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CHAPTER 4

Alien by Default: The Identity of the Turks of Bulgaria at Home and in Immigration

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This article discusses how the identity of the Bulgarian-born Turks, who form the second biggest ethnic and religious group in Bulgaria, has been shaped and reshaped in critical situations and under the impact of changing politics of identity. The point of departure is the so-called ‘Revival process’ which took place between 1984–1989, the last years of communist rule in the country. It was an assimilation campaign against the Turkish minority, aimed at the transformation of its identity and, ultimately, at its Bulgarianisation. The last three months of this assimilation campaign were marked by the massive exodus of Turkish families from Bulgaria to Turkey. Between the beginning of June and the end of August 1989 more than 350,000 Turks left Bulgaria, and about half of them returned to their birthplaces by the end of the same year.¹ During

¹ Some authors report 369 839 migrants during that period, 154 937 of whom returned by 1990 (Stoyanov 1998: 213–214, Kanev 1998: 112, Zhelyazkova 1998b: 392). According to other sources, the number of emigrants during the so-called ‘big excursion’ was about 320 000 (Dimitrova 1998: 79). Under state socialism there were two other preceding waves of migration from Bulgaria to Turkey. One of them took place in 1950–51, when some 155 000 people left Bulgaria; the other one extended between 1968–78, when another 130 000 went to Turkey after the ratification of an agreement between the two governments to help unite divided families (Kostanick 1957: 69,

the first half of the 1990s this migration continued on a different base and scale, resulting in the formation of a considerable community of new immigrants from Bulgaria in Turkey.²

The 'Revival process' was in fact the climax and the essence of a political program for the assimilation of certain minority groups in Bulgaria, which the socialist authorities had carried out for more than two decades. However, on a local level it was perceived as a sharp turn from long-standing traditions and patterns of friendly relations between Bulgarians and Turks, Christians and Muslims. The political acts undertaken during this campaign had a significant impact on the existing vernacular identity constructions and strategies. The ensuing mass emigration had situated a considerable number of Bulgarian-born Turks under completely different conditions. The immigrants had to start their lives anew in Turkey, to adapt to entirely different and unfamiliar social, political, economic and cultural conditions, to set contacts with new neighbour communities, and, ultimately, to construct the identity of immigrants. The situation changed also for those Turks who stayed in their home places or returned after a short stay in Turkey. Although they were no more subject to assimilation on behalf of the state, they had to bear the consequences of the dramatic events from the near past: divided families, lost property, deserted villages. They found themselves in a thoroughly changed local setting, and, furthermore, had to experience the significant shifts that went on in the wider Bulgarian society after the fall of state socialism. A considerable number of Turks chose to live between the two states, constantly travelling to and fro between Bulgaria and Turkey and making their living by means of petty ('suitcase') trade or seasonal work.

It is not my aim here to describe the whole variety of life strategies adopted by the Turks of Bulgaria after 1989. Nevertheless, the present article is an attempt at outlining different constructions and strategies of

Kanev 1989: 89, Zhelyazkova 1998b: 391-392, Büchschütz 2000: 168-183). The prevailing number of emigrants were ethnic Turks, allegedly joined by Bulgarian-speaking Muslims and Turkish-speaking Muslim gypsies, whose exact number is not known.

² Until 1997 the reported number of these immigrants in Bulgarian and Turkish sources alike comes up to 400 000 (Zhelyazkova 1998a: 12, Dimitrova 1998: 79). When speaking about the identity of the Turks of Bulgaria in immigration, I refer to exactly these new immigrants, who settled in Turkey in 1989 and during the 1990s.

their identity, observable in certain local communities, constructions and strategies that have evolved as a result of shifting minority politics and changing social settings. How are the shared images and identity strategies of Bulgaria's Turks constructed in everyday culture? What is the role of language, kinship, religion and local affiliation in these identity constructions? What is the impact of official politics of national identity upon the local strategies of identity? How do Bulgarian-born Turks cope with their position of being always 'Other', both in their country of birth and in the country of immigration? What are the shifting meanings of "Turkish-ness"?

In order to answer these questions, I comment the results of the anthropological field work which I conducted in settlements with Turkish inhabitants in Northeastern Bulgaria (Razgrad area) and which consisted of multiple short visits to the region in 1992, 1994, 1998, 2000, and 2001. During these visits I met local people, some of whom had already permanently settled in different Turkish cities. Furthermore, as a member of a research team in September 2002 I conducted a pilot investigation among new immigrants from Bulgaria in the city of Izmir, Turkey.³

The shifting identification strategies and constructions of the Turks of Bulgaria are viewed in the present article on a local level and from within the group of interest. I do not discuss, however, the role of individuals or organisations, acting as political representatives of the community under discussion, in the processes of identity formation and manifestation.⁴ Two remarks on the method of the study should be made in advance. Firstly, the article is structured as a comparison between different cases, and could by no means be regarded as a historical survey of a certain local community of Bulgaria's Turks.⁵ Secondly, due to the

³ This was part of the project 'The Migrant. Problems of Identity and Adaptation of the Bulgarian Turks, Immigrants in Turkey', sponsored by the New Bulgarian University. I appreciate very much the collaboration of my colleagues from NBU and of our hosts from the Department of Sociology at the Aegean University in Izmir. My observations on immigrant communities are further discussed in comparison with other researchers' explorations made in different Turkish cities (Zhelyazkova 1998, Maeva 2004).

⁴ Such political representatives undoubtedly have a significant impact on the formation of identity constructions and strategies on a local and individual level and, therefore, deserve a special study.

⁵ Thus for example, whereas in Bulgaria my field work took place in the region of Razgrad (the district center Razgrad, the towns of Isparih and Zavet, the villages of Senovo and Podaiva), the examined community of new immigrants from Bulgaria in

lack of ideologically unbiased studies on the identity of the Turks of Bulgaria before 1990, any observations made here about the processes of identification prior to the 'Revival process' campaign are thoroughly based on interviews and informants' retrospective accounts, recorded years later.

