to gradually put an end to the existence of Roma neighbourhoods<sup>ii</sup>. Nevertheless, attempts to resettle Roma in concrete blocks of flats among Bulgarian population failed in many respects. The special role played by extended Roma families and of the entire Roma community in preserving Roma culture, traditions and identity, suffered under such policies. Tomova (13:73) points out that the role of family ties grew in Roma communities after 1989 in times of crisis, unemployment and marginalization, putting an end to processes of nuclearisation. Many of these Roma, who already resided in concrete blocks of flats, failing to survive on their own, returned to the big family in the Roma neighbourhood, looking for material and moral support, becoming victims of increasing social segregation and rising anti-Roma attitudes.

Unemployment reached catastrophic dimensions among Roma communities, soaring between 76% and even 100% in some regions in the 1990s (14:10). Roma generally dropped out of a system of planned economy, which provided with a job large numbers of unqualified or semi-skilled Roma. This led as a consequence to the concentration of unemployed Roma in Roma neighbourhoods, with quickly deteriorating living conditions, growing poverty and starvation.<sup>iii</sup> A further point of concern in recent years is that 23.6 % of the Roma are involved in the grey economy, working without any employment contracts, compared to 4 % of the Bulgarian and 11.7 % of the ethnic Turkish population in the country (15:35). For other experts, the increasing pauperization of the population, especially of the Roma in South-East Europe, leads the formation of an ethnic *underclass* (3), which is most substantial in Bulgaria (4:43). Ethnicity and social class can be further seen as directly connected, since skin colour or the ethnic/ "racial" factor is found to contribute significantly to the physical

segregation of Roma (5:98). Unsuccessful attempts by countries with large Roma population to develop and implement effective policies of social integration and inclusion of this most vulnerable ethnic group, can lead to the transformation of the problem into a "social time bomb" (16:24). Roma leaders and experts have been raising the attention to such possible conflicts "with unpredictable and frightening consequences" not only for Roma, but also for individual countries in Europe (16:25).

### III. The Roma Neighbourhood

The Roma neighbourhood typically resembles a ghetto, located usually at the town's margins, very often surrounded by fences or concrete walls, as in the town of Sliven. One of the greatest problems in the Roma neighbourhoods is the illegal construction of annexed buildings, often attached to other family houses, lacking in certain basic facilities. Unplanned, labyrinthine construction without sewerage and poor hygiene are some of the preconditions for the spread of contagious diseases and the declining health of Roma. Several examples can serve as an illustration of the level of devastation. In 1992 52% of the houses in the neighbourhood, for instance, had no running water, 74% had no toilet facilities, 2, 6% had neither pipes nor sewerage in 1992 (13:65).

The population in the neighbourhood is not homogenous, consisting mostly of Roma, but also of other groups, such as ethnic Turks and Bulgarians. A strict hierarchical system existed among Roma in the past, based on tribal or occupational principles. Nevertheless, many of the internal boundaries have disappeared today, preserved only partially in some places or replaced by new systems of prestige and stratification. "Nadezhda" neighbourhood in Sliven is a good case in point, in which the so-called "naked" Roma stand lowest in the ranking system of the community (11). It is worrying that the rate of "anomic" Roma is rising, as is the rate of alcoholism, pauperization, divorce, prostitution and drug addiction (13:65). For Tomova, this leads to double marginalization – the creation of a ghetto within the ghetto – a problem the Roma community cannot solve by itself (13:65).

