

## Debate

# An Introduction to the Pomak Issue in Bulgaria<sup>1</sup>

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Nezife (70): Are you Bulgarian?

E.K.: I come from Greece.

Nezife: Yes. But are you Bulgarian?

E.K.: I am Greek.

Nezife: You are Greek. But are you Bulgarian?

E.K.: I am Greek-Orthodox.

Nezife: Ah! Greek Bulgarian, a real Bulgarian

## Religion and nationality in Bulgaria

The Christian-Orthodox faith, or rather, the affiliation to the culture group of Orthodox Christianity constitutes one of the cornerstones of Bulgarian nationality. This deep connection of religion or denomination with nationality, typical of most Balkan nations, stems, historically, from the administrative system of the Ottoman Empire (millet system), which provided for separate administrations of the religious groups living in its territory (see Castellan 1992:118-21; Hösch 1988:97-8; Sugar 1977:273-9). The religious institutions that took over the leadership of an administrative unit acquired considerably more power than they had originally possessed. The autonomy of the respective religious community, foreseen by the millet system, and the expansion of the religious institutions' jurisdiction provided, on the one hand, the native population with the possibility to preserve their faith and the interrelated life-styles, traditions and memories (not least those of the illustrious medieval empires<sup>2</sup>); on the other hand, they consolidated the distance between the various religious communities so strongly, that the difference in religion became the decisive characteristic of foreignness in the Balkans (cf. Daneva 1994:70).

The foreignness between the subjects of different faiths caused by the Ottoman system of administration was not the only one in the Empire. This was also heavily influenced in all the regions of the Balkan Peninsula through the occupation of different economic niches. As the case with religion, the foreignness based on socio-occupational difference gained explosive political impetus in the 19th century, as far as it corresponded with grave social inequality and economic exploitation. I refer here to the contrast between Bulgarians and Greeks, which historically originated in the centralized organization of the millet,<sup>3</sup> and acquired eminent importance in the Bulgarian nation-building process. By Bulgarians, we understand the Christian peasant population established in the central and eastern Balkans, and the Greeks are referred to as the administrative and trading ethnic group of the Phanariots, who monopolized all positions of the Christian Orthodox millet and used those as moneymaking sources.<sup>4</sup>

In this context, the mother tongue appears to be completely irrelevant as a criterion of ethnicity because, apart from everyday communication, it didn't enable one in any other way. Even Greek native speakers did not *a priori* belong to the Phanariots. Only mastering the Greek written language (the language of the New Testament and the Greek-Orthodox Church) – and,

occasionally, assisted by capital required to buy into an office – entry into the Phanariotic ethnic group became possible. Irrespective of the various degrees of difficulty for the different Christian sections of the population to acquire the Phanariotic symbolism –for an overwhelming majority of the population it was unachievable –, the prospect did, in principle, remain open to all Orthodox Christians, and for centuries represented the only chance for upward social mobility in the Empire<sup>5</sup>. It wasn't until the Bulgarian nationalism, with its demand for emancipation from the Phanariots, provided a further possibility and tried to achieve the same. It is no wonder then, that strong aversion toward and resentment of the Greeks (i.e. Phanariots) characterize the earliest writings of Bulgarian national ideology<sup>6</sup>. The language criterion became increasingly relevant within the framework of this conflict, however only within this particular framework.

It has to be strongly emphasized that the Greek-Bulgarian conflict took place exclusively in the Greek-Orthodox millet. Bulgarian-speaking Muslims were not considered as potential members of the Bulgarian nation. This historically stipulated subordination of the language criterion to that of the religion in the history of Bulgarian nationalism is plausibly confirmed by the fact that the establishment of an independent Bulgarian Church (and a corresponding administration) provided the first framework determining the borders of the Bulgarian nation, institutionally, and making possible the identification of the Bulgarians in the first place<sup>7</sup>. If the conflict had not taken place in the Ottoman Empire but in a secular Greek state, it is hardly conceivable that belonging to a religious community would be relevant to Bulgarian nationalism.

### **The Problem**

The outstanding significance of Christian-Orthodox faith for Bulgarian nationality, and its incompatibility with Islam led to a problem some years after the establishment of the Bulgarian state, and within the framework of the nation building process. This became increasingly acute, the more the Bulgarian state expanded its borders and thus took in Muslim sections of the population. The Bulgarian state as well as the Muslims living within its territory had now to face this contradictory situation. The Bulgarian state, when confronted with this contradiction, was totally unprepared ideologically. It lacked an intellectual concept, which could explain and justify the incorporation of areas inhabited primarily by Muslims into a predominantly Christian state. Even if the 'liberation' of the small number of Christian Bulgarians in these regions from the Ottoman yoke, and their unification with the fatherland, provided an argument of some weight, the position of the Muslims in the new state and their relation to the Bulgarian nation stayed unresolved. For that reason, the Bulgarian state authorities grasped at the only available and really primitive solution of Christianization of Muslims *en masse*, which, however, failed miserably.<sup>8</sup>

The conversion campaign of 1912-13 provide, on the one hand, empirical verification of a thesis offered here, about the close relation between religion and nationality/ethnicity in Bulgaria. The fact that the campaigns were exclusively limited to the Bulgarian speaking Pomaks clarify, on the other hand, for the first time a distinction of the Muslims made by the Bulgarian state. Here lie the seeds of the idea which situates the Muslims of Bulgaria as more or less foreign; an idea corresponding to the view that some would be easier to win over for the Bulgarian state than others.

