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A Bulgarian Example of Exchange and Reciprocity in the Family

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Abstract

The focus of this research is strongly connected to the intense periods of urbanisation, following the Second World War and the collapse of socialism in 1989, which did not appear to cause a break up of relations between urban and rural residents of the same kin. Although migrations between towns and villages created a physical separation, relatives have remained bound to each other through varying levels of commitment. The central research topic focuses on family networks that operate between countryside and city and the kinds of social and economic strategies that are employed. The research work looks at family networks and their differing degrees of personal embeddedness with respect to kinship and descent. I will focus on two levels of kinship, with regard to different groups of relatives and their unique needs. These groups differ in the sense of being actual or normative kin. The question is: what do family members exchange (in the sense of economic, social, and cultural capital) in times of transition and insecurity in order to maintain their social status? These individual and group strategies may provide an explanation for the peculiarities of the structure of Bulgarian society.

Introduction

The project I am working on concerns family networks and exchange across urban and rural districts, and is strongly connected to the intense processes of urbanisation, during and after socialist rule, which did not result in a separation of urban residents from their rural kin. Although migration between villages and cities has created distance between relatives, they have remained bound to each other through different kinds of commitments. The primary research focuses on family networks, that operate between countryside and city, and on their corresponding social and economic strategies. The fieldwork site is located in the Central Rhodope mountain region in the town of Smolyan. Originally made up of three villages, they were merged into a single town due to the modernisation politics of the Bulgarian Communist Party. Socialist efforts to industrialise the region turned Smolyan into the industrial centre of the district; however, after 1989 things changed with respect to economic and demographic processes. Many state enterprises were closed, and growing migration to the cities of Plovdiv and Sofia drained the region of its population, especially of its youth. Interestingly, some of the reasons for the elaboration of successful social and economic strategies within the family group may be found in the separation of families and generations caused by migration, economic insecurity, and cultural tensions in the region.

This paper describes kinship relations in families and descent groups and presents them as relations of solidarity and conflict. In the first part of the paper I examine exchange and reciprocity in the small kindred; while in the second part I present 'kin ritual', a significant 'socialist' custom deeply involved in creating and maintaining kinship ties in the extended kin. It is often the case that the ceremonial emphasis on kinship increases during the process of economic modernisation. 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'. The research work looks at family networks and their different degrees of personal embeddedness with respect to kinship and descent. I will focus on two levels of kinship, with regard to different groups of relatives and their unique needs. The question is: what do family members exchange (in Bourdieu's sense [1992] of economic, social, and cultural capital) in times of transition and insecurity in order to maintain their social status? Also, how did socialism affect their kinship relations?

The Kindred and the Kin

First, I would like to distinguish between the extents of actual kin and the central principles for building the family network structure. When I examine the problem, there are two ways of understanding the family: one definition refers specifically to the nuclear family and the small-scale circle of the closest relatives; and the other refers to the extended family. These two dimensions of the family network have different meaning and usage and thus are both examined. The questions revolve around the degree to which these relations are active, the range of a kinship network, and its functions today. We can refer to Campbell's (1974) concept for the social norm, which sets the boundaries of solidarity, and for so called 'actual kinship', which determines the ways these norms function. For example, from the whole group of cousins we prefer some for closer relations, while we avoid others. In the following, I examine family networks of differing degrees of closeness or differences concerning kinship and descent. To explain the terminological

difference between them, I define 'kinship' with reference to an individual (ego) 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 corporations, and 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. These are *the closest ones* and *the kin* (in Bulgarian, *rod, roda*), which signifies a cognatic descent group. However, according to my informants, 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 of the ego. The most suitable anthropological term is *kindred,* and it is a kind of network that is used in everyday life (the actual kin). The second one, called *kin* has a broader sense as a descent group. The existence of common ancestors is a pre-condition for that wider network to keep working (the normative kin). The family trees often include up to eight generations, of which up to five are 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 closest relatives includes substantial relations applied over the long-term, whereas *kin exchange* is rather prestigious and visible only during gatherings of kin.

