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THE DYNAMICS OF ETHNICITY: POMAK IDENTITIES

Introductory

In the last few years the study of ethnic identities has become extremely popular among scholars dealing with the Balkans. Predictably, the main focus was laid on the nationalities of former Yugoslavia who came into the consciousness of the Western audience as archaic in-groups fighting each other. Special interest was given to the case of the Muslims in Yugoslavia, above all the Bosnians. In the light of the formation of a Bosnian state new interpretations of the Bosnian Muslim's identities were tried (Bringa 1995). But also other ethnic groups and their identities have increasingly attracted scholarly interest. The population of Macedonia was subject of several studies (Mackridge and Yannakis 1997; Cowan 2000), and also minor minorities' ethnic and national identities were examined (Lienau 2000; Brunnbauer 2001b).

Some of these studies show how difficult it is to establish one-featured ethnic identities throughout the Balkans because the region lacks the early phases of nation-state formation. Nation states have only emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries. Related to that, also institutions which forge and assert national identities have come into being very late – in contrast to common wisdom, nation states create national identities through their policies, and not vice versa. Balkan nation states were therefore still engaged in struggles about national identities throughout the 20th century, some in belated efforts to achieve homogenisation, others in attempts to assert the identity of their nation out of fear that others would not accept this identity. The enforcement of a single national identity had become a main goal of official policy. Since their very existence Balkan nation – with the exception of Yugoslavia – states tried to eradicate ethnic boundaries on their territories, in order to establish firm ethnic and political frontiers. While an ethnic boundary can be defined as contextual, contrastive and negotiable, frontiers are not negotiable. The latter separates self-ascribed national groups, and denies any flexibility of identity. People have to become individuals with a firm identity that should be independent of the social, cultural, or even geographic context.

In spite of such tendencies and ambitions, minority peoples throughout the Balkans have by and large resisted assimilation and have opposed the "one state – one nation/one identity" principle. Other peoples have even not yet developed a full-fledged national identity and prefer other modes of collective self-identification rather than to refer to a homeland or common ancestry. Some Slavic-speaking Muslims or the Vlach populations may serve as illustrations. Partly because of the weakness of the institutions of the central state no matter how authoritarian, and partly because of a purely formal acceptance of identities ascribed by the state, the Balkans have thus remained a geographical and cultural region with a high density of different ethnic, national and other super-individual identities. Even Communism could not change fundamentally this picture. The fall of Communism brought conflicts about ethnicity back onto the public space, due to the consequences of the breakdown of the "second" Yugoslavia. The question of identity became of serious concern to people, insofar as in the end they have to settle either on one identity or to switch between several identities. Many people, especially in the course of the Yugoslav wars, were forced to take sides and to choose a specific national identity. People from mixed marriages and many of those, who formerly had declared themselves "Yugoslavs" now had to accept one, and renounce other identities. Those who could not, or did not want to make this inevitable choice, had to face physical and psychological harm.

But also in the countries not affected by war people had to rethink their identities. They had to find their places in the rapidly transforming countries of their own, as well as in the globalising world. In this context, identity could become as well a fortress against the challenges of transition and globalisation, as well as a strategic asset to improve ones economic situation. In the former Soviet Union people, who never had spoken a word of German, suddenly became aware of their ancient German forefathers and turned German in order to migrate to Germany and to receive German

citizenship. In the Balkans, Albanian Vlachs for example discover their Greek or Romanian origins, depending where they want to progress (Schwandner-Sievers 1998), and southern Albanian Muslims bribe officials to get a Greek name in order to receive a long-term residence permit for Greece. Hence after 1989 the flow of identities, which had never stopped, accelerated considerably.
A case very much in point are the Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks), a Balkan Muslim population, who have been rather ignored until 1989. Since then, however, they have become the subject of various studies mostly on the problem of their identity. This indeed seems their paramount problem because since the establishment of an independent Bulgarian nation state in 1878 the plight of the Pomaks is closely related to questions of identity. The Bulgarian state attempted several times to impose on the Pomaks its notion of their "true" identity. But nevertheless Pomaks retained modes of identification and loyalties which crosscut those ascribed by the state. In my paper I focus in the identity policies of the Communists after 1944 vis-à-vis the Pomaks and on the vernacular versions of Pomak identity that are increasingly expressed after 1989.

Who are the Pomaks?

