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## **Identities and Everyday Interethnic Relationships**

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**Abstract** This article examines the nature of group identity in order to gain insight into the character and quality of intergroup contacts, particularly the conditions for positive contacts between members of different ethnic groups. An important conception underlying the discussion is that identity is not a stable construct or fixed essence, but rather is discursive in nature and turns upon how individuals and collectivities distinguish themselves in their relations with other individuals and collectivities. Both resemblance and difference are thus essential principles of social identity, while ethnic identity is distinct from culture and may be analyzed as a form of social organization. This heightens the importance of the degree of permeability of group boundaries, and of one's relation with their own ethnic group, in minimizing prejudice and fostering interethnic relations. Analysis of field interviews with members of Bulgarian and Bulgarian Turkish ethnic groups provided the basis for the theoretical discussion concerning intergroup contacts. The interviews also serve to illustrate the inverse relationship between intergroup contacts and prejudices, as well as the fact that insofar as intergroup ethnic conflicts and perceived differences occur between narrative constructs, they can be transformed and resolved through openness towards differences and dialogue.

**Keywords** Group Identity; Intergroup Contacts; Ethnic Groups; Interethnic Relations; Group Boundaries; Bulgarian and Bulgarian Turkish Ethnic Groups

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## Social Identity and Intergroup Relations

### Identity and Difference

Although different social groups clearly have their own particular identities, questions have nevertheless been raised concerning what we in fact may assume about the nature of group identity. Jenkins (2008), for example, points to Brubaker's argument that ethnic groups are not "real" in a certain accepted sense. Brubaker (2004:12) thus claims that

Shifting attention from groups to groupness, and treating groupness as variable and contingent rather than fixed and given, allows us to take account of—and potentially to account for—phases of extraordinary cohesion and moments of intensely felt collective solidarity, without implicitly treating high levels of groupness as constant, enduring, or definitionally present.

In the same vein, Jenkins rejects the hypothesis that identity is a static construct. He instead argues that it consists of a changing process of identification, proposing that we utilize the following definition of identity for what he terms "sociological purposes."

"Identity" denotes the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their relations with other individuals and collectivities. [Jenkins 2008:18]

That is to say that relations based upon similarity and difference are established between both groups and individuals, with resemblance and distinction being essential principles of identification

in the social world. Jenkins addresses conceptions that have been well-established by the work of Benhabib, Hall, and others concerning the core of identity and the issue of distinction and distance, and he clearly states that difference fuels identity and that knowing "who is who" is a question of distinction.

Jenkins notes that among the numerous studies that have been published in the field of group identity research, two of the most influential perspectives are those presented in Barth's social anthropology and Tajfel's social psychology. He adds, however, that the interplay between resemblance, similarity, and difference has not received sufficient scholarly attention (Jenkins 2008).

### Ethnicity and Culture

Barth argues in his "Introduction" to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, one of the most cited works in the field, that ethnicity or ethnic identity is distinct from culture and may be analyzed as a form of social organization. He claims that

It is important to recognize that although ethnic categories take cultural differences into account, we can assume no simple one-to-one relationship between ethnic units and cultural similarities and differences. [Barth 1969:14]

Vermeulen and Govers maintain in this regard that the relation between ethnicity and culture can be interpreted in three ways—ethnicity refers to the notion of culture and to the usage of culture, but it is also an element of culture. They also state that

Ethnic identities are products of classification, ascription and self-ascription, and bound up with ideologies of descent. [Vermeulen and Govers 2000:9]

Vermeulen and Govers thus adopt Barth's definition of ethnicity as a type of social organization, viewing it as closely connected to culture in all three dimensions noted. And insofar as it comprises an element of culture, it involves a reciprocal level of awareness of group difference. Although Barth's work has been approached in many different, and perhaps conflicting, ways, Vermeulen and Govers (2000:9) accept the importance of his contributions and acknowledge that knowledge in the field could not progress without them.

### **Group Boundaries**

The paradigm of social identity, whereby interethnic relations are examined in terms of an "us versus them" dichotomy (Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1986), has often been employed as an explanatory model for intergroup relations, and it exerts a direct influence on problems associated with the development of intergroup communication. Researchers have particularly directed their attention in this regard to the permeability of group boundaries and the level or intensity of intergroup contacts (Ehala, Giles, and Harwood 2016). Numerous studies have confirmed that levels of conflict rise when group boundaries are marked by a low degree of permeability and contacts between groups are weak. Ehala and colleagues (2016), for example, who maintain that a capacity for collective action is basic to the formation of intergroup attitudes and communication, examine the development of representations of so-

cial identity at two levels. These are 1) the micro-level, where individual perceptions and convictions are located, and 2) the macro-level, which comprises shared representations about collective identities and intergroup contexts. They also observe that an emotional attachment to collective identity exerts an influence upon intergroup behavior at the individual level. A low level of permeability regarding group boundaries, which is associated with such indicators as religion and ethnicity, constitutes a factor that generates intergroup mistrust, discrimination, and ethnocentrism (Ehala et al. 2016).