### IV. Spatial Segregation, Poverty and Social Exclusion

Spatial segregation is a form of residential separation related to social class, "race" and ethnicity, a product of social structure and of the existing economic mode of production in a given society (17) (18) (19) (20) (7). Nevertheless, it can be associated not only with physical exclusion, but also with exclusion in terms of denial of access to social space and infringing citizenship rights, such as proper housing and social services. Spatial segregation can be further connected to processes of social change and transformation, leading as a result to changes in the existing socio-economic relations among different social groups. Traditional studies on spatial segregation include the *human ecology* approach and the research of the Chicago School, the positivistic empirical studies of *social area analysis* and *factoral ecology* and the *behavioural approach* (20:1636-1639). A subdivision of the behavioural approach, the *ethnic-cultural* approach, establishes that choices in housing preferences may be culturally presupposed, but also provoked as a response to racist treatment (20:1639). Spatial segregation can be viewed as voluntary or forced – the result of voluntary choice for maintaining a collective identity and specific way of living (ethnic-cultural and behavioural approach), as in the case of ethnic enclaves, or of existing social constraints (Marxist and Weberian schools) (19) (20). In both Marxist and Weberian approaches, different resources play an important role in gaining access to housing: financial, cognitive (education, knowledge and skills), political and social (social capital and effects on integration) (20:1640-1642). The role of the state, of social institutions and local authorities in supplying housing can be crucial, especially in countries with well-established welfare systems and stable economies (20:1642-1643).

There is obvious connection between spatial segregation and socio-economic status, which needs to be considered when studying the concentration of poverty in urban ghettos. Debates around the urban *underclass* are closely related to growing impoverishment in Roma neighbourhoods. The term *underclass* was coined by the Swedish economist and sociologist, Gunnar Myrdal in the 1960s. He, defined it as a "class of unemployed,

unemployables, and underemployed who are more and more hopelessly set apart from the nation at large and do not share in its life, its ambitions and its achievements” (21:10). It was later popularized as a problem by Anthony Giddens in the early 1970s. The term has been widely used with different connotations and meanings implied to it. What Giddens found as characteristic of this new social class was its position below the working class in terms of income, promotion prospects and job security, typical of the secondary labour market (22). It is often perceived as a threat to social security and order and demonized by the media, often referring to crime, deviance, and violence. The *underclass* is seen to be the result of extreme social polarization and the effect of rapid social and economic changes. A typical feature of the *underclass* is the overrepresentation of women and ethnic minorities, who are more vulnerable to poverty – mainly single mothers, elderly or very young people. It generally involves people living on welfare benefits, who resort to the informal economy as a means of subsistence. The ethnicisation of poverty and social unrest are other characteristic features of the *underclass*. It is further associated with processes of “ghettoisation, concentration and deterioration of the life conditions” in ghettos, inner cities, rust belt cities or rundown suburbia (23:7). Poverty is seen as the key reason for the existing “malign circuits of exclusion” and segregation (23:7). Chronic instances of the concentration of poverty issue from long-term unemployment, which leads to decreased access to education, healthcare, cultural and social integration.

Disagreement exists on the nature of such a social group “outside” society and its exclusion from it. The term *underclass* is often seen as too inadequate to apply, because of its negative connotations. Nineteenth-century England, for example, has been referred to as having “dangerous classes”, implying the inherent pathology of the urban poor. Oscar Lewis’s theory of the “culture of poverty” (24) is a typical extension of such negative attitudes, expressed by the so-called *culturalist* trend, relying on a pathologically transmitted culture, perceived as the main reason for the perpetuation of patterns of social exclusion. Charles Murray finds further explanation in certain cultural and behavioural patterns of the

mentality of the poor, and considers that welfare support encourages dependency and criminality among them (25:677). The *culturalists* blame the poor for their own plight and fail to account for systemic fallacies. Others seek *structuralist* explanations arguing the opposite - that the nature of inequality is not to be found in certain cultural and behavioural patterns of the people, but rather in the existing inequality as the result of structural and economic failure of the capitalist system to provide jobs (25:677). For *structuralists*, there is a widening gap between the wealthy and the poor, growing unemployment due to *laissez-faire* policies and decline in production spheres (6:48). The impossibility to expand the service sector to employ the victims of such processes and the general deterioration in housing, educational and recreational facilities, lead to further spatial segregation and restructuring of the urban space (6: 48). Decreased subsidies in welfare provision and especially in housing are perceived by *structuralists* as increasing poverty (6: 49).