The British specialist in Balkan minority-studies, Hugh Poulton writes: "The Bulgarian Muslims (i.e. the Pomaks) are a religious minority. They are Slavic Bulgarians who speak Bulgarian as their mother tongue, but whose religion and customs are Islamic" (Poulton 1994: 111). In Bulgaria the Pomaks are one of three larger minorities (besides Turks and Roma). In 1989 the Ministry of the Interior gave for the Pomak population of Bulgaria the number of 268,971 which was around 3 percent of the whole population of the country at the time (Konstantinov and Alhaug 1995: 24). Outside Bulgaria Pomaks live in Greece and Turkey. Their exact numbers can be estimated only very roughly, as they are not counted in national censuses. In Greece there are about 30-40,000 Pomaks, in Turkey probably a higher figure. What is known about the Turkish and Greek Pomaks (the former having come from Bulgaria as economic migrants or fleeing from repressive measures) is that they are subjected to processes of assimilation on the part of the respective majority societies, and in Greece also by the Turkish minority (Apostolov 1996). Many of the Greek Pomaks see themselves as ethnic Turks, as Turks are the only officially recognised minority in Greece.

The Bulgarian Pomaks live in compact settlements in the districts of Smolyan, Blagoevgrad, Pazardžik and Kărdžali, that is in the Mesta valley and the Rhodope mountains. Smaller Pomak communities exist near the town of Loveč (Lory 1987), and in a few small villages around Zlatarica near Veliko Tărnovo (Konstantinov and Alhaug 1995). Over 90 percent of the Pomaks live, however, in the south in the predominantly mountainous area of the Rhodopes. Before the mass exodus of Muslims from Bulgaria after 1878, Bulgarian Muslims inhabited also other parts of the country.
Traditionally Pomaks pursued a very isolated way of live. Before the communist collectivisation most Pomaks had been mountain agro-pastoralists. Their economy was oriented towards self sufficiency, the level of market integration remained very low. These occupations lost partly their subsistence character only after World War I when Pomaks started to plant tobacco. But tobacco production, too, remained a household based endeavour. Pomaks inclined to reduce contacts with the outside world to a minimum and to preserve the village community, as well as kinship-solidarity. During Communism the Pomaks did not take part in the migratory movement to the towns and the new industries. As far as possible they tried to remain in their native villages – which was made possible by the way collectivisation was carried out, as well as the subsequent "domestication of industry" (for the latter Creed 1998). The formation of collective farms (TKSZ) in the 1950s created new jobs in the villages. Salaried job-opportunities increased still further in the late 60s and 70s when a great number of small factories and work-shops were set up in the countryside to help relieve urban house-shortage, chronic consumer goods deficits and transportation problems. As a result Pomaks had no reason to search for paid work in urban centres. To get a salary from the state and to own a small plot of land for the production of the food for the family in the framework of the traditional village community was and to a large extent still is the ideal of Pomak life.

This very brief survey of the social and economic features of the Pomak community is important for understanding their identity. Because of their reluctance to go to the towns and disappear into the anonymous life of modern industry and urban centres, Pomaks have managed to retain a position at a certain distance from the majority society. Occupying such a niche the Pomaks represented remains of the old order in the eyes of Communist Party and State administration, even

more, as the were attached to a faith which to the Party was synonymous with conservatism. As such it was only a question of time when the Party would turn against them to bring them back into the future.

The contested identity of the Pomaks

The question of identity and the battles about determining it seem to be crucial for understanding the situation of the Bulgarian Pomaks. In this paper I will emphasise the role which the use of history has played for the construction of a Pomak identity. It was through the writing and telling of various histories about the origins of the Pomaks that the different versions of their identity have been formed. Notions of shared history and common ancestry are regarded as basic features of ethnic groups. Ideologues of national identity thus aim at inculcating those sentiments in groups whom they want to convince of a particular national identity. Not by chance historians and ethnographers are always taking the lead when questions of national identity are concerned, and states show their sensitiveness to the relation of national identity and history as well as ethnography by generously funding historical and ethnographical institutions. Especially Balkan historiography is in large parts an effort to establish ethnic genealogies.