Mutual Aid among Kindred

Mutual help between relatives is more or less a common phenomenon, but each 'national' tradition has specific parameters to address existent 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 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' meeting, for example (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 it also includes financial support, a component of every sphere of exchange. Regarding relations between generations, we can speak of two different types of exchange involved. We may observe monetary transactions on the one hand, and on the other a non-monetary response. Why does this differentiation occur? The answer lies in the nature of the relationships that exist in that mountain region: one that is related to migration processes of urbanisation. Generations are separated in terms of space, with money as the mediator between them. There are two questions that need explanation here: what kind of reciprocity exists depending on the nature of the objects exchanged; and what is the status of the different participants of these exchanges (Sahlins 1974: ch. 5). In the following, I examine money, work and food exchanges in detail.

Money

People say 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. Nonetheless, there is also a reversed link of reciprocity, as I shall expose further. And it can be seen that children have obligations too. Actions of giving occur regardless of who is the parent and who the child, since either side might be in a weak or strong position[3] at one time or another (long-term strategy).

When we speak of migration strategies, it is obvious that leaving the small town/village for the capital or to go abroad is not an explicitly individual decision concerning one's own prosperity. The migration of one family member raises the hopes for security of the whole family network. This could be a parent or an uncle living in the USA, who continually sends money to a sister or a nephew; but it can also be the son or daughter who sends money from abroad to help their parents survive or pay off their debts to the state or the bank. There are people working abroad who pay allowances to their old parents to compensate for the pensions the state is unable to provide. This is voluntary support and does not demand restitution, but it does require other services rendered, such as childcare and property maintenance, for example. Assistance between parents and children does not adhere to specific rules. The most economically active network members utilise all their capabilities at a given moment for the benefit of their group; later on the situation may change and other members might take their place. Age limits for economic activities are quite significant for the above described distribution, because long-term reciprocity among kindred distinguishes money from other objects exchanged. It takes time to accumulate money to be used in case relatives cannot afford to live in a given place.

Concerning income, it has become typical for someone to work two or three jobs (Benovska-Sabkova 2004; Chavdarova 1994) in order to feed and support the whole family. In support of the assertion, that part of multiple incomes from different sources is invested in the maintenance of the above type of family networks, I present the following case: A young single woman from the Rhodope Mountain town said, "I have two jobs in order to afford the luxury to travel." However these were not tourist trips, but rather frequent visits to her brother to help with the care of his children. This case describes relations between siblings; but when probed deeper, the main reason for the visits were the brother's children. Since the younger sister did not have children of her own, she directed her energy to her brother's family.

Work

Finding out how people organise their work and leisure activities with regards to their closest relatives is also of interest. I will give an example citing a conversation between a grandmother and her granddaughter, which illustrates their reciprocal relations. The granddaughter, about to go to work abroad, asked her grandmother: "Why do you intend to keep working in the fruit garden after I leave? Who is going to eat your jams now?"[4] And on the other hand, the girl was leaving home in order to help her father pay off his debts.[5]

Looking at spare time, we see equal contribution among family members. Family needs often prevail over individual choices, as seen clearly in the number of weekends and summer days spent in the hometown/village, helping on the subsistence plots, instead of going on proper vacations. As

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[3] This position often depends on the place of residence – village, small town, city, or abroad.
[4] The translation of the conversations cited from Bulgarian into English was carried out by the author.
[5] See the above section on money dependence between relatives.

restitution for these efforts, the relatives from town 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. The example of a young man from Smolyan will illustrate this quite simply and clearly. His mother had 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 the provocative question: "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 who 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 know that nannies will have significant influence on the language, behaviour, and mindset of their children. The afore mentioned Rhodopean family, for example, was even a little bit wary of the grandmother's inability to speak proper Bulgarian, due to her dialect; but even so, they preferred her because they trusted her over any crèche. The level of trust helps distinguish between the people whom you can 'take' from, and those from whom you cannot (or maybe should not) take. 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." To some extent, the grandmother prevented them from losing their job as musicians. The couple played together in one of the biggest hotels in Smolyan every single night from 8pm until midnight. It would clearly have been impossible for them to take care of the child without any outside help. In return, the couple helped the grandmother with her plot in the countryside, and had even furnished her country house before their own. The question was: what kind of help would you prefer and from whom?

