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Desislava Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva
Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0433-8087

Catchwords in British and Bulgarian Media Discourse on Minorities (GRT and Muslims)

Introduction

A catchword as defined by the Oxford Dictionary is "a popular word or phrase encapsulating a particular concept"; as such, it is a synonym of 'motto', 'formula', 'mantra' or 'buzzword', among others, as well as "a word printed or placed so as to attract attention" ("Catchword", n.d.-c). The Cambridge Dictionary defines a catchword as "a word or phrase that is often repeated by, or becomes connected with a particular organization, especially a political group" ("Catchword", n.d.-a). Collins English Dictionary adds that a catchword is "A catchword is a word or phrase that becomes popular or well-known, for example, because it is associated with a political campaign." ("Catchword", n.d.-b).[1] As seen from the definitions provided, catchwords are units that are ideologically bound as they are associated with politics,

[1] Collins English Dictionary offers three more meanings which, however, are deemed irrelevant for the study at hand (as in Gupta, 2022) because the focus here is not on catchwords used in commercials.

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which is never ideology-free, thus they are able to frame an issue and trigger particular attitudes.

Commenting on the function of catchwords, Darlington (2014) claims that they are similar to proverbs and generally provide "a mutually recognisable cultural shorthand for larger ideas, concepts, characters and stereotypes", adding that they represent "a type of knowing". Gupta (2025) also explains that catchwords can be used either extensively (widely) or intensively (within specific contexts), or both. He states:

> An existing word/phrase acquires a new sense at a social juncture, which then leads to it catching on in a significant manner over a subsequent time-period (in standard dictionaries, word-senses are enumerated separately, and new word-senses added as they settle). […] 'Catching on in a significant manner' means that, starting from that 'original' social juncture, catchwords/phrases have steadily growing usage-frequencies over a time-period, extensively (spread across contexts) and/or intensively (within a context). They are to be considered catchwords/phrases for the time-period over which there is steadily growing usage-frequency; they are to be considered catchwords/phrases insofar as such growing usage-frequency is extensive or intensive or both. (Gupta, 2025)

This quote is the starting point of the analysis as the focus of this very preliminary study is the use of words and phrases related to ethnic and religious groups in the media that have become popular at a particular point in time or are currently gaining popularity.

The focus of the study is twofold: media discourse on Gypsies, Roma and Travellers (GRT) in British newspapers and Roma in Bulgarian newspapers; on the other hand, media discourse on Muslims in Bulgarian and British newspapers. It should be clarified that the words and phrases analysed below have entered media discourse through political discourse due to either initiatives or language used by politicians in reference to any of these four groups. They also function as hooks which, once used, trigger all sets of notions associated with them, which can serve as a reason to call these phrases agenda-setters or framing devices (ideologically loaded, explicitly persuasive, simplifying, mis/disinformative, memorable/quotable, indexical of a worldview or agenda-creating), as well as hot-button topics (agenda-creating) with their underlying qualities (see Seargeant, 2023). As Seargeant (2023) further elaborates, catchwords "constitute concise forms of communication and they all have a particular significance for their audience, be this a specific faction or the public at large. The vast majority of them also have a certain salience

or prominence in political discourse, and indeed often become the subject of discussion and debate in their own right" (Seargeant, 2023). This is especially pertinent to the present study mostly due to the fact that when used in mainstream media, ethnonyms, along with references to ethnic and religious groups, explicitly mark a difference: people who are seen as deviant to mainstream culture definitely draw attention, especially if this difference is accompanied by a negative flair.

Therefore, also bearing in mind the fact that to name means to categorize, it can be claimed that ethnonyms and references to ethnic and religious groups can be viewed as a form of catchwords as their use prompts a flow of ideas and usually stereotypical images associated with the group being named. In addition, as Gossiaux (Госийо, 2002/2004) states, an ethnonym can also be viewed as a metaphor of ethnicity and ethnic identity. He opines that:

> An ethnonym is something like a reflection or a metaphor of ethnicity. It possesses the inherent simplicity of ethnicity: there is a specific name for the one who is different from me and my own people […]. An ethnonym possesses the estranging character of ethnicity: to be named means to be categorized. (Госийо, 2002/2004, p. 40, the translation is mine)

Naturally, ethnonyms and words in general are considered void of any emotional charge until used in a particular context that renders them positively or negatively charged. Still, due to the predominantly negative topics in relation to which the ethnonyms Roma, Gypsies or Travellers and the religious denominator Muslims are explicitly used, as well as due to the perception of their members as the ultimate ethnic and religious Other, they press buttons in readers' consciousness that prompt stereotypes, frames and prejudice.

Why GRT and Muslims in particular?

The ethnic groups of Roma in Bulgaria and Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in the UK and Muslims in Bulgaria and the UK have been chosen for this study mostly because these groups are visible in these two countries and their position in society is somewhat similar. However, the difference is that in the UK, both GRT and Muslims are considered culturally black, i.e., they have the position of minority groups that are considered both different from the majority and problematic. The problems caused by GRT in the UK are

associated predominantly with their itinerant lifestyle: they camp on illegal sites, steal, leave litter behind, and are noisy and crime-prone. Muslims, on the other hand, are considered problematic mostly as a result of the associations between the terrorist attacks of 9/11 on the World Trade Center in NY and the members of this religious group.

In Bulgaria, it is Roma who, similarly to GRT in the UK, are considered problematic due to their lifestyle: they live in ghettos with poor sanitation, high crime rates and cause social disorder, but they are also the main voting force at the time of elections. A clear distinction is made in Bulgaria between local and foreign Muslims. The majority of local Muslims belongs to the minority group of Bulgarian Turks. They are well integrated in society, have representation in government, and are literate and resemble Bulgarians in their lifestyle. The Muslims who are considered a threat are those coming from outside; they are perceived as possible terrorists under the influence of international media. Thus, in the Bulgarian press, it is more typical to refer to Bulgarian Muslims as Turkish, while the use of the religious marker 'Muslim' is primarily attributed to people coming from outside.

Corpus and method of analysis

Two main sets of corpora are used for the findings discussed. One of them is a manually created corpus based on publications in the Bulgarian *Sega*, *Standart* and *Dnevnik* and the British *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and *The Telegraph*. The other set is the electronically generated corpora enTenTen20 and bgTenTen20, both of which are part of Sketch Engine.