The problem of Pomak identity lies in the fact that they do not fit in one of the typical modes of nation building in the Balkans, where language and religion have usually served as primary marker of nations (with the notable exception of the Albanian nation, which was multi-confessional from its very beginning). Poulton's definition of who the Pomaks are, quoted above, provides a good point of departure for a discussion of "own" and "alien" versions of Pomak identity. It shows that a Pomak has the choice between two sets of identities which shall be called "organic" here.[1] These broad possibilities could be divided in several more options (Karagiannis 1998). The choice depends on what cultural features Pomak persons would choose for describing themselves. If they choose language to be the defining feature, they will have to see themselves as Bulgarians, but if that feature is religion, then their identity will be Muslim. The latter choice is open to a number of different interpretations. Muslim could mean an adherent to Islam and member of the *Ummah* of all Right Believers. It could also indicate a distinct Pomak identity. Or – and very likely – Muslim identity could lead to a Turkish ethnic adherence.

This ambiguity of the Pomak identity on an individual and group-level makes it possible for larger ethnic groups with a stable ethnic consciousness to try to impose their views about who the Pomaks are. In the Bulgarian context the most serious challenge has come from Bulgarian nationalistic campaigns carried out after 1878 by the nation-state and its institutions. A more vernacular version of identity-manipulation has come from the Turkish minority in Bulgaria. It gained momentum especially after the fall of Todor Zhivkov in the late fall of 1989 when the Party for Rights and Freedom (DPS) was founded. This party is identified as a primarily Turkish ethnic party, although its purported aims are to defend the rights of all minority groups (since parties based on ethnicity or religion are not allowed by the Bulgarian constitution). On the ground of the common religion there is a tendency within DPS to "Turkify" the Pomaks. This strategy proves quite successful especially in regions, where Orthodox Bulgarians and Pomaks live together (Western Rhodopes). There, many Pomaks identify themselves as Turks without knowing Turkish. It seems that they use a Turkish identification, based on religion, to draw an ethnic boundary to their Bulgarian neighbours. In the Eastern Rhodopes, where Pomaks and Turks intermingle, the opposing process can be observed. Here many Pomaks declare themselves Bulgarians, but less out of a Bulgarian national consciousness and rather in order to distinguish themselves from the Turkish population. The desire to distinguish and to create a symbolic boundary around the own community, which feels threatened by larger ones, is apparently the rationale of these identifications. These strategies show on the one hand the importance of ethnic boundaries for the construction of ethnic groups, as Barth has insisted (Barth 1969). But they also reveal the importance of the cultural stuff inside those boundaries because it depends also on what cultural features are chosen to be able to draw a boundary against another ethnic group. The Pomaks must react or adopt with two different identity-prescriptions used by nationalists from the two primary camps, which use different cultural symbols as decisive markers for ethnic identity. One of them is based on language, and the other one on religion. However, a growing number of Pomaks refuse both versions and refuse to define themselves either as Bulgarians or as Turks. They call themselves "Pomaks", "Achryani", or simply "Muslims".

Such facts point in the direction of discussing identity in terms of socially determined constructs. Identity is a social fact, and as such it is determined by human (i.e. social) behaviour (Banda-Beckman and Verkuyten 1995: 30f.). Social, cultural, and individual processes and decisions form identity. Fixed identities which are ascribed to a community with no regard for their social life can only be seen as highly ideological. Generally those who prescribe identities would deny exactly the constructed character of identities and as a consequence – their historical development. More often than not identities ascribed from outside tend to assume natural origin – i.e. to be inherited in one's "blood", as it were, and not to be a product of one's mind. Ascribed identities can, of course, be deconstructed. The agents of invention and imposition can be identified, and their interests and methods analysed.

The Balkans present a great number of cases of nation-state inventions and their impositions. A less well-known, but nevertheless very telling example of Balkan identity-politics is the Pomak one. It is a good example of how power constructs identities and how the targeted communities react to such impositions. It also illustrates how impositions are self-destructive as instead of achieving a single identity, actors on the ground adopt multiple context-sensitive identities. Thus the Pomaks' self-definitions are often related to the given context in which they act and communicate. History has always been the decisive means for constructing an identity for the Pomaks. The battle between different versions of history is, however, an unfair one. Nation-state historiography, which provides the basis for officially constructed and imposed identities, has an impressive number of power-instruments at its disposal – ranging from the school-system, public propaganda, to sheer force. By contrast, vernacular versions of history – Turkish and Pomak – ones, have enjoyed a degree of public life only since 1989 and are actually sometimes silenced even now, not to speak of their lack of material capacities to disseminate their interpretations of history, which is especially true for the Pomaks, as the Turks are after all a big minority with its own institutions.

