

## Article

# Imaginary Historical Pattern of Family and a Model for Construction of Political and Social Organizations—Extended Family (*Zadruga*) in Bulgaria

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**Abstract:** The notion of “zadruga” (named by Vuk Karadžić in 1818) was introduced in the scientific research literature, as well as in the social and political discourse, of the then young Balkan countries in the 19th century to mark the multitude of historical forms under which the “complex family organization” was known among the South-Slavic people in the region. The young Bulgarian science adopted this term in ethnographic studies of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Bulgarian scientists, lawyers, and researchers of customary law norms attempted to implement some of the features of this family model in modern Bulgarian legislation. In the period between the two world wars, the nascent cooperative movement in the agrarian sector also used the model of the “partnership” to justify its organization. This paper analyzes similar attempts to use scientific descriptions of the zadruga in the construction of various social and economic associations in Bulgaria during the interwar period. It also analyses the attempts of the new communist leaders to use the traditions of the pre-modern society in terms of communal living in zadruga through the imposition of a cooperative system, and the nationalization of the arable land in the first years under the totalitarian system following the Second World War. Part of the Bulgarian scientific community and Bulgarian ethnography has been involved in these attempts since the early 1950s.



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## 1. Introduction

In the history of social sciences, the characteristics of the social organization and the culture of the Balkan peoples have always been emphasized as a marker of the distinction of this part of south-east Europe. Historical anthropology in the Balkans is also part of this process—scrutiny of the social development and the modernization processes of society led to a redefinition of several postulates for their social organization and cultural changes. This also applies to the issue of the diverse family forms in the Balkans, i.e., what some authors called the “Balkan Family Pattern” or “Balkan Patriarchy” (Halpern et al. 1996, pp. 425–42; cf. also Kaser 2008). The designation “zadruga” is presented for the first time in Vuk Karadžić’s Serbian Dictionary published in Vienna in 1818 as: “*Zadruga—Hausgenossenschaft (in Gegensatz der Familie), plures familiae in eadem domo (more Serbico)*” (cf. Todorova 2006, p. 127). Practically all scholars agree that zadruga is a neologism, most probably coined by Vuk Karadžić himself to denominate a large family household, in contrast to the small, simple, or nuclear family comprising only parents and children (Ibid).

The most well-known definition in the ethnological literature of “zadruga” is that of Philip Mosely in the 1940s: “A household composed of two or more biological or small families, closely related by blood or adoption, owning its means of livelihood jointly and regulating the control of its property, labor, and livelihood communally” (Mosely 1976, p. 31). Five decades earlier, the Bulgarian ethnographer Dimitar Marinov defined the zadruga in Bulgaria as: “Under

*the name zadruga we understand a family consisting of 10-15-20, and even more small families or households (man, wife, and children), who live together around one threshing floor, work together, bring in together, eat together, and are ruled by one person” (Marinov [1892] 1984, p. 293).*

The notion “zadruga” (named by Vuk Karadžić in 1818) was introduced in the scientific research literature, as well as in the social and political discourse of the then young Balkan countries in the 19th century to mark the multitude of historical forms under which the “complex family organization” was known among the South-Slavic people in the region (Hristov 2014, pp. 218–34). The young Bulgarian science adopted this term in ethnographic studies of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the Bulgarian scientists, lawyers, and researchers of the norms of customary law made attempts to implement some of the features of this family model in the modern Bulgarian legislation. At the beginning of the 20th century, the nascent cooperative movement in the agrarian sector also used the model of “partnership” to justify its organization.