The manually collected corpora cover different periods of time. Those on Gypsies, Roma and Travellers cover two: one from 2001–2005, and one from 2020–2024. Those on Muslims cover slightly more recent periods: 2016–2018 and 2020–2022. As these four corpora proved insufficient for tracing the use of the catchphrases/words that were identified, the online corpora of Sketch Engine and the Google Ngram viewer were consulted to trace the usage of each selected unit over time. The problem encountered is that the Ngram viewer does not provide results for entries in Bulgarian, so it was difficult to assess the general trends and peaks in the use of the analysed Bulgarian words and phrases, therefore the study relied mostly on data obtained through Sketch Engine's Bulgarian corpus bgTenTen20.

The main methods of analysis used are content analysis along with the socio-cognitive approach within critical discourse studies[2] (van Dijk, 2018, 2024). The latter was deemed especially pertinent to the present study as, by analysing the use of a particular catchword or a phrase, one can trace its relation to the social processes that have prompted it and are reflected by it, as well as by the ideas it carries and spreads (see Gupta, 2022).

Analysis

The first characteristic of articles on ethnic minorities is the explicit use of the ethnonyms that mark that group. In the Bulgarian language, there are two ethnonyms that are used to denote the Roma: the autonym *Roma* (imposed in Europe as a common denominator of the whole group after the First Roma Congress held in south London at the beginning of April 1971[3]), and the exonym *Tsigani*. The former came about as a result of political correctness and identity politics in the 1990s, while the latter was considered offensive as it linked the ethnic group to a period in their history when they were held as slaves[4] in the confines of the Ottoman Empire (Achim, 1998; Hau, 2021; Marushiakova & Popov, 2009). However, the two are used interchangeably, and whenever used especially in the headlines of Bulgarian media they raise expectations of news related to either unruly behavior, crime, or electoral corruption. It would be far-fetched to argue that ethnonyms are catchwords as they show stability in their meaning and use, therefore they generally fall within frequency band 6, as described by the Oxford English Dictionary. Catchwords, as mentioned by Gupta (2025), are usually found in Bands 1–3 (<0.099 occurrences per million), but it is their catchiness that matters, not so much the band they occur in (see Gupta, 2025). It can be tentatively argued that the preference for one ethnonym

[2] The present study supports van Dijk's (2024, p. 4) opinion that triangular relations exist between discourse, social structures and cognition. As he explains, "Obviously, discourse as a form of (social) (inter) action is empirically part of society, but its structures can only be related to those of society through the cognitive processes of human beings" (van Dijk, 2024, p. 4).

[3] Various sources show different periods when the First World Roma Congress was held. This study adopts the time period specified in *History of the World Roma Congress 1971* (n.d.) as well as in the *First World Roma Congress* (n.d.).

[4] There are other theories regarding the meaning of *Tsigani*, but as the issue is irrelevant to the topic at hand, only one of them is presented.

over the other when referring to the group, i.e., *Tsigani* vs. the politically correct *Roma*, is noteworthy as it shows different attitudes. At the beginning of the century, these two ethnonyms were used almost at a similar rate, with a slight predominance of *Tsigani*, while the use of *Roma* dominated later on. *Tsigani* was characteristic of nationalist publications, especially on criminal activities performed by this group. The recognition of *Roma* as the politically correct way to name this group is indicative of the policies of inclusion that were undertaken as a result of identity politics.

Inclusion was a key word that was used not only in Bulgaria after the democratic changes in the country, but also worldwide. In reference to the Roma population in Europe, at the beginning of the century there was an initiative called "A Decade of Roma Inclusion", which was a hot-button topic for quite some time. It was the first joint effort of 12 European countries (mostly in Central and Eastern Europe) to improve the life of Roma populations inhabiting their countries. The period for said initiative was from 2005 to 2015, and it was welcomed with mixed feelings. On the one hand, people associated it with millions of Euros being wasted on a minority group that just does not want to integrate. On the other hand, the decade was viewed as an opportunity for some politicians and influential members of the Roma community to get richer, and there were also claims that the initiative was repressive to the majority as it provided money only for Roma while there were poor Bulgarians who would not be able to avail themselves of the funds. One way or another, Roma inclusion was a hot-button topic.

Checking the usage frequency of the whole phrase on Sketch Engine, the following results are obtained (*Bulgarian corpus from the web*, n.d.):

> *A Decade of Roma Inclusion* (*Десетилетие на ромското включване*): 51 hits; number of hits per million tokens, 0.01; percent of whole corpus, 9.007e-7%.[5]

The search also included abbreviated versions of the phrase that have frequently appeared in the media:

> The synonymous *A Decade of Roma Inclusion* (*Декада*[6] *на ромското включване*): 47 hits; number of hits per million tokens, 0.01; percent of whole corpus, 8.300e-7%.

> *Roma inclusion* (*ромско включване*): 207 hits; number of hits per million tokens, 0.04; percent of whole corpus, 0.000003656%.

[5] The size of the corpus of bgTenTen20 is 5,662,566,041 tokens.

[6] In Bulgarian, there are two synonymous versions of the English *decade*, namely *декада* and *десетилетие*.

Gypsy integration (*циганска интеграция*): 16 hits; number of hits per million tokens, 0; percent of whole corpus, 2.826e-7%.

Roma integration (*ромска интеграция*): 53 hits; number of hits per million tokens, 0.01; percent of whole corpus, 9.360e-7%.

The observed frequencies generally position the phrases in band 3 or 4.