The (re-) construction of the history of the Pomaks

Identities are rooted in history. Communities construct their identities to present themselves as historic entities existing continuously and uninterruptedly as such for as long a period as possible. The principle applies to the Pomak case, too. Different interpretations of their identity are based on different histories of their origin. On a written and national level Bulgarian, Turkish and Greek versions challenge each other. Their validity is confined to the borders of the respective nation-state with the important exception of the Turkish version which is also distributed by Bulgarian Turks within Bulgaria. Not surprisingly each national interpretation claims that the Pomaks are of their nationality, i.e. either Bulgarian, Greek, or Turkish.

The Greeks and Turks have to be the more imaginative identity-makers since their versions of Pomak origin sound the least convincing. Since it is a fact that the Pomaks speak Bulgarian their main thrust has been to prove that either the language is not Bulgarian or that it was imposed forcefully only in the 20th century – before that time Pomaks had been speaking Greek or Turkish respectively. In an article the Canadian-Bulgarian anthropologist Asen Balikci discusses the Greek and Turkish attempts to pocket the Pomaks (Balikci 1997). The official Greek line in how to perceive the Pomaks has also experienced changes. Currently there are attempts to establish Pomaks as a specific group within the Greek nation, different both from Turks and Bulgarians (Brunnbauer 2001a). In spite of the ingenuity of these attempts, my focus will be on the less imaginative, but more relevant Bulgarian case. The overwhelming majority of the Pomaks live in Bulgaria, and thus Bulgarian policy is of greatest concern to them.

Bulgarian concepts of the ethnic history of the Pomaks emerged in the course of Bulgarian nation-building and were related to the general ways, how Bulgarians came to see themselves as a nation. During the 19th century, when the Bulgarian nation was formed by intellectual forerunners and than the state, the nation was built mainly on two cultural pillars: language and religion, both going back to the glories of the First and Second Bulgarian Kingdoms. Within this context Bulgarian language was presented as the pillar of all other Slavic languages. It had been preserved all through the centuries of Ottoman domination (the so-called "Turkish Yoke") because of the resistance of the Bulgarians against Ottoman assimilation and also due to the Church which were thus given important credentials for the formation of the Bulgarian nation. Not accidentally, the first voice of Bulgarian national consciousness in the later half of the 18th century was a monk, Pajsi Hilendarski from Bansko.

The existence of a Bulgarian nation was thus traced back into the early middle-ages. But since Orthodox Christianity was an important feature of what I will call "Bulgarianness" (*balgarština*) the belonging of the Pomaks to the Bulgarian nation needed some additional proof. They had to be "genuine" Bulgarians in an environment of aggressive nationalism of the German type (*Sprachnationalismus*, *Kulturnationalismus*). Furthermore, the Pomaks lived mainly in areas which were the goal of Bulgarian expansionism after 1878 (the Pirin and Rhodope regions). Those regions were gained by Bulgaria after the First Balkan War of 1912 and their integration was a main aim of Bulgarian politics at that time. To be able to declare the Pomaks to be Bulgarians and to cope with the fact that they believed in Allah – the god of the former oppressors ! – the history of forced Islamisation had to be invented. Once shown that the Pomaks were converted by force and against their fiercest resistance, the continuation of their Bulgarianness could be claimed because their religion could then be regarded as something fundamentally alien to them.

This version of history is reflected by the officially adopted designation *bălgaromohamedani*, Bulgarian Mohammedans, in reference to the Pomaks. It has been one of the main aims of the extensive ethnographic, historical, and other writing about the Pomaks to prove that even after conversion to Islam they had continued to keep their Bulgarian language, together with Christian and sometimes even pagan traditions and customs (Vakarelski 1966; Vasilev 1961; Vrančev 1948). Many historians did not modify their theories about the "Bălgaro-mohamedani" after 1989: "After adopting Islam under the most terrible and harshest circumstances they [i.e. the Pomaks] – people whose mind is full of tragedy, but who are hard as stones – did keep their beautiful Bulgarian language, their old Slavic traditions, their pure national character, despite brutal pressure and persecution throughout centuries" (Pečilkov 1993: 5). Obvious differences in the mentality and habits between Christians and Pomaks were either ignored or attributed to old Slavic customs which were better preserved by the Pomaks who were said to have led isolated lives and not been affected by much assimilation from Ottoman Turks. Their language for example was said to be an extremely old, even Cyrillo-Methodian dialect, with a "pure and beautiful" Bulgarian flavour. Again the above quoted historian: "The Bulgarians with Muslim faith do not know one Turkish word, what is the basic and most categorical proof of their Bulgarian ethnicity (besides it is believed, that the oldest Bulgarian language – the Cyrill-Methodian one – is preserved exactly in the Central Rhodopes)" (ibid.).

