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# **FAMILY NETWORKS AND EXCHANGE BETWEEN TOWN AND VILLAGE**

## **The Transformation of Socialist Kinship Ideology into a Postsocialist Kinship Practice**

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The topic of this article is intimately connected to the Bulgarian urbanization processes that intensified after the Second World War, and again after 1989, which have not resulted in separation between urban and rural residents of the same kin. Migration between towns and villages does create a space between relatives, but they remain connected through various commitments. The research focuses on family networks that operate between the countryside and the city, and the kind of social and economic strategies that can be observed. A person has a different range and degree of embeddedness with respect to kinship and descent. What do family members exchange (in a sense of economic, social, and cultural capital) in times of transition and insecurity in order to keep their social status?

*Keywords:* kinship, kindred, descent, social networks, exchange

A kinship-based structure preceded the state as a method of government in most of the world (Young & Willmott 2000). The socialist state sought to change this structure. This article investigates kinship in postsocialist times, as brought forth by both socialist policy and by the withdrawal of the state after 1989, with a particular focus on the Rhodop region in Bulgaria. Socialist policy sought to change and weaken kinship through two strategies: intensive urbanization and the ideology of the “monolithic Bulgarian nation”. In practice, however, these policies strengthened kinship ties (Barova 2009). The new families that settled in towns could not survive without the resources received from their relatives in the countryside; and the peasants could not produce

such resources without the seasonal help of their relatives who had migrated to the towns. The extended family networks were thus kept alive. The socialist effort to consolidate the nation found expression in the invention of rituals (Hobsbawm 1983), the main goal of which was to integrate the ethnically and religiously mixed population of the country. This was done through the invention of a new genealogical history that presented Turks and Bulgarians, and also Muslims and Christians,<sup>1</sup> as kinsmen. As people from a “common origin”, they had to participate together in rituals and pretend that they were relatives. In actuality, they were never integrated completely, but the development of genealogical knowledge, as inspired by the socialist state, only strengthened the

kinship ties in the old descent groups. The “kin reunion ritual” was introduced initially in the Rhodop region to substitute for various religious rituals. In the 1980s, it became very popular and turned gradually into a competition between descent groups. It survived the transition from socialism and became a tool for establishing and maintaining durable and useful relationships. The management of genealogical knowledge thus turned into an important part of the kinship politics in the region.

Keeping the ties between different generations is also related to the intense migration processes in the region. Migration has been a significant part of these mountain peoples’ life, in which the help they might need very often comes from the outside. This may include money, different kinds of favors, and even participation in common businesses. Such strong relationships with the old place of residence show the commitment to the descent group. Even when people look for specialists to carry out different kinds of favors, they prefer to find someone from the “clan”. People from the region take special care in developing the so-called lineal indexes, which are circulated during the kin reunion meetings, in which not only the names of the relatives and their relations are described, but also their educational qualifications and their professions.

Against this backdrop, the thesis on which this article is based pursued the following questions: what is the relation between kinship ideology and practice in general? Has socialist rule changed the meaning of kinship, and, if so, to what extent? Which members of the descent group are included in the family networks? And, what do family members exchange in terms of economic and social capital through their networks, which might be regarded as a product of strategies of social investment (Bourdieu 1986)? The socialist system was a system of shortages (Kornai 1980) that encouraged the existence of networks of informal exchange. At the state level, the existence of such networks led to corruption and patron-client relations, while on an everyday level, it led to certain transformations in the usage of kinship (see Creed 1998: 186).

This article describes kinship relations in families

and descent groups and presents them as relations of solidarity and conflict. The first part examines exchange and reciprocity between close relatives; in the second, I present the kin reunion ritual, a significant “socialist” custom deeply involved in creating and maintaining kinship ties among the extended kin. It is often the case that the ceremonial emphasis on kinship increases during the process of economic modernization. Encouraged to expand in socialist times in order to replace the old religious rituals with secular ones, kin gatherings became very popular and continued to exist after 1989 without any directives from “above”. Not included here, but treated in my dissertation is a look at kinship in relation to social networks, using social network analysis (see Boissevain & Mitchell 1973; Hage 1983) as an additional method to complement the data gathered in the field by means of participant observation and narratives and in an attempt to reveal the actual structure of kinship ties. In considering the results of that research, I suggest that people act differently as relatives (towards the family) and as heirs (towards the descent group). Family networks present interactions within the group, while the relations between the heirs of a descent group present interactions between separate family groups. The descent group does not represent a network itself. However, it is a necessary condition for further exchange between the smaller family units.

In the following, I briefly introduce the field site before turning to the distinction of kindred and kin. The main section analyzes the family reunions as they took shape in the postsocialist times.

