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**PERVIOUS ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS
BOUNDARIES
(A case study of Zlataritsa)**

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The aim of the article is to describe the dynamics of multitude of group boundaries existing in Zlataritsa for more than a century (from the end of 19th until the first decade of 21st century) on purpose to examine to what extend borders between different groups (defined in terms of ethnic or/and religious affiliation) are pervious. The approach chosen is to analyze the dynamics of five indicators for openness/closeness of the group's boundaries: language; locality; mixed marriages; economical power; political participation and representation.

Ethno file

Area of study – small town of Zlataritsa, administrative center of Zlataritsa Municipality.

Region – Central North Bulgaria

Population – 2 000. High mobility since the end of 19th century until nowadays; sizable internal emigration wave to the big cities at the 50s and early 90s; high emigration wave (temporary labor and permanent migration to EU) since the late 1990s. Migration constitutes a key element in long-term economic and social development of Zlataritsa. It is not only emigration from the town. New groups are coming and settling in search of better opportunities there.

Ethnic profile (by time of settling)– *Bulgarians; Tzigani: “Starite Bulgari”* (The Old Bulgarians) group, *Vlasi* group, *Muzikanti* (Musicians) group, *Macedonski Vlasi* group, *Gradeshki Tzigani* group; *Turks*.

Religious profile – Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Evangelical Christianity, Islam. An Orthodox Church devoted to St. Nikolay is the only building of cult there.

Economy – Completed transition towards market economy. After 1989 local economy, previously based on daily migrations to nearest city's factories, had collapsed. Relatively specialized and mastered blue collars had rested unemployed. At 2007-2008 most of the local people are working temporary in gray economy in the town, in the region or abroad (in construction, agriculture and services). Small-scale agriculture and cattle breeding is mainly associated with provision of foodstuffs to the households (meat, milk eggs and vegetables). On 2007 Zlataritsa municipality became one of the first five officially declared GMO-free regions in Bulgaria. A new strategy for market oriented agricultural production is emerging slowly. A few “European type” dairy farms started about 2003. Other sectors: trade and services; administration, primary education, forestry. Despite the development of country tourism has been declared as economical strategy of Zlataritsa Municipality no projects to develop the infrastructure have been realized. The river crossing the town – Burzitsa - is in the

list of national ecological protected zones but still remains in disastrous situation because of different types of pollutions (from factories based in nearest town of Elena and from locals).

Political status – post communist period of democratization.

Methodology and theoretical frames

The determined objects of research demand elaboration of several research methods aimed to collect and analyze relevant data. The research started from classical Ethnological methods – structured and semi-structured interviews, participant observations, free conversations and observations and analysis of audio-visual sources (photos and home videos). There were conducted 36 interviews with informants belonging to different ethnic and/or religious groups at age from 19 to 79. Male and female informants are balanced in number. The educational status of informants is as follows: 10 with 8 degree at school (minor educational status), 20 with high education and 6 with University degree. The economical status of informants is almost equal – low monthly income (100-150 Euro) despite the job positions (or retirement). All of them own houses and land and produce food for their households. Participant observation was held during two local fests: the Festival of “Gardeners soup” (04.09.2007, 13.09.2008, 04.09.2009) devoted to temporary labor migrants – gardeners and the Towns fair (24.05.2008, 24.05.2009), devoted to Saints Cyril and Methodius – the creators of Bulgarian Alphabet. The aim of those observations was to monitor interactions between citizens from different groups, to register group identity manifestations in terms of symbols, music and location, eating together or separately; to measure how the group borders function.

To draw a map of different groups in time and space was necessary to apply the methods of Historical Demography – work in Parochial books preserved in local Church (from 1899 to 1950); statistics in local Statistic Service, national Statistic Institute and Municipality Archives. Local history books were used for collecting data and for content analysis as well.

An important part of work on data collecting was to pass my own life on review. Being tide connected with Zlataritsa because of my family origin but in the same time – living out of it and being experienced fieldworker I had to play a double role: of researcher and of (auto)informant. This necessity posed a set of questions on auto reflectivity of researcher. It is lemma that ethnographic fieldwork is an inter-subjective process that entails an interaction of various subjectivities (Geertz 1971). Thus I am not “full” insider or “full” outsider for the community in question. Here I will not enter in deep analysis on auto reflection as an

ethnographer as it is really fashionable nowadays. I want just to stress on one important problem: in this case first of all I had to establish clear limits what and why I am representing as informant. I find the most dangerous trap could be my own memories and reflections to be applied as indisputable truth because I had some previous theories and it is so easy to “prove” them. The selective memories might be covering and distorting the variety of processes and events important for this study. At least as a representative of local majority, visiting the place several times each year, I could stay ethnocentric and strongly positive that I know everything because of my own experience. In the same time I find my memories were a valuable source that could not be just rejected. Thus I have drawn an agenda for field work as if it is absolutely new place to enter and started to test each and every memory via data collected. The first surprise and a proof that this approach is correct and works was when I discovered that one of the groups studied did not settle in late 60s in Zlataritsa as I remembered for sure. The Parochial registers and interviews proved that this group came there in late 19th century but its life was concentrated in its neighborhood at the margins of the village. The rarely appearing colorful dressed women, carrying huge home woven bags with wooden spoons for selling, have been engraved on my memory as “visit of strangers”. When a family from this group bought the house of our neighbors at 1969 I commit the memory “those strangers had settled in Zlataritsa”. This case is a good example for difficulties I had to face and overcome as a researcher who acts as informant in the same time.