### **National switching**

After the unsuccessful religious conversion of 1912-13, a modification of the official national ideology (national switching) appeared to be the only appropriate method to resolve the Pomak problem. At that time, the first attempt was made to establish language as the most relevant criterion for the Bulgarian nationality. While it had once served to establish boundaries between Bulgarians and Greeks, it now had to effect an expansion of the Bulgarian nation's borders.

Elwert (1995:108) states that the inclusion of strategically important minorities in a nation often makes up the impetus of national switching, referring to alternations between reference frames of a nation, and, secondly, to moves between different conceptions of the nation's boundary. He mentions for example the adoption of the concept of "*Volksdeutsche*" (ethnic Germans) by Nazi Germany, which, on the one hand, made possible the inclusion of the "Sudeten-Deutsche" of Czecho-Slovakia, as well as the Mennonites of the Ukraine in the German nation, and, on the other hand, excluded the Ashkenazim Jews, whose German ethnicity had been instrumentalized in the past. The Bulgarian case has a parallel in the western part of the Balkans. There, Serbs (and Croats), in the early years of their nation-building process, regarded Bosnia's Muslims, and Muslims in general, as 'Turks'. After World War I, however, since Bosnia became territory of the 'Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes', they had been declared Serbs of Muslim faith. The new formula was: *Brat je mio, koje vere bio* ('we are all brothers, no matter what our faith'). Cf. Popovic 1986:310-4); Sugar 1969:52). The transition to Yugoslavism and the re-adoption of national ideology concepts, recently, can also be described as a politically motivated national switching. In contrast, Greece represents a very interesting case, where the same imperatives required the avoidance of switching. The language criterion was a very bad card for Greek nationalism. Only adherence to the criterion of Greek-Orthodox faith could warrant the Greek irredentism ('Megali Idea') and the claim of the state on territories with Slavic- Albanian- and Turkish-speaking population. As a result, the Muslims of the country have been systematically ignored. Since the formation of the Greek state, Muslims have always had to migrate to the territories of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey. The Greek-Turkish war of 1920-3 was followed by a population exchange, where the Christian and Muslim faith was laid down as the sole criterion for the affiliation to the Greek and Turkish nation respectively. In this way, Christians of Asia Minor, who did not speak Greek, migrated to Greece as 'Greeks', whereas Greek-speaking Muslims were declared 'Turks' and consequently had to leave the country (On the fate of the Muslims of Greece see Popovic 1986:107-83). Particularly tragic was the case of the Circassians, who had joined Greek troops and fought against Kemal. Later, as Turkey, understandably, did not want to take them, they stayed in Greece, where they lived under miserable conditions (Tchemalovitch 1934:206, quoted by Popovic 1986:155). The population exchange eliminated any possibility for national switching in Greece. The Greek Church, together with the 'Northern Epirus professionals' of the country, is still speaking, about 400.000 'Greeks' living in southern Albania, although only a very small part of this Christian-Orthodox population speaks Greek. This ideological consistency of Greece is seen by Bulgarian nationalists of the Rhodope as enviable, and is suggested as a model for consistent Bulgarian national politics.

### **The failure of linguistic national ideology**

The attempts to establish language as the most relevant criterion for the Bulgarian nationality, which became systematic only after the Second World War, were, and still are, highly unsuccessful. In the following paragraphs I shall address the reasons for this failure.

**Limited plausibility** First of all, the following fundamental problem has to be emphasized: a unilateral shift of the ideological structure of a nation, or the ideological contents of a nationality, does not automatically bring with it the desired shift of its old borders. That requires also the

consent of those affected on the other side of the old borders as well. If consent is not obtained, then the questionable shift is equivalent to an appropriation and provokes mistrust, which does not promote the resolution of problems.

The difference in faith did not only determine the perception of foreignness of the Balkan Christians, but also that of the Muslims. And if the Bulgarian state, motivated by genuine interests, thought a correction of the official state ideology necessary, this was by far no reason to induce the Pomaks to alter their perception of foreignness. In order to have a chance to be accepted, an ideological offer, such as this of the Bulgarian state to the Pomaks ('we are all brothers, because we all speak the same language'), has to be, if not profitable, at least plausible for the latter. And for evident reasons, this was not the case. It was now essential to convince the Pomaks, with historical arguments, that they had always been Bulgarians. The common language should be proof of the fact that Pomaks and Bulgarians constituted one people that, only later, was arbitrarily split into two parts through forced Islamization by the Turks (not the Ottomans).<sup>9</sup>

Irrespective of how correct this argumentation may be in its detail, it never succeeded in winning Pomak support for the Bulgarian cause. No religious Pomak, who is fully convinced of the moral superiority of his faith, would ever be able to accept as true the theory that his forefathers were forced to relinquish their faith. Furthermore, it is not evident why the Pomaks should prefer the position as incomplete, or rather 'crippled', members of the Bulgarian nation to that of a foreigner's status within the nation. Finally, the fact that the propaganda of linguistic nationalism was accompanied by systematic attempts to diminish the opportunities of the Pomaks to learn the Turkish language makes it clear that the objective of this ideology was to separate the Pomaks from the Turks. It is, therefore, only understandable that it caused a sense of 'imprisonment' in the Pomak population.

