

## Results

from

an ethnographic study of the communities in the neighbourhood of Stolipinovo

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## Introduction

The materials presented here originate from a six-person team’s study of Plovdiv’s residential quarter of Stolipinovo.<sup>1</sup> The text granted for public distribution is part of an internal interim report, compiled at the end of the study’s first phase. At this stage we were still experimenting with collating what we have learned and finding suitable ways to present it. We were still searching for the most appropriate voice with which to speak to our future audiences and were still experimenting with the form. It must not be viewed as a completed publication and it has not undergone review and editing, stylistic or content-wise. The original is written in Bulgarian language, except for the last chapter. It often contains meta-text and references to a discussion that was taking place between the study authors and the team of “Plovdiv 2019” for the concept of the then future final products

The research project was funded by the Plovdiv – European Capital of Culture 2019 initiative. Part of the team had done fieldwork before under other initiatives (see the chapter “Chairs in Stolipinovo”). Six more months of work are necessary in which to prepare two publications.<sup>2</sup> The first will be a book for the general public. It will seek to supplement publications about Plovdiv’s recent history with a collection of authentic accounts from the Roma & Turkish neighbourhood of Stolipinovo. It will give Plovdiv’s inhabitants an opportunity to, among other options, hear the actual voices of the people in Stolipinovo, learn more about life in the quarter, get an idea of what Plovdiv looks like when seen from there, and what its population dreams of.

Essentially the book will be a collection of direct dialogues between the inhabitants of the quarter and members of the team, dialogues that present diverse portraits of the people we spoke with. Careful preparation has allowed us to explore multiple themes and immerse ourselves into each of them, despite the fact that for our interlocutors they might have seemed nothing but daily

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<sup>1</sup> We must mention also the role of Mira Peykova, who did the transcription of all conversations recorded in Stolipinovo.

Indispensable is the entirely gratuitous contribution of Hanna Rose who agreed to edit, and in practice, co-author the English-language text in Part III.

<sup>2</sup> From here on follows the original text from December 2016, so most sentences are in the future tense. We expected this work to be completed in 2017, but the commissioner’s plans changed.

trifles. The dialogues are grouped into ten or so major themes, so that each of them stands out against the backdrop of an enormous diversity of perspectives and experiences in the community. The diversity made visible within each theme exposes the inadequacy of every outsider's desire to extract generalisations. A commentary along side the dialogues will give the reader additional context and, thanks to our long-term relationship with Stolipinovo, offer a deeper understanding of these topics. In Part II we put this format to the test by presenting extended excerpts from 21 dialogues. In the next project stage, we will triple the number of dialogues offered, and double the number of topics that can be set apart with a sufficient amount of internal diversity and points of view.

The second publication will be more specialised and will target artists and activists who have plans to work in Stolipinovo or in segregated communities in Bulgaria. Many initiatives arise with a noble sentiment and much enthusiasm to contribute to the improvement of life of people in such communities but ultimately prove to have little knowledge of both people's actual needs and of the obstacles to the improvement of their lives and fair participation in society. Often outsider activists plan to resolve "the problems" seen by the segregating majority, rather than the actual problems of those to whom they are coming to help. This is why the community rejects them. We will offer a guide that will (1) serve as an introduction to the context of the segregated community, (2) point to and elucidate the misunderstandings and discrepancies that stand in the way in the carrying out initiatives and (3) offer advice for a more suitable framework of how to think about the interactions with the community and, from there, also discern a certain criteria for improving the approaches of such work. This publication will come out in Bulgarian and English. It will introduce the international reader to the Bulgarian context of the relations between ethnic majority and minority. It will introduce the Bulgarian reader to the concrete context of Stolipinovo. We will combine the local knowledge we acquired about the community and the theoretical insight of anthropology and sociology, which we will translate into layman's terms by a host of illustrations and examples.

In Part I we make the first attempt at this format (in the chapter "How to Think Stolipinovo"). There we invite readers to abandon the hard categories they likely use for imagining Stolipinovo – "Roma quarter", "ghetto", "unemployment", "crime", "Gypsies" and so on – and try to think with concepts that might appear more abstract – for example, heterogeneity, hybridity, informality – but which are able to lead our efforts towards understanding in a way that is more finely tuned and traces out the sociological processes that give rise to what's particular in Stolipinovo's situation. These concepts enable us to leave behind the hard categories and accept that the people in Stolipinovo can have, for example, multiple identities, which are the result of a constant struggle for self-affirmation and the taking of responsibility.

The next chapters in Part I are easier to read; they speak, in a more direct way, about the local community. In "Chairs in Stolipinovo" and "Cubes in Stolipinovo" we point at, through the story our own trials and tribulations, several ubiquitous discrepancies between the expectations of outside activists and the way in which their actions are interpreted in the *mahala*. We also share our own surprise at the openness and welcome that the people extended to us there. The boundaries and barriers we stumbled upon are in no way evident and will be dealt with in a more analytic way in future texts; here, they are only outlined.

In "Cohabitation" and "Family Relations", we decided to re-examine, for the readers, two of our own internal analyses, which systematise what we have learned about separate themes from the life of the community. We also use these stories as tools in our in-field conversations, to go deeper in our discussions with the locals. The texts contain excerpts from our field notes and quotations from the dialogues. They are written in quite a personal style to avoid the claim for universality and expertise. As we

said already, the inherent tendency in the production of expert knowledge to define a common denominator for a community that otherwise has a hard time presenting its points of view in the public sphere could bring no benefit to it.

So far we have no plans for these internal analyses to be part of the guide for activist and artistic work. We append them here as a trial and in an effort to receive feedback on whether they would help artists to better understand the logic of living in Stolipinovo. We see the dialogues in Part II also as such illustrative material. Apart from being published as a book, in shortened form, they could be used in full as an addendum to the guide. In it, artists will be able to look for points of interest from which to begin researching their own creative practice. Dialogues are given here in the full variant, which contains many details – for example, the financial side of running a small business in Stolipinovo – that will be of interest to a more limited group of readers.

The principal motivation behind the two publications is to facilitate dialogue and understanding between Plovdiv and Stolipinovo.

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These texts are incomplete, and we ask that they be treated as such. The styles – and sometimes, regrettably, also the formatting – differ, and we extend our apologies to the reader for that. They are yet to be rigorously processed to attain the quality and precision that will make them publishable. Please do not distribute them. We are looking forward to your annotated feedback.

## **Part I: Analytical materials**

### **How to think about Stolipinovo**

NIKOLA VENKOV AND DIMITAR PANCHEV

#### **‘Gypsy quarter’ = ghetto = ?**

The current introduction must be read as an invitation to rethink what we know about Stolipinovo and its inhabitants, to distance ourselves from the customary stereotyping and to search for an alternative view of this “peripheral” area of the city we live in.

When the word *Stolipinovo* is mentioned, it invariably sets in motion an all-round logical chain dominated not just by negatively weighted associations, but by an all-encompassing stigma that puts all the inhabitants of the quarter under a common denominator: “The Gypsy Quarter”.

Whichever source of public information we may turn to, we form an “objective” idea about this part of Plovdiv loaded with frightful code words: criminality, lawlessness, “lack of control”. This turns Stolipinovo into the equivalent of unapproachable zone, inhabited by *other people* and *dangerous people*, who are different from *us*. Presumably, it is where Gypsies/Roma<sup>3</sup> live

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<sup>3</sup> I will mostly use both labels together to point to the entire spectrum of meanings that citizens use to burden the image of these communities. The dynamic between the popular usages of these two concepts in recent years has been looked at by Yakimova, Milena. 2012. *On "Gypsies", "Roma" and "Umberto Eco"*. *Kritika I humanizam* 39:279-299. Broadly, “Gypsies” is an established term in ethnological research circles, and we use it where we speak about traditional and historical communities; “Roma”, on the other hand, has been gaining ground after the London Congress of 1971 as the correct term to use. It is now the preferred term for use in public communication to overcome the negative connotations that had long been established in the popular usage of

who are different from *us* and different, also, from what is "normal" and what is not marked as a Gypsy/Roma neighbourhood.

In the eyes of the Bulgarian majority, such a prescription creates one more "objective reality" – those neighbourhoods out there are Gypsy neighbourhoods, therefore they are ghettos. The ghetto in the mind of the average citizen instantly relates to the phantasms that media and social networks pour out on him or her. It is a closed, encapsulated zone in which all kinds of proscribed things tend to take place; a place where there is no civilisation: no sewage systems, no institutions, no police, no public amenities, and no security from crime. The TV news about unpaid electricity bills, a brawl, or the reportage images of hand-made facades of homes appear to the audiences as immediate confirmation of those convictions. There is lawlessness in the full sense of the word: gangs of criminals roam the streets, and every "white person" should be afraid for his or her life.

Tabloid journalism fans out these phantasms with gusto: descriptions of prostitution, knives, drug stashes (regardless of whether there is any proof), horse-drawn carts, pigsties frequent their pages. The idea of a pre-cultural society merges with post-apocalyptic images from American films (and the images of American ghettos). The ghetto is a semi-restrained threat to the city: an ulcer hidden somewhere threatening our normal city. People think 'At least it's enclosed and limited within a certain zone, but we cannot know when it could spill over and explode'. All Stolipinovo is missing is a physical wall; only the surrounding industrial zone and sheer fear keep it at a distance from the rest of Plovdiv.

One can see ghettos corralled by walls and fences in Bulgaria's modern-day towns and cities.<sup>4</sup> In others, such as Stolipinovo, although there are no walls, the border between city and ghetto is palpable. Cities nowadays do not erect fortress walls, but because the enemy is inside the walls must point inwards. The ghetto is the last fortress in which the state and middle class have not established control over what is and is not permitted. The city needs its ghetto however. The ghetto (the Gypsy neighbourhood) is the necessary evil, the city's fifth column against its own inhabitants. The ghetto is a purgatory, as it were, where problematic and unnecessary populations have been cast off, the ones who must be hidden from public view except when their image must again be used as a generic description of what we *are not*.

Whereas the neighbourhood's physical difference – the streets that the city council has not asphalted, the makeshift housing – breeds an imagined idea of a ghetto (a closed space of social decay that is dangerous for outside visitors), the images of the ghetto interact back with the images of the Gypsy. For the last two decades the two concepts have been resonating and reinforcing each other in the Bulgarian imagination. The Ghetto is now not only the visible and different *mahala*: We have come to believe that all Gypsies across Bulgaria are immune against all manner of norms, laws and taxes. The word *Gypsification* was coined, meaning the appropriation of city space and its transformation into a ghetto severing it from the civilized and "normal" flesh of the city.<sup>5</sup>

Stolipinovo, a quarter situated in Plovdiv's East, is one of those places that have begun to take hold of the imagination since the start of Bulgaria's democratization in 1989. This process has been playing not only with the imagination of Bulgarian citizens and

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"Gypsies".

<sup>4</sup> Sliven is a notable example.

<sup>5</sup> For example, there's word of "Gypsification" in the area of the Women's Market in Sofia and, accordingly, of a "city's ulcer" and a "ghetto in Sofia's downtown".

institutions, but has steadily become a central attraction for donors, missionaries and foundations. The question of a “Gypsy minority” (later renamed “Roma”) suddenly became a topic. Bulgarian statesmen ratify and sign conventions whose primary goal is the protection of minorities living on Bulgarian territory – from the Framework Convention up to Bulgaria’s joining the Roma Decade. Stolipinovo is still being presented domestically and abroad (mainly in the EU) as the largest ethnic “ghetto” on the European continent. Thus it turns out that the political logic of Roma integration also assists in the processes of practical segregation.

However, it is exactly the neighbourhood of Stolipinovo that could challenge the two hard “facts” of our public knowledge – the ghetto and the Gypsy neighbourhood – as well as the sign of identity between the two. As soon as we try to get in touch with the quarter’s reality, all our ideas get so mixed up that we no longer know what language to use: Are we working in a Roma quarter? Are we resolving the “problems” of a segregated ghetto? In fact, are there any problems here, or are they outside – in the “normal” city with its power to segregate? This confusion warrants a great deal from the partners of Plovdiv 2019, but we think that it also has the potential to unclog the process of integration.

### **Heterogeneity, hybridity, informality**

Let us at last enter the “ghetto”, Stolipinovo, and be attentive. Not about our safety, but about the walls we are carrying in our minds, our pre-set ideas of what is happening here. Let us be attentive to these people whom we are gazing at but never seeing.

### **Heterogeneity**

The imposed image of a “ghetto” destroys the complex, heterogeneous and mixed character of daily life which exists here. Under heterogeneity, we must understand not only the cohabitation of different ethnic and religious identities (as is the case in Stolipinovo), but also of people who differ in their social status, cultural capital and economic situation. In media reports and online, they all are thought of as the same.

Once one begins to know Stolipinovo, it becomes a space that cannot be regarded as a unified whole. There are at once poor people and very poor people; there is a middle class, and there are the affluent; there is a majority that abides by the law, and there are drug dealers; there is patriarchal conservatism, and also the most open to LGBT people environment. All this diversity regulates itself almost without interference from institutions and sanctions (often the laws and formal rules rather violate it, throw it off-balance and are hostile to everyone). People in Stolipinovo have devised strategies for cohabitation that avoid serious conflicts. Because here rich and poor cannot stay isolated behind their walls rather, by necessity, they meet constantly, communicate, and reach compromises.

It turns out that instead of the “ghetto” threatening to destroy the cultured state of the Bulgarian environment, it is here that we can find many good practices which we could learn from. The word *ghetto*, however, obscures these long-established practices of negotiation and self-organisation of shared living by substituting them for images of arbitrary rule and naked violence.

People in Stolipinovo are well acquainted with how Bulgarians view them, and remonstrate against it. On numerous occasions random strangers have stopped us in the street to stress to us the full safety that a person from outside can enjoy here:

*The Bulgarians are very afraid, but it's safer here than it is downtown! After all, you've been here a while, have you not? Has anything happened to you? You can come here anytime and feel perfectly at home!*

To this, some people brought forward actual instances of verbal and even physical aggression which they had experienced while walking around the Bulgarian-dominated spaces. That aggression is one of the mechanisms that sustains the quarter's ghetto-like isolation. After all, its borders are porous: many people go to work outside the quarter; others roam the entire city daily in search of recyclable waste; young people go for walks in the neighbouring Trakia quarter. The city is neither isolated from Stolipinovo, nor is Stolipinovo an isolated container of backward people who know nothing of the world. Still, stronger are the connections with Germany, Belgium and France, to which there are regular taxi-van lines: "It's right here where the taxi to Hamburg stops". So when they see us in the street, people strike up conversations in French or German: "Wie geht's? Woher kommen Sie?"<sup>6</sup> In their experience, it's more natural to see people from Western Europe than from Plovdiv here.

### **Hybridity**

After heterogeneity, hybridity is the second concept that should replace that of the ghetto. In Stolipinovo nobody has the luxury to be fixed to a single place or identity, nor with a single way of living or profession. Everyone is half this and half that. A man can be a glassmaker and mattress maker, who used to work as a fitter. At the same time he could be from the Minority and a Bulgarian; he could love his country and feel unloved in it. He could dream simultaneously to emigrate and to return. Hybridity is the state of this neighbourhood: isolated and open, somewhat outside the law but actually closely linked to the municipal institutions and control. Council employees also face challenges in a "hybrid" manner – softening the rules, thereby alleviating life's hardships and at the same time continuing the isolation.

### **Informality**

In the average Bulgarian citizen's imagination, the informal is equivalent to the criminal and illegal; it is extremely immoral and in this sense must be absolutely prosecuted. Otherwise, the citizen -- who pays taxes, has a pension and uses health services, has the right to a work-free weekend and even paid leave -- feels deeply disadvantaged by the "Gypsy", who trades with his neighbours issuing no receipts. In fact, if we use these criteria nearly all our acquaintances in Stolipinovo should be classified as dodgers and criminals. For a number of reasons, the formal economy has no place for them – and in that sense, they are dismissed as unnecessary. Even those who have managed to overcome the barriers and to make all the compromises to incorporate themselves into a formal employee life work a multitude of jobs on the side to get an income that will allow them to survive. The difference in income levels between the people in Stolipinovo and those of the Majority are clearly visible. The income that the inhabitants in the quarter have even when they are formally employed most often falls far short of what's needed for basic living costs.