At the onset of the initiative, *A Decade of Roma Inclusion* appeared in the media somewhat optimistically. Initially, it was envisioned that 33 million Euros would be allotted for desegregation of schools, improved living conditions, improved employment, access to healthcare, among others. All these assumptions about the positive idea behind the initiative were clearly reflected in the media, as the following examples of some of the headlines used in that period show:

Funds are provided for the education of children from minority groups[7] /h/ (*Предвидени са средства за образование на децата от малцинствата* /h/ – Dn/ 23.04.2004)

Roma inclusion: six months until the elections /h/ (*Ромското включване: остават шест месеца до изборите* /h/ – Dn/ 01.02.2005)

Eight governments, the World Bank and Soros intent on integrating Roma by 2015 /h/ (*Осем правителства, Световната банка и Сорос ще интегрират ромите до 2015 г.* /h/ – Dn/ 02.02.2005)

James Wolfensohn: Roma's prosperity will also accelerate economic growth /h/ (*Джеймс Улфенсън: Замогването на ромите, ще ускори и икономическия ръст* /h/ – Dn/ 05.02.2005)

Millions of Euros allocated for Roma integration /h/ (*Милиони евро бяха отпуснати за ромската интеграция* /h/ – Dn/ 02.04.2005)

Sofia residency is returned to the Roma /h/ (*Връща се софийското жителство за ромите* /h/ – Dn/ 03.07.2006)

However, only a year after the start of the initiative, there was a change in attitude, which was clearly reflected in the media: Decade of Roma Migration /h/ (*Десетилетие на ромското преселение* /h/ – Dn/ 27.07.2006), as well as How much does the lack of integration of Roma cost? /h/ (*Колко струва липсата на интеграция на ромите* /h/ – Dn/ 23.04.2007). It became clear that a large part of the population thought that the money would be given to the group by Soros and that no participation of Bulgaria was expected, while

[7] The translation from Bulgarian into English was done by the author. The abbreviations used for the different parts of the newspaper articles are as follows: /h/ – headline, /sh/ – subheadline, followed by the abbreviation of the newspaper and the date of publication of the analysed article.

reality showed that the initiative envisioned co-funding by the country and the fund. Thus, the negative attitudes grew, as is obvious in some of the examples found in Sketch Engine:

> Dzhambazki: Roma integration has completely failed and is fake! /h/ "There have been no results from this Roma decade and other decades similar to it, nothing but a bag of Bulgarian and European money stolen from it. This was the comment made by the deputy chairman of VMRO,[8] Angel Dzhambazki, in "Bulgaria in the Morning". What he referred to was the National Action Plan for the initiative called "Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015", as well as the grave problems in Roma society and the people who benefit from them. "No one can say exactly how much money was stolen (from the integration project, editor's note), no one knows". (*Джамбазки: Ромската интеграция е напълно провалена и фалшива! /h/ "Нищо не се е случило за тези ромски декади и други подобни, в които бяха откраднати една торба български и европейски пари. Това коментира заместник-председателят на ВМРО Ангел Джамбазки в "България сутрин". Той визира Национален план за действие по инициативата "Десетилетие на ромското включване 2005–2015 г.", както и дълбоките проблеми в ромското общество и хората, които се възползват от тях. "Никой не може да каже точно колко пари са откраднати (от проекта за интеграцията, бел.ред), никой не знае".* – BGonAir/ 10.01.2017)
>
> Announced with fanfare in February 2005 and launched in April of the same year in Bulgaria, the Roma decade initiative still remains unclear to many people today. Many voters were conveniently told that the state would give these millions to "those Gypsies". Millions that would be set aside from the voters' pockets every year, millions that would disappear without a trace, but would most likely be stolen by the same "Gypsies" and the bosses of the ghettos. (*Гръмко открита през февруари 2005 г. и задвижена през април същата година в България, инициативата за ромската декада и днес остава неясна за мнозина. На много избиратели удобно им беше втълпено, че това са едни милиони, които държавата ще даде за "ония циганите". Милиони, които ще бъдат заделяни от техния джоб всяка година, милиони, които ще потъват незнайно къде, но най-вероятно ще бъдат откраднати от същите "ония цигани" и от босовете на гетата.* – Dn/ 16.04.2015)
>
> Despite the government's efforts to achieve equal treatment of Roma children – for example, through the National Action Plan Decade of Roma Inclusion – the negative attitude of society towards this ethnic group remains. There is also inequality in the field of education, and difficult access to healthcare, jobs and housing. (*Въпреки усилията на правителството за равноправно отношение към ромските деца – например чрез Националния план за действие "Десетилетие на ромското включване" – отрицателното отношение на обществото към тази етническа група остава.*

[8] VMRO is a conservative nationalist party striving at the unity of all Bulgarians (a.n.)

Остава и неравнопоставеността в областта на образованието, трудният достъп до здравеопазване, работни места и жилища. – Frognews/28.05.2009).

Unfortunately, under the pressure of European liberal "human rights activists", the madness called the Decade of Roma Inclusion is being imposed on Bulgaria – the forced integration of people who have no desire to be integrated into anything. (*За съжаление под натиска на европейските либерали „правозащитници", в България се налага безумието, наречено "десетилетие на ромското включване" – насилствено интегриране на хора, които нямат никакво желание да се интегрират към каквото и да било.* – EuroChicago.com/ 26.03.2010)

And that is why we are also talking about ministers, prime ministers, regional governors, mayors and municipal councillors who over the years were responsible for the non-existent integration. We must name those who waved at us, if you happen to remember that nonsense called the Decade of Roma Inclusion. A serious fraud into which torrents of both national and European money sank, and the result is zero, negative. (*И затова говорим и за министри, министър-председатели, областни управители, кметове, общински съветници, които в годините бяха отговорни за неслучилото се вписване. Трябва да посочим поименно тези, които размахваха, помните ли имаше една глупост наречена "Десетилетие на ромското включване". Една тежка измама, в която потънаха непребродими пари – национални и европейски, а резултатът е нулев, отрицателен.* – Epitsentar/ 18.07.2017)

The phrase acquires the meaning of funds wasted away, of embezzlement and abuse, of a failure, a scam and continuing poverty. As can be seen from the examples above, the parallel versions, i.e., *Gypsy inclusion* and *Roma integration*, are typical of the speeches given by nationalists (VMRO[9] members) who generally do not agree with the integration of the group and all the activities undertaken to improve the situation of Roma. They also prefer to call the gr oup by its exonym and any tolerance shown is considered unaccounted for. Thus, the focus in the examples above is again on the funds wasted to support integration that never happened.

Looking at the frequency of occurrences of the phrase, one can trace its use up until 2017, and then sporadically only when some kind of account of the results of the initiative is sought or as a reference to the unsuccessful integration when similar initiatives were proposed afterwards. A headline that probably best summarizes the general attitude uses another popular phrase built around the ethnonym Tsigani/ Gypsies, i.e., *циганска работа* ('Gypsy work'), which is a part of a popular saying in Bulgaria used with reference to something done hastily and sloppily: *Good job*

[9] Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization.

but a Gypsy one. The headline used by the Bulgarian *Dnevnik* is "Roma inclusion" as Gypsy work /h/ (*"Ромското включване" като циганската работа* – Dn/ 16.04.2015). The established relationship between the two phrases transfers the ideas conveyed by the saying to the initiative itself. As mentioned in the body of the article, the good intentions remained only intentions which did not produce anything due to sloppy performance and bad management of funds.