Zygmunt Bauman combines *structuralist* explanations with a system of rhetorical strategies to explain existing poverty and social inequalities in modern capitalist consumer societies (26). The functioning of the systems of social stratification in such societies, in his opinion, is being legitimized through attitudes to work ethic in modern industrial capitalism (26). Such a moral system of domination views negatively those incapable of work or unable to find work. It casts the blame on them, further reproducing poverty and legitimizing social structure (26). For Bauman, the new term *underclass* lumps together new varieties of contemporary poor, by reinforcing social exclusion as overtly dysfunctional to a well-functioning social system (26:66-77). Nevertheless, covertly the system needs the reproduction of such a substratum, directing and organizing social discontent to a perceived internal enemy on the basis of several key assumptions: their “criminalized” and “parasitic nature”, avoiding work not because they are unable to find work, but because of “sheer laziness”, and treating them as major perpetrators for the inefficient working of the system (26).

Similarly, for Herbert Gans, the term *underclass* is too broad and serves as an umbrella term to encompass highly diverse people. Therefore, the application of such a term seems not fit for sociology, but rather for political rhetoric (27:679). Nevertheless, the term is still considered necessary for instrumental purposes and greater clarity. Some have proposed to replace it with the term “ghetto poor”, such as Wilson, to account for emerging cultural patterns as the response to particular structural patterns of inequality (28:170).

Similar theoretical contestation exists regarding the social exclusion of the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe. The issue at stake is the extent to which we can adopt such a western concept as the *underclass* in a different social, cultural and economic context. Two opposing views can be delineated in this context. Janos Ladanyi has argued that despite the existing hidden dimensions of poverty under communism, its rates have risen significantly after 1989, and as a result, a new Eastern European *underclass* has started developing. It has been defined as a “social group divided by the rest of society by strict borders”, which has also been ethicized (29:68). Some of the features of this new kind of social class, as the result of poverty, are not only less income, poor housing conditions and a decreased standard of living, but also the existence of discrimination, the low probability of finding “normal” jobs, income, housing, social security, or access to better education for their children (34:71). The advent of a Roma *underclass* is also to account for rising ethnic tensions, according to Ladanyi, for whom the link between poverty and ethnicity is stronger than ever (29).

A major study of *Poverty under Post-Communism* (30), carried out in 6 post-communist countries between 1999-2000 tries to identify an existing link between poverty and modes to capitalist transformation, as well as between *underclass* formation, ethnicity and gender. Conclusions reached establish that more pronounced processes of *underclass* formation can be observed in “neo-paternalist” systems (Bulgaria, Romania and Russia), than in “neo-liberal regimes” (Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) (4) (6). The same holds true for the ethnicisation and feminisation of poverty (4) (31). A general conclusion is reached that “in all

countries the poor are mostly Roma and that with most Roma there is a tendency towards complete poverty” (3:14). According to Ivan Szelenyi, the segregation rate is higher in Bulgaria than in any other country, since the majority of Roma occupy Roma neighbourhoods or settlements with predominantly Roma population (3:114). The level of spatial and language segregation in Bulgaria is also higher, which results in higher percentage of self-identification of the population in such neighbourhoods as Roma, when compared to Roma in Hungary or Romania (3:14-15). In Bulgaria, the boundaries separating the Roma from the rest are stronger and clearer than in the rest of the countries under study (3:112). Such extreme spatial segregation also defines the strong social and ethnic segregation, according to Szelenyi (3:115). Growing poverty and high unemployment rates are the reason for malnutrition and systemic starvation among the poor, mostly Roma in Bulgaria and Romania (4:40).<sup>iv</sup>In general, the Roma are most isolated from macrosociety in Bulgaria (57% living in Roma neighbourhoods and 21% in “neighbourhoods with predominantly Roma population”), Romania (respectively 11% and 17%) and Hungary (11% and 21%) (4:41). This disastrous situation of the Roma immanently leads to decreased chances of obtaining better education and social integration (4:41). Summarizing the results on the formation of an ethnic *underclass*, Petar-Emil Mitev concludes that Bulgaria is the country with the highest rate of formation of an ethnic *underclass* on the basis of spatial segregation (living in ghettos), declassification (loss of jobs and land property) and school segregation (school drop-outs or special “Gypsy” schools) (4:43). This means that the highest burden of the crisis for the period under study was for the lowest levels of the social ladder. This new poverty is not part of the individual life-cycle, but is structurally dependent and affects whole social groups of the population (4:44). It is predicted that this will cause complete declassification for whole social strata and will be completely irreversible as a process (4:45).