### **The Field Site**

The town of Smolyan was originally made up of three villages (Smolyan, Rajkovo, and Ustovo), but it merged into one single town as a result of the modernization politics of the Bulgarian Communist Party during the 1960s. The Socialist efforts to industrialize the region turned Smolyan into the industrial centre of the district. After 1989, however, the economy and demography changed rapidly. Thus, there have been two turning points in the life of the villagers and townspeople: 1944 and 1989.

Before 1944, the region sustained a relative autonomy through developing forest cooperatives, transhumance, and craftsmanship, which were all closely related to labor migration (mainly to the Aegean Sea region). The region was characterized by a strong religiosity, a result to some extent of the co-existence of Christian and Muslim populations, and the deep genealogies both sides developed in order to keep the generations together. After 1944, however, the forests were nationalized, the shepherds could not follow their old paths down to the Aegean Sea (the region of Ksanti), and the artisans could not travel and sell their products freely because the borders were closed and under close guard. A new kind of labor migration to the big cities replaced the old one. At the same time, the secular and atheist state policy in the region aimed to destroy the religiosity and the kinship structures, which were seen as an obstacle to the modern socialist society. After 1989, another crucial change followed. Many state enterprises were closed, and growing migration to the cities of Plovdiv and Sofia drained the region of its population, especially its youth. Some of the reasons for the elaboration of successful social networks within the family group may be found in the separation of families and generations caused by the resulting migration, economic insecurity, and cultural tensions in the region.

### **Kindred and Kin**

There are two ways of understanding the family: one definition refers specifically to the nuclear family and the small-scale circle of closest relatives; the other refers to the extended family. These two dimensions of the family network have different meanings and usage, and both require examination. To what degree are these relationships active? What is the range of a kinship network, and how does it function today? We can refer to Campbell's (1974) concept of the social norm, which sets the boundaries for solidarity and for so-called actual kinship thus determining the ways these norms function. For example, from the whole group of cousins we may favor some for closer relations while we avoid others. I examine family networks with differing degrees

of closeness concerning kinship and descent. To explain the terminological difference between them, I define "kinship" with reference to an individual and "descent" with reference to an ancestor (Keesing 1975). Thus, we can distinguish between kinship networks based on parent-child relations and those based on descent. They differ in range, frequency, and usage (actual and normative) of ties in the examined cases of exchange. They vary in terms of structure, relations among relatives and matters of exchange. In order to illustrate the difference in structure between these two kinds of family networks, I will examine the emic terms people use such as *the closest ones* and *the kin* (in Bulgarian, *rod* and *roda*), the latter signifying a cognatic descent group. However, according to my informants, the expression *the closest ones* does not only include the nuclear family or household members, but also children, parents and grandparents, as well as siblings and first cousins. The most suitable anthropological term is *kindred*, and it constitutes a network that is used in everyday life (the actual kin). *Kin* refers broadly to the descent group. The existence of common ancestors is a precondition for that wider network to continue (the normative kin).

Family trees often include up to eight generations, of which up to five can be invited to participate in the family network. When looking at the relational differences between *kindred* and *kin*, the ties among the kindred – *the closest ones* – are always active, and the ties binding kin are activated periodically during the time of the *kin reunions*, which I will examine further. There are also differences in spheres of exchange in Bohannan's sense (1955). I argue that exchange among the closest relatives includes substantial relations applied over the long-term period, whereas *kin exchange* is more prestigious and visible only during gatherings of kin.

### **Mutual Aid among Kindred**

Mutual help between relatives is a common phenomenon, but each "national" tradition has specific parameters to address existing problems. Each kinship network has created internal norms of its own and the boundaries of solidarity are defined

by these norms. In the following, I will describe relations between the closest relatives – children, parents, siblings, and cousins – in order to show the nature of the exchange between them. The network they create is that of the actual kin, which differs from that of the normative kin observed at the kin reunion (Campbell 1974). This is an exchange sphere of a very substantial level, which includes any of the typical needs of everyday life – such as cooking, chopping wood, and taking care of children and elders – but also includes financial support, a component of every sphere of exchange. Relations between generations involve monetary transactions as well as non-monetary responses. Why does this differentiation occur? The answer lies in the migration and urbanization that have affected this mountain region. Generations are separated in terms of space, with money as the mediator between them. Reciprocity exists depending on the nature of the objects exchanged (Sahlins 1974: ch. 5). The difference between the exchanged objects can be explained in terms of the status of the different participants of these exchanges. In the following, I examine money, work and food exchanges in detail.

### *Money*

It is said that there is no parent who wants “to take from his child”; the parent is accustomed “to giving”, and does not expect to receive help or care in return. Nonetheless, there is also a reversed link of reciprocity: children have obligations too. Giving can be a long-term strategy and can occur regardless of who the parent is and who the child is, since either side might be in a weak or strong position<sup>2</sup> at one time or another.