The article aims to trace the uses of one of the forms of complex family and household organization in the past among South-Slavic people—the so-called *zadruga*—both in the academic research and in the public life and political discourse in Bulgaria from the second half of the 19th century to the imposition of the Soviet model of socialism in the 1950s, especially in the construction of various social and economic associations in Bulgaria in this period. The purpose of the study is not to examine statistical research on the existence—or not—of the *zadruga* in the pre-modern village in Bulgaria but to show how the model of family organization turned from academic fiction into a pattern for the building of new social relations in the newly-formed Bulgarian state, as a model for cooperative associations, and its role in favor of the new Socialistic ideology in the agricultural sphere, manipulating some traditional stereotypes of common work. The article analyzes the texts of all the researchers of the *zadruga* in Bulgaria at the end of the 19th century, who tried to propose some of the association’s organization principles in the elaboration of the modern Bulgarian legislation. Discussions on the possibilities of applying these principles to the cooperative movement are also examined, both before the Second World War and in the years of Soviet-style collectivization of agriculture in the early decade of socialist rule in Bulgaria.

## 2. Traditional *Zadruga* as Romantic Fiction for the “Golden Age” and Political Use

Bulgarian academics had become interested in the study of the various forms of family organization and traditions of collective living long before the liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule (1878). Traditions, customs, and rituals, including the so-called “customary law”, became a powerful weapon for grounding the long history and dignity of the Bulgarian nation as a basis of the claims for political freedom and state emancipation. There are several figures related to the Bulgarian national liberation movement of the 19th century, such as Georgi S. Rakovski, Lyuben Karavelov, and Petko Slaveykov, involved in the study of the characteristics of the folk culture of the Bulgarians. They were intellectual leaders developing the new national ideology, creators of revolutionary programs for the liberation of Bulgaria and, at the same time, researchers of “national antiquities”, and folklore, proving the right of political emancipation of the Bulgarians. Several Bulgarian intellectuals, who had graduated from universities in Western Europe or Russia, focused on “national legal customs” as a resource for normative building of the future independent Bulgarian state. What is more, as early as 1874, the future public prosecutor, judge, and lawyer in recently-liberated Bulgaria, Peter Odzhakov, translated and published in Prague in the Bulgarian language, the Instruction of the Montenegrin explorer of South-Slavic legal traditions Valtazar Bogišić entitled “*Upatvane za opisane pravovite obprovideto zhiveyat u Naroda*” [“Instructions for describing the legal customs, living among people”]. He not only collaborated together with Stefan Zahariev and with Bogišić over the collecting of the legal customs of the Bulgarians, but also wrote an introduction to the Bulgarian translation of the Instruction which he called “Letter to the Bulgarian patriots”. Based on this, after the Liberation, Peter Odzhakov published “Common hereditary law” (Odzhakov 1885) and the first part of the “History of Bulgarian law” (Odzhakov 1893).

The first Bulgarian jurists and active politicians in the period 1880–1890 were active lawyers and professors in law (such as Peter Odzhakov, Vasil Baldzhiev, and of course, Stefan Bobchev), economists like Ivan E. Geshov, for example, and so on, were occupied with the creation of modern Bulgaria. They undertook journeys through the country and registered several legal customs in order to optimize the new legislation and the juridical practice of the young Bulgarian state. A significant part of the studies formed materials about the nature, structure, and spread of the joint family forms. Bulgarian jurists, most of whom were politicians, ministers, and decision-makers at that time, saw the *zadruga* as a traditional social pattern whose norms and values had survived through the centuries and which would help in the successful economic and social development of the newly-liberated Bulgaria. Here is what Stefan Bobchev wrote in the conclusion of his most-cited work *“Bulgarskata chelyadna zadruga”* [“Bulgarian family *zadruga*”]:

*“Let us wind up by saying that here the *zadruga* deserves much attention from politician, economist, and statesman. At this time, when we are searching for artificial measures and expedient means in order to anticipate and avoid the proletarianization of the peasants, to forestall a future agrarian evil that has already appeared in near and neighboring countries, to preserve the peasant from wasting the family property and the collective common lands; at this time when everyone turns to cooperatives in order to search for a cure for very dangerous social misfortunes; at this time we feel that there isn’t anything more natural than to study the *zadruga*—this traditional, family cooperative group—and ask ourselves: will it be able to serve along with other means for bringing more prosperity in the agrarian, labor classes, for raising the peasant proletariat in order to prevent the big social evil which looms over the worker in the village from all directions?”* (Bobchev 1907, p. 194).