### **Interaction**

Intergroup relations, apart from their collective kernel, are realized in everyday life at the level of interrelations between individuals and smaller groups that usually live in proximity to each other. In accordance with the paradigm of symbolic interactionism, interaction with others is regarded as the primary field in which people construct their notions of themselves and of social life in general. "The self" is also "the other" within a given social situation insofar as it comprises the other from the other's perspective. The most important constructs for researchers in this tradition are "signs"—an umbrella term that covers the meanings that people put into their regular interaction, which are linked to both everyday life and the wider social context of communication.

Symbols are a question of consensus. Different people and different groups may well share the same signs and infer similar content because, as Hewitt (1976:27-28 as cited in Redmond 2015) observes,

“a community of symbols users adopt the convention of using given symbols consistently.” Symbols are bound to language, words, gestures, and to both verbal and nonverbal indications, and their meaning “thickens” when they are used by representatives of different social groups. Communication between groups, rather than within a given group, involves a much larger number of symbols and meanings that stem from the everyday social life of and *in* one’s own social group or groups—national, ethnic, professional, and so forth.

Mead (1934:6-7) argues that the behavior of an individual can be understood only in terms of the behavior of the entire social group of which one is a member insofar as one’s individual acts are involved in social acts that extend beyond the individual and implicate other members of the group. Self-reflection, which is an important element of the attitude one forms about oneself, emerges through the perception of others in that it is a process of “becoming another for one’s own self,” for in self-reflection one stands apart from, or outside of, oneself (Gillespie 2006:2). The way in which Mead presents the self as “another” within the social situation such that the self is “the other” from the other’s perspective is particularly significant for this conception. Self-reflection is attained after the self has adopted the other’s perspective and thus become other to itself (Gillespie 2006:3; see: Zografova 2016).

### The In-Group Identity Model

Social representations are constructs that are linked to social identity (Markova 2007) and, as certain re-

searchers argue, to intergroup representations and attitudes as well. For instance, Dovidio, Gaertner, Saguy (2007) maintain that when social representations dominate individual identities, people tend to exhibit distrust towards the external group rather than towards each other at the individual level (Insko et al. 2001).

The common in-group identity model has undergone significant development since Gaertner and colleagues introduced it in 1993 (Gaertner et al. 1993), with three extensions appearing in the literature. The first of these places a greater emphasis on two forms of recategorization:

- (a) within a single, superordinate identity in which original group boundaries are not emphasized, and
- b) a dual identity in which original group memberships are salient but recognized within the context of a common in-group identity. [Dovidio et al. 2007:319]

The second involves the recognition that “majority (high-power) and minority (low-power) groups have different preferences for different forms of recategorization.” The third extension takes into consideration the “potential strategic and functional effects of dual identity and single, superordinate group forms of recategorization for minority and majority groups” (Dovidio et al. 2007:320). A parallel acceptance of the superordinate group that integrates subgroup identities may be achieved through recategorization and the minimization of prejudices towards other groups, along with a redirection of positive feelings towards the common group: This offers a collective identity while preserving one’s own identity (Dovidio et al. 2007).

Even though the positive effects of double identity emerge within the framework of the superordinate identity, they nevertheless depend upon the specific context. Although double identity may be associated with having positive attitudes toward other groups, Dovidio and colleagues (2007) note on the basis of their work with diverse groups that it can also lead to negative attitudes when it is perceived as a cultural ideal and dominant cultural orientations are associated with assimilation. In addition, changes in the ways that groups are categorized—both one's own group and those of others—can lead to the minimization of prejudices and discrimination (Dovidio et al. 2007).

Dovidio and colleagues (2010) also analyze alternative forms of recategorization as double identity. They utilize the common in-group identity model to demonstrate how prejudices can obstruct prosocial behavior towards other groups such that minorities decline in numbers when their group members recategorize themselves with the superordinate identity. They argue that the goal of the process of recategorization

is to reduce bias by systematically altering the perception of intergroup boundaries, redefining who is conceived of as an in-group member. [Dovidio et al. 2010:193]

They also endeavor to reconstruct the perspectives of both majority and minority groups in respect to intergroup relations. While a superordinate identity may emerge in which the boundaries between groups are not highlighted, it is also possible that double identity involves visible boundaries that are

evident only within the common in-group identity. Moreover, the majority and minorities may differ in their preferences concerning forms of recategorization, which produce differing effects (Dovidio et al. 2010).

