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The Precursors of Bulgarian Rural Sociology

Studies concerning the Bulgarian countryside have always constituted a significant issue in the creativity and research of representatives of many sciences. The rural question was raised as early as the Middle Ages and was further developed after 1887 when Bulgaria regained independence after 500 years of Turkish occupation. Towards the end of the 18th century came an epoch of renaissance. Bulgaria entered the age of capitalist development, Bulgarian thinkers began to battle for their language, education and national church. The years 1878–1944 were a period of development of society and the capitalist state as well as new economic relations and social movements. Both during the Turkish occupation and immediately after regaining independence there was considerable interest in the countryside. This is entirely justified and determined by the specificity of Bulgarian society. Until 1887 relations were feudal in Bulgaria and its typically rural structure existed until the Ist World War, approximately 80% of the population living in the countryside. It is therefore not surprising that the countryside and its social structure became the centre of interest for many scholars.

Rural studies during the Middle Ages are nowadays considered proto-sociological. They were carried out mainly within the framework of theology or creativity of religious sects which were numerous in Bulgaria at the time. Social awareness connected with the countryside was highly developed before Bulgaria regained independence and it also had an important role during the independence process. Thinkers of the time saw the importance of problems of the Bulgarian rural population's position and consequently an improvement of their living conditions. In the work of many thinkers, such as Petko Raczew Slawejko or Georgi Rakowski the following rural sociological issues appear: comparisons between country and town, peasant living conditions, morality, culture. It should not, however, be forgotten

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that these studies are ideological and the rural issue is approached in the context of Bulgaria regaining independence.

After Bulgarian independence in 1887, the countryside became the focus of interest of thinkers, ideologists and political parties (mainly liberal and socialist). There was enormous change in all social spheres, both in the development of science, social and spiritual life. Sociology began to develop as a whole and consequently sociological studies and rural research. There was an emergence of sociological analyses about the significance of the countryside and its status in Bulgaria, as well as the Bulgarian economy and studies on the rural population. Representatives of various ideologies started showing particular interest in the countryside. The Marxist concept of rural issues from Bulgaria's renaissance to the 2nd World War was one of the most significant. Dymitr Blagoew (1856–1924), a Marxist, made an important contribution to rural sociology. He founded the "BRSDP" party organisation which broke into two factions in 1881: the "narrow" and the "broad-minded" socialists. Both factions analysed several problems connected with sociological cognition, including the Bulgarian countryside and its development trends. Using the term sociology, Blagoew analyses various social problems from the sociological point of view. He divides the rural issue into two levels: the theoretical level which in his view is very general and the empirical which is concrete. His theoretical generalisations and conclusions derive from Marxism and also from a real analysis of the concrete Bulgarian social reality. The first theoretical questions concerning rural issues are connected with the national criticism of sociological theory. Blagoew proves that in Bulgaria capitalist relations are formed both in town and in the countryside. He also analyses the rural issue from the historical perspective; the difficult position of the countryside and its population. He believes that after the Turkish occupation the countryside has played an immense role in the battle against capitalism. In his articles he analyses Bulgaria's rural past from before 40–50 years ago. This is mainly when capital began accumulating and a new social class structure was taking shape in Bulgarian society. Blagoew and his colleagues analysed the position of the countryside and the rural class which they saw as an important feature of the working class.

Behind these ideological considerations concerning the countryside there is however a concrete analysis of the life of the rural population. Blagoew makes a typology of the peasants, dividing them according to material position, interests, political views. He distinguishes three categories: large, medium and small. He is later more precise in his categories, speaking about six groups which the rural population can be divided into, bearing in mind the amount of land they own, where they live and whether they use their own or hired labour. Blagoew mainly used postal questionnaires and various statistical methods in his rural research.

By means of thorough historical analysis and empirical research Blagoew and his colleagues primarily wished to foresee the future of the Bulgarian countryside and establish social tendencies. Bulgaria saw the development of capitalism which also penetrated Bulgarian agriculture whereas according to Blagoew the future of the countryside and its population lies in socialism.

The work of Alexander Stambolijski (1879–1923), the representative of agrarianism and democratic ideology in Bulgaria, is also exceptionally important in the development of sociology. Being totally opposed to Blagoew's socialist assumptions, he follows the concepts of agrarianism in Europe and tries to adapt them to the Bulgarian environment. According to him, a compromise should be found between bourgeois ideas and the Marxist or socialist viewpoint. In his agrarianism the theory of class division holds a very important place. He understands the concept of class as a social group which is held together by a common principle, e.g. people doing the same type of work. In this way Stambolijski makes a distinction between different classes the most important being the agrarian class which is numerous and holds an important position as regards means of production. Stambolijski deals with concrete problems concerning the Bulgarian countryside and the social status of the rural population. Writing about the essence and functions of the agrarian union he raises several significant sociological issues concerning the countryside: legal and economic issues, the spiritual life of the rural population, health care and education. He stands up for the rural masses, their hard work and the political control of the class organisation. The inter-war period saw the growing development of this general idea. Stambolijski's agrarianism is the first step towards the constitution of rural and agrarian sociology.

