THE “OTHER WITHIN” IN THE BALKANS – THE CASE OF POMAKS

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Abstract: No Balkan Muslim identity is more contested, more wrapped in multiple intertwining twisted webs of myth and history than the Slavic-speaking Muslims or “Pomaks” of the Southern Balkan range. Standing at the crossroads of language, ethnicity and religion, the identification of Pomaks as a minority has been highly controversial. Throughout the Balkans, the case of Pomaks has not only challenged the nationalist versions of the history and assimilation campaigns but also the established understanding of the notions such as ethnicity, identity, group boundaries, kin vs host-states within the scholarly debate surrounding them. Despite the intellectual curiosity and perplexity that it creates among the scholars, even the use of the traditional name Pomak triggers a sharp criticism and a derogatory look in general public. They could only be “Muslim Bulgarians” for Bulgaria, “Slavic Speaking Greeks” for Greece and “Slavicized Turkish Brothers” for Turkey. Accepting their Pomakness without any ethnic, religious or linguistic hyphenation seems to be hardest of all for the Pomaks themselves as well as the nation-states surrounding them. After all, Pomaks has never been a self-proclaimed nation or ethnic group with a solid distinct mass group consciousness. In the conflict-ridden politics of Balkans where the ethnicities, nationalities or identities seldom match the territories that confine them in nation-states, like any other minority Pomaks has always been treated as the “other within”. Many local discourses of co-existence have been dictated by contesting nationalisms, between which identities were defined and contrasted, primarily from the outside. In other words, official identities ascribed to Pomaks have been tied to seemingly solid classificatory boundaries; yet, these boundaries themselves created questions about Pomakness which itself could not easily be classified.

Keywords: Balkans, Pomaks, identity constructions, national state, minorities policies.

“No Balkan Muslim identity is more contested, more wrapped in multiple intertwining twisted webs of myth and history than the Slavic-speaking Muslims or “Pomaks” of the Southern Balkan range”\(^1\).

Standing at the crossroads of language, ethnicity and religion, the identification of Pomaks as a minority has been highly controversial. Throughout the Balkans, the case of Pomaks has not only challenged the nationalist versions of the history and assimilation campaigns but also the established understanding of the notions such as ethnicity, identity, group boundaries, kin vs host-states within the scholarly debate surrounding them. Despite the intellectual curiosity and perplexity that it creates among the scholars, even the use of the traditional name Pomak triggers a sharp criticism and a derogatory look in general public. They could only be “Muslim Bulgarians” for Bulgaria, “Slavic Speaking Greeks” for Greece and “Slavicized Turkish Brothers” for Turkey. Accepting their Pomakness without any ethnic, religious or linguistic hyphenation seems to be hardest of all for the Pomaks themselves as well as the nation-states surrounding them. After all, Pomaks has never been a self-proclaimed

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\(^1\) Mary Neuburger, Pomak Borderlands: Muslims on the Edge of Nations, Nationalities Papers, 2000, Vol. 28, No. 1, p. 68.
nation or ethnic group with a solid distinct mass group consciousness. In the conflict-ridden politics of Balkans where the ethnicities, nationalities or identities seldom match the territories that confine them in nation-states, like any other minority Pomaks has always been treated as the “other within”. Many local discourses of co-existence have been dictated by contesting nationalisms, between which identities were defined and contrasted, primarily from the outside. In other words, official identities ascribed to Pomaks have been tied to seemingly solid classificatory boundaries; yet, these boundaries themselves created questions about Pomakness which itself could not easily be classified. The rigidity of ethnic classifications, initially questioned by Barth and Cohen is tested in this case as well. The manipulation of the ethnic boundaries employed by the nation-states in accordance with political considerations, foreign policy issues, and of course also economic interests as well as corresponding reactions of Pomaks in terms of shifting self- and group-identities demonstrate the porous and dynamic nature of ethnicity and identity. The examination of Pomakness as a troubled identity helps to clarify the ways in which power, domination and state policy intersect with and limit the options available for self and group identification.