Around the beginning of the century, another word was frequently circulated in the media, especially at the time of polls: *циганизация* (Gypsyization/ Gypsyfication). According to an online portal, it means "the process of converting a person or a group of people to the Gypsy culture, traditions, and way of life. It can also be used as a pejorative term, meaning 'deviating from the norms of society and becoming part of the marginalized sections of the population'" ("Циганизация", n.d.). It is interesting to note that *циганизация* (Gypsyization/ Gypsyfication) is not clearly defined in the Bulgarian online dictionary. The bigger corpus, bgTenTen20, shows the use of a word which can definitely be considered a trigger, i.e., Gypsyization/Gypsyfication (number of hits, 225; number of hits per million tokens, 0.04; percent of whole corpus, 0.000003973%).

The media articles analysed show two main uses of the word, i.e. either as a process of all-encompassing profanization or as a process of an increase of the number of Roma to the extent that Bulgarians become a minority. An example that is supportive of the meaning of increasing profanity was published in News.bg:

> Maybe that is why mass Gypsyization of the population is underway in our country. No, not as an ethnic belonging (for now). As a type of mentality, education, culture. Debasement, illiteracy, chalga, and petty things from everyday life are increasingly taking over the space, forcibly freed from the spirit of knowledge, culture, and lifelong learning. (*Може би и затова у нас е на ход масова циганизация на населението. Не, не като етническа принадлежност (засега). Като манталитет, образование, култура. Опростачването, неграмотността, чалгата и битовизмът все повече завладяват пространството, насилствено освободено от духа на знанието, културата, ученето през целия живот.* – News.bg/ 22.11.2010)

The word also referred to the demographic changes that would potentially be observed if the birth rate of the Roma population continued to be high. This use is encountered in publications after population polls. There is frequent speculation that the Roma minority in Bulgaria will outnumber indigenous Bulgarians in a matter of 30 to 50 years – a phenomenon which will eventually lead to the extinction of the majority:

> In 20 years, the nation lost 2 million people, and with these rates of depopulation and Gypsyization the population is at risk of complete extinction within just a few decades. (*За 20 години нацията загуби 2 милиона души и с тези темпове на обезлюдяване и циганизация е заплашена от пълно изчезване само за няколко десетилетия.* – News.bg/ 16.07.2011)

> The Bulgarian population is melting. By the end of the century, there will be about 3.0–3.5 million people, as many as we had in 1900, i.e., 200 years ago. Moreover, most of them will be Gypsies and Turks because the demographic crisis is currently most acute among the Bulgarian ethnic group. An accelerated process of Gypsyization is underway. Bulgaria is disappearing. (*Българското население се топи. Към края на века ще бъде около 3,0-3,5 млн души, колкото сме били в 1900та година, т.е. преди 200 години. При това повечето ще са цигани и турци. Защото демографската криза е най-остра всред българската етническа група. Протича ускорен процес на циганизация. България изчезва.* – Epitsentar/ 13.11.2017)

As these two examples show, *Gypsyization* is used to create scare scenarios and is successfully employed by nationalists to present the growing Roma population as a threat to the majority. The trend is not a new phenomenon but was observed at the beginning of the century as an approach practiced by the members of the Ataka nationalist movement (see Чешмеджиева, 2010). The most current examples show that the idea of ever-growing numbers of Roma and a process of extinction of Bulgarians is currently used by members of VMRO. Checking the data published by the National Statistical Institute, however, one can see that in the population poll in 2021 only 266,720 people (4.4% of the population) identified themselves as being of Roma ethnicity, which makes the group third in size after the Bulgarians and Turks (see *Етнокултурни характеристики*, 2022). Thus, even though unfounded, *Gypsyization* still manages to create moral panic and clearly defines the folk devils (Cohen, 2002; Frothingham, 2023) society can blame for the slow progress of the country, i.e., Roma.

The situation observed in the British media is slightly different as the number of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers is reported to be around 300,000 people (approximately 0.3% of the population in 2022) (Henry, 2022). Thus, at the beginning of the century, the common ethnonym used to denote the great variety of people constituting the group was *Gypsies and Travellers*, which occurred either as a noun phrase or separately. Roma was used sporadically and mostly to denote European immigrants of that ethnic group.[10]

[10] On the differences between the groups comprising GRT in the UK, see Henry (2022). On the variety of Bulgarian Roma, see Marushiakova and Popov (2016).

Currently, the name of the group is Gypsies, Roma and Travellers (GRT). The uniting factor among the variety of people that this ethnic group comprises is their nomadic way of life and culture, and a feeling of belonging as a result of similar treatment. This in particular was why the phrase *itinerant criminals* was used in a derogatory manner at the beginning of the century. Even though an ethnonym was not explicitly used, the phrase was invariably linked to the GRT community.

> '[I]tinerant criminals' caused damage to land and property, and a degree of anger was understandable (G/ 31.10.2003); the 56 itinerants, who say they are traditional Romany gipsies,[11] bought a three-acre field in Minety, Wilts. (DT/ 03.08.2004)

Checking the frequency of use of the phrase through Google Ngram, one can clearly see that the phrase fell in popularity and was not so frequently used after 2004.

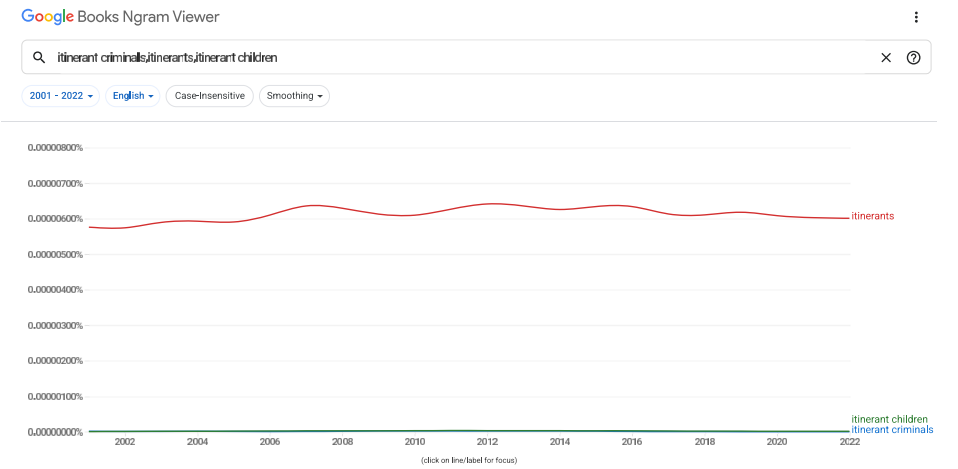


Diagram 1: Google Ngram frequency of use of *itinerant criminals*, *itinerants*, *itinerant children*