An examination of social identity in connection with intergroup relations and with the higher group levels of identity is deeply rooted in Tajfel's views of these issues. Tajfel (1981:255) defines social identity as

that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value or emotional significance attributed to that membership.

There is a deep bond with the groups or community to which one belongs or is affiliated with in the process of defining this type of identity. If we extend the notion of double identity, then the emotional significance ascribed to membership in both broader and smaller groups should be sufficiently distinct, and also occupy a sufficiently important place within one's identity structure, for it to be associated with an individual's actions within those groups. We should note, however, that it is quite difficult to demonstrate that two different groups possess the same level of importance in this regard.

National identity is dominant in a multicultural society such as Bulgaria, although other ethnic identities also have their relatively distinct identities and ways of life. Studies have produced controversial results in regard to the influence of multiculturalism upon social processes and relations. For instance, Robert Putnam argues in a paper widely known for

its critical stance regarding multiculturalism that the cohabitation of multiple communities and the co-existence of diverse ethnic groups within a nation or a multicultural society are associated with a reduction in social cohesion. Putnam (2007) also highlights the importance of properly evaluating the notion of multiculturalism, including how it is applied as politics, with Canada being presented as a good example of how multiculturalism can be successfully implemented.

### The Intergroup Contact Hypothesis

Gordon Allport's intergroup contact hypothesis has become broadly accepted in discussions concerning the character of intergroup contacts and their significance for intergroup relations. This hypothesis specifies four conditions that are necessary for optimal intergroup contact: 1) equal status within the situation, 2) common goals, 3) intergroup cooperation, and 4) authority support (Allport 1954; see also Pettigrew 1998). But, as is the case with other paradigms, the utilization of Allport's principles displays a certain ambiguity. For example, Pettigrew and Tropp conducted a detailed meta-analysis of the results of 713 case studies in the sphere of contact theory by checking analytical and statistical verification, as well as the variables that were included. The results reveal a paradox insofar as 94% of the cases demonstrate an inverse relationship between intergroup contacts and prejudices, but only 19% in fact fulfill Allport's requirements (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). Pettigrew and Tropp also list a number of other factors that have been revealed through previous studies, such as mediators, moderators, and context in respect to a given situation, that lead

to a reduction of prejudice in intergroup contacts. They view future research as involving the construction of complex multi-level models that include individual, structural, and normative "antecedents of contact" (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006).

Thomas Pettigrew's theory (1997; 1998) of deprovincialization proposes that intergroup contacts not only broaden the representations of other groups, they also promote a reevaluation of and distancing from one's own group. Friendships between representatives of different ethnic groups thereby lead both to a decrease in covert and direct prejudices, and to an increase in positive attitudes towards other ethnic minorities or immigrants. Maykel Verkuyten, who investigated the connection between out-group contact and in-group distance in a series of three studies in the Netherlands, demonstrates that contacts between representatives of the majority and those of other ethnic groups or communities both result in a greater understanding and appreciation of the culture and way of life of the other, and also foster greater self-reflection in terms of a self-evaluation of one's own group that typically does not occur. This leads to a decrease in fear and anxiety and a reinforcement of empathy while promoting a change of perspective and an increase in knowledge. Multicultural recognition had also been examined in respect to its role in mediating between intergroup contacts and in-group distance (Verkuyten, Thijs, and Bekhuis 2010). Generally speaking, these three studies confirm that the possibility for increased inter-ethnic contacts is connected with a greater acceptance of multiculturalism. The latter, in turn, is associated with fewer positive feelings towards one's own

group, which is to say that multiculturalism plays a mediating role between contacts and in-group identification (Verkuyten et al. 2010).

Pettigrew maintains that Allport's theory requires further elaboration insofar as it conflates essential components with facilitating processes, which necessitates further knowledge concerning how effects are generalized beyond a given situation. Pettigrew (1998) notes the existence of three types of generalization in this regard: 1) situational, or the extent to which effects are transferred to other situations; 2) the extent to which attitudes towards individuals are transmitted to the external group; and 3) whether attitudes are generalized towards other external groups.

Pettigrew's intergroup contact theory constitutes a conceptualization of intergroup contact at a meso-level, that is, an approach to individual and situational influences marked by a cross-analysis of micro- and macro-societal levels. Preliminary attitudes, along with differences in values and experiences, may exert an impact upon further connections with other groups, thereby modifying them (Pettigrew 1998). Another important aspect of the effects produced through such connections stems from the normative social structure, particularly in respect to inequality, or an inequitable distribution of power, which leads to poorly developed or even impaired, relations. Broader social milieus, particularly the normative context when it is marked by discriminative attitudes and practices, prevent intergroup contacts from developing in a productive direction (Pettigrew 1998). Pettigrew's analysis of data from a number of different studies, including

the biennial European Social Survey, indicates that greater attention should be paid to already existing prejudices insofar as individuals with such attitudes tend to avoid intergroup contacts.