It should be noted, that hindering the Pomaks to learn Turkish is also in obvious logical contradiction to the language ideology. Because of the underlying Bulgarian fear that the Pomaks could be turned into Turks, if they learned Turkish, the following idea is confirmed shared even by the Bulgarian state itself: native languages can be relinquished and therefore say nothing about an individual's affiliation to a community understood, in this case, as a group of common biological descent.

The relevance of the native language criterion, today, is rejected by the overwhelming majority of Pomaks. This also applies to certain theories of the official Bulgarian historiography which they find appropriating, and counter with self-developed theories. (on the Pomak vernacular academy see Konstantinov 1997:36-8)

**Political and ideological inconsistency** Apart from the limited plausibility that the linguistic national ideology always enjoyed popularity among the Pomaks, the inconsistency of its representation, and the contradictory policy which accompanied it, has also decisively contributed to its failure. As one may deduce from the emphasis placed by Bulgarian historiography on the forced character of the Islamization processes, the importance of faith was never dismissed for Bulgarian nationality; it was only subordinated to the language criterion. Therefore, it is not surprising that the people who referred to the Bulgarian language of the Pomaks in order to substantiate their affiliation to the Bulgarian nation, were the same ones who, some years later, forced them to abandon their Muslim symbolism. I refer here to the work of the Rodina activists, a work that exhibits traits covering the whole range from bourgeois tolerance to forcible outvoting.

Occasionally, that inconsistency of political action has been attributed to the impatience of certain activists and/or the domination of the movement by conservative-reactionary circles, and, thus, its contingent characteristics were being emphasized (cf. Karamandzhukov 1976:138, Introduction; Vranchev 1948:54).

To put it another way: such explanations stress the point that everything could have also been otherwise. If I take a critical stance regarding these explanation patterns, it is not because we attach no importance to chance in historical phenomena. Here, my purpose is rather to point out those factors that reduce the probability of its occurrence. Taking into account the fact that even the communist regime, which considerably minimized the relevance of religious faith and experience in Bulgarian society, fell back upon practices similar to those of the Rodina activists – even though in its initial years it had, indeed, condemned their activity as fascist –, it becomes obvious that ideological and political inconsistency in the treatment of the Pomak issue constitute the norm, and can therefore only be explained systemically.

It seems that fundamental alterations in the contents of a national ideology are possible but not always easy to implement. That applies especially in those cases, where a national ideology provides the only legitimation for a state. This is a very dangerous matter and cannot be dealt with frivolously. To use an illustrative metaphor, that situation could be compared to a man standing on an unstable branch. His only chance to find a more stable perch is to jump to a stronger branch, knowing, at the same time, that he may lose his equilibrium and fall. If the Bulgarian communists failed to treat religion as consistently as the regime of Enver Hodxa, it was only because they never had the necessary scope of action of the latter. Last but not least, that stems from the historical circumstance that the Albanian nation, as opposed to other nations of the Balkan Peninsula, was not able to originate until the religious differences had been ignored (cf. Schafberg 1983:51-6; Faensen 1980). In our case, if we ask about the profit that justifies risk taking, then it would be clear that the Bulgarian state could hardly derive any great benefit from it. Even if it ever succeeded in completing the elimination of religion in that country, just as in Albania, and in successfully establishing language as the sole criterion of nationality, it would only win over the Pomaks. The far more acute problem of the Turkish minority would still remain unresolved. For its resolution, a new ideology, a new historiography, a new invention of tradition would be needed<sup>10</sup>. On the one hand, a pure linguistic national ideology was especially important in order to guarantee the willingness for solidarity among more citizens than before; on the other hand, drawing extreme consequences from this ideology formed an especially dangerous undertaking, which should be avoided, last but not least due to its low yield. In the remaining middle course of action which found expression not in fundamental alteration but through a redefinition of the hierarchy among the tenets of national ideology, I perceive one of those systemic reasons, which caused the inconsistency of the Bulgarian nationalists in the Pomak issue<sup>11</sup>.

Such argumentation assumes that the communist elites of Bulgaria also failed to convince the population of the new social legitimation of their state. That failure can certainly be substantiated by the obvious fact that the aforesaid elites never dared to question the national foundations of the Bulgarian state. Quite the contrary: After the first euphoric postwar years, and in view of the ever-deepening economic crisis, there was more and more reference to nationalistic ideas<sup>12</sup>.