Another problem I had faced during the fieldwork (August - October 2007, April - May 2008, May – September 2009) was the syndrome of being “one of us”. It means that I had to respect all shackles emerging because most of people know my family and relatives. Thus I had to keep family reputation to play the roles of respected scholar and female at her middle age and never to do my interviews in the pub – par example; I could not just go for a walk in *Tziganskata* and *Vlashkata mahala* (both old Roma neighborhoods) and just take some pictures – to do this I had to have an appointment and socially acceptable explanation for everyone who might be asking me the most common questions in Zlataritsa: “Where are you going?” and “Where have you been?”. Being a slave of local etiquette took a lot of time and efforts to arrange my meetings in appropriate for informant’s time and place but my previous relations helped me to make those appointments easily. People know my face from TV and my voice from national radio – it is a part of local pride that “one of us” performs in National media – so everybody felt free to talk to “The Journalist”. Thereby my research combines long-term observations (personal experiences) with short-run individual research.

The concept of “borders” and “boundaries” is incredibly rich. Scholars like Frederik Barth (1969), Mikhail Bakhtin (1982) Yosef Lapid and Mathias Albert (2001) and Henk van Houtum (2002) among others have probed what borders mean and what it means to “border” peoples, cultures, and ideas in social and political life (see: Ackleson 2003: 324). The importance of borders and boundaries related problems provokes contemporary scholars to re-read Franc Boas and his students’ conception of culture boundaries (Bashkow 2004: 443). Much of the new thinking about borders rotates around the multifaceted and complex relationships among territory and identity¹. Marking and making difference in social space and people beyond the border and rejecting difference within the bordered. (van Houtum and Anke Strüver 2002: 142). Overcoming borders is, we would argue, mainly about overcoming the socially constructed imaginations of belonging to a certain place and of the need for a spatial. The borders express difference. When imagination has the potential to divide people it also has the potential to unite people. Overcoming borders then asks for the reimagining of borders and the reimagining of outsiders as insiders. That however, would ask for the imaginative framework that allows people to meet and interact with ‘others’, with ‘strangers’ (van Houtum and Anke Strüver 2002: 142).

Working on the boundaries a special attention was paid on ideas concerning cultural heritage and its articulation nowadays (Hobsbawm 1990; Geertz 1973). The second half of the 20th century has been signed from a strengthened interest to the issues, related to the personal and group identities (ethnic, national, religious, social/political, belonging to certain culture/subculture, personal, etc.) from the scholars all over the world. The scholars from the social sciences, belonging to different academic disciplines and followers of different methodological schools, permanently experiment different qualitative and quantitative methods to answer the questions, related to the way of formation of the personal and group identities, to the factors that influence it, to mechanisms through which the identity functions and changes (Kymlicka 1995; Gellner 1993; Gossiaux 2002; Bromley 1973; Appadurai 1991, Barth 1969; Anderson 1991; Giddens 1991, etc.). Maybe the only point that ultimately unites all the authors, elaborating on different aspects of identity questions, is the assertion that it is a complicated, complex category, functioning on different levels and appearing in different forms, according to variety of factors (with substantial or contextual character). Back to this research – the boundaries based on the complex category of identity can be expected to act in complex way. The study of a dynamic multicultural local community requires multiple

¹ On the Balkans see: (Green 2005).

approaches and implementation of multiple theoretical tools. Thus my choice is to work with a tool-kit of theories despite the need to look for salvation thorough a specific theory. This is because the complicated context requires complicated theoretical approaches

Observer (auto)observed

Zlataritsa is the native place of my parents (born in 1926 and 1928). In the process of urbanization they moved to Sofia at 1948. My brother was born in Zlataritsa too. I was born in Sofia later. My father worked hard to establish and to keep a strong Zlataritsa identity in the family. It was constantly noticed that I am not born there, but I am bonded by blood to Zlataritsa. Years later when I started to study migrations I recognized this classical migrant's strategy of strengthening the local identity related to the place of origin. Despite the long for Bulgaria distance (257 kilometers) we were regularly visiting "The Village!". My strongest and colorful early memories are connected to the people and place of the village. Like all my cousins, children of migrants to the big cities from early 50s, all my holidays were marked by the river, the mountain, the yard animated by hens and chickens, ships and pigs, and the vegetable garden. I felt I belong to the huge kin and neighborhood community which merged. Being the first generation born in cities which were in a process of fast growth we felt some small distances between Us – "from the big cities" and Them – local peasants. But after the first week of long summer school holydays the distances always diminished and again we were part of local networks and some sort like apologized that we are not always there.

"The Mountain gives birth to Man, the Field produces just Pumpkins!". This was the second identity pillar (and boundary) invented in my life. I felt inseparable part of great mountain community and a little bit anxious to be born in the capital Sofia, placed in the flat Sofia field. It took me about 50 years to learn that Zlataritsa is situated at only 75 m. above sea level unlike Sofia which is at 550 m. What about mountain then!? But still this new knowledge does not make my "a girl from the Capital" identity stronger. Deep in my heart I know - I am a woman from the Mountains.