In the first part of the article I provide basic demographic data and social characteristics of the Turks in Bulgaria and comment their reflection on the identity formation in a local context. The second part briefly comments the ideology of the 'Revival process', bringing to the fore the shifts this campaign had induced in the strategies of group identification of the Turks and, partly, of the national majority of Christian Bulgarians. In the third part, some aspects of the strategies of identification and adaptation of the Bulgarian-born Turks in immigration in Turkey are described. They are viewed in a social setting where the immigrants share similar cultural characteristics with the majority population in the country and yet are accepted as culturally 'alien'. In the end, some conclusions about the flexibility and dynamics of the identity of the Turks of Bulgaria are drawn out.

Some Demographic and Social Characteristics of the Turks of Bulgaria

The majority of Bulgaria's Turks are rural population, densely inhabiting two regions – Northeastern Bulgaria (Razgrad, Shoumen, Varna, Silistra) and Southeastern Bulgaria, near the border with Turkey (Kurdjali, Bourgas). Their proportional number in the particular settlements in these regions varies but in general the Turks form the majority in the villages and the rural areas. According to the results from the 2001 census, on the national scale the percentage of the Turks by self-definition is about 9.42%. By contrast, in the counties with biggest Turkish population the percentage goes up respectively to 61.65% (Kurdjali), 47.21% (Razgrad), 29.14% (Shoumen), etc.⁶ Naturally, the figures were different in the early 1980s, on the eve of the assimilation process against the

Izmir came exclusively from the Kurdjali area (Djebel, Kirkovo, Krumovgrad and adjacent villages).

⁶ As of 01.03.2001 the total population of Bulgaria numbers 7,928,901; 6,655,210 of them have defined themselves as ethnic Bulgarians, 746,664 as ethnic Turks, and the rest as Roma or other. In the Kurdjali county the total population is 164,019, including 55,939 Bulgarians and 101,116 Turks. The respective numbers for the Razgrad county are 152,417 (in total), 67,069 (Bulgarians) and 71,963 (Turks) (<http://www.nsi.bg/Census/Ethnos.htm>).

Turks in Bulgaria. The difference is a logical consequence of the above-mentioned mass exodus of Turks in 1989, of the emigration of Bulgarian citizens to other countries after the fall of state socialism, of the inner migration to economically more prosperous Bulgarian cities, of the decline of birth rates and life expectancy (including the diverse trends among the different ethnic groups), etc. However, during the 1970s-80s the censuses did not include the category of ethnic affiliation, so the conclusions about the size of the various ethnic communities in Bulgaria at that time can be only indirect and relative. Thus for example, in 1983 the press reported that the demographic increase in the regions with predominantly Turkish population exceeded six times the average population growth in the country (Stoyanov 1998: 153).⁷ The disproportion in the demographic increase between ethnic Bulgarians, on the one hand, and Turks, Muslim Bulgarians and Roma, on the other, were already a reason for concern among the communist authorities, and quite probably a major reason for the instigation of the 'Revival process' (ibid.: 147).

The following items are noteworthy with reference to the relation between demography and identity construction of the Turks:

- (1) In the 1980s the majority of ethnic Bulgarians perceived the Turkish minority as a demographic threat;
- (2) In numerous settlements in Eastern Bulgaria (except the bigger cities) the Turks formed the majority on a local scale, while the Bulgarians were a minority, i.e. locally the national majority appeared often as a minority.
- (3) Moreover, in the mountain villages of Southeastern Bulgaria (Kurdjali area) the Turks lived in homogeneous, compact, and often closed communities, where Bulgarian language was hardly spoken.

Certain social and cultural characteristics of the Turks of Bulgaria are fundamental in the discussion of their identity construction and strategy. As regards religion, the greater majority of them are Sunni Muslims. It is well-known that under state socialism religion was not tolerated and religious practice was very restricted. Nevertheless, in the case of Bulgaria it was observed that Muslims were more religious and attached to religion-based patterns of behaviour than Christians (cf. Büch-

⁷ In the early 1980s the size of the Turkish population in Bulgaria was rumoured to be approaching one million. This figure seems quite realistic now, if one puts together the statistic data from the recent census in Bulgaria and the reported number of immigrants from Bulgaria to Turkey between 1989 and 1997 (Dimitrova 1998: 79). Compared to the number of the total population of Bulgaria, the approximate percentage of ethnic Turks in the 1980s was 10% and above.

senschütz 2000: 117). Under the umbrella of communist ideology this was interpreted as a token of being conservative and backward. This evaluation was further enhanced by other characteristic features of the Turks, such as occupation, qualification, education, locality, gender-specific behaviour, and so on.

As I mentioned in the beginning, the majority of Bulgaria's Turks were rural population, whose principal occupation is agriculture (tobacco growing in the Rhodope region to the South) or construction building. In other words, most of them belonged to the category of unqualified labourers.⁸ Living predominantly in villages and small towns, the Turks tended to stick to a certain lifestyle, based on the extended family model (including early marriages, many children, shared households between representatives of three and more generations). Generally speaking, most Turks lived in underdeveloped regions of Bulgaria. There was, however, a noticeable distinction between the Northeast and the Southeast (respectively, Razgrad and Kurdjali). Although predominantly rural, the Razgrad area was relatively well developing, as it possessed fertile soil and provided a good production of grains. The collectivisation of agricultural farms, which deprived the local population of its property, pushed many Turks to migrate to Turkey in 1950-1951 (Kostanick 1957, Büchenschütz 2000: 128-132, Eminov 1997). The mountainous areas along the border with Turkey were an example of the most underdeveloped parts of the country. The communist authorities undertook special measures aimed at the intensive modernisation of such regions: development of light and heavy industry, encouragement of younger well-educated and qualified Bulgarians to settle there, development of education, etc.⁹ The different life standards of the Turks in Bulgaria brought about a regional categorisation among them: those living in the Northeast sustained an image of being urban, more civilised and open, in comparison to those from the Southeast who were considered backward, more conservative and traditional.