On the other hand, informal employment is not recognised as work (one that does not violate institutional regulations and publicly accepted rules). Both government statistics and the media tell us: there is 90% unemployment in Stolipinovo. If so, how do people there live and survive? To the rescue of this illogic comes the social benefits myth<sup>7</sup> (it is a myth that political players have imported directly from Western countries, where social benefits can really ensure a decent way of life, which is not the case in Bulgaria).

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<sup>6</sup> German for: "How are you doing? Where are you from?"

<sup>7</sup> The actual situation with social benefits is discussed in Grigorova, Vania. 2016. Poor vs. poor: use and abuse of the "lavish" social support myth". Sofia: Collective for public interventions.

Yet, the established outsider's perception for high unemployment and work-shyness does not mean that people in Stolipinovo are not gainfully employed; rather the contrary. We can see that innovative strategies are being employed in order to cope with the hardships that stigmatized Stolipinovo inhabitants face in a labour market which they have no access to. These strategies are, among others: dynamic entrepreneurship, flexibility and networking of resources. They indeed do this outside the institutions and legal contracts, but these are solutions that people are forced to adopt on a daily basis. They have proved to be a working part of daily life. What's more, people are self-organising; they devise *rules* and order with which to regulate their interactions. These are rules that differ from the formal laws and morals written out in a distant place, but are much more relevant to the actual problems that people here must deal with.

So, to avoid any further stigmatization of this type of economy, which aids the people of the Stolipinovo and which does not destroy the cohabitation of the community (unlike drug dealing, thefts and so on), but builds it up, we will use the term "informality" instead of the popularly accepted "grey economy" and "outside the law", or similar wording. This term entered the social sciences and economics in the 1970s<sup>8</sup> to emphasise the challenge institutions were facing in adapting to the actual problems populations faced (largely in the so-called Third World).

We have now reached the other stigma, which made us imagine some elemental, threatening non-civilisation: What happens in the Gypsy neighbourhood (the ghetto) is "chaotic", "indiscriminate", and "irrational". We open at random the first publication about Stolipinovo that we come across and begin reading that the authorities will undertake measures against "indiscriminate development". In fact, what looks disorganized and indiscriminate has got its own internal logic, which manages to sustain the relations between the people in the neighbourhood. The internal logic of the interactions between the members of the community, though incomprehensible to the outsider, has its own efficacy and creates its own mechanisms of mutual aid. In our work we try to understand and show the logic behind local actions. In this way we will bring back the "rationality" of the local population – the rationality that people have shown to us in our direct contacts. Paradoxically, to the locals, the brusque actions of the authorities are what is indiscriminate and incomprehensible, they are what pointlessly destroys what's been built with hard work amidst hardship.

The concepts of heterogeneity, hybridity and informality serve to help us go outside the habit of the descriptions firmly set in our minds, and go beyond the predilection for clear-cut causal models. The Stolipinovo reality is always beyond those things. It is invariably hybrid.

### **Hybridity of labour and incomes (a case study)**

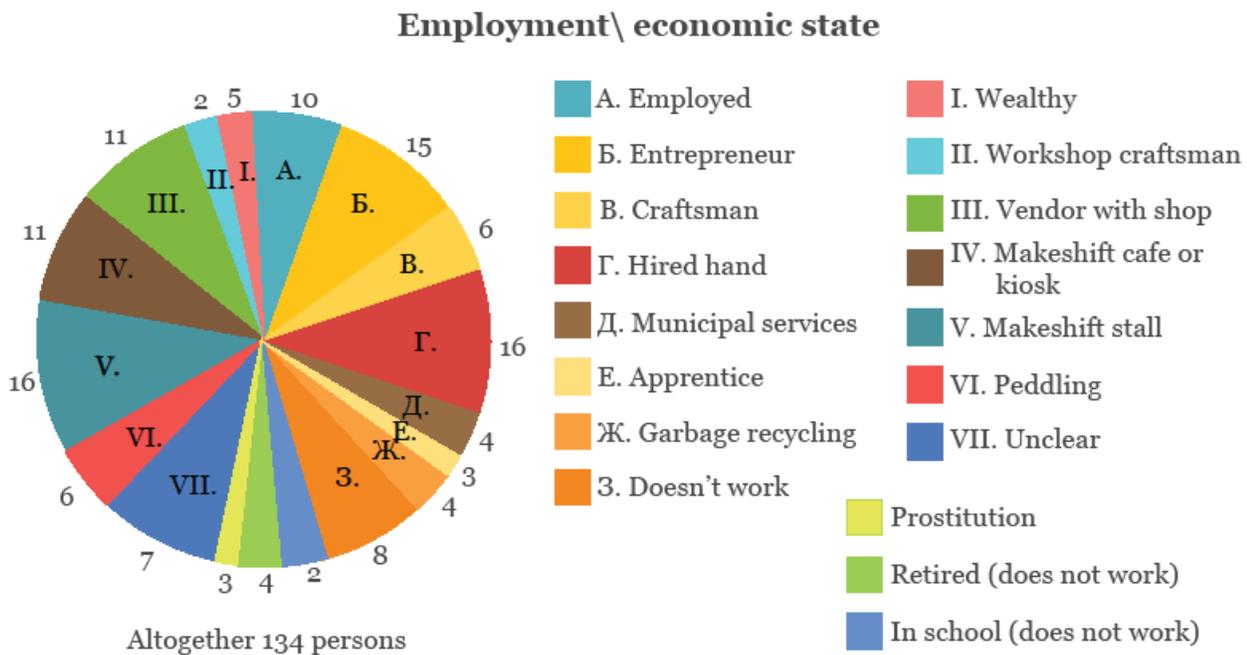
We will illustrate the impossibility to classify and put into a neat framework the reality of Stolipinovo by attempting to do this with the trades of the people we've met so far. Over the course of these months, we spoke with 134 people and wrote down the ways in which they earn the living of their families. Let us try to put this into a statistical overview. The first difficulty is to come up with the categories by which to distribute the 134 trades into a small number of groups that tell us something about the social status and stratification of the population in the quarter.<sup>9</sup> Considering the particularities of the "labour market" and the "business

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Hart, Keith. 1985. The informal economy. Cambridge Anthropology 10 (2):54-58.

<sup>9</sup> Since the case study is not representative, the summary covers only the ones we actually met.

niches” in the neighbourhood – that is, working with the most common employment there rather than on the formal labour market – we pieced together the categories shown in the figure below. The main types of employment are in retail; jobs outside the neighbourhood, highly insecure and typically for brief periods; and provision of very inventive form of service, for which, if the entrepreneurs had not been from the Minority but e.g. were founders of start-up businesses, one would have used the word *innovative*. So, we took these general employment types and subdivided them depending on how much success they’ve had. E.g. we have the categories Craftsman and Workshop Craftsman; the second one is a person who has reached the stage in which they can permanently employ several workers, whereas the first either works for himself or has apprentices whom he pays just by giving them food or occasional pocket money.



We did the classification in the legend by our own impressions of the status, income or desirability of the people here for the given type of work – it does not reflect the hierarchies that they build themselves, they would have been quite diverse. The first column shows the scale for the business and trades; the second column refers to the purely commercial ones.

In every production of statistics, creating a classification is problematic. In our case, it was the least of the challenges. It turned out here that the very attribution of a category for almost each person is highly questionable. Nearly everyone performs a host of work activities and falls into several categories at the same time. Additionally, the person would have switched his main trade several times over the last couple of years. The dire economic straits in the neighbourhood and the lack of access to the formal labour market result in a high level of *hybridity* of the trades and professions. In the course of a year, we were able to follow in real time the instability of our long-term acquaintances’ circumstances. For example, one man whom we knew as a small craftsman – *and simultaneously* as an even smaller entrepreneur in a different field – switched to being a hired hand, while in the moment he is

employed in a company. Yet, he by no means has a feeling of permanence in his current workplace and is always ready to switch to something else or go abroad.<sup>10</sup>

To be able to ascertain a single profession for the graph, we decided to use the main identities which were presented to us during our initial meetings (in the given example, an artisan). Some of the people we met when they were returning to Bulgaria for a month or two in the summer. We did not indicate the goings abroad and working abroad as it turned out that even people living abroad can be classified to the same categories (hired hand, employed, prostitution and so on).

If we add some detail to the categories, hybridity becomes even more apparent. “Employed” means stable long-term engagement by an employer (with or without a contract). We see it as one of the most sought-after statuses by the locals, as it gives them some income security. Still, it could include anything ranging from decent conditions of employment, such as those enjoyed by Bulgarians, to very low-paid heavy-load work and work that is unsafe or detrimental to the health. From this category we took out employment in “municipal services” companies (mostly street sweepers and garbage collectors) as this is the most common employment in the neighbourhood, which also has very clear-cut qualities – it is always formal employment, pays social security and pension contributions, but with pay that’s close to the minimum wage.

“Entrepreneur” encompasses all self-employed small businesses and services apart from the purely commercial and artisanal ones. Examples are DJ (with the relevant van-mounted equipment), taxi-van driver to France, or a self-thought waterworks and sewage specialist. Normally these are oriented towards customers within the neighbourhood. “Hired hand” relates to well-paid but short-term employment as a handyman outside of the neighbourhood, mostly as a painter, tiler, plasterer, and so on, including being available for hire to large construction companies (also just for several months while demand lasts at a construction site). “Garbage recycling” relates to jobs with the least prospects for prosperity. Here we put people who have found their livelihood as sole agents on the market – collecting recyclable materials around the city, which then they sell for recycling, or jobs at the poisonous processing of waste for a pittance.

The “Unemployed” category varies, but for us it usually means some sort of privilege – starting with people who have lost the job at the level they had been used to and who still have not accommodated to a job from a lower category. When asked “what do you do?” they respond that they are unemployed in the same way as would a Bulgarian. The category ranges from women put in the conservative role in which the husband fully provides for the family, to teenagers from relatively well-off families. Similarly privileged are the people in the categories “Retiree” and “At school”, which show that the respective person does not need to be exercising any economic activity (in Stolipinovo that does not go without saying). Note that among these 134 people the number of people aged 65 and older is twenty, whereas the number of people who we have classified as Retirees is four! Asked about their situation, they respond with “I am a retiree” unlike most other elderly people. The latter were all put down in some other category – mostly retail or scavenging waste bins around the city. In fact the number of working retirees is much greater due to the dire

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<sup>10</sup> Added December 2016: This person and his family now live in Germany. He is permanently employed. Added July 2018: After a year he came back from Germany with some money and twenty video games boxes. He was dreaming of opening his own game café but dreams were frustrated by the municipality starting to bulldoze businesses in this part of the neighbourhood. In the last half a year, we haven’t seen him.

state of health among people in this community: Many of our respondents aged 50-55 and above are disability retirees but continue to do piecemeal jobs to complement their meagre pensions or make up for the low wage earned by younger members of the family.

Let's move to the second column. The category "Affluent" – encompasses demonstrably wealthy residents whose success might stem from various origins. Usually they occupy a central place in the community due to the assistance they can afford to their neighbours and the various dependencies they thus build over time. Some of them formalize their clout by running for council members from Stolipinovo; others act in a more traditional register of respect and esteem.

We subdivided by our own opinion those engaged with commerce. First are the traders who have the resources to build or rent a good-looking shop at a selected by them location in the neighbourhood. Some of them even manage to do so well as to employ shop assistants. The next category – retailing in front of one's home, a fixture for Stolipinovo, has much more modest ambitions. Most often these are metal booths (produced by blacksmiths in the neighbourhood) or small shops attached to a house or the so-called cafes. Those who are of really meagre means set up a stall on the street, just in front of their home. Walking traders have, it seems to us, the least resources: they line their goods on a sheet on the street or walk the neighbourhood with a stroller filled with bananas or a bag with buns of home-made rice pudding and so on, which they sell for a pittance.

As "Unspecified" we have classified the interlocutors whose income is generated in ways that are so varied and temporally unstable that we either had difficulties adopting a specific category or were unsure whether to class them as "Unemployed". Also we included several people whose activities tend to ones that are clearly persecuted by the police (otherwise, nearly everything listed so far is, formally, "illegal"). These are too few to make a separate category save one: Those who deal in prostitution – either sex workers or pimps.

### **Name and identity**

The next realm of our prejudice that Stolipinovo is quick to confuse is the idea of "Roma quarters" / "Gypsy neighbourhoods". Roughly, one-fifth or one-sixth of the neighbourhood is inhabited by the so-called burgudzhii, or "blacksmith Gypsies", who would say they are "Gypsies". Outside this section of the neighbourhood people would say about themselves: "I am Turkish", or: "The Roma are over there, they start from that apartment block over there. They are Christians. We are Turkish and Muslim", or: "Here we speak Turkish, not Gypsy. Do you understand? When people from Turkey come here, we can talk to them, help them out with this or that. Those there, they wouldn't be able to do this, as they do not speak Turkish". But for an outside person it would be difficult to shake off the idea of Stolipinovo as a "Roma quarter". The reason is that, as discussed, "ghetto" and "Gypsy neighbourhood" relate to one another. But how is it possible for Turks to live in the "Gypsy neighbourhood"?

### **Naïve theories of ethnicity change**

To explain this, we could take several different ways. Most Bulgarians would say: "These are not Turks, they just pass themselves off as Turks. They study Turkish from satellite TV". They would even find confirmation that this is the reason for so many satellite dishes there.<sup>11</sup> Bulgarians would continue with the following arguments: "*Obviously*, their houses look as if they are

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<sup>11</sup> Once satellite dishes became ubiquitous in the Gypsy/Roma neighbourhoods, they, despite their technological currency, acquired a negative quality similar to that of the horse-drawn cart. Even today, when satellite dishes are a standard feature on

Gypsy, obviously they live in a *Gypsy quarter*. It follows that they *are* Gypsies. Turkish Gypsies” (Or even “Turkish-leaning Gypsies”). In this claim the citizen could rely even on ethnological studies. The category “Turkish Gypsies” was legitimized by setting it as a subsuming reference to other group constructions which ethnologists have collected from local communities: *millet*, *yerlii* and others.

The need for classification seems to be of fundamental significance for Bulgarian ethnologists and social scientists, and this issue became a subject of intensive study from the very start of the Democratic Transition Period. Many researchers were searching for a theoretical method for unifying the break up they were detecting between “Gypsy/Roma communities” across Bulgaria. In the majority of cases, though, this type of classification is an abstraction that can rarely be applied in practice: people whom these categories try to represent rarely identify with them. Rather, the categories exist as academic shorthands, and mostly due to the inner drive towards academic aesthetics, which seeks order and clearly defined boundaries. What’s more, this is an aesthetic which is originally rooted in popular ideas (“Turkish Gypsies”). It is a theorising that started off from these popular ideas, and, naturally, as a result, affirms them. Even the very effort to unite in one ethnic group a set of disparate groups, which may have different languages, religions, ways of life – sedentary or nomadic – and with no common name for themselves is based on this preconception of the Majority for “the Gypsies/Roma”. It is the category in which outsiders have historically forced all those groups, based on their similar social status in the wider society.

So, a possible approach is to say: “we know the truth: ‘they’ are Gypsies/Roma, but they have an interest in tricking us”. Obviously, this is not a strategy that contributes to a dialogue with the people in Stolipinovo. It works only for defending, the established convictions, the idea of the “ghetto” and, as a result, works to perpetuate the segregation of the neighbourhood.

A second approach for tackling the discrepancy between the externally prescribed and the internally defended identities of the Plovdiv minority population comes from the contemporary anthropological theories for the dynamics of ethnic identity.<sup>12</sup> If we use these theories to construct a model of the historical development of the community, and then translate it into popular parlance, the model should look something like this: In the 15th century a Gypsy population settled in Plovdiv (we have information about this in the registers of the then Turkish census). Since in both the traditional and contemporary ethnic relations Gypsies are invariably put on the lowest most disdained social rung, the members of such a community had a strong motivation in time to flow (sometimes individually, family by family, sometimes as a cultural strategy of the local group) into a less stigmatized identity. The most suitable way for the Muslim Gypsies would have been to switch over to the Turk ethnicity. For the Christian Gypsies who did not become Muslims, only recently an opportunity opened for acquiring a more respected, Western-imported identity: Roma. Note that the acquiring of an identity makes an “authentic” identity; it is not “posturing” lasting for centuries.

This is a soothing for the Bulgarian, though methodologically naive model: We have a Gypsy neighbourhood whose inhabitants have “Turkicized” in some, nearer or more distant age. Then everything is clear! And since, as good Bulgarians, we insist on the “historical truth” and “justice”, we know that deep down they are, “after all, Gypsies”.

