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Multi-cultural Relations in Rural Bulgaria

Abstract

This article provides a theoretical and empirical picture of cultural relations in rural Bulgaria as well as a timely assessment of the roles of the various groups evolving in the process of democratic consolidation. It also presents the complex development of cultural relations in a country in a period of significant change and illustrates how this complicated process shifts from the socialist idea of uniformity to the transition philosophy of multi-culturalism. The comparisons between two different rural regions offer significant challenges of intercultural theory and practice, besides pointing out the expediency of using the prefixes inter-, multi-, and trans- in the study of cultural heterogeneity and interactions.

Keywords: Bulgaria, multiculturalism, ethnicity, tolerance, social exclusion, Eastern Europe.

Introduction

The period of transformation is a very important time for intercultural relations in Bulgaria, given that under socialism the country was in a specific position because its communist party and government held on to their disastrous socio-cultural homogenisation policy based on forced assimilation, notwithstanding widespread disapprobation. The rationale underlying the persistence of such a rigid and rash position, which caused Bulgaria's international isolation in the late 1980s, is not quite clear yet, but three possible reasons ought to be mentioned: the growth of fundamentalist propaganda amongst Muslims especially amongst the ethnic Turks, the impending demographic alteration in the multiethnic regions, and the government's focus on nationalism in order to take Bulgaria's population's mind off economic problems. The transition to democracy in Bulgaria has a significant impact on the post-socialist cultural environment. Partly through

intellectual influence, partly through the prestige of Western democracies, cultures at local level are increasingly conceptualised as being more decentralised, ambivalent, contradictory and contextual (Fotev G. 2002).

In this paper we shall first delve into the presentation of cultural complexity and its variations. To evaluate and understand cultural differences in rural regions of Bulgaria we will present their paths of development in the time of transition and how and if the communities mutually encourage respect towards each other and institute a dialogue of shared interests. Some of the groups are more integrated in society, some are more distinct and strong, others feel isolated and weak. Reflecting on the specificities of the communities in rural regions, we will present and analyse the very complex social links between identity, social structures, and economic and political systems. The question of different responses to the transformation among the various cultural groups in the countryside will be an important analytical issue that could provide a clue to understanding the significance of the changes, particularly in the rural regions, and the elite's ability to propose a widely accepted cultural model.

According to scientific research, there are more than 22 ethnic groups in Bulgaria (Zhelyazkova A. et al. 1997). The main ethnic groups according to the self-identification in the last Population Census in 2001 are: Bulgarians – 84%, Turks – 9.4%, Roma – 4.7%, Russians – 0.2%, Armenians – 0.14%, Vlachs – 0.13%, Macedonians – 0.06%, Greeks – 0.04%, (http://www.nsi.bg/Census/Census.htm).

In this paper we will present two case studies from the regions of Dobrudzha and the Rhodope Mountains where Turks, Pomaks (ethnic Bulgarians of Muslim religion) and the Roma are investigated. The reason for the study of these three groups is their considerable presence in Bulgarian society (Population Census 2001, vol. 6, book 1: 34). However, there are important differences among these three groups with regard to their degree of integration, participation in political, economic, social and cultural life and satisfaction (Topalova W. 2002; Tomova I. 1995). The objective of the analysis below is to show and discuss these differences. However, due to the diversity of definitions of cultural complexity, in the following paragraph we will first propose a standpoint on the understanding of the basic terms in this article.

From Complex Cultures to Cultural Complexity

In 1871, evolution theorist Edward Burnett Tylor published *Primitive Culture*, which, despite legitimate or far too trenchant criticisms, was his work with the strongest impact on social sciences. Despite the methodological muddle that would account for the disparaging terms *culturalism*

and *cultural determinism*, there are at least two elements highlighted by Tylor, which, until decades ago, most authors constantly took up implicitly or explicitly.

Firstly, there is the consensual assumption of a *psychic unity of mankind*, therefore that man, being a member of a collectivity, acquires culture through socialisation, acculturation, or enculturation processes. Secondly, we ought to mention the widespread belief that culture is a complex whole in which the various elements form an organism or a well-integrated and equally well-regulated system. Thus, each culture has its own internal coherence. However, due to this second aspect, we implicitly end up devising a specific representation of culture in which cultural systems are harmonious and conflict-free wholes, but likewise barely dynamic or actually static.

These two aspects of the notion of culture, which stem from Tylor's and his successors' considerations, were fiercely challenged in the 1980s, thus calling in question the term's full legitimacy. Due to these somewhat legitimate harsh criticisms, the concept of culture adopted reached a crucial stage. Some authors, particularly those characterised by radical *anticulturalism*, even came to the point of doubting the purpose of the notion of culture, demanding its eviction from anthropology's conceptual pantheon. After more than a century, according to these critics, the discipline's old banner, its proud emblem, was obsolete and must be replaced by new representations, more compatible with current reality.