The most consistent official histories of the Pomaks were written under the Communist rule. The most ambitious and authoritative of them is the book "On the Past of the Bulgarian Mohammedans in the Rhodopes'" It was edited in 1958 by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and had gathered for its composition some of the best known and respected Bulgarian historians of these times, like Vera Mutafčieva and Nikolai Todorov. The book reflects very well the official and also popular majority way of thinking about the Pomaks and thus anticipated the name-changing campaign of 1971-1974 which formed he first phase of the so-called Process of Rebirth. In that process all Pomaks had to change their Turkic-Arabic names to Bulgarian ones (Konstantinov and Alhaug 1995). The book can be viewed as the logical of a cultural policy that viewed the Pomaks as Bulgarians, but with a certain shortcoming, a blemish – their Islamic religion.

The part of the book which interests us most is the chapter on "The Enforced Islamization of the Rhodope Bulgarians". The author is Nikolai Todorov, an outstanding Bulgarian historian. Todorov defines two waves of large-scale forced conversions to Islam in Bulgaria: the first under Sultan Selim II in the 16th century and the second under the reign of Mehmed IV (1648-1687). The first mass conversion allegedly affected a region stretching from the Aegean to Bosnia. The main source for Todorov's assertion is a chronicle from the 18th /sic!/ century which he does not quote anyway. The second wave is said to have been conducted by the Sultan's famous Grandvezir Mehmed Köprölü whose Janissary troops he commanded on a campaign against the Venetians in the long-drawn Ottoman-Venetian wars. Mehmed Köprölü is said to have forced the population of the Rhodope region of Čepino, through which he was passing with his troops, to accept Islam. The only source for this event is a chronicle of one Priest Draganov which according to Todorov was written "not long after the events" (Bălgarska Akademija na Naukite 1958: 68). Todorov concedes that the chronicle had got lost and that we know it only form the copy in Stefan Zahariev's book (Zahariev 1870: 67, ff). But most probably this chronicle is simply a fake, contrived by Zahariev in order to substantiate Bulgarian claims on this population. The authenticity of Draganov's chronicle was questioned already by the Bulgarian historian Antonina Zheljazkova in 1988 (Zheljazkova et al. 1997, 79ff), which then caused fierce attacks but is nowadays more or less accepted.

Todorov's example is so illustrative because it was a common practice not to quote original sources, but to take them uncritically from other authors. One author after the other perpetuated the quotation of the source without the slightest attempt at verification. Thus a whole genre became built on very few sources which were even fakes. But the point is that the (hi)story, however forged its basis was, was believed. The Forceful-Islamisation-Hypothesis was connected with other genre-topics that were constantly repeated. One of these features was the story of "some Bulgarians who rather preferred to be killed or to leave their homes than to adopt Islam. They stayed devoted to their grandfathers' faith. Others converted to Islam under the threat of death . They did this to save their lives. But although they changed their faith they did not cease to be sons of their people" (Bălgarska Akademija na Naukite 1958: 70). Other repeating features which do not miss in most of the accounts about the Pomaks are: "In every Pomak village there is at least one grave of a Christan who was killed by the Ottomans for his protest against Islamization." Another recurrent motif is that a lot of toponyms "recall" the Christian past of the Pomaks and the victims of the enforced Islamization. Such names are for example derivations from words like "church", "blood", "bride" or "virgin". The story is that villages in the Rhodopes bearing such names had been founded by Christian fugitives who had hid in the forests, fleeing from the Ottoman troops, or that they were places were massacres against stubborn Christians not willing to give up their faith took place. Another point is made by emphasising the good everyday relations between Pomaks and Christians. A popular story has it that one of these two communities had run to the rescue of the other during war-time: Pomaks rescuing Christians from retreating Ottoman troops during the Liberation War of 1877/8, or, conversely, Christians providing defence for the Pomaks in the face of the advancing Russian army. Indisputable massacres – like the ones in the Christian villages of Batak and Peruštica in 1876 or the expulsion of the Pomak population of many Rhodope villages in 1912 – are, if they cannot be ignored, attributed to a small group of fanatics in both communities and the senseless and fatal policy of the state. But, it is said, all that could not destroy the Bulgarianness of the Pomaks; they continued to keep their Bulgarian ethnicity nevertheless. The main premise behind such versions of history is that not religion, but language defines ethnicity: "They (the Pomaks) speak an old and pure Bulgarian language, which is the best proof of their Bulgarian origin" (Bălgarska Akademija na Naukite 1958: 72). Todorov's account in this volume contains all the important points needed for an official reconstruction of Pomak history. The main line of argument is that the Pomaks are Bulgarians, but with a certain defect: i.e. that they do not belong to the Christian community, but cling to the faith of the former oppressor. This can be rectified however and the Pomaks can be returned ("reborn") into their true and pure Bulgarianness.