At the same time one should not disregard the fact that Bulgarian nationalists were induced to political inconsistency as a result of the propaganda of the neighbouring Turkish state as well. No less domineering than the Bulgarian state, the Turkish state has always advocated the view that all Muslims of the Balkans are Turks, and, thereby, sabotaged the success of the Bulgarian linguistic national ideology. Since the beginning of the Pomak issue, the Muslim clergy of the Rhodope Mountains have engaged in propaganda which pictured Turkey as the Holy Land<sup>13</sup>. It is, thus,

clear that in the Bulgarian-Turkish dispute over the Pomaks, Turkey had held the winning hand for a long time, and still holds a good hand. For, where the educational level of a population is low, religious leaders are far more influential than teachers. Therefore, Turkish propaganda could be stopped, in the short term, solely through an attack against the religious institutions, and such measures were in fact taken by the activists of Rodina and, later, by the communist state. On the other hand, however, such attacks just verified the Pomaks' idea that they were living in the wrong country.

It thus came to pass that the upholders of linguistic nationalism produced the opposite effect to the one they wanted. The Turkish influence on the Muslim minority is to this day the non-plus-ultra concern of the Bulgarian nationalists. As in Greece, they complain about the interference of Turkey in the internal affairs of the Bulgarian state (cf. Asenov 1994; Georgiou 1994; Krusteva/Asenov 1993, etc.). Irrespective of the truthfulness of such accusations, in focussing the problems on Turkish policy, the systemic correlation is ignored that Turkey is only able to interfere because the Bulgarian state has failed on its part to satisfy the minorities living in its territory. One cannot grasp why the Turkish presence is not a home-made problem.

**Stigmatization** The most important reason for the failure of the linguistic national ideology lies, however, in the fact that it was never supported by the bulk of the Bulgarian population<sup>14</sup>. This is just understandable, when one considers that representations of the foreigner, which for a long time coincided with concepts of the enemy and images of hate, are very hard to abandon. The opposition to the world of Islam is so deeply embedded in the consciousness of the Bulgarians, and so laden with emotions, that it is unlikely to lose its significance, and be thrown overboard along with the interrelated prejudices, in view of the common language criterion. The opposite holds true: The long-term discrediting of Islam and its equation with backwardness by the Bulgarian state, have strongly reinforced previously extant prejudices against Muslims.

Furthermore, taking into consideration the historic contribution of the Pomaks in crushing the April rebellion, we can comprehend why 'Pomak' became a social stigma in Bulgaria. The Rodina activists complained early about the stigmatization of the Pomaks as non-Bulgarians or even Turks, since they perceived therein a fact thwarting their own efforts (cf. Karamandzhukov 1983: document 5; 1987: documents 32,34,48). However, they were unable to undertake anything against that. Stigmatization remains a real problem up to the present day.

Pomaks who spend some time in other regions of the country, outside the Rhodopes, are the ones who are mainly confronted with this problem. Coarse jokes about the Pomaks and prejudices against them seem to be so common among Bulgarians, that many Pomaks feel forced to hide their origin. Others, who do not want to do without the symbols of their faith, report the strong reservation or even alienation shown by Bulgarians in getting in contact with them. Occasionally, the Pomaks' affiliation to the Bulgarian nation is advocated by Bulgarians, but only in the context of discussions having directly or indirectly to do with the political dispute between Bulgaria and Turkey. Otherwise, never. For that reason, it is not surprising that the Bulgarian population has never perceived the Pomaks of Greece as a part of the Bulgarian nation living outside the 'fatherland'.

### **The Pomak marginality**

In light of these considerations, a reference to the outstanding principle for ethnically defined nations (imagined biological descent groups), according to which neither foreigners are allowed to

enter nor their own people (i.e. the members of the nation) to leave (Sundhaussen 1994:406), is especially relevant for the understanding of the Pomak issue. In the case of the Pomaks, both parts of this principle apply. On the one hand, people refer to the Bulgarian language of the Pomaks, and propagate their Bulgarian nationality, a fact that, last but not least, is combined with certain obligations of loyalty (they cannot leave); on the other hand, their symbolic deficits are sufficient to place them outside the bounds of the Bulgarian nation (they cannot enter). Therein one can discern the ethnic marginality of the Pomaks.

Under ethnic marginality I understand **a lack of clarity of ethnic affiliation, i.e. an uncertainty and indistinctness of assignment between the familiar and ethnically foreign**<sup>15</sup>. That marginal state of affairs applies also to the relation of Pomaks to the Turks. The Turkish leadership and social sciences have, as already mentioned, regarded the Pomaks always and consistently as Turks, and tried to convince them of that with corresponding propaganda. However, the Turkish neighbours of the Pomaks not only do not perceive the latter as Turks, but, as informants have verified, not even as serious Muslims, precisely because they do not speak Turkish. So, even in this delimitation, religious references are not excluded.

The declared difference here is not one between true and false faith, but between more and less true. In concrete terms, the chances to acquire the true faith, which are regarded as unequally distributed, are blown here out of proportion. The fact that the Turks held the leadership of the Islamic world for centuries, and produced a theological literature of enormous scope, bestowed upon the Turkish language in the Balkans an almost equal stature to Arabic. The Turkish Muslims of Bulgaria do not speak Arabic, but they can somehow compensate this deficiency with their mother tongue. In comparison, Pomaks do not speak either of the languages. Considering that the search for the true faith is especially pronounced in the Islamic world, it becomes clear why the lack of the knowledge of Turkish is perceived as a deficiency even by religious Pomaks themselves. After all, very few of them have ever read a book related in any way to their faith, since the Bulgarian state did not promote Islamic publications in Bulgarian language, or the teaching of Turkish among the Pomaks. However, irrespective of the importance of the knowledge of Turkish for gaining access to the true faith, such knowledge does not automatically place one within Islam. Faith is also necessary. And the Pomaks, for their part, accuse their Turkish neighbours of unfaithfulness, pointing out that neither are they regular Mosque-goers nor do they practice the other required Islamic edicts<sup>16</sup>. The peculiarity of this state of marginality, therefore, lies in the fact that the Pomaks are invited to two celebrations and, at the same time, are thrown out of both. Thereby, the difference to the Jewish case, which has preoccupied theorists most of all, becomes clear. Jewish marginality represents the experience of those Jews, who, after leaving their ghetto, on the one hand, increasingly dissociated themselves from the culture of their origin through their acceptance of the symbols of the world which they confronted, while, on the other, were kept away from this world due to their origin – a situation that ultimately emphasized the lack of clarity of their ethnic affiliation. The Pomaks, by comparison, have been always and by definition marginal. Unlike Jewish marginality, which concerns only a chapter of Jewish history, Pomak marginality coincides with the emergence of the group. Before the rise of the Bulgarian nationalism the Pomaks did not exist as a particular group. Their native world was never characterized by a monopoly on symbols, as in the Jewish case, which could have erected borders to the outside world. They simply constituted a part in the continuum of the Islamic world. Their formation as a separate group corresponds to the acute incompatibility of their faith with Bulgarian nationality, and of their language with Turkish nationality. Therefore, marginality in our case is experienced not only after turning away from the familiar world, but already rooted in this familiar and native world.

Ethnic marginality is thus the essence of Pomak ethnicity.<sup>17</sup> Understanding that situation keeps us from evaluating too highly the ever-increasing significance of the Pomak dilemma<sup>18</sup> – to become Bulgarians or Turks. Regardless of how important the appropriating role of the Bulgarian and the Turkish side may be, it alone will not be able to determine the future of Pomak ethnicity.

The aspect of rejection also makes a decisive contribution. That a Pomak without any knowledge of Turkish can never be accepted by the Turks as an equal member of their national community, even if that be his dearest wish, is highly probable. Even more blatant is the case with the Bulgarians. Even if a Pomak person gives up his or her faith, and adopts the entire symbolism of the Bulgarian nation, this still does not make such a person a Bulgarian. Such symbolic manifestations are regarded as evidence of satisfying the loyalty requirements to the Bulgarian state rather than as criterion for entrance into the Bulgarian national community. As we shall see, the assignment to the Pomak group very often takes place on the basis of being born into a Pomak family. Apparently, not even through the conversion to the Christian Orthodox faith may someone escape that assignment. For a complete incorporation into the Bulgarian national community it is required to detach oneself from the Pomak micro-society totally. Besides openly professing one's belief in the Bulgarian ideals, and religious conversion, one has to forsake one's home town, keep it secret, and, if at all possible, break off relations to relatives and friends living there. How many individuals would ever be willing to make such sacrifices and – even more important – what for? Even if the stigmatization constitutes a real problem for the Pomaks, which occasionally, as in the case of the Bulgarian army, corresponds to extremely unfair and discriminatory treatment, the consequences of stigmatization are for the most part not so unbearable, that they could move someone to take the aforementioned steps. The economic situation of the Pomaks has for decades been just as good or bad as that of the rest of the population of the country. For a long time, their region was indeed a paradise for people from all over the country, who were looking for work. Furthermore, manifestations of absolute loyalty and patriotism by individuals are in a state – and not only in a state like Bulgaria – not enough to guarantee an individual's upward mobility in the social hierarchy. For that, there are always too many candidates and too few positions. Required are further qualities too. If one does not have these, any further sacrifices would not make any sense. Conversion and abandonment of the hometown make good business sense only in desperate situations.

### **Polytaxis and marginality**

The basic error in overestimating the Bulgarian and Turkish tendencies towards appropriation in the case of the Pomaks lies in the inevitable conclusion of the approach that the 'dilemma options' imposed from above are the only options of ethnic self-perception available to the Pomaks. That is, however, empirically untenable. Especially noticeable in the Rhodope Mountains today is the highly flexible handling of national (Bulgarian and Turkish) and religious (Christian and Muslim) symbols by the Pomaks. Depending on objective or individually estimated requirements of a situation, and the objectives, which are sought in the long or short term, the Pomaks utilize various repertoires of symbols. The ideologically shaped, but also interrelated with certain objectives, self-limitation of choices to a single symbolic system may admittedly be found, but the number of individuals who do this is very low. That situational switching, a constant changeover of symbolic links, an attempt by individuals to reconcile the supposedly irreconcilable, may strike nationalists as despicable, and irritate essentialists of nationalism research (primordialists), but such difficulties are related to these specific viewpoints, not to the Pomaks. It is the nationalistic-singularistic idea of the irreplaceability of national symbolism and the related, axiomatically assumed, essentialism and primordialism that causes alienation.

These two suppositions have shaped lay perception in such a way (or is it the suppositions that have been shaped by layman perception?) that the slogan: ‘everyone needs a firm ethnic identity’ has become the common sense of our era. Meanwhile, exactly the opposite holds true. Not firm adherence to a single order, but **polytaxis**, the capacity to keep, in latency, different orders (Elwert 1995:110) is an anthropological universal. In what measure or in what form this polytactic potential may reveal itself, depends on the situation in which the individuals find themselves. While a nationalistic government tries to reduce it considerably through a rigid uniforming of the citizens, a marginal situation promotes its activation<sup>19</sup>.

The theoretical foundation of *polytaxis* is doubly important to us. First of all, it provides us with a framework of interpretation, with which the present day reality in the Rhodopes may be examined more adequately than with a dilemma supposition. On the other hand, it helps us to escape the not particularly conducive concept of cultural conflict, and shift the emphasis within the marginality theory from the psychology to the flexibility of human nature. Stonequist has pointed out human flexibility, and documented some very convincing cases in this regard<sup>20</sup>. However, because his study is based almost exclusively on the biographies of ‘outcast’ intellectuals, he consistently connected the utilization of this flexibility potential by individuals to psychological problems. In general, it is a strange feature of his theory that the psychological stress of marginals is due to a cultural conflict, while, at the same time, there is a reference to the fact that the most acute form of this stress is characteristic of those marginals who have overcome the cultural barriers (cf. Green 1947:167-8). One really wonders why ‘cultural conflict’ is necessary for understanding their situation. In our opinion, responsible for this misunderstanding, is a concept of culture, which perceives ‘culture’ as an orderly ‘home’ guaranteeing psychological security for the individual. If we assume that the firm commitment to an ethnicity is not essential for individuals, since they have the ability to oscillate between various orders, then it becomes apparent that ethnic marginality does not necessarily imply psychological stress for the individuals concerned

Although it is hardly denied that marginals are possibly under psychological strain, sociologists have often attacked Stonequist’s remarks on the psychology of the marginal man. Antonovsky (1956:62) has empirically proved that the psychological symptoms, ascribed to the marginals by Stonequist, apply only to a small part of them. Also Milton Goldberg (1941; and Gordon 1978), through a distinction between ‘marginal man’ and ‘marginal culture’ pointed out that individuals growing up in marginal cultures don’t show such symptoms (Goldberg’s approach represents, fundamentally, only a somewhat differentiated variant of that of Stonequist, since both share the same understanding of culture). However, we cannot follow Goldberg when he considers the existence of institutions and associations, in the activities of which the members of the marginal ethnic group can participate, to be necessary for the definition of a marginal culture, and, consequently, a guarantee for a ‘normal’ life of the individuals in question. Since the Pomaks have always lacked institutions, they should be classified, according to Goldberg, in the group of the ‘marginal men’, who, finally, are expected to show the symptoms mentioned by Stonequist. But this is untenable empirically<sup>21</sup>. On the criticism of the psychological approach in Stonequist’s theory cf. Golevsky (1952) as well as Green (1947).

Such problems arise only when marginality corresponds to a failure to achieve goals that are individually pursued and coupled with personal interests<sup>22</sup>. To this end, however, we need a psychology of failure rather than a theory of marginality. The state of marginality can also be voluntary, if individuals expect from that more than from the assimilation, which by definition may never be completely achieved by marginals.

That attitude, which is adopted by a large section of the Pomak population in the Rhodopes, is incompatible with psychological stress caused by deficits of identity.

## Ethnicity options

The situational switching of symbols by the Pomaks is so varied and diverse that it appears totally chaotic to an outsider. Preparing a matrix that may reflect all possibilities for switching in handling the various symbols would require the inclusion of so many elements that in the end we would lose track of the situation. Only the statements of the Pomaks regarding their ethnic self-perception help us recognize tendencies in their symbolic behavior. Meanwhile, it becomes obvious that the dilemma options are not inescapable for them, but only provide the framework for the further creation of options.

Six options of ethnic self-perception could be presented, whose borders have to be regarded as fluid due to their corresponding to tendencies of symbolic articulation. The options are: one Christian Bulgarian, one secular Bulgarian, one secular Pomak, one Bulgarian Mohammedan, one Muslim Pomak and one Turkish. The first three can be described as assimilation options, the latter three as dissimilation ones. To these is added the option of the independent political articulation of the minority (political Pomak option). Such a political articulation may not be connected with a specific ethnic self-perception, but, due to its integrating demand as well as its attempt to remove Pomak ethnicity from its position of marginality, and place the Pomak issue on the political agenda, is worthy of separate contemplation.

If options and switching of symbols constitute the subject of this paper, then it is because I consider the alternative to be the central moment of marginality (In this regard, the dilemma supposition is not false, just not differentiated enough). I endorse Heckmann's proposal who, following Antonovsky, drafts the marginality theory as theory of marginal positions<sup>23</sup>. The concept of option as definition of the marginal situation seems to me, however, more appropriate for the portrayal of the processes in the Rhodopes than that of position, because it implies the *change* of the definition as well as the connection of the latter to *expectations* (interests).

The symbols by means of which various options in the Rhodope are expressed can be made just as easy as they can be omitted. There is no institutional framework which could fix concrete obligations for the adoption of an ethnicity pattern. However great the difference between the options may be, an option change hardly causes problems for someone. In addition, the optional character of the Pomaks' ethnic self-perception is discernible in the fact, that between the latter and the Pomak electoral behaviour an obvious correlation exists. Konstantinov (1992:355) points out a correlation between Bulgarian names and pro-Bulgarian behaviour respectively and votes for the BSP ('Bulgarian Socialist Party'). (See also: Konstantinov 1997; Konstantinov and Alhaug 1995: 24; 71ff.)

Options, of course, are not created or supported out of the blue. They are formed out of an interplay of objective and subjective factors of social reality. Heckmann (1992:202-7) emphasizes the relation between objective and subjective factors for the formation of a marginal position. In this context, he speaks about objective constituent factors and conflict resolving demands on the subjects; thereby, following Antonovsky, he put together a position model. Since, unlike essentialists, we consider the issue of ethnicity to be a matter of interests, the latter are closely connected with both, the objective and the subjective forming factors of an option.

The objective constituent factor of a Pomak option lies in *the real chances of the individuals in the society*. This factor is fundamental for the split in the Pomak micro-society between supporters of assimilation and upholders of dissimilation. In this context, it would be appropriate to describe both groups as *ethclasses*, according to Gordon. He states: "I propose, then, that we refer to the

subsociety created by the intersection of the vertical stratifications of ethnicity with the horizontal stratifications of social class as the ethclass” (1978:134). One should always keep in mind that regarding the Pomaks to be a unit is only meaningful during the treatment of their ascription and stigmatization by the others. Otherwise, it could have fatal consequences for the sociological analysis of the Pomak issue. Actually, *the* Pomaks do not exist, but two Pomak ethclasses: the Muslim industrial workers in the villages and the atheistic or secular intellectuals of the towns. The subjective estimation of interests as well as the question about the required strategies and tactics which have to be followed, contribute to a further differentiation within each Pomak ethclass, out of which there finally arise the various options of ethnic self-perception.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The present essay is an English translation of the chapter “Eine Einführung in die pomakische Frage”, in Evangelos Karagiannis, *Zur Ethnizität der Pomaken Bulgariens*, Münster (LIT: 1997), pp. 34-52. I would like to thank Georg Elwert, Alexei Kalionski and Ulrich Büchenschütz for their useful hints. Also a big thank you to everyone in Bulgaria who supported me during my fieldwork. This essay I dedicate to my nephew Panayotis.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Hobsbawm’s (1990:75-6) remark on the relevance of Serbian liturgy for Serbian protonationalism.

<sup>3</sup> One year after the definitive abolition of the Serbian patriarchate of Pech, the Bulgarian archbishopric of Ohrid was dissolved. Whereby, the Greek patriarch of Constantinople ruled supreme over the Orthodox Christians of the Empire (Hösch 1988:97).

<sup>4</sup> On the Phanariots see Sarides (1979:142-56). The author describes the Phanariots as secular representatives of the Greek-Orthodox millet (143)

<sup>5</sup> In 1762, the priest Danail appealed to his compatriots in the words: “(...) and all of you prepared yourself for becoming Greeks, throw off your barbarian language and habits” (Springborn 1983:308). Springborn points out that Bulgarians who finished Greek schools could rise to the Greek upper class and become traders, teachers and, more rarely, civil servants. Later, several of them used to hide their name and origin. A part of the Bulgarian bourgeoisie approved the adoption of Greek high culture up to the mid 19th century (300; 308; 340). Cf. also Gellner’s (1995:93-4) remark on imagined Ruritania.

<sup>6</sup> The work of the monk Paisiy Hilendarski is typical of this ideology (Springborn 1983:284-91; Pundeff 1969:93-165). Cf. also Daneva (1994:69-101).

<sup>7</sup> The sultan firman of 11.03.1870 brought the Bulgarian exarchate into being (Hösch 1988:175). Eight years later, a tributary principality of Bulgaria was recognized. On the events of this period see Pundeff (1969:113-21).

<sup>8</sup> On christianization / renaming campaigns see Konstantinov 1992, also *The Story of Ali* (this journal, no 1); *The Story of Osman* (this journal, no 2).

<sup>9</sup> Rodina had declared the purchase and publication of books dealing with the past of the Rhodope to be one of its means by which the organisation could attain its avowed goal to awake

national sentiment among Pomaks (Karamandzhukov 1976:157). But only after the Second World War were there numerous publications of this kind (BAN 1958; 1964; Vasilev 1961 etc).

<sup>10</sup> In the 1980s, a national switching had taken place in Bulgaria once again. This time, the Turks of the country were to be integrated into the Bulgarian nation. The publication of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences *Problemi na razvitiето na bulgarskata narodnost i natsiya* (BAN 1988), as well as the volume *Stranitsi ot bulgarskata istoriya: Ocherk za izlyamiziranite bulgari i natsionalnovuzroditelniya protses* (1989) represent attempts by the Bulgarian social sciences to underpin theoretically the assimilation of the Turkish population, which was forced by state authorities. Now, the ‘academic’ hypothesis, that was put forward, maintained that the Turks of Bulgaria were Bulgarians who had lost not only their original faith but also their language during the Ottoman rule.

<sup>11</sup> This compromise, which could also be described as ‘secularization of the religion in the concept of national ideology’, is clearly revealed in the articles which were to provide the academic foundation of the switching. In all historical essays, the adoption of the Islamic faith by Pomaks is cast in the form of a national drama (a turning away of one part of the nation from the historical destiny determining all Bulgarians), although these academics try, with their papers, to convince everyone (including Pomaks) that the language criterion is decisive for the affiliation to the Bulgarian nation. In other words, no longer the faith but the affiliation to the culture group of Orthodox Christianity was relevant. Gellner (1995:109-13) talks, in this context, about a transition from faith to culture. This cultural aspect of religious and confessional affiliation is deeply rooted in the nationality/ethnicity of the Balkan populations (with the exception of the Albanians) as well as in that of the Russians.

<sup>12</sup> With the example of Rumania (Ceausescu era), Katherine Verdery (1991; 1993) has pointed out the systemic correlation between centralist economy planning, economy of shortage, and nationalism, and provided, thereby, a further explanation (not based on the argument of lack of legitimation of communist rule) for the continued existence of nationalism in the socialist countries.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Hristov (1958:110); Lambrev (1958:125); Bozhinov (1958:143); Karamandzhukov (1987:documents no 17, 22, 40). The hodjas of the region are the main proponents of dissimilation to this day.

<sup>14</sup> Finally, also the Serbian national switching has failed because of this fact. Al. Popovic (1986:313) refers to the Serbian slogan of the linguistic ideology and says: “ (...) ce slogan apparemment généraux et ‘démocratique’, se heurtait aussitôt dans la pratique quotidienne à des situations qui étaient pour les musulmans locaux absolument inacceptables: en effet si un grand nombre de musulmans de Bosnie-Herzégovine se déclaraient Serbes de confession musulmane, pour beaucoup d’autres l’ideologie serbe restait irrecevable, puisque, en exaltant le rôle de saint Sava, le ‘mythe des Némanides’ et le ‘mythe de Kosovo’, elle poussait obligatoirement les musulmans vers le rôle peu enviable de ‘renégats’, privés à tout jamais de gloire nationale propre, traînant comme un boulet, *ad vitam aeternam*, la ‘trahision des ancêtres’” (italics, Al.P.). Cf. Hobsbawm (1990:92).

<sup>15</sup> However differently marginality theory is reflected in sociological theory, the lack of clarity of ethnic affiliation represents a repeatedly observed phenomenon, for which an academic term is necessary. Robert E. Park (1928) introduced first the term of the ‘marginal man’. A sociological

concept of marginality is elaborated, later (1937), by Stonequist (1961). However, we understand by marginality not the individual experience of the problem of ascription but an objective situation, which makes specific demands on the individuals.

<sup>16</sup> On the relationships between Pomaks and Turks cf. Tepavicharov (1994:313-4).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. the concept of ‘marginal culture’ elaborated by Milton Goldberg (1941; Gordon 1978:269-78), following Goldenweiser’s concept of ‘marginal area’.

<sup>18</sup> “The Pomak community is progressively getting polarised and split along Bulgarian and Turkish lines. All these developments draw a dividing ethnic boundary between regions, groups, settlements, generations, strata and individuals. They leave less and less room for those of the Moslem Bulgarians who remain faithful to their ancient traditions” (Kalionski 1993:126).

<sup>19</sup> By that, it is not supposed that situational switching is only a matter of marginals. Individuals with double or even triple ethnic/national affiliation, who should not be confused with marginals, have to perform switching. It is always the respective social context which determines whether situational switching confirms a multiple ethnic affiliation or a position within an ethnic no-man’s-land. Cf. Antonovsky (1956:57).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Stonequist (1961:4) as well as the author’s very interesting expositions on switching of marginals who developed from vehement proponents of assimilation into nationalists and upholders of dissimilation (ibid:159-74, chapter VII).

<sup>21</sup> On the criticism of the psychological approach in Stonequist’s theory cf. Golevsky (1952) as well as Green (1947).

<sup>22</sup> Stonequist’s book is a real documentation of such cases. Green (1947:170-1) compares Greek students and Polish industrial workers, and points out that the latter don’t show the classical marginality symptoms of the former i.e. because, “they have a reduced success drive in comparison with the second generation Greeks. (...) Relatively, absolute rejection is probably easier to bear than grudging, uncertain, and unpredictable acceptance. This is one of the reasons why many Jews exhibit to a greater degree the classic symptoms of the marginal man than do most Negroes”.

<sup>23</sup> “The members of a marginal group (...) are compelled to formulate a definition of their situation. It has been pointed out that, at least for the Jewish group under study, a variety of such definitions has come into being. One cannot speak of the American Jewish definition of Jewish marginality” (Antonovsky 1956:61-2). “We would like (...) to introduce the term of ‘position’, the marginal position respectively. By position we mean a place, a ‘locality’ in the field of social relations, rights and duties; marginal positions are marked by the fact that in the field of social relations their group affiliation is uncertain and unclear. We work with the basic hypothesis that certain ethnic forms of orientation develop into marginal positions” (Heckmann 1992:201).

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