The trend is confirmed by the results obtained through Sketch Engine, which show that *itinerant criminals* is used not only for Gypsies and Travellers

[11] There are still examples in the media of use of this ethnonym with a small letter, which is discriminatory as it deprives the group of its ethnic status and identity (see Чешмеджиева-Стойчева, 2020).

but for other groups as well. The personal corpus from 2020–2024 does not show any use of the phrase.

As Google Ngram allows for the use of several phrases to be traced simultaneously, a check was run not only of *itinerant criminals* but also of *itinerants* and *itinerant children,* as Traveller children were also frequently referred to. The personal corpus from the period shows 5 cases of use of *Traveller children*:

> Parents have removed their children from the local primary school because of the influx of traveller children. (GO/ 21.11.04)
>
> In the last two decades schools have adopted an increasingly inclusive approach to pupils from a variety of different religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. But there is one group of children whose differences and specific needs are often overlooked – Gypsy traveller children. (G/ 19.08.03)
>
> There are an estimated 5,000 Traveller children at mainstream primary schools in Ireland out of a total Traveller population of 25,000. But as they get older, they get fewer. […]. And because they're uneducated, they're unwelcome at school. (G/ 15.01.02)
>
> Many traveller children now complete their years of compulsory schooling and are increasingly achieving success in exams. Some students have even been encouraged to stay on into the sixth form, at a time when post-16 education for traveller children is still almost unheard of. (G/ 30.10.01)

As can be seen, the use of *Traveller children* is restricted to the topic of schooling and conveys mostly the negative result of a lack of education as well as the prejudice people have about members of this community. A check through Sketch Engine for *Traveller children* shows number of hits, 747; number of hits per million tokens, 0.01; percent of whole corpus, 0.000001213%; corpus size (tokens), 61,585,997,113. However, this use is not restricted solely to members of the GRT community. The other phrase *itinerant children*, which is used as a synonym to *Traveller children*, occurs once in the personal corpus, while only 17 hits were found in the general corpus, which confirms that its use is very restricted and is related to children of GRT background. *Itinerant children* has been predominantly employed by the internet platform Child Abuse Community (childobusecommunity.ie).

The presence of *itinerant children* is significant as Traveller children continue to be viewed as particularly problematic for the education system as their itinerant way of life forces them to change schools every few months. These children were even linked to a special code in attendance registers called the T-code – T standing for traveller. Whenever a child accompanies one or both of their parents when they travel for business or something else,

the code used to mark the absence at school is T. This automatically singles out the child as a potential dropout or as a student who could potentially continue their education at a different school.

An interesting new development of this issue is reflected in the personal corpus. Guided by principles of political correctness and a desire to focus not so much on the ethnicity of children who swap schools but on the reason for it, a new phrase has been coined, namely *mobile children*, as reflected in *The Telegraph*: Pupils from traveller families are referred to as 'mobile children' by the Department for Education /h/ (T/ 21.08.2024). The use of *mobile children* is not detected in the personal corpora collected on GRT at the beginning of the century. Consulting Google Ngram, however, one can see that the use is not so new and can be traced back to the beginning of the 21st century and even earlier.

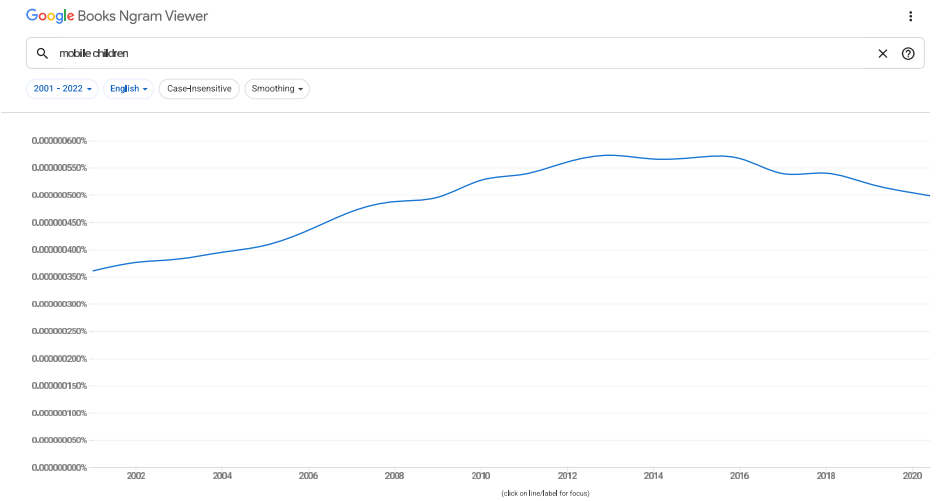


Diagram 2: Google Ngram frequency of use of *mobile children*

Using the Google Ngram viewer, one can see the popularity of the term reaching its peak in 2017, while it is currently slowly falling. Based on the information obtained from Sketch Engine, the phrase returns 252 hits (or less than 0.01% of the whole corpus). This shows its low frequency of occurrence, and its reference to GRT children can be defined as internal, confined to the field of education only. The electronic corpus shows a few occurrences in which *mobile children* is assigned to Traveller children:

> However, White Gypsy/Traveller pupils enrolled in school continue to have the lowest attendance rates of any ethnic group at 78.8% in 2016/17 compared to the 93.3% Scotland average. It follows that Gypsy/Traveller children and young people, and other mobile children whose attendance is irregular, are missing out on time in education compared to other children. (scot.gov/ 12.12.2018)
>
> Traveller pupils to be referred to as 'mobile children' under new government education guidance /h/. (DM/ 22.08.2024)