As the introduction reveals, Pomakness is a highly contested identity which leads to very subjective historical, geographical and anthropological documentation biased by the competing nationalist projects. Nonetheless, a careful meta-analysis of the existing resources and crossreferencing is likely to reveal highly reliable information. What an initial research reveals is that “Pomak” is an external marker of identity that is actually used by non-Pomaks. It is rarely employed as a practical self-identification by the members of the community, at least until the end of 1990s. Moreover, there never has been a significant mass movement or tendency on the part of Pomaks to express or pursue rights based on their “Pomakness”. In a very general sense, Pomak is used for describing the Muslim, non-Roma populations who speak a Slavic dialect and, hence, do not precisely fit into the category of Greek, Macedonian, or Albanian, and not to mention Bulgarian or Turk. Therefore, as Neuburger neatly points, Pomakness describes “inbetweenness”, rather than an affiliation with the classic concepts of nationality in Southeast Europe. The etymological debate around the term "Pomak" is as heated as the debate around their identities as well. Bulgarian resources argue that the name is derive either from pomagach (помагач), which means "helper" in reference to role of Pomaks.

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5 Mary Neuburger, op. cit.; O. Demetriou, op. cit.; A. Eminov, op. cit.


8 Mary Neuburger, op. cit.
as the auxiliary units of the Ottoman army. Some other Bulgarian sources also relate the word to an alleged forced conversion to Islam by Ottomans and asserts that the term is derived from the word pomâka (по мъка), which means "by pain." On the other hand, Greek sources claim that name Pomak comes from the Greek word pomax, which means "drinker" by referring to the historical claim that Pomaks came from a wine producer tribe in Greece. The last but not the least, Turkish scholars also claim that the name comes from word pomagach but argue that it is a word belonging to Kuman Turks of the region who are ancestors of the current Pomaks. Communities cultivate their identities within history and construct them by interpreting their histories. Throughout the centuries, Pomaks has been subject to many different influences and pressures triggered by diverse political, social, cultural and economic changes. They became Muslims, interacted with the communities around them, evicted from their land, tried to be assimilated into the nationalities surrounding them. Thus, they have very complex and challenging history which makes the question of search for an identity harder. It is quite demanding to pinpoint their roots in the area with a historical accuracy. Fundamentally, the mutual agreement between the scholars is that Pomaks are a religious minority. They are of a minority who speak a dialect belonging to the Eastern South Slavic diasystem as their mother tongue, but whose religion and customs are Islamic. Nonetheless, there is no agreement related to their origins. The most frequent assertion is that they are of Slavic origin that had inhabited the lands since the early ages. This version is always challenged by the competing thesis that Pomaks have actually immigrated into Southeast Europe in the 11th century with many other accompanying Turkic tribes from Siberia and Ukraine and have been assimilated into the Slavic majority of the land. The Pomaks are originally a mountainous community residing in the mountain ranges of the Balkan Peninsula from the Eastern Rhodope to the Northern Albanian Mountains. Majority of the population is concentrated in the Rhodope, but with important settlements in Eastern lands of Macedonia and around the Danube districts. Currently, they are living under the borders of different Balkan countries including Bulgaria.