More than this, "our" mountain is the Balkan – the heart of Balkan Peninsula – and Zlataritsa is situated almost in the middle of the Balkan (in the feet of Central Northern slopes of the mountain). The strong feelings to belong to "The Center of the Center" of the world become a part of my identity. Everything else (even The Capital) seemed like periphery. It is important to mention that Zlataritsa is located between two very powerful national ideological centers: at 25 kilometers from Veliko Tarnovo (the capital of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom – 12th-14th centuries) and at 16 kilometers from the town of Elena (one

of the main educational and ideological centers during Bulgarian Renaissance – 18-19th century). At 17 of April 1879, the first National Assembly was held in Veliko Tarnovo. Two important choices were done there: Sofia to be the Capital of new (re)established nation state and the local dialect (from the region of Veliko Tarnovo) to become official language standard. To speak the “purest” Bulgarian is very powerful tool creating strong national identity of the people from the region.

Being placed between them, Zlataritsa creates strong relations with the two most glorious episodes in Bulgarian history, well elaborated in national propaganda – the Second Bulgarian Kingdom (i.e. successful wars against neighbors) and the spiritual Renaissance (modern education leading to national independence). The idea that the people from the region are “Pure Bulgarians”, that they are descendants of guardians of “Bulgarianess” was very powerful propaganda tool during the Third Bulgarian Kingdom (1878-1944) and communist times (1944-1989). Its unique cultural identity tends to be applied all over the nation. It can be understood better in terms of aggressive assimilatory policies of totalitarianism which was especially developed in this region with mixed in terms of ethnic and religion origin population. We grew up with knowledge that “Zlataritsa was the most pure village with special privileges in old times [i.e. Ottoman Rule]” that means: “*There were no Turks here, because it was forbidden Turkish woman to give birth and a Turk to cross the village riding on horseback*”. The idea of special privileges to have mono-ethnic “Pure Bulgarian” settlement is still operating. In the spring of 2008 I registered its variation. “*We were allowed to cut a pork daytime. It was forbidden in Muslim [Ottoman – MK] Empire to cut pork and most of Bulgarians had to do this when it is dark. So we had a special permission*”, said Kolyo (27).

Some isolated archeological data show traces of several hamlets in this area (starting from early Bronze Epoch). The available Ottoman tax (*djizie*) register from 1479 show that there were living 48 households and 4 households of widows; the *djizie* register from 1515-1516 counts 46 households. All of them were Orthodox Christians. The name of the village was Izlatarche (Goldsmith). For centuries it remains almost unchanged. At 1622 the village gained the status of pass-keeper (*derbentjii*) which gave to the locals some privileges. Until the end of 19th century the population consists of Bulgarian Christians. There is no systematic academic research on history or culture of Zlataritsa, despite there was born one of the prominent Bulgarian scholars – Prof. Vassil Zlatarski (1866-1935) researcher on Medieval Bulgarian history. Like all over the country there emerged the institution of local non professional historians collecting artifacts, legends and toponymy. Their findings are included

in small museum exposition. The chief of the museum is not historian or ethnographer by training. The exposition was arranged at 1974 with respect to communist propaganda and nothing has changed until now. The doors of the museum are opening very rare so it is not functioning as a tool for creation of local memories and identity. But local historians pieces of works which are creating stable local mythology of “pure Bulgarian” village are broadcasted via local radio station and recently – via cable TV. Thus they are very powerful tool in creating local identity despite the population had changed considerably during 20th century. My grandparents were not a religious couple neither our relatives nor neighbors were. The only moments I remember entering the Church in the village with my Grandma were at the funerals. But a family legend which my Grandma used to retell to me connects my mother’s family with foundation of the Church. With her amazing voice Grandma used to sing for me the song “Marinka got Turkified” [*Poturchila sa 'i Marinka*]. This song tells the story of Marinka who has converted into Islam. She explains to her friends how does she feel. I still remember her commentary on questions of the faith:

<i>“Bulgarian faith is beautiful.</i>	<i>„Българска ѝ вяра хубавъ,</i>
<i>It smells splendid</i>	<i>тя на хубаву мирише,</i>
<i>It smells like small fresh Basil.</i>	<i>На ситен, дребен босилек.</i>
<i>Turkish fait is nasty.</i>	<i>Турскатъ ѝ вяра лошава,</i>
<i>It smells bad.</i>	<i>Тя на лошаву мирише,</i>
<i>It smells like Elder and Nettle.”²</i>	<i>На бъзи и на купривъ”.</i>

The confusion of ethnic and religious belonging on the Balkans have been widely studied (Todorova 1997) and it is not a special object of comments here. This is on how my identity of non-practicing Orthodox Christian was shaped by my beloved Grandma. Despite I never knew any Muslim at those times, I was prepared to keep and defend my Christian affiliation.

