BALKANS OF COLOUR

THE CASE OF POMAKS

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Speaking of Race in Bulgaria

Francesco Trupia

In Bulgaria the contemporary anti-Roma discourse and rampant Islamophobia have indicated how widespread racism is. It should be also pointed out that the country has regularly foreclosed the notion of race in order to assess such a phenomenon, thereby favoring the notion of ethnicity rather than race itself. The perpetuation of the myth of racelessness from the historiography and political landscape of Bulgaria and the Balkans in general, has diminished the shared connections between ethnic minority groups and other typically minoritised communities that are ascribed around their race. Elana Resnick argues that, in the Balkans, such a denial unravels a form of white supremacy and asserts the existence of racialized hierarchies. The entanglement of modern racism and power is not only appropriate to studying the chronological history of Europe but also paramount for rejecting the issue of racist politics as an unfortunate and unexpected identification with whiteness. Therefore, there is one question that deserves to be raised: does race, or do racial hierarchies, exist in Bulgaria?

In general, the tandem of race and racism can propel the same value-laden rationale behind which the research approach of Critical Race Studies (CRS) provides as a better lens of investigation worldwide. In particular, numerous intersecting and overlapping threads that pertain to the notion of race and phenomena of racialisation show multiple forms of discrimination and exclusion which have been similarly shaped by global white supremacy. The concrete tension between being unable to engage vs. being unwilling to examine forms of racism and anti-blackness is of great importance even in the Balkans where "ethnicity" matters the most.

Among others, the case of Pomaks provides a critical perspective for unraveling issues of internal racism and domestic coloniality in the contemporary history of Bulgaria. Within the country, according to Dušan Bjelić, race relations and internal (domestic) colonialism can be found in the race discourse against national minorities such as Turks and Muslim Pomaks. Subjected to racial-type laws and policies of assimilation, which almost led to cultural genocide, Pomak identity was hotly debated. Members of groups composed of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, the state-endorsed official historiography depicted them as most probable descendants of Bulgarian Christians who converted to Islam during the period of Ottoman rule. They retain the Bulgarian language as well as certain Orthodox practices, yet their self-identification with Islam has been historically strong.

After the Balkan Wars, Bulgaria and other Balkan states were quite young, somewhat lacking in national pride, and in desperate need of a dignified collective identity. As Myuhtar-May noted, the Slavic-speaking Pomaks were recast as "pure-blood" Bulgarians who spoke the "purest" Bulgarian language and preserved the "truest" Bulgarian traditions.

During the interwar period, the process of Nazi Germany's ethnic self-racialisation vis-à-vis Jewish ethnicity understood as an internal sub-race, did not differ much to the long-standing post-Ottoman process of Bulgaria's "ethnic self-racialisation" vis-à-vis Muslim nationals and ethnic Turks. While the latter were privileged by a former empire's minority status, Pomaks were instead subjected to forcible Christianisation and name-changing campaigns since the 1910s. In the 1940s, the Nazi-allied Bulgarian Monarchy passed the "Law for the Protection of the Nation" (Законът за защита на нацията), which resembled and recuperated some logics and interactions of the Nuremberg Race Law. Ironically, Slavic majoritarian populations were equalized to other colored races in the early 20th century, especially after the rapid production of racial hygiene policies and implementation of eugenic measures. These were about to counter 'qualitative' aspects of the implementation of Slavic and colored populations themselves along with their racial characteristics.

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In the aftermath of the Second World War, Michel Foucault introduced the concept of "internal racism" by referring to eugenics. Despite the takeover of Communist forces and anti-imperialist stances, Bulgaria's domestic colonisation unfolded violently within specific ethnic landscapes. This typical form of "internal (domestic) colonialism" was rethought by Foucault himself as a form of governmentality impinging on individuals in their most basic relations to themselves and others. Foucault argued that not only Nazism and Western ethnocentrism, but even socialism and Marxism were racist from the outset. During the same period of time, in Bulgaria, another wave of vigorous attempts was made to oblige Pomaks to abandon their Muslim and Arabic names and adopt Bulgarian ones. Paraphrasing Foucault here, Bulgarian socialism showed its racist component by taking up, developing, re-implanting, and modifying its basis or its modes of working. Race relations between Bulgarians and Muslim Pomaks were presented as existing inside the "same type", where the political conversion of ethnicity into race was central to account the history of Bulgaria. Race of Pomaks, in this sense, was an operative category of identity-remaking over their specific ethnic space, namely, the Rhodope region. Hence, Pomaks themselves were simply considered pure-blooded Bulgarians who had just been forced to convert to Islam during the Ottoman Empire.

