Small Places, Large Networks: Transformations of Clientelism in Bulgaria

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When in the 1960s and 1970s the interest in the study of clientelism gained momentum in relation with the development of anthropology of Mediterranean societies, Bulgaria was a socialist country, and such studies were impossible and unthinkable. However, citizens were involved in a wide variety of social practices to address the perennial shortages of goods and services and the political and bureaucratic restrictions and obstacles typical of the epoch and the political regime. After the end of socialism the world of these ingenious social actors experienced dramatic changes, but did not disappear. The narratives of the recent past have shown that as before, "all of us have problems which we at least attempt to resolve via friends and friends-of- friends, with whom we may even form temporary alliances" (Boissevain 1974: 3).

How has clientelism transformed throughout history? What are its main manifestations in different spheres of everyday life in Bulgaria? These are the main research questions I will address. This paper uses the term clientelism instead of "patron-client relationship", in view of the specifics of the Bulgarian examples. As the analysis will show further on, the role of the patron as a more or less stable social position occurs rarely in Bulgarian environment. The prevailing type are dyadic relations in which the patron and the client often change their places; these relationships are temporary and their duration coincides approximately with the time of preparation, establishment and implementation of a transaction.

Here I adhere to the concept of clientelism, formulated by Christian Giordano, who, by the way, uses the terms "patronage relationships and clientele system" as synonyms: "With its implicit strategy of personalyzing social relationships, the clentele system becomes the backboneof the management of the common good, which is privatized via multiple extensive vertical links featuring dyadic and often long-term ties between patrons and clients at crucial points" (Giordano 2013: 35). On the other hand, some authors conceptually separate clientelism from the sphere of personal favours and acquaintances (Ledeneva 1998: 56-57; Giordano 2013: 33-34), most often called *"blat"* in Russia, in Bulgaria – *'vrazki' "*connections/ties*"*. This distinction seems artificial insofar as "connections", "acquaintances" and "favours" are characterized as appropriation of "material-like common goods as well as symbolic-like state

privileges via highly personalized channels" (Giordano 2013: 34), i.e. as practically identical with clientelist relations.

Based on the Bulgarian examples I review the system of *"connections"* as one of the manifestations of clientelism, as far as in both cases the mechanisms of social interaction are the same. The analysis here is based on the theoretical contributions of Jeremy Boissevain (1974) in the study of social networks (Boissevain 1974: 24-28); the concept of social network is a suitable analytical tool because of its value neutrality. This paper addresses periods of socialism and postsocialism in Bulgaria.

From a theoretical point of view, the clear distinction between clientelism and corruption is a challenge. The study of corruption with the methods of socio-cultural anthropology is presented in relatively few publications, in contrast to numerous anthropological studies on the clientele system. According to a World Bank study, anthropological contributions to the study of corruption constitute about 2% of the relevant literature (Torsello 2011: 1-2). This condition changed lately with the growing interest of anthropologists to study corruption. [1]

Difficulty or inability to conduct direct observations of social practices qualified as criminal is one of the main obstacles anthropologists face along with apprehension of essentialism. Even reaching universal understanding of corruption is problematic, not least because the Eurocentric use of this term is not generally accepted (Ibid: 3; Pačenkov, Olimpieva 2007: 7). Admittedly rather the opposite is true: the concepts of legal and illegal are socially constructed, and they vary in different societies; in certain cultures the denial of involvement in acts of corruption can even be seen as a waiver of family or group solidarity (cf. De Sardan 1999: 27).

Recent contributions address clientelism, corruption and related phenomena in terms of inclusive concepts such as informal institutions (Helmke, Levitsky 2004: 725-727; Chavdarova 2013: 179-196) and informality (Giordano 2013: 27- 46). Helmke, Levitsky "define informal institutions as socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels" (2004: 727). While considering the advantages of the theory on informal institutions in the context of the "institutionalist turn" in comparative politics, I give priority to clear analytical distinctions between the concepts

[1] An inexhaustive list should not miss Gupta 1995: 375-402; De Sardan 1999: 25-52; Haller, Shore 2005; Sampson 2005: 103-130; Pachenkov, Olimpieva 2007; Torsello 2011: 1-26; Hardi, Heywood, Torsello 2015.

established (see above) in anthropology. The concept of informal institutions carries the risk of essentialism, because it implies pervasive ("socially shared" – ibid.) nature of clientelism and corruption. As far as my observations lead to different conclusions, I do not think this concept is relevant in Bulgarian context.