On the whole, the Turks in Bulgaria lagged behind the Bulgarian majority in terms of education. As late as the beginning of the 1980s there was still a considerable number of illiterate people among them, relatively few Turks who had graduated from universities, a big number

⁸ With the process of modernisation of the country, the number of those involved in the light industry (especially women) marked a stable increase throughout the 1970s-80s.

⁹ Part of the political measures already in the late 1940s, however, were the forced migration of Turks and Bulgarian-speaking Muslims from the border to inland regions for the purposes of national security.

of uneducated Turkish women (Büchsenschütz 2000: 115-116). Without going into details about the reasons for and consequences of this situation, I would like to draw attention to the following issues. First, the lack of education in the mother tongue put Turkish-speaking children in a disadvantaged position at school.¹⁰ Second, the authorities made good use of education for spreading communist ideology. This affected the entire population of the country but was particularly elaborated with reference to the minority groups (cf. Büchsenschütz 2000: 167). Third, in their proclaimed strife for social equality between all ethnic groups in the country the authorities introduced certain measures of positive discrimination (such as minority quotas at the universities, for instance), which were disapproved of by the Bulgarian majority. As regards the cultural autonomy of the Turks in Bulgaria, including cultural organisations, theatres, vocal and dance groups, newspapers and magazines, these were very scarce or already nonexistent in the beginning of the 1980s (Kanev 1998, Büchsenschütz 2000: 133).

To summarise, the outlined social characteristics of the Turks in Bulgaria attributed to them an image of being *different in a negative sense* (uneducated, traditional, underdeveloped, unqualified, conservative, etc.) from the national majority. This image was to a big extent articulated in official public discourses, i.e. by politicians, party activists, and the press. It was very influential in many parts of the country where there was no concentration of Turks and where this minority group was practically *unfamiliar* to the local Bulgarians.¹¹

The generalised portrait of the Turks in Bulgaria drawn above does not mean, of course, that there were no educated, modern, etc. people among them. On the contrary, in an urban setting the Turks tended to converge with the majority on the basis of the modernisation of Bulgarian society.¹² In the smaller settlements, forms of inclusion between ethnically different groups went along different lines. Folklorists' explorations during the 1980s revealed the significance of local affiliation,

¹⁰ On the other hand, those Turks who never went to school – usually women from the elderly generation and from entirely Turkish villages – could not have extended social contacts outside the family and the immediate community.

¹¹ This unfamiliarity proved to be a fertile breeding ground for feelings of fear, mistrust, endangerness, and lack of compassion during the 'Revival process'.

¹² The in-group diversity among the Turks did not, however, have an effect on the stereotypical image the Bulgarian majority shared about them.

especially in the traditional rural communities.¹³ Belonging to one and the same settlement made ethnic or religious differences irrelevant in everyday contacts in many situations of joint cultural practices and shared moral values. The socialist condition had reinforced this feeling of local unity because of the politics of equality, including allegedly equal access to resources but also equally restricted rights for all the citizens of socialist Bulgaria.¹⁴ The retrospective accounts I have recorded in the 1990s also provide evidence that the sense of local affiliation has often overarched ethnic and religious diversity and served as a means of differentiation between ethnically and religiously identical groups of people.¹⁵

The ‘Revival Process’ and the Conflict of Identity

The ‘Revival process’ was launched in the winter of 1984 with the compulsory administrative change of the names of the ethnic Turks, and developed in other political measures until the very end of communist rule in Bulgaria in November 1989. It is often pointed out as a chief reason for the change of the political system in the country. The replacement of the names of Arabic-Turkish origin with ‘Bulgarian’ names was inflicted upon some 900 000 people (among which 180 000 Roma). It was organised as a sudden, swift and secret operation, which started in the end of December 1984 in the Southeast, spread northwards and westwards and was completed by the end of January 1985. This kind of well-organised operation had a history¹⁶ and was an important part of the socialist politics of national identity in the 1970s-80s. At the core of these politics was the concept of the socialist nation, depicted in ideological discourses as united and homogeneous, free of any divisions

¹³ See for instance the publications in the journal ‘*Bulgarian Folklore*’ from that period.

¹⁴ Thus for example, all fellow-villagers, regardless of their ethnic or religious affiliations, were equally deprived of their land property or of the possibility to practice their religion; they were united in their daily work on the cooperative farms and exposed to the same extent of ideological indoctrination, etc.

¹⁵ See below on the distinction between Northern (‘*deliormanski*’) and Southern (‘*kurd-jalii*’) Turks.

¹⁶ Changes of the names of certain groups of Bulgaria’s population were carried through by different governments during the twentieth century (Kanev 1998: 84-85). The communists had applied this before 1984 as well. Their largest attempt prior to the ‘Revival process’ was the mass change of the names of the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims (the so-called ‘Pomaks’) in 1971-74 (Kanev 1998: 93-94, Büchschütz 2000: 97-104).

along ethnic, religious, gender or social-status lines (cf. Gaille 1996: 193). All the socialist citizens of the state had to be equally integrated by the socialist ideas and lifestyle. However, the reality was quite different: there were striking distinctions between the ethnic majority and certain minority groups (Roma, 'Pomaks', Turks), between the industrial centers and the peripheral rural areas, etc. In order to overcome the lagging of certain minorities vis-à-vis the ideal socialist standard, the authorities implemented integration by means of assimilation. The 'Revival process' was the most conspicuous large-scale manifestation of this political approach.