The *classic* concepts of society and culture were influenced by a certain amount of determinism and by the fact that people, as members of a social group, were not merely passive consumers of culture, but were actually its makers and builders. Consequently, man had to be studied both as *author* and *actor*, taking care not to reify culture by regarding it as an objective, unchanging and nearly ineluctable reality. In this case, the post-modern turning-point admittedly followed in the footsteps of contiguous disciplines, since the criticism regarding *culturalism* has at least some points in common with the one on *sociologism* by Émile Durkheim and his countless disciples and followers. From the experience of the tortuous historical and socio-cultural processes induced by the long-term expansion of the *world-system* (analysed with masterly skill by US sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein and French historian Fernand Braudel (Wallerstein 1974; Braudel 1979), the rise of techno-economic globalisation, and the expansion of international migratory movements, critics stressed that at this point the idea of culture as a *complex whole* had become untenable. The idea of culture as a coherent, organic and well-integrated whole proved obsolete due precisely to the previously mentioned deep macro-sociological changes. As Hans-Rudolf Wicker aptly stated, if classic authors spoke about *complex*

culture, reasoning in terms of *cultural complexity* is certainly more appropriate these days (Wicker 1997). This fitting formula underscores that nowadays an analysis of culture, as a fixed and isolated entity, would be quite pointless. However, we should add that probably this does not regard *late* or *reflexive modernity* societies alone (Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1996).

Studying *cultural complexity* means correlating culturally defined differences without challenging the undeniable boundaries that social groups themselves imagine, build, and then consolidate via aimed processes of essentialisation. However, this is clearly one of the main shortcomings of social science constructivism; it persists in not taking into account that the collectivities and individuals themselves bring about, and therefore determine, essentialist processes. From these reflections, we can draw the following two conclusions.

— At present, examining socio-cultural realities by focusing on a specific community, which is bound to be enclosed or encapsulated within a more extensive society, is methodologically misleading and counterproductive.

— From this point of view therefore, we can no longer minimise or, worse still, deny the sociological perspective's considerable relevance in the analysis of cultural phenomena.

These are basic reasons why the term *culture* can no longer be used *tout court*. This does not imply that social sciences have had to discard one of their key notions, which, moreover, has strongly contributed to the making of these disciplines. The exact opposite holds true instead: with proper precautions and appropriate discernment, the concept of culture is still quite sound.

To avoid the somewhat legitimate criticisms of *culturalism, essentialism, reification* etc. and to comply with new methodological approaches, we have to employ what we consider a clever and effective stratagem. The artifice is to use specific prefixes, which, however, have caused perplexities, some confusion, and some communication breakdowns among insiders. In fact, notions such as *multiculturalism, intercultural communication* and *transnational relations* (meaning, clearly, transcultural ties) are far more frequently used nowadays instead of the term culture. The prefixes *multi-, inter-* and *trans-* share obvious similarities as well as subtle distinct connotations, not always immediately perceptible. Lately, these slight but significant differences have inflamed the debate on cultural phenomena.

The prefix *multi*, as in the word *multiculturalism*, actually tends to stress the importance of cultural differences as well as their related boundaries. Consequently, it often highlights the sharp separation between ethnocultural collectivities. This prefix's application is more relativist, communitarian, and at times segregative, besides having a more cumulative and less

relational aspect than the other two (Taylor 1992; Akkari 2002). It is not surprising that *multi* is used by researchers, politicians and intellectuals who are identity producers in countries where cultural difference is a given, and pragmatically regarded as such (United Kingdom), or is turned into a cult (United States, Canada and Australia).

In a context of enormously diversified ethnic groups and cultures assembled in a single state, a national ideology based on *multi* seems to be the basic requirement to justify discourses aimed at legitimising cultural (as well as social) differences in the public sphere. Within this system of sometimes parallel but usually socially and economically juxtaposed majorities and minorities in a single state – as the classic examples of Trinidad and Tobago, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Mauritius show – it is not surprising that ethnocultural differences are demonstratively enacted under the banner of *multi*. The purpose of *agreement* is to forestall and take the edge off dangerous tensions that might arise from a political contest based entirely on the dispute between majority and opposition in the *multi* societies.

Both in the descriptive and the normative sphere, the prefix *inter* instead presupposes a more universalist view and a more voluntarist leaning. For this reason, it is often used, rightly or not, as opposed to *multi* (Akkari 2002). In fact, the prefix *inter* nearly always declares disagreement with the idea of culture as a *complex whole*, i.e. as an *iron cage* from which virtually captive individuals cannot escape. The advocates of *inter* regard the prefix *multi* as being too *isolationist* and *segregationist*. *Inter* instead is regarded as a term expressing integration, dialogue: in other words, communication between cultures and not separation.