This form of auto-referential racism came into shape through the so-called 'Rebirth Process' – namely, an often inconsistent and contradictory policies of nativisation that the Communist Bulgaria Party orchestrated and implemented on the ground against ethnic and religious minorities. The rhetoric was that of salvation and progress, more precisely of "cultural uplifting" (e.g. културно издигане), which echoed a particular tradition of humanist practices with a long colonial career. As Gerhard Meinsenbeg would have argued, the words 'culture' and 'race' happened to be interchangeable. Likewise, Angela Saini wrote that particular cultural features had been historically chosen arbitrarily, through a superficial selection of external characters. Culture mattered only because it had a political meaning attached to it. When the word "race" had been prudently replaced by 'population', racial differences came to replace the notion of 'human variation'.

Moreover, socialism's auto-referential racism showed how the traditional relationship between race discourse and nationalism had the tendency to reverse itself. Affirming the superior value of the majoritarian cultural self (us) and thereby making room for the logic of isolation and exclusion of the 'abnormal', Communist Bulgaria's nationalist turn of the 1970s was increasingly becoming, or perhaps had already become, a function of racism. After all, the power of nationalism has historically been to tell different peoples to descend from greatness, that they have been genetically endowed with something special, something passed down to them over generations. Both mechanisms of dissimilation and assimilation against Pomak identity and history were possible discourse strategies of the internal racism discourse. Expanded into an internal war that defends the core society against the threats born in its own body, the 'Rebirth Campaign" mulled over Pomak identity, history, and ontologies. The central scope was to engine a policy of nativisation of all mediating cultural devices among different communities in order to reinforce the 'unity' of the nation – namely, of the 'Edinstvo'. Literally "oneness", the Edinstvo was introduced as a performative societal model during socialism; its philosophy dragooned everyone into a sort of 'epistemic self-colonisation' implemented through institutionalizing a new normative history. Accordingly, Pomaks and other minorities would have taken an absolute distance from their own past, their legacies and ontologies. Becoming the ideological watchword of a society without divisions, the Edinstvo was an operative category of "socialist unity" blatantly depicted as a step further to a full-fledged classless society. Under the parapet of such a State-run ideology, the purpose of the Edinstvo was that of regrouping and reanimating Bulgarian-ness as a locus of state sovereignty. In this way, Communist Bulgaria showed its nationalism's internal supplement, as Balibar would refer to it. It was not merely exacerbated xenophobia but, in a sense, the very opposite: the rejection of the Bulgarian "complementary enemy", namely, the Muslim identity of Pomaks and their Turcophilia.

Tellingly, the term "complementary enemy" was firstly coined by Germaine Tillion during the war in Algeria against the French colonisation. Another similar paradigm - namely, 'judicial humanity' - almost equalises the colonised experiences of Pomaks to that of Egyptians under the British domination. In fact, judicial humanity could serve to unravel some mechanisms of Bulgaria's judicial internalisation of colonialism and coloniality. The British repression of "alternative sovereignties" that Egyptians had aspired to, yet repressed through a "technique of purification", enabled the British administration to turn law's ideals of humanity into violent weapons of control. Similarly, Communist authorities propagated their purpose of re-humanising non-Bulgarian subjectivities and healing the wounds of Turkification. From a (post-)colonial perspective, here Franz Fanon's argumentation could also provide yet another eye-opening lens of explanation of the paradigm of coloniality and race in Bulgaria. The different waves of the Rebirth Campaign, some of which were opposed particularly violently by Pomak communities between the 1960s and the 1970s, had the aim of re-humanising Pomak Muslims, and not dehumanising them. Pomaks themselves were not simply excluded and violently targeted; on the contrary, the act of changing their Muslim and Turkic-sounding names as well as forcing them to renounce their traditional attire, had the goal to elevate them from their status of backwardness and fully uplifted them to the status of Bulgarians. They were supposed, in other words, to return to their Bulgarian ancestry and be liberated from the inhuman condition prescribed by some former rulers. It followed that birth control, prohibition of abortion, selective breeding, and sterilization, were all some of the eugenicists' technologies for racially enhancing the ruling ethnic majority. If compared with Samera Esmeir's understanding of judicial humanity, Communist Bulgaria's purified ideal of humanity was only aimed at safeguarding the central authority of power and the danger of imperilling the sovereignty of the Bulgarian statehood.

