

MUSLIM MINORITIES OF BULGARIA AND GEORGIA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF  
POMAKS AND AJARIANS

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POMAKS AND AJARIANS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **MUSLIM MINORITIES OF BULGARIA AND GEORGIA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF POMAKS AND AJARIANS**

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This thesis analyses the transformation of identities of two religious minorities, Pomaks and Ajarians, located on the opposite sides of the Black Sea region, in Bulgaria and Georgia respectively. Both minorities embraced Islam under the Ottoman rule and encountered difficulties with the growth of ethno-religious nationalism in their respective countries' national ideologies in the post-Ottoman era. The thesis reviews the literature on ethnic and religious nationalism, for the relation between religion and nationalism was intimate in both Bulgaria and Georgia, and religion has been an integral part of national identity as well as the national discourse of these countries, and it collects data through semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted in Bulgaria and Georgia with elites and experts as well as the ordinary members of both Ajarian and Pomak communities. It underscores the intolerance Bulgarians and Georgians, whose faith is not Orthodox Christianity, are subjected to in Orthodox countries like Bulgaria and Georgia, where religion and ethnic and national identity is superposed. That is, it draws attention to the ethno-religious nationalism causing intolerance especially towards minorities who were

formerly considered as Orthodox Christians. The findings of the study demonstrate that minorities having more commonalities with the majority yet differences in terms of religious affiliation suffer more.

**Keywords:** Pomaks, Ajaris, Bulgaria, Georgia, minority

## Öz

### BULGARİSTAN VE GÜRCİSTAN'IN MÜSLÜMAN AZINLIKLARI: POMAK VE ACARALILARIN KARŞILAŞTIRMALI İNCELEMESİ

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Bu tez, Karadeniz'in iki yakasında, Bulgaristan ve Gürcistan'da yerleşik iki dinî azınlığın kimlik algısındaki değişimini ele almaktadır. Her iki azınlık da Osmanlı döneminde İslam'ı kabul etmiş ve Osmanlı sonrası dönemde vatandaşı oldukları ülkelerin etno-dinî milliyetçilik ideolojilerinin hedefi hâline gelmişlerdir. Bu tezde din ile etnik ve ulusal kimliğin bütünleştiği Bulgaristan ve Gürcistan gibi toplumlarda, dinî aidiyet açısından çoğunluktan farklılaşan ama etnik, dil, tarih ve kültür olarak büyük ölçüde benzeşen dinî azınlıkların çoğunluk grubuyla ortak kültürel, dinî ve dilsel özelliklere sahip olmayan etnik azınlıklara göre daha fazla ayrımcılığa ve asimilasyona maruz kaldıkları savunulmaktadır. Başka bir ifadeyle, etno-dinî milliyetçilik, özellikle daha önce Ortodoks Hristiyan olarak kabul edilen azınlıklara karşı hoşgörüsüzlüğe neden olmaktadır. Bu nedenle, çoğunluk ile daha fazla ortaklığa sahip olan ama onlardan dinsel olarak farklılaşan azınlıklar daha fazla sorun yaşamaktadırlar. Bu tez, etnik ve dinsel milliyetçilik literatürünü gözden geçirmektedir, zira din ve milliyetçilik arasındaki ilişki hem Bulgaristan'da hem de Gürcistan'da yakındır ve din her zaman ulusal kimliğin ve bu ülkelerin ulusal söyleminin ayrılmaz bir parçası olmuştur. Bu



arařtırmada nitel yöntemler kullanılmıř, Bulgaristan ve Gürcistan'da seçkinler ve uzmanların yanı sıra Acara ve Pomak toplumunun sıradan fertleriyle de yapılandırılmıř derinlemesine mülakatlar yapılmıřtır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Pomaklar, Acaralılar, Bulgaristan, Gürcistan, azınlık

*To my family*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In his memoir, Anderson (2018) refers to four essential points of making a comparison. While three of them are about the compared, the last one is concerned with who makes the comparison: “it is good to think about one’s own circumstances, class position, gender, level and type of education, age, mother language, etc., when doing comparisons” (2018: 131). I myself coming from a minority community, I could as well bear empathy for the minorities compared, but I refrained from having my personal baggage and reflecting my own feelings to the text, and I endeavoured not to show any sign of my personal history.

It was in the spring of 2015 that I first visited Georgia. I was on a four-person research team conducting fieldwork on the conversion phenomena in Ajaria, state-church relations, and minority politics in Georgia. Since then, I have been studying on Georgia, focusing on minority politics, religion, and state-church relations. As part of different projects and research teams, and on several occasions, I conducted dozens of interviews. Throughout the process, Georgia, has proved conducive to research. Therefore, I would like to thank Georgians for their hospitality. Bulgaria, however, was a ‘virgin land’ for me in terms of fieldwork, research, and network of acquaintances although it was my country of origin. Still, I achieved too much from scratch and should thank those helpful Bulgarians, Pomaks, and Turks, who were enthusiastic to help me during the fieldwork.

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Finally, I should state that any faults or errors that remain in the thesis are entirely my own and none of the thanked persons might be held accountable for them.

Karaman, 2020

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMG	Administration of Muslims of All Georgia
ASSR	Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
BCP	Bulgarian Communist Party
CoE	The Council of Europe
DUMZ	The Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Transcaucasia
EMC	The Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center
FCNM	The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities
GDI	Georgian Democracy Initiative
NATO	The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRM	New Religious Movements
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction to the Study

This thesis presents a comparative analysis of the transformation of ethnic, religious and national identities of two religious minorities, Pomaks and Ajarians, located on the opposite sides of the Black Sea region, in Bulgaria and Georgia, respectively. Both minorities embraced Islam under the Ottoman rule and underwent difficult times with the growth of ethno-religious nationalism in their countries' national ideologies in the post-Ottoman era.