In this “pure Bulgarian place”, I had learned first community division and I knew the border, clearly drawn in space in the past. We (my close relatives and neighbors) belong to Upper neighborhood (*Gornata mahala*) in opposite to Lower village neighborhood (*Dolnata mahala*). The village center (*Charshija*) separates even today the social space despite the strong internal mix of population through 20th century. Elderly people still keep the memory of conflicts between young men from both neighborhoods especially when the question was

² Strange enough but in this part of Bulgaria the Nettle is not valued. It was to feed turkey’s chicken. Bulgarian ethnographers had registered strong symbolic and ritual connection between nettle and the idea of surviving through the winters at many other regions.

to exchange maidens. It is well registered tradition of marriages within the neighborhood and if someone “stranger” wants to marry “our” girl, he becomes an abductor. The solution of the conflict has its ritual expression during the wedding ceremony. The young man from “the other” neighborhood has to pay to the youngsters a symbolic ransom-money for the right to “take” a bride from their *mahala*. Those tensions had disappeared in the period between the Two Wars when mass temporary labor emigration from the village has started. My father from *Dolnata mahala* had no problems to have romance and to marry my mother from the *Gornata mahala* at 1949 and to feel more related to her neighborhood after that. All his life he was committed to *Gornata mahala*. Thus he confirmed the proverb “*Were from is the Bride, there from are your relatives*”. Walking in Zlataritsa I still feel I belong to upper place and it is a small but existing part of my identity and dignity too.

To score: my family brought me up with indisputable consciousness of “Pure” Bulgarian, non-practicing Orthodox Christian, originated from the heart of the Balkan, from the best part of the village. At 1974 Zlataritsa was pronounced to be a town. It made my parents proud – you never call them peasants by origin anymore. There were a lot of jokes on the new citizen’s identity of the villagers. Indeed the infrastructure of the settlement had started to ruin after 1989. There is no more hospital and maternity hospital, cinema theater or orchestra in the restaurant playing in the evenings. Local population is declining fast – from 6 000 at 1974 to 2 000 at 2008. Being pronounced town and a center of Municipality Zlataritsa recently have characteristics of village in terms of business and infrastructure more than in my childhood. It entered in the list of most abandoned and undeveloped rural places in Bulgaria. Despite local Bulgarians complain that the life and the possibilities in the town are in poor conditions the intensification of internal immigrations since 1990 shows something other. New people come because there are relatively better opportunities for living. In the all elements which construct the local ideology as was shown we can identify a positive cultural and functional (van Houtum and Lagendijk 2001: 754) identity of the small town in poor economical conditions.

To finish revision of my own memories I will share three more memories from my childhood: My grandfather origins from a family of gardeners. He and his father were seasonal labor migrants to Romania as most of the men from Zlataritsa in the start of 20th century. Working in the garden with local Romanians and selling vegetables he took some knowledge of everyday Romanian (*Vlashki* as he used to call it). I have clear memory of Grandpa sitting on the bench and asking questions on *Vlashki* to young ladies who were selling wooden spoons and spindles. His conclusion always was that they do not speak correct

Vlashki (Romanian) ergo they are not *Vlahinki* (Romanians) as they pretend. In local speech (and not only even today) *Vlah* is the term for *Romanian*. The conclusion of my Grandpa, feeling that he is an expert on Romania was that those ladies belong to *Tzigani* group.

The second one: Once in the year in the summer my Grandma would invite Fadimka a thin lady at her age to help her in plastering the furnace with fuller's earth. The complete process was taking about 3 hours and finishing they were sitting under awning, eating, sipping home made wine and chatting for this and that with hours. In the late afternoon Grandma would prepare some money, a big bundle consisting of beautiful clothes we has grown out of – for Fadimka's grandchildren - and a string-bag full of vegetables from the garden, some caned food and flour. All I knew about Fadimka was that she is a friend of Grandma - a poor woman who helps and receives some support in return. Grandma never told me that Fadimka belongs to *Tzigani* group.

The third one: It happened that I almost had no local friends Bulgarians at my age at our street. At the end of the street in a small house were living with their family a brother and sister at my age – Ramukoto and Duda. We were playing on the street or in the river together with the other kids from neighboring small Gypsy neighborhood (*Tziganska Mahala*). We were getting dark together, eating together, visiting the cinema in the late afternoons and dancing outside the restaurant where their parents were playing pop and classic music in the evenings. All the time we were talking Bulgarian. In my memories they differ from me as I differed from local Bulgarians – they were Gypsies, I was a citizen. The first time I had realized our differences was when another girl from the capital Sofia fall in love with a Gypsy boy and she wanted to marry him.

The groups – ethnic and religious affiliation

Zlataritsa was established by Bulgarians Orthodox Christians. It exists at this place at least from 15th century. At 2008 there are 1000 Bulgarians (almost 50% of local population). For Bulgarians the next five groups are *Tzigani* (Gypsies):

“Starite Bulgari” (The Old Bulgarians) group had come there possibly earlier than late 19th century. The group member's memory maintains they always have been Orthodox Christians. The men from this group are smiths and farriers. The other groups identify them as a special group – neither *Bulgarians* nor *Tzigani*. They are 10 persons at 2008.

Vlasi group has come there about late 80s of 19th century. The first notices in parochial registers (funerals and baptisms) prove this. The old people remember that they came from

the village of Rezach – a high mountain almost depopulated today village in Zlataritsa municipality. The *Vlasi* group is practicing Orthodox Christianity despite they are strong believers in bad eye and magic and perform related practices. Their “Real Christians” identity creates borders between the group and the “Others” (“Atheists”). Their recent considerable labor migrations flow to Greece supports their efforts of being “good Christians”. The other groups identify them as “*Vlashki Tzigani*”. They represent themselves as “*Vlasi*” (Romanians) or “*Kopanari*” (Spindle-makers). The dynamics of those two levels of auto identification – ethnic and professional have been well studied (Marushiakova and Popov 1997). They are about 600 people at 2008.