Preferring relatives is quite acceptable concerning childcare, but this principle also applies whenever the security of the family or one of its members is threatened. Based on sociological and ethnographic studies, we can see differences regarding expectations people have of the state and of the immediate social network. Data from these studies suggests minimum expectations of state institutions (Creed 1998; Giordano 2003). Since no one relies on the state anymore, it is apparent that social security is left to traditional mechanisms such as mutual aid among kindred. Thus 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 *familiasm* into business relations, which allows the whole family to participate in a common business; and more importantly, the family alone attends to its social security. Private family businesses do not exclude the participation of some family members in other activities, yet they guarantee their social security. In one clear example, the children of a family from Smolyan moved to Sofia to live and work; however, their employers there did not cover their social insurance. 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, children are included 'in name only' in the family firm owned by their father, who pays their health and pension insurance. This way, while working for a company that treats them as freelance (and therefore not insured) employees, they 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, one in which children and parents play their roles consecutively.

Food

When I asked people, who 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*)[6]. These family members, together with a small group of close friends and neighbours, are involved in the social life of the household. It is interesting to note that these friends and neighbours are also considered as relatives: "They are as good as though they are part of our kin."

While visiting relatives (especially if you come from a different town or village) there is a symbolic exchange of food, which is honoured 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"; and the reverse is also true. Guests bring little presents, very often foods and drinks such as chocolates and coffee, both homemade and store-bought products, regardless if it is a specific celebration or just a regular visit. And 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 of the younger generation, who have migrated to the bigger cities (mostly Sofia or Plovdiv) still spend their every weekend at home. I will not go into too much detail here on the exchange of food for practical purposes, only to say that the jars with preserves (Smollett 1989) are in constant flow between rural and urban areas: "We go there (to the village) with empty jars and return with full ones." I will attempt to express this exchange as a symbolic presentation of the ties, which prevents networks from breaking. In this sense, 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 recognised 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 relation to visits between kinsmen. People say that the situation has always been the same, but it is not so. This becomes obvious when speaking of the ethnographically oriented approach to celebrating calendar events, such as name-days. These celebrations involved not only the closest relatives, but very often also the whole village or neighbourhood (so called *mahala*). Visits often 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. And if someone neglected to visit his neighbour, it was regarded as an insult: "If people don't respect you, you are no one". One might imagine opulent feasts going on, and wonder how it could be possible in villages where resources are limited; the answer is that the prepared food and drinks were few and simple – one tray with appetisers, one tray with glasses, and one fork, which is used by everybody – and the visit of each guest was no longer than half an hour, at which point he or she had to leave and make room for the next visitors. But now the visitations have declined due to the expense of the expanded list

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[6] Bulgarian kinship terms do not differ much from the English ones. The only difference of meaning could be found in the term for grandchildren. In Bulgarian, there are separate terms for female and male grandchildren, as there are such for grandparents ('*baba*' for female and '*diado*' for male).

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 (i.e. of importance) remain members of the kindred. However, another example could give us a different explanation for the present contraction of social networks. An old priest from Ustovo told me, "They are all (i.e. the neighbourhood) my relatives. I have baptised 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 20th 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 this 'baking', all members of society relied on her. The baking was a communal activity that took a whole week. Consequently, this co-operative work could be the reason for the unity of the entire neighbourhood, since stopping would clearly have contributed to alienation. Such an 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 illegal by the state laws) and thus remained hidden behind the walls of the household. The collective action 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 expanding social networks would find its way through the new secular events encouraged by the socialist politics.

Kin Reunion – mobilisation 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[7] of the extended kin has become a contemporary phenomenon, which expands possibilities and better serves the network exchange. Actually the origin of the 'kin reunion' (*rodova sreshta*) can be found in the socialist past. In the study region, the event was driven by socialist politics in 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 it is in the Rhodope mountain region). It was an activity of the Fatherland Front[8].

But now, the meaning of these kin gatherings has changed and there is something new found in these events (Creed 2002). What is inherited from the past is the uniform way of celebrating – annual regularity, official speeches and anthems, some kind of cultural program, and a committee –

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[7] The distinction between kin group and kin gathering is based on the temporariness and periodicity of the gathering.
[8] A massive organisation, which goal was to influence the whole population of the state, including people who were not members of the Communist Party. Fatherland Front (FF) itself was a satellite organisation of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP).

the main body of kin reunion celebration[9]. But there is something new for families that I observed, which had not occurred before 1990. They had heard of the Fatherland Front activities but had never done anything like them before. Thus their need to discover their kin has been of a different type (Creed 1998), one that is a symbolic presentation of kinship coming from 'below'. Furthermore, the newly emerged reunions ignored the confessional separation. For example, I found one such case in Rajkovo, in which two big branches of the same kin – once (in 1669 as indicated in their brochure) separated by different confessions (Christianity and Islam) – have now reunited and even published a brochure with the original names and pictures of the members of the two branches celebrating together for the first time. Here, the initiators were Christians and the invited relatives also included Muslims. Ordeals surrounding their past assimilations changed to trials for integration. As the value of 'unity' is now coming from the people and not from the ex-rulers – The Bulgarian Communist Party – which presented the whole State, it seems to be more successful.