Other authors, such as Ivan E. Geshov, pointed out the economic, moral, and political advantages of the *zadruga*, which might have contributed to the agrarian development of the Bulgarian village:

*“As a medium between the individual and the community, the *zadruga* teaches us of self-government. Keeping a joint household resembles, in a nutshell, the government of community, of an anonym society. The *zadruga* appears to be the beginning of the parliamentary regime and prepares its members to exercise their public and political rights”* (Geshov 1887, p. 446).

The first complete study in Bulgarian ethnography on the *zadruga* in north-west Bulgaria was one by Dimitar Marinov [1892] (1984, pp. 175–380). He also looked at the aspiration for collective labor, collective production, and consumption, as opposed to poverty, as a “magical power which preserved our *zadruga* from decay during the most difficult times. The *zadruga* is still [at the end of the 19th century—P.H.] the one that keeps these sacred determinants; left on their own, without the protection of the law and exposed to the blows of either the new European civilization or the new spirit, there are still traces of these determinants” (Marinov [1892] 1984, p. 294).

After the Liberation of the country from the Ottoman Empire in 1878, some of the Bulgarian researchers of the *zadruga*, such as Stefan Bobchev, were mostly Russian-trained and politically formed part of the Russophile, mainly liberally-orientated spectrum. Following their Russian precursors, they looked for the salvation of Bulgarian society from the modern influence of Western-European individualism in the old peasant collectiveness and suggested this as a model for future social organization. According to them, the *zadruga* kept the social order and developed social cohesion, regulated the relations between the individual and the community, and thus became a “nursery” of self-government (Genchev 1987, p. 61). This idea is reflected in the works of the Bulgarian writers from the beginning of the 20th century; in the works of such classics of Bulgarian literature as that of Elin Pelin or Yordan Yovkov, one can feel a strain of nostalgia for the peasant primordiality and the patriarchal spirit of the *zadruga*.

On the other hand, the data collected during the study of the family structure of the households of the Bulgarian Muslims (the so-called *Pomaks*) in the region of the Rhodope Mountains (which, until 1912, had still been within the Ottoman Empire) is used as evidence for their kinship with the neighboring Bulgarian Christian population that, until the Balkan Wars, kept the extended family as a pattern of household formation (Shishkov 1935, pp. 57–65). Here is what one of the first thorough researchers of the Rhodope Mountains, Stoyu Shishkov, wrote in the early 20th century: *“The family household zadruga is to be found very often; there is still a strong aspiration for it and it is still approved and respected. Even though regulated by the Koran, many features of the domestic life are based on folk [“Bulgarian”—P.H.] customs. Two, three and more brothers live and work together and everything is a common possession”* (Shishkov 1935, p. 94).

The example of Stoyu Shishkov refers to the Muslim extended family of *Agushevtsi* from the village of Toz Borun; according to the account of the researcher, in 1927, apart from the women, the family consisted of 34 male members (sons, grandsons, great-grandsons). Stoyu Shishkov added:

*“Cattle, land, tools—everything is a common possession but the father provides each married son with a separate room in the house for sleeping and clothing or builds a new house near the old one”* (Shishkov 1935, p. 95).

The author saw the principles of the “old zadruga” as also typical of the Bulgarian-Christians, in the formation of stock-breeding associations for joint labor and use in the case of the Bulgarian-Muslims and in the family associations for joint use of meadows and woods (Shishkov 1935, pp. 98–100).

According to contemporary scholars, this approach to the study of the Bulgarian Muslims was prompted by the policy of Bulgarian institutions, which substantiated Slavic (i.e., Bulgarian) origin of this confessional community influenced by the Pan-Slavic ideas of the then Bulgarian political elite. The subsequent studies of historians and demographers of the early 21st century show that even in the case of the Bulgarian Muslims, the extended family was not the leading pattern of household in the period of the late Ottoman Empire. Ulf Brunnbauer also summarizes:

*“Pomak households usually divided in every generation. . . . The size, which can be calculated on the basis of household listings and censuses, confirms neither the oral tradition nor the assumption of many Bulgarian scholars about the ‘big families of the past’.”* (Brunnbauer 2002, pp. 339, 343).