For more than a millennium, Bulgaria and Georgia have been Christian countries with their own national autocephalous churches and, their national identities have developed in adherence with Eastern Orthodoxy and a common language. Both countries were baptized during the first millennium, so Orthodox Christianity is deeply rooted in their national cultures, languages, and folklores. Moreover, the national churches are considered as protectors of these communities, preservers of national cultures and languages, and supporters of the liberation movements in their respective countries. That is, Christianity, strictly speaking, Eastern Orthodoxy has dramatically influenced the national identity of both Bulgarians and Georgians.

Islam arrived in both countries later than Christianity and is represented today by a number of minorities although it is regarded incompatible with the national psyche. Muslims are perceived as 'others,' 'outsiders,' and even, rarely as it is, the 'enemy.' In the national memories of Bulgarians and Georgians, Turks, regardless of whether

they were Ottoman or Safavid, constitute the 'other,' and there is ample folklore and poetry which depicts them as the enemy, other, and foreign (Guramishvili, 1958; Lozanova, 1994; Mutafchieva, 1995; Myuhtar-May, 2014: 13; Zafer, 2014: 352).

Pomaks,<sup>1</sup> Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, and Ajarians,<sup>2</sup> ethnic Georgian Muslims, are considered by their respective communities to be part of the nation due to their ethno-linguistic affinities with the majority, yet at the same time are left outside of it due to their adherence to Islam. That is, they are not truly embraced as members of their respective nations. They exist in an 'in-between' and fuzzy situation, and perceived as a challenge to the nation-building processes in both countries during post-communist and post-Soviet periods. Even though Bulgaria and Georgia are multi-ethnic states, an exclusionary nationalism, which is based on religion (Eastern Orthodoxy) and the common language (Bulgarian and Georgian), has developed; those who do not comply with these have been alienated and treated differently. As a result, Pomaks and Ajarians, who are considered the most acculturated to the majority, or less outsiders, have been subjected to forced assimilation,<sup>3</sup> while others, such as Turks in Bulgaria, have been forced to emigrate to Turkey. The *Borchali* Turks/Azeris of Kvemo Kartli in Georgia remained untouched since they were considered as Azerbaijanis in the Soviet era. In contrast, those, who were seen as unreliable in Georgia, such as *Ahiska*/Meskhetian Turks, were deported *en masse* to the other Soviet republics. Bulgaria and Georgia pursued assimilationist policies towards Pomaks and Ajarians, considering them to be 'originally' Orthodox Christians, who had been made to convert to Islam 'against their will' during the Ottoman period. Moreover, despite their adherence to Islam, Pomaks and Ajarians preserve some pre-Islamic or so-called Christian cultural traits coming from the past,

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<sup>1</sup> The highly accepted view in the literature on Pomaks in Bulgaria defines Pomaks as Bulgarian speaking, therefore ethnic Bulgarians. However, there are challenges to this definition by Pomaks themselves which are discussed in the fifth chapter. There are also divisions among Pomaks themselves; while a part of the community define itself as Bulgarian, the others define themselves as Muslims and/or Pomaks.

<sup>2</sup> Rickmers (1934: 471) identified Ajarians with Gurians, a 'division of the Mingrelians,' and Ajarians only distinguished from the latter by their faith and 'the habits acquired under Islam.'

<sup>3</sup> Transculturation may replace the term assimilation from an anthropological perspective.

which legitimizes and provokes the respective states' acts towards converting them to Eastern Orthodoxy.

Regardless of their political regimes, the nationalizing or homogenizing post-imperial nation states like Bulgaria and Georgia hardly tolerated their minorities' ambiguous in-betweenness, in which they shared characteristics with the majority in some respects, but diverged from them in others. The shortcut to sort this problem out had almost always been the acculturation, if not assimilation, of these minorities with the majority. To this end, communist policies in Bulgaria produced certain identities among Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, be they Pomak, Bulgarian or Turk.

Policies in pre-communist and communist Bulgaria were aimed at the Christianisation of the populace, dissemination of Bulgarian consciousness, and negation of the Muslim religious identity among Pomaks. During the communist era, the discriminatory policies of the regime raised self-awareness of some Pomaks, while that era seems to have been less traumatic for the Ajarians in Georgia. The Georgian case also targeted the 'nationalisation' and/or Georgianisation of Ajarians, as well as their Christianisation starting in the last years of the Soviet Union. It is noteworthy that, while Georgian Muslims were unable to generate an ethnic Ajarian consciousness, several segments of Pomak society chose to embrace Bulgarian, Turkish, Arab, and pre-Turkish myths of origin.<sup>4</sup>

Pomaks and Ajarians, with distinctive and nonstandard identities vis-à-vis the titular communities, are two of many minorities who came into existence on the fringes of the land empires around the Black Sea region or in other regions such as Greek Catholic Ruthenians (Ukrainians) in Galicia, Turkish-speaking Eastern Orthodox Karamanlis and Urums, Georgian-speaking Muslim Ingiloy and Armenian-speaking

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<sup>4</sup> Pomaks are scattered across Rhodope mountains from east to west and inhabiting both with Turks and Bulgarians, while Ajarians did not have such contact with the Turks. However, Pomaks who are located in central and eastern Rhodopes, densely populated by Turks, mostly tend to identify with Bulgarians while in the Western Rhodopes, where Pomaks are surrounded by Bulgarians, they identify with the Turks.

Muslim Hemshins in Caucasus, Turkish-speaking Eastern Orthodox Gagauzes in Moldova, Turkish-speaking Jewish Krymchaks and Karaites in Crimea, Krashens (Christian Tatars) in Russia, Chinese-speaking Muslim Huis in China, and Asamiya-speaking Muslim Assamese or Garias in India. Located in the midst of religions, civilisations and cultures, they all represent the uncommon and hybrid, and are examples of the minorities as remnants of empires. Either their religion or language is different from that of the majority. Furthermore, Coakley points to a tendency to identify uncommon minorities with their special appellations rather than with the majority. For instance, according to him, Protestants in Polish Masuria are identified as 'Masurs,' Protestants in Lithuania as 'Memellanders,' Eastern Orthodox people in Estonia as 'Setus,' and finally (Bulgarian-speaking) Muslims in Bulgaria as 'Pomaks' rather than as Poles, Lithuanians, Estonians, and Bulgarians, respectively, although they speak the languages or dialects of the majorities (Coakley, 2002: 218).