Migration is a strategic choice transcending individual decision making. The migration of one family member raises hopes for the security of the whole family network. This could be a parent or an uncle living in the USA, for example, who continually sends money to a daughter or a nephew, but it can also be the son or daughter who sends money from abroad to help their parents survive or to pay off their debts to the state or the bank. There are people working abroad who pay remittances to their eld-

erly parents to compensate for the pension the state is unable to provide. This is voluntary support and does not demand restitution, but it does require other services rendered in return such as, for example, childcare and property maintenance. Assistance between parents and children does not adhere to specific rules. The most economically active network members utilize all their capabilities at a given moment for the benefit of their group; later, the situation may change and other members may take their place.

To enhance income, it has become typical for someone to work two or three jobs in order to feed and support the whole family (Benovska-Sabkova 2004; Chavdarova 1994). A part of the multiple incomes from different sources is invested in the maintenance of the family networks. The case of a young, single woman from a mountain town in Rhodope illustrates this: “I have two jobs in order to afford the luxury to travel.” She was not talking however about leisure trips, but rather about frequent visits to her brother to help with the care of his children. The trips foster not only the sibling ties; since the younger sister did not have children of her own, she was directing her energy to her brother’s family.

### *Work*

Work and leisure activities also intertwine familial ties. An exchange between a grandmother and her granddaughter illustrates their reciprocal relations. The granddaughter, who is about to go to work abroad, asks her grandmother: “Why do you intend to keep working in the fruit garden after I leave? Who is going to eat your jams now?”<sup>3</sup> The girl, in her turn, was leaving home in order to help her father pay off his debts.

If we look at the use of spare time in connection with the family, we see an equal contribution among family members. Family needs often prevail over individual choices, as seen in the number of weekends and summer days spent in the hometown or village helping on the subsistence plots instead of going away somewhere else for a vacation. As restitution for these efforts, the relatives from

the cities receive a substantial amount of the food produced. However, this system of reciprocity exists not only to balance levels of exchange and to provide help whenever it is needed, but it is also about trust among kindred. Consider the example of a young man from Smolyan whose mother moved from another small town in the central Rhodopes to live with her son and daughter-in-law in order to take care of their newborn child. Knowing that they were well enough off to afford a nanny for the child, I asked the young man: "Do you think it is a good idea for a grandmother to look after her grandchildren?" He answered, "I'm not sure whether it is good, but it is more convenient. Otherwise you have to call for someone else, an outsider whom you have to allow into your home (...) I don't know, maybe we are not yet ready for this, we are suspicious of strangers." People are aware that hired nannies will have a significant influence on the language, behavior, and mindset of their children. This Rhodopean family was even slightly wary of the grandmother's inability to speak standard Bulgarian, due to her dialect. Yet they preferred her because they trusted her more than any childcare center or nanny. The level of trust helps distinguish between the people from whom you can "take", and those from whom you cannot (or maybe should not). However, the young man's wife gave me a different explanation concerning the "use" of the grandmother's help. She said: "She had to come, otherwise there would be no chance for us to work." The presence of the grandmother allowed them to keep their jobs as musicians as the couple played together every night in one of the biggest hotels in Smolyan, from 8 p.m. until midnight. It would have been impossible for them to take care of the child without outside help. In return, the couple helped the grandmother with her garden in the countryside; they even furnished her house in the country before they furnished their own.

Help from relatives is thus preferred when it comes to childcare, but this principle also applies whenever the security of the family or of one of its members is threatened. In this regard, my case study concurs with findings from elsewhere, which suggest that people have minimal expectations of

state institutions (Creed 1998; Giordano 2003). Social security is left to traditional mechanisms such as mutual aid among kindred. The loss of trust in state institutions only strengthens the position of the family as an institution that guarantees security and employment. An emerging type of commitment transfers familial networks into business relations, allowing the whole family to participate in a common business, and more importantly, attending to its own social security needs. In one example, the children of a family from Smolyan moved to Sofia to live and work; their employers in the city did not cover their social insurance however. It is common practice for employers in postsocialist private firms not to pay their employees' health and pension insurance in order to avoid paying taxes to the state. Constrained by this situation, many children are included "in name only" in family firms owned by their fathers, and their health insurance and pension are paid for through the family company. In this way, while working for a company that treats them as uninsured freelance employees, these children accumulate, on paper, an employment history under the umbrella of the family business in which they do not actually participate. It is, once again, a long-term strategy in which children and parents play their respective roles.