Empirically, my observations are based on fifty-three autobiographical narratives and/or autobiographical interviews: a result from a fieldwork carried out in the period 2001-2007.[2] Fifty of the interviews were taken in Sofia among representatives of the so called "technical intelligentsia" (engineers , architects, designers, etc.).

The everyday clientele system and nepotism during socialist epoch. During the socialism in Bulgaria there existed a firm belief, sometimes explicitly expressed, that *"Without "connections" one can neither be born nor die".* Among the reasons for the pervasive influence of "connections" on daily life in socialist Bulgaria are the institutional weakness of the states, characterizing Mediterranean and Balkan societies (Giordano 2013: 29) and the socialist "economics of shortage". Interview with a former bookkeeper in a warehouse for wholesale recalls almost forgotten today deficits of most banal goods:

"... Toilet paper, caps [for jars], plastic products from the GDR: there were nice basins, nice tubs, nice buckets. Their plastic was more refined, while the Bulgarian one somewhat more coarse. [...] In our warehouse the most scarce thing were the jar caps. And there were many good Russian goods. And they were very scarce. They were called "Russian sets" - household utensils, so on one shelf there were haning on the wall ladles, forks, spoons. " [3]

The list is much longer than that: with "connections" theater tickets were bought, without "connections" it was difficult to get into the list of clients of a reputable tailor, a good hairdresser, to receive adequate medical care and so on.

It is known from the literature that reciprocity is a condition without which the clientelist relationship would be lost. Families who needed to accommodate their children in kindergarten, had to look for a "connection" (usually with a staff member); however, they should be prepared to offer a comparable "service" in return, often – delayed in time. Just like the kindergarten enrollment, access to the driving course or especially the acquisition of a hunting license was very limited and therefore a serious effort was required to find the right "connection".

[2] Three of the interviews were conducted by Peter Petrov, to whom I am grateful.
[3] Interview with Y. V., taken by P. Petrov on 21.10.2001 in Gabrovo.

In this daily mass clientelism (see. Benovska-Sabkova 1993; Benovska-Sabkova 2001) the social network established in the workplace allows for transactions far beyond the world of labour. A widespread strategy is to use the social networks of colleagues in seeking access to scarce goods or services (for example, if the mother-in-law of a colleague is a nurse, or a colleague's cousin works in a department store). Thus the work position of each person becomes his/her social capital and the size of this capital depends on the degree of access to resources. In Bulgaria and the Soviet Union, the access to resources got primal importance in informal exercise of power at the expense of the importance of money. As Ledeneva testifies, here in force is the principle *"He who guards, he has"* [*'Кто охраняет, тот имеет'*](Ledeneva 1998).

Striving to deal with shortages requires a willingness to improvise ad hoc, and a good knowledge of the basic principles of clientele transactions. One day in the early 1980s I saw a queue at one of the neighbourhood stores and also stood in the line once I realized that people were waiting to buy men's socks. A customer wished to buy more than the maximum permitted two pair and before hearing the answer of the shopkeeper, she declared she worked as a nurse in a dental cabinet. The client, well acquainted with the rules of reciprocity, announced in advance what favour she offered in return (i.e., dental care).

In these conditions under socialism the representatives of some professions, such as shopkeepers, tailors, hairdressers, etc. enjoyed prestige and privileges disproportionate to the level of their education and training. A feuilleton, published in 1968, gives an idea of this situation. The feuilleton recreates the rivalries between women who compete to appeal more to the seller in a local shop for fruits and vegetables in order to get a scarce commodity. While lining up the comrades Petrova and Ivanova compete to "prove" friendship or non-existent kinship with the seller. *"Maybe you are interested, who is that person, over whom women had been contesting the right? Kolyo, the greengrocer from our neighborhood department store"* (Popov 1968: 4).

One of the interviews provides a close parallel with the picture of the feuilleton. The female interlocutor, an engineer, talked about the work of her former husband, a butcher in a shop in the center of Sofia, next to the Ministry of Agriculture. In the shop there was a back door, where there was a second, unofficial line of people with shopping privileges, but they also carried, in return, bottles of alcohol according to the rules of reciprocity:

"And then my husband worked here on "Makedonia" [square], at the buttchershop. [...] He was the manager of the store. [...] There, behind the door someone constantly [comes], one person comes; says: "for the minister", "for the boss". The entire [Ministry of] Agriculture was at the door. So I've been there when the line on the back of the store was larger than the line in the hall. [...] From there, some friends were knocking, suppliers, everyone arrives, he picks the best steaks, he comes with the bottle, [my husband says]:"Come now with this person to drink" [...]. But he began to get drunk, bad drunkenness and so we divorced."