Why was it called so? The name alluded to one of the most significant periods in the Bulgarian national history, the so-called Revival period from the second half of the nineteenth century. This was the period of formation of the national idea among the Bulgarians, when the intellectual elite struggled for and achieved ecclesiastic autonomy, lay education in the Bulgarian language, and, finally, national liberation from Ottoman rule. There are two stable components in the construction of Bulgarian national identity, which have preserved their significance irrespective of the dominant ideology. One of them is the central role of the Eastern Orthodox Church in the strengthening and the survival of the Bulgarian nation and statehood. The other one is the persistent appearance of the 'Turks' as the national enemy. This myth refers in the first place to the 'Turkish yoke', i.e. the five centuries of Ottoman domination over the territory of today's Bulgaria; according to it, the 'Turkish' invaders had imposed their rule by excessive abuse, destruction and death. The image of the villain Turks was widely spread and imposed by means of the media, arts and standard education.¹⁷ It had an impact on identity constructions on a local level as well. In the socialist era, the 'Turk' had retained the position of a 'national enemy' (enriched with new ideological interpretations related to the membership of neighbouring Turkey in NATO, viz. the 'imperialistic bloc'), notwithstanding the fact that ethnicity was not a category relevant to the understanding of the socialist nation.

In the beginning of the 1980s there was a series of anniversary celebrations commemorating significant moments in the history of the Bulgarian nation (Gaille 1996: 209-210), the most important of which was the 1300th anniversary of the creation of the Bulgarian state (in 681). Spectacular celebrations were organised across the country, which of-

¹⁷ Even today, when the ethnic diversity of the Bulgarians is recognised and minority rights are on the political agenda, this image is still reproduced in public discourses.

ferred a good opportunity for propagating the concept of the socialist nation. In such a context, the ideology of the ‘Revival process’ was worked out starting from the idea that the Turks in Bulgaria were actually of Bulgarian origin, descendants of people who were forcefully Islamicised and Turkified during the centuries of Ottoman rule. Now these people were to be welcomed again into the big family of the Bulgarian nation. It was proclaimed that they voluntarily and consciously changed their names and embraced their ‘reborn’ identity *en masse*. The whole thing was presented as something very positive for those ‘reborn’ – they were to obtain equal status with the national majority and thus raise their own social status.

The name change was supervised by a large-scale ideological campaign aimed at its explanation and justification. Other measures were implemented to strengthen the Turks’ integration through assimilation. These included the consequent change of names in identification documents, medical records, school diplomas, birth and death certificates, gravestone inscriptions, etc.; the ban to speak Turkish in public; the ban to wear traditional Muslim garment, especially women’s veils and ‘*shalvars*’ (large pants), the ban to perform certain Muslim rituals, particularly circumcision and religious funerals; the separate Muslim and Christian cemeteries were merged together and religious funeral rituals were altogether replaced by a standardized secular ceremony; public gatherings of groups bigger than 8-10 persons were forbidden, etc. To suppress resistance, the authorities not only mobilized the police and army to enforce its measures, but also interned and imprisoned many suspects. Some of the ‘most dangerous’ ones were expelled from the country, and the final result of the whole campaign was the so-called ‘big excursion’, when entire families left for Turkey, leaving behind almost all their property along with their houses.

This brief description¹⁸ makes it clear that the campaign was in fact restrictive towards the most conspicuous traits of the Turks’ identity, as well as towards any opportunity for their group mobilization.

The campaign completely failed to achieve its goals. First of all, its proclaimed ‘enlightening’ methods proved unsuccessful and the campaign was instigated by force and violence. Second, its basic idea was rejected by both the Turkish minority and the Bulgarian majority. Each of the groups felt threatened by the loss of its specific identity. These feelings were stronger in the regions with ethnically mixed population.

¹⁸ Further on the ‘Revival process’, see Gaille (1996), Hopken (1997), Kanev (1998), Stoyanov (1998), Zhelyazkova (1998b), Büchsenshützt (2000), Maeva (2004).

The mechanism of inter-group communication, established during the long years of co-existence, had been seriously shaken by the imposed political measures. Ostensibly aimed at drawing the two groups closer to each other, the 'Revival process' policy had *de facto* definitely set them apart. This was not only a result of the intervention of the army and the police. More important was the concern of the members of the Bulgarian majority and the Turkish minority to preserve group boundaries. No matter how great the cooperation between two groups and how permeable the boundaries between them, people are sensitive to the very existence of these boundaries. According to F. Barth (1969) the existence of the 'Other' is at the very core of group ascription. In other words, the group boundary, no matter how fluid and porous, is a tangible marker of the 'own' identity. People are sensitive to its elimination, because the lack of the boundary would mean that the group had lost 'its own self', the major criterion for its distinctiveness from the 'Other'. In this particular case, the eradication of the cultural traits that so clearly differentiated the Turkish community from its Bulgarian neighbours and the imposition of the distinctive cultural attributes of the Bulgarians was perceived by the two parties as an attempt at not just blurring but destroying the boundary between them, hence, at destroying their unique identities.

I will summarize three important effects of the 'Revival process' policy on the process of identity construction of the Turks in Bulgaria. One was the sharpening of the negative public image of the Turks. Another effect was the widening of the social distance between ethnic Turks and Bulgarians. And the third one was the emphasis on ethnicity as a major category in identity constructions. The latter also encompassed religion, which had obtained clear ethnic outlines (cf. for instance the popular expression '*Turkish faith*' instead of Islam). Adherence to Islam in turn was regarded as a sign of backwardness and fanaticism. Thus, the extreme turn in the official politics of ethnic and national identity undertaken by the communist authorities in Bulgaria in the second half of the 1980s resulted in a complete shift in the identity construction of the Turks living in the country.¹⁹

¹⁹ I attempt to delineate the general trends in identity construction processes influenced by changes in official politics. There were, however, many individual variations, which call for closer attention. Many ethnic Turks for instance embraced the imposed 'Bulgarian' identity and undertook a strategy towards full amalgamation with the majority population in the country.