This thesis argues that minorities who share more commonalities with the majority/titular community have greater difficulties in their relations with them. That is, Pomaks and Ajarians, whose religious affiliations differ from the titular communities', share ethnic, linguistic, historic, and cultural affinities with them and are part of these Orthodox societies, where ethnicity and religion are conflated. As a result, they experience persecution and discrimination more severely than other minorities, e.g. ethnic Azeris in Georgia and Turks in Bulgaria, who share less, if any, affinities with the majority community. In other words, in Orthodox countries like Bulgaria and Georgia, where ethnicity and faith are almost inseparable and where historically influential and powerful autocephalous churches exist, the minorities deemed ethnically and linguistically the most similar to the majority are hardly considered "full members" of the nation and suffer more severe discrimination than other minorities. Briefly, the more affinities minorities have with the majority, the more discrimination and homogenisation policies they face.

Furthermore, the strong influence of Eastern Orthodoxy and the Church on nationalism both in Bulgaria and Georgia has resulted in the superposition of religion

and the national identity, which causes intolerance towards Bulgarians and Georgians, whose faith is not Orthodox Christianity. Other ethnic and religious minorities, such as Azeris and Turks, however, are treated as latecomers and feel 'foreign' and as the 'other' in the national identity construction process.

In addition, this thesis focuses on how the perception of ethnicity and religion in Bulgaria and Georgia affects Pomaks and Ajarians, who have adhered to a different religion at some time in the past, and thus did not follow the 'standard path' of being Bulgarian or Georgian. To this end, it examines the transformation of their identity throughout the twentieth century, how they perceive their ethnic, national, and religious identity, and the strategies they adopted to cope with the challenge of their in-betweenness. The thesis also explores the reasons why Ajarians adopted the Georgian national identity, while Pomaks generated various identities, including a *sui generis* Pomak identity.

To address these arguments, this thesis reviews the literature on ethnic and religious nationalism as well as the literature on onomastics, names and naming, for many nationalising states have proposed name changes for minorities and considered these changes as decisive in their 'nationalisation' and transformation. In the classical nationalism literature, religion is not viewed as a determining factor in constructing a national identity (especially in Western nationalism), but it has a special place in other parts of the world including Eastern Europe and South Caucasus. While in Western type of nationalism, the influence of religion over identity is simplified, in others it has developed as an essential component of identity (Jaffrelot, 2009: 407). In Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, the relation between religion and nationalism was distinct from that in the Western societies, and religion has always been an integral part of national identity as well as the national discourse. As for the Bulgarian case, it is mostly related with the legacy of the Ottoman *millet* system, which prioritized religion over language and nationality, and as for the Georgian case, it is mostly historical, reflecting the fact that only the church institution existed when the state authority withered away and was considered by many to protect the



Georgianhood. In contrast to what the modernisation paradigm and secularisation theory predicted (Fox, 2004: 716), the last quarter of the twentieth century was a time of religious revival in this part of the world and worldwide. Moreover, Orthodox Christianity and its established institution, the Orthodox church, attracted societies through the vacuum created after the demise of the Western socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. It regained its importance as an aspect of identity and a “differentiating marker” (Tishkov, 1997: 107), as well as “one of the major cultural boundary markers” (Agadjanian, 2001: 477).

The chapter on the theoretical framework discusses Western and Eastern types of nationalism. It considers ethnodoxy, fusing a group’s ethnicity with its faith, as a concept illuminating the types of nationalism in two countries and their policies concerning Pomaks and Ajarians. The practice of ethnodoxy, firstly used by Karpov and Lisovskaya (2008), and developed by Karpov, Lisovskaya, and Barry (2012), is explored as regards its relevance to this study since its components such as ‘exclusion of apostates,’ ‘marginalization of converts,’ and ‘religious superiority’ of the group seem to fit the understanding of the national identity in firmly aligned with Eastern Orthodoxy and the religious minorities.

## **1.2 The Rationale for the Comparison of Pomaks and Ajarians**

The Muslim religious minorities, i.e., Pomaks and Ajarians, bear close resemblances to the Orthodox majorities in Bulgaria and Georgia. Ajarians and Pomaks came into being during the imperial enlargement in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and thereafter by embracing Islam. Islamisation of both groups was a result of the conditions and contradictions of their societies, along with a number of other factors. Among these were the confessional tensions between Eastern Orthodoxy and

Bogomilism<sup>5</sup> and Paulicianism/Pavlikyanism<sup>6</sup> in Bulgaria and the socio-political characteristics of Georgia (where centrifugal forces like Georgian principalities, which had emerged against the unifying Kingdom of Kartli in Georgia, sided with the imperial power (Toumanoff, 1954: 124), approaching it culturally and religiously). Subsequent to the retreat of the Ottoman Empire, the Ajarians and Pomaks, who had been intermingled with the majority of Muslim population in the empire, became religious minorities in their respective states despite being linguistically affiliated with their respective populations. The linguistic affiliation can be seen as a centripetal force in homogenizing their respective constituent nations.

Map 1: Bulgaria and Georgia. Produced via Snazzy Maps.



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<sup>5</sup> Bogomilism, named after the priest Bogomil (Jeremia), emerged in Bulgaria in the tenth century. It was based on the teachings of Paulicianism and Syrian Massalians, which advocated tenets of early Christianity and Manichean duality (Lavrín, 1929: 270-272). It spread to Macedonia and Bosnia, and then to Asia Minor.