The removal of the defect was seen as a semiotic (anthroponymic) operation which could be imposed on the Pomaks employing violence if needs be. Books like the academic volume referred to above anticipate such operations. The first of these drastic measures was the enforced conversion to Christianity in the autumn months of 1912 which was called of a year later, when most Pomaks returned to the Islamic faith. After that, in intervals of various lengths name-changing campaigns followed: 1938-1944, 1962-64, and 1971-72 (Konstantinov 1992b; Konstantinov and Alhaug 1995: 25ff.). The last conversion was the most brutal one (for a good description of this campaign and the resistance against it from the perspective of a small town in the Rhodopes, Madan, cf. Karagiannis 1995: 20ff.). The party had declared that Pomaks must take Bulgarian names because they were Bulgarians and should express their national identity accordingly. The name-changing campaign was carried out with administrative orders and with the support of the army, the secret police, special police forces, and para-military support. Any attempt to resist the measures – and there have been such (Karagiannis 1995) – were crushed by force. An unknown number of Pomaks, who refused to accept the new name, were killed or injured, several hundred people were interned in the notorious prison camp on the Belene Island on the Danube.

The Communist Party aimed at the destruction of all semiotic representations of a distinctive Pomak culture. Not only names, but also traditions and customs, as well as wearing of traditional dresses were forbidden. The idea was that no public symbol of the Pomaks' different faith and different culture should remain – an ambition which unwittingly laid bare the fact that such differences did exist. Another point which the authorities were trying to make was that the campaign of "rebirth" was a voluntary step towards modernisation and thus the Socialist State was helping the Pomaks to get out of their "backwardness" – a backwardness identified with Islam.

Hence we can observe a process in which academic or literary fictions by historians, ethnographers and writers on the topic of the Pomaks as forcefully Islamised Bulgarians, escalated to a

military operation designed to bring the Pomaks back into a state of complete Bulgarianness. In this process all representations which could serve as a basis for a distinguished Pomak identity, or even worse – for a Turkish one – were targeted to be extinguished. Such an assimilatory policy was tested on the Pomaks and would ten years later be applied to the Bulgarian Turks – a second edition of "the process of rebirth", but much better known because of its international repercussions (for instance Poulton 1994: 129ff). The conversion campaign among the Turks was almost identical but this time it was directed against a minority of 800 000 people, who offered resolute resistance in some places. Until 1989, there would not off be any Pomaks or Turks – but just Bulgarians.

Summing up the reasons of the "processes of rebirth" several main motives could be identified:

> (1) The Party was afraid that the Pomaks would assimilate into the larger Turkish minority. All efforts of more or less peaceful dissemination of a Bulgarian ethnic consciousness among them had, in the eyes of the Party, failed.
> (2) Party and State felt threatened by the Turkish, or more generally, Muslim population in their country. There were – unproven – rumours about Turkish demands for autonomy. this fear of the minority was connected with fear from the Republic of Turkey, member of a hostile military alliance, and also fear from Islam. In the 1970s and especially 1980s these fears of Turks and Muslims intensified also because of their higher birth rates. Bulgarian nationalists feared that the demographic balance could change.
> (3) There were tensions resulting from an obvious contradiction between Communist rhetoric of modernity and the traditional life-style of the Muslim minorities. Despite industrialisation and collectivisation compactly settling Muslim groups have by and large managed to keep distinctive features of their life-styles. Integration of Muslims into mainstream society was only partially successful.
> (4) By 1970s a strongly nationalistic faction in the Communist Party leadership became more and more dominant. It could galvanise support also among Anti-Communists who shared the nationalist goals of this faction. During the 1980s, when economic problems increased, the Party thought different ways of creating legitimacy beyond the classic Marxist-Leninist dogma. Nationalism was one promising option. The nationalist attitudes were illustrated by the monumental celebrations of 1.300 years of Bulgarian statehood (683-1983). To accept to be a multiethnic country did not fit in the notions of Bulgarian grandeur.