The communist authorities in Bulgaria tried to conceal the failure of the 'Revival process' campaign which provoked mass emigration of Bulgaria's Turks to Turkey in the summer of 1989. The downfall of communism in November 1989 among other things brought about a shift in the identification processes among ethnic and religious communities in the country. After a short period of sharp ethnic tensions between Turks and Bulgarians in 1990-92, shifts in the strategies of identity construction had occurred, shaped by the changing socio-political climate.

Aspects of Identity Construction among the Turks of Bulgaria on the Local Level

During the post-socialist period significant changes in the construction of identity among the various ethnic groups in Bulgaria have occurred under the impact of the changing sociopolitical context. It is not possible to describe them here at length; I will just mention two issues of relevance to the present discussion. On the one hand, ethnic differences in Bulgarian society have become publicly visible and admitted, and, on the other hand, it has become possible for everyone to freely express his/her religious affiliation. Below I undertake an attempt at elucidating some of the most distinctive components of identity construction among the Turks in Bulgaria, as articulated on the local level.²⁰

As mentioned above, except for the district center of Razgrad, in many of the nearby smaller towns and villages the Turks form the majority of the population. This situation influences their strategy of articulating (ethnic) identity in a manner convergent with the strategy of the national majority of Orthodox Christian Bulgarians. Similarity can be observed, first of all, in the prestigious positions the two groups obtain in local ethnic classifications. The latter classifications are much more particularised and evaluative in comparison with the ethnic categorization widely used in public discourses (Elchinova 1997: 162-164). Another point of convergence is the way in which the members of the two ethno-religious communities imagine themselves and depict the other group: as having 'pure' and, hence, indisputable identity. Consequently, on a local level these identities are construed as stable, both in a cultural perspective (possessing stable identity markers) and in a social-psychological perspective (with feelings of high group self-confidence

²⁰ The description basically draws upon my fieldwork observations from the region of Razgrad.

and pride, and low group vulnerability). These characteristics distinguish the Sunni Turks and the Orthodox Christian Bulgarians from other neighbour communities. In the case of Bulgaria 'pure' identities are articulated in terms of certain relations between ethnicity/language and religion, viz. each ethnic Bulgarian is an Orthodox Christian 'by definition', whereas every ethnic Turk is a Sunni Muslim. In the vernacular concepts identities based on these correlations are clearly defined, stable and indisputable. Furthermore, the rules of interaction between groups possessing such identities are also clearly stated. By contrast, groups that diverge from this pattern of identity construction, such as the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, the Bulgarian Catholics, the Gagauzes (Turkic-speaking Orthodox Christians), etc. are considered as having vague, contested and vulnerable identities.

As the following examples demonstrate, these perceived and expressed stable, even fixed identities, are in fact very flexible constructions. Moreover, they may well be contested in certain contexts and for certain purposes, thereby triggering off increasing feelings of vulnerability among their bearers. At this point, however, I would like to point out that on a local scale such a pattern of constructing 'pure', stable and indisputable identities defines clear-cut boundaries between the cohabiting communities of Turks and Bulgarians and determines their mutual neighbourly and supportive relations, provided that these ethnic boundaries are recognised and sustained.

In spite of the similarities, the principal characteristics upon which each of the two groups, Turks and Bulgarians, constructs its identity are different (Elchinova 2001: 70-75). The Turks' pillars of identity are religion, the extended family and local affiliations. Religion for the Turks of Bulgaria is bound up with the acquisition and observance of a particular moral codex rather than with certain religious institutions or a system of orthodoxy and orthopraxy (cf. also Bringa 1995, Dimitrova 1998: 118). This is how they describe the essence of the individual's socialization: a person is born a Turk, Bulgarian or Roma but (s)he *becomes* a 'true Muslim', i.e. a member of the community, in the course of the elaborate ritualised process of learning the culture of this community. Pivotal in the conception of religion as the embodiment of the community's culture and tradition are such things as family structure, gender, and relations between the generations, because they set the pattern for the transmission of culture and the preservation of the traditional value system. Only through maintaining the relevant social structure, norms of behaviour and cultural possessions can a person become a 'true Muslim' – a quality which distinguishes the Turks from members

of any other ethnic and religious community. One of the consequences of this vision is that individuals who have been socialized in another community (such as the 'Pomaks', for instance) cannot be 'true Muslims', even if their religious affiliation is (Sunni) Islam.

Such a view on religion emphasises the significance of the extended family as the immediate setting in which communal tradition and morality are transmitted. The social-economic conditions under which the Turks of Bulgaria live, including limited migration to cities, occupations in agriculture, maintenance of traditional lifestyles, etc., contribute to the preservation of the extended family structure even today. Their Bulgarian neighbours, who have been more intensely affected by the process of urbanization, often regard this as a positive feature: "Turks get married younger, have more than one child, respect their parents" (meaning also that they live together with, and take care of, their elderly parents). The inverse interpretation is that all this represents a token of backwardness. In spite of the ambiguous evaluations coming from outside the group, for the members of the Turkish community the preservation of the extended family is a chief trait of identification, defining them as 'true Muslims'.²¹

The significance of the extended family is associated with the marital norms, which bring to the fore the strict observance of endogamy in terms of religion, ethnicity and locality. In this respect, both the Turks and their Bulgarian neighbours consider endogamy as a condition for preserving the 'pure', stable and non-vulnerable identity.

The preservation of traditional gender role division within the family has a similar meaning. It constitutes the pivotal role of women in the extended family but also confines their activity to the framework of the family and the house, while at the same time it situates men in the public space and attributes to them the role of safeguards of tradition.

In spite of the apparent similarity between the gender role divisions among Turkish and Bulgarian rural communities, Bulgarians regard the restrictions on the behaviour of Turkish women as restricted rights, pointing them out as a major distinctive feature and a token of the backward and parochial nature of the Turks.