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Bulgarian streets – and thus became something “normal” – there are “too many dishes” in the Gypsy neighbourhood.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Wimmer, Andreas. 2008. The making and unmaking of ethnic boundaries: A multilevel process theory. *American Journal of Sociology* 113 (4):970-1022.

This however is again not a particularly practical attitude when we are actually communicating and building trust with members of this community. It would mean that in this discussion we *pretend* that we agree to the truth of the person about him- or herself, but we are also being disingenuous, because we know that he or she has a “false idea” of his or her origin. On the other hand, if we are methodologically correct in employing the ethno-dynamic theories, the question of choosing between exclusive alternatives loses its meaning. Let us now go deeper into this model.

### **Understanding the ethno-dynamic theory**

The Turks in Stolipinovo are the descendants of an old Plovdiv Muslim population of neighbourhoods which nowadays are located in the city’s downtown. In the early 20th century the municipal authorities gave these people land in a hamlet in the city’s periphery. This population continued to be connected with the inner neighbourhood (Hadji Hasan Mahala), but in time families from other parts of the city, and also from elsewhere, flocked to Stolipinovo.

According to the ethno-dynamic theory, if in 15-century Plovdiv a group was distinguished under the label “Gypsies”, then in the centuries that followed each Ottoman Turk who failed to sustain the way of life required of a Turk and was not positively evaluated in his own ethnic group (e.g. to have his own family home, professional vocation and so on) had the opportunity to assimilate into the ‘Gypsy’ group. To make this more clear, we can compare some of today’s homeless and alcoholics, who pose difficulties before middle-class Bulgarians as to how to define them in ethnic terms: We are not certain whether they are “too down and out” Bulgarians or “outright” Gypsies (the latter solution automatically “normalizes” the situation: The Gypsy has this social niche for himself, and there is no more need for asking questions about this man’s past; also, he does not bring forth any sympathy or pain).<sup>13</sup> When Bulgarian society turns these people away, they can find an environment for communication and acceptance in this social niche.<sup>14</sup> This way, the ethnic boundary has been crossed downwards. This is a more extreme example of de-classification than the one during the 16th and 17th centuries. At that time the Gypsy group was a settled one and also had its own economic niche of vocations and crafts.

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<sup>13</sup> What’s important here is not that they have lived in poverty for a long time, but not to demonstrate the social markers that distinguish them from “Bulgarian”, mostly education, volubility, restraint, proper conduct and pronunciation. Many homeless people have higher education or have lived in settled Bulgarian environment for a sufficient amount of time for them to develop the requisite markers.

<sup>14</sup> There are also mixing environments that work like the U.S. melting pot Museum of Sofia’s History (the former model. For example, Sofia’s Women’s Market or the plaza in front of the Central Public Baths, where a varied group of poor people tends to gather and an outside observer would find it hard to mete out ethnic judgement. At such places, ethnic barriers break down -- for example, often people would have learned each other’s language equally well. The peddler at the market, who you’ve always thought was Bulgarian due to his confidence and correct pronunciation, would turn and exchange a few words in Gypsy with another passing peddler. Another man, a tradesman with his own shop who, partly because of his looks but mostly because of his life’s story (he used to be a construction worker and way back during the socialist period started going about flea markets to sell stuff before settling at the market here), you would judge to be from some minority would start swearing with a Bulgarian feeling of ownership that today the market had gotten full of Gypsies and that enough is enough already.

Conversely, the boundary was crossed upwards by those who managed to go up in life and acquire certain privileges and social markers that allowed them to cope with the entrance barriers which the more prestigious group set before them. They would still be looked down upon but if not them or their children, then their grandchildren would blend and belong to the new group. An example for this today is the “well-integrated Roma”, whom we in fact cannot even identify as a Roma if he or she happens to speak without any accent, has a job and a regular income and, most important, has changed his place of residence and moved out of the “ghetto”.<sup>15</sup> The grand complaint expressed by the “integration-minded”

The Bulgarian intellectuals who like to be “integrating the Roma” insistently bemoan that those rare individuals that are “educated and intelligent Gypsies” sever all connections with their community instead of returning to it to serve as examples and teachers to their brethren. What they complain about is in fact a classic process which all non-prestigious ethnicities undergo throughout history. The porosity of boundaries for individual families described here guarantees that the Gypsy ethnicity in the city, both during the Ottoman rule and in the 20th century, contains predominantly the families which used to live in deepest misery. In other words, the concept of “Gypsy” is rather a social category than one based on “blood heritage”.

### **Other illustrations for the inter-ethnic flow**

Here we’ll make a brief detour, to better explain the ethno-dynamic theory. The processes described are universal and relate to all ethnic groups living in mixed societies. Therefore they also relate to the “Bulgarians” in pre-national times and the respective prestigious ethnic groups with which they had more porous boundaries. The so-called Grecomans were precisely the first two or three generations (whose origin is still identifiable) of the Bulgarian families who had managed to attain the social markers of the Philippopolis-residing Greeks: with a profitable commercial business, good command of the Greek language, Greek manners and upbringing; a big house of the Three-Hill area; education for the children by a Greek tutor; intimate knowledge of Greek history and national pride. This process was not particular for the Revival Period; on the contrary, it was then when it became an issue and was given a critical name: Greco-mania. But the same constant flow in the three centuries prior had been a guarantee that in Plovdiv the affluent Christian citizen was Greek regardless of whether they emerged from Bulgarian immigrants to the city who had a good economic fortune.<sup>16</sup>

Conversely, when in the 20th century the Bulgarian nationality in Plovdiv acquired greater prestige than the Greek, many Plovdiv families who also spoke good Bulgarian, removed the telltale “oglu” from their surnames, explaining it in the “erstwhile fashion” that their grandfathers had passed themselves off as Greeks. However, they still continued to write postcards in Greek to their cousins in Athens (just take a look at the family archives. Nikola found one such postcard at a great-grandmother’s of his). A study has carefully explored the transformations of Greek identity in a small town on the Bulgarian South Coast.<sup>17</sup> It was nearly extinct

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<sup>15</sup> For examples, cf. Nikolay Tilkidzhiev (ed.), *The Successful Roma*. Iztok Zapad 2011. (in Bulgarian)

<sup>16</sup> For a perfect illustration of this dynamic of identities in Revival Period Krushevo and its sudden problematization in the times of the Internal Macedonian-Edirne Revolutionary Organisation (VMORO), cf. Brown, K. 2003, *The past in question: Modern Macedonia and the Uncertainties of Nation*, Princeton University Press, c. 79-103.

<sup>17</sup> Agelopoulos, G. 2007, 'The Coca-Cola Kashkaval Network: Belonging and Business in the Postsocialist Balkans', *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, Nr 25, №. 1, pp. 42-52.

through the 20th century, enjoyed a quick revival in the 1990s thanks to the economic advantage that connections with Greece and Greek-residing relatives carried in the times of crisis. The study reveals also the conclusion that those relatives in Greece make after visits were paid – that their cousins who remained in Bulgaria are today practically Bulgarians.

The boundary is sustained through time by the need to protect the group from the less prestigious. Even if you yourself have just crossed over from such a group, this is exactly the mandatory moment for you to replicate the negative stereotypes towards your fellow brothers of origin so that you obliterate your own personal story and preclude any suspicions as to your belonging and loyalty to the new group. This relates also to the downward social mobility, in which the adoption of the new identity is a way of avoiding the shame and sense of failure that your social living conditions would cause by the measures of the old identity.

The processes described thus far – of protecting and crossing over mainly as a means for acquiring a more privileged social status in the ethno-social hierarchy – is easy to understand for locals of Stolipinovo:

*Everybody says: “we’re bad”, “[we are] Gypsies” ... We are not Gypsies! There are Gypsies [that is, groups with actual Gypsy identity], there are also Turks...*

*Who used to rule here for 500 years? Turkey! Right? That is why we cannot say that we are all Gypsies, or all are Bulgarians! Because it can well have been that once the great-grandmother of your great-grandmother was with a Turk! Right?*

*Look, are we Bulgarians, are we Gypsies, are we Turks – all the same everyone says: “they’re bad, this and that”.*

Here “they’re bad” is precisely the boundary sustained on the part of the prestigious Bulgarian ethnicity; the boundary marks a lack of prestige and defines the Gypsy ethnicity. Our interlocutor protests at once the substitution of his authentic identity and the hierarchy sustained by representatives of the prestigious ethnicity.

In conclusion, we could have the understanding that according to the ethno-dynamic theory, there was a constant flow in both directions already since the first settlement along the ethnic boundary in the 15th century. When the Turkish elite and wealthy citizens left after 1885, the merging intensified among the remaining poorer people, and gradually the internal boundary fell. Several generations in, it is difficult to tell apart people of Gypsy origin from Turkish origin and to think of a process of “artificial” Turkisation of a “Gypsy substrate” of sorts.

### **Socio-ecological niches**

So if we insist on describing the person whom we meet today in Stolipinovo as a Gypsy/Roma just because he is a resident of a “ghetto”, we *surely have no more reasons* for this than he does when he describes himself as a Turk. As earlier, the solution now is to *abandon the strictly classificatory thinking that seeks absolute genealogies* and to substitute it with an attitude to a hybrid world in which identity is never definite but depends on the situations and relations in which a person finds himself. It is an identity which is constantly shaken from outside and affirmed through various practices from the inside.

If, going through generations, families gradually flow through ethnic boundaries by adopting the way of life of their new communities, it turns out that identity is rather a social and ecological category – it has more to do with a particular way of life (which accompanies some social status) than something inherited from the “forefathers”.<sup>18</sup> And this is precisely the reaction of the

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<sup>18</sup> Cultural forms and social organisation are being inherited, but they are not properly “ethnic”, rather have to do with social

majority today: it insists on keeping the identity categories rooted in the ways of living. Families which, by some social markers, resemble what we recognize as life in a ghetto/Gypsy neighbourhood cannot be anything different from Gypsies/Roma. This fixing holds, however, some populations in the social niche determined by various heritage(s) but also by external restrictions: the niche of people who are “uneducated”, “unintegrated”, do not speak correct Bulgarian, who do not own a formally built home, who are not bound by the law or any regulations, who ply trades that earn them the lowest pay and the worst work conditions and so forth.

If someone from outside detects some of these markers, he would insist on calling his interlocutor Roma/Gypsy, thus pasting on him the remaining markers and foreordaining his place in the social structure. The outside person refuses to accept the right of the other to be Turkish, because he feels that this will violate “the truthful” social structure. He refuses also to accept that person’s right to be a Bulgarian – a civil identity on which Stolipinovo residents also insist.<sup>19</sup> The outside person experiences such claims as an attack against the “truth”.

Our own team went through this in the early stages of our work. While still clinging to our preconceptions of what the Roma behaviour, speech, body resemble it was the poorer and less educated residents of the neighbourhood who seemed to us as “Roma who pass themselves off as Turks”. When we came across a person with greater social capital outside the neighbourhood and, accordingly, with richer cultural capital – for example, one who would knowledgeably discuss with us the developments in the national or the city politics and who would express himself in a more sophisticated Bulgarian – we were promptly ready to believe him when he would tell us he was a “Plovdiv Turk”.<sup>20</sup> As a consequence, the division we were sticking to was directed by our unconscious drive to reaffirm our preconceptions and to imagine those uneducated as “Gypsies”.

### **The role of well-meaning outsiders**

It is important that we understand and recognize that our resistance to agreeing with what the person in front of us thinks of his

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positions. What’s being sustained here is the ethnic boundary, not the concrete content being divided by it.

<sup>19</sup> It turns out that the man from the minority is much better in working with the division between cultural-ethnic and national-civic identity. An elderly Turkish man expressed in a quite expressive manner his desire for an equitable participation in the Bulgarian civic nation: *Let me tell you something! Some say: “Your guys”! Just hold on a second! We live in Bulgaria! There’s no such thing as my guys, your guys! We’re together, for goodness sake! Are we Bulgarian citizens, or what? We’re not from ...ehey – anasun amundan! We were born here after all! My father, my grandfather, my grand-grand... – we were born here, there’s no such a thing as our people, your people. I know Bulgarian, I’ll sit with this prosecutor or judge, I’ll be speaking with him like, ... he won’t be speaking Bulgarian nicer than me. Because I was born here, in Bulgaria, I must know how to speak Bulgarian! – a pensioner from Stolipinovo who scavenges waste from around Plovdiv’s waste disposal containers.*

<sup>20</sup> In the course of our conversations, we would learn that some of them had uncles, cousins and other relatives who joined in the 1950s and ‘60s to migrations of the Turkish minority to Turkey. They settled from Istanbul all the way to Adana.

own identity<sup>21</sup> is not the result of some more direct access on our part to historic truth, but is due to our own self-interest. That is I have the motivation to think him as Roma because I want to protect and affirm the equivalence of Roma neighbourhood and ghetto, an equivalence I've always believed in. It sustains my idea of how the world operates – in particular, the idea of the hierarchies in Bulgarian society, which I instinctively refuse to challenge.

Or suppose I come from abroad with my plan to make a project or write a report about the Roma and the difficulties they are facing. I am in a dilemma what I am to do with these Turkish people I find there. I need the problems with the Roma integration! Ok, I respect the fact that they are Turkish, but everyone here has referred them to me as Roma, and it is Roma that I get funding for. Also, their problems seem quite “Romani” to me – discrimination, poor access to jobs, education, etc. At the end, in my report I will still write about the Roma integration in Stolipinovo, mentioning that they self-identify as Turks.<sup>22</sup> It is in such an innocent way that the well-meaning activists and artists join the cycle of imposing a stigmatising identity on the locals. Plovdiv 2019 should be aware this would be an urge most of their partners will face – and are bound to tackle inadequately. This carries the risk of distancing the community from the entire programme.

The projects and programmes for integration, international donors and so on thus also contribute to the imposition of an outside identity that the locals do not necessarily recognize. This concerns not just Stolipinovo but all marginalized groups across Bulgaria. Defining “the Roma minority” as a target group for special measures sustains the same principle, which we have been discussing, of ascribing an ethnic identity *based on social status markers*. As Roma are labelled the communities that the Bulgarian society segregates and those that have developed certain forms of adaptation for coping (or failing to cope) with economic hardships. To avail themselves of the donor programmes, the locals need to agree to a redefinition of their identity. This in Stolipinovo triggers a string of internal conflicts. While Gypsy-speaking burgudzhii have adopted their identification as Roma and use it to get access to all kinds of support and initiatives, the Turkish reject the interference of organisations which consider them excluded for being “Roma”. The locals with Turkish identity in Stolipinovo often see these organisations as simply trying to take advantage of them in an effort to get and appropriate international funding.

### **The local's multiple identity**

The residents of Stolipinovo themselves are not free from the tensions of the divergent identity. Contrary to our abstract puzzlement of how to think of them, they are faced with that cognitive conflict in a sense that's much more direct and painful. The immediate world of their everyday life in the quarter imposes the Turkish identity on them. But every meeting with Bulgarians, Bulgarian media, institutions, each sojourn to the city's Bulgarian spaces imposes on them the identity of Gypsies or Roma, including all the accompanying negative images.<sup>23</sup> This is one of the reasons for the community's self-encapsulation in the

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<sup>21</sup> Incidentally, this resistance is no less intense when he or she is in front of us body and soul rather than when we read about him or her in a text such as the current one

<sup>22</sup> This example comes from an actual situation with one international partner of the Plovdiv 2019 Foundation.

<sup>23</sup> And quite often this happens in a most aggressive and ugly manner. Here is not the place for recounting the multiple stories we hear. We will only give one of them, told by the elderly pensioner from Stolipinovo who scavenges the waste containers. He told us that he had particular areas in the city where it is “safe” for him. Otherwise: “There are these drug addicts there, these bastards,

neighbourhood. It occurs often enough to impose these images also as significant self-conceptions. This way it turns out that also the local people live in a paradoxical hybridity of identity: they live in the constant tension between the pride of their local history, their belonging to the Muslim religion and traditions, and the public identity of a population that has no history, dignity, skills or values – “like the Gypsies”.