This family had no difficulty in getting especially scarce and strictly controlled goods such as washing machines, color televisions or refrigerators: *"My husband was a butcher and he had connections everywhere. We did not have such problems: [color TV] "Toshiba" [was released at the market] – he calls – they deliver it. [...] In this regard, we have not had problems due to the fact that my husband was a butcher and he gave good steaks to responsible people."*[4]

The theme of everyday clientelism under socialism ceases to be banal, if we consider its political connotations. The issue of the illegitimate nature of clientelism comes to the fore here. It contradicts the official socialist morality (see Basics 1971; Benovska-Sabkova 2001; Ledeneva 1998: 2), therefore it was called on the *emic* level *"the second way"* (Roth 2000: 186), and in the language of propaganda sociology - *"the little truth"* (see Mitev1984; Rajčev 1985: 13-36; Rajčev 1991: 95-103).[5] The consumption under socialism was highly politicized (Verdery 1996: 28-29; Ruusmann 2010: 115-135) and hence the need for government strategies to tackle shortages. These strategies had been published in the decrees of the Council of Ministers from 1979, on "meeting the needs of citizens" since (Otečestven Front daily, 1979). Measures were announced to limit the supply of goods through "connections". Therefore, still the use of "connections" was not without supervision.

Attempts to establish control were evidenced both in archival sources (for this see Roth 2000: 187) and in narratives. The interview with Jordan.V., a former bookkeeper in a warehouse, testifies to the attempts to limit shopping "with connections".

"There was an official order. It was known by everyone that there was an order, but it was broken, you know that every order is penultimate. [...] But the director scolded in meetings

[4] Interview with V. T., 10.02.2003.

[5] The existence of "the little truth" is as well recognized in the official party documents. The few quoted sociological publications on the problem appeared after its marking in the official documents of the Twelfth Congress of the Communist Party: "The little truth" exists ... it is a reality" - see Zhivkov 1982: 254-255.

not to sell form the warehouse, but it was sold from warehouses. And what they called cronysm [vrazkarstvo] - that was exactly it. [...] The managers were directly responsible for their products and they had a warehouse at their disposal. And I just did not have the right to go alone to [buy from other warehouses] some things. [...] Only they, only they [the managers] could give me something to buy, or so that I could "fix" [pay favour] of an acquaintance. [...] I wached out. Privileging only the closest people." [6]

This story recalls the established at the same time trade practices "with connections" in Estonia according to Reet Ruusmann (ibid: 115-135). The continuation of the same interview shows that the attempts to limit shopping *"the second way"* had partial success. Except for exercising control, the interview makes evident the specific ethics and rules of the clientele transactions. Those seeking "services" tend to "stretch" the length of clientelist chains and gain access to resources even by more distant and mediated "connections". Conversely, those who have access and guard these resources, seek to limit the circle of people who can be admitted to these resources. The interview clearly shows that the respondent has done favours "only to the closest people", i.e., she has narrowing the circle of beneficiaries of the proximity to her.

The areas of manifestation of the clientele system under socialism are analyzed in detail in my previous publications (Benovska-Sabkova 1993; Benovska-Sabkova 2001). Here I will outline very briefly the main areas: public healthcare, access to the right to buy housing, education and job search. Healthcare is one of the priority areas of the clientele system in cross-cultural perspective, and medical doctors have a privileged position in this system (Gellner 1977: 4; Ledeneva 1998: 29-31).

Under socialism, the shortage of living floorspace (mostly in the big cities) made the access to a dwelling a key and hard problem, also a matter of strong politicization. The administrative control on dwellings (provided by state, municipalities or by enterprises) did not follow the logics of the market; it was rather determined by principles, stated to be social (regarding these phenomena in the Soviet Union, cf. Eisendstadt & Roniger 1984: 187-189). Family A had to prove to be more needy and more deserving than family B, in order to get access to a dwelling; money were of no relevance in that respect (Benovska-Sabkova 2001).

[6] Interview with Y. V. taken by P. Petrov on 21.10.2001 in Gabrovo.

It is evident from Jeremy Boissevain's study on Sicily that education is one of the priority spheres of the clientelism there (Boissevain 1966: 25-26; 27-28). In Bulgaria, university enrolment and enrolment in the elite high schools under socialism were the object of patron-client transactions, due to the great demand and limited supply.