Greece, Macedonia, Albania and Turkey. The actual numbers of Pomaks are difficult to assess because they are not documented as separate minorities in censuses, besides, many would refuse to declare themselves officially as Pomaks. The approximate estimates are as follows: There are about 750,000 Pomaks in total: around 100,000 in Albania; around 40,000 to 45,000 in Greece and Macedonia; and between 250,000 and 300,000 in Bulgaria and around 300,000 in Turkey. What is even harder to estimate is the number of Pomaks in the past due to lack of reliable sources as well as continuously shifting borders and migrating populations of Balkans. The earliest evidence of settlements appears in the Ottoman tax registers from 1499–1502. What these documents reveal is that inhabitants had a mixture of Bulgarian and Turkish-Islamic names. The registrar includes names such as Ali, son of Vladislav, Elias (Ilyas), son of Ismail, and Bahader, son of Georgi, as the residents of the still-existing Teplen village in the Western Rhodopes. The number of Slavic speaking Muslims in the Rhodope, recorded by various Ottoman documents, grew steadily after the sixteenth century. An extensive study by Kiel, based on several Ottoman registers dating from 1516 to 1865, traces this gradual increase in population. Under the Ottoman rule, Pomaks have benefited from a considerable amount of autonomy, with an Agha as a community leader who was in charge of domestic affairs of the community. Besides what has been found in the Ottoman archives, information about the Pomaks is rather limited. Tsvetkova mentions Paul Lucas, a celebrated French traveler of 18th century, who describes Slavic speaking Muslims in the Rhodope Mountains in 1706 in his notes. Crossing the mountains from Plovdiv to Drama, he writes about the communities he encounters: “And when we had covered a distance of seven miles in those same mountains and along very arduous paths, we passed through the village called Pashmakli. It is populated by Turks only, but they do not speak their language. Their dialect is, rather, distorted Slavonic mixed with Greek and Bulgarian.”

Traditionally, Pomaks pursued a very isolated way of life. The specific features of the Rhodope region were rocky and infertile terrain and a lack of substantial transportation systems, which curtailed the economic and cultural communication with the rest of the country. The geography limits their farming opportunities into potato growing, rearing livestock and timber production. After the First World War, the areas have also been introduced to cultivation of silkworm and tobacco which has become predominant form of agricultural production over the years. Some of the male adult population also works in mines in which wages are low and work conditions are very poor. The villages are generally dispersed in the mountains and far away from the centers of trade and commerce. There is only a limited Pomak cohesion in terms

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18 S. Dimitrov & R. Stoykov, op. cit.
20 B. Tsvetkova, op. cit.
21 Tsvetana Georgieva, op. cit.; Hugh Poulton, op. cit.; Talip Kucukcan, op. cit.
22 Mila Mancheva, op. cit.
of shared territory, with the largest concentration being in the Central Rhodope, nonetheless, in
general, the geographic distribution of Pomaks is rather scattered due to both instability of
borders in the last two centuries and the isolating effect of the mountain terrain. All that really
unites Pomaks is their adherence to Islam and their use of South Slavic dialects which may vary
slightly based on region as well23. Hence, their lifestyle was shaped by Islamic belief and
common law as well as their reliance on the village community and kinship solidarity24. This
disconnection between the different settlements can also be accounted as an explanation of lack
of cohesive identity. Especially in Bulgaria and Greece, even during intense political and social
change, Pomaks were able to keep their specific social features. The main reason for this was
that they did not take part in the migratory movements into towns and new industrial centers,
but tried to remain in their villages. Pomaks were rather reluctant to work in urban centers, and
to disperse in the cities, but rather lived at a certain distance from the majority society25. In
Greece, it was the deliberate policy of the government to keep Pomaks to their traditional
economic activities, to their old settlements, and their traditional lifestyles by confining to a
restricted zone. However, in the last three decades Pomak communities have been opening
more towards the outside world, as infrastructure development and emigration into towns began
to have an impact26. Aftermath of the Ottoman retreat from Balkans has proved to be much
more chaotic, conflict-ridden than the rest of the Pomak history. Pomaks, all of a sudden, were
caught in the middle of the conflict about borders between competing nationalisms. They were
the most complicated part of the question about how land and people should be demarcated into
nations and states. Not surprisingly, all of the emerging nation-states claimed Pomaks as their
own and at the same time accused them of being a traitor, man of the Other. Therefore, during
the Balkan wars, they have been both persecuted and welcomed in different periods and under
different governments. The fluctuation of borders only added to their misery by the loss of
much needed farming lands or forestation areas, leading to even starvation27. The later
emergence of the nation states at the end of the First World War by the collapse of the Ottoman
Empire has led to many different versions of the Pomak history under each nation-state.
Pomaks had converted to Islam under Ottoman duress (according to Bulgarians, Macedonians,
Greeks), or lost their original language due to (admittedly voluntary) linguistic assimilation
(according to Turks, Albanians), or both their language and religion through these processes
(the Greeks)28. For all these nations, the inclination to claim the Pomaks had less to do with any
real sympathy for Pomaks as a kindred population and more to do with their strategic value in
ethnographic battles over the disputed territories29. This biased, nationalist approach to local
history of Pomaks dominated Balkan writings. All those aspects of Pomaks culture that

