

Experiencing Ethnicity through Sport: Minority Sports Organizations in Interwar Bulgaria (1918–1941)

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(Summary)

The article examines the role of sports and gymnastic activities in the consolidation and expression of ethnicity among Jews, Armenians, and Turks in interwar Bulgaria (1918–1941). Based on the cases of the Jewish Zionist “Maccabi” Society, the Armenian sports and scouting organization “Homenetmen” and the Turkish gymnastic union “Turan” the paper reveals how physical training was perceived by the activists of these movements as an integral part of the ethnic resilience of their respective communities. In the context of the frequent (and sometimes deliberate) “silencing” of minorities’ identity projects by the Bulgarian state in the period, sport served not just as a means of group cohesion – it actually represented the most effective mechanism for public demarginalization of the groups under discussion. From this perspective, the essay attempts to contribute to a fuller theoretical understanding of the places and functions of sport within the processes of identity affirmation and the expression of ethnic/national consciousness. The article is based on an interdisciplinary approach, with particular emphasis on the analysis of available periodicals and other archival sources of these sports organizations.

Keywords: sport; gymnastics organizations; nationalism; identity; ethnicity; interwar Bulgaria (1918–1941)

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