As mentioned above, the phrase *mobile children* has been used in order to focus people's attention on children's "mobility, rather than ethnicity", therefore it is considered politically correct. This, however, marks a narrowing of the meaning of *mobile*, attaching it to a particular group of people who are not only able to move but also young and attending school. Furthermore, as seen in the example from *The Telegraph* above, even if the ethnonym Traveller or Gypsy is left out, *mobile* is not applied to anyone in general, but only to that group of people leading an itinerant way of life. Whether the phrase will catch on or not is to be seen; however, remarks have been made by various organisations stating that *mobile children* obliterates the cultural variety observed in these communities and, in a way, is not politically correct but depersonalizing. As mentioned in *The Telegraph* again:

> Previous guidance on school attendance, which came into force in May 2022 and still applied until last week, said the "T code" referred to a number of different groups under the umbrella term traveller, including "Roma, English and Welsh gypsies, Irish and Scottish travellers, showmen (fairground people) circus people, bargees (occupational boat dwellers) and new travellers". (T/ 21.08.2024)

The idea of depersonalization and obliteration has been linked to the use of another acronym considered the politically correct way to denote a few minority groups, including GRT, Muslims and Asians, namely the use of the acronym *BAME* in the British context.

The *BAME* acronym has gained prominence and is instantaneously associated with all groups considered ethnically different, or black, Asian, and minority ethnic, or people who "do not consider themselves to be white" ("BAME", n.d.). The umbrella acronym that preceded *BAME* was *BME* (black and minority ethnic).

> In Bolton, a Conservative councillor was suspended hours after the new restrictions were announced for posting on Facebook: "Don't penalise me over the increase in Covid cases in Greater Manchester. I've stuck to the rules for four long months. Blame the 48,000 illegal immigrants, the BAME community and the morons that

> never obey the rules." (G/ 5.12.2020). An older youth worker, who had been part of this conciliatory group, said: "A number of BAME young people have made chains to stop people throwing things on the fires." (G/ 19.07.2024)

Although not explicitly used for Muslims or GRT, BAME points to an existing difference and its occurrence in an article creates expectations about information that is connected with something or someone considered *Other* – not the same. The *BAME* acronym has been rising in popularity and shows an increased number of uses, surpassing the established *BME*.

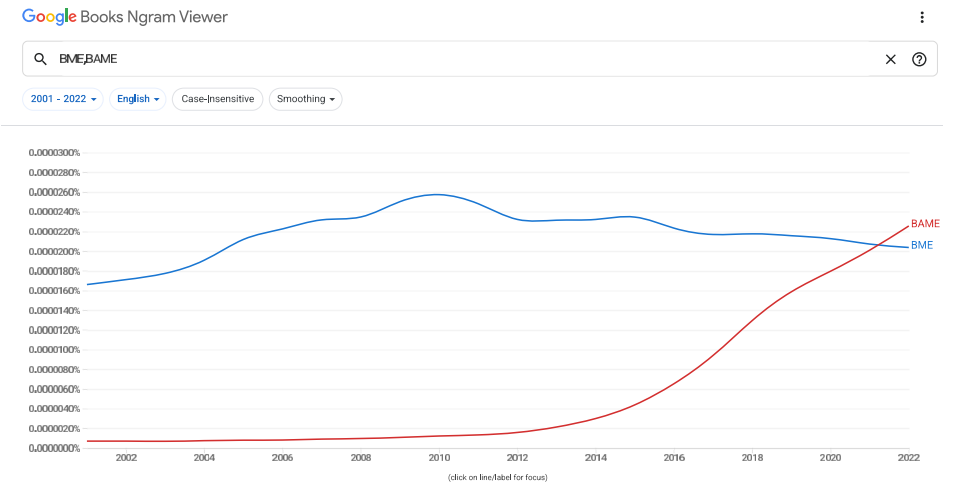


Diagram 3. Google Ngram frequency of use of *BME*, *BAME*

At the same time, it should be mentioned that neither *BME* nor *BAME* enjoy popularity among the cultural groups they encompass or stand for, namely as a result of their very generic nature. In an article titled "BME label insulting, says ex-minister Priti Patel" /h/ (BBC/ 9.03.2018), Priti Patel, an MP of Ugandan-Indian background and currently the Shadow Foreign Secretary of the UK, opined:

> Don't label me as a BME. I've said that to people in the cabinet. I've said that to civil servants. I think it's patronising and insulting." She said the term was "totally unhelpful because we are people and everybody wants to be recognised for their individual merits". (BBC/ 9.03.2018)

A similar observation was made on ITV's *Good Morning Britain* television show in an interview on the Race report issued by the Commission on

Race and Ethnic Disparities, aired in the wake of Black Lives Matter on 31 March 2021. The interview was titled "Is it time to scrap the term BAME?". The general opinion of the interviewees was that even though things have improved for ethnic groups in the UK, institutional racism does exist and the term *BAME* does nothing more than deprive ethnic minorities of their unique identities by placing them all under one and the same umbrella term. Thus, rather than celebrating their uniqueness, *BAME* obliterates it. Further into the topic, it can also be claimed that discarding the differences between the communities subsumed under the acronym actually provides fertile ground for more negative stereotypes to be transferred from one group to another or others within this amalgam of ethnic minorities. This in itself could potentially trigger negative reactions, prejudice and further discrimination to all people termed *BAME*.

One of the most negatively presented groups in the media is undoubtedly Muslims. There are multiple accounts that this group has been viewed with suspicion and mistrust as a result of the involvement of Muslims in the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center (see Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2024; Poole, 2006; Poole & Williamson, 2023; Said, 1979, 1997). Plenty of references have been used to denote this group: terrorists, radicals, Islamists, jihadists, etc. The word *jihad,* frequently translated in the media as "religious war", became a buzz word as it was stereotypically associated with the intent of members of that group to kill non-Muslims.

Jihad has been in circulation in both British and Bulgarian media (in the latter through translated articles on terrorist activities or general information on Muslims who are not local but located outside the confines of the country). There are two meanings of *jihad*, as shown in the Merriam-Webster dictionary: "1: a holy war waged on behalf of Islam as a religious duty; also, a personal struggle in devotion to Islam, especially involving spiritual discipline"; "2: a crusade for a principle or belief" ("Jihad", n.d.). This word has been in use for a long time (since 1800), but it reached its peak in 2010, and its frequency of use has since fallen. The use of *jihad* without modifiers has been noted in both personal corpora, but the focus here will be on some new phrases that are gaining popularity in different contexts in the media, i.e., *land jihad*, *hijab jihad*, *love jihad*, and *sexual jihad*. The last two are observed in Bulgarian media as well, while the first two have not entered it yet. The interesting observation here is that only the frequency of *love jihad* can be traced through Google Ngram viewer, while the other three have not been

reflected there, which means they have not entered Google's book depository yet. The trend observed in the diagram of *love jihad* is upward, i.e., the phrase is gaining momentum.