23 Mary Neuburger, Pomak Borderlands: Muslims on the Edge of Nations, Nationalities Papers, 2000, Vol. 28,
No. 1.
24 Hugh Poulton, op. cit.; H. Çavusoglu, op. cit.; Tsvetana Georgieva, op. cit.; U. Brunnbauer, op. cit.
25 Mila Mancheva, op. cit.; U. Brunnbauer, op. cit.; Hamdi Omer, op. cit.
26 U. Brunnbauer, op. cit.
27 Vladimir Ortakovski, op. cit., Maria Todorova, The Ottoman Legacy in the Balkans, in (ed.) L. Carl Brown,
Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East, Columbia University Press, New
York, 1996.
727–742.
29 Mary Neuburger, The Orient Within: Muslim Minorities and The Negotiation of National Identities, Cornell
coincided with majority customs were embraced as “native” proofs of ethnic/national religious brotherhood, while disparities were ascribed to “foreign” influences that had been imposed under different occupation periods. The policies geared towards handling the Pomaks, in general, oscillated between two extremes: either complete assimilation or complete ignorance and isolation between different states as well as between different regimes in the same state. As much as there has been similar policies and reactions, local realities of Pomak history has been shaped by many different dynamics exclusive to their own experiences. Hence, it is still an obligation for us to closely examine Pomak experience under each nationstate to identify the unifying patterns which have led to Turkification among Pomaks.

The paradox of the Pomak fate lies in their in-betweenness which has made them both the object of desire and source of a security threat. They were both claimed as co-nationals or potential traitors by this multitude of Balkan nations. Pomaks had converted to Islam under Ottoman duress (according to Bulgarians, Macedonians, Greeks), or lost their original language due to linguistic assimilation (according to Turks, Albanians, Greeks), or both their language and religion through these processes (the Greeks). As Neuburger indicates, Pomaks “were perceived as a gray zone, ripe to be painted white or black by the pretenders to their national wills”. The traditional Balkan nationalist discourse of the last century tried to claim the Pomaks as the part of “the Self” based on a common thread such as language or religion. Any discrepancies were easily discarded and attributed to cultural change throughout the history. The underlying motivation for these nationality claims were their strategic value in ethnographic battles over the disputed territories of Thrace and Macedonia rather than a sincere quest for identity. The fate of the Pomaks in each of the nation-states has been shaped by the perceived degree of the Pomaks as insiders or outsiders. The more the nation –states perceived them to be a part of their nationality, more they have tried to assimilate them as it has been in the case of Bulgaria, Turkey and Macedonia. On the other hand, the more they have been perceived as an outsider with close ties to the surrounding states around them, the tendency has been to isolate them and ignore their differences as it has been the case in Greece. An analysis of the historical development of Pomak communities and their interaction with other minorities and the majority reveals the insight into the question of why there has been a pattern of Turkification among the Pomaks and explain the reasons for this common pattern despite differences in their experiences.