It is important to note that Pettigrew identifies additional conditions for realizing intergroup contacts in terms of Allport's hypothesis, including the *reason why* and the *way* in which they take place. He also views establishing such contacts as a process, which contrasts with Allport's view that the problem is *when* the connection takes place. Generalization is not addressed in other respects since the issue here concerns transferring the effects of intergroup contacts either to the group as a whole, or to other situations and other groups.

Pettigrew proposes four future directions for the further development of intergroup contact theory. These are 1) specification of the processes of intergroup contact in order to determine the many mediators and moderators involved; 2) greater focus upon negative contact, such as prejudice, distrust, and conflict; 3) placing intergroup contact within a longitudinal, multilevel social context rather than addressing it solely as a situational phenomenon; and 4) more direct applications of contact theory to social policy in which intergroup contact is viewed in respect to particular institutional settings (Pettigrew 2008).

The realization of an optimal contact with representatives of another group leads to a new assessment of both the in-group and the out-group, whereby in-group norms and values are no longer the sole ground for constructing one's attitudes towards the

world. The process of deprovincialization that thereby takes place results in the formation of a changed view concerning both the members of one's own group and members of external groups. This opens up new possibilities for representatives of the majority to observe the various cultural practices of the "outside," understand their value, and see that the practices of one's own group are not the only means for perceiving the world.

Intergroup contact also has the power to reduce intergroup anxiety and both individual and collective intergroup threat. This lessened threat in turn leads to greater intergroup contact in the future. All these effects—greater trust, forgiveness and future intergroup contact, and less anxiety and threat—are components of deprovincialization. [Pettigrew 2012:326]

The generalization of the effects of intergroup contacts and friendships to other situations and groups is a particularly important problem that provokes many additional questions. It is one of the issues that Pettigrew (1998) develops in connection with the actualization of the contact hypothesis.

Research concerning the influence of prejudice and the ethnic conception of nation, as well as the influence of national identity upon support for the multicultural rights of minorities, reaffirms both the negative impact of the ethnic national concept and the positive impact of national identification (Visintin et al. 2016). Regional ethnic diversity in Bulgaria is an important social feature—support for multiculturalism is increased in areas where several ethnic groups coexist in a common social space (Visintin et al. 2016).

Regardless of the often common historical fate of groups living in proximity to each other, actual intergroup relations are frequently complicated, conflicting, or even hostile in given socio-political contexts. A constructivist approach can be useful in this regard for casting light upon the deeper mechanisms at work within unbalanced intergroup relations, regardless of the intergroup contacts that do take place. For example, Kenneth Gergen develops the idea that relational social phenomena "surround" the self, as well as interpersonal and intergroup relations, arguing that individuals become antagonists not only because their world constructions vary, but also because they all come with their own stories about precisely what and how much they deserve. Conflicts thus occur between narrative constructs, but they can also be transformed and resolved through dialogue (Gergen 2009:196).

## Interviews with Representatives of Two Ethnic Groups

This study has analyzed data produced in field interviews conducted in face-to-face conversations with 20 individuals of Bulgarian origin and 10 of Turkish origin in two Bulgarian districts with differing ethnic population ratios.<sup>1</sup> The two locations are Kardzhali, where the population (2011 census) consists of 30.2% Bulgarians, 66.2% Turks, and 1.0% Roma, and Stara Zagora, where the corresponding

<sup>1</sup> The interviews were conducted during 2014 as part of the 2013-2016 project "The Dynamics of Interethnic Attitudes in Bulgaria: A Social-Psychological Perspective," which was jointly funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science within the framework of the Bulgarian-Swiss Research Program.



census figures are 86.2% Bulgarians, 4.9% Turks, and 7.8% Roma.

Excerpts from these interviews will be provided below in order to indicate the results of our study. The general topics covered were the following:

- Collective supergroup and subgroup identities and the representations of “others”
- Everyday life and relationships
- Historical collective memory concerning important periods, conditions, and events for Bulgarians, Bulgarian Turks, and Roma
- Respondents’ views concerning how ethnic relations could be developed

The entirety of the data in question was coded in respect to common contents. This made it possible to grasp the general picture, as well as trends in interethnic relations, along with the most significant symbols and signs related to the respondents’ everyday lives and holiday customs.