It is worth mentioning that the first Bulgarian socialists from the late 19th century did not share the ideas either of the Bulgarian Slavophiles or of their adherents in Serbia (such as Svetozar Marković), who saw in the zadruga “the purest form of collectivism” which would lead society from selfishness to altruism, from exploitation to justice (cf. Kassabova-Dintcheva 2002, p. 223). The founder of the Bulgarian Labor Social Democratic Party, Dimitar Blagoev, defined the zadruga as a family pattern that promoted conservative social structures and prevented the development of modern social movements. According to him, authoritarian patriarchy within the zadruga restricted the development of individual initiative, encouraged slave mentality, and led to xenophobia (Blagoev [1892] 1985, pp. 208–26).

After the Balkan Wars and the First World War, Bulgaria, which turned out to be in the camp of the defeated, faced new social challenges and political priorities. In 1923, the Agricultural Party in Bulgaria, which legally assumed power in 1919, was deposed by a military coup-d'état and a more or less authoritarian dictatorship was established in the country. It was the Agrarian Party in the years of its rule (1919–1923) that contributed to the rapid development of cooperative work in the agricultural sector, which will be discussed below. In 1923, the cooperative associations in the country already numbered 2300 (Bulgaria 20 vek 1999, p. 443). All of them declared as one of their main models of social organization the traditions of mutual assistance in the undivided rural family. Although the new government, which came to power with a military coup on 9 June 1923, closed a

number of cooperatives associated with the Agrarian and Communist Parties, the formation of new cooperatives and organizations continued—in 1924, the Insurance Company “Zadruga” was founded and in 1925 the Agricultural Cooperative Insurance Company (ibid.). Furthermore, even though the definition of the social phenomenon “zadruga” by different authors is a result of a combination of different criteria, it is generally understood as a family form of economic community with undivided property (Gruev 2008, p. 331). The economic characteristics of the zadruga are also emphasized; it is considered as a kind of cooperative association for uniting capital and work, providing agriculture with the opportunity for efficient division of labor. Hence the interpretation of the zadruga as an “autochthonous social form of cooperation” (Ibid, p. 339).

### 3. “We Are Stronger Together!” Zadruga and Development of the Cooperative Movement in Bulgaria

The ideas behind the traditional Bulgarian zadruga and the cooperative associations in some European countries (Germany and Italy) were at the root of the first Bulgarian agricultural and worker cooperatives (Stoyanov 1937, p. 64). It is no coincidence that the first cooperative association for mutual support of labor migrants (men on the gurbet, i.e., working outside their home regions<sup>1</sup>) who arrived in Istanbul from the village of Mirkovo (Pirdop District) in the 1840s, was called Zadruga “Mirkovski waquf” (Rusenov 1986, p. 88). Even before the Liberation of Bulgaria, in the early 1870s, one of the researchers of the zadruga and a connoisseur of the Bulgarian village—Stefan Bobchev, wrote in an article in the journal “Chitalishte”, entitled “We are poor, what to do?”, the following: “Only through the association will we get out of the difficult situation of farmers, artisans and traders” (Bobchev 1873, p. 895).