Pomaks of Bulgaria live in closed and traditional communities, in the Rhodope mountains in Southern Bulgaria, from Mesta River valley in the west to the Haskova-Kurdzali line in the east, and a small number of them live around the Lovec, on the northern slopes of the

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30 Yonca Koksal, Struggling to Define Nationhood: Ethnic Politics and Imperial Legacies in Bulgaria and Turkey, Nationalities and Pluralisms From Old to New Worlds, Special Warsaw ASN Convention, Centre for East European Studies, Warsaw University, Poland, 2004.
31 Mary Neuburger, op. cit.
Balkan mountains\textsuperscript{35}. While there is no substantial controversy surrounding the roots of the Turks or the Romas, the irreconcilable debate in respect to the origins and true identity of Pomaks is never ending due to conflicting security and national interests of Bulgaria, Turkey and Greece. In Bulgaria, the Pomak population is referred to as both “Bulgarian Mohammedans”, “Bulgarian Speaking Muslims” or “Pomaks” yet, the last term is generally used in derogatory meaning. The name Bulgarian Mohammedans is used in the official and legal terminology. This name is meant to reflect the Bulgarian historical thesis that the Pomaks used to be Slavic Christians that were subject to forced Islamization in the past\textsuperscript{36}. Bulgarian policies towards the Muslim community on the whole can best be described with the word inconsistency. After the independence of Bulgaria, the minority rights were guaranteed by unilateral and multilateral treaties. Nonetheless, especially between 1878 and 1945, the determining factor was the changing governments and political conditions. In this period, the experience of Pomaks changed from enjoying the rights and privileges of an autonomous religious group to suffering periods of forced conversion and immigration in accordance with the change in government policies and security concerns. Thus, the Pomaks, similar to the rest of the Muslim community, was exposed to inconsistent and controversial treatment which left them confused about their social status and future\textsuperscript{37}. The modern Bulgaria, which appeared on the political map as a result of the 1877–78 Russo-Turkish War, was established on the principle of “one nation, one state” like many other nationstates of the time. The Bulgarian nationality was constructed along linguistic as well as religious lines, hence to be Bulgarian meant to speak Bulgarian and belong to the Bulgarian Orthodox church. This concept tacitly estranged the Muslims as well as other religious communities like Catholics and Jews\textsuperscript{38}. This principle, however, proved to be in contradiction with the reality of Ottoman legacy which has left Bulgaria with a heterogeneous population in terms of both ethnicity and religion. Under these circumstances, unification of the nation and the state became the main objective and diversity of the population was perceived as a threat to this unification\textsuperscript{39}. Yet, the state policy to deal with the minorities was also underlined by legacy of the past. Minority policies were characterized by dealing with Muslims as a homogenous group regardless of ethnic or linguistic differences, much like the Ottoman Millet system. The term Muslim was virtually equated with Turks, whether they were ethnic Turks or Slav Muslims, Muslim Roma, Tatars or Cirkassians. In the case of Pomaks, even though Bulgarian intellectuals were very well aware of their distinctiveness, in the first decades of Bulgaria independence, Pomaks were treated as a part of the Turkish community. Pomaks were, for example, listed under the rubric “Turks” in the first Bulgarian national censuses\textsuperscript{40}. In the period 1878 - 1944 there were three main conversion campaigns against the Pomaks, which were carried out as an official state policy, backed up by the Orthodox Church. The first conversion campaign took place immediately after the Russian–

\textsuperscript{35} A. Eminov, op. cit.,


\textsuperscript{37} M. Apostolov, op. cit.; U. Brunnbauer, op. cit.; Tsvetana Georgieva, op. cit..

\textsuperscript{38} Hugh Poulton, op. cit.; Maria Todorova, The Ottoman Legacy in the Balkans, in (ed.) L. Carl Brown, Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East, Columbia University Press, New York, 1996.

\textsuperscript{39} Tsvetana Georgieva, op. cit.; Maria Todorova, op. cit., Mila Mancheva, op. cit..