When Bulgarians were asked about the first thing that would come to mind when thinking of their Turkish compatriots, they made the following responses:

- Bulgarian Turks do not speak Bulgarian
- they’re hardworking
- they have generally positive characteristics
- they’re not bad people, but they nevertheless invaded and conquered Bulgarian territory
- I don’t like all of the shouting and noise from the minarets
- they’re people like us, but they have more rights than we, Bulgarians, do

- they’re gypsies, and I don’t like them
- they’re good people, but politicians set us against them
- they’re more religious than we are—they preserve their traditions
- there are both good and bad people among them

Questions about the contexts of possible communication (“Tell me about your contacts with Bulgarian Turks. Where do you meet Bulgarian Turks? On what occasions?”) received the following answers:

- we’re neighbors
- we have professional contacts
- we’re friends or acquaintances
- we went to school together
- I have a generally good impression of them
- we live side by side, we help each other
- we met during military service
- we were roommates
- we see each other everywhere

Bulgarian Turks were also questioned about their spontaneous associations concerning their ethnic Bulgarian compatriots (“What would be the first thing that comes to mind when you think about Bulgarians?”). The answers were coded with the following statements:

- they’re respectable
- it depends on the person
- they work in administration
- they’re neighbors
- they symbolize negativity in some way (dishonest and deceitful politicians)
- they’re poorly adapted to Turkish culture (a different way of life)

Relationships based upon profession, neighborhood, and friendship are maintained in a mutual fashion. Almost all of our Bulgarian respondents have connections with Turks, and everyday interpersonal relations constitute a basis for the dissemination of collectively shared representations. Bulgarian respondents point to the positive qualities of Bulgarian Turks in their representations, such as being hardworking, “people like us,” and intelligent. They often remark that they like Turkish traditions and celebrate their holidays together. They also express approval of how Bulgarian Turks preserve their own customs (see: Bakalova and Zografova 2014). Some of them also remarked, however, that quite negative attitudes towards Bulgarian Turks were being spread among representatives of Bulgarian ethnic groups.

It must be noted that the centuries-long coexistence of different ethnic groups is an important element of the local socio-political context in Bulgaria. Apart from Bulgaria being an ethnic nation-based society, with a sense of national identity being dominant, various regions within the country have developed in a multicultural manner. As one might expect, areas of mixed population are locations for more intensive contacts between representatives of diverse groups and communities, at both interpersonal and intergroup levels. A similar result emerges from an analysis of the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) 2003 data, which demonstrate that support for multicultural rights is strong precisely where there is greater ethnic diversity (see: Visintin et al. 2016). When different ethnic groups share inherited common spaces and communities, a favorable context is formed for

keeping one’s own culture while sharing a common life with other groups (Berry 2013).

A study with more than 3800 respondents from France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and West Germany investigated attitudes towards the main minority groups, including whether people have friends with national, racial, cultural, religious, and social class backgrounds that are different than their own. Researchers found that the Europeans questioned had lower levels of prejudice and higher degrees of empathy and support for other groups when they indeed had such relations within their own circles (Pettigrew 1998). Our own interviews reveal how the respondents’ interactions demarcate lines of identification that both indicate differences and also display proximity between different communities. For example, our respondents were asked about how they evaluated the traditions, culture, and collective characteristics of the “other” group, and they remarked that there was explicit mutual recognition of and support for religious holidays, such as Bairam, Easter, and Christmas, as well as wedding traditions and various other customs and celebration practices.

But, our research also raised difficult questions, quite often avoided at both public and interpersonal levels, which for decades have been problematic issues for the majority of society. These include the so-called “rebirth process,” in which Bulgarian Turks were stripped of their identity documents and property by the communist regime, as well as the consequences of five centuries of Ottoman rule (late 1300s to late 1800s). Investigating such issues, along with stereotypical representations and symbolically

linked associations regarding everyday relations and celebrations, can foster the emergence of clear ideas concerning attitudes towards “others,” cohabitation, and concrete interpersonal relationships.

### **Interview Examples and Excerpts: Ethnic Identity, Common National Identity, Representations of Others, Everyday Relations**

*Respondent Y. (male 28, Stara Zagora)* associates his ethno-national identity with Bulgaria and lists a number of its essential characteristics: place of birth and residence, life experiences, studying and working in the country. However, this respondent also remarks that “what’s happening in our country doesn’t make me feel very Bulgarian.” When asked to describe the principal cultural characteristics of Bulgarians, he summarizes what he views as their positive traits, such as “peace-loving,” but also speaks of “well-intentioned hypocrisy” when describing the relations between the different social groups with which he is affiliated. The respondent notes that there are similarities between the celebration practices of these groups and those of “Roma, more commonly known as ‘gypsies.’” Y. likes the traditions of Bulgarian Turks, as well as their practices of raising children.