For this reason, despite their energetic and emotional protests when (early on) we made involuntary mistakes to ask after “Gypsy weddings” or anything “about the Roma”, they sometimes used the word “Gypsy/Gypsies” when they were telling us about themselves or about Stolipinovo. We also felt that there is a shared identity with the Gypsies across the country. It was visible in responses, such as:

*And why is that that you chose to work on the Minority? – Because I am mad at how you are always the worst... – Yes! Why the newspaper [always] says [e.g.] ‘Three Gypsies raped someone in a village’, eh!? I searched online and found: Neither of those three was Gypsy!’).*

But on closer inspection it turns out that the word Gypsies is used *always* when they talk about themselves with respect to a perspective or relations imposed by “the Bulgarians”, the Bulgarian institutions or media. A perspective that’s most often experienced as violence on part of the Bulgarians – in the same manner that the Bulgarians regard the Gypsies’ self-renaming to “Turks” as violence on truth. But in this case it is a daily experienced, already accepted violence: “All right then, we are like that”. More than that, when they say: “We the Stolipinovo Gypsies”, they are in fact stating: “Yes, we are indeed trapped in this social niche of impossibility. Indeed, we have the problems that the entire Bulgarian society thrusts on those it calls ‘Gypsies/Roma’”.

Hybridity and contradiction between categories accompany the Stolipinovo residents at all levels. We think that the way forward is not in searching for a “solution” – in the intellectual cutting up of the contradictions through theorizing clear boundaries and groupings of some sorts, through concealment behind constructs of knowledge – but in making these contradictions both visible and accepted in the entirety of their complexity and interrelations. In practice, when we are doing fieldwork, we must respect the truths of the people we are in contact with and make every effort to show the public their justifiable reasons for those truths. The Turkish in Stolipinovo know that they are also Gypsies – they know they have been made this from without. They also know that they are Bulgarians. And that they have the right to be that, despite the fact that they are being denied it.<sup>24</sup>

## Conclusion

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there are children who throw stones and swear... I pay no attention to them. But for a grown man – one above 40 or 50, to be swearing at me – I am not going to allow that. These kids, these schoolkids, you can forget them. You would step down from your bike, and shout: Now I’m going to beat you up! And they would run away. But if someone who is grown up and insulting me, this and that – I won’t tolerate that! And also to say to me “Gypsy”! I don’t know a word of Gypsy! And he should call me Gypsy.” At this point the old man’s son-in-law chimed in: “It’s not the matter that he would call him ‘Gypsy’ or something else. His ultimate goal is, by calling him this name, to insult him and humiliate him.”

<sup>24</sup> “Well! I have been to the UK! And France too! You won’t hear anybody there calling you what you are [what you are supposed to be]. But here, once you’ve crossed the border, they start right away with: “Fuck you, Gypsy!” – a middle aged artisan.

Stolipinovo cannot and should not be thought of through popular terms such as “ghetto” and “Gypsy quarter”. Our work in the quarter has shown a different picture than the apocalyptic one we can see in media reports. The latter neither is true nor helps for a positive form of political action. Instead, a step forward would be the attentive acquaintance with the perspectives of the local people.

Here we started with the names and categories we use uncritically for describing the world. Each naming that originates at a site of authority can affect the relations between the naming majority and the minority being “explained”, thus prompting the latter’s encapsulation. This concerns also the results of the work of the current team. That is why we need to be extra careful with the terms we choose to employ. We will use and respect the internal perspectives of the local people of their own identity.

What’s needed is a transition from the external framework of reception of the people in Stolipinovo – a framework that strives to homogenize and lay down clear-cut causal relations and black-and-white categories – to those based on internal perspectives which function in a highly heterogeneous, hybrid and informal environment.

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### **Family Relations**

BY NIKOLA VENKOV AND GENIKA BAYCHEVA

#### **“My mother-in-law turned out to be a good woman”**

The woman in whose house new generations (her children’s families) begin to live has a role of considerable significance and commands great respect. Often she is the husband’s mother, but there can be other possibilities: the wife’s mother, a mother, and so on. She is who takes care of one or many daughters-in-law and grandchildren. Often she provides economic support to the young families – or at least she provides the space and the household setting. In Stolipinovo young families rarely have the economic opportunity to move into a home of their own, but it is also not really a sought after goal. Rather, it is desirable that young families be near their parents, under their care and control. What is valued is for the family to stay together and share everything, as well as to guarantee that the young won’t go down the wrong path. Even when the young and the old live separately, the mother-in-law sees to it that she’s around and watches what the young are up to.

All this has to do with the mother-in-law’s most critical responsibility: She must train the young girl to behave in a way that does not embarrass her new relatives, to take proper care of her family, to raise the grandchildren in the right manner. Often the daughter-in-law spends more time with her mother-in-law than with her husband. Due to the girls’ tender age, the mother-in-law often takes the role of a second mother, though clear-cut rules and norms of behaviour apply.

We are talking with Albena, a friend of ours (middle aged, permanently employed), who has a new daughter-in-law, the wife of her younger son:

*I do not know her yet. For now she listens to what I say. She is quite young, she’s 16, a child. I tell her parents: “But what for a while! Let the young grow a little; we’re nowhere to go anyway”. But they are giving her to us. Well, if they are giving her, I can do nothing but take her in and watch over her.*

I ask her if her daughters-in-law obey her, if they take care of the house and help.

*Yes, they are helping out. They cook, they do what I tell them to do.*

When multiple generations live in one house, the mother-in-law is the head, the chief woman, who assigns tasks and the one whom the rest of the women obey.

We've heard stories about bad mothers-in-law. This is something that's very hard for the girl who's come to live to other people's house, and is in somebody else's control, and a hostile one. Then we see that her connection to her own family is not severed, just like in the classic Bulgarian novels. The love of the mother remains strong. Albena continues:

*I had a really hard time with my own mother-in-law. She thrust us all, the entire family, into a small room; she never gave me even a pan. I gave her all the money I received as child benefits, while she gave us nothing. She was really bad.*

*"How did you manage?", I ask.*

*My mother came over [from the other neighbourhood]. When she saw the state we were in, she became very sad. She gave me money. And so she started coming over. She was the only one to help me. Whereas my mother-in-law would take everything from us.*

*That is why, now I do not want to meddle into my daughters-in-law business. I want to give them everything, to have a second floor erected on the house – so that everyone has his own space and be well.*

Another friend of ours chimed in: *Well, my mother-in-law was very good. It was the reverse with us: I used to take all her money. I'd tell her: "Give me something to buy this and that..." But she loved me very much...*

Here we can see also the significance of what it means for the family to live under the same roof, in a limited space. The people who live in a house and have the money (having a place of your own is one of the most important goals for accumulating savings), would build a new room, in which the young family could live in certain circumstances for being on their own. Building a whole new floor to a house is an investment in the future, when the other sons or brothers get married. Sometimes people can start building a new house where the old one used to be – like the Bulgarians do. But you need to have saved enough to undertake this. Recently we saw a house like that, to which they had managed to get as far as the concrete floor of the second floor. It was at a place where we remembered a small cottage with a small yard in one of the neighbourhood's narrow streets. Seeing us examining the house, the neighbour approached us and said:

*It's a big house! They started it just recently. Everything is legal! The neighbours live abroad, a young boy with his family.*

Now they had returned with lots of money and had started building.

*Everything is legal. The house's foundations go a whole metre. That was the most expensive: pouring concrete for the foundation. Four rooms on this floor, and probably four on the second floor. And there you go!*

That's how he described to us, with some exhilaration, his neighbour's success and the space which that guy will have and which will help him solve all his potential future problems. Our interlocutor, Dancho (middle aged, owns a stall in front of his house), used to be a builder before being pensioned off due to a disability. He insisted on emphasizing how well the concrete had been poured into the foundations and how much money it had costed the boy. Despite the impression the building had produced, it seemed that, in order to complete the house, one more year had to be spent saving money in Germany: They had gone and had left

the construction just like that – at the level of concrete, bricks and construction supports.

I noticed in the above conversation with Albena that young women do not have their own money. Even the money they earn are given away. The money is at the discretion of the mother-in-law, not even the husband. Hers is the decision whether to leave the young something, and they do not protest. Sometimes it is the mother-in-law that provides a considerable financial support to the family. In addition to the massive expenses such as for a wedding or for a new-born child, in many cases it is she who maintains the young family and/or the children. When Albena started telling us about her family, she began by telling how many diapers she buys, how the daughters-in-law want her to buy this or that. She felt like an A.T.M. for them (her comparison).

She mentions that this is the reason that women have stopped giving birth to so many children – because child-bearing is linked to spending, and child benefits are no longer what they used to be. I wonder if there aren't other reasons – whether women no longer want to be tied down to the eternal rearing of children and whether families have started considering how they are supposed to raise their offspring – but I forgot to ask her that.

In any case, it appears that the tendency during the economic crisis is the same as for the Bulgarians, who, instead of two or three children in earlier times, started giving birth to a single child, and quite late, in their 30s, very rarely two children. The standard number in Stolipinovo now is two or three children. We even heard about mothers who make an abortion because they think they've had enough children. In fact it seems abortions are now quite widespread, but can cause a row in the family because of the wish of someone of the important relatives to keep the child. The birth-giving age has been rising too as a result of a conscious decision, despite the early marriages:

*Also the previous daughter-in-law came to us very young, but they were careful and she gave birth after four years. Now I'm telling also my smaller son [and his wife] not to hurry.*

A father tells us they weren't thinking about a new child: "in five or six years. Now I want it to go to school, to learn things and that I give him something".

I remember how Simeon (young, craftsman) was making fun of his friend and classmate that he had become a grandfather at 30. This was banter, but it showed that although there are still people who bear children at a young age, this is now regarded as somewhat unwise. This taunt was made also in the context that now all these mouths (a son-in-law and a grandchild!) cause Simeon too many troubles in feeding them, which is why he is poor and always on the brink of starvation. Incidentally this family is an example that the bride does not necessarily go to a new family. I think that, especially among craftsmen and masters, sons-in-law are a precious resource as they become apprentices in the workshops and are a helping hand, and don't need to be paid – perhaps they get part of the profit, if there's one at all.

Household chores – cleaning, cooking, childcare – are entirely in the hands of women. They tells us that, if left to themselves, their husbands "cannot fry a couple of eggs".

But the mother-in-law who is responsible for taking care of the family problems, the money management and so on is spared these tasks, which are transferred onto the daughters-in-law.

It's curious that the same model repeats itself in families in which there is no men or in which all the women except the youngest are at work. The mother (middle aged, permanently employed) takes responsibility and tells the rest what they should do. The

elder daughters (young, permanently employed) are responsible for the cleaning and the cooking, despite the fact that they, too, go to work. For example, they cook the food which the youngest, Petya (teenager, goes to school), then takes her mother in the shop where she works. The elder daughters used to be married but have lost their husbands for various reasons and have returned to the home of their mother.

Petya has serious responsibilities about the raising of her sister's young child, and often these responsibilities are assigned by her mother. I remember that one time when she had forgotten to pick up the child from the kindergarten, it was her own mother, not the child's mother, who gave her hell on the phone. Similarly, the raising of Petya had been the responsibility of her elder sisters, rather than her mother's.

The older woman is tasked with the responsibility for all the others, and that is expected from relatives and neighbours – the public opinion in the quarter. The family, on the other hand, is expected to obey everything she says. Gyurgena (middle aged, retiree) says that her “children” (this code word for sons, daughters, daughters-in-law and grandchildren is quite telling) “are lost without me”. Despite her illness, now, at the tearing down of the house, she is reluctant to be hospitalized for fear of leaving them to themselves and “so people later would not have cause to speak ill of me, that it's all my fault, that I had left them in the lurch”. Even in such a critical moment, it is people's opinion that is of importance. Gyurgena does not work, her husband is who works and earns money, but it is easily visible that her position in the family hierarchy is very high and that her decision making is on par with that of her husband. She is universally respected and makes decisions about the life of the family, has the money that she gives the children when they ask for something. In any case, the young listen not only because they rely on the mother-in-law to help them when the going gets tough and not only because of ingrained respect to the family and the elderly – with whom you should never quarrel – but also because of the opinion of everyone around, the too palpable public gaze.

### **Man, woman and economy**

Here almost everyone believes that a woman's place is at home. She takes care of everything around the house, the children, the relations with the neighbours. She more or less has no right to be away from home and the relatives, to go somewhere on her own. On the other hand, the man is away for nearly the entire day – he goes to work, goes around seeking for a job, or visits friends.

The man should be the one to earn the family's living. But because of unemployment and poverty for many people in the quarter, this role has changed somewhat. When I asked the wife of Petar (young, craftsman) whether his wife is worried about the day in which her husband did not receive any orders and had no money for food, he answered for her:

*I do not let my wife think this way. If I were to loiter at home and we have no food as a result of this, that's a different matter.*

Then he put an emphasis:

*“When I am trying to find money – that is not “there's nothing”. While I'm outside, I am trying to scrape off something. And I will! There's no chance I leave this child hungry!”,* pointing to his 3- or 4-year-old boy beside him.

Petar, like many craftsmen who work for the people in the quarter, sells his services very cheaply. Also he doesn't have many clients. He is often on the brink of survival and needs to take up all manner of other ideas in order to earn something. That is why the word “scrape off something” is quite apt. He told me that here, in the *mahala*, it is very important that you meet many people, that you exchange a word or two, because this is how you can get wind of some new job that needs to be done, or of some need for

which you could offer your services, or some entrepreneurial idea might pop up. So for many men here in this situation of uncertainty, to work or to go see friends is the way to earn the daily bread. Rich or poor, a man would come across as lazy only if he stays at home. This would mean that his wife is looking after him, and this is a real shame.

That is why the man is always outside the home. But this also means that, unlike the wife, he is not controlled. Often the women we talk to say they do not know where their husbands are, and this seems to be no problem for them: "I do not know where he is, he's somewhere around the neighbourhood." "Well, he's going here and there, what can he be doing! He's doesn't have a job after all." When we were present at the women's gossip gatherings, we haven't heard them discussing what their husbands are doing. At least not in our presence.

So the men enjoy a particular form of freedom compared with the state of the women – work or no work, she must be under the eye of her kin. Men, on the other hand, work or fun, may do what they like.

While she's close to her home and her relatives, a woman can take up a substantial amount of responsibilities. We often find out that she manages the family's budget. The husband gives his wife everything he's earned. Then it's the wife who decides what's to be done with the income. Rejep (middle age, craftsman) told me that when he received his first big commission in his life (from one of the quarter's big shots, he paid him 500 leva), his first fear was that his wife would soon come back home and he will have to give her all the money. And that would be it. The money would have been spent on some furniture for the house or something like that. While he had dreamed for years that, should he happen to have so much money, he would have liked to buy a machine for his workshop. That's why he hailed a taxi and dashed off to Praktiker.

Here's an excerpt from one of our interviews, with Ismet (elderly, a merchant with his own shop). It shows that the wife's housekeeping skills can be of great importance for the husband.

*Well, don't be thinking that it's so much money that we had. I'm talking about 10 – 15 thousand leva, something like that. We used to have quite a bit of gold. Some 2 kilos we had, but everything is now gone! [after his wife's death]*

*"You got all that from the shop?"*

*"Yes, yes! [But] everything is gone. Little by little. What would you think? Not that I could take it all at once! My wife, she would take something, and then she would save something. Saving, this sort of thing. You know how women are! It's the wife who holds the house together, bro. What I am to do otherwise? Nothing!*

*"Now, I can do nothing. Everything is gone, we lost, scattered everything, understand? She, if I were to give her 20 leva, it's as if I can no longer take this money away from her! I tell her: 'Give me 5 leva to buy some petrol.' For this or that. She would say: 'No, I have nothing.' Seriously! That's what she used to be like. But now, at the end, what has become of me? She is gone, and slowly I let everything slip away.. for the funeral.. we made her this grave .. [...] so that's how the money goes, we spend.*

*[...] Yes, yes, I'm telling you, we used to be in money. I used to make the money, but it was she who kept it. Here, the other day my daughter comes to me and is like, 'Dad, let us go and buy two mobiles.' I say: 'What are you going to do with two phones?' They're cheap, 200 leva each, there's a sales promotion, she says ... (laughing). We then went to Technopolis. I say: 'Well! I do not have this money.' [But...]*

It seems to me the daily management of the household requires a great amount of skill that a man who works outside the home just

doesn't need. That is why the wife is often much more experienced, and if the couple start a business, the woman would be the "manager"; the husband would much more often be the one to do tasks. Of course, his tasks would take place outside the home. He would not be selling at the annexe to the house; he'd be procuring merchandise or whatever.