²¹ This is not to say, however, that there is no disapproval of the extended family pattern among the Turks too. On the contrary, younger people, especially city dwellers, often complain about the restrictions imposed on them by this pattern and its corresponding behavioural rules.

The understanding of religion as tradition (Elchinova 1999: 8-11) pushes forward the significance of local affiliation in the identity constructions of the Turks of Bulgaria, inasmuch as local affiliation is associated with particular variables of tradition. Furthermore, in local group classifications, local affiliation is a category of equal significance with confession and ethnicity. Thus, for instance, for Turks born and living in a certain village, their fellow Turks who have migrated from another part of the country are no less different than the local Bulgarians. The rule of endogamy is still valid with regard to them, and group boundaries are reinforced in reaction against the numerous shared cultural features that would make these boundaries less distinct. An illustration of this is the way in which the 'Northerners' in Zavet (Razgrad area) look down upon their fellow citizens who have migrated from the Kirdjali area decades ago. The former make jokes about the latter's dialect, clothing, habits, they do not tolerate intermarriages with them, and take every opportunity to stress their 'Otherness' (see also Dimitrova 1998: 123).

A discussion on the interpretation of local affiliation as a tool for identification and differentiation would be incomplete without briefly commenting the category of 'own Others'. This category is most explicitly used by Orthodox Christian Bulgarians (who speak about '*our* Turks' or '*our* Gypsies'), but it is also relevant for their Turkish or other neighbours. It refers to a shared territory and community, usually interpreted as common locality (village, town), but sometimes as a shared wider space too (nation, state, or country). In everyday discourses 'own Others', e.g. 'our Turks', 'our Gypsies', 'our Protestants', etc. is used to denote people who have a different ethnic or religious identity from 'Us', but share 'by birth' the same settlement, the same local moral co-dex, as well as joint local rituals and festivities with 'Us'. 'Own Others' as opposed to 'alien Others' are regarded as close to 'Us' in many respects and are relatively positively evaluated. Thus for example, 'our Turks' are described by their Bulgarian fellow villagers as better than the Turks from Turkey or from another part of Bulgaria; 'our Gypsies' never steal in contrast to the gypsies who come from another place, etc.²²

The category of 'own Other' appears to be very operational in processes of defining group boundaries, emphasising their transactional and

²² The usage of this concept is much more problematic and less operational in urban environments.

dialogical nature (cf. Barth 1969) and defining complex concepts of social proximity and distance, inclusions and exclusions.

Identity Strategies in Immigration

What happened with the Turks from Bulgaria who settled down in Turkey? Do they share the identity constructions described above? How has the different structure of Turkish society influenced their identity strategies? I will base my discussion of these questions on the case of the new immigrants from Bulgaria in Izmir. Having been driven away from their home country by the communist government's politics of assimilation, they found themselves in a host country where the national majority seemingly shared the same dominant characteristics of identity: language, religion, rituals, customs, attire, cuisine. Moreover, they encountered a governmental policy that was much more tolerable in comparison to their immediate experience in Bulgaria. The Turkish authorities undertook measures to help them settle down in the host country. They provided temporary shelter during the first months after the immigration, offered the migrants citizenship and identity documents,²³ assisted them in their choice of a settlement where they could permanently establish themselves, offered them land and long-term low-interest credits to build houses of their own. Immigrant children were enrolled in school in due time. Most of the new immigrants from Bulgaria chose to stay in cities where they had relatives (immigrants from previous years), or where their fellow villagers and countrymen moved to corporately (Bursa, Izmir, Corlu, Istanbul).²⁴ As a result, there are at present entire neighbourhoods in these cities which since 1989 are inhabited by immigrants from Bulgaria (e.g. Sarnic in Izmir). Very often such immigrants are found living in remote neighbourhoods together with migrants from different parts of Turkey or some neighbour countries (like in Mevlana in Izmir). Relatively less frequently they build their homes in smaller and cosier quarters inhabited by indigenous lower middle-class Turks

²³ Curiously, again changing their names, especially the family names.

²⁴ Few immigrants agreed to settle in underdeveloped regions of Turkey, in spite of the special privileges offered by the authorities. One of the reasons for their choice of settlement was that they needed more than governmental support in order to restart their lives from zero. Moreover, in their rural milieu they were used to rely on family and kinship networks, therefore in immigration they were very concerned to sustain these networks even across the border. Better job opportunities in the big cities also account for the migrants' choice of permanent settlement.

(as is Pinarbasi in Izmir) (see also Dimitrova 1998: 83-84, 95-97, Krastev 1998: 164-166).

After the shock and fear they had experienced during the assimilation campaign in Bulgaria and their consequent emigration, these immigrants had to overcome dramatic changes and adjust to a completely unfamiliar social setting. I will mention just two of the serious changes they had to cope with here. One, in the case of Izmir, is the transition from small, underdeveloped mountain villages and towns in Bulgaria, where their major occupations were tobacco growing and domestic stockbreeding, to a dynamic and multifaceted coastal city with a population of over 3,5 million.²⁵ The other enormous difference is the structure of Turkish society. The immigrants came from a largely homogeneous socialist society in Bulgaria directly to the saliently stratified society of Turkey, with groups clearly defined along lines of property, education and social status.

These two circumstances already sufficed to make the newcomers feel not quite at home in the new setting. In addition, they had little or no knowledge of Turkish society, the state and culture in general, nor of the minor details of everyday life: how to dress or behave appropriately in public, how to do shopping, even how to speak to be understood by locals.²⁶ This was another reason why the new immigrants preferred to live with their relatives who had moved to Turkey earlier and who were supposed to guide them in the unfamiliar social environment.