When asked about his first-hand experiences communicating with Bulgarian Turks, Y. replied that

I don’t have such contacts, but have an adequate impression through my acquaintances. [Turks] are people who help Bulgarians a lot in certain situations. But, unfortunately, they have that rooted

Turkish mentality, their way of thinking that ethnic Bulgarians don’t like very much. I’ve seen this. It’s good that tolerance between these ethnic groups is being promoted and there isn’t dissension and conflict.

*Respondent K. (male 59, Stara Zagora)* links his national and ethnic identity with his birthplace, adding that what makes him feel Bulgarian are his “wonderful family, children, and grandchildren.” K. states that customs, arts, and folklore are important elements of Bulgarian culture and traditions. He views his Turkish friends as “literate and respectful of the constitution and rules in Bulgaria,” and appears to have no concealed hostility towards their ethnic community. K. ascribes reservations and negative overtones to the attitudes of his own ethnic group towards Turks, whom he regards as hardworking and friendly. He notes that both groups celebrate their various holidays together.

*Respondent N. (female 66, Stara Zagora)* reveals how ambivalence in emotional relations and representations is typically stimulated by the normative context, and her interview displays a rich spectrum of biased feelings and attitudes. The respondent identifies herself as a Bulgarian by highlighting the mutual understanding she has with others in her community and her bond to everyday life. N. maintains that local traditions and culture are represented by milestone historical events, such as Liberation Day (March 3rd) and Unification Day (September 6th), and by local customs, such as Martenitsa. Although N. regularly communicates with Turks among her acquaintances and in her professional circle, she nevertheless has negative feelings

about their presence in the country. She states that she does not like people speaking Turkish. And although she has no first-hand experience of unacceptable behavior by Turks towards Bulgarians, she retells stories (or ideas of possible stories) that she has heard. This inner conflict is resolved, as is the case with other respondents, by blaming a third party, usually “politicians” in general. Political circles are thus held to be responsible for exacerbating intergroup tensions, while otherwise “people live well.” N. states that “I don’t have a negative personal opinion” about Turks.

I should note that the normative context has a significant influence on the attitudes one has towards others. For instance, it may reflect accumulated fear and negative expectations, which may of course be reinforced by personal experiences and stories of unpleasant experiences on the part of one’s acquaintances. Nonetheless, years of experiencing positive relations in daily contacts create a completely different setting, as is evident from the comments of the following respondent.

*Respondent K. (female 63, Kardzhali)* identifies herself as a Bulgarian through her family story, origin, and kinship. K. has worked as a teacher, and expresses her warm feelings and strongly positive attitude towards the Turkish ethnic group.

I’m very positively oriented towards Bulgarian Turks because, in the first place, I’ve worked in a village that is entirely Turkish. I’ve worked with Turkish kids. Most of my colleagues were Turks, and I had wonderful relations with them—they are friendly and very hospitable. They love to help, es-

pecially when someone is in need. If someone is in a bad situation, they are the most responsive.

This individual has a completely positive attitude and representation of the other on the basis of contacts in daily life, which makes it possible for her to have a broad vision of how interethnic connections can develop as interpersonal and mutually tolerant relations. She states that both ethnic groups have very similar lifestyles, and that their traditions have merged. K. relates that they celebrate the Turkish holiday of Sheker Bairam together and “dye [Easter] eggs with the Turkish kids. They enjoy it very much and have fun.”

*Respondent G. (female 39, Kardzhali)* views her identity through such basic issues as territory and culture, and states that she is proud of her country’s history. She enjoys celebrating holidays regardless of their religious origin since they bring relatives and friends together without any consideration of their ethnic backgrounds. This respondent describes her attitude towards the Turks with whom she works and communicates as positive, but observes that the general attitude of Bulgarians towards the Turkish ethnic group contains negative overtones. She also maintains, however, that they are caused by the impact of the media, which “distort the truth of our relationships.” G. replied that she would accept a relative of hers living with a Turk when asked about social distances.

*Respondent S. (female 33, Kardzhali)* expresses the opinion that traditions and religion unite Turks. She also states that, regardless of the differences between them, “both Bulgarians and Turks get

up in the morning, have their coffee, and go out,” the only important detail being that Turks go to the mosque on Friday. This respondent reduces the similarities and differences between these two ethnic groups to the level of everyday life. In contrast, **Respondent G.** identifies characteristics that supposedly distinguish Bulgarians and Turks apart from their mundane activities, stating that Bulgarians have higher self-esteem while Turks “have complexes.” She explains her views concerning Turkish attitudes towards Bulgarians with the observation that when there is a lack of communication, Turks tend to think of Bulgarians as “bad” and prefer not to approach them. She also maintains that Bulgarians at times tend to underestimate Turks. In mixed areas, however, Turks learn to speak Bulgarian quite quickly and Bulgarians get along well with them. This conclusion resides on the respondent’s daily experience and communication, and it highlights the direct interconnection between an increased number of social contacts and an improvement in the quality of relationships with representatives of other ethnic groups. We may regard this as a quite concise explanation in ordinary language of the essence of Allport’s hypothesis that social contacts are crucial in certain conditions for reducing prejudice.