\textsuperscript{40} Tsvetana Georgieva, op. cit.; Maria Todorova, op. cit., Mila Mancheva, op. cit..
The Ottoman War of 1877/78, different from successors, it was only limited to a specific region. However, it had already displayed the features of future attempts of forced assimilation of Pomaks in Bulgaria. Pomaks argued to be true Bulgarians, and that their Muslim faith was the result of forced conversion. Assimilatory measures were directed against all visible cultural features of Pomak life, which separated them from the majority. Since distinctive Pomak habits were either determined by religion or expressed in form of religious rituals, eradicating all signs of Islamic culture was the foremost aim of assimilation. Turkish–Arabic names, Muslim prayers and holidays, religious rituals, and traditional dresses of women as well as men banned and replaced by Bulgarian/Orthodox ones. The assimilation during 1912-1913 Balkan Wars was seen as an opportunity before any peace treaty was signed that would draw the borders along ethnic lines. To all speculations on the “voluntary character” of conversion, a multitude of archive documents, reveal the forced nature of conversion. Until 1942, the Bulgarian policy has oscillated between religious tolerance and cultural assimilation. By the late 1920s and into 1930s, the government, quite irritated by the increasing number of reports indicating the turkification of Pomaks, placed a ban on the use of “Pomak” as a name of reference. They have deprived the Pomaks of their right to marry Muslim of a different ethnicity. This prohibition was unmistakably related to marriages between Pomak and Turkish Muslims. Pomak Muslim students were banned from attending Turkish minority religious schools, where they have received religious education traditionally. As a result, all Muslims schools in areas with compact Pomak population were transformed into public schools with Bulgarian Christian teaching staff. In addition to that, in 1937, government founded an organization called Rodina (meaning Motherland) that included Muslim and Christian intellectuals set out to reclaim the Bulgarian consciousness of Pomaks. It aimed to replace the use of Muslim names and rituals with Bulgarian ones. Nonetheless, all these culturally charged policies were abandoned during the Second World War and another major forced conversion campaign was carried out by the government with the help of the Orthodox church during 1942-1943. The communist regime, unfortunately, failed to break the cycle of continuous change of polices and controversy. In the first years of the new regime, the ethnic and religious rights of Pomaks were restored. The names changes were reversed and religious rituals could be performed openly. The Rodina was declared a fascist organization and reprisals were carried out against its members. The change in policies, however, was short-lived after the affiliation between Pomaks and other ethnic groups in the region proved to be continuous security concern. In 1948, thousands of Pomaks were evicted from the Bulgarian-Greek border area of the Rhodopes and resettled to Northern Bulgaria. Pomaks were also deprived of their right to self-identification. In 1951, the Communist regime invalidated the data from the 1946 census; since it was found that a considerable amount of Pomaks indicated “Turkish” as their

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41 Tsvetana Georgieva, op. cit.; Mila Mancheva, op. cit.
44 A. Eminov, op. cit.; Vladimir Ortakovski, op. cit.; Mila Mancheva, op. cit.
45 Mary Neuburger, op. cit.
nationality. Throughout the rest of the 1960s, Politburo engaged in devising measures for preventing Tatars, Gypsies, and Bulgarians, professing Islam, from identifying themselves as Turks.\textsuperscript{46} The most comprehensive forced assimilation campaign against the Pomaks took place in 1972-1974. The Pomaks were chosen as an example for “Rebirth Process”, which was eventually extended to the Turks. In fact, after this assimilation campaign not a single Pomak Muslim with non-Bulgarian name was left in the country. Similar to earlier attempts, the only external signs of their identity differentiating them from majority, meaning their Islamic names and rituals, were erased. Despite the fact that all of their rights to identity, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, were completely taken away, Pomaks continued to use their Muslim names, and practise Islamic rituals at home and among kinship. Therefore, the response of Pomaks were to isolate themselves and solidify their community.\textsuperscript{47} In the aftermath of Communism, while the Turkish minority was gaining their rights rapidly, due to pressure from Turkey in international arena, Pomaks could not benefit legally and affectively from this emancipation. At this point the Pomak minority sought to collaborate with the rising Turkish minority groups who were politically mobilized. A very strong actor has been a political party called Movement for Rights and Freedoms. The MRF is a secular organization which demanded legal protection in conformity with international law, political rights, an opportunity to participate at all levels of administration as well as a protection for their cultural and linguistic identity. While insisting on collective rights for minorities and fighting for cultural autonomy, the MRF has portrayed itself as loyal to Bulgarian sovereignty to solidify its position. Yet, the MRF remained to be an overwhelmingly Turkish organization; which has contributed to turkification of Pomaks by means of ethnic-political mobilization.\textsuperscript{48} Pomaks were merged into the Turkish movement in order to attain their religious rights and minority. Only by the end of 1990s and early 2000, the Pomaks started to shows signs of reforming their ethnic consciousness. This was mainly due to Bulgarian efforts to reallocate sources accessible to Pomaks with the hopes of EU membership. Cultural and social investments to Pomak lands and population started slowly the emergence of more pronounced Pomak identity.\textsuperscript{49}