The interviews provide enough evidences that getting job is most often done by an unwritten rule "with connections" or at least thanks to "acquaintances". One interlocutor admits: *"All the positions that I have held, I have worked thanks to friends who recommended me or hired me directly with them."* [7] Virtually all interlocutors got a job "with connections" at least once in their career. Some of them have changed three or even four jobs and in each occasion they have received information and assistance in filling the job by relatives, friends, friends of friends, neighbors, classmates.

The "misrecognition game", observed by Ledeneva, is as well familiar in Bulgaria – i.e. a storytellers' strategy to not acknowledge personal involvement in clientele transactions and attribute them to others (Ledeneva 1998). Taking this to consideration, I came to this data by asking questions about "connections" concerning job appointments in an indirect form: *"How did you hear about this job?"* The answer would be less sincere, if the question directly addressed the subject of connections. Yet, some of the interlocutors openly declared theuse of connections *("I was appointed with connections"* - E. P., born 1925). One of the interviews reveals the social fabric of the transaction featuring "friends of friends" (in this case - a friend of a relative):

"In 1980 I graduated, I started working again with connections since I lived in Sofia. There were no [work] places [...] my uncle helped me again. He called a friend in [department] "Labour and Manpower", he headed "Labour and Manpower" in Sofia. I went to the door, he recognized me, there were a hundred people there, but we just look alike with my uncle. [...] He asked me where I lived, sent me to [neighborhood] "Krasno Selo" to [department] "Labour and Manpower" on [boulevard] "Botev" it was and from there directly they gave me papers for [a job at the designers' bureau] "Agropromproekt". [8]

According to another interlocuter, during her fifteen years of work in the same large design organization, all appointments were done only by "acquaintances" and "connections"; even the students who did internships in this design office, they got there by acquaintances

[7] Interview with E.S., 14.02.20014, Sofia.
[8] Interview with V. T., 10.02.2003.

(K.Zh., born 1954). In this sense the Bulgarian examples deviate from the principle declared by Granovetter, for "the strength of the weak ties" (Granovetter 1983: 201-233) according to which the use of "the weak ties" (acquaintances) in job search is more effective than "the strong ties" (friends). The findings of Granovetter have validity in societies with a strong institutional environment; the picture is different in societies with public mistrust.

The mass clientelism under socialism in Bulgaria coexists with political nepotism. Officially unagnowledged, both phenomena are a public secret, though. In an earlier publication, I compared the nepotism, practiced by the regime of Todor Živkov (1956-1989), with the tribalism in the post-colonial Sub-Saharan African societies (Benovska-Săbkova 1993: 3). The family clan of Živkov occupied key power posts in the county. The daughter, son-in-law and the son of Todor Živkov, his wife's brother, as well as the close relative Petko Dančev occupied various high party and state posts. It was precisely the complete arrogance in the introduction of members of the family or of the kinship group into the power apparatus that contributed to the ultimate discrediting of Živkov's regime at the time. Public opinion was particularly sensitive to the farcical proclamation of his son – Vladimir Živkov - as professor at the Party's Academy of Social Sciences. [9]

Besides "Živkov" clan, associated with the birthplace of the leader - Pravets, I should mention other communist clans of rather local significance: that of Pencho Kubadinski (Loznica), of Cola Dragoyčeva (Byala Slatina) or the clan of former "antifascist partisans" from Southwestern Bulgaria. In these cases we observe the so called localism, in which the birthplaces of "leaders" enjoy privileges. Resources began to flow to the former poor little villages; they turned into small flourishing towns and at the same time served as "shop windows of socialism" (Benovska-Săbkova 1993: 7).

The communist nepotism is partly explained with the rural background and poor education of the communist elite; with the conspiratidхьв mentality that trusts only "our people"; and with the virtually uncontrolled way of exercising power. The communist nepotism, however, is in sharp contradiction to the Marxist moral credo, and especially in "The Moral Code of the Builder of Communism", adopted in 1961 by the 22nd Congress of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) (cf. Basics 1971).

[9] Political nepotism was not in the least (and still is not) a Bulgarian socialist specificity; to mension but a few cases: Ceausescu clan in Romania; or North Korea with "the great teacher" Kim Ir Sung and his hairs.