Returning to the *underclass* debate, Michael Stewart is against the application of the term to the situation of Roma communities in post-communist countries. For him, it “exaggerates

the reality of separation and in so doing reproduces the very ideology by which the exclusion of the Gypsies tends to be justified” (33). Stewart criticises the work of Ivan Szelenyi and Rebecca Emigh (34) and that of Ladanyi (29), arguing against the appropriation of ghetto imagery and the exaggeration of residential segregation (33). His argumentation is based on facts that point out the lack of homogeneity of the population in Roma neighbourhoods and the negative power of labeling, which may start functioning as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Stewart contends that the Roma are capable of finding original solutions to their problems (33). Therefore, he suggests substituting the term *underclass* with “social exclusion” by stressing its dynamic and processual nature (33).

I would like to adhere to a more discursive approach to the *underclass* debate, which accounts for the different subject positions of actors that appropriate it. The term requires careful application, since it can be manipulated equally by social scientists, the state and its institutions in drafting and legitimizing various policies towards the Roma. If certain general patterns in the causal link between poverty and exclusion can be viewed as logical, still it is necessary to avoid any negative references to social pathology, criminality, or “culture of poverty”, which tend to perceive poverty and crime as a “genetic predisposition” and a “voluntary choice”, posing an “imminent danger” coming from Roma neighbourhoods. On the other hand, I consider that stronger emphasis on the nature of a socio-structural formation as the *underclass* (with special emphasis on mechanisms and processes of social exclusion embedded in social structure and socio-economic relations), could be used as a means of pressure and lobbying for better designing and implementing social policies. However, it is necessary to recognize the danger of too much emphasis on the image of the Roma as social outcasts, which may reinforce the existence of negative stereotypes and the victimization of the group. This may undermine the diversity and complexity of the internal social division and structure of Roma communities, as well as their capacity for self-organization and individual strategies for coping with poverty and marginalization.

## V. The Trialectics of Space: Spatial Practice, Representational Space and Representations of Space

Below I apply the “trialectics of space” to study the production of space between Roma and non-Roma historically and interactionally in the town of Stara Zagora. In *The Production of Space* (1991) (7) Henri Lefebvre explores the dynamics of mental, physical and social space. Space production for him is a social product (7:26-7), which takes place on three different conflicting levels: *spatial practice*, *representational space* and *representations of space*. *Spatial practice* is the physical and experienced space with all existing material practices, commonsense activities and contradictions in everyday life. *Representations of space* (or discourses on space) are the discursive regimes of theories, spatial and planning professions and expert knowledges. This is the conceptualized space as conceived by scientists, planners, urbanists, technocrats and social engineers, or artists. It has a material expression in maps, plans, models and designs. Studying *representations of space* also implies analyzing ideologies historically as embedded in particular urban policies. *Representational space* (or *spaces of representation*), are discourses of space, which is the third element in the triad. This is space directly lived through its images and symbols by its “inhabitants” or “users”, but also some artists, making symbolic use of physical objects and the environment. Lefebvre further calls this triad of the perceived (or experienced), the conceived and the lived space (7:39-40). All these three levels interconnect in the production of space. When studying space, it is necessary to refer to its history, but also to particular history of representations and their relationship with each other, with practice and ideology (7:42). The production of space also involves realizing the interests of particular dominant groups, who act in accordance with representation, and the extent to which “users” are seen as passively experiencing spatial policies imposed on them (7:43). Here we encounter several problems, regarding the role of ideology in representations of space and whether or not the “inhabitants” of space possess any form of representational space (7:44).