Their lack of competence in the dominant culture already put the immigrants from Bulgaria in a marginal position in Turkish society. This position is expressed by the word *gocmenler*, used by indigenous Turks to denote the immigrants from Bulgaria since 1989.²⁷ This categorizes the latter at the same social stratum with the Kurds and migrants from the underdeveloped regions of North and Northeast Turkey. "We live together with the gypsies", the inhabitants of the Mevlana neighbour-

²⁵ Just for the sake of comparison, there is no city of this size in Bulgaria. The biggest city, the capital Sofia, has a population of about 1,5 million.

²⁶ One particular story about bread consumption was heard several times, in versions told by different people. Bread was their staple food in Bulgaria. In Turkey they found out that bread loafs were much smaller and they had to buy five or more loafs for the family's daily supply. This was often a reason for funny confusions when their indigenous neighbours started asking them if they were preparing for a wedding or another feast.

²⁷ As far as I know, this word is not used to name the immigrants from Bulgaria from previous migration waves who are by now well-established in Turkish society.

hood in Izmir bitterly conclude, referring to their Kurdish neighbours whom they consider to be very backward people with a peculiar lifestyle. The new immigrants have been categorised at the same social stratum by the authorities as well, who allotted them building plots for their houses. Even the homogeneous neighbourhoods which are inhabited almost entirely by immigrants from Bulgaria testify to their lower social position: there are no public utilities in these neighbourhoods, not even water-drainage systems, the streets are not paved and, as a whole, they look very rural and poor. In such a setting in the 1-2 years since their migration to Turkey, the immigrants from Bulgaria have erected their houses – with at least two completed and furnished floors and, as a rule, still unroofed, with constructions reminding of the owners' intention to continue building. The inhabitants of these newly-built quarters feel isolated and homesick for the beautiful scenery of their birthplaces (Bochkov 2002, Dimitrova 1998: 98-101), but also enjoy the fact that they have got rid of hard agricultural labour.

Social conditions in the host country did not make social adaptation an easy process for the immigrants, in spite of the favourable official policy towards them. Of course, problems of adaptation widely varied for the different groups of immigrants.²⁸ The obstacles were bigger for the old people who were among the first to go back to Bulgaria already by the end of 1989.²⁹ The immigrants with university diplomas moved to the most dynamic and developed Turkish cities and quickly managed to establish themselves at prestigious jobs and social positions. In general, success at social adaptation and integration depended considerably on age, education, and professional qualifications.

How do indigenous Turks accept and assess their new fellow countrymen? How do the immigrants from Bulgaria redefine their identity in the new social environment? Soon after they had welcomed the refugees from Bulgaria with sympathy, the local Turks recognised in them serious rivals in the competition for jobs. They saw the immigrants from

²⁸ In this respect there are no generalised data and conclusions concerning all the Bulgarian-born Turks who migrated to Turkey after 1989. For more detailed information see Dimitrova (1998: 82-84). The situation varies, in broad terms, according to the character of the place where they come from and where they have settled, according to their education and also their age, which gave them different perspectives for accomplishment in Turkish society.

²⁹ Because of economic reasons, many of them stayed in Turkey with the families of their married children but suffered a lot in the new place where they were condemned to social isolation.

Bulgaria as very different from themselves and drew clear-cut boundaries between the two communities. Interestingly, the differences are described in terms of those characteristics which, prior to immigration, the Bulgarian-born Turks considered pivotal for their identity: religion/ morality, language, customs, clothing, cuisine. Perhaps the greatest shock took place at the level of language. The immigrants soon realised that their Turkish considerably differed from the literary language in Turkey, as well as from the vernacular. In other words, again, just like in Bulgaria, they do not speak the language of the majority, thus again lacking competence in the dominant culture. Moreover, those who have completed their education in Bulgaria will have almost no chance to ever master the language of the majority (especially the literary language). Thus, even in Turkey their mother tongue is still a token of the distinctiveness of their community and an obstacle for their smooth adaptation to the wider society.

The most notable distinction between local and migrant Turks, however, runs along religious lines. Informants describe it as the observance of different values and norms of behaviour, which makes that the immigrants insufficiently conform to the image of 'true' Muslims in the eyes of local people. The difference in the religious/moral system is expressed first of all in gender roles. Whereas these migrant Turks in Bulgaria have been mocked at as very conservative in their attitude towards women, now in Turkey they are evaluated as unacceptably liberal. Immigrants from Bulgaria, men and women alike, go to work, usually accepting unqualified and underpaid jobs. Working women are something that saliently distinguishes Bulgarian immigrants from the local Turks of lower social strata. For those who came from Bulgaria it is only natural that women work, because such is the routine in their country of origin. Moreover, it was highly esteemed by socialist ideology, which insisted on equality between the sexes. In immigration it was still very important for them that both spouses should work, in order to support the family that went to Turkey with virtually no property or capital.

The indigenous Turks, however, disapprove of the working immigrant women and qualify them as 'impure'. This evaluation is given not so much in terms of hygiene as in terms of morality, because immigrant women's behaviour contradicts commonplace norms. According to these norms, women that go to work are not moral enough and, furthermore, not religious enough. This negative assessment has caused the immigrants to reconsider the major components of their identity construction. Again they put forward traits of a moral kind, however, without reference to religion. Correspondingly, they elaborate a self-image

of hardworking and industrious people, thrifty and modest, used to living in hardship and often in privation. According to my informants, this is the reason for their material prosperity. This is how they managed to build their big new houses in the host country in a relatively short period of time, their houses often being bigger and better furnished than those of the local inhabitants (see also Dimitrova 1998: 93-95). In such a perspective, the immigrants now interpret religion not as morality but rather as mosque attendance, i.e. as a practice, which is typical for people who do not go to work (meaning old retired people), or a practice that idle people use to excuse their reluctance to work.³⁰

In this context the role of the family as well as of local affiliation is reinforced in processes of constructing group identity. Family and local affiliation have become indispensable for survival in, and adaptation to, the new social environment. As already mentioned above, kinship ties and neighbourhood (*komsuluk*) have predetermined the choice of permanent settlement in Turkey to a large extent. The mutual support and help among relatives and neighbours are among the decisive factors that made the construction of migrants' houses possible. In spite of the huge distances that often separate family members, the family networks are still strong. Weddings and funerals are among the major events where family members living in various Bulgarian and Turkish settlements gather together.³¹ However, migration has also triggered off the reverse process of loosening kinship ties and the disintegration of family networks (Georgieva 1998: 58-61).