There are women who have taken up a business of their own, or a job. There are others for whom the husband is firm in saying: "My wife may not work. I'll take care of everything". This applies not only to those who earn well. For example, I spoke to a young family in which the husband had gone through thick and thin, but was currently employed to carry goods at a farm produce exchange in Komatevo for 25 leva a day. His wife complained that staying at home bored her, to which he resignedly explained: "Well, it's like that here: she must stay at home and look after the children" – as if renouncing his own responsibility. Another man, who finds work at construction sites, says: "Never! Even if we have nothing to eat, she will not work!" I wonder if this stance is somewhat for the sake of keeping appearances before the community. It's like buying new furniture: you earn enough so your wife does not need to work, she can be a princess and be better equipped to raise the children? Some women said they lived this way not because their husbands forbade them, but because they themselves think that it's best if they stayed in the neighbourhood and looked after the children.

In a third type of families, the wife has the freedom to have an economic activity of her own, but it has to be to some extent household work and at a "safe" place – for example, selling at a stall in front of the house. Starting formal work with an employer somewhere else is not permitted. It seems husbands' first thought is that this would give the woman an opportunity to be unfaithful. At the very least, she'd be exposed to some kind of interest and would be able to communicate with other men. For some reason working as a cleaning lady at the town council is considered acceptable, but a job with a private employer is considered dangerous, most probably because of the authority he will have over his female employee. Once we started talking to two street sweeping ladies in Plovdiv's downtown, they turned out to be from Stolipinovo. The young girl told us that people from the nearby Turkish restaurant, having seen her in the street, offered her a job for double her wages. It was visible that she had the desire, but she was wary of what her husband's reaction would be, as he was very jealous.

Communication with men is very risky outside the neighbourhood. When a woman is on her street, she is being observed by the public opinion, by relatives and neighbours. There we know women who run by themselves cafes visited by both women and men. Galya (young, makeshift booth), one of these women, told us that she is a seamstress by trade, but her husband prohibits her from going to work. I ask her: "Well, how come he lets you hang around here in front of the apartment block? He is not here, you are running the booth all by yourself?" "Well, all his people are here: brothers, aunts, sisters. Everyone's watching."

Even Petar, who, as a man, should be less involved in the neighbourly life, once told me, comparing the alienation in the Bulgarian quarters:

*In your own apartment block, do you know all the people? You do, but most probably all you do is say 'Hi, hello' to them? While here, in these apartment blocks we are all together all the time! If you need pepper, anything, any service – you're most welcome! Everyone can tell you what's in the other man's bedroom, what's in his fridge!*

This togetherness both helps and is in the way. It seems here one's always careful what one's doing, and this applies especially to women. Another friend of ours who runs an entire trading business told us she cannot put on a nice dress that she has, with a larger décolletage, because the neighbours from across the street are 'simpletons' and would immediately start talking about her.

There is a great many women who run their lives on their own and have, for one reason or another, no man beside them. They were enterprising enough to find a job outside the neighbourhood or to start a business of their own; sometimes both. Even to build a home to themselves. Here's the story of one of them, some 60 years old:

*Her husband left her some 20 years ago, her and the children. Earlier she had lived in a nice house in the neighbourhood's central parts. Then she came here and built herself a house with her sons. It had been a bare spot. At some point the police came; fines were issued... But one has to live somewhere. One of her sons died of an illness or a stroke when he was 27.*

*The other has been living in France for 8 years now.*

*She raised his child [even while he was still living here], because his wife had run away, leaving him with a 9-month-old baby. She raised the child until it was 10 years old, and then that woman came back and took it away. She went to the police, but they told her: "You failed to have the child registered to your name; there is no other way out now". She wanted to go and take it back, but the municipality officers told her: "Look, you've looked after the child for so many years, we can see it hurts. But don't. She'd come, there would be a fight and finally social services would arrive and take it to an institution. At least the kid is with its mother, she won't kill it. It's better if it's with her [then with the state]." So the woman resigned herself to it.*

*Today: Forty leva for medicines, she has a heart pump – she is not supposed to get out of bed. She has no right to a pension. She used to work at the Petar Chengelov shoe factory [there are lots of people in the quarter who used to work there and who lost their jobs in the early 1990s]. But in 1990 she was let go – and there has been no work ever since. Yes, there's work – she corrects herself – but it's all like this one here – she waves her hand towards the grill, we'd just bought meatballs from her – there is no state work [this is a figure of speech for any legal work with a salary and social security contributions]. Until now she cleans two staircases in an apartment block in the Smirnenski quarter: 35 leva per staircase. To have the right to a pension, she must pay 1,500 leva in social security contributions she's in arrears. She doesn't have this money and she wouldn't make it at this grill here.*

It is probable that her son sends her money from France, but she, to be able to manage everything, besides going to work outside the neighbourhood and grilling meat for her neighbours does a few more business ideas. When we met she had not worked for several days because she was out of cash for the coal – which, I thought is understandable if two meatballs and quarter of a loaf of bread cost me 1 lev. Besides these she had invested in old electronic games for the children, put inside her house, and in a trampoline for the smaller children in the yard. They came to jump on it in exchange for a few coins. Juxtaposed with all of this we kept thinking of her sentence: "I have a heart pump; I shouldn't be getting out of bed at all."

This brief account shows the number of hardships that many people in Stolipinovo must cope with. This story is not an exception of any sort, allowing for the uniqueness of each man's fate. We've heard dozens of stories like this one – especially at the makeshift houses on the quarter's outskirts, where everyone has ended up due to some personal drama of their own. At least we can see above that the healthcare system still works for the people with no money and resources.

It seem these women, who are battling with life all by themselves, would be at least middle aged (the youngest we met was around 45). For the younger, there'd always be some more senior relative to be their guardian (as in the earlier example with Petya). Also it seems that with regards to the married women, men's prejudices to let their wives go out of the mahala and so on apply predominantly to the young generation. I wonder whether this is because they wouldn't so much as attract men's interest or

because the older generation had experience working outside the neighbourhood during the socialist period, at factories and offices, and for them the woman being independent has become normalised.

We also see the return of Muslim attire (covering the hair) mainly in younger women and families; the older ones appear not to pay attention to this. Incidentally, the women here do not attend the masjids in the *mahala*. For them the most important holiday is the Bayram, when they go downtown, to the main Dzhumaya Mosque. But it looks as though for them this holiday is an occasion for the women to take a walk together and to sit in a café or restaurant without their husbands. No woman I talked to about this said she fasted during the Ramadan – this appears to have been left for the men; they are, after all, the heads of the families and the protectors of religious virtues.

It struck me that it is usually the women who go to the council, social services, the school. It's as if the husband is somewhat afraid of communicating with institutions, of finding himself in uncommon situations where he cannot act with authority. Women take this role in their stride, and more often it is they who go about arranging the issuance of various documents. Some of them can even be quite confident in themselves. Galya told us about a schoolteacher who used to beat her daughter; many other children were complaining as well. She went to the school to talk to the director, but was unsure if she was interested in the matter at all. That is why she found the teacher and told her: "If you should ever do this again, I'll come here and beat you myself".

### Meeting, love, marriage

The understanding of relationships appears to be somewhat different in Stolipinovo than what it is for us Bulgarians. While we are increasingly pursuing individualistic happiness; indulge in a long period of choosing one then another partner, in deciding if we truly love someone, whether our tastes will fit, whether we won't have too many arguments, and so on, while our career, education or job are significant complications for making those choices, in Stolipinovo the highest value is having a family! This is a status that indicates that you have achieved something in your life: you are raising a family. Consequently, weddings are the most important festive rituals, where a whole lot of extravagance is poured out for everyone to see.

When we Bulgarians get to meet someone, the first question we normally ask is: "What do you do?" or "What are you studying?". In Stolipinovo the first question we were asked was invariably: "Are you married?" The most important goal in life is to start a family, and everything else comes as a consequence of that: you work not to achieve some goals or to make a career, but to bring bread to the family's table – an effort that requires more and more resources. If young Bulgarians are in search of the partner "who will make me happy" – that is, he or she will increase my *personal* happiness (albeit this, understandably, often proves an illusion) – it seems to me that personal feelings in the neighbourhood take a back seat. First come the respect of the community and the commitments to the new social status. In fact, I have never heard anyone here talk or think in the concepts of "happy" and "unhappy" on any occasion whatsoever – people do not step into their lives with such lofty expectations. No one here says about a young couple: "may they be happy together" or "may they love one another" – here people say: "may they get along together well". That is, not to torment one another from then on, and may the family not fall apart.

I do not know if the reason behind this realism is the fact that here everyone, starting in early childhood, observes from close quarters a huge number of fates of their neighbours and relatives with the attendant hardships, joys and betrayals, while the Bulgarians, who live in greater isolation, have more room for fantasizing. The understanding in Stolipinovo very much resembles the one common for the Bulgarian society until 60 or 70 years ago, perhaps before the Western ideal of love started to sow its

seeds through literature. Nowadays it is entering Stolipinovo through the TV screen and the internet. Interest grows in Turkish and Indian TV series, which depict precisely large patriarchal families in similar conflicts of the traditional values with the new individualistic influence.

Many of my older interlocutors told me that their marriages had been arranged by their parents. This is not so common nowadays. In a later period a great mania of running away from one's parents started to take root among young people who wanted get married, while their parents didn't want to "give them away" so young anymore. It appears the wish to get married – that is, to become adult and be respected – is so great that many young people aged 13 to 15 pursue marriage themselves. Today those people say: "Fact is, we were stupid then, but everybody would do this back then. Everyone wanted to have a piece of the action." It seems to me that marriage was exactly like a teenage fad mixed with rebellion against the parents. For Bulgarian schoolkids such thrills are caused by the first sexual encounter, the desire to lose your virginity and things like that, but this has very little consequence for the rest of your life. For Stolipinovo young people, however, because of the strict customs as to virginity, it is enough for a girl to spend a night at a boy's place (regardless of what they do) for the community to consider them married. There are here and there some broadminded families who want to have their girl back to them after such a case (though she not always agrees).

Most parents say: "Now I am really sorry I got married so young and did not have the time of my life. I wish my children got married later and got an education", and so on. But again, it turns out that their children got married young too, and they could offer no answer why this happened. We need to consider that the very situation of talking to us – to Bulgarians for whom early marriage is nothing good and who are not bound by the norms and values like our interlocutor is, and besides, our customs are seen as superior to theirs since we are from the hegemonic majority – all this makes these things irrational. And consequently, as irrational is the only way the interlocutor could explain them. The person has no way to analyse the other kinds of affective pressure that were brought to bear on him or her, and that is why they will describe what they did as folly, as if it was a moment of inexplicable haziness of the mind. Here's one excerpt from an interview with Zeki (middle age, craftsman):

*I: Which year in school did yours made it to?*

*Z: Mine? One daughter to seventh; the other to sixth, and that was that! Plus, how should I put it, people get married very young here. One of the girls got married at 18; the other at 14 or 15. [...] There needs to be a law here! No marrying under 18! [Of course there is such a law, but what is meant here is that it does not apply in the community because of the disagreement with the traditional customs. In Stolipinovo, marriage has relation with institutions of the state; it is based on affirmation from the community.]*

*I: OK. But why was your wife 13 years old? [He was 17 at that moment.]*

*Z: Foolishness, it's what I'm telling you. If there were such a law...*

*I: But was it you who chose her? What did you like in a 13-year-old little girl?*

*Z: Yes, it was me who chose her! Well, beats me! Just tell me what did I like in her? What sort of a woman would a 13-year-old girl have made? [...]*

*I: Well, why did **you** choose her such a small girl?*

*Z: Well, beats me, I'm telling you! If you would ask me! We used to go out together for some time, and then we were like: 'Let's get married!' Well, we got married! It's been 30 years now. But she was 13 when I took her. Inexperience! I don't know how to answer. Foolishness – just to have something [so that he, too, had a wife].*

*I: But [since you were saying about a law -] back in those times this wasn't permitted at all!*

*Z: It wasn't, but her mother, when she arrived to pick her up, didn't bring the police along! Had she come with police, perhaps she would have taken her back. But she didn't. She came over – 'Aaa, I'm not going. I want a man!' 'Well, here's one for you then!' Her mother and father and her relatives arrived, asking: 'How come you got married?' and she replied: 'I want a man'. [That is: the state of being married.]*

We can imagine the delegation of the girl's relatives that arrives in the girl's house and is perhaps ready to take back the prodigal daughter even through a brawl. On the other hand, it seems that his parents did not mind that he should get married when they welcomed her into their home. Sometimes this is how you get a daughter-in-law who is above your social station. These elopements take place often enough, which explains why still today some parents stop their daughters from going to school at around the age 12-13 and keep them near the house, so that they meet no stranger boys who could charm and dupe them.

Still, I get the impression that this “young people's fad” has died down a bit, perhaps some 10 to 15 years ago. If for their parents “falling in love” was invariably affirmed with marriage (isn't this the kind of love in traditional fairytales and novels that have been read to us all?), today's young people see the world differently and are surely reluctant to get married at a young age. In some circles – especially in the ones who remain in school until year 7 or 8 and above – it is customary to have a “girlfriend” or a “boyfriend”. We know also some boys who are already 18 or 20 and who say they do not want to get married any time soon (sometimes to the consternation of their parents). They would much rather live freely for some time, go abroad and work. Control is stronger for the girls, and depends on the family. Some could prevent their daughter from going to school at around year 5 because of the above-mentioned concerns. Others have more trust in their daughters and let them decide for themselves who to communicate with and how to protect themselves. Be it as it may, today young people communicate with each other via Facebook, outside their parents' control. Perhaps that helps them abandon the romantic ideas that the first love lasts forever.

Yet, there is diversity also among the older generation. I have heard stories where things are much more thought out and people got married at today's community-approved age or even later. We know people who say: We used to go out two or three years, and then we got married. A third group of people were consciously asking themselves the question: It's time for me to get married, I need to find myself a wife/husband. In all these cases, the requirements with regards to the prospective partner have always been very simple: he or she must not be rude, a drunkard, must be hard-working. That is why the decision to marry can be taken after a very short consideration: after one or two dates! A young man around 30 whom we met on the street surprised me by saying he was from Karlovo, but was married to a girl from here and the two were now visiting. I enquired how they had met, all the way from Karlovo. He said a friend of his was married to a cousin of hers and told him: “There is [such a girl] there, go and take a look”. So he came over, they went on a date for a cup of coffee, then liked one another and gave each other a word. That was it. Another story: The husband of Sevda (elderly, peddler) was from another town, but used to live here at a relative's place. “They told me about him, they told me he works hard. I was hard-working too. And so we decided it.” But in a few years things went south, he took to drinking and was of no help at home.

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There is a multitude of subjects that have remained outside this text. They relate to, among other topics, unfaithfulness, the consequences of massive emigration, the women who have parted with their husbands, the process of consolidation of values within the family, the choice the daughters-in-law and the economics of kinship. You can find and explore them in our dialogues with the people of Stolipinovo.

## **Part II: Dialogues from Stolipinovo**

### **Introductory notes**

Here you will find the words of Stolipinovo. These are transcripts of our conversations with dozens of men and women, discussing all kinds of issues from their lives. Some of the conversations are reminiscent of the practice of ethnographic interview, where you let your interlocutor talk about what he or she considers important in his or her own words and to listen with great care in order to get into the logic and prepare your subsequent questions. Others represent a curious contrast to it; they are almost like battles between us and them which are still, however, very dialogical and readable.

The conversations are not presented in their completeness. We have broken them up into a dozen or so topics (work and business, education, the identity of the local residents and so on) so as to shape the picture of Stolipinovo somewhat according to the interests of the outsider who would open this book. We had to balance, however, two contradictory considerations: On the one hand, we wanted to highlight the various topics that came up repeatedly in our conversations. We wanted to make these passages easy to locate for those readers who have research goals in mind. On the other hand, we wanted to preserve the integrity of the speaker. Each story paints a portrait of its author, and although a conversation can touch upon many topics, all of them always help shape the point of view of the same person. It is in this case that we can see both the person's oneness and contradictions. We discover that a person who recalls with great nostalgia the times of socialism is at the same time a devout Muslim who regularly goes to the mosque, or that a person does not hesitate to break official laws but has a strong sense of morality and duty to his or her neighbours and acquaintances. For these reasons we have kept the passages relatively long, and one would find also passages that diverge from the declared topic. Unfortunately, this means that, for example, if you want to get acquainted with everything our interlocutors have told us about the past, you will find only part of it under the topic "Past". We hope, however, that this will motivate you to read the entire fruit of our labour. For the final product of this project we are in a process of developing a structure that will overcome these tensions.