All of these cannot gloss over the discourse over domestic colonisation which, since the end of the 19th century, was not only associated not only a biological race thinking, but also embedded in the colonial roots of ethnic nationalism. After the Ottoman Empire, in fact, Bulgarian institutions had to forge a new nation out of the crumbled structures of the old colonial regime and transcend them. The new "foreign nationals" were soon considered the outsiders to the new state; they were not outside the border of the state itself, but rather present and belonging to it.

To conclude, even if the 'word' race was not being used, the idea of race and race thinking was there, deep within the bedrock. Within it, Western Europe's colonialism penetrated Bulgaria as well as the Balkans and Eastern Europe in the same sequential order, informing each other via the boomerang effect of colonial practices.

WHO IS WHO?

TO KNOW MORE

***Michel Foucault* is one of the most celebrated French philosophers and activists who challenged people's assumptions about medicine, prison, psychiatry, government and sexuality. All his writings continue to have a huge influence on politics and its related issues of personal freedom and activism.**

***Franz Fanon* was one of the most outspoken African intellectuals and Marxists. His work has largely influenced the post-colonial studies, where he was also deeply concerned with the psychopathology of colonization and the cultural consequences of decolonization.**

***Germaine Tillion* was a French ethnologist and a member of the French resistance during the Nazi occupation of France. Tillion is still a renowned scholar for her studies in Algeria during the 1950s, especially during the anti-colonial struggle of Algerians. She was among the first to denounce the use of torture by French colonial forces.**

Étienne Balibar **is a French philosopher and the most celebrated student of Louis Althusser. In his career, he has been working on the theoretical nexus of historical materialism and critical theory.**

Dušan Bjelić **is professor and Chair at the University of Southern Maine, US. His areas of interest are ethnomethodology and critical studies of psychoanalysis and psychiatry.**

Elana Resnick **is Assistant Professor at the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Santa Barbara (US). Her research interests cover environmental politics, phenomena of racialization, socialist and postsocialist period in European Union and Bulgaria.**

Angela Saini **is a British journalist, writer and radio presenter. Among her publications, *Superior. The Return of Race Science* (2019), and *Inferior: How Science Got Women Wrong and the New Research that is Rewriting the Story* (2018) have received international recognition and attention from both civil society actors and academia.**

use Wikipedia or other research platforms to look people up: ResearchGate, Academia

QUESTIONS AND FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. Does Foucalt's analysis of racism fail to adequately take into the account the role of European colonialism in the Balkans? After reading the text, **do you think that racism and colonialism are always two faces of the same coin?**

2. Bulgaria has never had a history of colonisation, even though the text above argues that a different form of colonisation shifted gears domestically after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. **What's your take on it?**

3. "In all areas of social life in Bulgaria, ethnic and religious minority groups remain mostly separated and disturbingly unequal to the core society". After reading and reflecting on the text above, **do you agree with this statement, why or why not?**



FUTHER READING

Neuberger, Mary (2004) *The Orient Within: Muslim Minorities and the Negotiation of Nationhood in Bulgaria*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Dušan I. Bjelić (2018) *Toward a Genealogy of the Balkan Discourses on Race, in: "Interventions* International Journal of Postcolonial Studies".

Arneil Barbara (2017) *Domestic Colonies. The Turn Inward Colony*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Angela Saini (2019) *Superior. The Return of Race Science*, Boston: Beacon Press.

Samera Esmeir (2012) *Judicial Humanity. A Colonial History,* Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

LEVEL: BEGINNERS

Discovering Pomak Ontologies and Epistemologies

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

- Pomak identity
- Islamisation and Christianisation
- Surat & Qur'an
- Shalvari

Empathy is an important part of understading cultural differences and diverse ontologies than yours. Keep it in mind.

WHO ARE THE POMAKS?