Pomaks are a minority group at the crossroads of border not only in their geographical location but also in their ethnographic location. They are standing in place where fundamental markers of identity cross into each other: religion, language, and ethnicity. Their existence as a distinct group stands against the monolithic nationalism of Balkan states which try recklessly to impose a uniform identity in their quest to unify the nation and the state. In this political environment in which both the borders and identities imposed on them shift continually, it shall be understood that they would need to construct a multiple layered, context-bound identity that would ensure their survival as a group. Even only during the last century, their names have been changed four times into Bulgarian- Christian names and then four times restored back to


\textsuperscript{47} A. Zhelyazkova, op. cit.; O. Demetriou, op. cit..

\textsuperscript{48} Mila Mancheva, op. cit.; A. Zhelyazkova, op. cit.; O. Demetriou, op. cit..

\textsuperscript{49} Yonca Koksal, op. cit.
Turkic-Muslim ones in Bulgaria; they have been officially categorized as Muslims, then Turkish, then Greek, then Pomak in Greece; and have been welcomed as members of a new republic which created Turkishness as a new identity for all of its population without leaving space for sub-nationalities. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Balkan states were left with disputed borders and multitude of ethnic groups. They indeed had a Greek, Bulgarian or Turkish states but their populations were not at all Greek, Bulgarian or Turkish. Yet, the nationalisms they have subscribed to were promoting the idea of one-nation one state which did not concur with the reality that ruling elite has to face. Under these circumstances, and the heavy pressure of being surrounded by other states that did have a historical claim to either their lands or populations, their choice had been to ascribe a preset identity to their entire population to make the administrative border concur with the ethnic frontier to achieve an integrity that a new state required. As it has been well-observed, nation-states coming out of multiethnic empires tend to convey previous administrative practices into their new administrative structures. This reveals a path-dependent model, in which imperial administrative practices tend to influence the course for the government policies of new nation states. Even though flourishing nation–states had assertions of all sorts about new beginnings free from imperial rule; most of their domestic and international policies have been influenced by the imperial legacy of The Ottoman Empire. All of the nation states mentioned have opted for defining their lines of inclusion or exclusion for their nations along the lines of the millet system in Ottoman Empire. In millet system the society was divided along religious lines. Muslims formed one millet and the non-Muslims formed three distinct millets: Orthodox Christians, Jews and Armenians. These millets had a legally protected status with internal autonomy in cultural and judicial affairs.