<sup>6</sup> Paulicianism is a Christian sect that appeared in the mid seventh century in eastern Anatolia and Armenia, and even established a state in Tephrike (Divrigi) in the ninth century. Paulicians called for the restoration of the purity of Christianity and the abolition of the body of the clergy in the church. They refused fasting, icons and the church hierarchy, and finally abandoned the church. According to Levchenko (2007: 138), they demanded the equality of the early church as well as equality of those outside the church in secular life. Paulicians were suppressed by successive Byzantine emperors, and a large body of them were settled in the Thracian part of the empire to guard the invading peoples from the north, and were thereafter known as Bogomils according to Levchenko (2007: 155). Thousands of Paulicians inhabited Plovdiv, Bulgaria in 969 (Lavrín, 1929: 271), whose teachings may have influenced the displeased in the Balkans. Garsoian (1967: 14-17) writes that during the Crusades the Paulicians in the east even fought against the crusaders within the Muslim armies.

Ajarians are Georgian-speaking Muslims mostly inhabiting the Autonomous Republic of Ajaria in the southwest of Georgia and sharing a border with Turkey. Similar to the Pomaks in Bulgaria, Ajarians are a religious minority in Georgia, yet unlike Pomaks, they have their own autonomous republic, which was established in 1921.<sup>7</sup> Linguistically and ethnically, they are affiliated with Georgians, but are differentiated from them by their religious orientation. The majority (their Christian counterparts) refer to them as *Acareli* to distinguish them from the Christian Ajarians in the republic.<sup>8</sup>

Pomaks are a Muslim minority that scattered across five Balkan countries. However, they are concentrated chiefly in the Bulgarian and Greek parts of the Rhodope Mountains. It is their language that distinguishes Pomaks from other Muslim minorities in the region. The related literature generally acknowledges that they speak a dialect of Bulgarian, or some Bulgarian scholars assert that they speak a purer form of Bulgarian (Neuburger, 1997: 173; Raichevsky, 2004; Todorova, 1990: 443).

Regarding Ajarians and Pomaks as comparable communities, this study discusses the commonality of these countries and the two religious minorities. First, Bulgaria and Georgia were both parts of the Eastern Orthodox civilisation and peripheries of the Byzantine Empire. Bulgarian people were formed between the seventh and ninth centuries as a result of the acculturation of two groups of people – the Slavs, who had come first, and the nomadic Bulgars, who came later – within the contemporary Bulgaria and the Balkans, where they embraced Orthodox Christianity transferred from the Byzantine Empire. It was also the case with Georgia. Despite Georgia's geographical remoteness and political disconnection from Constantinople, Georgia was, most of the time, Byzantine-oriented. In short, Bulgaria and Georgia's religious affiliations is their most remarkable similarity.

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<sup>7</sup> For more information on the creation of the Ajarian Autonomous SSR, see Chapter 3.

<sup>8</sup> The interview data show that the meaning of the term *Acareli* is somewhat shifted, losing the previous meaning to include all Ajarians regardless of religion.

Second, both countries had been ruled by the Ottoman Turks for a long period (Bulgaria between the fourteenth and twentieth centuries and western part of Georgia between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries), and were freed from the Turkish rule as a result of the Russo-Turkish struggle for the domination of the Black Sea region in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Georgia was occupied by Russia in 1801, and Ajaria was incorporated into Georgia after 1878. Bulgaria, on the other hand, was formed as a principality subsequent to a war between Ottoman Turkey and the Tsarist Russia in 1878. The Rhodope regions where Pomaks live gradually became part of the Bulgarian Kingdom until 1912. Third, since both Orthodox countries had been under Islamic rule for centuries and had lost their political independence, their Orthodox churches were perceived as the unifiers of their peoples and protectors of their national languages and cultures. Fourth, the national churches and the Orthodox religion gained increasing importance over centuries, ultimately becoming integral to national identification. Fifth, in both countries, Islam is seen as a late-arrival and non-native, and so is perceived as foreign and as the 'other'. In both cultures, a level of animosity is publicly levelled towards Islam and its representatives in folklore.

Sixth, the most explicit similarity between Ajarians and Pomaks is their religious affiliation and their adoption of Islam. Ajarians and Pomaks embraced Islam while Bulgaria and Georgia were part of the Ottoman Empire, but they became minorities in the post-Ottoman era under their respective new regimes and faced persecution due to their religious affiliation. State policies related to these minorities have been identical in Bulgaria and Georgia, both rhetorically and in practice. As described by Strassoldo (1982: 123-124), the people in borderlands are "passive components of their own state system" and "victims of national politics." They follow "ambiguous identities" due to "economic, cultural and linguistic factors" (Strassoldo cited in Akyüz, 2013: 84-85). Indeed, located in the peripheries of their countries, Pomaks and Ajarians, the groups which are the main focus of this study, have faced state persecution in their post-Ottoman histories and become 'victims' of their states' policies. Seventh, the development of narrative regarding the 'forced Islamisation' of