### *Food*

When I asked people about who it was that enjoyed the privilege of visiting their home most often, the answers I received were universal: children (*deca*) and grandchildren (*vnuci*), brothers (*brat*) and sisters (*sestra*), and first and second cousins (*bratovchedi*). These family members, together with a small group of close friends and neighbors, are involved in the social life of the household. It is interesting to note that these friends and neighbors are also considered relatives: "It is as if they are part of our kin" is a common statement. While visiting relatives (especially if someone comes from a different town or village) there is a symbolic exchange of food, a practice that is honored as a rule and an obligation. People use an archaic Turkish word – *aramgan* – for trivial gifts brought from remote places. They say: "No one can

walk into the house with empty hands.” The reverse is also true. Guests bring little presents, very often food and drink such as chocolates and coffee, both homemade and store-bought products, regardless of whether it is a specific celebration or just a regular visit. Hosts will set the table immediately after a visitor steps inside, serving salad, a homemade dish, and alcoholic drinks. Smolyan’s inhabitants have always talked about these kinds of visits as feasts and as spontaneous celebrations; many young people, who have migrated to bigger cities such as Sofia or Plovdiv, still spend every weekend at home, and there is a constant flow of jars of preserves between rural and urban areas (Smollett 1989). As the head of a young Pomak family says, “We go there [to the village] with empty jars and return with full ones.” This exchange is a symbolic presentation of ties which prevents networks from breaking. It is, again, a long-term strategy, something done to secure future relationships, even though the exchange is immediate.

Food exchange is considered a tradition and it is the usual practice for showing love and respect. Although hospitality is recognized as a traditional and distinguished feature of Bulgarians, and especially of Rhodopean mountain residents, the question remains: to whom is this hospitality actually addressed? I argue that the contraction of social networks to the area of the family is most evident in visits between kinsmen. Here, the change in practice becomes obvious particularly in the celebration of calendar events such as name days. These celebrations used to involve not only the closest relatives, but the whole village or neighborhood (the so-called *mahala*). Visits continued into the night and even throughout the next day because the whole village had to call on each person named Ivan in the community, for example. If someone neglected to visit his neighbor, it was regarded as an insult; people used to say “If people don’t respect you, you are no one.” One might imagine opulent feasts and wonder how this was possible in villages where resources were limited. But food and drinks were few and simple – a tray with appetizers, a tray with glasses, and one fork used by everybody – and

each guest’s visit was no longer than half an hour, at which point he or she had to leave and make room for the next visitors. Now, such visitations have declined due to the expense of the expanded list of food: “Big banquets have alienated people from each other.” My informant Zlatka, a middle-aged woman from Rajkovo, explained the situation in this way: “I think that the circle of guests invited to these family feasts gets narrower nowadays. The only reason is that we used to make the meetings much more opulent, and when you cannot afford it these days, you prefer to narrow your circle.” The economic reason for restrictions is enforced by the obligation to return the visit. New forms of consumerism have forced people to reduce their networks of friends and relatives, and only the privileged ones – those of importance – remain members of the kindred.

Another example provides a different explanation for the present contraction of social networks. An elderly priest from Ustovo told me, “They are all (i.e. the neighborhood) my relatives. I have baptized them all and together we prepare the religious and domestic rituals.” When he told me a story about “baking the Easter cakes” in the first half of the twentieth century, I was surprised that this activity was public and not limited to each household. There was only one specially adapted oven in the whole village, and since only one woman had authority over the baking, all the members of the group relied on her. Baking was a communal activity that took a whole week. Consequently, this cooperative work could be the reason for the unity of the entire neighborhood, since stopping it would have contributed to alienation. Such alienation would happen not because of “rising consumerism” or limited resources, but because of the religious restrictions enforced during socialism. The sacred events became invisible within the community as they were regarded as illegal by the laws of the state, and thus they remained hidden behind the walls of the household. Collective activity was gradually pushed aside (Heady 2003; Svašek 2006) and the household gained hegemony over all the “religious and domestic rituals”. However, the opposite tendency, towards an expansion of social networks,

would find its way through the new secular events that were being encouraged by the socialist politics.

### **Kin Reunion – Mobilization of Extended Kin**

The moral value of “unity” is a precondition for common action. Exchange is necessary to ensure these actions (Heady 2003). Implicitly, the network itself needs to expand. In times when the (considered as) kinship unity with the “godfather” does not have the same influence as it did in the past, another unity, which has equal emotional and sacred value to the people, must replace it. And that is how the gathering<sup>4</sup> of the extended kin has become a contemporary phenomenon which expands possibilities and better serves the network exchange. The origin of the kin reunion (*rodova sreshita*) can be found in the socialist past. In the region studied here, the event was introduced by the socialist politics at the beginning of the 1980s (during the time of the so-called revival process) in an effort by the Bulgarian Communist Party to reinforce a nationalistic self-image in the ethnically mixed regions of the state (as in the Rhodope mountain region). It was an activity of the Fatherland Front, a satellite organization of the Bulgarian Communist Party.<sup>5</sup>

The meaning of these kin gatherings has changed, however, and something new is now found in these events (Creed 2002). Inherited from the past are the main elements of the kin reunion celebration such as the annual regularity, official speeches and anthems, some kind of cultural program, and a committee.<sup>6</sup> Among the families I observed, there were aspects which had not occurred before 1990. They had heard of state-fostered activities but they had never participated in them. Their need to discover their kin was thus of a different type (Creed 1998), one that is a symbolic presentation of kinship coming from “below”. Furthermore, these newly emerged reunions ignored religious separation. I found one such case in Rajkovo, where two big branches of the same kin that had been separated since 1669 by different religions (Christianity and Islam) were now reunited and had even published a brochure with the original names and pictures of the members of the different branches celebrating together for the first

time. The initiators of this reunion were Christians and invited relatives also included Muslims. The ordeals surrounding their past assimilation under socialist rule had changed to attempts at integration. As the value of “unity” is now coming from the people and not from the former rulers – the Bulgarian Communist Party, who represented the whole state – it seems to be more successful.

