LEVEL: ADVANCED

THE POMAK AMAZONS: ANTI-REVITALISM & GENDER PERSPECTIVES

Some of the critical issues and keywords that the text below includes:

- Bulgarian-ness
- Rodina (Родина)
- Revitalsts (or, revitalism)
- Hodzha
- Cultural Uplifting (Културно Издигане)

If English is not your first or second language, avoid using online translations.Your language skills will improve if you use dictionaries!

CAN YOU MAP OUT THE LOCATIES MENTIONED IN THE TEXT? ?



1

WOMEN AGAINST THE STATE

Local stories of Pomak revolts against Communist policies were made available by two of the Communist persecutors and presumed scholars, respectively Peter Diulgerov and Peter Marinov. The latter was a renowned ethnographer and notorious figure, having joined the Bulgarian Communist Party in 1944 with his fellows from '**Rodina**' – a cultural movement founded in Smolyan to promote Bulgarian-ness to "misguided brothers" sisters."

LEARN TO UNLEARN

In time of Yugoslavia, distrust toward State-run campaigns was expressed by Muslim women, who refused to participate in the political life and in the public life. In Communist Bulgaria, Pomak women were at the center of active forms of civil disobedience, including some with violent actions.

CONTINUE TO THE NEXT PAGE



Central Mosque in Rudozem

However, after a few years, precisely in 1947, Marinov and his Rodina's fellows were expelled from the Bulgarian Communist Party since rumors arose regarding their collaboration with the Fascist regime in the pre-war period. Neuburger reports how Marinov nevertheless described how revolts of Pomak communities unfolded. He noted the gender dimension of the Pomak resistance in Rudozem, where Pomak women were much more active than men in standing up against the forced name-changing campaigns for newborns between the 1960s and 1970s. As Myuhtar-May wrote, in the early 1960s, in the village of Brezhnitsa, the Communist attempt of **revitalists** to force Pomak women into a new attire failed utterly. After arresting the young **hodzha** (religious teacher), Pomak women who had heard of it headed toward the jeep-load of Communist revitalists and stumbled upon an access road blocked by them. Forcing the vehicle to a stop, one of the Pomak women, Ana Dŭrvova, shattered the windshield with a bludgeon. The women collectively pulled the hodzha out of the jeep and safely escorted him home. A couple of years later, precisely between 1970 and 1974, the local resistance of Pomaks against the name-changing campaign escalated across other regions of Bulgaria. In February 1970, the spirit of this local resistance was so contagious that other small towns, such as Lŭzhnitsa, Madan, Rudozem, Dospat and Devin, and other surrounding villages in Southwestern Bulgaria, as well as in Dolno Izvorovo in Central Bulgaria on March 1972, were all influenced by. Thousands of Pomak resisters assembled for several days to contest the assimilation campaigns. In May of 1972, in the village of Yakoruda in the Western Rhodopes, a few Pomaks with freshly changed names accepted to promote the 'reacquisition' of their Bulgarian identity as volunteer brigades. The fanfare was utterly interrupted, however. Other local Pomaks began to organize blockades at the exits of the town and later headed to the main town square. There, Peter Diulgerov was holding a speech emphasizing the tragic fate that Pomaks happened to face due to the measures of Ottoman colonialists. Pomaks came to incite the locals to oppose the Communists and their subtle plans to heal the 'wounds of Turkication.' Despite the several hours of threats of bloodshed with barred doors and physical resistance, they had to give in to the pressure of local authorities.



The founders of Rodina organisation. On the front, from the left: Adil Hodgadgikov, Arif Beiski, Petar Marinov. Behind, standing, from the left: Mehmed Karahusov and Mehmed Isharliev.

2

STIMULUS MATERIAL





Above, the "Community Centre Hristo Botev" in the city of Smolyan, on the wall of which a commemorative plate remembers the date of the foundation of Rodina organisation.

On 3 March 1937, here the "Rodina" organisation was founded by patriotic Bulgarians

3

SKILLS, PRACTICES AND EXCERCESES

After reading the text "**WOMEN AGAINST THE STATE**" and looking at the **STIMULUS MATERIAL**, think of Pomak women who rebelled against the assimilation campaign, and look at the male members of Rodina.

Is there any gender perspective over nationalism in Bulgaria and the Balkans in general?



Think of how women and how they have been historically misrepresented in the history of the Balkans

<u>Conduct a research about the role of women during Communist Bulgaria.</u> Use visuals, such as posters, images from newspapers, propaganda items, photos from open archives, to map out how Communist regime depicted womanhood in Bulgaria. Start with the three photos below:



A Greek woman with her kids in the Bulgarian campaign "remaking memories"



A Angela Davis visiting Bulgarian female workers at the Varna port



Turkish women demanding their names back in 1989, after the forced name-changing campaign between 1984/1985

USE THESE PHOTOES FOR YOUR STUDY

> One of the significant developments of this still young twenty-first century, and one that has been growing in strength for several years, is the movement of decolonial feminisms the world over
>
> *François Vergès*

Likewise, Frantz Fanon wrote "*Let's win over the women and the rest will follow*". What actions need to be taken in (society, country, collective, city or village of your choice) to raise awareness about minority women's right?