Ajarians and Pomaks during the Ottoman era in their respective regions, as well as the 'return' to and/or restoration of Christianity among the two minorities, occurred simultaneously and followed similar paths in both countries. Furthermore, the two states used identical methods for the acculturation of these religious minorities to the majority. Bulgaria endeavoured to cut the relationship between Pomaks and the Turkish minority to reduce the influence of the latter upon the former; similarly, the Soviet authorities prevented border interactions between Ajarians and Turkey. Despite these efforts, the Pomaks somehow retained their contacts with the Turkish minority. The Ajarians, however, had no opportunity to maintain their relationship with the Turks, who represent Islam in these regions. Thus, the criteria of comparison are not only similar historical conditions but also the policies, narratives and pressures applied onto them by their respective states. Finally, both groups remained for a while part of states with similar regimes, communist Bulgaria and socialist Soviet Georgia, which had similar ideological perspectives and conducted similar persecutions toward religions and national and religious minorities. In other words, Bulgarian communists replicated the Soviet political, economic, and social models (Zhelyazkova, 2001: 287-288). They followed such Stalinist policies as collectivization, terror, purges, and suppression of religion and clergy, but they also at times pursued cultural, social, and economic advancement of national minorities in their territory (Crampton, 1987: 173-176; Petkova, 2002: 43). In the post-communist and post-socialist period, however, minorities' repressed and persecuted religious inclinations, practices, and identities were revived as a reaction to the former policies. Still, although they were exposed to analogous state policies of similar ideological regimes and experienced the same processes, name changes being the most peculiar one, Pomaks' and Ajarians' course seems to have been differentiated in the new era. The (non-)existence of groups, with which Pomaks and Ajarians would make alliances, interact, and continue solidarity, has probably sealed their course in the post-Ottoman and post-Soviet/communist periods. The existence of the Turkish minority, in Bulgaria, but not in Georgia, has played a notable role in the formation of a single Georgian identity of Ajarians but multiple Pomak identities.

Comparing the two communities under focus poses two major challenges, which needs to be clarified before making the comparison. First, while Bulgaria was formed in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and gained her full independence from the Ottoman Empire in the early years of the following century, Georgia had been part of and dependent on Tsarist Russia, and then the Soviet Union, until 1991, except a short period of independence between 1918 and 1921. Put differently, while Bulgaria was the sole authority in her domestic minority politics, Georgia was subjected to rule of the Soviet Union. This difference may be a challenge to comparison. However, as several research indicate, Soviet Georgia and her ruling socialist elite manoeuvred in the local level especially with regard to vital issues. Therefore, they cannot be conceived completely passive, for Georgia was capable of defending her local or national interests even though it was within the limits of the Soviet nationality policy in the 1920s.

Moreover, Georgian nationalism, national mindedness, and autonomy were strong in Georgia even after Bolsheviks occupied the country and anathematized Menshevism with which founders of the first independent Georgian republic were related. As seen in the Georgian affair in 1920s, Stalin and his clique endeavoured to suppress what they called as 'chauvinist' (Lang, 1972: 232). However, instead of disappearing, Georgian nationalism went underground, and whenever the circumstances were suitable, it showed itself. For instance, when the list of officially recognised nationalities of the Soviet Union was prepared, Georgian elites opposed the designation of Mingrelians, Svans, Lazes, and Ajarians as distinct nationalities from Georgians and accused the authorities of dividing the Georgian nation (Hirsch, 2005: 132-133). These groups were considered by Georgians as subgroups of the Georgian nation with regional appellations, rather than as distinct nationalities. The opponents of this view, on the other hand, criticized the Georgians for pursuing the "physical liquidation of national minorities" in Georgia (Hirsch, 2005: 133). In the end, parties found a middle ground, or as Hirsch (2005: 136) described, "the Georgians largely got their way," and the aforementioned groups were catalogued as subgroups under the Georgians. Besides, as ups and downs of the nationality policy between

1920s and 1930s showed, titular and larger ethnic groups began to be favoured over smaller ones. Also, amalgamation of smaller ethnic groups under Georgian nationality took place in due course (Blauvelt, 2014: 1012). Similarly, after the 1939 census, Ajarians were omitted from the census list (Kaiser, 2015: 47-48), although they were the titular group of their autonomous republic.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, in the post-world war period, Georgians were described as nationalist and Georgia as one of the most 'nationalistic' Soviet republics by the contemporary observers (Lang, 1972: 219, 244) and criticized for the shortcomings in following the all-Union policy and 'excessive nationalism' (Dragadze, 1988: 42). Uprising of Tbilisians after the Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956 and the demonstrations that broke out due to the constitutional drafts altering the state language status of Georgian in 1970s are further examples of Georgians' capability of defending her local-national interests and protesting the policies which were perceived 'unnational.'

The second challenge is that Ajarians have had their autonomous region since 1921, but Pomaks do not have such autonomy. This can be a hindrance to comparison. Nevertheless, Ajarians' autonomy was exceptional in the Soviet Union in that it was religion-based rather than ethnic-based. Therefore, Ajarians were not ensured any political framework; in other words, they were not allowed to develop their distinct identity and culture in the Soviet Union. Therefore, Ajarians' nominal autonomy did not grant any opportunities which were ensured for other groups throughout the Soviet Union.

### **1.2.1 Politics of Naming or Naming Contestation**

There are several terms used to describe Slavic-speaking Muslims in the Balkans, among which *Ahriyani*, *Torbesh* and Pomak are the most famous, and this multiple naming of the group is indicative of the contested or unsettled identity of this group, if we interpret them as one group. In the parts of Bulgaria where Pomaks mostly

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<sup>9</sup> Ajarians were listed as a separate group in the census of 1926.

reside, the term *Bulgaro-Mohammedan* (Bulgarian Muslim) is the official appellation of the group (Konstantinov, 1992b: 83), although *Pomak* is the most frequently used both inside and outside Bulgaria, as well as in the related literature. Other terms commonly used in Bulgaria in the Rhodope region include *Pogantsi*, *Poturani*, and *Ahriyani* (Turan, 1999: 69-70; Apostolov, 1996: 727; Eren, 1964: 572). Slavic-speaking Muslims are referred to mostly as *Torbeshi* in North Macedonia, although *Potur*<sup>10</sup> and *Kurkis* are also in use (Turan, 1999: 70; Apostolov, 1996: 727; Dikici, 2008). In Albania, they are known as *Gorans* and/or Slavized Albans (Turan, 1999: 70), and in Greece, they are known as Slavic-speaking Islamized Greeks (Todorova, 1998: 475; Demetriou, 2004: 106-107). Finally, in Turkey, the appellation 'Pomak' is frequently used for the group, and in related literature, they are referred to as 'Pomak Turks' (Memişoğlu, 1991; Çavuşoğlu, 1993; Günşen 2013).