The event itself involves a series of binding ceremonial actions. The laying of a memorial tablet in honour of an ancestor and naming a street after his or her name are the most frequent practices for marking kin's territory. Since each of the observed kin groups repeats these actions, we can assume that among different groups kin reunions are turning into emulations. Demonstrations of power manifest themselves in different ways: through the depth of genealogy, the amount of relatives participating in the feast, or the number of branches and generations involved. Social status of any particular member of the kin group is also of importance. A list of members (including their education and occupation) is compiled for that purpose. Rich relatives from the past, who once emigrated[10] abroad, are also a source of pride. Above all, stands the ancestral patriarch, with whom the whole kin identifies. The ancestor is someone of social import, who did a lot for his kin and the whole community. It may be that he helped the community build a church, or perhaps that he owned much land and distributed it wisely among his heirs. Actually, the ancestor may be a woman, too. 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 17th Century). Baba Stana is an ancestor of two big family branches (Muslim and Christian) in Rajkovo, which I have mentioned above. Baba Stana's case is intriguing because she is honoured as an ancestor both by Muslims and Christians, which corroborates 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 lineal woodland corporation members, the kin of Ivan S., who joined these 'tournaments of value' (Appadurai 1999) a little bit later. Their first celebration was in 2006. 'Guests' and 'initiators' (who are both relatives) were already gathered 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 organised kinship ties. Their ancestor (Ivan S.), who was born in the second half of the 19th century, was a wealthy man. He had a big family – four sons and six daughters – to whom he left his sizeable woodland. After nationalisation (1949) the land was taken

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[9] The committee is a voluntary group of relatives (very often distinguished ones), which organise the events dedicated to an ancestor's memory and his descendants.

[10] Most common in the beginning of the 20th century, the main destination was the New World.

from them; only after more than forty years was it given back. New generations were born in the interim, so the number of heirs had multiplied decreasing the size of land 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[11] 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 organising the event easier, by using their ties and prestige in the settlement. Each one of them receives a different task according to his or her abilities and age. An heir of one of the ancestor's daughters was chosen as president of the committee. He was middle-aged, and a historian and high school principal in Ustovo. The other people involved in the organisation were mostly pensioners, but some were also notables, who had a lot of experience and ties within the community. A younger member of the family (in his late thirties) was chosen as treasurer (money had to be collected from other relatives in order to pay for the place where they organise the kin gatherings and for other events). A similar committee structure was evident in the other observed kin groups. Even though there are several generations involved, the privileged role of the elders is obvious, as well as the leading role of the relatives living in the ancestor's residence, the gathering place. Organising the kin reunion took a few months in the case described, but "it was a very short time", according to my informants. The organisation may take a year, when it includes the laying of memorial tablets, the denomination of the streets after ancestors, and the publishing of brochures on family history. The meeting of Ivan S.' kin took place in a restaurant on the square of the quarter (Ustovo), which is the ancestor's birthplace. Invited relatives numbered around one hundred people. The head of the corporation inaugurated the reunion with a biographical sketch stressing 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 fights for liberation of Rhodopes (1912). The story tells that when the 21st regiment and its commander, Colonel Vladimir Serafimov,[12] passed the town, 'grandfather' (as his heirs call him) welcomed part of the regiment into his home and donated quite a large amount of cloth to be used for the soldiers' puttees. The grandfather's service to his own inheritors was his notarised testament of perfectly distributed land, which has become the basis of the present woodland corporation. As part of their remembrance, the oldest heir (the daughter of Ivan S., at the age of 83) also made a speech, and the others presented her with gifts. The official part proceeded out on the square with picture taking of the whole kin – all the different branches together with portraits of the ancestor and his wife and the ancestor's parents ('we cherish them as relics'), as well as more speeches and the laying of the memorial tablet.