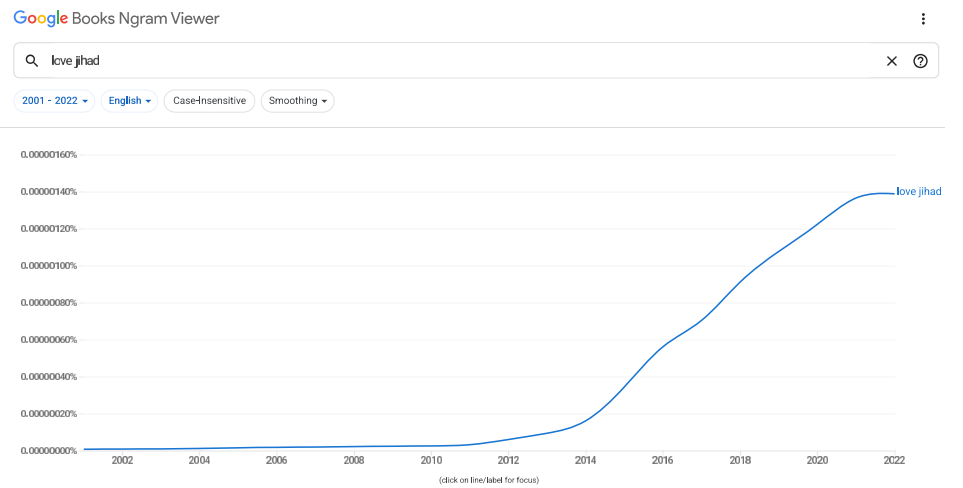


Diagram 4. Google Ngram frequency of use of *love jihad* and *hijab jihad*

The phrases *land jihad*, *love jihad* and *hijab jihad* are used in relation to events in India. *Land jihad* is used in reference to the attempts of the Muslim minority to find places to perform their prayers, while *love jihad* refers to the allegedly forced conversion of Hindu girls and women to Islam through marriages to Muslims.

> Indian police arrest Muslim man under 'love jihad' law for allegedly attempting to convert Hindu woman to Islam /h/ […] The woman, who has not been named, married someone else in June, but in his complaint after the approval of the 'love jihad' law last week, her father claimed the man continued pursuing and harassing her (T/ 3.12.2021). Love jihad: India's lethal religious conspiracy theory (G/ 9.02.2022). When Muslims, with fewer and fewer mosques to pray in, began to offer their prayers outside on the dirt of Gurgaon's open roadsides, the furious men howled that they would not tolerate Muslim "land jihad". (G/ 10.12.2021)

Hijab jihad refers to Muslim girls' practice of wearing the hijab in public and is particularly related to events that occurred in Indian universities that declined to let girls wearing hijabs enter their campuses. The difference in the use of the phrases is obvious. They all revolve around the idea of Muslims imposing their culture and traditions on non-Muslims in a violent manner, and if that truly

might be the case with *love jihad*, then with *land jihad* and *hijab jihad* the main victims are Muslims who are being chased and abused. Whenever seen praying in an unauthorised place, Muslims have been chased away and sometimes even beaten or pelted with stones. The hijabs of Muslim girls have been pulled down and they have been thrown out of school for not complying.

The idea behind *love jihad*, also referred to by the code name *Romeo jihad,* is that victims who are non-Muslims are coerced into converting: Hindus target mixed-faith couples in India /h/ Extremists accuse Muslims of love jihad /sh/ (*Хиндуисти вземат на мушка смесени религиозни двойки в Индия* /h/ *Екстремисти винят мюсюлманите в любовен джихад* /sh/ – ClubZ/ 29.04.2018).

Sexual jihad is the opposite practice, according to which women sympathetic to Jihadists travel to places dominated by them and offer themselves as wives to the soldiers, e.g. Tunisia's 'sexual jihad' – extremist fatwa or propaganda? (BBC/ 27.10.2013). In the Bulgarian context, this phrase exists with one more meaning: the freedom jihadists have in satisfying their sexual cravings whenever they want: *Девици на небето и сексуален джихад на Земята* /h/ […] *"Ислямска държава" обещава на бойците си по 72 девици на небето и "сексуален джихад" на Земята. В прав текст това означава, че на всеки боец се полагат жени, които да задоволяват сексуалните му фантазии* (DW/ 7.10.2014). The original source of the article reads: The fight against "sexual jihad" /h/ […] Much of IS's propaganda revolves around sexualized violence, observes the Iraqi women's rights activist. IS promises fighters 72 virgins in heaven and sexual jihad on earth, for which women must be available for sexual services (Telegrafi).

The phrases formed around *jihad*, i.e., *land jihad*, *hijab jihad*, *love jihad*, and *sexual jihad*, mark cases of internal use as they appear only in the contexts mentioned here, and only time will show whether their use will settle or die off. However, the fact that they are extensively used not only locally in India but also in The Daily Telegraph and other sources shows that their use is spreading.

Conclusion

This analysis of the Bulgarian and the British media discourse based on manually created corpora as well as on the electronic corpora of Sketch Engine shows extensive use of several phrases and words related to Roma in Bulgaria, Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in the UK, and Muslims in Bulgaria and the UK.

It has been found that use of these phrases is linked to particular periods of time characterised by specific social processes.

Thus, *Decade of Roma Inclusion* has been used throughout the period that the initiative covered, i.e., 2005–2015, but its significance and connotation have changed. At the beginning of the period, the phrase sounded positive and suggested possibilities for Roma to really be included in Bulgarian society as a result of the various projects and undertakings aimed at improving their literacy, access to health care, living conditions, etc. Only a few years later, however, the connotation of the initiative became predominantly negative, suggesting fraudulent activities, wasted funds and failure. After the end of the decade, the phrase appeared only sporadically in publications analysing the results of the initiative or its significance for the Roma community in Bulgaria. It was also linked to another phrase developed around the use of the exonym *Tsigani*. *Gypsy work* has been in wide use in Bulgarian society for a long time and its negative connotations have been transferred to the results of the *Decade of Roma Inclusion* initiative.