Pomaks are one of the most minor yet much-debated minority groups in Bulgaria, historically living in the Rhodope mountainous region across Turkey and Greece. Bulgarian historiography has, over the decades, described them as "Bulgarian Mohammedans" or "Bulgarian Muslims" due to their fluency in many Slavic dialects and Bulgarian language proper. The institutionalized viewpoint over the community implied that Pomaks themselves were descendants of Bulgarian ancestors, whom the Ottomans Islamized by force during the Ottoman Empire. Bulgarian authorities have always questioned the **Pomaks' 'identity** pedigree'. Since they have embraced only an idiosyncratic form of Islam, Pomak identity became a subject of discussion during socialism. Within the Party, the danger posed by their cultural affinity with ethnic Turks put Sofia on alert. Communist officials decided to mull over a mass-scale assimilation campaign through name-changings, which was not implemented smoothly at first. Since the 1910s, Pomaks were forcedly **Christianised** to embrace their "native identity" and heal from the previous process of **Islamisation** they themselves had undergone during the Ottoman period. As time has passed by, Pomaks' self-identification continues to appear puzzling and it sparks criticism in today's Bulgaria. According to the 2001 census, between 60.000 and 130.000 citizens declared themselves "Muslim" and "Muslim with Bulgarian identity." Additionally, Pomak communities live in the Western Thrace, in North-easternmost Greece, where Turkish influence is quite strong.

CAN YOU MAP OUT THE GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION OF THE RHODOPE REGION?



LEARN TO UNLEARN

If Pomaks in Western Thrace speak Bulgarian at home, go to Turkish schools and live in a Greek environment, are Pomak children trilingual?

This question was posted in Quora – the popular crowdsourced Q&A platform. Beyond the answers, it should be pointed out that **Pomak identity** is undoubtedly transnational. In Bulgaria, they speak the national language, while in Greece, they might speak Turkish and Greek, too. Many live in Turkey, in and around the city of Bursa. Their religious identity is often associated with Islam, but others may refer to Orthodox Christianity. This heterogeneity had often led to the misleading ascription of Pomaks themselves due to the inconsistent and contradictory yet troubling process of demographic engineering established long before the socialist period in which ethnic and religious (primarily Muslim) minorities were targeted.

2

STIMULUS MATERIAL

Hanging **Shalvari** in the town of Ribnovo, one of the most typical female pair of loose-fitting trousers... **whose attire was forbidden in socialist time, especially after the assimilation campaigns started in the 1910s.**



Shalvari are part of the Ottoman culture. Bright colours and flowered prints are favoured by rural women.

Down on the right, Arabic-written graves placed nearby the local mosque of the Pomak village of Kornitsa, Southwest Bulgaria...



...and we separated them and made from water every living thing? Then will they not believe?

Surat 30, V. 30. This phrase recalls the Surat Al- 'Anbyā' (The Prophets) ...

...during communism, many Arabic-written scripts were chiselled from tombes of Muslims



... Building a fountain is seen as a spiritual act in the Rhodopes. A sip of water can restore memories of joyous events or a family member. Above, on the left, just outside the town of Rudozem, this fountain reminds one of the most specific verses of the Qur'an. It speaks of how Allah made water the cause and origin of life. The Rhodopes are rich in water, a symbol of eternity, energy, togetherness and belonging

3

QUESTIONS, PRACTICES, EXERCISES



This cartoon shows Ludmilla Zhivkova - daughter of the Party boss, Todor Zhivkov - bribing Bulgarian academics and scholars. It alludes to the historical controversy of Bulgarian culture and nationalism, which, especially during socialism, Zhivkova used to boost through unmarxist perspectives and passion for mysticism and folklore.

SET UP A RESEARCH GROUP

Discover more about how Pomaks were described in socialist Bulgaria and the reasons for which their identities disappeared from the circle of academic production.

As Margarita Karahimora argues, the interpretation of the historical legacy of Bulgaria was compromised by the overwhelming idea of patriotism and national pride that misled folklore and religious studies. Minority groups were mentioned almost anywhere, not the cultures of neighboring countries strictly connected with Bulgarian culture. Such a 'scientific truth' penetrated all aspects of everyday life, education included. In this regard, Evelina Kelbecheva points out that only in the last couple of years more detailed sections have been introduced in the history textbooks concerning the mistreatment of ethnic minority groups.