We changed all the names of the Stolipinovo residents we spoke to. However, we preserved the character of the names (Turkish, Bulgarian, pet name, and so on) to keep intact the subtleties that help us read into the social characteristics of the other's name (and also the countermeasures they apply by giving us a particular name).

Here and there we changed parts of our interlocutors' biographies to preserve a person's anonymity. That depends on how strong he or she wished to remain anonymous. That is why we had to remove, much to our regret, some of the most interesting episodes and opinions, which puts their authors in a delicate position – not necessarily before Bulgarian readers (you think now that it was something against the law but these cases are rare), but before their neighbours, relatives and members of the community. In other cases, we have deemed necessary to keep certain significant opinions and episodes and remove the rest of the persons' stories and

biographies in order to prevent them from being recognised in Stolipinovo.

We must keep in mind that the following pages offer us a glimpse into the private and intimate lives of people who unselfishly and trustfully have given us access to these lives without knowing for sure what the consequences might be. Neither do we know what will happen once this text has gone out into the world. Therefore, we kindly ask our readers to show respect: to the real living people standing on the other side, though with changed names; to the perfectly ordinary (and at the same time so extraordinary!) people who have recounted their most intimate, asking in return nothing but respect and understanding.

Finally, a few words about the punctuation and symbols. Our lines would always start with a dash, unlike those of our interlocutors. We have not indicated the individual members of our team, but when we would talk to several interlocutors, each change of the speaker would be marked.

Editor's notes and explanations go inside double brackets, with our words printed in italics. If we have simply added a word that the interlocutor has omitted by the rules of conversational speech, we have left it in print type rather than italic. More extensive reflections, as well as introductory descriptions, appear in separate paragraphs in italics. ((...)) and (( )) denote blank spaces, and ((?)) a word we cannot decipher from the recordings (most of the conversations were conducted outdoors in a noisy setting). ((-)) is a name or location we have redacted away. Ellipses and dots mark longer and shorter breaks in speech; a dash next to a word marks a sudden break of thought.

We have to bear in mind that colloquial speech has a different rhythm and characteristics from written text, and the transfer from one to the other is always problematic (for the opposite problem of asking people to read text in a conversational situation, see the chapter "Chairs in Stolipinovo"). In most cases, we as authors added the punctuation and it is no part of our interlocutor's speech. Furthermore, we have more or less blurred the dialect distinctions, the typical Plovdiv pronunciation (of [ɪ], [ə] and [ʊ], instead of [e], [ʌ] and [ɔ], "не може" instead of "нимой" and so on) and many errors that some of our interlocutors make, since they in fact speak in a foreign language for us. Occasionally, we have kept some to provide local colour. We value these variations from literary speech, but in printed text (which automatically implies a formal situation) they look insulting and far more striking than they do in direct communication. At the end of the section, we have put a vocabulary including several dialect words that appear to have originated in Stolipinovo or perhaps among the Minority in the region, as well as a list of local geographic names used in the conversations and also a list of older or specialised words.

Release note: The working sample of 142 pages with conversations allocated in 12 topics is not part of the public release of this interim set of materials from the study.

## **Part III: Concept of an artistic guide**

### **21 questions about Stolipinovo**

Nikola Venkov, Genika Baycheva, Dimitar Panchev, Rossitsa Kratunkova, Benoit and Veronique Reboul-Salze

The topics and, especially, their order are of course subject to further change – but below is our action plan.

They will be written out in a very concise, highly synthesised form, each taking up to 2 to 3 pages, except for the introductory topics, which will be longer. The total will be approx. 100 pages. Each topic will explain “how things are” – in their sociological

diversity and variations in the community, without offering any justification of why this is so. We hope to find room also for illustrative examples – short descriptions of specific cases. In general, this study will be used as an encyclopaedia – there is a large number of topics, and the reader will refer to the one they are interested in at the moment. [The planned guide structure is as follows.](#)

### **Introductory section**

#### The Bulgarian Society / Plovdiv

- Short history - social, economic and of cultural forms, rather than political – starting from late Ottoman time. The aim is to provide the context for the perspectives and the grudges of the Bulgarian majority today. Explaining that Bulgarians see themselves as impoverished, on the national construction, the failure of the 90s etc.

- It should all be written in a neutral descriptive way always through involved groups' 'viewpoints'.

#### The Excluded Minorities - Relations and Positions

-- Similarly - history of how gypsies were positioned in the bigger frame during 20th cent. Mention there are also other minorities in Bg and in what ways this is mobilised by Bulgarians (Jews, Armenians <> Turks, Pomaks <> Gypsy).

-- Providing the bigger picture of gypsies/Roma being constituted as one group from a variety of many and based on what perceptions.

#### Stolipinovo district / Plovdiv

-- Quick history of the local community (and how it makes the above themes concrete), the neighbourhood and their relation to Plovdiv. Various other introductory info - position, transport etc.

#### Prejudices and Tensions

-- Description of the Bulgarian view, plus stories of concrete experiences and qualifying of them.

-- Prejudices are on both sides. It's important to show it.

(Image of Ghetto vs. Heterogeneity?)

-- Main argument: that in Stolipinovo there is everything. But outsiders find only what they are determined to.

### **21 questions on Stolipinovo**

21 chapters formulated as 'questions' to which the reader might want to find answers. They are based on the coding topics which emerged from our notes and interview transcripts.

1. „How to name us, the people in St.”?

2. How do people make a living in St.? (How does a person from St. get on?)

3. What it means to be a woman in St.?

4. -//- a man -//-? (it will be not only family gender roles, but more generally the issues that face various strata)

5. -//- young -//-? (for youth and teenagers - children are not a topic of the study)
6. -//- old -//-?
7. What would the ideal Stolipinovo family be like? (on the family relations, values, practices, etc.)
8. How people deal with social difference? (relationships between poor-rich, джинс- system, the threat of and solidarity with the alcoholics, drug addicts, etc.)
9. How space functions? (public/private space, informal construction, where people hang out and socialise...)
10. How people deal with close quarters living? (the diversity of relationships, neighbours, the municipal services and problems with them)
11. What are the boundaries enclosing St.? (explaining about St. connection to the world, the modes of visiting Plovdiv, the boundary is mainly there, and for certain social subgroups. Also locals own reasoning about 'the place of St.' in the wider world)
12. Learning in St.
13. What is 'success' in St.?
14. What does culture mean here? Popular culture, interests, hobbies
15. How significant are celebrations?
16. Capitalism in St. (on the specificity of local business and survival - hybridity, ingenuity and short-term)
17. Reuse and recycle
18. The poor man's ingenuity (maybe informal construction should move here, along with many practices showing locals as rational and inventive, plus some discussion about the relationship with imposed state rules and institutions - leading onto:
19. The people, the law, the institutions
20. The political world (how people see the world ordered and their place in it, how this makes transformation possible or not according to them, etc. This is not party and election politics)
21. What are the greatest issues for the people in St.?

### **12 questions on the artist**

The typical structure will be: context of how artists usually view this type of communities (from our experience with collaborating with artists in Stolipinovo, but also elsewhere), explicatory examples of activities, short analysis thereof, and the drawing up of principles and recommendations regarding concrete needs.

1. Would you be accepted? Risks and positive signs

(explaining the different layers of openness, acceptance and intrusion - the welcoming and suspicion in parallel. That growing mistrust is really invisible for long time and is readily mistaken with disorganisation, incompetence, etc., on the locals part)

2. How time passes here? (What to expect in terms of time management, how to think about sustainability and long-term project)

3. Different sides' interests, do they meet? (very important for sustainability)
4. Whom does the intervention help more? (about relations of power)
5. Do we reach those who have the greatest need?
6. Some previous interventions and their local acceptance
7. The locals as an audience (consider them always as an audience which is present, in fact, as many audiences. Objectification. Sometimes even things we think as positive might turn out insulting)
8. They are not Different, ultimately (about othering and invisible positive stereotyping - 'people here are more natural', etc.)
9. Include as equals - friends and partners
10. ...
11. What can we do for St.?
12. A list for quick-checking one's project design, as a summary of above topics

### **Meta-notes**

Justification of the chosen design (below) for the guide. I make the most of the fact that a digital format was chosen, in order to solve the first major issue: it is impossible to use only two pages per question to synthesise information about a large and heterogeneous group of people and at the same time ensure that said information is (a) thought-provoking, interesting and nontrivial and (b) not totally misguided, generalising and universalising.

The guide pursues two conflicting objectives. It should:

-- Contain diverse troves of information where every 2019 partner could find something for their specific topic of interest related to their project.

-- Be small in volume to allow for a quick browse by busy people.

The solution we found to the abovementioned challenges is to split the content into as many "slices" and "sub-slices" as possible. This will make explicit the structure of the text and give the reader the freedom to read more in-depth or more cursorily. Or they could read thoroughly some parts while getting only quickly acquainted with their context.

Therefore, the analytical text under each topic comes in the shape of separate and independent notes, meant to be read in any order. Each note carries a single message. We need a larger volume for the note (usually between a single paragraph and half a page) to indicate the existing heterogeneity and interrelationships, and introduce the minimal context the reader needs.

Many of these notes are accompanied by illustrative examples from the field. They, too, come in the shape of separate short texts called field pieces. They are concrete and lively and they are meant to maintain the reader's curiosity. They have another significant purpose, however: to keep readers alert to the fact that they should always be sceptical of generalisations we are forced to make when we summarise the community's ways. That is why we have taken pains to supply many field pieces that contradict the picture we are painting.

The notes contain also concrete advice aimed at the people who will be implementing projects in the community. On every page, we have sought to make clear why the aspects we are paying attention to are relevant to the reader-activist. These places in the text, and sometimes entire notes, are marked with the label *A point about action*.

This structure of notes will account for each topic (“question”) from the list of 21 QUESTIONS ABOUT STOLIPINOVO. Questions will be also interconnected through hyperlinks between notes that have a relation in reality. Often one note could properly belong two two and more topics (see further below).

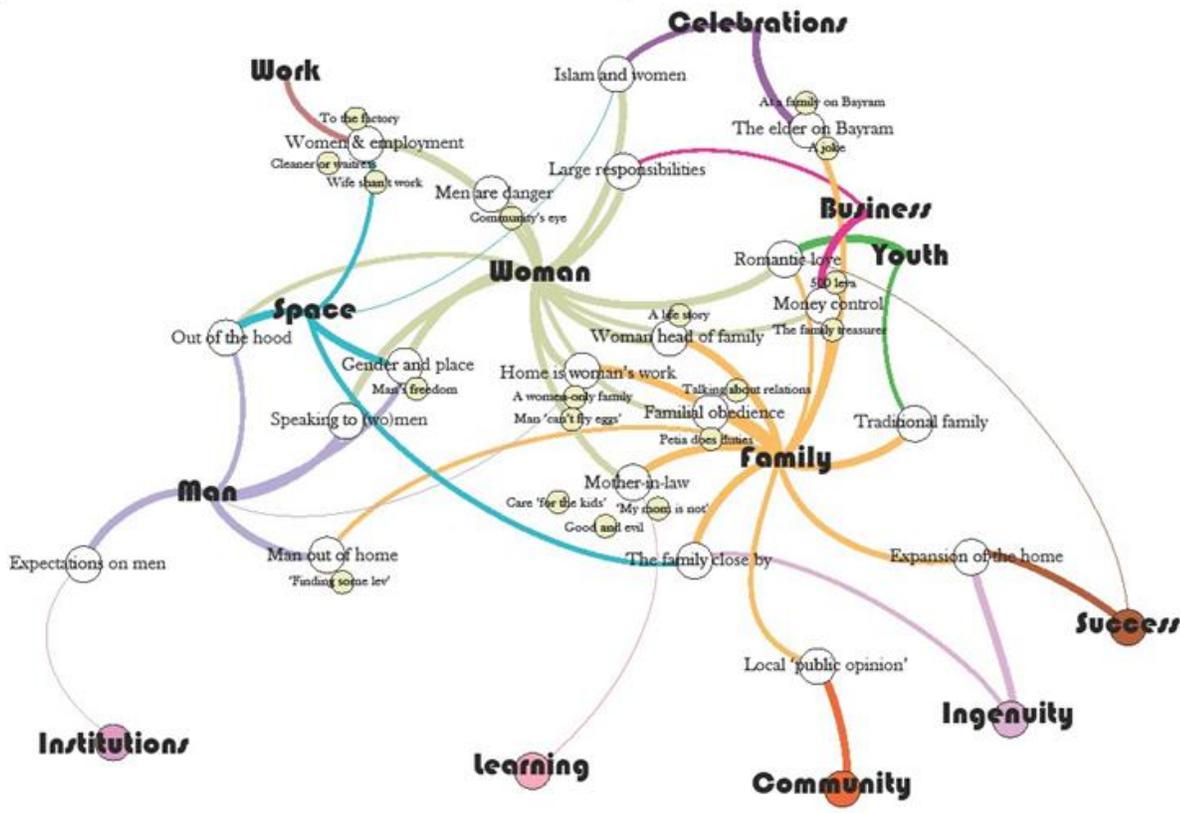
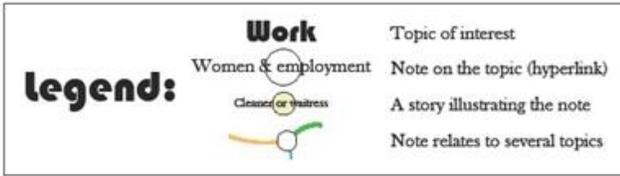
The present design test shows that one topic will probably comprise 15-20 notes. As a result, the number of pages dedicated to one topic increases. The solution is to split the guide and organise it into two levels. The first level summarises the fundamental messages of the notes to a certain topic into a text that’s a page or a page and half long. This will be the level the reader will see and will be equivalent to our budget proposal for a 100-page guide. (The guide can be even shorter, maybe some 50-60 pages, the introductions included.) Thanks to the digital format, the detailed level could be hidden and the individual notes could be opened only if the reader wants to see them. The reading will be nonlinear, as an exploration of fragments. It will have a lot of similarity to the way artists will be exploring the actual neighbourhood. The detailed level text will probably grow to 400-500 pages.

What you see below is a test of the detailed level, while the synthesised summary level is at the end of the document. For the test, I developed some of the questions about women and family. Thus a comparison can be made with the provisional work submitted at an earlier stage of development (see Part I). Family issues are perhaps not the most exciting subject, but **this fact** will allow for a more objective assessment of the merits of the presentation form itself.

It must be noted that composing an English text is significantly more difficult taking into account the readers' expected lack of familiarity with the Bulgarian context. The quality, coherence and precision of the text we are offering here could be achieved only thanks to the intensive collaboration with the native English-speaking editor Hannah Oswald-Rose, who joined the project free of charge at this stage. Following extensive discussions with Hannah, many details we, as Bulgarians, would otherwise consider obvious have been highlighted.

### **Guide’s Table of Contents by means of a Notes Map**

The structure of the text built of separate notes makes it possible to demonstrate the interrelationships between the different aspects of life in Stolipinovo. Almost every note is relevant to two or three questions (topics) of the 21. For example, the gender role division relates also to the question "How does space in Stolipinovo function?". This has allowed me to create a highly visual and attractive table of contents of the guide in the shape of a “map of topics”. It is a review of how the information is organised and, I hope, will tempt the potential reader to delve into playful exploration.



**Topics:**

<b>Family</b>	What would the ideal Stolipinovo family be like?	<b>Youth</b>	What it means to be young in Stolipinovo?
<b>Woman</b>	What it means to be a woman in Stolipinovo?	<b>Community</b>	How people deal with close quarters living?
<b>Man</b>	What it means to be a man in Stolipinovo?	<b>Business</b>	Capitalism in Stolipinovo
<b>Space</b>	How space functions?	<b>Ingenuity</b>	The poor man's ingenuity

This is just a small test which contains the topics Woman and Family (drafted at around 70%). The rest of the topics in the sidelines appears only by virtue of the internal logic of the notes developed here, and therefore leaves out the entire 21-topic list. The map of the final guide will be much richer. Achieving maximum visual clarity will make the optimal placement of the elements a very complex issue. In my search for a solution, I studied and experimented with mathematical software that computes the topological and spatial organisation of functional networks. It distributes in space the objects (in this case, the notes) based on specified interrelations between them. Zones and interfaces emerge that allow the reader to quickly see the extent to which notes relate to the topic he or she is interested in, as well as which, and how many, relate to other topics. The topic-areas get arranged on their own. For example, above it is immediately apparent that, at the moment, "Men" comes in the guide only when I deal with



## **Topic I. What it means to be a woman in Stolipinovo?**

### **Note 1: The woman should be near the home, the man – out of it**

SHORT TITLE: GENDER AND PLACE

TOPICS TOPOLOGY: WOMAN 10, MAN 8, SPACE 9

In Stolipinovo most people agree that the woman's place is near her home, while the man should not be lingering there. The woman is concerned with everything connected to the household, the children, the neighbours... (Note #6: Care of the home is woman's work) It is not looked upon well, if without a good reason (e.g. going to work, to the hospital, etc.) she wanders off alone beyond the area in which her family is known by everybody. If she does this frequently, she would fall under suspicion for not taking good care of her family, of being unreliable, and, ultimately, for committing adultery.