### **Spatial Practice and Representational Space**

How is social space perceived, experienced, lived and reproduced in spatial practices in Roma neighbourhoods and between Roma and non-Roma in Stara Zagora? What are the means for creating and sustaining ethnic boundaries in processes of interaction? Below I provide findings from a project called "Civic Forum: Living Together" (35) as well as results from field work and interviews in Stara Zagora. A survey carried out by the Bulgarian Society for Culture and Education under this project (35) in three residential districts in Stara Zagora with Roma inhabitants, maps out the existing socio-economic, infrastructural problems and those occurring in interethnic relations. They are seen as related to several major areas, such as: unemployment (65 %), problems with plumbing and sewerage in the neighbourhoods (66%), shortage of housing (16%), lack of public transportation (44%), rising criminality (38 %), poor hygiene (18%), insufficient town development and the need for different public facilities, such as pharmacies, super markets, confectionaries, or churches (35). The three neighbourhoods in Stara Zagora under study are: "Tri Chuchura", "Zheleznik" and "Lozenets", of which only the latter is with a predominantly Roma population. It is situated on a hill on the margins of Stara Zagora, which also makes it spatially distant and isolated from important public facilities. The other two residential districts are examples of the late socialist type of construction building and of the failure to integrate successfully Roma together with Bulgarian families in "modern" for the time concrete blocks of flats. All interviewees agree that there are serious problems in the three neighbourhoods (81-90%), which also affect interpersonal relations (35). The gravest problems of the predominantly Roma populated "Lozenets" district are related to unemployment (96%), followed by criminality (51%), plumbing and sewerage deficiencies (38%) (35). Poor transportation facilities and housing shortage come out as significant problems, when compared with the figures provided by the other two neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, the three residential districts are confronted by more or less the same difficulties in their everyday life. Residential problems, according to the survey, may be seen as the reason for growing ethnic tensions (35). They are more serious in

ethnically mixed districts, such as "Tri Chuchura" and "Zheleznik" and less severe in the predominantly Roma neighbourhood, where the population is more homogeneous (35). People of Bulgarian ethnic origin interviewed in the ethnically diverse areas give answers reflecting pre-existing and widely proliferated negative stereotypes about Roma in Bulgaria (35). In the mixed population neighbourhoods Roma are seen mostly as "culturally different", "dirty", having a "different value system", "lacking in good education and upbringing" ("Tri Chuchura- North" -19%; Zheleznik -10%). They are also "prone to criminal acts and violence", "noisy" and "dangerous" (respectively 18% and 9 %) (35). Roma interviewees in "Lozenets" provide a reverse picture of interethnic attitudes (35). For them, one can witness constant racial discrimination, prejudice and deep-rooted hatred, insults and disrespect (14%) (35). There is also widening social class difference experienced by people in "Lozenets", lack of information about the true condition of poverty among Roma, widespread myths about Roma wealth (5%) and discrimination on the labour market (4%) (35).