It was not until 1936 however, with the growing trend of rural sociology in the United States that discussion began in Bulgaria connected with the use of this concept. A theoretical trend emerged whose representatives began to discuss the subject of rural sociology. The first article about rural sociology – "The Sociology of the Bulgarian Countryside" by Nanko Moraliew appeared in the *Philosophical Review* in 1936. A year later he raises the issue of rural research in detail in a brochure: "The Countryside. The Economic Structure of the Bulgarian Countryside." In his opinion sociological research should view the countryside as a whole, researching all the problems including its dynamic, not only its structure. In 1936 agricultural sociology as a term appears in the work of the American sociologist Iruni Sanders who lectured at the University of Sofia. In his numerous articles Sanders raises methodological problems connected with rural research; the term rural sociology also appears in Naum Dolinski's work. The work of the mentioned sociologists however only concerns formal issues, in other words questions about what can really be called rural soci-

ology and what its object should be. Rural sociology begins with concrete theoretical discussions and empirical research by many authors, sociologists as well as representatives of sciences closely connected with sociology such as economics and statistics.

There were also many discussions about the countryside and describing the paradigm of rural research. This is where Ivan Hadziyski (1907–1944) should be mentioned. He raises many social phenomena in his rural research. It would be difficult to carry out any further research without his findings. His monograph "The Existence and Spirituality of our Peasants" is a comprehensive sociological analysis of the Bulgarian countryside, its economy and population from the beginnings of the Bulgarian state until the arrival of capitalism in Bulgaria. The author analyses the issues of morality in the life of the rural population and its spirituality in relation to the beginnings of Bulgaria and his contemporary times. This is a dialectical picture of the past and present. It is a mainly theoretical and retrospective work with great significance in Bulgarian rural sociology. Many modern rural sociologists consider it important not only due to its historical and sociological point of view but also due to its timeless character.

Yianaki Mollov is an important figure whose achievements in the field of rural sociology and agro-sociology are substantial. He made a considerable contribution to the development of empirical research and to solving certain theoretical and methodological problems. He carried out his first rural research in the 1920s. He was one of the creators of official agrarian policy in Bulgaria. He studied agronomy in Moscow. After his studies he became a professor at the Institute of Agricultural Economics at Sofia University. He was a member of the Bulgarian Academy of Science and an exceptional voluntary worker and politician. He was Minister of Agriculture and the National Economy a few times. Although his interest in the countryside is mainly economic, his research does have sociological reference.

Mollov analyses the methodological issues on the Bulgarian countryside, including the criteria which should be used when choosing typical farms. In his empirical rural studies Mollov followed the methods and techniques applied by other authors, such as Frederic Le Play. Together with his colleagues he tried to carry out as much research as possible so that it could be representative for the whole country. He believes that individual farms should be treated as socio-economic entities, organic entities which must be analysed also taking into account their dynamic. That is why he mentions two ways of carrying out research on specific farms; the first being statistic rural research; the second are methods more concerned with quality, i.e. observations and questions which the rural population are asked. Both these methods should be applied to give an overall view of the

Bulgarian countryside. Questionnaires are the main research instrument used by Mollov.

Mollov and his colleagues also used various other sources: respondents' opinions, official local government documents, parish registers. Mollov tried to present the full character of the Bulgarian countryside both on the economic and the social level that is why he made full use of many methods, not only the statistical ones. In his opinion the latter could not give a comprehensive view of the social structure of the Bulgarian countryside. Problems concerning the economy, the organisational structure of agriculture, production and income were of prime importance but the position of the rural population, their work organisation and standard of living were also important. Towards the end of the 1920s he investigated property status, age, work capability, education, type of land (owned, leased), inventory. This was the first research of this kind in which sociological methods were used as a result of which it was possible to recognise not only the way farms functioned but also the daily life of the rural population. Mollov and his colleagues carried out approximately five such investigations before the 2nd World War.

Several works which appeared and particularly numerous questionnaires and budget analyses led to the preparation of a farmers' handbook. Numerous books and articles covering not only economic issues but also giving a picture of rural relations, life and matters concerning the improvement of the existence of the rural population. Apart from research on economic problems Mollov carried out a few monographs concerning single villages. On their basis he reached the conclusion that the countryside does not only mean land but also people living there, their existence, morality, spirituality and those aspects should not be overlooked in rural research. Another issue raised by Mollov was the role of women in running the economy and household duties, the role of rural youth, relations between boys and girls in the country. Using a questionnaire Mollov researched this issue from the economic, political, social and cultural point of view.

Through all this research Mollov managed to show not only the structure of the rural population and to raise rural economic issues but he also gave a picture of all the aspects of rural life. This had great significance for the development of further research.

We therefore, see that despite the centuries old rule of the military-feudal Turkish empire in Bulgaria, rural sociological thought was developing both at the theoretical and the empirical level. In fact the development of rural sociology in Bulgaria has a similar course as in other countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Following rural sociological thought which was highly ideological in the 1920s came rural sociology which had two dimensions, the formal connected with establishing a uniform paradigm and the theoretical empirical which also developed within the framework of

other sciences mainly economics. Many works can be included in early Bulgarian sociography since at the beginning the boundary between sociology and other social science was vague.

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