Because of the interplay between naming and the politics in the related Balkan states, naming of this group has become a complicated issue. That is to say, they should be considered as either the same group that is politically separated or as different Muslim groups whose culture and language approximate to each other. Bulgaria, for example, defines Gorans in Albania and Kosovo as ethnic Bulgarians and encourages the two countries to do the same. In 2017, Albania recognised Gorans, who had been issued passports by Bulgaria for some time, as Bulgarian minority. Recognition of Gorans may be attributed to Albania's integration to the European Union. Slavic-speaking Muslims in North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Albania have been a disputed issue in these countries as well in Bulgaria. Some researchers argue that the members of these groups, i.e. Pomaks, the Torbeshes, and Gorans, consider themselves as different from each other (Dikici, 2008: 28-29). However, the field research on Pomaks in Bulgaria manifested that, thanks to the positive and integrating forces of globalisation, the elites of these groups began to contact more with each other and discover their similarities that once had been diminished by the nationalizing policies

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<sup>10</sup> *Potur* is the short form of *Poturnak/Poturnyak*, or *Poturchin* (Islamised, or 'turned to Turk.' The term refers to those former Christians who became Turk after adopting Islam) (Koyuncu, 2017: 211).



of Balkan states. The approach of Pomaks, and to some extent, of the Torbeshes and Gorans at the elite level, is to focus on their commonalities such as common culture, styles of dressing in the rural areas, and the Slavic language that is enriched with Turkish and Arabic words. Some Torbesh and Goran elites define both Gorans and Torbeshes as Pomaks<sup>11</sup> without rejecting individual group affiliations. For instance, a Pomak interviewee from Sofia who visited Goran and Torbesh populated regions of Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Albania, told that people in some villages in these countries speak the tongue which his grandfathers used to speak during his early age.<sup>12</sup> However, the everyday level seems to be another issue and should also be researched.

There are a number of speculations and contrasting views regarding the etymology of the term Pomak. One thesis is that *Pomak* comes from the Bulgarian words *pomagam* [help] and *pomagach* [helper], which are obviously derogatory in that they refer to the assistance given by the Pomaks (who were then Christian Bulgarians) to the Muslim Turks. According to the nineteenth century Bulgarian revolutionary and poet Georgi Rakovsky, Pomaks descended from Bulgarians who helped the newcomers conquer the region and then they converted to Islam. His thesis on the etymology of Pomak is shared by his contemporaries and other scholars (Raichevsky, 2004: 20, 32, 38). A newer interpretation adopted by the authors in socialist era rejects the earlier accounts; accordingly, Pomaks suffered from the Ottoman rule and converted to Islam by force. Therefore, supporters of this view linked the word Pomak to the verb *matchia se* (miča) [to suffer, to be tormented] (Anagnostou, 2005: 60).

Unlike the Pomak case, the term Ajarian is named after the region Ajaria (also as Ach'ara, Adjara, Adzharia, Acharia, Adjaria, Adzharistan, and Ajaristan). Moreover, there is no such abundance of terms used to refer to Ajarians probably because

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<sup>11</sup> Interviews with Pomaks in Sofia and Istanbul; Ayradinovski, 2014; Svetieva, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion in Sofia, on September 11, 2018.

'Georgian Islam' was mostly historically affiliated with Ajaria region and its people. Still, some transliteration differences exist, including 'Acharans,' 'Adjars,' 'Adzhars,' 'Ajars,' and 'Ajarians.'<sup>13</sup> They may sometimes be considered as 'Ajar Turks,' similar to 'Pomak Turks,' in Turkish media and literature.

### 1.3 The Population Figures of Pomaks and Ajarians

Slavic or Bulgarian-speaking Muslims in the Balkans populated the Bulgarian territory, settling mainly in the Western and Central Rhodope Mountains, in the Blagoevgrad, Kardzhali, and Smolyan districts of Rhodopes, and in Lovech. In 1910, just before the Bulgarian Kingdom expanded to the Pomaks' regions in the south, Pomak population in the country was 21, 143 (Bajraktarević and Popovic, 2012). At the same period, according to other sources, Pomak's population in the principality was around 20-28 thousand (Turan, 1999: 72). Pomak population boomed to 88,399 in 1920 (Bachvarov, 1997: 221). In 1926, their population was 102,351. According to the official sources (Turan, 1999: 73), in 1989 it reached 268,971.

Bulgarian state's policy on Pomaks had not always been firm and stable, but gradually evolved and periodically fluctuated. Pomaks were classified and counted under the rubric of Turks in the censuses prior to the twentieth century (Todorova, 1998: 478). This was probably due to the remaining effects of *millet* system of Ottoman rule in Bulgaria. For the first time in the 1900 census, Pomaks appeared as a separate group (Turan, 1998a: 115). This continued until the 1926 census, which was the last census categorizing them separately (Zelengora, 2017b: 79).

According to the recent Bulgarian census of 2011,<sup>14</sup> of the total 7,364,570 Bulgarian population, 577,139 identified themselves as Muslim (National Statistical Institute, 2011a: 4). This indicates an obvious decrease compared to the census of 2001, in

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<sup>13</sup> In this thesis, the term 'Ajarian' is accepted.

<sup>14</sup> The next Bulgarian census will be conducted between 22 January and 15 February 2021.

which 996,978 people defined themselves as Muslims (National Statistical Institute, 2001c). This fall may be explained by the migration of Bulgarian citizens to European Union countries and Turkey in pursuit of better jobs and life conditions. However, as some experts argue, the census result may not be reliable regarding the number of ethno-religious minorities such as Roma, Turks, and Muslims (Babali, 2013: 241-243). The minority members themselves had the same concerns; according to them, the number of minorities is lowered on purpose. Cambazov (2013a: 24), for instance, argues that the official census results distort the real number of Bulgarians, Turks, and Pomaks.<sup>15</sup> While Bulgarians' is exaggerated, the other two are diminished, and Pomaks are compulsorily classified under the Bulgarian ethnic group.