   I would argue that the demonstration of the reunion itself, its visibility, is an object of exchange too, as long as a sign in a system of signs of status can be objectified (Baudrillard 1981). And this kind of exchange takes place between different kin groups. Memorial tablets, street denominations, anthems of the kin, published brochures on family history, and so on, are just external signs of the desired prestige. Belonging to kin is prestigious and can ensure access to resources: "it gives us self-confidence". But it depends on the size and reputation of the kin to which one belongs. "Few people have such ancestors, as we do," said Hristo, 77 years old from Ustovo, who is an heir of one of the seminal figures of the 19th century there, Hadji Hristo Popgeorgiev, a famous dealer in

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[11] A term used by members of the corporation because it consists of the elders in the kin group. Actually they are the heirs apparent of the land or rather their living descendants are the heirs.
[12] He is a hero from the Balkan War, known as the rescuer of the Rhodopes and Smolyan region, fighting against the Turkish army in October 1912.

friezes, who was ready to build his own factory. Only the difficultly of crossing mountain roads stopped him from doing this. The case of Hristo is a classic example of patrilineal descent: he is the son of a son of the ancestor's son; but no rules exist for choosing which kin to belong to[13]. For example, his wife, who is a daughter-in-law in this kin group, also recognises herself as part of it; but a different 'daughter-in-law' from another not as famous kin group in Ustovo, claims to belong to her father's kin in the neighbouring quarter of Rajkovo, because it is bigger and of more importance. Other people said they belong to their mother's kin. The reason is one and the same. It is the desire to belong to a bigger normative kin group. To some extent, one is able to choose one's own kin and to use it as a kind of good credit. The other option is to make your kin bigger and more significant for the same purpose.

Thus, another focal point of the present paper is: how people are incorporated in the kin group. Who are the initiators and to whom is that initiative addressed? When tracing back the gatherings 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. We should note that committee members are from a generation between 55 and 70 years. They hold the leadership, and the younger generations are their target. In that sense, elders are the ones who lead the family politics as we've seen in the woodland corporation. If we trace back the meetings of all kin groups observed, we would see how joining developed from spontaneous to conscious politics. In kin groups, which have already had a few meetings, informants report that 'guests', i.e. 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 generation(s) join(s) later – for the second or third reunion.

An expansion of the kin has its practical reasons, too. Putting these signs of prestige into practise can be seen in concomitant initiatives, which I will call 'charity events'. Here, I have to mention again one of the distinctive features of kin reunion. For the organisers, it is always of importance to locate, invite, and list the names of some wealthy and highly educated relatives in the kin brochure. It is not stated openly, but I learned about some cases of charity offered by these prestigious relatives. This charity concerns mostly the building of family houses, chapels and fountains, but it could also mean help given 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. Here we can see the fusion between practical and symbolic sides of exchange. Speaking about practise, there is another kind of exchange that occurs during the unofficial part of the kin reunion. It is exchange of useful information and ties, which is about access to resources and 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 was helping to solve this problem. For example, a young woman (at 35 years) became secretary of the initiative committee (she is of course a member of the kin) and older members there helped her find a new job. "They just gave her the right information," my informant told me. Furthermore, the real exchange of ties happens at the time of the meeting. "The young exchange phone numbers and call each other later for different kind of services," said the same informant, who is also a member of the committee. So

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[13] This 'belonging' concerns normative kin and participation in 'kin reunion' events and not the actual range of kinship ties.

exchange of information may happen at the time of the gathering, or before that, when organising the event, and also after, once new connections are established.

When Does the Exchange Break Down?