“*Muzikanti*” (Musicians) group had come about first decade of 20th century from Kotel, a small town placed in the Eastern Balkan. They were Muslims. Despite the *Muzikanti* group kept their Muslim names until forced renaming (1962) and the first official conversions into Christianity have started about 1993, because of activities of local priest, all of them accepted local rituals in the time of settlement and always act as Orthodox Christians. This shift in religious practices is well studied too (Marushiakova and Popov 1997). For generations the men from *Muzikanti* group had worked in military bands. They developed specific group culture. The general group’s identification and their self identification is *Tzigani*. They are 200 persons at 2008.

Macedonski Vlasi group came at 2004. To the question: Why do you call them “Macedonski” (Macedonian), the locals – Bulgarians and Gypsies answer: “Because of their nasty temper!”³ I had no chance to talk to members of this group. All information comes from interviews with other groups members. They say that those *Vlasi* talk *Vlashki* but nobody knows where from they came. Because *Macedonski vlasi* keep only short-term relations (while buying food) in the public space there is no reliable information about them. They do not interact with the *Vlasi* not in the everyday life nor in the field of religiosity. The other groups identify them generally as *Tzicani*. They are 100 persons at 2008.

Gradeshki Tzigani group came about 2000. They came from the village of Gradets near Kotel to work in forestry. The small and unstable group *Gradeshki Tzigani* Evangelists does not develop group identity based on religion. Their group borders are connected to place of origin and they present themselves as *Gradeshki* (meaning – from Gradets). The other groups identify them as *Tzigani*. They are 50 people at 2008.

³ In the region the image of Macedonians was shaped by media information about revolts and uprisings (early 20th century). The group image of those barely known people is of armed bad temper man and women.

The Turks came at 1993 from different high mountain villages. They are 15 persons at 2008.

Displaced at mid 50s from the Rhodopes Mountain Bulgarian Muslims had settled at depopulated Turkish high mountain villages. Despite the lack of educated *hodjas* and mosque they still perform as a group based on religious affiliation at the new place to settle at early 90s. Bulgarian Muslim women keep their Muslim identity. Elderly women respect the rules of Islamic way of life (in terms of diet, garments, prayers etc.) The men of all ages are non practicing Muslims and do not respect the prohibitions related to Islam (they are eating pork, drinking alcohol etc.). The gossips tell that if the family of *Bulgarian Muslim* maiden rejects to accept her intent to marry Christian boy the choice of the girl is to convert into Orthodox Christianity. In fact there is only one official conversion in the town. The other families prefer to move to one of the nearest towns. The other groups identify *Bulgarian Muslims* as *Pomacs* or *Turks* (because of religious affiliation) but the members of this group prefer to stress on their Bulgarian ethnic origin. They are 50 inhabitants at 2008.

I agree with Comaroff (1991: 250-251) that the conversion cannot be seen as analytical category because it always is a part of broader historical transformations. It is undoubtedly that in Bulgarian society the changes are going still fast despite the “transition period” was officially pronounced to be finished. As it was observed at other cases the “religious change entailed first and foremost a change in practices and that knowledge, or "belief," was acquired gradually as part of a wider universe of meanings” (Grosz-Ngaté 2002: 6). This pattern can be clearly seen in the case of *Muzikanti* group and starts to occur recently in *Bulgarian Muslims* group. The local priest, relatively young (45), very active and supported in his efforts by Church officials, plays important role in this process. Thus in the field of religious affiliation it seems to be witnessing a process of homogenization (slow going process of conversion) in a relatively high secularized environment. But still this process does not mean that the group borders are annihilated or that the conversion is irreversible. As it will be shown grouping at the basis of religious affiliation is still active (the case with new cemetery).

The language

As it was mentioned above the region in which is placed Zlataritsa pretends to be leader in developing modern education since Bulgarian Renaissance. The *Daskalolivnitsa* (Pre-modern school for teachers) in Elena started to provide educated teachers at the second half of 19th century. At early 20th century in Veliko Tarnovo was established modern School

for education of teachers. For more than 50 years it was the main center to provide teachers with Bachelors degree for Northern Bulgaria. Thus Zlataritsa had access to highly qualified local teachers. The first school there was established at 1860. Now it is a regular high school. At 1905 in Zlataritsa was established “Winter professional school for technicians specialized in agricultural machines”. At those times classes for education of girls (management of household, sewing and cooking) were opened in the building of the regular school. However Zlataritsa become an important local educational center for high school education. The nearest Veliko Tarnovo University and Svishtov University provide opportunity for young people to continue their education. During the communist times it was obligatory for each Bulgarian citizen to attend classes at least until 8th degree (basic education). The result is relatively high education of locals. The statistics show that there are only 39 illiterate elderly persons in the town mostly newcomers elderly Roma and Turks. This short review is to explain the good Bulgarian language ability of locals. The ethnic groups of Gypsies and Turks are bilinguals. Young generations are fluent in Bulgarian. They prefer to talk Bulgarian between themselves and they use their group language at home – to communicate with elderly people. In the interviews with large mixed groups I had registered situational code switching and I agree with Kathrin Woolard (Woolard 1999: 16) that this creates relation between two systems in a linguistic repertoire, and between two corresponding social situations. The statement of Mayers-Scotton: “Code switching itself becomes unmarked choice for making salient simultaneously two or more positively valued identities” (Myers-Scotton 1993: 122) is applicable to the case of Zlataritsa. Each group members have been taught at their mothers tongue and it is still the principal criteria in creating group identity (and borders) but this language becomes less and less important in groups strategies because it is exclusive on local and national levels (Bulgarian dominated nation state).