New identities and new histories

Soon after the overthrow of Zhivkov's regime in November 1989 most of the laws discriminating Bulgaria's Muslim minorities were abolished. This happened not without facing fierce nationalist opposition: in January 1990 violent nationalistic demonstrations took place in the centre of Sofia, protesting against the decision of the still existing Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party for allowing Muslims to regain their names, faith and language. It should also be mentioned that many architects of the Process of Rebirth were still powerful figures at this time. Academician Nikolai Todorov was, for example, elected Chairman of the National Assembly. But for all that opposition, since 1990 it has become possible for Muslims to take back their old names or to create for themselves new "Muslim" names. The practising of Islam was allowed again and religion experienced a, albeit short-lived boom. Mosques were renovated and reopened, and new ones were built, often with funds from rich Islamic states. For Bulgarian nationalists this was a traumatic experience. "For short-sighted political gains the minds of the people [i.e. the Pomaks] were again confused. [...] In the district of Smolyan cassettes with prayers and talks in a foreign language which nobody understands are distributed and obscure the consciousness of our brothers [the Pomaks]" (Pečilkov 1993, 18). The liberalisation of the "semiotic codes" marking ethnicity and national identity generated feelings of being threatened among the majority population. Visions of the Muslim threat, historically materialised in the Ottoman empire, re-emerged (Konstantinov 1992a: 75).

For the Pomak identity these changes implied a return of the battles over their ethnic consciousness back onto the public scene. The official version – before 1989 being the only one allowed – was going to be contested again in the public as in the private sphere. Broadly speaking, three tendencies of Pomak self-definition arose. The first was to adopt a Turkish identity – a

phenomenon located primarily in the Western Rhodopes (Čeč region) and the Mesta valley. A second tendency, but this time in the opposite direction, was to accept the nation-state designed identity, that is to see oneself as ethnically Bulgarian. More often than not this correlated with sympathy for or membership in the Bulgarian Socialist Party – the party which succeeded the former ruling Bulgarian Communist Party. A good example of the second tendency can be provided by the small and isolated village of Zabărdo in the northern slopes of the Rhodope mountains. The village is known as a "red" village and its population which is entirely Pomak calls itself Bulgarian. There is even an initiative to build a Christian chapel in the village. A third tendency is to refuse to adopt either a Bulgarian or a Turkish orientation, but to cling to a distinct and Pomak-specific ethnic consciousness. Such Bulgarian Muslims would call themselves Pomaks, Achryane, Muslims and so on. This tendency seems to have its greatest spread in the Central Rhodopes around the towns of Čepelare and Smolyan.

All these identities can be said to be founded on versions of history which differ radically from each other. The official nation-state theory about the origin of the Pomaks has already been presented above and I shall now turn to alternative versions. These share one common premise: they deny that the Pomaks had been originally Christians who were forced to adopt Islam. In the extreme case they would exclude every possible connection with a Slavic origin of the Pomaks; such versions would claim instead that when the Pomaks arrived on the Balkans they had already been Muslims. The mayor of Smilyan, an overwhelmingly Pomak village of two thousand inhabitants told me the following story about the Pomaks' origin. In the first place, he made a difference between the Pomaks proper who lived in the Western Rhodopes and the Achryane, the Muslim population of the Central Rhodopes (including Smilyan). The Pomaks had allegedly come with the Proto-Bulgarians from the steppes of Central Asia and were a warlike people; whereas the Achryane were descendants of people from Syria who had been settled in the Rhodopes during the 8th century. The action is attributed to a Byzantine Emperor as a measure against the Slavs. As a matter of historic fact, during the second half of the 8th century settlers from Syria had been indeed placed in Thrace, in the foothills of the Rhodopes by the Byzantine Emperor Constantin V Copronymus (741-775). But, of course, there is no proof for a descent of the present-day Pomaks from these Syrian settlers. The theory is not plausible and contradicts what we know about Islamisation, but the point is that it is believed by many people like the mayor of Smilyan – an intelligent, educated person.

Other anti-official Pomak histories are for instance the following. In one version the Pomaks are presented as descendants of the Yürüks, Anatolian nomadic sheep-breeders who had settled on the Balkans – and specifically in the Rhodopes – soon after the Ottoman occupation in mid-14 century. Indeed the presence of the Muslim Yürüks played an important role in the process of Islamisation, but again there are no sources establishing a direct descent of the Pomaks from them (more probable seems the theory that the population of the only four ethnically Turkish villages in the Central Rhodopes are descendants of the Yürüks).