How do people solve or fail to solve conflicts through kinship? I would like to refer to Evans-Pritchard's introduction to 'The Gift' (Mauss 1967: 1) that says, gifts are voluntary in theory, but in fact they are given and repaid under obligation. So what force is there in the thing 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 relatives. Consequently, it may happen that ties 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 expectancy of return (e.g., one expects his brother to give back the loan he has taken, but does not have the same expectations of his child or his mother). And if there is a break in the generational chain (parents-children), solidarity among kindred clearly decreases. There are some crucial moments in the life cycle that may result in a split. Marriage can be considered as such, also whether or not there are children in the family. 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 mobilised (Benovska-Sabkova 2001). If it is in the best interests 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 it does not have children the relations with others may stay more reserved and even hostile. Another example from Ustovo: Radka is not married and does not have children. Her story is quite different from others I have heard in the area. When she used to work for the Smolyan municipality, she had helped her relatives in the nearest village to get land after privatisation 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 piece of land inherited from her father, she had met only hostility, as though she had taken their land. This case would not be exceptional for rural-urban relations after land reform in Bulgaria (Kaneff 1995), if there was not the fact that after this bad behaviour 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 that, since Radka did not have any children, and therefore their relation did not require reciprocity any longer. Insofar as a lack of children might damage the kindred exchange, marriage may be crucial for established ties. For example, a young woman from Zlatograd (a small Central Rhodopean town), whose kin were Muslims, got married to a man from the Christian village of Momchilovtzi. The parents of the boy regarded this marriage as improper and refused to communicate with their daughter-in-law or give her help of any kind. In fact, they did not want to recognise her as kin because of her Islamic origin. To some extent, it was a question of marriage exchange (Levi-Strauss 1969) and of village endogamy.

Since the collapse of the socialist state, another reason for a split between relatives has emerged. That is the problem of dividing inherited land, as it can be seen in the case of R.S. Family conflicts relating to land following the denationalisation of land in 1990 are often more numerous than cases of solidarity. Figuratively, it is a struggle of different interests between rural and urban heirs of

common land. Political addictions and separation, most commonly into democrats (in the city) and socialists (in the villages and small towns), are also reflected there. 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: with the relatives in the village continuing to cultivate the land while the relatives in the town look after the administrative procedures of the agrarian reform. In return, citizens receive money (especially when it concerns woodland) or products form the harvest, and countrymen are left to use the whole land freely as it was 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 should be found in the customary laws of inheritance and rights of use of the land, which were abrogated with great difficulty in the beginning of the 20th century.

Even when conflicts related to any of the aforementioned matters are unresolved over time, naturally there are still some ways to encourage the piqued relatives to reconcile. Kin gatherings can be considered as such, and resumption of social order in the name of 'unity' is yet another function of kin reunion. People reported how families, who had not spoken for years, met at the party and started a relationship again. The carrying out of the event at regular intervals is beneficiary to this process. Katya, a descendant of 'big' 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.

Conclusions

This paper started with the differentiation of exchanges between kindred and between kin, which differ both in terms of exchanged goods and prestige. This distinction concerns kinship practices as group and individual strategies. It is about interaction within the group, when referring to kindred, and ego and interaction between different groups, when referring to 'kin' as a descent group. People act differently in respect to relatives and heirs, when seeking resources or credit. Networks of the closest ones are limited in the number of their agents and stay more or less static, while 'kin' networks tend towards expansion and their agents are free to move from one kinship group to another. To some extent, people can choose their kin and origin (i.e. ancestor's figure is optional). Furthermore, according to the given examples, children are the privileged members in kindred groups, while in kin groups elders hold the leadership. The type of relations that exist between their members could explain the contrast between the "closedness" of the small kindred group and the "openness" of the large kin group. These are actual and normative relations. Real exchange flows only in between the members of the small kindred group, while the large kin has a representative role – the bigger, the better – and that is why it needs to expand. The 'kin' is not an active network, but it is a necessary condition for further exchanges within the smaller kindred groups. It is the basis from which the smaller networks originate.

That is how people use the traditional and modern (socialist) rituals to ensure their connectedness as family and kin (*rod*). The newly emerged celebrations of name-days and 'kin reunions' emphasise kinship ties rather than keeping the whole community (neighbourhood, village, nation) together as was the case in the aforementioned celebrations of previous times. One possible conclusion is that in times of transition new values have come to replace the old types of solidarity

and exchange; and the family itself has become the cultural arena where old religious and secular practices are preserved and reinvented. In the past, name-days, as related to religion, were not family but congregational feasts; and 'kin reunions', as related to socialist ideology, did not aim for self-awareness of belonging to a distinguished kin group (which could lead to undesired inequality), but aimed instead at national self-consciousness (to strengthen the state itself). The assumption, that institutions of religion and the state have lost their influence, and that people cannot rely on them any longer, could be the explanation for the importance of family institutions nowadays. Maybe the need to feel more secure in insecure times is the reason for keeping the family ties so strong. To support this statement, let me recall the examples of parents paying alone for their children's health and pension insurance, and of children who provide for their old parents with 'pensions' (instead of the state institutions), as well as the examples of charitable acts performed by relatives (instead of the church).

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