The reunion event itself involves a series of binding ceremonial actions. The laying of a memorial tablet in honor of an ancestor, and naming a street after his or her name, are the most frequent practices for marking kin’s territory – inventions that had been emulated by various observed groups. Demonstrations of power manifest themselves through the depth of the genealogy, the amount of relatives participating in the feast, and the number of branches and generations involved. The social status of any particular member of the kin group is also important. A list of members (including their educational attainments and occupations) is compiled for that purpose. Rich relatives from the past who have emigrated<sup>7</sup> are also a source of pride. Above everyone stands the ancestral patriarch, with whom the whole kin identifies. The ancestor is someone of social import, someone who did a lot for his kin and for the whole community. It may be that he helped the community build a church, or perhaps he owned much land and distributed it wisely among his heirs. The ancestor may also be a woman. Such is the case of Baba Stana (Grandmother Stana), who kept her Christian faith and saved one of her sons from conversion to Islam in the seventeenth century. Baba Stana is the ancestor of the two large Muslim and Christian family branches in Rajkovo mentioned above. Her case is intriguing because she is honored as an ancestor by both Muslims and Christians, thus corroborating the idea of increasing “unity”.

There is no common rule for choosing an ancestor. It is the symbolic presentation for the living heirs that matters. The living receive the fruits of what has been bequeathed by the ancestor in the past; it is a kind of long-term reciprocity, but reversed towards the past.

I will give an example from the most recent gathering I observed, that of the members of a lineal woodland corporation, the kin of Ivan S., who had joined these “tournaments of value”<sup>8</sup> (Appadurai 1999: 21) a little later. Their first celebration was in 2006. “Guests” and “initiators” (both relatives) were already organized in their woodland corporation. Their case illustrates a classic example of a kin group united by common descent and common land, but at the same time, it is also an example of more strictly organized kinship ties. Their ancestor, Ivan S., had been born in the second half of the nineteenth century and was a wealthy man. He had a large family, four sons and six daughters, to whom he left his sizeable woodland. After nationalization in 1949, the land was taken from them and was only given back after more than forty years. New generations had been born in the interim, so the number of heirs had multiplied, decreasing the size of land that could be inherited by each person. The decision of the present inheritors (most of them residing in other towns) was to consolidate the land and to possess it jointly. This is how the lineal corporation was established. A family council<sup>9</sup> leads the corporation, whose members gather during one of the annual meetings to choose the initiative committee. Committee members are chosen from among the local participants in the corporation in order to make organizing the event easier, by using their ties and prestige in the local area. Each one receives a different task according to his or her abilities and age. A middle-aged man, an historian and high-school principal in Ustovo, and a descendant of one of the ancestor’s daughters, was chosen as president of the committee. The other people involved in the organization were mostly senior citizens, but some were also people who had experience and ties within the community. A younger member of the family, who was in his late thirties, was chosen as treasurer; money had to be collected from other relatives, for example, in order to pay for the location where they organize the kin gatherings and for other events. A similar committee structure was evident in the other kin groups that were studied. Even though there are several generations involved, the privileged

role of the elders is clear, as is the leading role of the relatives who live in the ancestor’s residence, sometimes used as the gathering place. Organizing the kin reunion in this case took several months, but “it was a very short time”, according to my informants from that particular descent group. Organization of the event may take a year, if it includes actions such as the laying of memorial tablets, naming streets after ancestors, or publishing brochures on family history. The meeting of Ivan S.’s kin took place in a restaurant on the Ustovo square in the quarter where the ancestor had been born. The invited relatives numbered around one hundred people. The head of the corporation inaugurated the reunion with a biographical sketch that emphasized the ancestor’s merits and his value to the region and his family. Ivan S. was a famous textile trader at the time of the fighting for the liberation of Rhodopes (1912). The story tells that when the 21st regiment and its commander, Colonel Vladimir Serafimov,<sup>10</sup> passed through the town, “grandfather” (as his heirs call him) welcomed part of the regiment into his home and donated a large amount of cloth to be used for the soldiers’ puttees. The grandfather’s service to his own heirs was his notarized testament of perfectly distributed land, which has become the basis of the present corporation. As part of their remembrance, the oldest heir (Ivan S.’s daughter, aged 83) also made a speech, and she was presented with gifts. The official part of the reunion continued in the square with a group photograph taken of the whole kin, of all the different branches of the family, together with portraits of the ancestor and his wife and the ancestor’s parents (“we cherish them as relics”), followed by more speeches and the laying of the memorial tablet.