**Respondent Z. (female 71, Kardzhali-Momchilgrad)** exemplifies how two identities, one tied to the community and the other related to the broader context, can be combined and amalgamated. This respondent possesses a double affiliation, and she points to

the ethnicity with which our mind has been impregnated, we have a memory...we are Turks after all...

Bulgarian Turks, because if you live in Bulgaria, you speak more Bulgarian...We have to conform to the principles of the state.

Z. speaks both Turkish and Bulgarian, enjoys both cultural practices, and has a sister who is married to a Bulgarian.

**Respondent S. (female 54, Kardzhali)**, another representative of the Turkish community, generalized her ideas about the two ethnic groups by referring to their celebrations and traditions, which she claims are united by the common feature of being “more a time for relaxation than celebration.” She remarks that young people do not keep their traditions because, regrettably, they leave the country. Language is one of the cultural components that have to be preserved and passed on to future generations. This respondent’s opinions about Bulgarians are somewhat controversial in that she thinks they are better educated than Turks, but also more nationalistic.

Her answer to the question about how she views Turks’ opinions about Bulgarians illustrates with a single example the barriers and difficulties, but also possibilities, concerning interethnic communication:

Our Turks, ordinary people, I don’t think they make a distinction. Politicians deliberately do that, and some Turks and Bulgarians are influenced by them. There was this five-year-old who used to come over while I was working in a school and we always spoke in Bulgarian. One time I let slip a word in Turkish and he asked me “Are you Turkish? I hate Turks.”

The respondent adds that there are people like this in the Bulgarian community, and it is a question of how they are educated. In general, she thinks that the Bulgarian (younger) generation shouldn't be influenced in this way, but rather have a broader, European view.

The expression "I let slip" that the respondent uses reveals the social inhibition that marks the interactions Turks have with Bulgarians, even seeking to avoid expressing their identity through language. Once again, however, she tends to assign the primary responsibility for the peaceful coexistence of ethnic groups to those in charge of society.

## Views on the Development of Ethnic Relations

Representatives of the two groups studied were asked to describe how they imagine the development of intergroup relations and what could be done to improve and enrich them.

*Respondent I. (male 58, Kardzhali)* pointed to the connection between the standard of living and the level to which ethnic groups' representatives communicate.

Ethnic relations can be improved only if the standard of living is raised. If people have better living conditions, they wouldn't get involved in these kinds of problems and won't be deceived by those politicians who created the problems on purpose in order to get more votes. Their aim is more voters and more seats in Parliament.

*Respondent Z.* also regards the development of ethnic relations as directly dependent upon the standard of living. Better living conditions would prevent people from being manipulated by politicians "who are only looking for more votes so that they can get into Parliament." The view that there is a direct link between, on the one hand, improving and developing interethnic relations and, on the other, raising the standard of living is shared by other respondents as well.

Another element common to interviews with respondents from both the Bulgarian and Turkish groups is the link between the development of ethnic relations and the restoration of social justice and equality. This view is often expressed as a hostile attitude towards Roma insofar as representatives of both these groups share stereotypical ideas about the Roma way of life, including the persistent belief that they enjoy greater access to social assistance.

Our respondents' answers to the question "What else could those in charge of the government do to reduce inequality?" were coded as follows:

- Set quotas for integrated early education
- Provide job opportunities
- Provide training and re-qualification so that everyone can find a job
- Stop social assistance
- Provide equal social assistance to everyone
- Stop special protection for Roma
- Politicians should have united positions and work together

The answers of the Bulgarian respondents may be summarized as follows:

- Provide job opportunities
- Stop social assistance for those who quit or refuse work
- Set quotas for (communities) living together
- Re-establish manufacturing
- Politicians should work for the good of everyone in the country

Another question concerned measures that could be undertaken in order to foster everyday communication between ethnic communities in Bulgaria. The answers given by our Bulgarian respondents were coded as follows:

- Communication cannot be fostered forcibly
- We should act with understanding and do good
- Education should be improved
- Everyone should be equal
- Communities should work together
- There should be common cultural practices
- Economic conditions need to be improved

Bulgarian Turkish respondents answered the same question as follows:

- Quotas should be implemented for both living and studying together
- There are no obstacles to community interaction
- Better language proficiency is needed
- Politically neutral media are necessary
- People have to work with facts, not stereotypes or prejudices
- There must be sincerity/consistency of words and actions
- We have to be tolerant of the other's opinions

- Living standards must be improved so that people are not manipulated by politicians
- Roma must have jobs
- It depends on us, as individuals

## Conclusion

The analysis of the stories collected in the interviews with Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks revealed ambivalences in attitudes and opinions concerning representatives of the other group. At the same time, however, both groups indicated the existence of mutually maintained interrelations based upon friendship, working together, and living in the same neighborhoods.