The social organization of the extended family became one of the models for the development of the first cooperatives in Bulgaria at the end of the 19th century. The name “zadruga” was given to labor associations, banks, insurance companies, and mutual aid funds. Although organized according to the modern Western European cooperative associations of the time, these institutions and associations emphasized their connection to the traditions of family organization of the pre-modern era and often used the word “zadruga” in their names. For example, the first Bulgarian Popular Bank was founded in 1903; despite the wars through which Bulgaria went (the two Balkan Wars and the First World War), in only 15 years the number of banks grew to 50. These ideas were also at the root of the “Zadruga” Cooperative Bank, which was founded in 1920 and whose shareholders multiplied from 26 to 607 people in only 6 years. The role of the bank was defined by the local press as follows:

*“Thanks to the Popular Bank and the “Zadruga” Cooperative Bank, many money-lender traps in Plovdiv were removed; many craftsmen and retailers who, until then, had been bending beneath the burden of money-lending, were supported” (Plovdivski obštinski vestnik: ПЛОВДИВСКИ ОБЩНСКИ ВЕСТНИК 1926).*

Sava Kalimenov’s article of 1934 indicatively entitled “Cooperative or Zadruga” points out the advantages of the structure of the traditional zadruga in the development of worker cooperatives:

*“When reading the above title, perhaps some of our readers will think that it is a matter of words—replacing the foreign word “cooperative” with the Slavic word “zadruga”. . . . But there is another reason, which is not less important, for the failure of the producers’ cooperative— that is to say of the real cooperative. Precisely this reason which is more dependent on us, on our will and understanding and which is, so to say, in our hands, within our power, is the same reason that is very well-researched and studied and directs us to the transformation of today’s producers’ cooperative into what we call worker zadruga . . . ” (Bratstvo 1934).*

At the time of the outbreak of World War II, Bulgarian cooperatives, which were more or less organized on the basis of the traditional principles of division of work (attributed



to the zadruga), already had a 50-year-long history and experience in almost every agricultural, social, and public sector: 6455 registered cooperatives united in 15 branch unions with 995,000 members; every third household in Bulgaria was a member of one of them. The basic principles of the traditional partnership—common/collective ownership, joint production, and consumption—are at the heart of many of these cooperatives. However, the sovietisation of the country after the war put an end to this type of cooperative. On 20 December 1946, all cooperative unions functioning at that time (21 altogether) were merged into a Central Cooperative Union and a seat in Sofia; their property was nationalized, and the cooperatives were depersonalized. In this way, the new socialist power nationalized the cooperative associations created in the previous decades and subordinated them to the central power. In the agrarian sector, the central government set up Soviet-style worker cooperatives in the villages, in which individual households practically lost ownership of their land, inventory, and livestock, which was transferred to the new cooperatives. Thus, “cooperation” in agriculture on the Soviet model began without official nationalization of the land, but through voluntary or often forced seizure of farmland and livestock in communal cooperatives. This created a new type of interest in the division of labor in the traditional zadruga and in the principles of its organization which this time was provoked by officially-imposed communist ideology. This led to informal property expropriation, which led in the following decades to the peasants being cut off from their properties and the massive emigration of the active population to the cities. In perspective, this caused the decline of agriculture in Bulgaria in the 1980s.

The idea of studying the traditions of life together, collectivism, and mutual aid in the zadruga and in the village community revived after the Second World War when a “socialist people’s authority” was established, which in a few years transformed into a totalitarian dictatorship. The mass collectivization of agriculture, which in Bulgaria was related to the formation of socialist cooperatives TKZS (Labor cooperative farms), created the social environment in which ethnographers could study the traditions of collectivism in the zadruga, which became a political task. In 1951, the “Questionnaire for studying the collective manifestations in the Bulgarian agricultural way of living” was published; in its preface, one can read:

*“The proposed questionnaire is an attempt to cover all the collective activities in the agricultural way of living of the Bulgarian nation, from the most distant past to nowadays—the traditional and new forms of voluntary and collective labor” (Angelova and Primovski 1951, p. 4).*