On the other hand, the man is out all day. He goes to work, he goes about looking for work, or he goes about meeting with male friends and peers. These three activities often overlap in a community with a high rate of informal, short-term and/or insecure employment (Topic II. Note 2: For the man being out of home means taking care of the family). In any scenario, a man staying at home all day could fall under suspicion for not taking good care of his family.

Yet, the difference in expectations towards genders cannot be subsumed in a simplistic scheme, that man owns the public space and takes on all activities beyond the familial, to which women are confined. In Stolipinovo, commonly the woman would be going to work or running a business (Note #5: Women and employment – a variety of arrangements). She would be the one visiting state institutions (Topic II. Note 1: The pressure of gender expectations on men). More rarely, she would take walks for pleasure with her mum, girlfriends, or children, in the centre of Plovdiv. The boundaries of the acceptable and the not acceptable are complex and also variable between families. A basis that seems to be important is that a female family member is considered under threat if she is left alone in an unfamiliar environment; especially if there is a chance that she encounters strange men there (Note #3: Unfamiliar men are a danger).

On the other hand, men are quite free to indulge in deeds of their choice, once they are out of the perimeter of their kin and neighbours. An independent and enterprising spirit is an important quality for the younger man and thus he gets a lot of leeway from the family and community. Mistakes are more easily forgiven.

FIELD PIECE 1A: THE GENDER ASYMMETRY IN SOCIAL CONTROL (GENIKA AND ROSI)

SHORT TITLE: ASYMMETRY OF SOCIAL CONTROL

Sometimes we asked the women we were spending time with, where their husband was as we were talking. We expected to learn what kind of job he did, or if not employed, to hear that he was running such and such errand in that moment. Instead, we got replies that they didn't know, with a tone displaying that they weren't very curious about it. They'd casually say: "I don't know where he is, somewhere around the hood", "Oh, he is walking around, what else can he do? He is without work too." Having attended a number of women's gatherings for the chat, we haven't heard them discussing at any time the activities of their husbands. (At least – not in front of us.) Thus, men seem to be enjoying quite a degree of freedom from social control, especially compared with the women. At work or else, she must always be under watch. He – going to work or looking for fun – can do whatever he wants.

## **Note 2: A point about action: Asking people out of their customary place**

SHORT TITLE: A: OUT OF THE HOOD

TOPICS TOPOLOGY: WOMAN 7, MAN 7, SPACE 10

If in your project you wish to take women outside of Stolipinovo, or even to a part of the neighbourhood they don't normally visit, you will likely face resistance. You will have better chances with older women (50+) or with inviting a group of women who are related to each other. They could be seen as providing control over each other to a satisfactory degree. (Even if you are a woman, and not 'a threat', you are still an outsider and cannot be trusted by the family to protect them.)

Taking together a husband and a wife outside of their familiar social environment would also rarely be agreed to (again it might be easier with the older generation) because it would expose the man to situations where he would lose his demeanour of authority in front of his wife. In fact, inviting both of them would already create an awkward situation where you, in effect, have made the woman into his equal partner and broken the established categories. We suggest that you approach this with a phrase such as 'and bring your family', which maintains the man's position as 'a head of family'. (Still, to keep the comfort of familiar authority, many men would prefer to choose their family's entertainment on their own, rather than submit to one structured by someone else.)

In a male-only group the dynamics can be quite different. There a man can accept the authority of another leader, especially if he is his mate. Thus, if you had a friendly relationship, he would be quite happy to comply with your invitation, to see it as a display of respect to him, and to pay respects back to you. If you are a woman (and not from the community) he would likely also oblige to an invitation but you could expect some flirting undercurrent. It is not necessarily connected with sexual interest, but helps him to construct a social position that is not subordinated to yours. Again, older men both do not need these performances, and are more accustomed to the conventions of Bulgarian society, having lived under socialism.

Therefore, if you plan actions to take place locally, directly in the community, you will likely achieve much greater audience, participation and impact.

## **Note 3: Unfamiliar men are a danger**

MEN ARE DANGER

WOMAN 10, SPACE 3

A woman's contact with men is seen as unsafe if it could take place beyond the community's eye and the restraining threat of subsequent gossip. On her home street in the neighbourhood she could even run an entire café that is frequented by men; here communication takes place before the eyes of 'public opinion': relatives and neighbours (Topic IV. Note 3: The significance of the 'public opinion' of neighbours and relatives).

However, venturing on her own beyond the area where her family is known is seen as riskier and many women in the neighbourhood would avoid doing that without a demonstrable reason. This is an important factor limiting women's independence (Note 1: The woman should be near the home, the man – out of it): the belief that a woman who is not being watched by the closer community is in danger of dishonouring her family. Not much emphasis is placed on distinguishing between the threats: a lone woman might be harassed by men, a woman could turn out to be unfaithful and flirtatious, a woman could be gullible and

easily enticed by claims of romantic love (Note #10: The sway of romantic love). All these images of her as vulnerable – or rather as a point of vulnerability for the family – coexist in the community's imagination.

We should note that these fears and distrust fall upon women in the age range when they are considered potentially attractive: from 11-13 to 45-50 years old. While younger women should be under watch, older ones can be fairly independent (in fact, they take on the duty of the watchers, Topic III. Note 1: The mother-in-law). They also belong to an older generation, which as a standard was employed outside of the neighbourhood and led a more independent life.

There is also a high variability between families. Usually the ones that place a higher value on education are also more likely to trust their female children and let them have more independence. Those youngsters would also be raised equipped to make their own judgements and handle their freedom. Other families, however, might stop their girls from going to classes altogether, at the age of 12 or 13 to prevent them from being snatched by boys (Note

10: The sway of romantic love).

FIELD PIECE 3A: THE EYE OF THE INTIMATE COMMUNITY (GENIKA)

COMMUNITY'S EYE

Galia (young woman, married, running a tiny café) tells me that by profession she is a seamstress but her husband doesn't allow her to go to work. I ask her, Ok, how does he let you down here, in front of the block? Now he isn't around and you are alone, running the kiosk? She replies with a wave of her hand towards the space around us: Well, here are all his kin – brothers, aunts, sisters. They are all watching.

**Note 4: A point about action: Speaking with men or women**

A: SPEAKING TO (WO)MEN

WOMAN 10, MAN 10

Bulgarian and foreign people are not subject to the norms of inter-gender conduct (Note #3: Unfamiliar men are a danger). Such women are known to be strongly independent and that is respected. You would have no trouble speaking to most men and being taken for your word. On the other hand, 'conquering' a woman from across the minority divide is seen as a special challenge, a demonstration of one's masculine and social success, so the most confident men (esp. if you are chatting with pimps, criminal bosses and the like) might push it to see what happens.

As a man you can speak to women and younger married women too, also by playing the card of an outsider. If their husband is present, you might have to respect the hierarchy though. In all cases paying attention to body language and the positioning of your bodies in space will tell you how your intervention is being interpreted. With age all of these issues subside. You might even be treated as a 'son'/'daughter'.

**Note 5: Women and employment – a variety of arrangements**

WOMEN & EMPLOYMENT

WOMAN 10, WORK 8, SPACE 6

During socialism both genders in the neighbourhood were pushed to integrate in the official workforce and that normalised the experience that a woman would go to work outside of the family structure. At the same time, unease with the idea of leaving women without a watcher still holds a big sway in the community (Note #3: Unfamiliar men are a danger). This tension between the two settled norms leads to a variety of employment arrangements which we observed in different families.

Many women operate a small business in the vicinity of their home: a kiosk, a food stall, a shop integrated into the house. In this case, the desire to remain on the territory of the familiar community is mixed with the realities of the Bulgarian economy, as well as the high degree of exclusion of workers who are from Stolipinovo (##). Yet, some women develop their business into itinerant trading: visiting the villages around Plovdiv (##), going to markets, or selling on the streets of the city (this was more common during the hardships of the '90s).

There are couples in which the man will not let his wife work at all, even if she wants to. Usually these are from the younger generation. They see this as keeping to the community's authentic tradition (or an Islamic tradition), and it is perceived as a point of prestige for the man.

Still, many women are employed outside of the neighbourhood. The most established employer is the municipality. The workforces of the municipal companies for cleaning and for park maintenance are constituted mostly of people from the Stolipinovo community, which itself is thus carried over. The other more acceptable employment for women is in factories and bigger workshops where, again, other people from the neighbourhood would already be established. Women often apply for work together with a relative or join one already working there. In Plovdiv, several private sewing and shoe-making factories benefit from that, but not many of them accept Turkish and Roma workers.

The least acceptable option is the small private employer outside of the neighbourhood (as an office cleaner, working in the kitchen, a vendor, etc). In these workplaces the younger woman would be exposed to individual contacts of unpredictable nature, and especially, to the authority the boss might have over his female worker.

Although here we placed emphasis on the male-female relations, a compounding factor for the above strategies of the local women looking for work, is the risk of exposure to Bulgarian everyday racism (##).

FIELD PIECE 5A: POOR MEN WOULDN'T LET THEIR WIVES WORK (NIKOLA)

WIFE SHAN'T WORK

The men who insist that they are the sole provider for their family are not necessarily ones who have a good income. It was a man who worked on construction sites who insisted to me that he wouldn't let his wife work even if they had no food on the table. Let me detail here the situation of another couple, of about 20-25, with two kids. The man was an orphan who grew up in an institution. When I asked him how he earned his money, he said that he was a ski-instructor (he acquired this thanks to the foster home) but he couldn't really get a job, because: *You know how* when they see you are from the minority [making a gesture over his face], they look at you in a bit more interesting way. But now glory to God, I've found a job – at the wholesale fruit & vegetable market of the city, for 25 leva per day.

(We've met a few men from Stolipinovo who work at the wholesale – to help unload trucks, carry sacks, etc – of course, hired informally and by the day, without contracts nor stable prospects.) He concluded, with certain amount of pride, I've been

everything [i.e. I've worked all kinds of jobs]! I've been even a drug-addict!

Despite his precarious employment, his wife, who was holding him by the arm, complained that she stays at home all day and feels bored. He responded to this by explaining to us in a resigned tone: Well, for us it is like this. She must stay home and tend the children. (To me this seemed like a move to avoid personal responsibility for the matter.)

FIELD PIECE 5B: TO THE FACTORY WITH A FRIEND

TO THE FACTORY

FIELD PIECE 5C: CLEANER – YES, WAITRESS - NO (GENIKA AND ROSI)

CLEANER OR WAITRESS

### **Note 6: Care of the home is woman's work**

HOME IS WOMAN'S WORK

WOMAN 10, FAMILY 10, MAN 2

FIELD PIECE 6A: THE MAN 'CAN'T FRY EGGS ON HIS OWN'

MAN 'CAN'T FRY EGGS'

FIELD PIECE 6B: THE CASE OF A WOMEN-ONLY FAMILY

A WOMEN-ONLY FAMILY

### **Note 7: The woman can and does have large responsibilities**

LARGE RESPONSIBILITIES

WOMAN 10, BUSINESS 5

### **Note 8: The woman as a head of family**

Woman head of family Family 10, Woman 10

Despite the norms of distrust (Note 3: Unfamiliar men are a danger) that encroach on women's potential to be independent (Note 1: The woman should be near the home, the man – out of it), there are many women in Stolipinovo who govern their life on their own after they have lost their partners for one reason or another. They would be taking the initiative to develop a business or to look for work beyond the neighbourhood. They could even set about constructing a house for (and with) their dependent family.

Such self-dependent women would normally be middle aged or older (the youngest one we have met was 45). They benefit from the respect and responsibility accorded to older women (Topic III. Note 1: The mother-in-law). In order to end up in this situation, a woman would have to not have any older relatives, male or female, who would have otherwise assumed responsibility for her.

FIELD PIECE 8A: AN INDEPENDENT WOMAN'S LIFE STORY (NIKOLA AND BENOIT)

A LIFE STORY

Here is the story of Petrana (old woman, 'divorced', with a business in front of her home), around 60 years old, self-reliant

grandma. We met her in the poorest part of Stolipinovo that was constructed in the '90s by people without their own homes. There she was setting up a barbecue to grill some meat and sell it to her neighbours.

Petrana's husband left her 20 years ago, leaving her with the children. Until then she lived in the centre of the neighbourhood, in a nice house. They came here, and built this house by themselves, with her two sons. It was a bare place. They were coming from the police, writing fines, but what could you do?! – you've got to live somewhere. Her first son died from illness or a stroke at 27. The other one is in France for 8 years now.

She brought up his kid – also while he was still living here – because his wife ran away. She left it as a 9-month baby. Petrana raised it for 10 years, when that woman appeared and snatched the child away. The old lady went to the police but they told her: At the time you haven't re-registered the kid in your name, nothing could be done. She desired to go and take it back, but the clerks there told her, Look, you have taken care for it for so many years, it pains you – but don't do that. She will come, there might be a tussle, and at the end they will come to take it into a home [to institutionalise it]. At least she is its mother, she won't kill it. It's better there. That's how Petrana reconciled herself with the fact.

Today: she gives 40 lv for medicine per month; she has 'a pump' on the heart, she isn't supposed to get out of bed to work at all. She has no pension. At the time, she worked in "Petar Tchengelov", the state factory for shoes. We meet many people in the neighbourhood who worked there. In the early years of transition to democracy they are all laid off. In 1990 she also loses her job – and hasn't found work until today (2015). *Well, there is work*, she corrects herself, *but all of it is like this one* – she waves towards the barbecue stand where two meatballs were sizzling for me. *There is no work from the state*. That is, there is no formal work, with a salary and social insurance. She also cleans two block staircases in Smirneski neighbourhood (at the opposite end of Plovdiv) throughout all these years. She gets 35 lv per entrance. In order to get a pension, she learned she had to pay 1500 lv social insurance. *I don't have the means to raise these money; by this barbecue?*

In fact, for a few days she didn't work the barbecue because she didn't have the money to get coal. This makes sense when for two large meatballs and a quarter loaf of bread "Dobrudja" in which she put them, she asked for the meagre 1 lv.

We guess that her son is sending some money from France but she tells me that to ensure her sustenance she had invested also in 'a game' for the kids (a 1990s large console game inside her house), and in a trampoline in her yard for the younger kids, who would come to jump on it for 50 stotinki [25 eurocents].

Having heard this long list of Petrana's business activities the full force of the sentence „I am with a pump on the heart, I am not even supposed to get up from bed" came into view for us.

.....

### **Note 9: Islam and women in Stolipinovo**

ISLAM AND WOMEN

WOMAN 10, CELEBRATIONS 8, SPACE 2

### **Note 10: The sway of romantic love**

ROMANTIC LOVE

WOMAN 10, YOUTH 10, FAMILY 6, SUCCESS 3

for younger and unmarried girls, ...

(the expression, used both in Stolipinovo and by older generations of Bulgarians, is „ще я излъже някой”, “someone would lure/dupe/wheedle her”)

## **Topic II. What it means to be a man in Stolipinovo?**

### **Note 1: The pressure of gender expectations on men**

EXPECTATIONS ON MEN

MAN 10, INSTITUTIONS 3

### **Note 2: For the man being out of home means taking care of the family**

MAN OUT OF HOME

MAN 10, FAMILY 6,

FIELD PIECE 2A: BEING OUT IS ‘FINDING SOME LEV’

‘FINDING SOME LEV’

## **Topic III. What would the ideal Stolipinovo family be like?**

### **Note 1: The mother-in-law**

MOTHER-IN-LAW

FAMILY 10, WOMAN 9, LEARNING 4

The elder woman – the mother, or more often, the mother-in-law – is considered the hostess of the household and is paid much respect. She takes care of one or more daughters-in-law and the grandchildren. The other women in the family obey her advice (Note 4: Familial obedience is important), as it is seen as the elder woman’s right and responsibility to set out the family’s course, to solve the issues that arise between its members, and to plan for the needs of the household. Often she is even the one who disburses the pooled finances of the family. The collective income of her husband, sons, daughters and daughters-in-law, would routinely be given to her (# Money control in the family). Thus, when any members of the family want to spend money, they have to ask from her and get her approval for their spending. On the flip side, the senior couple usually dedicates all of their resources to their children and grandchildren, with little consideration to themselves.