The second analysed word related to the same ethnic group, i.e., *Gypsyization*, also shows two different uses, depending on the political incline of the text producer. Nationalists preferred the meaning which created panic and conveyed a scenario in which Roma outnumber the majority in the country. The analysis also shows uses of Gypsyization with the meaning of all-encompassing profanization, referring to the slow rate of development of the country.

In the British media, the phrases used to denote the GRT group are mainly linked to the itinerant lifestyle of this group. *Itinerant criminals*, *itinerant children* and *Traveller children* were used at the beginning of the century to mark members of this group. The use of the modifier *itinerant* has been found to have internal use, usually associated with education. In the most recent corpus, the use of *mobile children* has replaced *itinerant children* and *Traveller children*, thus marking a narrowing of the meaning of the phrase in the context of education.

The last few years have seen another occurrence, namely that of the acronym BAME used to refer to black, Asian and ethnic minority people, also including Muslims and GRT. This acronym has gained popularity, replacing the one used before it, i.e., BME. However, its use has been contested by members of the groups it encompasses because of its overly generic nature and its obliteration of individual and cultural differences.

Other phrases found in articles on Muslims that mark new coinages used in both the British and Bulgarian media (as a result of international news) revolve around the idea of jihad and mark a phenomenon that still at the time

of writing of this analysis refers only to events in India, i.e., *land jihad*, *love jihad*, *hijab jihad*, and to the lifestyle of ISIS/ ISIL fighters – *sex jihad*. These phrases are gaining momentum, but *hijab jihad* and *sex jihad* have not yet been reflected in Google Ngram. Still, these phrases contribute to the fossilization of the negative image of Muslims that is generally reported in the media. Only time will show whether these phrases will establish their presence in media discourse or will fade away.

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Słowa klucze w brytyjskim i bułgarskim dyskursie medialnym na temat mniejszości (Cyganie, Romowie, Trawelerzy i muzułmanie)

Artykuł śledzi występowanie niektórych popularnych zwrotów związanych z Cyganami, Romami i Trawelerami (CRT) oraz muzułmanami w dyskursie medialnym w Bułgarii i Wielkiej Brytanii. Wyniki opierają się na dwóch różnych zbiorach korpusów: z jednej strony – na korpusie wszystkich artykułów na temat CRT i muzułmanów opublikowanych w brytyjskich gazetach „The Independent", „The Guardian" oraz „The Telegraph" oraz bułgarskich „Dnevnik", „Sega" i „Standart" w różnych okresach; z drugiej strony – na bułgarskim i brytyjskim korpusie elektronicznym Sketch engine. Wykorzystując analizę treści i podejście społeczno-poznawcze w ramach krytycznych studiów nad dyskursem, autorka koncentruje się na użyciu terminów *Roma inclusion* [integracja Romów], *Gypsyization* [cyganizacja], *itinerants* [wędrowcy], *mobile children* [dzieci mobilne], *BAME* [czarni, Azjaci i mniejszości etniczne] oraz *jihad* [dżihad] w dyskursie medialnym oraz na zmianach semantycznych, którym te terminy podlegają. Uwzględniono także znaczenie omawianych wyrażeń dla osób, które opisują. Badanie pokazuje, że niektóre użycia wygasły, inne uległy zmianie lub ich znaczenie uległo zawężeniu, a frekwencja innych właśnie nabiera impetu.

Słowa kluczowe: dyskurs medialny; krytyczna analiza dyskursu; słowa klucze; muzułmanie; Cyganie, Romowie i Trawelerzy

Catchwords in British and Bulgarian media discourse on minorities (GRT and Muslims)

The paper traces the occurrence of some common phrases related to Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, and Muslims in the media discourses in Bulgaria and the UK. The findings are based on two different sets of corpora: on the one hand, a corpus of all articles on GRT and Muslims published in the British *The Independent*, *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph* and the Bulgarian *Dnevnik*, *Sega* and *Standart* in different time periods; on the other hand, the Bulgarian and British electronic corpora of Sketch engine. Using content analysis and the socio-cognitive approach within critical discourse studies, the analysis focuses on the use of the terms *Roma inclusion*, *Gypsyization*, *itinerants*, *mobile children*, *BAME*, and *jihad* in media discourse and the changes in meaning these words and phrases undergo, and their significance for the people they denote. The study shows that some uses have died out, others have changed or their meaning has narrowed, while still others are just gaining momentum.

Keywords: media discourse; critical discourse analysis; catchwords; Muslims; GRT

Desislava Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva (d.stoycheva@shu.bg) – profesorka nadzwyczajna filologii angielskiej na Uniwersytecie im. Konstantina Presławskiego w Szumenie w Bułgarii. Autorka książek: *Етническият друг: Образът на ромите, циганите и пътуващите хора в българската и британската преса* [Etniczny Inny: Wizerunek Romów, Cyganów i ludności wędrownej w prasie bułgarskiej i brytyjskiej; 2020] oraz *Muslims in the Bulgarian and the British press: The Multifarious Image of the Religious Other* [Muzułmanie w prasie bułgarskiej i brytyjskiej. Różnorodny obraz religijnego Innego; 2024]. W 2018 roku otrzymała nagrodę za osiągnięcia w dziedzinie tłumaczeń specjalistycznych i naukowych za tłumaczenie książki Marii Montessori *The Secret of Childhood* [Sekret dzieciństwa]. Zainteresowania badawcze: językoznawstwo porównawcze, medioznawstwo i kulturoznawstwo ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem kwestii pochodzenia etnicznego, religii i tożsamości.

Desislava Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva (d.stoycheva@shu.bg) – Associate professor in English Philology at the Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen, Bulgaria. Author of the books: *Етническият друг: Образът на ромите, циганите и пътуващите хора в българската и британската преса* [The Ethnic Other: The Image of Roma, Gypsies and Traveling People in the Bulgarian and the British Press; 2020] and *Muslims in the Bulgarian and the British Press: The Multifarious Image of the Religious Other* (2024). In 2018, she received an award for achievements in the field of specialized and scientific translation for the translation of Maria Montessori's book *The Secret of Childhood*. Research interests: comparative linguistics, media studies and cultural studies, with a focus on ethnicity, religion and identity.

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