In another variant the Pomaks are the descendants of Ottoman (Turkish) soldiers who had married Bulgarian women. This theory is based on the assumption that men transfer nationality (through blood/sperm) and women language (through bringing up the children). As a consequence the Pomaks speak Bulgarian as a mother tongue, but are of Turkish (sometimes Pomak) nationality.Yet another variant is that the Pomaks descend form the Kumano-Turks who on their way from the steppes of Central Asia to the Balkans stopped for some time in the Ukraine where they adopted a Slavic tongue.

It has also to be said that some – mostly elderly – Pomaks deny that the Pomaks have been speaking Bulgarian before 1912 (or 1878). The claim is that Pomaks had been forced to attend Bulgarian schools and learn Bulgarian and that they had been forbidden to speak Turkish. Vernacular versions of Pomak history would also claim that the Pomaks (or Achryane) had come from western Anatolia. Similarities between names of Anatolian and Rhodope villages are used as a proof of this scenario.

The list of popular theories about the origins of the Pomaks could be continued, but I would rather stop at this point as the pattern has become obvious. Its logic and motivation is to resist the officially imposed identity by presenting its own versions and "proofs". Versions can often contradict each other and in a single village one is likely to come across several theories – or even one and the same person may tell more than one. The striking point is that all these histories and explanations of identity structurally resemble the official version: they belong to a discourse which sees identity as an immutable, organically inherited fact. Neither the official nor the unofficial versions of Pomak identity

accept the validity of a constructed identity. Pomak identity is in fact in a flow, but both nation state and vernacular identity-makers try to impose a single identity which excludes all other possible ones. Taking recourse to history – and the more distant that history, the better – they try to integrate people into a corporate community with a single, monolithic, nonnegotiable and immutable identity. History serves this purpose very well because once someone is put in a genealogical sequence he/she cannot easily escape it's its claws. In such an operation history stresses the distinctiveness of a group's past in order to contrast it with the "other". Members of one community must be separated from the other by clearly defined and easily recognisable borders. One cannot be of ours and of the others simultaneously – that is how identity is regarded when the individual's right to decide for oneself is refuted.

Conclusion

In place of a conclusion I want to give a further example of construction of identity and one that illustrates that official identity versions are themselves not too scrupulous when it comes to historic truth. If necessary it could invent events and persons and make them popular knowledge through the use of institutions of the state (history textbooks, monuments, propaganda).

In the already mentioned village of Smilyan there stands a monument of one Bishop Visarion. The official history has it that he was killed during the 17th century conversion-campaign by the Ottoman troops because he dared to offer resistance. The existence of the Bishop seems to have been contrived however – there was no bishop at this time in Smilyan and consequently no Bishop Visarion could have held office there.

A similar example of inventing history, though more on the level of experience than fact, is the following. On the small orthodox church in the Pomak village of Trigrad (some five Christian families live there nowadays) a plaque reads: "To our brothers who have given their lives for our liberation in 1912-1913". There were no Christian Bulgarians to be liberated in Trigrad in 1912-1913 however, because the population was entirely Pomak. For them liberation meant the burning down of their village by Bulgarian troops and irregulars from the neighbouring Christian villages after which they had to flee southwards. When they came back, they saw their best property and the administration of the village taken over by Christians. Both examples show that versions of national identity need to be expressed by material markers which confer a certain national meaning to public spaces.

Differing perceptions of the Bulgarian liberation movement of the latter third of 19 century. have not been subjected to intensive debate. What was liberation for most of the Christian population of the Bulgarian provinces of the Ottoman Empire, was perceived completely different by the large Muslim population. These cleavages still exist, although often more on a subconscious level. The processes of nation-building throughout the 20th century have also alienated many Muslims who felt that their grievances were not addressed and that their communities were marginalised. To reach a new consciousness of citizenship however, alternative experiences of these processes have to be taken into account. For the Balkans as elsewhere it is vital to be able to step beyond homogenous identities which try to pocket people without regard for their own will. The case of the Pomaks shows that ethnic boundaries can shift, are manipulated, and cause distress. This should give politicians in the region something to think about.

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[1] „Organic" in so far, as the social environment would take it as a „natural", „grown", and „traditional" identity. Since on the Balkans and elswhere nation-states and nationalisms do not accept

heterogeneous identities, they claim one feature of oneself to be decisive for the belonging to a given in-group. To have a multiple identity is not accepted. For that the term „organic“.