Therefore, with *inter* the meeting and interaction of cultures take on a distinctly more dynamic and relational aspect and using this prefix highlights the ability of each individual to define, shape and negotiate (to some extent) his/her belonging and cultural identity. In the terms using *inter*, we can obviously perceive a more liberal and sometimes Jacobinic spirit pervaded by civic republicanism, which ultimately postulates normative models of cultural integration and not separation between majorities and minorities. The idea of *interculturalité*, frequently found in the Francophone science of education and socio-linguistics, is a sociologically relevant fact that not only challenges the *multi* point of view, but also the *assimilation* political doctrine that still characterises the French national State's structure and is the basic guideline to grant French citizenship to a foreigner. The notion of *interculturalité* challenges this model of the foreigner's absorption while stressing the preservation of cultural differences within a strongly integrated community of citizens, which in itself is considered the mainstay of the republican *Etat-Nation*, one and undivided.

Consider, however, that the most popular as well as the politically most effective metaphor of *interculturalité* has been the national soccer team, which won the World Cup in 2002. It was and still is presented as a collective in which players/actors, despite their clear cultural differences, understand each other perfectly and fight together to honour the tricolour flag. With the *interculturalité* model, individuals, though culturally very diverse, develop a shared feeling of loyalty towards the French State. This attitude has a remarkable correspondence with the *constitutional patriotism* strongly called out for by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas (Habermas 1992).

Finally, those who operate with the prefix *trans* generally opt for an explicitly voluntarist standing often implying utopian contents by which a human being can be above and beyond his surrounding society that tries to lock him up within rigid norms, pre-established identities, and ineluctable behaviour models. In the end, the possibility of free choice is expressed via *trans*. *Trans* concepts, which are often optimistic outcomes of the past twenty years' debate on globalisation, stress the importance of individuality, and are consequently characterised by radical individualism which allows the person to act almost without collective or social restrictions. The implicit idea of the prefix *trans* could be condensed in the postmodern formula whereby the road to *everything goes* is laid open to man. Adjectives such as *transcultural* or *transnational* are used mainly to suggest the capability, most often personal but occasionally even collective, to go beyond cultural boundaries and national frontiers and fluctuate very freely among belongings and identities.

The crisis of the classic notion of culture along with the advent of the prefixes *multi*, *inter*, and *trans*, reveals that there is no single model of *cultural complexity*, neither at the descriptive nor at the normative level. Besides, this means that believing that one prefix would be more descriptively *adequate* or normatively *correct* than the other would be deceptive. Therefore, the idea of one of these prefixes' preeminence is fundamentally misleading, while arguing over one of these prefixes' supremacy in social sciences is unsavoury and frankly seems quite uncalled for and inappropriate, both from a theoretical point of view and that of empirical evidence, for the following reasons.

The social organisation of cultural complexity, being many-shaped and many-sided, calls for an interpretation via a contextualising methodological approach. Consequently, this type of analysis also requires a system of representations mediated by suitable terms for the various situations that can properly express the plurality of processes and relations. Therefore, being restricted to one single prefix is not enough. All three prefixes could simultaneously be useful for an analysis in several concrete situations as for example *formal multiculturalism* in national public institutions and in the

juridical system, while pragmatic *interculturality* – in everyday life. There-fore, phenomena represented via the prefixes *multi*, *inter* and *trans* can successfully coexist within the same context. Thus, these three prefixes should not be considered in opposition to each other but should rather be regarded as complementary. They are needed to build concepts that do not necessarily contradict each other but rather complete one another.

Within social sciences, there are different disciplines with different se-mantic and terminological traditions. Political philosophy, especially the North American one, assigns a different meaning to the prefix *multi* from the one used by Francophone sciences of education, which prefers the pre-fix *inter* instead. Such is the case of US philosopher David Hollinger who has lately coined the terms *pluralistic multiculturalism* and *cosmopolite multiculturalism*. With the former, he evokes those classic forms of mul-ticulturalism based on the clear separation of groups and belongings, while with the latter he draws us towards certain post-ethnic phenomena that many anthropologists classify as *trans*. There are many similar equivalen-cies; unfortunately, we cannot delve into them in this context. However, we consider it appropriate to gauge the soundness of prefixes even with refer-ence to the processes or relations they are meant to represent. *Multi* and *inter* seem to be more appropriate for the conceptualisation of dynamics and relations regarding groups and collectivities. *Trans* seems more appro-priate to reconstruct personal routes.