Contrary to the expectations, the communist clans did not disappear after the end of socialism, but experienced shifts and transformations. Since the governace of the former Tsar Simeon Sax Coburg Gotha (2001-2005), the heirs of the former communist leaders have occupied important positions in the Bulgarian political life. Sergey Stanishev, a son of a Politburo member of the former Bulgarian Communist Party, headed the party - heiress (the Bulgarian Socialist Party) and was a Prime Minister (2005-2009). Perhaps his political "patrons" have influence outside Bulgaria because he is currently the President of the Party of European Socialists in the European Parliament for a second term. Evgenia Živkova, the granddaughter of the communist leader Todor Živkov, was a two-term member of the Bulgarian Parliament, then she retired from the political life in favor of a successful business.

Post-socialist transformations of the clientelist system in Bulgaria. What has changed since the fall of the Berlin Wall? In some social areas, clientelism is transformed into corruption; in other areas and institutions, where corruption existed still under socialism, albeit unrecognized (customs, traffic police), it has become endemic evil after the end of the era. In this respect Bulgaria is no different from the general picture in the post-socialist countries (Lovell 2005: 66-67). After the Bulgarian accession to the European Union in 2007, however, corruption is measured in the context of the EU; so Bulgaria, along with Romania, is pointed out as an EU Member State with the highest levels of corruption.

Despite the rigorous public speaking in Bulgarian media and in official documents over the past twenty-seven years, the reliable study of corruption continues to be a difficult task. There are well-known reservations against the methods used by the international organization "Transparency International" in the comparative measurement of corruption indexes globally (see Torsello 2011: 5). Measuring the perception of corruption affects discourses on this phenomenon, but it does not directly explore corrupt practices.

Due to the complexity of the problem and the brevity of this text, I will focus mainly on the following issues: a) the post-socialist transformations of clientelism into corruption; b) the internal dynamics of corrupt processes. I adhere to the most prevalent (though very general) definition of corruption as "the abuse of public office for private gain" (Sampson 2005: 106; for almost identical definitions, see Lovell 2005: 67; Torsello 2011: 3). In the Bulgarian post-socialist society there is a condition that corruption "assumes that the role of public official is

clearly understood by both official and citizen" (Lovell 2005: 72). Despite the historical deposits and historically inherited habitus of corruption typical of the region of Southeast Europe as a whole (Sampson 2005: 123-124; Giordano 2013: 30-32), today Bulgarians clearly distinguish the boundaries and phenomenology of corruption as well as the distinction between public and private (Giordano 2013: 31). Moreover, “most of the Bulgarians are intolerant to corruption” (Policy Brief 2014: 4). In this sense, the reference to cultural relativism is not necessary in the contemporary Bulgarian context.

How and to what extent was clientelism transformed into corruption during post-socialism in Bulgaria? In which social spheres is corruption accidental and where does it have endemic character? These are the main questions asked in this part of the text.

With the development of free trade after 1989, the shortages of goods and services disappeared in the late 1990s and with that the need for "connections" in this area as well vanished. The acquisition of some particularly sensitive possessions indicating the social status such as dwellings and cars is done entirely on a market basis, also because their supply exceeded the demand after 2000 (Benovska-Sabkova 2001: 189). Citizens can buy without "connections" apartments, high-tech goods, toilet paper, cars, socks; younger generations not only do not remember the restrictions of the recent past, but do not understand how this was possible. In similar conditions, some authors like Ledeneva (1998) and Popkov (2007: 239-248), announced the disappearance of *blat* in Russia. This conclusion seems hasty or at least the Bulgarian examples lead to different conclusions. Indeed, the need for "connections" in the field of trade is minimized, but has not disappeared, because people are relying on them in the purchase of quality goods at a lower price. Overall, the clientele system has retained its importance in everyday life and in political life.

Further, I will focus on areas that affect every family and every person in Bulgaria: healthcare and education.

In many social spheres clientelism transformed into corruption. Despite the introduction of the healthcare insurance system and private healthcare in 1999, the gifts to doctors were replaced by considerable sums that patients pay as a result of various forms of racketeering, hidden or quite often absolutely official and institutionalized. After the birth of a child in the mid-1990s, R. T. presented to the doctor the usual expensive gift. After gratitude was expressed, the doctor declared that family owed him, apart from the usual gift, and a certain amount of cash.

This is a typical example of the ability of clientelism to be transformed into corruption. Altogether, however, payment in cash implies the possibility of terminating the clientelist relationship, as far as the participation of money exhausts the dyad interpersonal relationship and interrupts the chain of reciprocity: the service is paid, and so continuing the dyad relationship is not necessarily or even unnecessary (see Boissevain 1974: 49).