Moreover, as seen in the Table 2 more than two million citizens of Bulgaria, i.e. more than a quarter of the population, preferred to hide their religious adherences in the census of 2011 and marked either the columns of undeclared or not stated. Yalimov (2016: 236) argues that most of these absentees are believed to be Pomaks and Roma since they refrain from revealing their religious identification because of the negative public opinions regarding them. A similar tendency may be observed regarding ethnic identities as seen in the Table 1, in which undeclared and not stated columns amount to 736, 981.

Since Bulgaria does not consider Pomaks to be a distinct ethnic category, no Pomak designation was included in the census forms of 2001 and 2011 or in previous censuses (The United Nation Statistics Division, 2001: 6; National Statistical Institute, 2011b: 6). Thus, it is not possible to declare an accurate figure on the latest Pomak population in Bulgaria. Still, as regards those who declared themselves to be part of the Bulgarian ethnic group, 131,531 and 67,350 identified themselves as Muslims in 2001 and 2011 censuses (Eminov, 2007: 7; Trankova, 2012a: 35; National Statistical

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<sup>15</sup> For the representatives of Muslims in Bulgaria, the estimated number of Muslims in the country exceeds one and a half million. Two thirds of it are Turks, and the remaining are Pomaks, Roma, and Tatars (Cambazov, 2016: 146).

Institute, 2011a: 27), yet this number is low even despite the decrease of the ratio of the Muslim population in Bulgaria.

Table 1: Population of Bulgaria by Major Ethnic Groups<sup>16</sup>

Years / Ethnic Groups	2011		2001		1992 <sup>17</sup>	
	Total	Percentage Distribution	Total	Percentage Distribution	Total	Percentage Distribution
Bulgarians	5,664,624	84.8/76.9*	6,655,210	83.9	7,271,185	85.67
Turks	588,318	**8.8/8.0	746,664	9.4	800,052	9.43
Roma	325,343	4.9/4.4	370,908	4.6	313,396	3.69
Pomaks	—	—	—	—	—	—
Others	49,304	0.7/0.6	69,204	0.9	94,203	1.1
Not stated	53,391	0.8/0.7	62,108	0.8	—	—
Total declared <sup>18</sup>	6,680,980	100/90.7	—	—	—	—
Undeclared / Unknown	683,590 <sup>19</sup>	9.2	24,807	—	8,481	0.09
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7,364,570</b>	100	<b>7,928,901</b>	100	<b>8,487,317</b>	100

<sup>16</sup> Different sources are used to generate this table: Zhelyazkova, 2001: 293; National Statistical Institute, 2001a; National Statistical Institute, 2011a; Wikipedia; National Statistical Institute, 2001b.

\* Of total.

\*\* Of declared.

<sup>17</sup> The fact that 35,000 Pomaks from the Western Rhodope, in the municipalities of Yakoruda and Gotse Delchev, identified their language as Turkish in the 1992 census triggered decades old anxieties in Bulgaria with regard of Pomaks' 'Turkification.' It caused discontent and controversy in the parliament, so the results of the census columns regarding mother tongue, ethnic identity and religion in these two regions were annulled (Bachvarov, 1997: 221; Zhelyazkova, 2001: 294). However, based on the data of Bulgarian Statistical Institute regarding 1992 census, of those who identified themselves as Muslim and Bulgarian speaker as mother tongue, 70,251 identified themselves as Bulgarian, 63,595 as Bulgarian-Muslims, and 25,540 as Turks (Council of Europe, 2003: 18). In the 2011 census, Cambazov (2013a: 44) mentions that of 64,000 Pomaks in Blagoevgrad, 36,000 identified themselves as Turks.

<sup>18</sup> It refers to those who answered the question of ethnic group which is Item 4.10 in the census questionnaire of the National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria.

<sup>19</sup> Five options are available in Item 4.10: Bulgarian, Turkish, Roma, Other, Not Stated (National Statistical Institute, 2011b). 683,590 persons left the question unanswered, and 53,391 people answered 'Not Stated.'

Table 2: Population of Bulgaria by Religion<sup>20</sup>

Years / Religious Denominatio n	2011		2001		1992	
	Total	Percentage Distribution	Total	Percentage Distribution	Total	Percentage Distribution
Eastern Orthodox	4,374,135	76/59.4*	6,552,751	82.6	7,247,592	85.4
Muslims	577,139	**10/7.8	966,978	12.2	1,110,295	13.1
Other <sup>21</sup>	124,865	2.2/1.7	101,056	1.3	93,684	1.1
Not stated	409,898	7.10/5.6	283,309	3.6	—	—
No Religion <sup>22</sup>	272,264	4.70/3.7	—	—	—	—
Total declared	5,758,301	100/78,2	—	—	—	—
Undeclared	1,606,269	21.80	24,807	—	—	—
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7,364,570</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>7,928,901</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8,487,317</b>	<b>100</b>

From 1992 to 2011, the Muslim population in the country, or to be exact, those who declared their religious denomination as Muslim decreased by 50 percent from 1,110,295 to 577,139. Those who identified themselves as Eastern Orthodox decreased from 7,247,592 in 1992 to 4,374,135 in 2011. The Pomak population in Bulgaria in early 1990s was estimated between 200,000 and 270,000 (Ilchev and Perry, 1996: 116; Eminov, 2007: 21; Bachvarov, 1997: 221).<sup>23</sup> The figures above on the demography of Bulgaria demonstrate that Bulgarian population is steadily decreasing, and has already fallen to 7,000,039 in 2018 (National Statistical Institute,

<sup>20</sup> Different sources are used to generate this table: Zhelyazkova, 2001: 293; National Statistical Institute, 2011a; National Statistical Institute, 2001b; National Statistical Institute, 2001c; Wikipedia.

\* Of total.