Lack of knowledge about differences between Roma and Turks in the neighbourhood is also seen as a problem (35). There is growing conviction on both sides that the two ethnic groups are too different, and therefore, cannot live together (35). For some Roma, the new "ideology" of integration has only highlighted differences and aggravated the condition of the Roma by creating even stronger negative attitudes towards them (A.M.)(36). This has further generational implications. According to an interviewee, while he was able to get higher education and was well accepted and respected by Bulgarians with his work, which helped him build a successful professional career, after the changes in 1989, most young people, like his son, remained totally segregated, living and communicating only with Roma in the neighbourhood, despite their good education (A.M.) (36). For another Rom, there are many Roma, especially children, who have spent their whole lives in the Roma neighbourhood and have never been downtown (Z.D.) (36). This is explained not only with poor transport and the difficulty to cover public transportation expenses, but also with fear of aggression and attacks on Roma (Z.D.) (36). Additionally,

different cases were provided by interviewees, when Roma were discriminated in cafes, restaurants or swimming pools (36).

The above examples clearly depict existing perceptions and problems in interaction between Roma and non-Roma in their daily routine in different spheres, regarding private life, work or leisure. While for Bulgarians ethnic distinctions are mostly perceived as “cultural”, related to values, mentality, upbringing, social behavior or “aptitude” for certain deviant practices, for Roma distinctions rest mostly in socio-economic differences, poverty, prejudiced attitudes and discrimination, often due to lack of proper knowledge about Roma life and culture.

### Representations of Space

The representations of space are the conceived dominant gaze produced in macrosocial attitudes to Roma by elite discourse, such as town planners, governmental authorities or the media. Research on historical sources of the settlement of Roma in the Balkans focuses on the role of the Ottoman Empire and its institutional policies aiming to settle the vagrant Roma population. This process was initiated with the centralization of the state under Mehmed the Conqueror in mid-15<sup>th</sup> century (37:203). Under a special “Law for the Gypsies in the Rumeli Vilayet” of 1530, issued by Suleiman the Magnificent, all Roma had to be settled in separate districts on a religious basis, just like the rest of the *raya* (37:203). With the liberation of the Bulgarian lands, Roma were no longer subject to special legislation. They became full citizens of the country. Nevertheless, their settlement was regulated by means of different general laws and administrative measures (37:204-205). Processes of migration to the new Bulgarian state increased the number of Roma. Nomadic groups settled down separately in town and rural areas, practicing their specific culture, traditions and way of life (37:205). Roma were self-represented to local authorities and regional administration by the so-called “cheribashiya” – a well-respected Rom by the community (37:205). Urban policies in the new Principality aimed to settle Roma in the outskirts of towns – a problem seriously hampered by processes of urbanization and migrations to towns, as well as constant demographic growth (37: 207).

In late-nineteenth century Stara Zagora, records point out that Roma had their separate neighbourhood in the eastern part of the town along the river Bedechka, with their own “cheribashiya” (37:203). In the 1890s Roma settled down also in the western and southern parts of the town, forming separate neighbourhoods (37:209). The poor living conditions and lack of urban regulation in such settlements created problems for local authorities (37:203). Their official approach to the problem was to make Roma “equal with the rest of the citizens in terms of housing and way of living, making them find housing, just like any other poor: of Bulgarian, Jewish, Turkish or other origins” (37:210). Problems related to poverty, poor hygiene and living conditions were still on the agenda in the 1920s, aggravated by newly arriving settlers and growing Roma population (37:210). Special commissions were assigned to settle Roma on the outskirts of Stara Zagora, which nevertheless remained without much success (37:210). The resettlement of Roma from “Tabahna” neighbourhood, for example, was discussed at a special meeting and in 1929; a committee was assigned to propose location for a new neighbourhood, providing better living conditions. All authorities agreed that Roma should be made to live separately (38:81). As a means of compensation, such Roma would be spared annual urban taxes for a year (38: 81). In 1938 the problem with the Roma neighbourhood was posed on the agenda once again by the Town Council, however, without any further actions following (38:81). Special measures for settling and resettling Roma continued after 1944 with the change of the socio-political system. Most Roma from the previously existing neighbourhoods were settled in a new neighbourhood, called “Lozenets,” at the beginning of the 1960s. People were allocated special parcels of land for construction, supported by local authorities with building materials, transportation and preferential loans provided by the Bulgarian National Bank (37:213). Such policies followed after unsuccessful attempts to resettle Roma in rural areas and involve them in agricultural activities (37:213). Subsequent state policies in the late 1970s aimed to disperse Roma communities among ethnic Bulgarians within a 10-12 year period (37:2013). However, such policies proved mostly unsuccessful, because of