Following Baudrillard (1981), I would argue that the demonstration of the reunion itself, its visibility, is also an object of exchange, as long as a sign in a system of signs of status can be objectified. This kind of exchange takes place between different kin groups. Memorial tablets, street naming, anthems of the kin, published brochures on family history and so on, are just external signs of the desired prestige. Belonging to a kin is prestigious and can ensure



access to resources; it gives the kin group members self-confidence, but it also depends on the size and reputation of the kin to which one belongs.

“Few people have such ancestors, as we do,” said Hristo (aged 77) from Ustovo, a descendent of one of the seminal figures of the nineteenth century in this region. Hadji Hristo Popgeorgiev, a famous dealer in friezes, was ready to build his own factory. Only the difficulty of travel on the mountain roads prevented him from doing so. The son of a son of the ancestor’s son, Hristo is a classic example of patrilineal descent – but no rules exist for choosing which kin to belong to.<sup>11</sup> For example, his wife, who is a daughter-in-law in this kin group, also recognizes herself as part of it, but a different daughter-in-law from another kin group in Ustovo that is not so well known, claims to belong to her father’s kin in the neighboring quarter of Rajkovo because it is larger and more important. Belonging to a particular kin group can serve as a kind of good credit and hence some people will choose their mother’s kin as their major affiliation, while others will opt to choose another kin group that might be larger and more significant. This raises the question of how people are incorporated into the kin group. Who are the initiators and to whom is that initiative addressed?

When tracing the grouping of a single kin, a tendency of gradual expansion of the kinship network is noticeable. Expansion is one of the main tasks of the initiative committee; it should find evidence that a formerly spontaneous growth of kin is now a conscious politics. Committee members are between 55 and 70 years old. As illustrated by the woodland corporation, these elders hold the leadership in the family politics and they target the younger generations. From kin groups that have already had a few meetings, informants report that “guests”, that is, members of the kin, enlarged their numbers every time, and that growing numbers of youngsters were involved. One meeting gathers approximately four generations. Usually the younger generations join later, at the second or third reunion.

An expansion of the kin also has practical reasons. Taking advantage of signs of prestige can be seen in concomitant initiatives, which I will call “charity

events”. For the organizers, it is important to locate, invite, and list the names of some wealthy and highly educated relatives in the kin brochure. While not openly stated, I learned about some cases of charity that had been offered by prestigious relatives; for instance, they had built family dwellings, chapels and fountains or had given funds to needy relatives. People who have an anniversary in the same year also give to charity. Sometimes charity is exercised by paying the bill in a restaurant, thus fusing the practical and symbolic side of exchange. During the unofficial part of the kin reunion, there is also an exchange of useful information and connections, thereby giving access to resources if not the resources themselves. It is common practice to circulate questionnaires among relatives asking for names, addresses, phone numbers and the exact relation to the kin group that one belongs to. Very often this information is printed as an address book, which facilitates further communication between relatives. When I asked how people find jobs, it became clear that the kinship network helped to solve this problem. For example, a 35-year-old woman became secretary of the initiative committee and older members there helped her find a new job. “They just gave her the right information,” my informant told me. The real exchange of ties happens at the time of the meeting. “The young exchange phone numbers and call each other later for different kinds of services,” said the same informant, who is also a member of the committee. Exchange of information may happen at the time of the gathering, or before, when actually organizing the event, and also after, once new connections are established.

### **When Does the Network Exchange Break Down?**

How do people solve, or fail to solve, conflicts through kinship? In his introduction to Mauss’s *The Gift*, Evans-Pritchard (1967: 1) says that gifts are voluntary in theory, but in practice they are given and repaid under obligation. So what force is there in the gift that is given that compels the recipient to reciprocate in kind? Family ties are not so resilient that one could afford not to attend to them; their maintenance requires constant exchange between

the relatives, and consequently ties do break. Nevertheless, the movement of resources in the vertical structure of the nuclear family network is done without calculation, and in the horizontal structures of the kindred with the expectation of return (for example, one expects a brother to give back the loan he has taken, but the same is not expected of a child or a mother). If there is a break in the generational chain, solidarity among kindred clearly decreases. There are also crucial moments in the life cycle that may result in a split. Marriage can be considered as such, as well as a lack of children. As ethnographic and sociological data collected in Bulgaria shows, being married and having children are the core values for people, especially in villages and small towns. The availability of children is crucial for the family network to be mobilized (Benovska-Sabkova 2001). If it is in the best interest of the children, a nuclear family will maintain warm relations with other relatives, and vice versa. The network is used to the full extent in the name of "the children". It would be fair to say that if the family has children, the ties with other relatives are intensified, but if there are no children the relations with others may stay more reserved and even hostile. Radka, an informant from Ustovo, is not married and does not have children, and therefore her story is quite different. When she used to work for the Smolyan municipality, she had helped her relatives in the nearest village to obtain land after the privatization reforms in 1990. She said that she had received nothing at all in return, and when she went back to the village to cultivate her own piece of land that she had inherited from her father, she was met with hostility as if she had taken their land. This case would not be exceptional for rural-urban relations after the land reform in Bulgaria (Kaneff 1995) if it was not for the fact that after this bad behavior, Radka's aunt asked her for a little "loan" and then sent the money to her own daughter in town. Maybe the aunt felt she had the right to do this, since Radka did not have any children, and therefore their relationship did not require reciprocity any longer. So we can see that a lack of children may damage the kindred exchange, but marriage may also be