I have no information if there is some home based education on Greek in *Vlasi* group. This is probably because the elderly people who have no Greek language knowledge stay home and take care for the kids while parents are abroad. In the households based on mixed marriages the common language is Bulgarian.

As all over the country when people are to communicate in mixed language environment in public or private space they all shift to Bulgarian. The interviews show that all Zlataritsa inhabitants are proud to talk “the purest Bulgarian” and in terms of language they develop strong Bulgarian identity. Thereby the language barriers are diminishing their significance. What young generations are eager to know is English.

Mixed space

There were three traditional ethnic zones (*mahali*) until almost early 50s – Bulgarian (*Gorna and Dolna mahala*), *Vlashka mahala* and Tziganska (*Muzikanti*) *mahala*. The territorial boundaries become to break about this time with first big wave of migration to the big cities and with relatively increasing incomes of the whole local population – first slowly than on regular basis. Both Tzigani groups (*Vlasi* and *Muzikanti*) had started to buy abandoned houses of Bulgarians. But until now they are situated relatively close to the old neighborhoods. The *Muzikanti* prefer to buy houses in *Gornata mahala* and *Vlasi* prefer to buy houses in *Dolnata mahala*. There are settled the so-called *Macedonski Vlasi*. This relatively new coming small group has been marginalized by all other groups. They inhabit abandoned houses in *Dolnata mahala* near the village cemetery. There is only one *Vlasi* family living in *Gornata mahala*. This exception is to prove the rule.

The newcomers *Gradeshki Tsigani* occupy completely abandoned houses at periphery of the town – near to the forest and one family lives at abandoned public building. Coming from high mountain villages the *Bulgarian Muslims* started to buy houses in the newest part of *Dolnata mahala*. The *Turks* – 4 households - dispersed all over the town.

Each new coming group tends to create its own space but the circumstances (houses for selling or just to capture; money limits; size of the household etc.) are dictating the new reality. Thus from a village with well defined borders of neighborhoods until the early 50s *Zlataritsa* turns to a settlement with diminishing tendency of forming homogenous neighborhood of newcomers.

Until the 60s *Tzigani Muzikanti* have had separate (Muslim) cemetery. There is a location named “*Tzigansko grobishte*” in *Zlataritsa* surroundings. We have no reliable data to prove if this cemetery was created on ethnic or on religious principle. Collective memories do not keep any information on that cemetery. Because of assimilatory strategy of Communist regime the Muslim cemetery was closed about 1962 and since then there is only one shared cemetery. “*Our cemetery looks like a sandwich*”, says Father Ivan (45), the local priest, “*Tzigani, Bulgarians, Vlasi – they all are together*”. At the end of 2007 local authorities gave permission to Bulgarian Muslims to arrange their own cemetery. At spring of 2008 it is still empty. The process of re-arranging separate cemeteries had started in the early 90s in the mixed regions of Bulgaria after the collapse of communist regime.

Each group tends to arrange a meeting point and place to socialize located at the edge of their relatively preserved neighborhood. Those meeting points range from benches situated in front of the house where neighbors communicate in the evenings and children play around

to some store or pub. The *Muzicanti* predominantly gather around a pub in Gornata Mahala; *Vlasi* – at the main restaurant and a cafe at the center; *Bulgarian Muslims* – at old time pastry shop and two small restaurants owned by group members; *Gradeshki tzigani* – at homes. This division is very approximately. All groups' members are visiting those places and use their facilities because of mixed settlement.

The observation of two town fests has shown that people from all groups communicate intensively. They eat together, drink alcohol together, dance together and buy cheap stuff. There were mixed teams of cooks participating in the competition for the “best gardener's soup” because the teams were constructed on neighborhoods principle. One can expect that this new established fest devoted to gardeners migrants (i.e. local Bulgarian Christians) could stay closed in Bulgarians group. On the contrary this fest was really uniting people from different groups. Exactly the same has happened on the other fest observed. Thus social dynamics of the space provides territory of communication more than of separation.

Despite on geographical maps the District of Zlataritsa line is clearly drawn and the town's limits are drawn up by name plates people remember them only when it is a question of restoring possession on the arable land or forest. And this is limited to the circle of elderly local Bulgarians who inherited some land and intend to sell it to newcomers. Interviews have clearly shown that the imaginary boundaries of “local” mixed and dynamic community stretch to the points where reach migrants and in the same time shrinks to ones own *Mahala* or house. And it is not surprising because even the most mobile persons at the earth imagine culture in spatial terms.

Mixed marriages as indicator of openness

Living for centuries in ethnic and religious mixed environment Bulgarians had created powerful cultural system to prevent mixed marriages especially for their girls (Karamihova 1997). That is why I believe it is important to study the dynamics of perceptions of mixed marriages.