existing negative attitudes towards Roma and the role of the Roma neighbourhood in preserving the culture and identity of the community (37:213-2014). For a Romni, who was forced to move in the new blocks of flats provided by the state, the experience was extremely disturbing. She felt lonely and separated from her community (Kolev, 2003 cited in 37:214). Better living conditions could not make up for the absence of the support of the extended family and for prejudiced attitudes she suffered from. "Look how they are all staring at us, as if we are murderers and thieves", complains the wife, "What do I need this really good flat for, if I have nobody to share a word with?!" (Kolev, 2003 cited in 37:214). Still other Roma, willing to change their lives were better prepared to move out of the neighbourhood and integrate with macrosociety (37:214).

After 1989, Ivanova and Krastev describe "Lozenets" as extending and becoming a "place of contrasts": the poor shanty town and small huts with "annexes" to provide shelter for the growing families and the two-three-storey buildings of the "successful" Roma - travelling abroad pimps, prostitutes, copper traders or usurers (37:413). Chaotic urban construction without special planning and permission made infrastructure deteriorate. Ghettos within the ghetto emerged, creating further social distances among Roma (37:214). New sub-ghettos emerged in the southern part of the town, where extremely poor and marginalized Roma live (37:215). The authors conclude the following: "All this leads to increased spatial segregation within the Gypsy/Roma community. This means not only deterioration in the living environment, but also difficulty in finding jobs, growing poverty and misery, almost non-existent conditions for the socialization of children and young people" (37:215).

Returning to the previous research on the three neighbourhoods in Stara Zagora with varying degrees of Roma inhabitants, we can observe a continuation of previous tendencies towards segregating Roma in separate neighbourhoods with growing hostility towards Roma and widening social distances. At the same time, problems of poverty, access to public facilities and dealing with illegal constructions persist in the Roma neighbourhood. Special measures

proposed by the residents in the mixed-population neighbourhoods required ethnic segregation in terms of housing and transportation. Both the residents of "Tri Chuchura" and "Zheleznik" districts saw a possible solution to the problem in moving of all Roma to the Roma neighbourhood or to special blocks of flats only for Roma (35). It was further suggested to put up a wall between "Lozenets" and the other residential districts (35). A change in the bus routes to "Tri Chuchura" was also proposed, since many of the Roma living in "Lozenets" use the same means of public transportation. No such tendencies of segregation could be found among the Roma in "Lozenets" (35). Emphasis was put on the need for mutual understanding and co-existence (35). Creating more job opportunities and measures dealing with unemployment were seen as vital for the Roma population (35).

A vital question to pose is how representations of space inform social policy, create knowledge and form public opinion. The current debate around Roma neighbourhoods in Stara Zagora, just like those in other parts of the country, is strongly informed and influenced by dominant negative attitudes towards Roma, by political and nationalistic ideologies. Predominantly, they aim to separate, segregate and contain Roma, so as not to "create problems", ignoring essential issues regarding poverty, unemployment and discrimination. If *representations of space* are the legitimization of the interests of dominant groups, informing and legitimizing social policies targeting Roma and shaping public opinion (frequently supported by skewed demographic data and pseudo-academic research), then little power is left to *representational space* (Roma internal discourse) to influence such knowledge and measures, directly affecting their destiny. Roma *representational space*, therefore, we can consider, should find its strong voice by means of special channels and agents (media, non-profit organizations, state-supported policies, educational initiatives) to aid creating knowledge about Roma and shape policies on Roma-related issues, such as housing, unemployment and access to public services.