Almost all of the Bulgarians who were interviewed have had or currently maintain contacts with representatives of the Turkish ethnic group, which to a large degree was expected because of the historical nature of the multicultural cities, towns, and regions where they reside. Individuals with different ethnic backgrounds support and appreciate the traditions of the other, celebrate holidays and events together, and share everyday joys and problems. However, one interesting outcome of the analysis is that although most Bulgarian respondents have a generally positive opinion about their Turkish co-citizens—or positive acculturation orientations (see: Bakalova and Zografova 2014)—they nevertheless confirm the existence of negative attitudes within their ethnic group towards Bulgarian Turks. This reflects a general awareness within their social context of controversial narratives that contain both negative and positive shades of meaning.

Relations of this type between communities demonstrate a degree of tolerance. But, one could not say that this would constitute tolerance as Verkuyten (2010) defines it, namely, an evaluation and acceptance of difference and a generalized positive attitude towards foreign groups, not only with an absence of prejudice, but also with an acceptance of what one would not approve of or is in fact prejudiced against.

It is noteworthy that our Bulgarian Turkish respondents expressed a positive attitude towards their Bulgarian co-citizens and their cultural practices, and they typically assumed that other representatives of their ethnic group shared a similar opinion. For instance, one respondent remarked that

I live in a seven-story building where I'm the only one who is Turkish. Most of my friends are Bulgarians. For 50 years I have lived and gone to school mostly with Bulgarians. In my opinion, there is no difference between Turks and Bulgarians. I was born here, in Bulgaria, and here is where I will stay. I feel good here. It's up to everyone to make their own decisions, it doesn't matter whether it's abroad or in Bulgaria.

This statement appears to prove Brubaker's thesis that ethnicity does not involve a substantial group or entity, but rather comprises a process of identification involving "individuals' point of view, a worldview." This entails "taking as a basic analytical category not the 'group' as an entity, but groupness as a contextually fluctuating conceptual variable" (Brubaker 2004:38).

Our study, which is presented here only in part through excerpts from selected interviews, reveals

that the national identity of Bulgarians is a positive factor that plays an affirmative role in the building of support for cultural preservation and the integration of minorities (see: Zografova 2016). It is also true that a common national identity may decrease the social distance minorities experience in respect to the majority and strengthen their orientation towards integration (Dovidio et al. 2007).

A large percentage of our interviews of both Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks display a tendency towards deprovincialization, such as when Bulgarian Turks indicate an acceptance and interiorization of the common national identity. There are also tendencies towards generalization (Pettigrew 2008) that are visible primarily when in respect to positive contacts between individuals from different ethnic groups. These can then become transferred to the group as a whole, thereby serving as a mechanism for constructing perceptions and ideas.

Our research, however, has not revealed a transfer of positive ideas and attitudes towards Roma. On the contrary, even when positive overtones are evident in direct contacts between Bulgarians and Turks, negative attitudes, prejudices, and a lack of acceptance towards Roma remain.

In their meta-analyses of hundreds of studies, Pettigrew and Tropp have presented the various conditions and contexts within which intergroup contacts do in fact reduce prejudices. For example, their study of a sample of 696 individuals indicates that intergroup contact is indeed associated with lower levels of prejudice in 94% of the cases (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). Another important finding is that



there is a synergy between the factors underlying Allport's original hypothesis. The effects produced by separate factors may be controversial upon occasion, such as when institutional support for intergroup contacts does not produce highly positive results since the contacts take place under competitive conditions. But, insofar as Pettigrew and Tropp's work also reveals that very few of the cases studied reflected the original combination of conditions identified in Allport's hypothesis, they argue for the existence of a new trend in contemporary intergroup studies that involves the inclusion of anxiety and threat as mediating variables. When these are

reduced in intergroup contacts, then possibilities to limit prejudice emerge (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006).

Further studies in the field are needed to broaden and, at the same time, specify conditions that are sensitive to the social context. An analysis of the influence that intergroup contacts have upon the positive development of the mutual representations and everyday experiences of different social groups is also needed. It is also necessary to take into consideration the fact that different mechanisms operate on individual and group ethnic levels which cannot be transferred from one level to another.

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