Design and present a manifesto for action, showing different intersectional perspectives.

Keep in mind: Your action must be active – it cannot be an essay, for instance – and it must involve collective work and include cross-cultural perspectives of decolonisation.

4 QUESTIONS & IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION, DEBATES, REFLECTION

> *... Socialism was racist from the outset ... you will always find a racist component in socialism, which has, in fact taken racism up, developed, re-implanted, and modified it in a certain respect, but it has undoubtedly not re-examined its basis or modes of working.*
>
> Michel Foucault

Too often, anti-colonial scholars and activists, refer to socialism as a cure from neoliberalism and colonialist mechanism of racialisation. **Do you agree?**

Think of Communism in Bulgaria. **Was it racist, in your opinion?**

If so, **to what extent racial discourse/practices unfolded from Communism in Bulgaria?**



Referring to the STIMULUS MATERIAL above ...

... according to Rodina's adopted statute, one of the goals was to "support all initiatives aimed at the cultural uplifting of Bulgarian Muslims [...]". In this instance, Franz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* can provide some food for thought. Paraphrasing the psychiatrist and political philosopher, Bulgaria's engineered form of colonialism did not claim to dehumanize Bulgarian Muslims but to humanize them. As Samara Esmeir, Britain-led colonial legal reforms in Egypt claimed to elevate Egyptians to humans' status and liberate them from the inhuman conditions prescribed by their "native" rulers, such as Islamic law, Ottoman domination, etc.

Comparing Rodina's goal to "culturally uplift Bulgarian Muslims", do you see any connection between the Pomak resistance with Fanon's critique and/or Esmeir's argumentation on colonial Egypt?

READING TIPS



Samara Esmeir (2021) *Juridical Humanity. A Colonial History*. Stanford University Press.

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth, Penguin Classics* (republished, edition 2001)

SUGGESTIONS FOR TRAINERS AND EDUCATORS

LEVEL: ADVANCED

THE POMAK AMAZONS: ANTI-REVITALISM & GENDER PERSPECTIVES

COMPLEXITY

This section is meant to engage an audience who is already familiar with minority issues in the Balkans and both history and legacies of socialism in the region.

GROUP SIZE & TYPE

8-15 participants, foreigners, and Bulgarians, ideally activists or practitioners already engaged in the NGO sector, youth organizations, or collectives.

TIME

90 minutes or 2 hours in case of the need to wrap up and/or set a follow-up activities

OBJECTIVES

- Familiarise with the political history of Pomak communities;
- Reflect critically on how knowledge production of socialism came to impinge on, and mull over, Pomak groups in Bulgaria;
- Understand and come to know the high level of violence and domestic racialization against Pomaks between the 1960s and the 1970s;
- Stimulate critical thinking on epistemic violence of the socialist regime in Bulgaria and beyond;
- (Re)think of decolonial practices in the political history of Pomaks and other minority groups vis-à-vis ongoing strategies of decolonization worldwide.

MATERIAL

Internet connection, laptop, projector, flipchart posters, handouts, (online) vocabulary; Bulgarian history and literature textbook for high school students.

PREPARATION

- Make sure to review the keywords before kicking off the different activities.
- Organise activities in two sections of 45 minutes each. Make sure to have enough time to restore participants' attention for the second session.
- Divide participants into small groups in order to initiate research activities and have diverse findings to discuss as a follow-up activity.
- Make sure to have a stable internet connection in order to use Google Maps for section 2. STIMULUS MATERIAL, and access to social media platforms for section 3. SKILLS, PRACTICES, EXERCISES;
- Be prepared to open up the discussion among the participants and related sensitive topics, such as religion, literature, and history. Throughout, make sure that none in the group will feel marginalized or discriminated against.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

- If you are in Sofia, visit the Monument for the Victims of Communism;
- If you are nearby Kornitsa, organize a visit to the small monument erected to commemorate the Pomak victims of March 1973. In both places, ask people what they know about these two monuments and what they mean to them and their communities;
- Alternatively, pick up a Bulgarian history and/or literature textbook. If you lead a group of foreigners, pay attention to photos and pictures chosen to illustrate historical and literature knowledge of the Bulgarian past and identity;
- If you lead a group of Bulgarians, reflect on how Bulgarian heroism and national identity convey a message of ethnonationalism and cultural homogenization at the expense to minority groups in general, and Pomaks in particular.