In the transformation period, the main characteristic of Bulgarian cul-tural relations is the officially recognised multiculturality. Multiculturalism as defined above is a socio-cultural manifestation of multi-ethnicity, multi-religiosity and multi-linguistics. However, this is not always how things turned out in the rural context of Bulgaria in the time of transition. Discrimination, segregation, higher risks of unemployment for specific communities, etc. have developed instead. Before analysing the multicul-tural practices we will turn to a presentation of our empirical data.

The Empirical Data – Comparison between Plain and Mountain Rural Regions

This paper's analyses rely on in-depth interviews conducted by a team of sociologists and ethnologists with more than 100 people representing three communities – Turkish, Roma and Pomak.[1] These are equally women and men from villages in the regions of the Rhodope Mountains (Kardzhali) and Dobrudzha (Dobric). Concretely, the research took place in the villages

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of Bezvodica, Spasovo, Sokolovo, Trigrad, Kushla, Godeshevo, Nanovica, and Chakalarovo. The statistical data in the table below shows the variety of the ethnic groups in the studied regions.

Table 1

Statistical data on ethnic groups in the regions
of Sofia, Dobric and Kardzhali (in %)

Place	Bulgarians	Ethnic Turks	Roma	Others
Capital Sofia	96.0	0.53	1.5	1.97
Dobric	75.9	15.6	6.4	2.1
Kardzhali	34.8	61.9	0.0	3.3

Source: Population Census 2001, 2003, Sofia: National Statistics Institute.

Religious affiliation reveals that while in the region of Kardzhali the Christians are 21%, the Muslims – 70% and the non-religious – 8%, in the one of Dobric these groups are 75%, 21% and 2% (the total to 100.0% involves other religious groups). The choice of the region of Dobric, situated in Northeast Bulgaria, was intentional. Predominantly a level district, it is known for its ethnic diversity: here Bulgarians, Roma, ethnic Turks, Vlachs, etc., live side by side. For comparative reasons, we included the region of the Rhodope Mountains, which is characterised by its predominantly Muslim population (Turks and Pomaks) involving more than 60% of the inhabitants. The population of Godeshevo is 100% Pomak. The population of the region of the Rhodope Mountains has decreased in the transition as a result of the migration of the local population to Turkey and similar processes of migration occur with the Turks from North-East Bulgaria (Kostova D. 2005: 105). There are also strong temporary or permanent migrations from the region of the Rhodope Mountains to other villages and cities in Bulgaria. These are people seeking jobs because they could not find adequate ones with their qualifications or any employment in their villages. The moves, mainly to the cities, represent two thirds of all mobility transfers. The opposite moves from the cities to the villages involve people that are predominantly retirees. For them moving to the villages is a survival strategy as life in the cities is very expensive. Having a house and some land in the villages, these people integrate their miserable pensions with some additional income by farming 1–2 dekars[2] of land. Today some of the villages in the Rhodope Mountain are inhabited only by re-

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[2] 1 dekar = 1/10 hectare.

tirees. As such, many village schools have been closed down, further hindering the possibility for young families to settle in these villages.

Comparing the regions of Dobrudzha and the Rhodope Mountains shows significant population differences. The age structure of the people in the Rhodope Mountains shows larger groupings among older generations, while the population in the villages of the region of Dobric is significantly younger. As a whole, the research includes respondents of various ages. The respondents' age ranges from 18 to 70 thus contributing to the potentiality to analyse the *trans-generation perceptions* (Talcott Parsons 1976: 61) of people with different experience and expectations. The interviewed people come from various social milieus, which include students, pensioners, employed and unemployed, teachers, farmers, drivers, shop keepers, doctors, accountants, local administration representatives, local party activists, cleaners and entrepreneurs, the more powerful and the powerless. This choice enables us to compare different life knowledge and to reveal the contrast between the strategies of people from diverse social strata. Moreover, it contributes to expose the influence of the various social roles, their hierarchy and to define the place of cultural identification, its strength and contractability within the broader space of social statuses.

For other reasons, such as explaining the impact of isolation, the village of Kushla is of interest. Its inhabitants are Pomaks with a very special Bulgarian pronunciation; no other region of Bulgaria uses a more sing-song intonation. The village's specific characteristic is that it is on the border with Greece and under socialism average Bulgarians were not granted access or allowed only by special permit because it was a boundary region. As such, very little has changed over the last decades. The people lived as in a military detachment. There was a curfew and none were allowed to be outdoors after 10.00 p.m. As one of our respondents expressed:

> *The people here are similar to the specific Bulgarian short horned cattle that one can find nowadays only in Kushla. The biologists are saying that this type is 6000 years old. We are like the animal – we can survive in whatever conditions, eat little, and can adapt easily to changes.* (Interview with B., Man of Pomac origin, Muslim, May 2003)

The involvement of a plain region as Dobrudzha and a mountain one as the Rhodope Mountains allows registering the degree of conservatism and liberalism in the construction of otherness and its influence on tolerant or conflictual interrelations. Easier access to employment possibilities for the people from the plain region and the very difficult transportation in the mountains have different bearings on the people's life-standard and survival strategies in the two rural regions. Both regions are on borders, the difference being that the boundary in the region of Dobrudzha offers sev-

eral gateways that stimulate activities. In the case of the Rhodope Mountains, the gateways are quite far, thus hindering moves. In the following chapter we will analyse these interactions in more detail.

In the 1980s, the ethnic crisis in Bulgaria created a very strong cause for the transformation of Bulgarian national identity. The conflict between the two largest ethnic groups – Bulgarians and Turks – was so strong that the population accepted it as a considerable conflict and identity crisis. Despite the widespread face-to-face tolerance in the country and particularly in the villages, in 1989 for 2 months 350,000 Turks left the country and only 120,000 came back at the end of the same year when the violent revolution was taking place. The ethnic crisis in Bulgaria has forced identification and re-identification activities. It has also shown that, despite the crisis and its deep impact on society, the strong traditional mechanisms of tolerance and peaceful coexistence between the various ethnic groups is very deep-rooted at local level (Kostova D. 2005: 93 ff.). However, there are significant factors in the transition that could create sharp conflicts. The next paragraphs will deal with the relations of tolerance and tensions in the studied rural regions.

Potentiality for Conflicts – Socio-Economic Spaces

The rural regions inhabited by Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks are among the most economically backward in the country and are also severely affected by the reforms. The collapse of the agricultural collectives lead to high unemployment and increasing poverty of the vast majority of the population in both studied regions, but is more severe in the Rhodope region. In both regions, minor industries have developed over the last 30 to 40 years but all of them are seriously affected by the economic crisis in the time of the transformation (Tomova I. 2000: 137 ff.). The small manufacturing and light industry factories in most of the villages were not supplied with local raw materials. These were usually branches with peripheral production established in order to provide work for the labour force. At the beginning of the transition from socialism to market economy, most of these factories in the villages were closed down due to the lack of markets and raw materials. The layoffs lost their employment.

Concerning agriculture, tobacco production was a basic means of living for the Turkish and the Pomak population in the studied regions. It too has undergone a severe crisis; since the onset of the reforms, its output has significantly decreased with a negative effect on the employment and the incomes of many thousands of families. The crisis in the branch severely affected tobacco producers (Tomova I. 2000: 138 ff.). Bulgartabak Company, a monopolist in purchasing and manufacturing tobacco, is constantly

reducing purchasing prices, and delaying payments for years until the value of the money is reduced by inflation, thus driving a considerable part of tobacco producers to starvation. During the empirical survey, when the parliamentary Turkish Party (Movement for Rights and Freedom) reached a partial solution of the tobacco purchase problem, a vast majority of people from the Rhodope Mountains reverted to this traditional production. However, the Bulgartabak Company has not yet been privatised and there are numerous problems with the purchasing and prices of tobacco production. This places the Pomaks and the Turks that produce tobacco within the group of the country's poorest people. Another problem is that the women engaged in tobacco cultivation are not granted maternity or children's allowance. Since they work without a labour contract, they are not considered unemployed and therefore cannot be granted social benefits. In response to the economic hardship, tobacco producers organised a series of protest demonstrations against the low tobacco purchase prices, payment delays, and the way their production was qualified. There were different forms of protest: strikes, burning of tobacco packs, and road blockades. However, the most radical form of protest was the migration of thousands of Bulgarian Turks to Turkey.

Some producers tried to reorient towards other crops like maize, potatoes, beans, onions and gherkins, but they lack the necessary market infrastructure, which did not encourage their activity. Nevertheless, they continue to farm agricultural products as a survival strategy. The research observations in the Rhodope Mountains show a general lack of personal initiative. The studied villages rather represent isolated and deserted places. As the majority of the people are retired, it is difficult for them to be active and have definite private business development strategies. If someone establishes a successful business, he/she is followed by dozens of similar ventures in the same village and the competition leads to closure for most of them. The same outcome can be seen in the gathering of mushrooms, raspberries and herbs and growing organic agricultural products.

In a number of villages in the west Rhodope Mountains, the local authorities promoted the establishment of Greek companies, mainly in the sphere of textile industry, which aimed at lowering the high unemployment level among women. However, these companies were offering jobs with unbearable conditions: longer working hours, no social insurance, and salaries lower than the country's minimum wages. There are similar complaints regarding Turkish companies in the East Rhodope and in the Dobrudzha region. Our interviews reveal that people working in these companies are convinced that their labour rights are not protected because they belong to minorities. Very often the unsettled social problems are interpreted on the grounds of ethnicity.

The field observation shows that local authorities are weak in promoting better economic development and in establishing new economic structures on the territory of their municipalities. Moreover, there is a significant gap between the central and the local authorities. The representatives of the villages define their places as a periphery that the central government does not care about (Interviews with the mayors of B. and S., May 2003). Besides which, there is a passive expectation that the central authorities will take measures to solve the problems. In most cases, the people dream about the re-establishment of the decrees that guaranteed a privileged regime to border and mountain regions with a mixed population.

The comparison between the two studied regions reveals that the people in the villages of the region of Dobrudzha are facing the transition with fewer hardships. The closeness to the tourist region of the Black Sea is a factor influencing the slower decrease of employment possibilities. The tourists' demand for agricultural production has further improved the economic status of the people in the region. All the local people who have not migrated from other places have 0.5 to 10 dekars of land, and farm it for personal and market purposes. In the researched villages, the prevailing part of the Turks relies on agricultural production as a main means of subsistence. When asked about their strategy in the transition, the majority of them say that they depend on their hard work to increase the land's productivity. Many agricultural producers in the Dobrudzha region count on the possibility for active trade due to the tourist industry's demands.

The Turks are hard working people. It was a matter of knowledge coming from the family. My parents were not rich but they were working very, very hard to earn for us, we were always well dressed and well fed. Now we are the same. (Interview with Z. A., Female, Turkish origin, Muslim, May 2002, the village of Bezvodica)

Despite the ability for hard work, the most serious problem of the present-day rural population is the high unemployment rate and long-term unemployment. It occurred at first in the regions with mixed population. The official data for 2005 show an average unemployment level of 11.64% in the region of Dobric and 11.44% in Kardzhali (http://www.nsz.government.bg/Analyses/AnaPro/2005/11/Pril1.htm). Our interviews reveal higher levels of unemployment among the ethnic communities. The explanation of the difference between the data from the field research and from the National Labour Office is that many men from the villages in the Rhodope and Dobrudzha regions are engaged in the so-called "shadow economy." Being unable to find jobs in their native place, many of them move to large towns and cities where they are involved in construction or other activities, very often without labour contracts. The ones that

remain in the villages have temporary and unsteady jobs in agriculture, very often without labour contracts.

The evaluation from the empirical research reveals that in the studied villages the Roma face the highest and long-lasting unemployment levels, which leads to a sharp increase of their poverty. The unemployment among the Roma is about three times higher than among ethnic Bulgarians. Of all the interviewed Roma, less than a tenth reveal that they live well in the transition. There are many factors underlying these realities, the most important ones being low qualification, the decreasing role of education as a value, and the group's increasing marginalisation. Consequently, it will become impossible for the vast majority of the Roma to integrate successfully into the country's economic and social life, even after the crisis is overcome. Many Romany children turn to begging, prostitution and petty crime on the streets.

> *The young people are in a desperate situation. All young men are trying to find jobs on the Golden Sands. Four people travel together to be able to survive, they travel every day, work the whole day and in the evening he is so tired that he cannot think of anything but rest. He was studying for many years, he has a special education, but as he cannot find a job of his qualification, he has to do a heavy, unqualified job. And the employers are very hard in this situation of high rates of unemployment. They are decreasing the salaries tremendously misusing the situation that the queue for job places is very long. In this sense, I do not find anything real between the speeches of the politicians and the reality. They are trying to convince us that things are becoming better. Not at all! The things are becoming worse. There is an enormous gap between promises and reality. There are criminal acts. Of course, there are. One is forced to become a professional robber. He starts with the nails, then a hen, and then I do not know what, and so on. Step by step he is getting used to the situation to take from the others and the moral is disappearing and he is beginning to accept the robbery as something normal. His logic is "I am hungry and I will take something." There are robberies every day. A neighbour has 4 children and is unemployed and he entered our cellar. I do not excuse him but the child does not understand that there is no money, he is asking for food. When I am in the shop, I will never buy a croissant as for the same price I will buy bread for the whole family. But the child is asking and crying for the croissant.* (Interview with Z. A., Female, Turkish origin, Muslim, May 2002, the village of Bezvodica)

Thus, economic and social factors combine to deprive increasing numbers of Romany youths of a better future. There are significant grounds to consider Roma *not only as an ethnic or cultural group but also as a social*

minority with some "underclass" characteristics (for instance low education, poor health, long-term unemployment, reliance on welfare, general resignation, and low respect for the authorities).

The self-perception of belonging to an excluded social minority is clearly expressed in this quotation:

> *I think that currently there is genocide against the gypsies in all ex-socialist countries. From one side, they are limiting them... This is a scenario, a theatre. The truth is that the last 12 years were like genocide for the gypsies. If we take a girl that was 12 years by then, she is 24 now. What does she have? I take a girl, not a boy. It is clear that the boy is unemployed. He steels, breaks in and robs. Everybody should come to this conclusion because there aren't any other possibilities for this person.* (Interview S.P., Male, Roma origin, Christian, June 2002, Sokolovo)

This real and psychological distancing of Roma children from the social systems will have long-term consequences for the community, as with no knowledge or skills they will not be competitive on the labour market. Consequently, the social inequality between Roma and other communities will broaden, further increasing the negative attitudes towards them. A very significant factor is the existing prejudices and fears of being robbed or wounded by a Roma for example. This illustrates the development of physical isolation of the country's ethnic communities. All our respondents have repeated several times during the interviews that under socialism the borders between the cultural communities could be overcome through everyday contacts in employment, schools, and shops when all people were fully employed. In the transition, all these channels of possible mutual interchange of information and knowledge are extremely limited due to the collapse of the economy. This leads to a deep crisis in social relations between the country's ethnic groups. In this sense, we can speak about a strong process of *peripherisation* of the minority communities.

> *When they had a job they would go to work, and no one would ask them if they are gypsies or Turks, or Bulgarians. They loved their jobs and respected their colleagues, but now they don't have these jobs anymore. People will get a job sooner or later, but until then, the gypsies will probably die. Currently the gypsies are isolated from the Bulgarians, and they are disappearing. The current politics for the ethnos is worse than the one of Hitler.* (Interview S., Female, Roma, Muslim, June 2002, Nanovica)

Under socialism, in correspondence with the idea of the unification of society, the minorities had adopted or had been forced to accept the major-

ity's models of economic, and, to some extent, social behaviour. The people from the Mountain as well as from the plain villages like their land and their home. The education preferences show that the people were mainly studying professions that they could apply in their villages. Apparently, the strict rules under socialism for a citizenship at a definite place also created a lack of desire to migrate. Unfortunately, the current social and economic conditions of deep economic crisis in the period of transformation are causing despair and many people see no hope for normal life in local places.

> *His youth will pass in this village and his whole life. What wife can he find here? I want to change things. I want him to live in a good environment, with Bulgarians; to have a good job, to marry. What can he do here? He doesn't have any opportunities, no future. He will get like me.*
> (Interview M., Male, Roma, Christian, June 2002, village of Bezvodica)

To escape from this perspective many people permanently or temporarily migrate to the larger cities or to the capital. In the Rhodope Mountains before socialism men traditionally worked in the fields during the summer and came back in winter. This tradition has been re-established in the transition. Now people are involved mainly in the construction business while in the past it was agriculture. The break of land ownership during socialism is causing many conversions in the transition period. A respondent from the village of Godeshevo was comparing in his interview that while his grandfather owned many hectares of land and his employees were 2 men from Greece, now his son is a seasonal employee of the Greeks.

All the data from our field research and the analysis of the monitoring of the mass media publications reveal that there is no ethnic negativism in Bulgaria that will turn into a system of sustainable prejudices. Yet, tensions based on theft, unfair competition for jobs, lack of significant political and institutional presentation, etc. are an everyday reality. Simultaneously, ethnic Bulgarians expressed the opinion in some of the conducted interviews that part of the Bulgarian population lives under hardly better economic conditions. It was further suggested that, in order to avoid the Bulgarian population's negative reactions towards the privileges granted to some Roma people, the programmes developed for the ethnic groups should have a broader scope, and not be targeted exclusively at minorities. One of the interviewed village mayors voiced the opinion that the ethnic and especially the Roma communities are tolerated at the expense of the other communities.

Our analysis of the Bulgarian ethnic scene reveals that there is a very low level of social integration in rural areas. An integrating mechanism that unites the population and strengthens its integrity is lacking. The elite po-

sitions belong to a very small portion of the members of other than Bulgarian cultural group and they cannot contribute to the minorities' economic development. Social integration at village level is very fragile and there are empirical grounds to present it rather as disintegration than weak integration. In this frame, the worst case is that of the Roma. The social distance between the Roma and other ethnic groups is very wide and the Roma are socially excluded from basic social fields as the labour market, the health system, and partially from education. This is shown by other empirical research as well (UNDP Report, Avoiding the Dependency Trap: Roma in Central and Eastern Europe, 20.12.2002: 87 ff.). Only the traditionally strong tolerant relations in the villages do not allow this disintegration to turn into sharp conflicts and tensions. The transition has stopped the weak processes of integration from the period of socialism. The new rules of the development are favourable for the minorities rather as entities than as individuals. The transition turns into an **unequal chance** and possibility for success due to its specific objectives emphasising on individualism and individual responsibilities. The minority groups cannot answer the new requirements so as to fully profit from the reforms. On the other hand, the transition is rather favourable for people who held powerful positions in the villages under socialism. The representatives of the minorities are very rarely among these privileged people.

Bulgarian reality reveals that the cultural communities apply an individualistic rather than a group approach to overcome the crisis. Our empirical material shows that in critical situations the resources of the family unite for survival. However, a critical situation can be sustained only to a certain point. When the outside forces and tensions are very strong, even the closest family relations cannot last. The aftermath is human degradation, alcoholism, passivity, and despair. All the interviews we have conducted reveal that each village faces this problem.

In some of the interviews we conducted with the Bulgarian community representatives, the opinion was expressed that if the Roma continue to get special privileges, as not paying their electricity for example, the Bulgarians would rather identify themselves as Roma to have this privilege as well. No less significant is the fact that the Roma community is less consolidated in comparison with the country's other ethnic groups. Its leadership, despite some positive attempts, is still fragmented, weak and obsessed by petty disputes among themselves. The outcome is the inability to formulate significant objectives and to unify the elite and the rest of the community in an effort for their effective fulfilment. The political representation of the Roma community at local and national levels is negligible. In this sense, the institutional resources of the Roma are very limited.

The Roma communities' growing need of radical measures for the solution of their social and economic problems was noticed in all the studied villages. In contrast to the Turkish community, the lack of significant political representation and access of the Roma community to local self-government bodies, on which the implementation, financial and statutory support of the solutions depend, are cited as one of the main obstacles toward effective solutions. On the other hand, a still widely held opinion is that Bulgarians regard the Roma problems as "inherent to the community," i.e. unimportant to society as a whole. At the same time, the solutions are usually seen "outside the possibilities of the community" – state institutions, international organisations and NGOs.

Conclusion

The comparison between the two models of survival strategies, representing the culturally diverse rural regions of Dobrudzha and Kardzhali, suggests that North-East Bulgaria during the transition is more advanced in socio-economic terms and the development in the Rhodope Mountains is almost frozen. The reasons are complex. In the case of Dobrudzha they involve the traditions of managing with changes, the inherited more flexible economic structures, easier access and transport, and closeness to a very advanced tourist region as that of the Black Sea. The mountain is a hard place to live in a period of reform and the locals perceive the transformation as a decreasing opportunity for advancement. The socio-economic and political developments have a significant impact on the cultural relations in the two studied regions. The Dobrudzha region can be characterised as more open to integration and modernity, and pragmatic in cultural interrelations, while the mechanisms of neighbourhood tolerance and prejudice are still at work in the Rhodope villages.

The distance between the minorities and the majority is increased in the transition in socio-economic terms. Consequently, unification processes that were taking place under socialism have been cut off. The transformation has also brought a model of development that encourages individualism rather than collective actions and it is difficult for the minorities to adapt to its requirements. Therefore, the chances of the minorities in the villages to adjust to the transition are at a slower pace. The minorities' low level of social integration results in their high level of unemployment, poverty, dissatisfaction with the state and its institutions. This further increases the mistrust not only in all these institutions but also in society as a whole. Therefore, minorities close further onto themselves or choose illegal strategies for survival.

Despite the deep economic and social crisis in the transition, the Bulgarian example of multiculturality shows that there is a degree of consensus that prevents crucial conflicts. Its value is in the idea to accept plurality. This is clearly revealed especially by our study on young people belonging to the different cultural communities. They do not lay emphasis on the differences, the latter are in the periphery of their consciousness and thus of their everyday life. For them, identity does not condition friendships, tolerance towards others, jobs, schools, etc. In this sense, the traditional Bulgarian tolerance is transferred in multicultural relations as an open system of acceptance of otherness.

Ultimately, the clear-cut separation between the *entitled nation* (the Bulgarians) and its minorities (especially the ethnic Turks and the Roma) on the one hand, and among the minority communities themselves on the other, leads us to believe that the prefix *multi* aptly characterises relations in situations of ethnocultural heterogeneity. However, as our theoretical approach regarding the notion of *cultural complexity* illustrated, this prefix also indicates that, despite the clear-cut separation among the various ethnocultural communities, relations among the latter are characterised, as the cases we studied in Bulgaria show, by visible social inequalities, strong tensions and at times conflicts. Usually, however, a widespread tolerance and in some cases mutual respect and interculturality as well can be detected. Contrary to what is increasingly supposed about Western Europe's societies (e.g. the Netherlands or the United Kingdom), multiculturalism apparently is alive and well in Bulgaria. Actually, in Bulgaria it seems to ensure a peaceful co-existence and thus the current social and political stability in this country.

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