crucial for established ties. For example, a young woman from the small Rhodopean town Zlatograd, whose kin were Muslims, married a man from the Christian village of Momchilovtzi. The young man's parents regarded this marriage as improper and refused to communicate with their daughter-in-law or to give her help of any kind. They did not want to recognize her as kin because of her Islamic origin.

Since the collapse of the socialist state, dividing inherited land has become another reason for divisions between relatives. Family conflicts relating to land following the denationalization of land in 1990 are often more numerous than cases of solidarity. Figuratively, it is a struggle of different interests between the rural and urban heirs of common land. Political affiliations and differences, most commonly between democrats (in the city) and socialists (in the villages and small towns), are also reflected here. These contradictions may lead to a refusal of cooperation between the two (or more) groups. But since this will bring losses to both, the disputes are usually settled by compromises: the relatives in the village continue to cultivate the land, for example, while those in the town take care of the administrative procedures involved in the agrarian reform. In return, citizens receive money (especially when it concerns woodland) or products from the harvest, and the relatives in the country are left to use the whole land freely as they were before. It seems to me that both rural and urban relatives are to some extent resistant to changes concerning land property and inheritance. The roots of this resistance can be found in the customary laws of inheritance and rights to use the land, which were abrogated with great difficulty in the beginning of the twentieth century.

Even when conflicts are unresolved, there are ways to encourage the piqued relatives to come to a reconciliation. Kin reunions can be considered such occasions: resumption of the social order in the name of "unity" is thus another function of the kin reunion. People reported how families who had not spoken for years met at the party and rekindled their relationship. The holding of the event at regular intervals is beneficiary to this process. Katya,

a descendant of a “large” kin from Rajkovo, spoke about some close family: “At our first gathering only one of them came; at the second all of the elders came, and now we are waiting for their children to come too.” The obligation to participate in such events supports further communication and exchange.

In this way, people use the traditional and the modern (i.e. socialist) rituals to ensure their connectedness as family and kin (*rod*). The newly emerged celebrations of name days and the kin reunions emphasize kinship ties rather than keeping the whole community (neighborhood, village, nation) together, as was the case in celebrations in earlier times. One possible conclusion is that in times of transition, new values have come to replace the previous forms of solidarity and exchange, and the family itself has become the cultural arena where the older religious and secular practices are preserved and reinvented. In the past, name days were related to religion and were not family but congregational feasts; kin reunions, in the socialist ideology, did not aim for the self-awareness of belonging to a distinguished kin group – which could have led to undesired inequality – but aimed instead at national self-consciousness in order to strengthen the state. As the institutions of religion and the state have lost influence and reliability, family institutions have risen in importance. They provide security in insecure times in the form of parents paying for their children’s health and pension insurance; of children, rather than the state, providing for their elderly parents with “pensions”; and of charitable acts performed by relatives rather than the church. All these activities support this assertion.

### Conclusion

Postsocialist Bulgarian kinship is a particular type of social network created in the city and maintaining a liaison with the village. Family networks are an urban phenomenon, because in rural areas kinship relations cover the entire social life of the individual and cannot be considered as a separate segment of the network of social relationships. Family networks are not an exclusively Bulgarian, Balkan, or even

postsocialist phenomenon (see Bott 1957; Kapferer 1973; Možný 1991). However, viewed through the prism of the present legacies of the socialist era, and considering the ethnic peculiarities of Smolyan, these networks have their own social and ethnic characteristics and deserve to be the subject of anthropological research.

What distinguishes family and kinship relations in the central Rhodopes? I am tempted to say that it is a significant resistance to change during both the socialist and postsocialist, as well as the contemporary secularized and urbanized times. Change has left traces but has not altered the nature of the relationships between relatives. These relations have been kept alive thanks to the intergenerational exchange that takes place during family and kinship gatherings in the region, successfully reconfirming and strengthening the kinship ties to restore order in relationships and resolve conflicts.