JUST BELOW, CHECK OUT THE READING TIPS

Still too difficult to grasp?

Look at the following activities below for a better understanding

After reading and looking at the **STIMULUS MATERIAL, do you think that traditional attire and local ontologies can mislead the historical image of Pomaks in Bulgaria and beyond even more? If so, how?**



READING TIPS

Teodora DRAGOSTINOVA (2020) *Cold War from the Margins. A Small Socialist State on the Global Cultural Scene*, Cornell University Press. Chapter 5, "Like a Grand World Civilisation," pp. 162-195.

Margarita KARAMIHOVA (2021) "Exploring Memories of Communism in Bulgaria", in H. RIGELS / G. GRANZINETTI / A. KOLA (Eds) *Studying the Memory of Communism. Genealogies, Social Practices and Communication*, Toruń Wydawnicstwo Nauko Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, pp. 257-275.

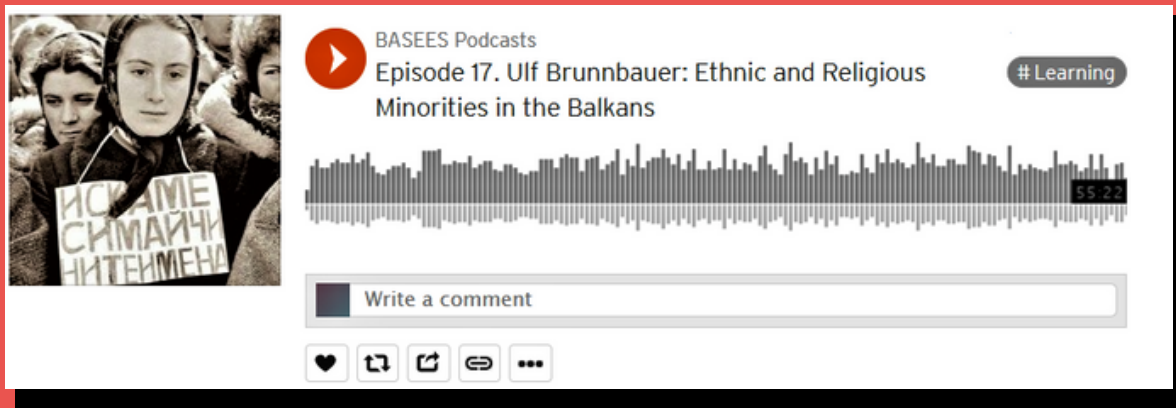
Evelina KELBECHEVA (2020) "A Chronicle of an Anachronism: The Struggle for Adequate Education about the Communist Past", in *Constructions and Instrumentalization of the Past. A Comparative Study on the Memory Management of the Region*, Centre for Baltic and East European Studies.

4

HISTORY LISTENING

Ulf Brunnbauer is Professor of History at the University of Regensburg and director of the Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies. He talks to ***Petru Negură***, Humboldt fellow at the Leibniz Institute, Regensburg, about the categories of perception and strategies for the inclusion and exclusion of interwar Bulgaria, Greece, and Yugoslavia's Muslim minorities. The Bulgarian-speaking Pomaks is especially revealing, with both Bulgarian and Greek nationalists and state agencies claiming they were "alienated" from their true identity (Bulgarian or Greek), having been forced to embrace Islam in the past.

https://soundcloud.com/user-267970745/episode-17-ulf-brunnbauer-ethnic-and-religious-diversity-in-the-balkans



LEVEL: MEDIUM

DECOLONIAL ENCOUNTERS IN BULGARIA: THE POMAK REBELS

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

- Pomak identity
- "Rebirth Process"
- Turkophiles
- Name-Changing Procedure

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 OPPOSING COMMUNIST COLONISATION

During Communism, the **Pomak identity** became a subject of discussion inside the Party due to the danger that their cultural affinity with ethnic Turks could have represented for Communist Bulgaria. In 1964, Communist officials decided to initiate a mass-scale assimilation campaign through a **name-changing procedure**, which was not implemented smoothly.