Soliciting bribes by doctors or illegal additional payments in the hospitals prompts periodically scandals in Bulgarian media during 1990-s (see Benovska-Sabkova 2001). In 1999, a public scandal surfaced in Bulgaria on the occasion of a large sum, demanded by a physician ($2000 demanded just for issuing the epicrisis). In this connection, a series of interviews were taken by the press and broadcast by the media from outstanding experts from the sphere of public health.

Even after the scandal wore off, an extract from an interview, carried by the *Trud* daily, can be quoted as an illustration of the existence of the problem, where a question concerning corruption was addressed to a surgeon, member of an elite crew in an outstanding clinic. Question: "When someone of your patients insists on paying you, do you refuse hims?" – Answer: "*We have sponsorship accounts*." – Question: "But he wants to pay you personally." – Answer: "*This is his right. The salary of an assistant-professor at the Medical Academy is 230 leva*" (*Trud* daily, 13 February, 2000, p. 5).

Is it all about petty or grand corruption? Is it accidental or endemic? The first question seems simple, but reaching the response is complicated, because the amount of illegal bribes, requested by physicians, is sometimes not negligible – it may be thousands in euros or in dollars. In the 1990s it was mainly about bribes demanded from patients and their families, especially in cases of surgical treatment (Benovska-Sabkova 2001: 180). The introduction of mandatory healthcare insurance in 1999, and the transformation of the majority of hospitals into commercial companies in 2000 (excluding the major clinics of nationwide importance) [10] have brought major new resources in the field of healthcare. These are the resources of the healthcare insurance, distributed by the only in the country State Health Insurance Fund. Draining these resources is done through various mechanisms, such as prescribing unnecessary and sometimes dangerous for the patient operations or procedures; through fictitious mass hospitalization of patients; through the payment by the patient of procedures that are already paid by the Health Insurance Fund;

[10] See, e.g.. http://www.sveta-anna.eu/about_us.html. Accessed: 1.06.2016.

through manipulating the prices of medicines in favour of pharmaceutical companies, etc. None of the families in my personal social circle has avoided meeting with illegally requested additional charge to conduct the surgery or other life-saving treatment. In an informal conversation, held in 2012, a professor of medicine shared her shocking personal experience in her role as a patient: during her stay in one of the largest and most prestigious hospitals in Bulgaria she witnessed a widespread request for bribes from the patients.

The theme of corruption in healthcare is daily presented in the electronic media, on the Internet and in the press. It is clear that during post-socialism in this field in Bulgaria there is a wide range of corrupt practices: from petty to grand corruption. The introduction of the market principles since 1999 not only did not end the corrupt practices, but has also led to endemic corruption.

The clientelist relations in the field of education have transformed, but the cases of corruption, hidden and irregular during socialism, became a common practice in the period of post-socialism. Some practices have transformed – taking private lessons in preparation for university exams (Benovska-Sabkova 2001) is now rare. This is due to the reduced number of students since 2000, owing to the ongoing demographic crisis since the early "transition", as well as the emigration and the access Bulgarian youth has to universities in Western Europe and the U.S. after entering the EU. Over the past six or seven years the Bulgarian universities still have many vacancies and some university programs are closed for lack of students. The tensions in the educational system and the taking of private lessons as a "shadow practice" has shifted from admittance to university to being accepted in the elite schools after seventh grade.

A new form of corruption has emerged: taking exams with a bribe. Unlike healthcare, these practices are unequally represented in higher and secondary education. One of the most popular universities – the University of National and World Economy (UNWE) - has an informal, but firm reputation as being the most corrupt. Publicly known is the sleng riddle whereby the abbreviation of the name of the University in Bulgarian should be read as "Tomorrow Bring the Required Amount." On a visit at the same university in 2003 I witnessed a disturbing scene: a professor who was wiping the inscription "200 lev" painted on the office door by an anonymous student. I understood that the professor was forced daily to delete this inscription, because it appeared on his office door every morning.

An interview with a university professor presents a long and complex narrative of the efforts of a group of his colleagues in the late 1990s to prevent a coalition of corrupt teachers from "selling" exams.

The anti-corruption initiative succeeded in this case, but the overall corruption in education and science is not eradicated. One example is the operation of the National Science Fund, especially after the accession of Bulgaria to the European Union (2007) and the introduction of European funds. In 2011, after a major corruption scandal in the National Science Fund and following the unprecedented street protests of scholars, the then education Minister was forced to resign. Problems still persist because the corruption in the National Fund has not been terminated, at the same time its former chairman of the Fund, who publicized the scandal in the media, is a target of repression. Overall, the European funds are the main object of corrupt ambitions.