Family gatherings and kin reunions have their own Rhodopean features; for example, the practices of labor migration and the coexistence of Christianity and Islam in the region. Different types of exchanges are carried out through the family gatherings, especially in the cases in which the family is divided by the distance caused by the processes of migration. The exchange of economic and social capital, “food from the village – contacts through the city” (Kaser 1999: 8), is valid for all regions of Bulgaria and probably in most of the postsocialist countries, but in the Rhodopes, special care is given to the cultural and symbolic exchange between the generations. The need for educating the younger generation is exposed as one of the main reasons for celebrating (Stamenova 1995: 185). It is linked to the knowledge of kin, which is an essential tool in the hands of the elders who hold back and integrate the younger generation into the family and kinship group. The emphasis on kinship relations in itself is a way of preserving the traditional model.

The kinship network does not displace other social networks of young migrants; it exists in parallel but in another dimension that the young call “The Old House”, or which they refer to as “security” and “warmth”. Those who have migrated from the vil-

lage to the big city do not give up the traditional social security that they are offered: the security of the “root”, of the family and kinship. Cultural exchanges between relatives occur in both domestic and public spaces. Family gatherings, name days, religious rituals, and kin reunions all perform the same task: the integration of the younger generation in the family.

Socialist cultural policy, in using tradition for its own purposes whether intentionally or not, promoted further cultural exchanges between relatives. Invented during the time of socialist rule, the family reunion renders family and kinship groupings more significant than religious and other local community links. The main reason for inventing kin reunions was the so-called revival process, whose ideological purpose was the integration (or assimilation) of the Bulgarian Muslims in the region by intervening in the most intimate relations of the people: their family and kinship ties. During the 1980s, mass meetings of the biggest kin groups in the region were organized in the name of the “common origin” shared by both Bulgarian Christians and Muslims. They continue to be practiced today, without political encouragement “from above”. Kin reunions have at least partially succeeded in overcoming the socialist clichés that were imposed on them. They have a strong emotional content and hold importance both for the kin groups involved and for the whole village community, which sees its values and behaviors represented through the kin reunion ritual. Organizing and conducting the ritual itself, in turn, has a great potential for the creation and maintenance of functional family and kinship networks as carriers of social capital. Yet, in all the activity that is part of the meetings may be recognized the effort for “establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term” (Bourdieu 1986: 249f.), necessary for the existence of the living family network which is quite different from the static structure of the family tree.

The kin group is not a network in itself, but there are various smaller segments within it where connections are active and where the social status of the participants is important. Kinship as a basis of social relations may serve different types of strate-

gies, from basic survival strategies to the more subtle ones providing prosperity and lobby systems. The strategies are interconnected with the scope of the network, in which the closest ones participate in the daily assistance, while the larger kin group is important in achieving higher economic and social goals.

The delicate topic of informal intergenerational exchange occurs not only during holiday periods but also on ordinary working days – in the form of money, services and labor. It requires specific methods in order to avoid the pitfalls of the norms that people tend to declare as daily practice. Social network analysis clarified the two basic emic concepts in the work, “the closest ones” and “the kin”, and helped to distinguish actual and normative ties, the discovery of the most typical roles and activities within the networks of mutual help and their scope, as well as the spatial distribution between the village and town. That model can be used for further analysis of the family and kinship relations and their impact on social practice.

Ultimately, the exchange that takes place in the family networks between town and village represents one rational solution to the problems that arise in postsocialist reality. Despite the retaining aspects of such a network, which periodically holds its agents back “to their roots”, the family network ensures the survival, the social security and the progress of its members who are still learning to live without the support of the socialist welfare state.

## Notes

- 1 The statistics reveal interesting ethnic and religious divisions in the region: 87.7% of the population identifies as Bulgarian and only 4.4% as Turks, while at the same time 42% of the Rhodopeans identify with the practice of Islam and only 29.7% with Christianity.
- 2 This position often depends on the place of residence – village, small town, city, or abroad.
- 3 Translations of field conversations in Bulgarian into English were done by the author.
- 4 The distinction between kin group and kin gathering is based on the temporariness and periodicity of the gathering.
- 5 This was a massive organization, whose goal was to influence the whole population of the state, including people who were not members of the Communist Party.

- 6 The committee is a voluntary group of relatives (very often distinguished ones), which organizes events that are dedicated to an ancestor's memory and to his or her descendants.
- 7 Emigration had been most common in the beginning of the twentieth century, the main destination being the New World.
- 8 *Tournaments of value* – complex periodic events that are removed in some culturally well-defined way from routines of economic life. Participation in them is likely to be both a privilege of those in power and an instrument of status contests between them (Appadurai 1999: 21).
- 9 A term used by members of the corporation because it consists of the elders in the kin group. In actuality they are the heirs apparent of the land, or, rather, the heirs are their living descendants.
- 10 Colonel Vladimir Serafimov is a hero from the Balkan War, known as the rescuer of the Rhodopes and Smolyan region, who fought against the Turkish army in October 1912.
- 11 This “belonging” concerns normative kin and participation in “kin reunion” events and not the actual range of kinship ties.

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