LEARN TO UNLEARN

Pomaks are not ethnically Turkish, nor do they speak a Turkic language. They are a Slavic-speaking community that embraced Islam as a religious knowledge system. For this reason, Communist authorities depicted them as "**Turchophiles**." Yet the latter ascription reflected a negative attitude of Bulgarian authorities against Islam, which was associated with ethnic Turks and the former Ottoman Empire in the country.

NEXT PAGE



In 1964, the Bulgarian Academy of Science distributed to local teachers and other influential figures a list of 'acceptable Bulgarian names' to convince Pomaks to embrace their Bulgarian-ness again. When the '**Rebirth Process**' was launched on the ground, ethnic Pomaks resisted it.

Although almost all Pomaks had their original Arabic-Turkish names changed into new Bulgarian ones by 1980, outbursts and uprisings unfolded between the 1960s and the 1970s. Many Pomaks made their voices heard and stood up against Communist policies, paying a high price for their resistance. As Mary Neuburger recollected in her work, many were either interned or brutally killed, and their bodies were thrown into local rivers or mine shafts. When the Blagoevgrad Prefecture began to visit villages in South-westernmost Bulgaria to promote the name-changing campaign among locals, dissidence was already on the rise. While in the town of Brashten, many elderly Pomaks were found only disturbed by the name-changing, rumors of revolt coming from the village of Ribnovo were soon proven true. A large-scale violent protest took place. Many Pomaks took to the hills, but others patrolled the town's school and its main entrances all day long, keeping teachers under house arrest at the same time. Petar Diulgerov, the Blagoevgrad Regional Secretary of the Communist Party, described the gravity of the resistance in the mountainous region. The rebels – that was the way Pomak resistors were described – did not only take control of the local government but also fought violently with a government commission and military detachment that were sent from the town of Gotse Delchev to quell the revolt. Despite this, Pomaks were able to heavily injure police officers and disarm them, putting fezzes and turbans on their heads as a sign of disagreement with the 'Rebirth Process.' A few kilometers away, precisely in the village of Vukovar, which was back then considered one of the most Turcophile villages in the region, a similar tactic was organised to confront Communist officers. Local Pomaks resisted Diulgerov and his comrades, building a human yet impenetrable wall composed of most villagers surrounding the mayor's office, where Diulgerov and the others could not have escaped. From midnight until sunrise, many Pomaks armed themselves with hunting rifles, axes, and sticks, letting Diulgerov and other officials out of the village, yet without changing the local population's names. In March 1973, a few Pomaks were murdered in the town of Kornitsa for opposing the name-changing campaign. A commemorative monument is today placed downtown, remembering the names of those who opposed the so-called vŭzhroditelen protses.



Access to the town of Ribnovo, where Pomaks resisted the assimilation campaign

STIMULUS MATERIAL

On the right, a relatively small monument of memory erected alongside the central square of Kornitsa, a village nearby Gotse Delchev in Southwest Bulgaria. It is one of the few places of memory that recall one of the most brutal waves of the assimilation campaign against Pomaks. About 2000 horse police were thrown against the Pomak resistors rioting the central square of Kornitsa. Youssein, Moharem, Salih, and Tefik died due to the violent assault, as confirmed by the then-mayor of the village, Bayram Zul. Ismail was killed a few days later after refusing to sign a declaration to change his original name.



"Forever living in our hearts"
In Memory of Those Killed in a Time of the Assimilation Policy of the Communist regime – March 1973



.... Tomasz Kamussela, a historian of modern central and eastern Europe, argues that the Monument of the Victims of Communism in Sofia contributes to forgetting rather than remembering the political killings conducted by the Communist Party. By simply glancing at the wall, the memory of minority groups – such as Pomaks and Turks, Roma and Muslims in general - are largely underrepresented despite approximately being a third of the whole number of victims across Bulgaria. The presence of a small chapel named "Temple of All Bulgarian Martyrs" and a stone-made Christian cross posited next to the wall contribute to assimilating the memory of Muslims into an image of the mono-ethnic homogenously religious identity of the victims of Communism in Bulgaria between 1944 and 1989.

Tomasz Kamusella (2019) *Ethnic cleansing during the Cold War. The forgotten 1989 expulsion of Turks from Communist Bulgaria,* Routledge, pp. 274

READING TIPS



Monument of the Victims of the Bulgarian Communist Regime, which displays the names of about 9.000 victims

ACTIONS, EXERCISES, PRACTICES

Local Pomaks resisted Diulgerov and his comrades, building a human yet impenetrable wall composed of the great majority of villagers ...