It is also important to know how people experience such representations of space and the means and strategies through which they create

trust rather than fear, hostility and antagonism. In his research Eric Uslaner tries to challenge well-established arguments of scholars, like Robert Putnam, who argue that trust is lower when we are surrounded by people different from us (8). For Uslaner, diverse neighbourhoods when well-integrated can lead to higher levels of trust, provided that people also have diverse social networks (8). Segregation and not diversity is for him the reason for mistrust, for growing prejudices and racist stereotypes, as well as for creating strong in-group loyalty (8:423-425). Housing policies, according to evidence in natural environments in the US, analyzed by Uslaner, can help create integrated neighbourhoods and build trust (8:430). In integrated housing projects people developed much more positive attitudes to ethnic minorities than those in segregated communities, where negative stereotypes persisted (8:430-431). The National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020) (39) and the Action Plan for its implementation extensively provide for policies and measures on national and regional and local level to deal with problems of Roma housing, stipulating the need to improve housing conditions, deconcentrate Roma segregated neighbourhoods, as well as improve technical and social infrastructure for educational and cultural purposes (39:37-41). Such policies designed should go hand in hand with other integrational policies aiming to create greater trust in society in interethnic relations, which will foster processes of desegregation and improve interethnic relations. For this reason, it is vital to include Roma discourse, to provide access of internal Roma view of *representational space* in dominant social institutions responsible for shaping public opinion and creating knowledge about Roma. Such processes will only suffer if the third element of the triad is not considered while imposing dominant views of *representations of space* informing mainstream policy measures targeting the Roma.

## V. Conclusion

The paper aimed to discuss the nature of urban segregation the particular case of the Roma as a response to inequality and social exclusion. A historical and demographic picture of the Roma population and neighbourhoods in the town of Stara Zagora has been mapped out. Reasons for

social segregation have been accounted for by providing the necessary historical contextualization and accounting for diverse discourse positions in representing space: the *spatial practice, representations of space and representational space*. The Roma neighbourhood has been presented as the product of both social marginalization and discrimination and as a means for preserving in-group cohesion, traditions and culture in a hostile environment. Contemporary scholarly debates on poverty and the *underclass* have further problematized the issue. Arguments have been provided against the direct uncritical appropriation of Western discourses, which may lead to further victimization of the group and for a more instrumental and processual accounts of the structural mechanisms producing social inequalities.

To sum up, Roma ghettos have become the terrain of different discursive interpretations of urban segregation and ethnicity in Eastern Europe. To a great extent growing inequality and the rate of poverty can be viewed in the context of the role of capitalism in creating greater discrepancies in class and ethnic terms. The urban distribution of space reflects materially and symbolically such inequalities.

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- <sup>i</sup> The difficulty comes from the criteria of self-identification adopted in census taking. Occupying the lowest level of society, marginalized and treated with greatest suspicion by the majority, many of the Roma tend to identify with other, more respectable ethnic groups.
- <sup>ii</sup> According to Marushiakova and Popov (11: 118), the number of Roma neighbourhoods in the 1970s was 546, of which only 36 were partially liquidated.
- <sup>iii</sup> Pinnock states that unemployment among Roma in the late 1990s was between 76 % and 90% , according to different NGOs, compared to the average 13-18 % for Bulgarians (14: 10). Latest data is provided by the World Bank and OSI, according to which in 2008, 50.8 % of the Roma (aged 18-65) had had some sort of employment during the previous week (cited in 15: 35).
- <sup>iv</sup> Low educational and qualificational levels among Roma in Bulgaria, however, do not explain higher unemployment, when compared to similar tendencies among non-Roma (4:41). Therefore, explanations should also be sought in existing obstacles in the educational system and the transmission of poverty from one generation to another (4:41). There is a tendency that Roma, who are better integrated and do not identify as Roma are much better-off than the rest of the community (4:41).
- <sup>v</sup> Non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire.