ETHNIC DISCOURSE AND GROUP PRESENTATION
IN MODERN BULGARIAN SOCIETY

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In this article I am focusing the attention on the last ten years of the development of the Bulgarian society — a period featured as transition, deep change in all social spheres. Ethnicity is regarded as one of the major culture images of this period. Distinction is drawn between the official and everyday concepts of ethnicity. Traditional patterns of tolerant co-existence between ethnically and religiously others are outlined and com-mented, as well as the impact of political and economic policies upon everyday culture. Ethnicity is viewed here as interactive, i.e. constructed in the processes of culture inter-action between the various ethnic groups in society. Hence, ethnic discourse is the core concept in the analysis, which tackles with such questions as to what types and forms of ethnic discourse can be observed in the Bulgarian society today, what is the role of ethnic stereotypes in them, what are the major strategies of group presentation in eth-nic discourse. It is argued that these strategies depend on the demographic characteris-tics of a particular region and the country as a whole, on specific historical events and the changing policy towards ethnic minorities, on the inside and outside culture images of the ethnic groups, on the nature of their self-identification.

INTRODUCTION

This article discusses some aspects of ethnic relations in Bulgarian society in the last decade. More precisely, it comments on a) ethnicity as a symbolic construction of everyday culture, b) some characteristic features of identity formation with regard to the largest ethno-religious groups in Bulgaria, and c) particular strategies of group presentation in interethnic culture contacts. The focus is on "identity symbols", defined by S. Harrison (1999: 240) as symbolic objects and practices by which social groups and categories represent their identities. First of all, the cultural context of their formation and change is outlined. Second, the ethnic situation in Bulgaria is described in the perspective of the present development of Bulgarian society towards association with European structures and values.

Two basic presumptions underlie the analysis. One is that there are (at least) two principally different levels of defining ethnicity — official (specialized: political, scholarly, media, etc.) and everyday (non-official, non-specialized). Along with their regular interaction there is often discrepancy, even contradiction between the definitions of identity produced at both lev-

els. Concentrating on the everyday concepts of ethnicity and strategies for its presentation, I will therefore try to illustrate how they are influenced by and used in official policies of ethnicity.

The second presumption is that identities are interactive (or, contextual) constructions. People shape, interpret and express their identities very much under the impact of the various 'others' they are in contact with. Here in particular this implies that ethnic groups form their identities to a great extent in the processes of cultural interaction, thus influencing each other's identification strategies. In other words, they have co-relating identities. Such a view on identity highlights its mutability and multiplicity, rather than its sustainability. Accordingly, processes and strategies of identity formation and expression will be further brought to the fore, instead of structures and concepts of identity, and interpretations rather than meanings.

How does social development influence the significance of ethnicity? What are the everyday cultural images of ethnicity? What are the types of ethnic discourse and how are they manifested in everyday culture? How do the different ethnic communities present themselves in ethnic discourse? These are the major questions addressed in the following analysis. It is based on data from various anthropological research projects, carried out in the last decade and based on research methods such as case studies, semi-structured interviews, life history approach, and observation of cultural practices. The target groups in these projects were certain local communities of East Orthodox Christian Bulgarians, Muslim Bulgarians, and Sunni Turks, which, together with the Gypsies, are the biggest ethno-religious groups in the country. The members of the first group form the national majority. Around 72% of them live in towns, and 28% in villages. The other two groups are predominantly rural. For instance, 68% of the Turkish population lives in villages, and 32% in towns (Genov and Krasteva, 1999: p. 189). The situation with the Bulgarian Muslims is similar. However, the latter are very difficult to be defined in strict demographic terms because they identify themselves in different ways, as will be further discussed. Bulgarian Muslims (or Pomaks, as is their popular name) are ethnic Bulgarians, who speak the Bulgarian language and whose religion is Islam. This population lives for the most part in the less developed mountain regions like the Rhodopes (especially the Middle and West Rhodopes). Ethnic Turks inhabit mainly two big regions — Northeastern and Southeastern Bulgaria. Their mother tongue is Turkish.

This research was conducted in two regions where representatives of the three groups live together. One is the Razgrad area in the Northeast. Here the Turkish population predominates in many settlements, followed by the

Christian Bulgarians, while there are relatively few Muslim Bulgarians. Except for the main city Razgrad, which is an industrial center, the region is rural.

The other region is the West Rhodopes, more precisely Gotse Delchev area in the Southwest. Here the number of Muslim Bulgarians is highest, and in many of the villages in the region they form the majority of the population. There are only a few Turks, living mainly in three villages. This is one of the less developed rural areas of the country. In both regions tobacco cultivation is the chief occupation of the people and the main source of income. The varying proportions between the three groups inhabiting these regions allows an exploration of how the majority/minority ratio influences group images and strategies in ethnic discourse.

ETHNIC ISSUES IN BULGARIA: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Ethnicity before Communism

The present ethnic situation in Bulgaria is a result of significant processes from the near and remote past. In this section, a brief overview of the history of and politics towards ethnic groups in the country is presented. A starting point is the period of the so-called 'Turkish yoke',[1] which began in the 14th c. when Ottoman Turks invaded the Balkans. For five centuries Bulgarians lived under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, having no political rights, nor independence. The Ottoman Empire is often given as an example of religious tolerance, though its politics towards the various *millets* within it was not consistent throughout its existence. Relative religious tolerance towards 'the people of the Script' (Christians, Muslims and Jews) went along with the invasion of Islam in the Balkans. The dissemination of Islam among the autochthon population was achieved by means of intense migration, spontaneous or provoked by the ruler, as well as voluntary or imposed by military and economic conversion (Zhelyazkova, 1997). The second half of the 19th c. is characterized as the National Revival Period, i.e. the period of the formation of the Bulgarian nation. It consisted of three major aspects: the striving for secular education in the Bulgarian language, the struggle for an independent Bulgarian church (dominated by that time by the Greek Patriarchy), and the National Liberation Movement (struggle for an inde-

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[1]Nowadays this significant period of the history of the Bulgarian people and state is given diverse scholarly qualifications, ranging from 'Ottoman presence' to 'oppression' and 'yoke'. The stable common attitudes are, however, uniform and expressed by the phrase 'Turkish yoke'.

pendent Bulgarian state).

It is not the aim here to give a detailed description and analysis of these processes. I would only draw the attention to some of their results, which are relevant to the subject of ethnicity. First, this was the period when the two most important minorities in today's Bulgaria were formed, i.e. the Sunni Turks and the Muslim Bulgarians. Second, the Ottoman rule provoked the emergence of a real phobia towards Islam among the non-Muslim population in Bulgaria and, larger, in the Balkans. 'The Muslim' became the most distinctive and representative figure of the antagonist in popular beliefs and ideas. The image of the Muslim in everyday culture is one of the threatening 'other': backward and uncivilized, fanatic, conservative and hostile, and aggressive (cf. Ballard, 1996). These stereotypes have persisted through time to remain valid even today. It is worth noting that for Bulgarians, the 'Muslim' completely overlaps with the 'Turk'. This explains the circulation of such expressions as 'Turkish yoke', 'Turkish faith' (for Islam), 'Turks' (for all Muslims, regardless of their ethnicity). From the very beginning of the dissemination of Islam in the Balkans, it provoked reactions of ethnic exclusion. The convertites were labeled as 'others', 'traitors', and 'Turks'. A tendency of dissolving ethnicity into confession appeared (Zhelyazkova, 1997: 32-33), which had led to different results.[2] Besides the ossification of such negative images of and attitudes towards the 'other' (understood mostly as the 'Turk', which also implies the 'Muslim'), there were also some positive effects. All ethnic and religious groups in Bulgaria gained experience in co-existence with cultural 'others', developed their everyday contacts and joint culture practices, and developed sustainable patterns of tolerance towards ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity. The neighbor Turk or Muslim is regarded as 'our', a part of 'us', someone that 'we' spend 'our' lives with, someone of real virtues, such as industriousness, modesty, and dignity (Zografova: 59-61). These ambiguous evaluations of the 'other' may seem inconsistent or contradictory, but they are only logical if identity is considered as interactive, i.e. constructed, developed and expressed in the processes of cultural interaction between the different groups (Barth, 1969).

These ambiguous concepts of otherness had fostered conflicts or mutual understanding over time under the impact of changing socio-political circumstances. The minority policy of the Bulgarian State had significantly

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[2]One can observe for the most part cases of partial but sometimes also of full overlapping between ethnicity and religion, as in the case of the Bosnians and also of some Bulgarian Muslims.

influenced these processes. Immediately before and after the Liberation (1878), intense migrations shaped the ethnic map of the Bulgarian State. These processes preserved their intensity up to WWII, due to the complicated relations between the new Balkan states. Wars and bilateral agreements for exchange of population were the motors of these migrations (Kanev, 1998; Ortakovski, 1998). From the Liberation until WWII the Bulgarian Kingdom was involved in four campaigns of exchange of population of Turks, Greeks, Romanians and Germans, living in the country. As a result, the Greeks, for instance, who immediately after the Liberation were the second largest minority group after the Turks, in the 1920s drastically decreased in number. Many Turks and other Muslims also left the country. As they form the biggest ethnic and religious minority groups in the country today, it is worth noting their diversity. Most Muslims in Bulgaria are Sunni, comprising ethnic Turks, Bulgarians and Gypsies, and in addition there are small but distinctive Shiite groups (*kazalbashi, bektashi, alevi*).

The ethno-religious divevsity of the country and the rights of the minority have been always constitutionally recognized and guaranteed.[3] However, theory and practice often diverged, and the actual policy towards certain minority groups often went through drastic turns. The general tendency was from relatively large autonomy to growing control on behalf of the state upon formal and non-formal minority institutions (Kanev, 1998: 69).

A major sphere of practicing minority rights is education. Until WWII, education in the mother tongues of the various ethnic and religious groups initially was exclusively private, but then gradually went under increasing state control.[4] There were minority schools of all grades (except for higher education), which allowed for education in the mother tongue, along with obligatory (since 1885) learning of the Bulgarian language (Kanev, 1998: 78-80).

Publishing is another sphere of exercising minority rights. From the Liberation up to WWII almost all the larger ethnic and religious groups in Bulgaria published their own newspapers and journals, as well as other literature (Kanev, 1998: 80-81).

Certain discriminating or repressive activities towards different minori-

[3]In fact all Bulgarian constitutions (from 1879, 1947, 1871, 1991) lay down the position and rights of the ethnic and religious groups, living in the country. Bulgaria has also ratified most international documents, concerning human rights, ethnic and religious rights included (see for details in Kanev, 1998).

[4]Muslims, Jews, Armenians, Greeks and Romanians, as well as non-Orthodox Christian Bulgarians (Catholics and Protestants) ran own private schools. Muslim schools were in addition ethnically divided into Turkish, Muslim Bulgarian, Tartaric and Gypsy ones.

ties were, however, committed at that time. These were, for instance, connected with the bilateral agreements for exchange of population — exchanges formulated as voluntary, but often 'stimulated' by repressive administrative measures by both sides. The examples can be furthered with the attempts of the Bulgarian State to assimilate Muslim Bulgarians by forcefully changing their names and religion. There were two such campaigns before WWII: during the first Balkan War in 1912-1913 (suspended in 1914 by the successive government) and in 1942 (suspended by the Communist government in 1944). Anti-Semitic laws and activities restricted the rights of Jews during WWII.[5] Further, salient discrimination of Gypsies was encouraged both by official authorities, and by minority institutions.

Ethnicity in the Totalitarian State

The Communists continued the inconsistent policy towards ethnic and religious minorities after they assumed power in 1944. Minorities were sometimes tolerated, and at other times repressed, all under the same constitutional system. Briefly, two basic principles determined the Communists' policy towards ethnic and religious minorities[6] — proletarian internationalism and direct nationalism. These principles fostered various strategies of both tolerance and discrimination towards certain minorities in different years. During the 1944-1956 period all discriminative laws of the previous administrations were suspended and the principle of equality and brotherhood between all ethnic groups was proclaimed. For instance, the rights and properties of Bulgarian Jews were restored, but at the same time their emigration was keenly supported to result in the loss of 35,000 Jews, who left for Israel in 1948-1953.[7] Thus, the largest minority groups in Bulgaria in the

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[5]At the same time Bulgaria was one of the two European countries that saved its Jews from Nazi camps.

[6]Whereas after the Liberation minorities were mainly regarded in religious terms and more rights were given to the various religious denominations, totalitarian authorities recognized only ethnic groups, since religion in all its forms was forbidden. There were, however, three officially recognized religions — East Orthodox Christianity, Islam and Judaism. These institutions were thoroughly controlled by the state — and all other denominations were subject to state repression (Krasteva, 1998).

This situation draws attention to a delicate issue — the status of Muslim Bulgarians. Though detached from the majority of Bulgarians on the religious principle, they are evidently classified, at least at certain times, as an ethnic group. This ambiguous assessment has deeply influenced public attitudes towards Muslim Bulgarians and still is the base of debates on their identity. It has also influenced the vulnerability of Muslim Bulgarians themselves.

[7]Besides the Jews, after WWII some 15,000 Armenians, 2,000 Czechs and Slovaks, and 100-200 Serbs also left Bulgaria as a result of official agreements and policy (Kanev, 1998: 88; Krasteva, 1998).

second half of the 20th c. became Turks, Romani and Muslim Bulgarians. Although all schools went under state control, minorities had the opportunity to run their own schools, publications, and cultural organizations (theatres, folk song and dance groups, choirs, etc) up until 1956, when a big shift in official policy towards them was committed. From that moment on, random acts threatening their ethnic and religious identity gradually became regular, and peaked in the severe nationalism of the "Revival process" project in the 1980s. In 1984, Turkish schools were already shut down. After 1959 all regional editions in Turkish ceased to exist. Only central editions were still published both in Turkish and Bulgarian, and since 1984 — only in Bulgarian. Local radio programs in Turkish were also closed down. During the 1970s and 1980s a straightforward assimilation policy was systematically held, including forms of positive and negative discrimination.[8]

The social status of minority groups undoubtedly depended on the general policy of totalitarian authorities. In the 1940s, when the Communists came to power, the country was predominantly agrarian, with prevailingly rural populations and a stable layer of lower and middle class owners of land. Traditional patriarchal culture dominated peoples' lives. The decades of 'building socialism' were in fact years of extensive industrialization of the country, accompanied by rapid urbanization, growth of educational level, and change of life standards. All these processes affected the majority and the minorities differently. The majority of Christian Bulgarians migrated to the big cities, raised their educational level, and acquired modern modes of consumption and reproduction. At the same time, even by the end of totalitarianism, most of the Turks and Muslim Bulgarians and about half of the Romani still lived in villages, were occupied in agriculture and stockbreeding, had lower levels of education and maintained predominantly traditional ways of life. For most of them the only way to success and prosperity was making money. That was why they were ready to do difficult, risky, but relatively better paid work — in mining, construction building, and tobacco growing (Kanev, 1998: 91). Those were the social-economic prerequisites of their patriarchality — the preservation of the large patriarchal family with its strictly determined roles, according to age and gender, with its nature of an economic enterprise (among other things women and children were of high economic value), and with its traditional strategies for survival (self-

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[8]Positive discrimination was carried out through such practices as quotas for students from minoriting groups at the universities, the toleration of minority members for party activists (as a rule elected for lower positions), and the claims for abolition of Gypsy ghettos in the cities, etc. All these measures eventually turned out to be part of the politics of assimilation.

serving production, barter of goods, shared property). This stimulated increased reproduction among minorities — early marriages and many children were the rule among Turks, Muslim Bulgarians and Gypsies, but the exception among the Bulgarian majority.

Demographic tendencies are very important for understanding the ethnic question and public attitudes towards ethnic groups in Bulgaria. They have an impact on official policies, but also foster stereotypes and prejudices in everyday culture. The image of the threatening, aggressive Turk/Pomak/Gypsy who can survive under any conditions and is about to assimilate with 'us' by overtaking 'us' in number, has gradually emerged and gained vast popularity. Media have significantly contributed to its 'verification' and publicity.

Hugh Poulton (1994: 122-123) points out that demographic imbalance is one of the reasons for the repressive minority policy of the Bulgarian authorities in the 1970s and 1980s.[9] Interpreting demographic data in a nationalistic context, largely using anti-Turk and anti-Muslim public sentiments, totalitarian authorities used them to gain legitimacy for their policy of homogenizing the nation. The first big step in this direction was made in 1973-1974 by the change of names of the Muslim Bulgarians.[10] This was in fact an act of changing the total identity of a large group of the population (about 220,000 people): not only their names and identity cards were changed, but also their traditional clothing, customs and religious practices were forbidden. The ideological motivation of the process was that Muslim Bulgarians were true Bulgarians by origin who had been forcefully converted into Islam during the Turkish yoke and who had to reunite with their ancestry. The frame of the process was demagogically presented as positive: Muslim Bulgarians would become a part of the majority, i.e. share its status (something impossible to achieve by simply changing peoples' names, but not the social-economic conditions of life). The operation was forcefully carried out by mobilizing the party activists, police and army, and in some parts of the country there were even armed collisions and killed people.

At that time Turks were still officially recognized as an ethnic minority, though gentle assimilation was systematically carried out throughout the

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[9]For comparison, in 1984, on the eve of the so called 'Revival process', the natural average increase of population in the villages in the district of Kurdjali (inhabited mainly by Turks) was 14.7%, comparod with 2.3% in the country as a whole (after Kanev, 1998: 93).

[10]Their original Arabic-Islamic names were replaced with 'Bulgarian' ones. The curious thing about the latter was that they were not exactly Bulgarian by origin, nor traditional for Christian Bulgarians. As a matter of fact, the changed names distinguished the 'other' identity of the Muslim Bulgarians as much as their former Arabic names did.

years. It culminated in the winter of 1984-1985 with the forceful change of the names of some 900,000 Turks and 180,000 Muslim Gypsies. This was the so-called 'Revival process'. It began in the context of large-scale celebrations of the 1,300[th] anniversary of the Bulgarian State, when the entire history of the nation was publicly recapitulated and moments of national pride and disgrace were recalled. The 'Turkish yoke' was stigmatized as the darkest period in Bulgarian history; the main reason for all future disadvantages and misfortunes of the country.[11]

The 'Revival process' was aimed at proving the Bulgarian origin of the local Turks. Basic measures included changing Arabic names to 'Bulgarian' ones, prohibiting the usage of Turkish in public, prohibiting traditional clothing, particularly the women's *shalvars*. The resistance of Turks against this policy took a dramatic form in the late 1980s. Its most expressive manifestation was the so-called 'big excursion' in the summer of 1989 — the mass migration of entire families to Turkey, often leaving most of their property behind to start a new life in a foreign country. As a matter of fact, the authorities provoked this migration by expelling the most 'dangerous' for their policy individuals. Bulgarian authorities claimed that the Turkish State should give free access to Bulgarian Turks in order to prove its willingness to protect their rights. Thus, in the end, whole Turkish families in Bulgaria sold their houses and property practically for nothing and migrated to Turkey. After 1989 many of these emigrants returned to their homes in Bulgaria. Nowadays migration to Turkey is low and only for economic reasons. However, the migration processes among the Turks,[12] have led to some significant changes in the demographic structure of the regions where they used to live.

The migration of the Turks caused a serious economic and political crisis in Bulgaria and raised international critique, thus becoming one of the main reasons for the decline of the Communist regime in November 1989.

ETHNICITY AND TRANSITION

Bulgarian society today is featured as a society in transition — a process

[11]The 'slavery' syndrome has been largely exploited throughout the modern history of Bulgaria. Even today, enriched with the 'slavery under communism', it is pointed out as a basic reason for the problems of transition and the underdevelopment of Bulgarian society.

[12]Two large scale migrations of ethnic Turks to Turkey preceded the 'big excursion' in the totalitarian period: in 1950-1951 (154,000 left Bulgaria) and in 1968 (130,000) (Kanev, 1998: 89).

Many Pomaks also migrated to Turkey but they found it more difficult to adapt there because they did not speak the language. Moreover, they were not included in the special migration agreements between Bulgaria and Turkey and lacked free access to Turkey.

generally described as a shift from centralized to market economy, from totalitarianism to democracy. One of the chief characteristics of transition is pluralism in all the social spheres. In everyday concepts it is rendered as diversity — political, religious, ethnic, economic, and cultural. The identity crisis, evoked by the crucial social change, is largely due to the recognition and awareness of diversity. In terms of ethnicity, transition brought on an abrupt shift from the homogeneous socialist nation (rather an ideological construction than a reality) to an ethnically diverse society. This was enhanced by the 'return' of religion in the public sphere. Thus, detailed ethno-religious classifications gained validity in the new conditions of life. In addition to the new social stratification, ethnic and religious diversity contributed to the feeling of anomie that characterizes the social psychology of transition. From the rigid, yet seemingly united and organized Communist society, people moved into a complex and diverse, and seemingly chaotic, though democratic social reality. The lack of efficient strategies for adaptation to the new conditions initially caused high resistance towards the changes. That was the reason for the initial nationalistic claims, directed against the restoration of the original names of Turks and Muslims, the election of minority representatives for mayors in local administrations, the legalization of a 'party of the Turks' (MRL), etc. The 'invasion' of many non-traditional religions confessions, popularly called 'sects', attracted similar negative reactions.

Being a process of crucial change in all social spheres (economy, politics, social stratification, education, religion, science, social psychology, value systems, identities, etc.), transition produces its specific culture (Baytchinska, 1997; Dainov et al., 1997) and gives birth to images of its own. These images of change, their appearance, variety or absence are the key for a better understanding of current social development (see Geertz, 1993:338). Ethnicity is exactly such a significant image of the changes going on in Bulgarian society in the 1990s and today.

Ethnic tension in the first years of the transition period in Bulgaria seemed to be a natural reaction after the extreme socialist policy of homogenization of the nation in the preceding years. Soon these first extreme reactions were overcome and public attitudes concerning ethnicity and religion went back to their normal course. A stable ethnic equilibrium has been established in Bulgaria in recent years. What are the prerequisites for and the features of this equilibrium? If we sum up the historical overview, first it is rooted in the long years of co-existence and commonality between people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Accordingly, it is based on stable images of the different groups, formed in their mutual life. Though

not completely positive, these images constitute a balanced and solid ground for tolerant relationships.[13] During the new history of the country, the various ethno-religious groups have shared in general similar statuses and conditions of life. Of course, as was mentioned above, the majority of Turks and Muslim Bulgarians remained rural populations as opposed to the majority of Christian Bulgarians. Jews and Armenians in turn, were as a rule city dwellers, sharing urban modes of culture and occupation. However, most of the time they all lived under similar conditions, regardless of their ethnic origin — urban population, on the one hand, and rural, on the other. The egalitarian communist ideology r einforced this unification.[14] Equality between the ethnic groups at that time was one of lacking rights, property, and perspective, more than of anything else. In the totalitarian state religion was prohibited, and 45 years of being Christian, Muslim or other, did not make sense for most people, who began declaring themselves atheists.[15] Traditional culture was also prohibited and a new socialist system of rites and festivities was established. Everybody was deprived of property.[16] All conditions of life were similar for the *people*, including education, medical care, social aid, travelling abroad, etc. Privileges were given to the *nomenclatura* — senior members of the Communist Party or of some of its satellite organizations. Party membership was the primary means of inequality in the socialist society. Therefore, the position of the *people* towards the totalitarian elite was similar, regardless of ethnic, religious or cultural identity.

A new minority policy and the recognition of human rights characterize the changed conditions during the transition period. People got the chance to freely declare their ethnic and religious identity. Muslims, who chose to, could take back their birth given names, returning migrants from Turkey could get back their houses or were given compensations for them, every-

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[13]A sociological survey on ethnic stereotypes from 1994 reveals that most ethnic groups in Bulgaria demonstrate high levels of tolerance towards the others — they do not mind having them for colleagues or neighbors. Mixed marriages are noticeably less approved, but this is only natural, as far as marriage is one of the main cultural spheres of exclusion. However, there is one distinctive exception, the Gypsies, who used to be and still are the main object of intolerance in Bulgarian society (Ethnic Prejudices, 1996).

[14]The basic disparity in the totalitarian society was the one between the ruling elite, called in the 1980s the *nomenclatura* and all the rest, *the people*.

[15]After 1989 many people still define themselves as non-believers (Genov, Krasteva, 1998: 362). At the same time they call themselves Christians, Muslims, etc., which points to a new function of religion today — to mark affiliation to a certain family, *ethnos*, tradition.

[16]Socialism generated the "culture of queues". One had to enroll in long lists and wait for everything — food, TV sets, washing machines, cars, apartments (people had to wait 20 or 30 years to acquire of the last two).

body could attend religious ceremonies and freely demonstrate religiosity, and new mosques and churches were erected, etc. Though the various ethnic groups are not equally affected by the ongoing social changes, their members share similar concepts of the state and the government, democracy and market economy, and so on. They also share similar values and common images of transition, such as the return of religion, respect for traditional culture and *ethos*, the way to Europe, soccer, emigration, etc.

As for the official policy towards the minority groups, many of their rights they were deprived of during Communism were restored: education in mother tongues was introduced as a facultative subject at elementary schools in 1994;[17] their former cultural organizations were restored or new ones were established; newspapers and magazines in minority languages also appeared; though sparsely, radio and television stations started broadcasting programs in mother tongues; and religious education and literature became widespread (see Krasteva, 1997). However, even the last constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria does not allow the registration of parties based on ethnic or religious principles.

To summarize, at present a stable ethnic situation exists in Bulgaria. Within the total population of approximately 8,000,000, the following ethnic groups can be distinguished: Bulgarians (85.7%), Turks (9.4%), Gypsies (3.7%), Jews, Armenians, Greeks, Russians, Gagauzes (approximately 1% each). The most widespread religion in Bulgaria is East Orthodox Christianity. Data from the 1992 census show that the vast majority of Bulgarians, around 60% of Gypsies and 1% of ethnic Turks, share Christian traditions. The second significant religion is Islam, professed by Turks, Muslim Bulgarians and 39% of Gypsies.[18] It is clear that there is a categorical majority of Christian Bulgarians, which is a factor of stability in the otherwise ethnically and religiously heterogeneous society. It is important that in Bulgaria during the transition period the search for political legitimacy has not degenerated into nationalism, as in some neighboring countries (Dainov, 1997: 22). The balanced official policy and the use of traditional patterns of tolerant co-existence have for a short time overcome the initial

[17]This is perpetuated by the lack of textbooks and teachers — the educated Turks have integrated well in Turkish society and do not return, and only few Gypsies are trained to teach.

[18]The data are excerpts from the census of December 1992. The ethnic picture did not change considerably changed during the following years. It should be taken into consideration that the census was based on the principle of self-identification. This influenced the numbers of the less favoured groups, as members of these groups identified themselves with other communities (Genov, Krasteva, 1999: 449). In March 2001 a new census was carried out, the results of which are still not reported.

fear of diversity. Moderate tolerance is the generalized evaluation of rela-
tions between the various ethnic and religious groups in the country. It is
characterized by random conflicts and fading debates on ethnicity. Social-
economic problems definitely have replaced ethnic and religious ones in the
past 2-3 years. People are much more concerned with their economic status,
than with ethnic differences. As a result, during the Kosovo conflict
Bulgaria became famous for its pattern of ethnic stability. I will further out-
line this pattern from 'below', i.e. at the level of everyday culture concepts
and practices.

THE ETHNIC DISCOURSE

There are three related concepts further accounted for in the context of
Bulgarian society. These are *ethnic discourse*, *self-presentation strategies and eth -
nic images*. *Ethnic discourse* can be defined as any act of socio-cultural interac-
tion, which refers to the expression of ethnic identity. This is based on the
idea that discourse, as a communicative category, depends for its interpreta-
tion on the meaning which participants assign to it (van Dijk, 1989: 22). This
distinction can be made between official and non-official levels of ethnic dis-
course. In this discussion more attention is paid to the day-to-day level of
cultural communication in Bulgarian small towns and villages where repre-
sentatives of the three ethno-religious groups under study live together.
Ethnic discourse at that level has traditional forms and well-established
norms and principles.
   The social level, to which the discussion refers, produces a specific men-
tality, that of the village and the small town dweller, which determines to a
great extent the various interpretations of and reactions to political, econom-
ic, and social action in Bulgaria. Without going into a detailed description of
this type of mentality, it can be mentioned that this investigation studies
communities, which can be characterized as conservative, traditional, rela-
tively closed and self-absorbed. Related to this is the strong feeling of local
affiliation, shared by the members of these communities. This feeling can
even override the importance of ethnic and religious differentiation.[19]

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[19]I remind the reader of 'our Turks' and 'our Gypsies', who are in principle positively
assessed in all respects, in contrast to those, coming from other parts of the country, of from
other countries. It is obvious that such an attitude is indispensable for sustaining relations of
tolerance and mutual understanding on a local scale. Totalitarian authorities were well aware
of this fact and one of their methods was to use outsiders for applying the repressive mea-
sures towards the Turks during the 'Revival process'.

At this point I would like to stress a few things. These communities still have a living folk culture, which means that folk beliefs, knowledge, norms and values play a major part in social and cultural communication as well as in the formation of specific attitudes and ideologies. This explains why ethnic discourse is so often "objectified" in folk culture events, and why folk texts of various kinds are so widely used in it. In fact everyday life is dominated by the folklore tradition (regarded as a system of values, norms, texts, patterns, technologies).

Systems of kinship, including position, terminology and meaning, underlie and model the concept of local, ethnic and religious identity. Kinship and locality are the sources of the binary opposition "us/them", which is basic to a folklore value system and is expressed by means of the various folk culture symbolic codes.[20] Everything points out that in this type of community the group factor prevails over the individual. Ethnic discourse may result in the presentation of attitudes and strategies of the group rather than of the individual.

The Concept of Ethnic Identity in Everyday Culture

The mentality at issue develops its own concept of ethnic identity, which is quite different from institutionalized, scholarly or political concepts.

In social psychology and anthropology, ethnic identity is defined as a stable cognitive construct and a behavioral attitude, based on related notions of kinship, similarity, attraction, differentiation from the others, self-evaluation and self-esteem, a sense of common origin and historical experience as well as an awareness of biological and cultural continuity. The basic mechanisms which maintain an ethnic community are differentiation from the others and integration within the group. The accompanying psychological effects are self-confidence and trust in the other members of the group, on the one hand, and on the other, basic anxieties about safety and survival. Phenomena such as language, religion, rites, customs, culture symbols, psycho-geography, myth and history, ideology, technology etc. act as amplifiers and expressions of ethnic identity (Us and Them, 1987; Hutchinson and Smith, 1996).

At the core of the day-to-day idea of ethnicity lies the opposition of "us/them" with all its mythological implications.[21] In traditional communi-

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[20]Folk culture is highly sensitive to symbols, it turns everything into a symbolic system. Thus clothing, food, cuisine, singing, dancing, etc. are very expressive codes of social, aesthetic, moral and other ideas.

[21]In mythology "alien" is anybody who does not belong to "our" community, to "our" values, to "our" culture. Both mythology and folklore define any culture, which is different from

ties, the terms in which "selfness" is described are family, kin, village/town, region, faith, and ethnicity. In other words, kinship, local, ethnic and religious affiliations are to a great extent considered to be synonymous with the collective self. It is essential in this respect to highlight the fact that religion is thought to be a prime ethno-differentiating and ethno-integrating factor. That is why religious diversity is often rendered as ethnic diversity. Actually, all forms of affiliation encountered above are more or less regarded as equivalent to ethnicity. As a result "folk" classifications of ethnic groups are much more detailed than the scholarly definitions.

> Each form of community affiliation develops specific symbolic codes, by means of which the syncretic identity of the individual in traditional society is expressed. The basis for this syncretic identity is being a member of a certain collectivity, whether ethnic, religious, local or other. It is quite common for the communities in question to express ethnicity or local/regional affiliation in terms of religion. This is particularly the case for the Orthodox Christian Bulgarians: the ethnic or local "other" is always described as being of an 'alien/other faith'. In addition, religious identity is described in ethnic terms, for example 'Turkish faith' instead of Islam, or 'Turkish gypsy' instead of Muslim gypsy.
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> It is worth pointing out that the use of the above-described symbolic codes of kinship, locality, ethnicity, and religion, varies according to the particular context, as well as to group preferences. Thus, for the Orthodox Christian Bulgarians, the preferred languages to express identity are those of kinship and ethnicity, while Muslim Bulgarians and Sunni Turks prefer the language of religion. To be a 'true Muslim' is the highest position one could obtain in culture and society and this can only be reached after a long and elaborate process of socialization.

Types of Ethnic Discourse

Two types of ethnic discourse can be distinguished in terms of the major strategies of the participants. In order to give them a full description, the following questions have to be answered: what discourse strategies do the ethnic groups use? What determines these strategies? How are they expressed? In responding to these questions, the following factors should be taken into consideration: the process of self-identification of the group members, their interpretation of the communicative event, the influence of the other participants and the preferred symbolic languages of self-presentation.

The two major types of ethnic discourse are as follows:

"our", i.e. from the pattern, as anti-culture, one of a chaotic, demonic nature. Thus the "alien" always obtains a negative, vigorous and harmful nature. Yet, the "alien" is indispensable for "our" existence (Lotman, 1990: 253).

1. Discourse of "exclusion", in which the aim is to distinguish and even draw boundaries between participants identified as members of a certain ethnic and/or religious group. This type of discourse is connected with certain symbolic situations and systems.

2. Discourse of "inclusion", in which the emphasis is on interaction, mutuality, unity, removal of inter-group boundaries. This type of discourse is to be observed in local cult ceremonies on certain religious holidays, in all kinds of celebrations, and of course in everyday contacts.

Within these two general types a rich variety of concrete communicative situations can be observed. I will comment on some of them.

Anthroponymy and name-giving traditions are among the manifestations of the first type of discourse. In folk culture the intrinsic identification power of the name is amplified. It signifies the position of the individual in culture and society, correlating with his/her reputation within the community. In traditional culture the personal name serves to show not so much the individuality of its bearer, but his/her affiliation to a certain collectivity, such as the family, the kin, the ethnos, the religious group. Former communist authorities used this fact in their assimilation policy.[22]

Rituals, both folklore and religious, are another typical form of the discourse of "exclusion". Their nature of highly symbolic events, designating moments of transition or crisis in the life of the community, calls for a closer consolidation and unity of action and emotions among its members. Rituals mark situations in which the very existence and well being of the community are threatened by the influence of any "alien" agent. For that reason various purifying and protecting practices are developed in all kinds of rituals. One of them is the exclusion of anybody who is not a member of the community.

Marriage and related rituals are a very expressive sphere for the emergence of this type of ethnic discourse. In traditional communities endogamy is the prime rule with regard to all kinds of "otherness", i.e. local, ethnic, religious. In turn, weddings are ambiguous in nature. In the ritual part no outsiders are admitted, whereas the wedding feast is a joint gathering of all neighbors, regardless of their ethnic or religious affiliation. Mixed marriages are generally not tolerated at the everyday level even in urban milieu. Despite varying explanations and evaluations they are given in the culture

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[22]Because many family names in Bulgarian have a Turkic stem, many Christians were also repressed during the 'Revival process'. Suspected of being Turks, who tried to keep their original names, they had to prove their Bulgarian origin. All Christian Bulgarians, whose first names were or resembled Turkish names, were also forced to change their names for the sake of "purity".

of the different etho-religious groups, mixed marriages have also suffered different ideological interpretations at the official level. Thus for example, during the 'Revival process' there was an official directive to encourage marriages between Turks and Bulgarians, as well as to encourage the migration of young Bulgarian couples into regions with a considerable Turkish population, in order to change the demographic characteristics of these regions. On the other hand, many Turks, especially females, looked for formal marriages with ethnic Bulgarians, in order to 'conceal' their identity and avoid being expelled to Turkey.

> Finally, death and funerals have the same ambiguous characteristics. To say a last good-bye to a deceased neighbor is act of paying respect to him/her and showing concern to the mourning family. However, the funeral ritual itself is seen as something very distinctive in terms of ethnic and religious background. Muslim and Christian graveyards, for instance, are always clearly separated from one another. During the 'Revival Process' Muslims were forced to bury their deceased in the same place and after the same civil ceremony as Christians. This evoked negative reactions from both sides, and remarks like the following could often be heard: 'I don't want my eternal home to be among strangers'; 'I am afraid that when I die, I will become a Muslim/Christian'.

As for the discourse of "inclusion", I will only discuss one of its representative forms. These are the common religious ceremonies and celebrations, in which members of all ethno-religious groups participate. There are numerous shrines in both regions, such as chapels, monasteries, *tekes* (Muslim tombs), etc. of local or broader significance. They are dedicated to a certain saint, most often Christian, celebrated on a given day. These holy places are attributed magical power (healing, protecting, etc.) and standard ritual practices for evoking this power are performed at the proper time. People of various confessions and ethnic backgrounds take part in them, but no sign of differentiation or inequality can be noticed during these events. It is interesting to trace how symbols, typical of one religion, are "translated" into the symbols of the other in such a context. Everyday neighborhood relations and mutual help, as well as the festivity sphere also offer various forms of the "inclusion" discourse.

Cultural Stereotypes and Ethnic Images in Ethnic Discourse

The cognitive patterns in traditional culture are highly evaluative and symbolic. Neutral information is the exception, not the rule. In these cognitive patterns, knowledge, beliefs, notions, metaphors and opinions inter-

twine to form group ideology and behavioral attitudes. Cultural stereotypes play a significant role in inter-ethnic cultural contacts. They appear either in the structure of (folk) cultural texts or in the form of free valences and are a basic means for expressing group identity. Their nature of evaluative, over-generalized, conventional, inconsistent and conservative statements is largely discussed in the specialized literature (van Dijk, 1987). Here, I would like to draw attention to the use of cultural stereotypes in the formation of what is called here an *ethnic image*. This is a set of commonly shared stereotypical concepts, knowledge, opinions, statements (often prejudices), by means of which a certain ethnic group imagines and presents itself or another group in ethnic discourse. The ethnic image shares the characteristics of cultural stereotypes. It is constructed by elements of various kinds, such as language, physical appearance, habits, rituals, feasts, religion, territory, origin, mythology and history, etc.; briefly, by all cultural facts of ethno-differentiating and ethno-integrating functions. In practice the ethnic image is usually objectified by some of its components, in conformity with the context. However, as a cultural construction and social-psychological unity it has a systemic character. This systemic character can only be discerned in terms of motivation and argumentation, i.e. how and why certain concepts of a given group appear, as well as how and why these concepts are used to explain certain behavior. Thus the ethnic images appear as a cognitive matrix, which underlies behavior. Consequently, they are a crucial component of strategy making in ethnic discourse. It is essential to highlight once again the evaluative nature of the ethnic image, which determines its systemic characteal as a cultural construct. The ethnic image contains the knowledge of a given ethnic community about itself or about another group, according to the group specific axiology. The image of a certain group is formed from two perspectives: from "inside", the group members' idea about themselves, as well as from "outside", the way the others view the group. These, often contradictory, images of a certain group are in joint circulation in a community.

The conservative character of ethnic images makes them almost impermeable to innovations. It is interesting to examine how ongoing social changes, as well as books, films, media discussions are accumulated and modified to fit the "matrix" of the ethnic image. On the other hand, this particular trait is the basis for the ideological use of ethnic images. It can be politically motivated. For instance, representatives of the referent groups claim that they used to be more alike in socialist times. Although sometimes used jokingly, this paradoxical statement has its roots in the official policy of assimilation. Every ethnic, religious or even more general cultural features were

not allowed to be publicly displayed: traditional clothing, customs and rituals, mother tongues (if different from Bulgarian), names of Arabic origin, religious practice, etc.

Nevertheless, not all similarities are a result of official policy; sometimes they are culturally determined. For instance, Turkish informants often say that they have adopted the "Bulgarian" wedding ritual, but this is not really the traditional Christian Bulgarian wedding; it is just a part of a modern civil practice.

However, the democratic changes in Bulgarian society after 1989 have caused a demonstrative affiliation with everything which is considered to be ethnically distinctive. These changes have led to the restoration of the balance between the various ethnic and religious groups, which was held in place by the folkloric concept of "otherness". This is true particularly for the elderly generations, whereas younger people, who are less influenced by traditional patterns, find it much harder to strike a balance to overcome ethnic tension.

On a local scale ethnic images are the basis of a non-codified hierarchy of the ethno-religious groups. The position in this hierarchy depends on demographic indicators, both local and national, such as the majority/minority ratio. Another factor is the "minor differences" effect: those, who are most alike, are most likely to be rejected as they could be mistaken for "us", or could pretend to belong to "us". This threatens the uniqueness and reason for existence of a specific group: ergo it should not be allowed.

It is only natural that positive characteristics are assigned to the "self" group, while the negative ones are associated with the "other". These evaluations do not have to be objective. There is a certain set of mythological binary oppositions preserved in traditional culture for the description of "us" and "them". The "other" is usually described as "impure", "bad", "harmful", "hostile", "stinking", "simple-minded", "uneducated", "retrograde", "immoral", etc. The use of these qualifications varies according to the specific group and the context. For instance, Gypsies always attract the most derogatory evaluations by any other group. It is quite the opposite with Turks and Bulgarians, to say nothing of Armenians or Jews (who however are not a subject of current ethnic discourse in Bulgaria). Of course the amount and degree of negative characteristics varies with regard to the recipient's identity. The presence and the image of the researcher should also be taken into consideration, as most of this kind of research is based on situations where discussions on ethnicity are provoked. Thus the "frankness" and "openness" which was displayed by Orthodox Christian Bulgarians, in contrast to the more reticent Turks and Muslim Bulgarians,

can be interpreted not only in terms of cultural patterns of communication, but also as a result of 'being of the same kind' with the researcher.

