

BETWEEN PRIDE AND SHAME: EMOTIONAL CONTENT OF BULGARIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY¹

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We examine the extent to which changing historical contexts shaped Bulgarian national identity by arousing collective emotions such as pride and shame and created internal schism in Bulgarian society.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework integrates social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and its developments with intergroup emotion theory (Smith, 1993)

We view the role of emotion in identity processes as twofold:

- 1) as an outcome of identity-based comparisons;
- 2) as a communicative medium and mediator of social action.

Historical and social cultural context

The formation of the Bulgarian nation and national identity has taken place within specific historical circumstances at an important crossroads between East and West. This history arouses strongly negative and often conflicting emotions. After the medieval Bulgarian state was conquered by Ottoman forces, Bulgaria experienced 500 years of Ottoman rule and was liberated by the Russian army in 1878, evoking sympathy for the Russians and hatred towards the Turks. National identity has been shaped by this long lack of statehood, by the historic struggle of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church for independent status within the context of an Islamic empire, and by the idiosyncratic molding of an important part of the Bulgarian intelligentsia during the second half of the 19 century with, as in other Slavic countries, predominantly negative attitude towards Western culture.

At the beginning of the 20th century Bulgaria went through a period of rapid economic growth. Significant part of the emerging new Bulgarian intelligentsia and bourgeoisie was educated in West-European universities and experienced the influence of Western culture. At the same time the alliance between Bulgarian and Russian cultures (the most pronounced expression of which is the common Cyrillic alphabet) continued to model the attitudes of Bulgarian people towards Russia.

During the first half of the 20th century Bulgarians lived through two national catastrophes and an extremely uneasy relationship with Nazi Germany, as Bulgaria was at the same time an ally of and opposed to Nazi Germany, to come to 1944 when Soviet troops entered the country and helped establish a totalitarian regime. This opened deep division in Bulgarian society. For some Bulgarians what happened on the 9th of September 1944 was perceived as Soviet occupation and a coup d'état, whereas for others it meant liberation and socialist revolution. In the years that followed Bulgaria was situated within the Eastern bloc under the harshest communist regime after that in the Soviet Union. As a result Bulgaria did not have its 1956, as Hungary did; it did not have its 1968, as Czechoslovakia did. Consequently, for many decades Bulgarian society underwent deep internal polarization and antagonism, with all the negative repercussions for perceived national identity. It is only logical to assume that, as a result of this historical experience, Bulgarian national identity incorporated a profound sense of inferiority and confusion.

In the last twenty years Bulgaria has changed from being a member of the Eastern bloc to being a full member of the European Union, and from a totalitarian to a pluralistic society. These dramatic political and economic shifts form a completely new context in which Bulgarians are to reshape their sense of national identity in a new East-West context.

Hypotheses

On the background of the above historical and cultural developments we defined the following expectations: 1) Bulgarians are perplexed regarding the emotions they experience when thinking of their national belonging. 2) Integration with the West is associated with pride whereas integration with the East – with shame. 3) Comparison with high status nations evokes shame, whereas comparison with low status nations – pride.

Research tasks

To identify the emotional components of Bulgarian national identity along the dimension pride – shame,

To reveal how these emotional components of Bulgarian national identity relate to the process of European integration and/or integration with Russia

To explore how the comparative (international) context affects both the collective emotions and the salience of the national identities

Method

The study was carried out in three stages.

1. As a first stage, we conducted a study in which a sample (e.g., 100) of Bulgarian respondents were asked to report what it is about being Bulgarian that makes them feel proud or ashamed.

2. The attributes that they spontaneously generated were then included in the pilot for the survey interview, in which participants were presented with one of two of the intergroup comparison primes (e.g., Albanian and German) and then asked to rate or estimate (on a 7-point scale) the typicality of these attributes in Bulgarians. Thus we checked whether the rather 'minimal' primes have an influence on the perception of national identity attributes.

3. Main survey interview.

a. Measure the rated or estimated typicality of the attributes of Bulgarian national identity on a pride – shame dimension.

b. Measure attitudes to integration with European Union and with Russia on 5-point negative-positive consequences scales.

c. Introduce comparative prime by inviting respondents to name 3 attributes of (e.g.) Albanians (or Germans,), on the one hand, and 3 attributes of Bulgarians, on the other hand.

d. Ask respondent to locate Bulgaria's position on a scale of 'development' such as the UN's Human Development Index, where selected other countries are already shown.

Respondents: Six regions of Bulgaria were chosen. Out of every region 100 people were respondents. Altogether face-to-face interviews were conducted with 710 people.

Regions except the capital city were chosen to include not only Bulgarians but also larger masses of the main ethnic minorities in Bulgaria – Bulgarian Muslims, Turks and Gypsies. From every region 10 clusters were chosen randomly from cities, towns, villages and city municipalities. To assure comparison from each cluster 10 respondents were chosen following the method of Leslie Kish and by quota of gender and age group respectively.