The comparison between the corrupt practices in the areas of healthcare and those in education proves that the first are endemic, while the latter are rather expressions of accidental corruption. As regards the possible reasons, here we should pay attention to internal imbalances in these two social systems: the drain of doctors going to Western Europe (especially after joining the Eropean Union in 2007)[11] and generally, the unequal accumulation of medical personnel and hospitals in the capital city at the expense of an acute shortage of medical care in small towns and villages in the country. In turn, corruption in education is fueled by the demographic problems (insufficient number of students), along with the low salaries in the education system.

However, there are institutions in which corruption is absolutely pervasive and this is so in the traffic police. According to the investigative journalist Slavi Angelov, the internal police investigation conducted in 2011 showed that out of 60 squads of traffic policemen only one did not take bribes and that was the detachment of policemen who checked on their colleagues. [12] While it is all about "petty" corruption, its pervasiveness is a systemic problem too alarming.

The comparison with the quantitative sociological measurements leads to other directions of analysis, such as about the dynamics in the perceptions of corruption in Bulgaria since the

[11] [A/N]507 doctors declared they would leave the country in 2014. – Medical News, 27.02.2015. http://medicalnews.bg/2015/02/27/. Accessed: 1.06.2016.
[12] „*On target*“. Film by Slavi Angelov, 2014, aired on the Bulgarian national television channel. - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jeU-sGQRriA. Accessed 1.06.2016.

early years of measurements (after 1998) until today[13]. The highest levels of corruption were noted in 1999 (Report 1999: 23) and 2014 (Policy Brief 46 2014: 1). The comparison between the reports for these two years show the changes that occurred in the perceptions of corruption. In 1999 the Bulgarians considered customs officers as the most corrupt (Report 1999: 9; Kostov, Bakalov 1999: 53). A survey conducted locally (city of Vraca) demonstrates that the highest percentage of those involved in an enquiry in Vraca (85%) think that the most corrupted are the customs officials; 60% have pointed out the tax administration, followed by judges and physicians (40% each) and the policemen (30%). Only after them come ministers, mayors, etc. (Kostov & Bakalov: 1999: 53).

In 2014, the levels of corruption rose to the level of 1999, according to an analysis by the Center for the Study of Democracy. "In 2014, representatives of the legislature, political class and representatives of the executive branch with high authority were considered the most corrupt. It should be noted that the corruption reputation of officials, considered the most corrupt, has deteriorated further. Only the reputation of customs officers has improved negligibly (within the stochastic error). It is important to emphasize, too, that the reputation of most groups, considered the most corrupt, has deteriorated to the greatest extent during the period 2002 - 2014" (Policy Brief 46 2014: 6). A comparison between the data for 1999 and those for 2014 shows that the perception of political corruption in 2014 shifted the notion of customs officers as being the most corrupt professional group. The image of customs officers as champions of corruption in the 1990s is most likely associated with cross-border smuggling accompanying at that time the wars during the breakup of the former Yugoslavia. It is clear that the forms of corruption vary depending on the political and economic context in the country. In this sense, the increased perception of corruption in 2014 is due, among the others, to the high degree of political instability in Bulgaria amid the crowded street protests against the unpopular Socialist government of of then-prime minister Plamen Oresharski.

The perceived high levels of corruption do not contradict the intolerance of the Bulgarians to it; the latter, in turn, does not exclude the willingness to participate in corrupt transactions (Policy Brief 46 2014: 6). Despite the high degree of intolerance of Bulgarian

[13] The local Bulgarian branch of "Transperancy International" is called „Transperancy without borders" and it carried out the first measurements in 1998 – See the website: http://transparency.bg/bg/. Other NGOs in Bulgaria also engage in measuring corruption: „ Coalition 2000" – see http://www.anticorruption.bg/; Centre for the Study of Democracy – see http://www.csd.bg/. Accessed: 1.06.2016.

society towards corruption, in the years after the accession of Bulgaria to the European Union (2007) between 16.5% and 29.3% of the population was involved in corrupt deals. A careful reading of the analysis of 2014 shows another thing: how the findings of sociological analysis depend on the methods applied. One of the graphs presented in the analysis for 2014 is entitled "Corruption pressure and involvement in corrupt deals" (Ibid: 2, Fig. 3). However, the graph represents the percentage of the population over 18 years involved in offering bribes, but also the percentage of those citizens who presented gift or provided service. The analysis does not contain data, whether the latter two forms are corrupt act or not; classification of clientelist forms of reciprocity as corruption certainly influences the conclusions by presenting a higher level of perception of corruption. This is not meant to downplay the problem of corruption, but to show the need for greater precision in the use of concepts.