It is important to mention that the demographic revolution was held by Bulgarians - generation born about 1900. Women from this generation made the transition from 6-9 to 2 child oriented family. Their children (born between 1920 and 1935) become the first high educated generation (graduating at least Gymnasium) and the first to postpone their marriages (after the age of 21-22 years for female instead of 18-19). As all over the country the other groups made this transition with delay of one or two generations. The *Vlasi* group still has 3-4 children oriented families, but the number of celibate females and males constantly grows and

postponed marriages occur in the generations born after 1980. Only in two cases of *Gradeshki Tzigani* there are more than 2 children in the family (in one of them there are 9 children). The Two World Wars did not affect sizably the local population, nor did the Trans-Atlantic temporary labor migrations in the start of 20th century. But still the marriage market (the balance between males and females in marriageable age) in Zlataritsa passed through several crises in 20th century. The biggest one happened at late 40s in the process of fast urbanization, industrialization and nationalization of the arable lands. The flow of young migrants to the big cities left the proportions of village youngsters misbalanced. The lack of potential marriage partners was partly fulfilled via marriages with girls from the places where the young Zlataritsa's Bulgarians held their army services and via chain migrations after the first maiden from certain remote village comes. The temporary lack of boys was partly compensated via marriages with soldiers working on the construction of railway Zlataritsa – Elena (1960-1968). Those were the times that put the end of local endogamous circle. But the effects of mass migration in the end of 40s revealed in mid 60s. Local Bulgarian population aged.

Almost until 60s there is no reliable data about mixed marriages in terms of ethnic or religious affiliation. But the possibility to have marriages between Roma and Bulgarians was known far before the first mixed marriages had happened. People were talking about *Melalii* – a group constructed by offspring of Gypsy-Bulgarians marriages. Even today some locals confuse “*Starite Bulgari*” with *Melalii* in attempt to explain why those obviously Roma people are so deep integrated into Bulgarian society. At the end of 50s and 60s we can register fast transition in the social and educational status of *Muzikanti* group. The specialized education in Army Brass Band School (in the city of Pazardjik, Southern Bulgaria) had opened new possibilities for Roma boys. Studying far from home (and far from the relatively closed until than group) in mixed school, working for the Army and enjoying all privileges and prestige of it, moving with their families from town to town because of Army politics – those were some of the factors which shaped completely new generation of well educated, well paid, good integrated musicians. Thus they become possible matches for Bulgarian girls which families stood in the village and become to decline in incomes working in socialist cooperatives. Today the number of mixed marriages between Roma and Bulgarians became so common, that the collective memory does not keep any trace about the first couple to do this. Except the marriage of the girl from Sofia to *Muzikanti* boy in mid 60s in which case the stress was on moving from the Capital to the village (evaluated as personal regress) no body remembers any tensions because of those ethnically mixed marriage.

Zlataritsa population lessens slowly but constantly after the 60s. The new stream of temporary labor or permanent emigrants flow started after 1989. But in the early 90s in the emptied space has had settled new small groups – *Bulgarian Muslims*, coming from high mountain area of the district, followed by *Turks* and *Gradeshki Tzigani*. After the collapse of Army Brass bands more than 10 *Muzikanti* families came back home as well as more than 30 families of retired Bulgarians did. There is no reliable data to enlighten this process. But the fact is that the marriage market collapsed again. It can explain the rapidity of growth of mixed marriages between locals and new coming groups. Supporting factors are the social and educational equality of youngsters and the intensive integration of *Roma*, *Turk* and *Bulgarian Muslims* groups. Here are some examples registered at *Gornata Mahala*:

Household A: The father (1950) is local *Bulgarian*; the mother, *Bulgarian* too (1952) was born in the town where he held his army service. The first born son (1970) got married for *Bulgarian Muslim* girl and the second son (1975) married to *Bulgarian Muslim* girl.

Household B: The father (1951) and the mother (1950) are local *Bulgarians*. The first born son (1971) is bachelor, the second one (1975) got married to *Turkish* girl which mother is *Roma*.

Household C: The father (1957) and the mother (1960) are *Turks*. The first born son (1976) got married to a local *Bulgarian Christian*, the second son (1978) married to *Turkish* girl from the town of Lovetch.

Household D: The father (1958) and the mother (1961) are local *Bulgarians*. The first born daughter (1978) married to *Turk* (from case C), the son (1979) married *Bulgarian Muslim*.

Household E: The father (1968) is *Bulgarian*, born in the nearest village; the mother (1970) is *Muzikanti* gypsie. Their son (1999) just married WASP - American Peace Corp Activist (1991) and they plan to move to the USA in the autumn. The mother's brother – *Muzikanti Tsigani* (1975) married to local *Bulgarian* girl (1976).

Household F: The father (1957) is *Muzikanti Tsigani*, the mother (1962) is of *Turkish* origin; the first born son (1980) married to *Bulgarian Muslim*, the second one (1984) married to *Bulgarian Christian* adopted by *Muzikanty Tsigani* family.

Those examples illustrate well enough the variety of mixed marriages. But the *Vlasi* group is absent in the list. The *Vlasi* group still keeps endogamy in Zlataritsa. It is sure that there is only one case of Bulgarian woman married to *Vlach* in mid 70s. But the group is open to local *Greeks* in the villages they migrate in Greece (more than 6 marriages for 10 years). The interview with the priest who has been visiting Greek villages where *Vlasi* migrate

mostly at 2007 proves that the mixed marriages are predominantly with ethnic Greeks. The other small groups - *Gradeshki* and *Macedonski Vlasi* still keep relations with their native places and still are endogamous.