Results

Being a Bulgarian – a reason to be proud or ashamed?

To reveal whether respondents were more proud than ashamed of being Bulgarians we proceeded as follows. The attributes spontaneously generated by the respondents in the first stage of the methodology were in the second stage rated for typicality and association with the pride and shame concepts. Then we formulated a set of potential items related to pride or shame. Further these items were used to gather data in a pilot study. These data were subjected to factor analysis. On the basis of this analysis we developed two eight item scales: Pride scale Cronbach Alpha = .80 (pertaining to folklore, cuisine, religion, history, achievements in science, sports achievements, Bulgarian nature, Cyrillic alphabet) and Shame scale Alpha = .83 (pertaining to low standard of living, ignorance, bad manners, lack of obedience to law and order, proclivity to fibbing and pilfering, etc.) In the main study we obtained the Mean for these scales, the Median and the Mode. The Mean for Pride is $M = 35.74$; $M(\text{shame}) = 33.70$; Median (pride) 37.00 ; Median (shame) 35.00 Mode (pride) 40 ; Mode (shame) 40 . Although the pride score is slightly higher (and statistically significant $t = 8.66$; $df = 708$, $p < .001$) than the shame score the difference is still much smaller than is usual when national identity is measured. Moreover the Mode for the two scales is equal.

The emotional context of integration with EU and Russia

To reveal how pride and shame relate to the process of integration with EU and/or Russia we tested two multiple regression models.

The first one tested the attitude towards integration with EU. Thus, the dependent variable was integration with EU. Independent predictors were shame and pride. Age, education and gender were control variables. In the first step of the model were entered only the control variables. Results showed that the model was significant $F = 14.18$ ($3; 705$) $p < .001$. In the second step were added the variables pride and shame. Results showed that the model was again significant $F = 11.55$ ($5, 705$), $p < .001$. As we can see from Table 1 pride, age and education are significant predictors of integration with EU. The more proud, the more educated and the younger are stronger supporters of integration with EU.

Table 1. Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting Support for... EU

Variable	Step 1			Step 2		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Constant	3.48	.20		2.58	.47	2.58
Age	-.01	.00	-.12**	-.01	.00	-.01**
Education	.22	.04	.19***	.21	.04	.21***
Male gender	-.01	.09	-.01	.01	.09	.01
Pride scale				.30	.08	.30***
Shame scale				-.09	.07	-.09
R^2	.06			.08		
F for change in R^2	14.183***			7.23**		

Note: $n = 705$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The second multiple regression model tested attitude towards integration with Russia. The steps followed were identical with the first regression model. Results showed that in the first step the model was significant $F = 8.31$ ($3, 705$), $p < .001$. Table 2 shows that age and education are significant predictors of integration with Russia. The older and the less educated are supporters of integration with Russia. Adding pride and shame made no difference regarding the significance of the model.

Table 2. Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting Support for... Russia

Variable	Step 1			Step 2		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Constant	3.66	.17		3.34	.40	
Age	.01	.00	.18***	.01	.00	.18***
Education	-.03	.04	-.03	-.03	.04	-.04
Male gender	.03	.07	.02	.04	.07	.02
Pride scale				.08	.07	.04
Shame scale				-.01	.06	-.00
R^2	.19			.19		
F for change in R^2	8.31***			.65		

Note: $n = 705$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The emotional effects of self-estimation of Bulgarians in comparison with other nations

To test the expectation whether comparisons with perceived high/low status nations leads to changes in pride and shame of being Bulgarian we carried out two two-stage regression analysis.

In the first regression the dependent variable was pride. Independent predictors were Albanian and German trait priming, which was compared with Bulgarian trait priming. Control variables were age, gender and education. When only age, gender and education were entered in the regression equation the model was not significant. When type of priming variables was added the model was border line significant – $F = 2.10$ ($5, 705$) $p = .06$; $R\text{-square} = .02$. When respondents were primed with Albanian traits the Beta coefficient was $Beta = -.13$, $p < .05$. When respondents were primed with German traits the Beta coefficient was $Beta = -.13$, $p < .05$. In other words, no matter whether primed with Albanian or German traits respondents reported decrease in pride.

In the second two-stage regression analysis the predictors were the same but the dependent variable was shame. When only age, gender and education were entered in the regression equation the model was not significant. When type of priming was added the model became significant $F = 10.36$ ($5, 705$) $p < .001$. The $R\text{-square} = .07$. For both types of priming (Albanian traits or German traits) the Beta coefficients were significant at $p < .001$ (See Table 3 and Figs 1 and 2) As indicated in the Tables no matter

whether primed with Albanian or German traits, respondents become more ashamed of being Bulgarian (See Table 3 and Figure 1).

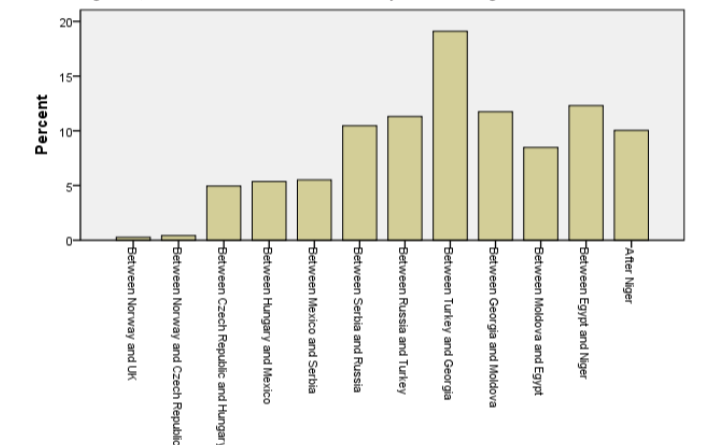
Table 3. Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting Shame.

Variable	Step 1			Step 2		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Constant	4.35	.11		3.85	.13	
Age	-.003	.00	-.08*	-.003	.00	-.08*
Male gender	.02	.05	.01	.02	.04	.02
Education	-.01	.02	-.01	.01	.02	.02
Type of priming task:						
Albanian traits				.49	.08	.38***
German traits				.48	.07	.37***
R^2	.01			.06		
F for change in R^2	1.38			23.68***		

Note: $n = 705$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

To further explore the self-estimation of Bulgarians in comparison with other nations we introduced an indirect measure of national self esteem. As described in the Method section we asked respondents to locate the position of Bulgaria on the UN human development index (See Fig 2). Indicators comprising this index include adjusted net savings, adult literacy rate, carbon dioxide emissions per capita, combined gross evolution in education, expenditure on public health (% of GDP), expenditure on education (% of GDP), GDP per capita, gender inequality index value, homicide rate, etc.

Figure 2. If you rank the countries according to their level of development, and Norway is ranked first, whereas Niger last, between which two countries would you situate Bulgaria on the scale below.



On Figure 2 we see the self ranking of Bulgarians. The real place of Bulgaria on this Index is between Mexico and Serbia – rank 58 out of 180 countries <http://hdr.undp.org/en/data/profiles/>). Only 5% of the respondents placed Bulgaria on the 'correct' location. Exactly 10% placed it even after Niger. Altogether 82.4% of the respondents placed Bulgaria below its actual location on the Index.

Discussion

Emotionally Bulgarian national identity is 'crucified' between pride and shame. Pride and shame are almost equally present in the national identification of Bulgarian people. It can be suggested that these results reflect the complex and contradictory historical fate of the Bulgarian people, which has been marked by wrong political choices and consequent losses (WW1 and WW2), long periods of subjection to foreign powers, and historical examples of inability to protect national causes. It is important to determine how this emotional 'crucifixion' of Bulgarians between pride and shame affects their behaviour. Does it 'paralyze' them and doom them to constant wandering between different (extreme) decisions or could it mobilize them to perform something positive?

The obtained positive relation between pride of being Bulgarian and support for integration with the European Union could be interpreted in at least two ways. First it is logical to assume that the integration of Bulgaria in the European Union is recognition for the achievements of the nation and for its abilities to contribute to the common European future, and this is definitely worth being proud of. It can also easily be presumed that integration with the European Union is supported by people who are proud to be Bulgarian in the first place. In other words those people who have self confidence that they are representatives of a nation with dignity view integration with the European union as something well deserved and unquestionable.

The lack of relation between the emotional dimensions of Bulgarian national identity and the support for integration with Russia (neither pride nor shame had any impact) might reflect the still 'fermenting' attitude of Bulgarians towards Russia. During the last two decades a slow change in relations between the two nations has occurred, resulting in a gradual discharge of the ideologically loaded emotions that had piled up for centuries. This process however seems not to have come to its end.

As reported in the Results section comparison with other nations seem to create emotional discomfort for Bulgarians. This tendency deserves special attention. No matter whether primed with characteristics of a nation that is ahead of Bulgaria on the basis of objective indicators (Germany) or with characteristics of a nation that is far behind Bulgaria when estimated with the universal development criteria (Albania) the effect is the same – decrease of the feeling of pride and increase of the feeling of shame. With these results we are faced with a serious national syndrome – low self esteem. And this is based not only on real problems and failures of the country but on underestimation of the achievements of Bulgaria and inability to assess adequately its actual position.

The study clearly demonstrates that emotions do matter. In what ways the constructive 'load' of positive emotions on the one hand and the 'withholding' effect of negative emotions on the other operate in concrete social situations and activities is still to be determined on the basis of further analysis.

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Endnotes

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