It is the mother-in-law’s responsibility to educate the sometimes very young girl that has come into the family (**Error! Reference source not found.** The age of giving birth) on what her contribution must be in the new collective life she is joining. The mother-in-law sometimes becomes like a second mother for the girl, though her most important task is to teach the youngster how to behave ‘properly’ so as not to embarrass her new relatives. A married woman often spends more time with her mother-in-law than with her husband, (who would usually be out, Topic I. Note 1: The woman should be near the home, the man – out of it).

**A point for action:** When you pursue the cooperation of locals, the best path might be to identify those members of the family

whose word is heard and gain their goodwill and support. These often (but not always) are the elder women.

#### FIELD PIECE 2A: 'MY MOTHER IS NOT LIKE THAT' (NIKOLA)

'MY MOM IS NOT'

I presented Kemal (a middle-aged man, married, operating a kiosk) with our conclusions about the respect accorded to the mother-in-law. He responded emotionally: Look, this is what people say! However, my mother for example, is not like this! She lives on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor, he motions to the block of flats behind us, and I – on the 4<sup>th</sup>. We have separate flats, you see?

She would never say something to us. My mother would never come to tell my wife what she should do. Ok, she comes here every morning, we have coffee, she helps my wife all day here at the kiosk. But to order her around or something like that – never! To tell her, 'Come to clean my apartment' – never! There are others who do such. Yes, there are such who are very impertinent (нахални). Such... old wives, lets call them (бабички да ги кажем), who are constantly meddling – 'why you did this', 'why you did that so'!

#### FIELD PIECE 2B: FEELING RESPONSIBLE 'FOR THE KIDS' (GENIKA)

CARE 'FOR THE KIDS'

Giurgena (a middle-aged woman, married, and a pensioner) says about "her children", Without me they wouldn't survive! That Giurgena calls her sons, daughters, daughters-in-law and grandchildren by the collective "my children", speaks for the role and responsibilities of elder women.

Although she had serious health issues, she rejected the idea of seeing a doctor (and the threat of being hospitalised), because it would mean leaving 'the children' on their own. At the moment we spoke to her, their house had just been bulldozed by the municipality, putting her family in a particularly difficult situation. She asserted that she couldn't leave them for the doctor, because otherwise people would talk and they would blame her 'for everything': For leaving them like that. Even in such a dramatic moment, being seriously ill and with a bulldozed house, the most important factor to consider was the opinion of the community (Topic IV.Note #3:The significance of the 'public opinion' of neighbours and relatives).

Giurgena did not go to work, and it was her husband who brought money to the family. Yet, it seemed clear during my time with them that she was positioned highly in the family hierarchy. She took decisions on par with her husband about the collective course of action, and was respected by everyone. She also had money at her disposal, which she would hand out to the kids when they asked for something.

#### FIELD PIECE 2C: GOOD AND EVIL MOTHERS-IN-LAW (GENIKA)

GOOD AND EVIL

### **Note 3: The thriving of the traditional family**

TRADITIONAL FAMILY

FAMILY 10, YOUTH 6

Although there are all kinds of situations in different families, on the whole, young couples submit to the established tradition of

custodianship by the parents (Note #1: The mother-in-law). There could be a number of factors that keep them obedient (Note 4: Familial obedience is important): a material one is that in difficult times they may be dependent on the financial help and more general support of the mother(-in-law), and difficult times are always expected in the neighbourhood. A cultural one is that they are brought up to strongly respect the family and those older than them. A social one is the pressure exerted by the expectations of all significant people around them – i.e. the community's 'public opinion' (Topic IV. Note 3: The significance of the 'public opinion' of neighbours and relatives).

Social factors are the most binding, as they make and re-make one's identity in practical terms, through the everyday confronting of the self in the eyes of one's peers.

Couples who want to lead a more independent life would seek to settle in a separate home but even then this would be nearby (Note #5: The family should live close by). If they go abroad for work, intense communication via internet or smartphones would allow the relationship to continue.

#### **Note 4: Familial obedience is important**

FAMILIAL OBEDIENCE

FAMILY 10, WOMAN 7

It is considered important that younger people in general, and daughters and daughters-in-law in particular, are obedient to the parents' generation. 'Слуша ме' ('listens to me', 'is obedient') is an important praise word for a younger or a female member of the family.

The complex dynamics of relations, needs and events in the extended family comes as a priority for most of its members. It is the primary organising structure of people's lives here, as well as the primary social and economic safety net. Thus, they might be more inclined to compromise with other obligations, such as those imposed by their employer, by school or other institutions.

**A point about action:** As the actions that are important for you, will likely be at the tail of local people's priorities, you would encounter a fair amount of drop-outs. The economic instability of life here adds up with a demanding circle of relatives. You have to take into account that you will be in touch with people who share all their resources in a family network. It makes them available or not. They may have an unpredictable obligation that will make them leave what you are doing together even if they appreciate and enjoy it.

FIELD PIECE 4A: PETIA DOES LOTS OF THINGS FOR THE FAMILY

PETIA DOES DUTIES

FIELD PIECE 4B: TALKING ABOUT GOOD FAMILY RELATIONS (GENIKA)

TALKING ABOUT RELATIONS

Albena (a middle-aged woman, married, with a salaried job) recently got a new daughter-in-law, who had married her younger son. I am asking, Is she good? The answer is, I don't know yet what she's like. For now she listens to what I say.

A few weeks later, at another meet up with Albena, I similarly asked if the daughters-in-law are listening to her, whether they work around the house and tidy; help her out? Yes, they help me, they cook, they do what they're told.

**A point about action:** This is an ordinary and welcomed conversation topic, which gives opportunity to the woman to express her pride of those qualities of her family that are cherished in the community. Of course, it also serves to continuously reiterate the expected performances from each social and family role. Here, I asked my questions in this specific way in order to build a more ordinary and relatable character, even if I am obviously an outsider. I wanted to show that what is normal to talk and gossip about in the community is also familiar to me in my own life and we can all relax about class boundaries. In your work with the locals it will help you a lot to show that you speak the same ‘cultural language’, even if you speak different native languages (in our case, Bulgarian and Turkish).

### **Note 5: The family should live close by**

THE FAMILY CLOSE BY

FAMILY 10, INGENUITY 6, SPACE 7

The younger couple usually live near their parents, even if they have the opportunity to move to a new house or flat. Often a new room would be added for the new family, to a house that has already seen several extensions (Topic IV. Note 2: Family growth and expansion of the home). Thus, the extended family could stay together; resources would continue to be shared; and the old would be able to keep a watchful eye on the young and give them daily guidance. The young are expected to repay this with familial respect (Note 4: Familial obedience is important).

Even if the family lives in an apartment block and extensions of this sort are impossible, a new apartment or a house would be sought in the same block or nearby. The importance of familial links and daily proximity means also that those individuals who are upwardly mobile, or who would like to leave the din of the neighbourhood, would still prefer to settle in directly adjacent areas.

### **Note 6: Money control in the family**

MONEY CONTROL

FAMILY 10, WOMAN 7, BUSINESS 10

Contrary to our expectations, in many families it is the wife who disposes of the family income and financial resources. ...

Field piece 6a: The first 500 leva of Redjep

500 LEVA

FIELD PIECE #6B: THE WIFE AS THE FAMILY TREASURER

THE FAMILY TREASURER

### **Topic IV. Other**

#### **Note 1: Paying respects to the elders on Kurban Bayram**

THE ELDER ON BAYRAM

CELEBRATIONS 10, FAMILY 8

Muslim tradition reinforces the importance of age hierarchy. Each year, on the Kurban Bayram holiday (##), everyone must pay respects to those relatives, neighbours and friends who are their senior. They pay them a visit and kiss their right hand with lips and forehead. In a day with a festive mood, this ritual displays and reaffirms the goodwill between individuals. Kids are taught to honour all adults around them, but also middle-age people visit those older. The kurban – the traditional sacrifice and festive consumption of a male sheep (##) – tends to be hosted by the older members of the kin.

**A point about action:** We found that it is acceptable for the non-Muslim friend to also give and receive respects. In this way, he or she would further strengthen a shared relation of goodwill.

FIELD PIECE 1A: AT A FAMILY ON KURBAN BAYRAM (NIKOLA)

AT A FAMILY ON BAYRAM

The grandchildren of my friend (middle-aged man, married, craftsman) came around in excitement at the prospect to be interacting with the adults, kissing hands, and be receiving attention and affection. The kids started towards me but paused in thought. They looked at their grandpa questioningly, is it ok to pay honours to me as well? He encouraged them, to their delight. Outside, his wife was preparing, together with her daughter, sour cabbage-leaf sarmi (stuffed with meat and rice). I asked, why such a simple meal was being cooked for the holiday, wouldn't they cook a ram? They explained that they are soon going to his mother's house, and there was a ram being slaughtered. They will contribute the sarmi. Over there, all of the mother's children, grandchildren and so on, would gather – around 20 people. *Now the younger are coming to greet us, then in the afternoon we will go to greet the older. ...See?*, he finished as a car pulled up on the street opposite and a man and woman of around 40-45 emerged and turned toward us.

FIELD PIECE 1B: A JOKE (NIKOLA)

A JOKE

A pair of middle-aged men barged in the workshop, in high spirits, greeting my host and laughing. He was happy to see them and presented them to me – *These are my mates since I was a small boy here! We used to play on these streets.* There was suddenly a small battle, they were trying to take his hand and kiss it. He was pulling out and laughing: *No, I'm not older than you! Not that much older!*

**A point about action:** Like any other social interaction, the ritual also can be used for making light of your friends! Religion and tradition in Stolipinovo are an everyday part of life and because of that they cannot be always serious and solemn. Do not be afraid to engage in discussions or even play about them.

...

## Note 2: Family growth and expansion of the home

EXPANSION OF THE HOME

INGENUITY 10, SUCCESS 9, FAMILY 8

Investing in the expansion of the house for the next generations is one of the major needs which organises the families income motives (another being the weddings of sons and grandsons). ...

Note 3: The significance of the ‘public opinion’ of neighbours and relatives

LOCAL ‘PUBLIC OPINION’

COMMUNITY 10, FAMILY 7

## Guide – a brief groundwork

The following page and a half offers a model for the *main text* of the guide. The probe covers the set of notes written out above. Their order has been synchronised to match the linear order below. Each note is summarised in up to two sentences (in square brackets below) so a topic would comprise a page or just over.

The important point is that each pair of square brackets is a link to the corresponding full note. (I have not added this functionality here; the colouring only serves the visualisation.) In fact, this is the guide’s table of contents, though it can be read as a stand-alone text. It will appear at the top of the guide.

For the time being, I have put the links to the *field pieces* and *the points about action* as footnotes to avoid breaking up the text. This formatting is not final.

### What it means to be a woman in Stolipinovo?

[In Stolipinovo most people agree that the woman’s place is near her home, while the man should not linger there. Yet, the difference in expectations towards genders cannot be subsumed in a simplistic scheme: commonly the woman would be going to work or running a business; she would be the one visiting state institutions; she would take walks for pleasure with other women in the centre of Plovdiv.]<sup>23 24</sup> [A woman’s contact with men is seen as unsafe if it could take place beyond the community’s eye and the restraining threat of subsequent gossip. While younger women should be under watch, older ones can be fairly independent.]<sup>25 26</sup> [Still, during socialism the experience that a woman could go to work outside of the family structure became common. As a result, today one can observe a great variety of employment arrangements: while there are couples where the man will not let his wife work, many women operate a small business in the vicinity of their home, many work in the municipal cleaning companies or in factories; the least acceptable option is the small private employer where no other people from the community work.]<sup>27 28 29</sup> [The woman is concerned with everything connected to the household, as well as to the children, and to maintaining the relations with the neighbours and the relatives. All the family and community responsibilities are still hers to handle even if she goes to work.]<sup>30 31</sup> [The woman can and does have large responsibilities: she would for example govern the family’s budget including the income of her husband. ... ..] [Despite the norms of distrust that encroach on women’s potential to be independent there are many women in Stolipinovo who govern their life on their own after they have lost their partners for one reason or another. Such self-dependent women would normally be middle aged or older.]<sup>32</sup>

...

[We see a slight return of more Islamic dress, mostly with some younger women. Women rarely fast during Ramadan but the holiday visit to the centre of the city and the mosque there is a social occasion for everyone.] ...

[The sway of romantic love ....]

...

A half-page more

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<sup>23</sup> [Field piece: The gender asymmetry in social control]

<sup>24</sup> [A note on action: If in your project you wish to take women outside of Stolipinovo, or even to a part of the neighbourhood they don't normally visit, you will likely face resistance. If you plan actions to take place locally, directly in the community, you will likely achieve much greater audience, participation and impact.]

<sup>25</sup> [Field piece: The eye of the intimate community]

<sup>26</sup> [A note on action: Bulgarian and foreign people are not subject to the norms of inter-gender conduct. You can freely speak to both sexes, but if both are present, you might have to respect the hierarchy.]

<sup>27</sup> [Field piece: Poor men wouldn't let their wives work]

<sup>28</sup> [Field piece: To the factory with a friend]

<sup>29</sup> [Field piece: Cleaner – yes, waitress – no]

<sup>30</sup> [Field piece: The man 'can't fry eggs on his own']

<sup>31</sup> [Field piece: The case of a women-only family]

<sup>32</sup> [Field piece: An independent woman's life story]

### **What would the ideal Stolipinovo family be like?**

[The elder woman – the mother, or more often, the mother-in-law – is considered the hostess of the household and is paid much respect. It is the mother-in-law's responsibility to educate the young girl that has come into the family on what her contribution must be in the new collective life she is joining.]<sup>33 34 35</sup> [On the whole, young couples submit to the established tradition of custodianship by the parents. There are a number of factors for this: difficult times are always expected and then the family would rely on mutual financial support; kids are brought up to strongly respect those older than them; most significantly, there is the pressure exerted by the expectations of the community.] [The complex dynamics of relations, needs and events in the extended family comes as a priority for most of its members. It is the primary organising structure of people's lives here.]<sup>36 37 38</sup> [The younger couple usually live near their parents, even if they have the opportunity to move to a new house or flat. Often a new room would be added for the new family, to a house that has already seen several extensions.]

...

[Contrary to our expectations, in many families it is the wife who disposes of the family income and financial resources. ...]<sup>39 40</sup>

...

Two-thirds of a page more.

### **How significant are celebrations?**

...

[Muslim tradition reinforces the importance of age hierarchy. Each year, on the Kurban Bayram holiday, everyone must pay respects to those relatives, neighbours and friends who are their senior.]<sup>41 42 43</sup>

<sup>33</sup> On action: When you pursue the cooperation of locals, the best path might be to identify those members of the family whose word is heard and gain their goodwill and support.

<sup>34</sup> [Field piece: Feeling responsible 'for the kids']

<sup>35</sup> [Field piece: Good and evil mothers-in-law]

<sup>36</sup> On action: You have to take into account that you will be in touch with people who share all their resources in a family network, which makes their time and obligations quite unpredictable.

<sup>37</sup> [Field piece: Petia does lots of things for the family]

<sup>38</sup> [Field piece: *Talking about good family relations.*] On action: In your work with the locals it will help you a lot to show that you speak the same 'cultural language', even if you speak different native languages.

<sup>39</sup> [Field piece: The first 500 leva of Redjep]

<sup>40</sup> [Field piece: The wife as the family treasurer]

<sup>41</sup> On action: We found that it is acceptable for the non-Muslim friend to also take part in the ritual exchange and strengthen mutual respect.

<sup>42</sup> [Field piece: At a family on Kurban Bayram]

<sup>43</sup> [Field piece: *A joke.*] On action: Religion and tradition in Stolipinovo is an everyday part of life and because of that not necessarily serious and solemn – you can also play about it.