The use of positive/negative qualifications differs considerably between the ideological and pragmatic levels. Theoretically the polarization between "us" and "them" exists, however it is rarely applied in real life to a familiar person or group of people. It is perfectly possible for a person to declare that he/she hates "the others" (the Turks, the gypsies, the Pomaks) but, when it comes to a neighbor, colleague or friend, to present them in a positive light (cf. the idea of 'our Turks', etc.).

> Moreover, the use of positive characteristics concerning "other" groups has specific functions in ethnic discourse. It gives a sense of objectivity and also helps the speaker's positive self-presentation or image making (van Dijk, 1989b: 279). The function of self-criticism is similar; it says: 'Yes, we are direct not only when we speak about others, but also when we speak of ourselves, and this is one of our virtues.' But self-criticism is also an expression of high group self-esteem: 'We are aware that we are not perfect, but we like ourselves the way we are, and the others should treat us accordingly.' At the same time a lack of self-criticism and an entirely positive presentation of "own" group, is often a sign of low self-esteem, a crisis of identity and feelings of vulnerability, as is the case with some of the Pomaks.

CASES OF GROUP-PRESENTATION STRATEGIES

Now I present the dominant characteristics of the interethnic communication strategies employed by each of the ethno-religious groups under discussion, and explain the basis of their formation.

East Orthodox Christian Bulgarians

East Orthodox Christian Bulgarians are the majority in the country, however in the areas under study they are in the minority. Both modernization and economic crisis have led them to intensively migrate to the cities. On a local scale, this has caused a demographic crisis, which has resulted in an ethnic discourse strategy, dominated by what can be called "the fear of the majority". This is a fear of losing the dominant position, both in number and significance. What are the components of this strategy? It is directed mainly at the group which is considered to immediately threaten their safety in demographic terms — the Turks (in Northeastern Bulgaria) and the Muslim Bulgarians (in the West Rhodopes). However, there is a difference in reaction to the two "alien" groups.

Distinction from the Turks is more obvious and "natural", as they differ in language, religion, and traditions. For that reason, in regions where the Turks are not the majority, they are seen as good neighbors, and mutual help and understanding are brought to the fore. However, when the Turks are in the majority on a local scale, they are considered to be a threat to "our" community. Their rejection as a group is usually historically motivated: 'My grandparents used to tell me stories about how the Turks tormented the Bulgarians during the yoke, so how can I like them!'

As for the Pomaks, the case is quite different. They seem to be closer to "us" — they speak the same language, have the same origin, and also have many similar traditions; only their religion and religious holidays, as well as clothing and food are different. Pomaks are considered to be more dangerous than the Turks because of the "minor differences" effect. Two major strategies are used to symbolically decrease this danger. One is by showing that "they" are a part of "us". This is the origin of the popular motif that the Pomaks are Bulgarians who have lost their religion, but preserved their language after the Turkish invasion in Bulgaria. The very name "Pomak", in folk etymology derived from the verb "to suffer", reflects an air of compassion. Many stories are told of families who were split up as a result of forceful assimilation by the Turks: some family members converted to Islam and the others managed to hide and keep their religion. Even now one can still find "Pomak" and "Bulgarian" families with a blood kin relationship. (It is interesting that Pomaks avoid telling such stories).

These kinship ties induce tolerance and mutual understanding. However, they also call for distinction. First of all, in everyday speech, the members of this group are never called simply "Bulgarians" by the "genuine" Bulgarians. They are either "Pomaks" (which is often considered pejorative and avoided in certain situations), or "the Muslims" and "the Mohammedans". In addition, they are of a different temperament, as a rule not as good as "us". They are seen to be extremely conservative, very closed within their community, and even unfriendly to the "others". They are also told to be hypocritical, they try to bribe everybody (doctors, lawyers, clerks), they mistreat their women, they are uncivilized, stubborn and naive, and they also stink because of the food they traditionally eat.

Of course in the Bulgarians' image of the Pomaks there are also positive characteristics, however these are often used in such a way as to emphasize again that they are not as good as "us". For instance, Pomaks work very hard, but they do not know how to enjoy life; they are modest, honest, respectful to the old people, but they are also a very closed community, even hostile to the others. They get married "on time" and have a lot of children,

which is positive but also means that they are not able to do anything better; they demonstrate high morality but also tend to hidden adultery.

Speaking about the "others" is a good way of self-presentation, as a hidden or direct comparison is always drawn. But the way in which the group speaks of itself is also indicative. As a whole, Christian Bulgarians are not afraid to be self-critical, they show self-confidence and self-esteem and consider themselves the "model group", which in a way they are being the majority in the country. The most preferable symbolic languages of self-presentation are kinship, ethnicity and local identity. The latter produces a huge amount of toponymy and toponymic legends, which are used to appropriate the common territory: 'We know how the village was founded, we can trace our family history back to the very beginning of the settlement, which means that it is our property, something that belongs to us and we are attached to it'. No other group demonstrates such competence in local history and geography.

Sunni Turks

Turks are usually very reproductive communities, but their populations have fluctuated in number as a result of the intense migration processes to and from Turkey. Repressed by the 'Revival process' policy they returned to Turkey as the "promised land" and entire families left their homes and properties to go and live there. Some of them succeeded in finding jobs and settling down, but many discovered that they could not settle — for economic or sentimental reasons. At present their interest in Turkey is primarily economic and the traffic of emigrants has reduced. The conviction that 'we are more Bulgarian than Turkish' became important especially for the older generations and more conservative individuals.

Despite emigration, Turks are not afraid that they can be assimilated, whether they are the majority or a minority in a region. The sense of stability is due to the clear and well-preserved role structure in the family and in the local community. This is in fact the source of their self-confidence, as it guarantees the reproduction of the group as a unity. It is no wonder, in this respect, that the family is their major means for self-identification. In the extended family, traditions and ethics are safely transmitted from generation to generation, which is a way to preserve "our" uniqueness and integrity. Religion is however the main symbolic language of identification. Ethnicity is seen as a "natural", biological characteristic, while religion, in contrast, is considered a prime culture specific feature. They may be born Turks but they become Muslims after a long process of socialization. Thus to

be Muslim means to have proficiency in culture, to be a part and bearer of culture.

> In fact religion seems more important than kinship and local identity for the Sunni Turks. Evidence of this is seen in the fact that religious folk legends are very popular among all Muslims in Bulgaria, but not so much among the Christians. This is not related to their stronger religious feelings. On the whole all people in Bulgaria are more atheistic than religious. Religion is interpreted rather as a part of tradition, a way to express identity, than as faith and doctrine (Elchinova, 1999). The general strategy of the Turks in ethnic discourse can be described in the following way: 'We accept all the others, after all we all have the same predecessors — Adam and Eve, we believe in the same God, even though He has different names, follow His Scripture. But still Islam is the latest and truest religion and the Koran is the final and best holy book.' The hint of superiority is easily perceivable. The positive descriptions of the "others" are very much a result of the traditional norms of communication, which as a rule never express direct denial or negation.

This communicative rule is however often displaced by the "minor differences" effect. For that reason, Pomaks who are more similar than Christian Bulgarians in terms of religion and related customs, more often attract derogative remarks. 'Pomaks pretend to be like us, so they threaten our identity. They are surely good Muslims, even more devoted to religion than we are, but this devotion is a bit too exaggerated, and it is suspicious after all.' However, this negative attitude is implicit in the system of norms and prohibitions, or only paralinguistically explicit.

Muslim Bulgarians

Of the three groups, Pomaks seem to hold the worst position — they resemble one or the other group in different ways and are rejected by both. This can easily lead to feelings of vulnerability and frustration among them. But it is not only the imposed negative image that gives birth to such feelings, it is also the inability to describe "our" identity in definite terms. Pomaks constitute the group which suffers a crisis of identity.[23] As the "others" build up barriers between "themselves" and "us", it is only natural for "us" to feel uncertain or threatened about "our" own identity. Christians say: 'Yes, they are Bulgarians but not exactly. Turks state: Pomaks are Muslims but not as true as we are.' So an existential question for the

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[23]It is interesting to compare them with the Gypsies, who serve as the bad example to everybody, but do not suffer from an identity crisis, due to their distinct and definite identity.

Pomaks becomes 'Then who and what are we?'

There are three principal ways in which Muslim Bulgarians solve their identity problem. These strategies vary according to region and generation, or, actually, according to the dominant culture patterns. The first way is not to distinguish between Christian and Muslim Bulgarians, to forget about traditions and religion, which are not so significant in their lives anyway. These people are more modern and urban oriented, and share the same cliche about Pomaks as the Bulgarians ("Pomak" as a synonym of a simple-minded and savage person). Muslim Bulgarians who share the second strategy define themselves as Turks. These are relatively the smallest group, which thus expresses its reaction to former discriminative politics. They are, however, acknowledged by no one as Turks, for the simple reason that they do not speak the language. The last most distinctive, and perhaps largest, group are the Muslim Bulgarians who try to create a different, unique and genuine identity. 'We are direct descendants of the first (proto-) Bulgarians, we have best preserved the genuine Bulgarian language and customs, and in that way we are more Bulgarian than the Bulgarians themselves.' This latter group of Pomaks try very hard to achieve inner consolidation of their community as a response to the "others'" attempts to isolate them. The consolidation is a way to prove their group's own virtues and abilities. As a result this often leads to the formation of relatively closed and very conservative communities. Their strategy in ethnic discourse is dominated by "the fear of the minority" (and minority is interpreted here more in terms of inferiority, than of number). This is the fear that "we" might be rejected, neglected, or underestimated by the "others". The Muslim population in the West Rhodopes predominantly shares this strategy. It leads to the following effects. First, Pomaks try very hard to compete with the others, to prove that they are better, if not the best - by acquiring higher education, and by achieving high living standards (money, houses, furniture, etc.).

Second, ethnic identity is religiously expressed, i.e. religion is the major symbolic language of identification. There is no well-preserved family memory that goes back more than two generations, being traditionally passed in stories, mythological or historical in nature. Thus, stories about the origin of the Pomaks are rare, except for the standard motif of a historical background that they were forced to convert to Islam. However, Pomaks do not like to emphasize this motif for two reasons. First, it shows them more or less as traitors. Second, they do not want to be considered as distinct from Christian Bulgarians. One can find, however, many religious legends which depict Mohammed as their true predecessor and in some of these legendary tales he is also said to have been born in a local village. Religion seems to be the only distinct and firm identification factor for the Pomaks, and that is why they tend to turn it into an ethnic category. In this respect it is worth mentioning that the Pomaks in the West Rhodopes prefer to be referred to as "Muslims" and "Mohammedans".

Third, a tendency to ward self-reflectiveness and extreme constraint towards the others can be observed among them. They tend to present their group in the best way. This also includes a total lack of self-criticism; 'We may have some bad features but we should keep them for ourselves and never speak about them before strangers.' This is a manifestation of a striving to prove "ourselves", regardless of "the others" that may laugh at "us".

The identity crisis of the Pomaks also gives rise to a conflict between the generations. Many young people try to merge with the modern, "civilized" urban inhabitants. They try not to distinguish themselves from Christian Bulgarians. Many of them kept 'Bulgarian' names even when they were allowed to regain their original names. More often than not members of the same family have different family names — the elder with their Arabic surnames, and the younger with their "Bulgarian" versions. Young people also deny traditional norms and ways of living and often migrate to the big cities where they are anonymous, so nobody claims that they are not like the majority of the Bulgarians. However, these young Muslim Bulgarians often confront serious problems with their adaptation and social realization. Marriage and friendship often are problematic outside their "own" community. The other option is to stick to traditional patterns - to live with their parents, quit school (especially for the girls), if it is in the nearby town, get married during adolescence and bear more than just 2-3 children. This guarantees more or less successful socialization, but leaves these young people out of the mainstream of social development.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In this article I tried to give a picture of the ethnic situation in Bulgaria at present, regarding in particular three of the largest ethno-religious groups. The emphasis is on the dialogical construction and expression of identity at the everyday level. Interethnic cultural communication is discussed in the context of transition — a process of deep social changes that for the last ten years has determined social development in ex-Communist countries.

The character of ethnic discourse today is influenced, on the one hand, by significant events from the near and remote past (including the shifts in official policy towards ethnic and religious minorities) and, on the other hand, by sustainable traditional patterns of co-existence between cultural others. Various forms of the discourses of exclusion and inclusion can be observed in everyday culture, which contribute to the preservation of balanced interethnic relations. At the day-to-day cultural level ethno-religious differ-

entiation is salient, although inter-group boundaries are not obstacles to, but rather zones of intensive contacts. The strategies and norms of this interaction depend on different factors, among which are the majority/minority ratio on a local scale, the inside and outside culture images of the groups, and the nature of the communal sense of identity (stable or endangered, monolith or hybrid, distinct or marginal). Particular cases of strategies of group presentation illustrate these processes. It should be pointed out that my observations refer to the situation in two regions with specific demographic structures. In other areas of the country and especially in an urban setting a wider variety of interethnic communicative strategies are developed.

Referring to day-to-day patterns of cultural interaction, this analysis is eventually aimed at revealing the psycho-social motivation of tolerance and mutual understanding that have proved to be dominant in the relations between the members of the studied groups. For Bulgarian social scientists, it is a prime task to examine whether, to what extent and how socio-political processes have influenced the traditionally set patterns of peaceful coexistence in multiethnic communities, as well as how they can be used at the official level for developing reliable and tolerant policies towards ethnic and religious diversity.

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