High levels of corruption in post-socialist countries is generally explained by the "relative lack of power in the system" (Lovell 2005: 72). As for Bulgaria, the weakness of a number of state institutions can be explained more by the multiplicity of centers of power, as opposed to a strong central government under socialism. There is indirect evidence of the latter: from the analysis of the Center for the Study of Democracy it is clear that the number of those convicted of power abuse in 1989-2013 was the highest (355 people) in 1989 - the last socialist year. That number significantly decreased since 1992, ranging between 50 and 5 people - the last number dates back to 2013. These data vividly illustrate the ineffectiveness of the administration of justice in post-socialism and support the thesis of the existence of multiple centers of power in Bulgaria.

Instead of conclusion. Typical of the clientele relations is the desire that they be disguised as friendship (Boissevain 1966) and this is part of their particular ethos. However, the analysis shows that the differences between the "true friendship" and clientelism are recognizable and clearly comprehensible to the modern Bulgarians. In some of the interviews, this is explicitly stated. The emotional friendship requires to avoid calculating the returns when supporting a friend, and reciprocity is not mandatory, unlike the clientelist relationship impossible without reciprocity.

The above non-exhaustive examples, however, have to show the high potential of clientelism to be transformed into corruption during post-socialism, when the institutional

weakness of the state reaches threatening levels. That's why it is important to clearly identify the "margins" of the clientelist system as well as its destructive potential.

Nevertheless, the literature demonstrated the semi-legal nature of the clientelist system (Giordano 2013: 41) and its subversive character (Creed 1998: 184; Ledeneva 1998), there is a tendency for certain scholars to downplay these negative aspects. In fact, besides being a semi-legal, the clientele system hampers the work of institutions when professional appointments are not granted to people most qualified to do a job, but to those who have "connections". This system reinforces inequalities in society. The privileges, acquired by some professional groups or individuals, act as a rule contrary to the rights of others who are deprived of the resources of the common good. Hence, there is an increased feeling of a perceived deficit of justice in Bulgarian society under socialism as well as after it. *"Everything happens with connections in this country"* - that is an expression that can be heard spoken by young Bulgarian emigrants as an explanation for their unwillingness to live at their homeland. The clientele system reproduces and reinforces even more the public mistrust. Related studies can contribute to the awareness and understanding of this problem in Bulgarian society.

During post-socialism the clientelist system ("vrăzki") and corruption in Bulgaria have undergone significant transformations. Clientelism almost completely disappeared in some areas, such as buying homes, and its application in the field of consumption of goods and services is critically reduced. In return, however, in other social and economic spheres the clientele system is transformed into corruption, "petty corruption became grand corruption", and corruption scandals have become part of the political scene, as much as in other Southeast European countries (Sampson 2005: 124). Corruption in Bulgaria is the main warrant of the political game itself: “every subsequent cycle of political counteropposition turns into struggle for the right to be corrupted” (Stančev 1997: 62).

In certain areas corruption is ubiquitous (traffic police), in others such as healthcare - it is endemic, in education - accidental. Sociological survey and economic analysis stress most of all on the “grand corruption”, obviously in view of the big economic losses, which it inflicts on the Bulgarian economy. The difference of the anthropological approach is in the focus laid on the spheres of everyday activities, i.e. “petty corruption”. It is worth considering also whether the “petty” corruption practiced en masse does not inflict even bigger damage, namely due to its mass character. It is precisely corruption in spheres, in which people are clashing on the

everyday level, as education, health services, etc., that most negatively affect social trust, personal and social morality, triggering in this way the next cycles of the "cancer" of corruption.

Taking into account constant failings of the state institutions and negative experiences, people in the areas of Mediterranean and Southeast Europe resort to corruption "with good reason since tobody is foolosh to the point of doing things that serve no purpose or that could be damaging" (Giordano 2013: 42).

Is it possible then to curb corruption in Bulgaria? Small successes are possible, as shown by the grasroot initiative of a small group of academics against their corrupt rulers. Such small "victories" are still not enough to change the general picture. Here, however, I have shown the flexibility of the clientelist system and corruption and their ability to transform as a result of changes in the socio-economic environment. It can be assumed that for the same reason a change in the direction of managing corruption in Bulgaria is possible.

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