During the 1950s, in the north-west and mid-west Bulgaria, areas well-known for preserving their social structure for the longest time with a dominant tendency towards complex family households (the general conclusion in Hristov (2014, p. 7), complex ethnographic expeditions were undertaken within which the family structure was examined by Rayna Pesheva (1961, pp. 511–57). Under the influence of the ethnographic school of the then Soviet Union and mostly of the concept of *patronymy* of Mark Kosven (Kosven 1963), Pesheva interpreted the fieldwork materials she had collected from different parts of Bulgaria as “late phasic forms” of archaic kinship organization preserved in regions which were behind in the process of modernization and which were well-known for their conservatism (Pesheva 1980, p. 311). Of course, the focus was on the manifestations of collective living and collective labor in the patriarchal village. In this regard, following the Marxist version of the paradigm of evolutionism, the studies by Bulgarian ethnographers of the 1950s, and particularly of Rayna Pesheva, were focused on the discovery in the then-modernizing Bulgarian society of archaic family kinship forms of the type of the South Slavic zadruga (Hristov 2012, p. 31).

Despite the “archaization” (influenced by the Soviet ethnographic school) in the interpretation of the observed family kinship forms in the middle of the 20th century, the materials of Rayna Pesheva turned out to be valuable and were later cited by ethnographers from the USSR (in a comparative aspect) as well as by ethnologists and anthropologists

from Western Europe, such Paul H. Stahl (1986), for example, or by social historians such as Karl Kaser (Kazer 2002, pp. 191, 346).

Despite the officially-declared desire to preserve the collective foundations of agriculture and the traditions of mutual assistance, the mass collectivization of arable land and its incorporation (often forcibly) into Soviet-style cooperative farms drastically changed social relations in the village. The *zadruga* loses one of its main (and, according to some authors, the only) characteristics—its economic basis and the associated pooling of labor and capital for collective land cultivation. The family-type association in a common farm, characteristic of the *zadruga*, where relatives together own and cultivate their land, use its resources and consume what is produced, lost its ownership and household members, who became wage laborers in the Soviet-type rural cooperative. Precisely because the *zadruga* is, above all, a simple cooperative, the creation of the new socialist cooperative, such as the TKZS, led to the inevitable destruction of the former—the Model Statute of the TKZS from 1950 gave members the opportunity to enter the farms irrespective of their contribution with property (Gruev 2008, p. 7). Thus, paradoxically, the new “socialist” cooperatives led to radical changes in both family relations inherited from the extended “*zadruga*” family and the principles of association and cooperation practiced in the country until the mid-20th century.

#### 4. Conclusions

In conclusion, the study of the complex forms of family household known in the literature as *zadruga* has an almost two-centuries-old history in Bulgaria. Although created as a neologism two hundred years ago, the model of complex family households—the Balkan *zadruga*, has aroused the interest and enthusiasm of several Bulgarian researchers who were actively involved in social life and were also actively engaged in the creation of the legislation of the modern Bulgarian state. The pattern of the extended family and the patriarchal pastoral relations in the Bulgarian village dominated by the *zadruga* were always the focus of the interest amongst scholars, politicians, jurists, and writers. In different historical epochs, various aspects of collective living and collective relations in the family were outlined, but the attention was always on the significance of the *zadruga* for the entire social life in the Bulgarian pre-modern village. In the decades of early modernization at the end of the 19th century, as well as during the political changes in Bulgaria at the beginning of the 20th century, and during the years of the imposition of Soviet-type cooperative farming in the Bulgarian village in the early socialist period in the 1950s, the pattern of social relations recognized as *zadruga* was used for the shaping of changing social reality. Both in the decades of the development of modern cooperative associations in the early 20th century and in the years of early socialism and the establishment of Soviet-type agricultural cooperatives, the basic principles of joint work and consumption, of mutual aid, and the creation of social security, inspired the politicians and social workers of the various parties in the political sphere of social life in Bulgaria.

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#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The traditional pattern of seasonal labor migration in the Balkans, according to which men earn money somewhere “away” or “abroad” (the neighboring region, the big city, another state/country or “somewhere on the world”), but invariably return to their home places and families “here”, is known in different Balkan languages with the Turkish–Arabic “*gurbet/kurbet*”, or through the South-Slavic term “*pechalbarstvo*” (cf. Hristov 2015, pp. 31–46).

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