Based fundamentally on this existing social and administrative structure, each nation has defined what it means to be minority according to their religious status. As a result, the Orthodox Christians in Greece and Bulgaria have been easily included in the nation whereas Muslims were declared to be the minorities. On the other hand, the Muslims in Turkey were easily accepted as Turks, where as the non-Muslims were recognized as the minorities apart from the core of nationality. Those definitions have also been solidified by the international treaties that have established these states and bilateral agreements with each other such as Treaty of Istanbul in 1913, Treaty of Neuilly in 1919, and Lausanne Treaty in 1924. In midst of it all, Pomaks were caught up in this vortex about how Balkans should be reconstructed; meaning how territory and people should be divided. Pomaks were left at a “grey zone” in this black and white vision of nationality and minority status. They were not quite fitting into neatly defined categories of nationhood ascribed upon them. In Bulgaria, they had racial features of Slavs, speaking Slavic but somehow they were not Slavs because they were Muslim. In Greece,

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50 A. Eminov, op. cit..
53 Yonca Koksal, op. cit.; Hugh Poulton, op. cit..
54 Mary Neuburger, op. cit.
they were known to be native people of the land, yet they were talking a Slavic language and on top of that they were Muslim. In Turkey, they were the Muslim brothers yet not quite so Turk with a Slavic mother tongue and different understanding of Islam. None of these nation-states were willing to recognize them as a distinct group. They could either be defined as part of the Muslim minority in Greece and Bulgaria without a distinctive identity or their Greekness or Bulgarianness has to be discovered and resuscitated. Hence, they were either “Others” or “Self”. In this manner, the policy choices of these states have oscillated between oppression, assimilation, tolerance and ignorance depending on the domestic and international factors.

Pomaks is one of the minority groups that have been cramped between nationalist discourses of Balkan states. As their experience which walks us through periods of oppression, isolation, denial and ignorance, assimilation and tolerance in various Balkan states, we get closer to understand the interplay between states, minorities, majorities, international forces, transnational actors and historical legacies in the process of identity formation. The relatively short but conflict-ridden history of Pomak identity provide challenges for the not only the members of the group who are in constant search for a stable, well defined identity but also for the scholars who closely observes the process. The dynamic nature of identity formation which constantly adapts to the social, economic and political circumstances makes it harder to make statements that would not be questioned by time. In the case of Pomaks and their quest for identity, the shifting political atmosphere due to European Union integration within the region is already upsetting the balances. The conscientiously built relations between the localities and center, minority and majority; and between the state and the populations are being challenged as an overarching European identity provides a new and important option. As the article suggests the dual layered and shifting Pomak identity has been a result of extensive interaction and intensive negotiations between the minority and majority with the added complication of host and kin nations. Pomaks, who have been confused and threatened by the constantly shifting borders, ethnicities and policies had reconciled over a dual layered identity: Pomakness as a private identity and Turkishness as a public identity. While private Pomak identity enabled them to enjoy their local affiliation and sustain an inclusion and exclusion system, the Turkish identity enabled them to negotiate their survival through the inconsistent and threatening minority policies. Nonetheless, the availability of a supra-national European identity now offers them a new way to assert their distinctive identities without being subject to any nationalist harassment. Being European is easier and less dangerous than being an ethnically contested minority. Most of the recent literature and ongoing research concerning Pomaks point to this new development. The Pomaks are slowly, yet easily adapting to being European citizens. The increase of resources available to minorities and projects for their socio-economic and cultural development are important incentives for Pomaks to internalize their new identity. Thus, there is a new dynamic in the identity formation of Pomaks that need serious consideration. Even though, it is quite early to make any conclusive remarks for communities like Bulgarian or Turkish Pomaks, the case of Greek Pomaks who have been benefiting from the membership within the recent years after the clearing of restrictions upon their minority rights could be

55 Nesim Seker, Identity Formation and the Political Power in the late Ottoman Empire and Early Turkish Republic, History Actual Online, Núm. 8, 2005, pp. 59-67.
56 Hugh Poulton, op. cit.; Yonca Koksal, op. cit.
examined to understand how majority, minority and state as well as the supranational agencies interact and negotiate with each other and how these negotiations influence the Pomak identity.

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