I find that the mixed marriages are the main indicator for plausibility of group boundaries. The mixed (in terms of ethnic or religious affiliation) marriages create temporary micro intermediate groups which strategy is generally directed to integration in Bulgarian macro society. The only clear exception is the *Vlasi* group which marriage strategies seem to be directed to Greece. The mixed marriages (in the town or abroad) contribute to state that ethnic identities in Zlataritsa become more hybrid, fluid, multifaceted and dynamic from the end of 20th and the first decade of 21st century.

The economical power

The map of economic activities of the groups in Zlataritsa shows relatively equal social conditions and relatively homogenous labor market. Except the groups of *Gradeshki Tzigani* and *Macedonski Vlasi* all other inhabitants own houses with gardens, one car and relatively modern furniture including refrigerator, electric stove, TV set etc. Differences are in the quality and in the year of purchasing. Temporary migrant's strategies still are oriented toward renovation and furnishing the family house. A label of success for last two years become the renovation of windows and installation of fashion PVC ones.

The review of economical activities of locals has shown as follows:

- *Bulgarian Christians* – Whole range of jobs; high rate of temporary labor migrations.
- *Bulgarian Muslims* – Trade and restaurants, small dairy-farms; high rate of permanent emigration to the USA.
- *Vlasi* – predominantly labor migrants to Northern Greece; some women provide temporary work in agriculture for elderly Bulgarians.
- *Muzkanti* – street musicians in Spain and small-scale trade in the region, some of them (male and female) provide temporary work in agriculture for elderly Bulgarians.
- *Starite Bulgari* – the last blacksmiths and farriers – small business mostly for repairs.
- *Gradeshki Tzigani* – forestry.
- *Turks* – technicians.

This brief review shows that more of the members of the groups are in constant communication at the working places of their members and at the level of everyday life. We could not say that one of them keeps the economical power in the town or have strong ethnically defined business. This keeps groups open and in a seemingly equal positions.

Political participation and representation

Traditionally the power to rule Zlataritsa belongs to Bulgarians. But this group division is not strong anymore. The *Bulgarians* (Christians and Muslims) enter city council and occupy different administrative positions because of political support of their Parties (left or right) which are not ethnically defined. Unlike other places in Bulgaria the Muslims in the town of Zlataritsa do not support the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) – openly ethnic and religious defined party (since 1990). This is not the case of whole District of Zlataritsa. *Bulgarian Muslims* from high mountain village Kalaydji vote for MRF candidates and their Major since 2007 is MRF partisan. The questions related to dynamics of electoral choices of Bulgarian Muslims in this Municipality will be object of future researches.

From mid 90s a local Roma activist gained support from Euro Roma party. Since then there are at least two representatives of *Muzikanti* group in the City Council. One of representatives is Bulgarian married to Gypsy husband. Because this activist had left Zlataritsa at 2007 and the others are not politically active I suppose that for the next elections probably no *Roma* member of the council will be. The *Vlasi* are under represented in the city council. They do not develop strategies related to Zlataritsa and do not elect their activists. Thus empowerment of the groups at the local level seems to be balanced. The division goes on the level of national political parties which partisans are representatives of different ethnic or religious groups. This way political division creates mixed groups of partisans and serves for more intensive dialogue between locals.

Conclusion

The group boundaries constructed on ethnic or religious belonging are constantly reshaping up to group strategies. The review of main indicators for construction of group boundaries shows that we can call Zlataritsa a dynamic “open” local community with pervious group borders. People there are spatially and socially close. As Gerald Creed states there exists a particular form of racist discourse regarding Gypsies but still “that is derogatory yet inclusive” (Creed 2004: 67). In Zlataritsa case this discourse includes all previous groups and recently the *Bulgarian Muslims* on the base of their different religious affiliation and it goes further to new coming groups.

Due to high rate of migrations all over 20th and in the first decade of 21st century the “destruction” of ethnic or religious boundaries has become a critical necessity for local community to survive. G. Creed gives another key to understand this culture mechanism:

“The possibility that rural Bulgarians have a notion of community that is based on conflict may account for the lack of extreme xenophobic and virulent nationalism in this multiethnic country” (Creed 2004: 67).

The constant reshaping and diminishing of group boundaries is related to the local culture of high mobility, which for a century creates broad networks all over the country and since 1989 – at Mediterranean region of EU. All ethnic and religious groups take advantages of it on common local base. There are some indicators for initial process of integration of first families belonging to the last coming groups – *Gradeshki Tzigani* and *Macedonski Vlasi*. The fieldwork data have shown that this social dynamics does not allows different groups to create neither sub-culture or to be completely “others”.

All those findings do not mean that Zlataritsa community develops a process of homogenization (assimilation). Everybody there knows clearly the ethnic and religious affiliation of old and new citizens. This knowledge goes back to the ancestors (people keep bilateral counting of families). The mixed marriages are accepted as a blessing and as a curse – a necessity of modern life. The whole community in Zlataritsa functions in what I define **active tolerance** in opposition of M. Hayden’s idea of **antagonistic tolerance** (Hayden 2002).

Thus Zlataritsa inhabitants can be seen as a community which constantly generates differences and assembles identities constructs pervious boundaries and feels comfortable re-telling the story of “pure Bulgarian” place even if they do not belong to the group of native Bulgarian Christians.

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