Local affiliations have obtained new significance in immigration. Rural communities are often reproduced in the host country. Neighbours and friends have often moved together to the new place of residence.³² Thus, the local community serves to provide the continuity of tradition, of life before and after emigration. It also provides the necessary conditions for the individual's socialisation. Thus, the process of socialisation

³⁰ In the private sphere, religion has retained its characteristics of a significant value system and a prerequisite for successful socialisation within the immediate group. However, with respect to the wider society religion receives these new connotations.

³¹ Weddings, funerals, as well as elections are among the major occasions on which migrants travel back to their places of birth for short visits.

³² This fact makes the question whether these immigrants feel homesick, quite complicated. My informants have stated how much they missed their birthplaces but they also complain that they do not feel good anymore when they visit them because of the lacking social contacts: "Noone is there anymore – no friends, no neighbours, no relatives".

splits: on the one hand, there is socialisation in wider Turkish society, a process often problematic and perpetuated as such by a variety of obstacles for the immigrants.³³ On the other hand, there is socialisation within the immediate social community, which has preserved its character in the host country – a process, guaranteed by the well-acquired mechanism of tradition, customs and rituals, transmitted in the family and the narrower social circle. Consequently, local community has sustained its role as the basis of cultural and biological reproduction.³⁴ It is worth mentioning that the in-group differentiations are also reproduced and even multiplied in immigration. One can observe the distinguishing lines between Northerners and Southerners, between ‘old’ and ‘new’ immigrants (see also Dimitrova 1998: 123-125).

To summarize, in spite of the seemingly shared cultural traits (language, religion, ethnicity, etc), the immigrants from Bulgaria are described as culturally different by the indigenous population and are referred to the position of a minority group – a situation very similar to the position they used to take in the country of departure. Just as in Bulgaria, in Turkey they lack competence in the culture of the majority (Evdimov 2003) and accomplish satisfactory social fulfilment primarily within the immediate local community. There is, however, a substantial difference in the degree of ‘Otherness’ attributed to them in the two societies: for the indigenous Turks in Turkey the Turks from Bulgaria are more alien (i.e. ‘alien Other’) than they are for their Bulgarian neighbours in their places of birth. In response, the immigrants stick to habits (related to the observance of Islam, drinking of alcohol, consumption of certain food, etc.) that stress their distinctiveness from the local population and emphasise their relation to Bulgaria.³⁵ As a matter of fact, the immigrants thus express their attachment to a certain lifestyle which they define as better, more civilised and ‘European’ than the lifestyle of the host community, and in which they find the source of their own group self-esteem.

³³ Some researchers emphasise the social isolation of the new immigrants from Bulgaria outside their close group (Dimitrova 1998: 103, 121).

³⁴ Immigrants see intermarriages with indigenous Turks as a tool for upward social mobility. However, since indigenous people still disapprove of intermarriages and since both communities regard one another as very different, intermarriages between them are still an exception.

³⁵ A very good illustration of this are the immigrants’ markets (see also Dimitrova 1998: 114): there the immigrants sell and buy goods brought from Bulgaria, such as cigarettes, brandy, sweets, meat-balls, and even Turkish delight.

Inasmuch as both in the country of origin and the host country they are invariably regarded as 'Other', the immigrants have found refuge in the local community. For them the local community and the place of birth replace and compensate the missing home country. It is there that they feel 'their own' from birth to death and are competent in the dominant culture. In this intimate surrounding ethnic and national identity is totally irrelevant.

Conclusions

Two types of strategies of identification and cultural adaptation among Bulgaria's Turks were compared in the article, viz. of people who returned to and/or stayed in their country of birth after the 'Revival process' assimilation campaign in 1984-89, and of others who permanently settled down in the Republic of Turkey. The analysis of these strategies allows for the following conclusions. The analysed cases show that the Bulgarian-born Turks perceive themselves as socially more distant from the Turks in Turkey (who have the same ethnic and religious characteristics), than from the ethnically and religiously different Bulgarians. Respectively, the former regard them as 'alien Other', while the latter call them 'own Other'. Curiously, only the 'Revival process' ideology had depicted Bulgaria's Turks as not different from the majority, but that was only to serve the purposes of forceful assimilation. In all these cases, the Turks of Bulgaria have built up the identity of an 'alien' or 'culturally other' group. However, their 'Otherness' has been variably construed, emphasised or subdued according to changing social conditions. The shifting interpretations of their identity under different political and social conditions have led to reconsiderations and reassessments of identity markers such as religion, the extended family, gender roles, and local affiliation. It can be argued that ethnicity is rather insignificant in their in-group identity constructions. Other components, such as kinship, gender, religious and local affiliations, varying in significance with regard to the particular context, determine their position in local and official social categorizations. Ethnicity, as a rule, is introduced and intensified on a local level under the impact of official nationalist rhetoric. The examples under discussion reveal that the very notion of 'Turkishness' is variably construed, very often appearing not as an ethnic or national category but rather as a cultural one. Thus, being a Turk can be defined in very different, even contradictory ways, and according to diverse cultural patterns. The case of the Turks of Bulgaria illustrates the flexibility of identity and reveals how the concept of 'pure'

and 'immutable' identities, sustained both on a national and a local level, is often challenged and refuted in actual inter-group contacts.

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