Pomak uprisings remind us of the currently organized actions of civil disobedience, which take place through blocking roads, occupying vital public spaces, resisting a wealth of injustices, human rights violations, and police violence.

Tiana Jacout, Robin Boardman, and Liam Geary Baulch - all activists of Extinction Rebellion - speak of

SHUTTING DOWN ONE AREA IS FINE, BUT TARGETTING SEVERAL WILL CAUSE THE MOST DISRUPTION – THEREFORE, YOU HAVE TO CHOOSE YOUR AREAS FOR MAXIMUM IMPACT.

THINKING ABOUT DIFFERENT LEVELS OF **CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE** AND TRYING TO **DESIGN ACTIONS** SO THAT, WHOEVER TURNS UP, THERE ARE WAYS TO BE INCLUDED AND INVOLVED.

RECOGNISING IMPORTANT AREAS WHERE ACCESS NEEDS TO BE CLEAR AND PLAN ACCORDINGLY. **WE ARE HERE TO DISRUPT, NOT TO CAUSE HARM**

READING TIP

This is not a Drill. An Extiction Rebellion Handbook, 2019, Penguin Random House, UK.



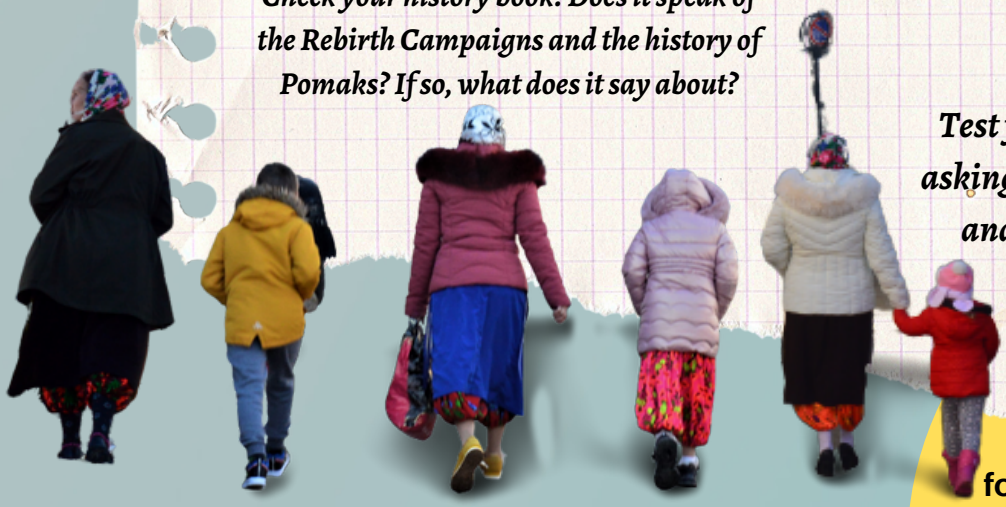
Yordan Yovkov School in Ribnovo, where clashes between Pomaks and Party officials took place

AFTER LOOKING AT THE STIMULS MATERIAL AND READING THE TEXT

Check your history book. Does it speak of the Rebirth Campaigns and the history of Pomaks? If so, what does it say about?

Set up a discussion group to evaluate and think of the safeguard of Pomak histories, epistemologies, as well as the denial of their minority rights during Communism and in today's Bulgaria.

Test your history teacher at school, asking about the Rebirth Campaigns and the history of Pomak rebels



Referring to the history text above, focus on the issue of violence. If a broader concept of peace means a lack of violence and the presence of justice and equity and a report for human rights and the Earth, could Pomak violence be justified? If so, how?

4 FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The notion of epistemic violence could be used to describe the case of Pomak rebels. In a few words, epistemic violence is the necessary action of extricating oneself from the linkage between modernity and coloniality, and then definitely from all power that is not constituted by a free decision made by free decision. Since the Rebirth Process had nothing to share with the freedom and rights of Pomaks, whose revolts embraced a form of protection of the community's heritage on a collective and personal level, **can you draw a comparison between epistemic violence and self-defense? Can a violent action of self-evidence be justified, at an individual and collective level, as a means of protecting human rights? Do you know other forms of resistance? If so, which ones you can mention?**

During Communism, bureaucratization and centralization came to control literary and cultural life strictly. Schools, universities, unions of writers and journalists, and their public houses and reading publics were systematically silenced. Todor Zhivkov, leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party, had even stated that the backbone of Bulgarian literature is a political one. Likewise, Petko Slaveikov said that knowledge in Bulgaria was a resource of power with a view to the interests.

"Българин да се наричам,
Първа радост е за мене ..."

"To be called Bulgarian
Is a great joy for me ..."



TO KNOW MORE

These lines are taken from "Az Sum Bulgarche" (Аз съм българче) – namely, a significant poet written by Ivan Vazov. He was a Bulgarian poet, novelist, and playwright who is today still recognised as the Patriarch of Bulgarian literature. All students in Bulgaria know by hearing this poet. 1. **Does Ivan Vazov's poet highlight some education problems regarding the recognition of different identities of young students?** 2. **Should education be free from national references, significantly when potentially raising controversies over history and respect for diversity? If so, what steps can be taken to achieve this?**

Type up* Ivan Vazov *on your search engine. Start with his wikipedia page: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivan_Vazov
... or alternatively: https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/decolonising-curriculum-how-do-i-get-started

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.

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

Conduct a research about the role of women during Communist Bulgaria. 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: BEGINNERS

Discovering Pomak Ontologies and Epistemologies

COMPLEXITY

This section is meant to engage a group of beginners with little knowledge about Pomak communities, identities, and histories.

GROUP SIZE & TYPE

8-15 participants, ideally foreigners who have very little knowledge of Bulgaria and its diversity, as well as Bulgarian students living in the capital Sofia or outside the Rhodope region.

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 history and identities of Pomak communities;
- Reflect critically on knowledge of Pomaks and other minority groups during socialism in Bulgaria;
- Understand and come to know the high level of diversity of Bulgaria along with a series of different ontologies and cosmologies in the Rhodope region
- Stimulate critical thinking and develop research skills through easy-to-handle pieces of minority history

MATERIAL

Internet connection, laptop, projector, flipchart posters, handouts, (online) dictionary

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.
- Prepare links for the "History Listening" and YouTube video for a group activity. For listening to the podcast, invite your group to listen to it before/after if you have less time available for the other activities.
- Be prepared to open up the discussion among the participants about the cartoon and related sensitive topics, such as nationalism, ethnicity, and religion. Throughout, make sure that none in the group will feel marginalized or discriminated against.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

If possible, organize a one-day trip to one of the different Pomak villages mentioned in this section. Ribnovo may be the best place to go during the first part of January in order to acquire a full-fledged understanding of Pomak history, traditions, and everyday customs.

SUGGESTIONS FOR TRAINERS AND EDUCATORS

LEVEL: MEDIUM

DECOLONIAL ENCOUNTERS IN BULGARIA: THE POMAK REBELS

COMPLEXITY

This section is meant to engage a group of university students with some knowledge of minority groups, ideally of Pomak communities, identities, and histories.

GROUP SIZE & TYPE

8-15 participants, ideally foreigners who have very little knowledge of Bulgaria and its diversity, as well as Bulgarian students living in the capital Sofia or outside the Rhodope region.

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 history and identities of Pomak communities;
- Reflect critically on knowledge of Pomaks and other minority groups during socialism in Bulgaria;
- Understand and come to know the high level of diversity of Bulgaria along with a series of different ontologies and cosmologies in the Rhodope region
- Stimulate critical thinking and develop research skills through easy-to-handle pieces of minority history

MATERIAL

Internet connection, laptop, projector, flipchart posters, handouts, (online) dictionary

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.
- Prepare links for the "History Listening" and YouTube video for a group activity. For listening to the podcast, invite your group to listen to it before/after if you have less time available for the other activities.
- Be prepared to open up the discussion among the participants about the cartoon and related sensitive topics, such as nationalism, ethnicity, and religion. Throughout, make sure that none in the group will feel marginalized or discriminated against.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

If possible, organize a one-day trip to one of the different Pomak villages mentioned in this section. Ribnovo may be the best place to go during the first part of January in order to acquire a full-fledged understanding of Pomak history, traditions, and everyday customs.

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.