\*\* Of declared.

<sup>21</sup> The ‘other’ column in this table were for those who marked Catholic, Protestant, and other options in the census questionnaire in 2011.

<sup>22</sup> According to the census questionnaire in 2011, no religion option existed (National Statistical Institute, 2011b: 6).

<sup>23</sup> According to a document of the European Population Committee, the number of Bulgarians professing Islam is approximately 177,000 after cross table calculations between religion, mother tongue, and minority are made (Council of Europe, 1999: 55).

2019). It is expected to further diminish to a number between 4,692,336 and 5,205,354 until 2080 according to the population projections made by National Statistical Institute (2018) of Bulgaria.

Three factors that are behind the decrease of Bulgarian population may be identified: decline in the birth rate for decades, rise in the death rate, and outmigration of Bulgarians (Crampton, 2007: 443-444). Although Bulgarian population has decreased only since 1980s, natural growth rate, which is associated mostly by the birth rate in Bulgarian case, has been shrinking since 1950s. For instance, birth rates declined from 39.9 in 1920 to 13.0 in 1987 per thousand while mortality rates also declined thanks to the health care improvements in the same period (Taaffe, 1990: 437). It means aging of the population, which causes higher death rates, hinders reproduction of the population in the long run (Taaffe, 1990: 440-441). For instance, death rates increased from 12.5 in 1990 to 14.2 in 2004 and 15.5 in 2019 per thousand (Crampton, 2007: 444; National Statistical Institute, 2020).

As for outmigration, it is a phenomenon that took place after the beginning of the Bulgarian Principality in 1878, wherein Turks and Muslim subjects of Bulgaria voluntarily or involuntarily migrated to Turkey during the twentieth century at various times. Between 1946 and 1985, for instance, 268,066 Muslims emigrated, and an additional three hundred in 1989 (Taaffe, 1990: 444-445). In 1990s and afterwards, more Bulgarians (including Turks and Pomaks) began to leave the country for better life conditions to Europe and elsewhere. For instance, an interviewee in the study stated “after 2014 limitations on Bulgarian workers in the European Union were halted by the UK and Germany, the villages were almost half deserted/emptied. The young are abroad, visiting [their homeland] a month in a year. Those in the UK are seasonal workers in agriculture, who come and go.”<sup>24</sup> In addition to migration,

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with a Pomak researcher in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018. For more information on Pomaks’ migration for work and the life they left behind, see (Roussi, 2017).

Bulgarians including Pomaks began to have fewer children. A village resident compared three generations of Pomaks in his neighbourhood:

The number of the children of Pomaks has decreased. My father had five siblings, my mother had six. I have three siblings [and four children]. The previous generation had six-seven children, my generation have three-four, the generation after ours has barely two. Only one daughter of mine has three children, others have two. The maximum number of children of a family in R. [which is a very traditional and conservative village in Bulgarian standards] is three.<sup>25</sup>

Table 3: Population of Georgia by Major Ethnic Groups<sup>26</sup>

Years / Ethnic Groups	2014		2002		1989	
	Total	Percentage Distribution	Total	Percentage Distribution	Total	Percentage Distribution
Georgians	3,224,564	86.8	3,661,173	83.8	3,787,393	70.1
Azeris	233,024	6.3	284,761	6.5	307,556	5.7
Armenians	168,102	4.5	248,929	5.7	437,211	8.1
Others	88,114	2.3	176,672	4	868,681	16
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,713,804</b>	100	<b>4,371,535</b>	100	<b>5,400,841</b>	100

According to the 2014 census in Georgia, the Georgian Muslim population in Ajaria was 132,852.<sup>27</sup> If Georgian Muslims in Guria, Samtskhe-Javakheti, and Tbilisi are included, the figure rises to about 150,000-160,000. To reach such a number, one must make cross-table counts using tables of ‘regions and ethnicity,’ ‘regions and

<sup>25</sup> Interview with a Pomak tradesman in a village (O) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 16 September 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Different sources are used to generate this table: Broers, 2008: 277; RFE/RL, 2013; Geostat, 2016a; Geostat, 2002; Geostat, 2016b.

<sup>27</sup> The number of Ajarians in the republic was reported to be 71,428 in the census of 1926, 88,230 in 1937 (Allworth, 1993: 9), 245,000 in 1959 and 354,224 in 1979 (Mints, 1973: 120; Akiner, 1983: 244). Henze (1991: 149) gives the total population of Georgian SSR as 5,395,841 in 1989, and that of Ajarian ASSR as 392,432.

religion,' and 'native language' in the census statistics since there is no precise rubric for Georgian Muslims or Muslim Ajarians as in the case of Pomaks (Geostat, 2016b).<sup>28</sup>

Table 4: Population of Georgia by Religion<sup>29</sup>

Years / Religious Denomination	2014		2002		1989*	
	Total	Percentage Distribution	Total	Percentage Distribution	Total	Percentage Distribution
Georgian Orthodox	3,097,573	83.4	3,666,233	83.9	—	—
Muslims	398,677	10.7	433,784	9.9	—	—
Armenian Apostolic	109,041	2.9	171,139	3.9	—	—
Catholics	19,2	0.5	34,727	0.8	—	—
Other**	89,3	2.4	65,640	1.5	—	—
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,713,804</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4,371,535</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5,400,841</b>	<b>100</b>
Muslims in Ajaria	132,852	39.8***	115,161	30.6***	—	—
Georgian Orthodox in Ajaria	182,041	54.5***	240,552	63.9***	—	—
Ajaria Total	333,953		376,016		392,432	

The Muslim population in the Autonomous Republic of Ajaria is concentrated in the rural and mountainous areas (84,101), while the remaining (48,751) live in urban regions, predominantly in Batumi and Kobuleti. A comparison with the 2002 census results reveal that Georgian Muslims in Ajaria, despite the extensive conversions since the late 1980s, increased from 115,161 to 132,852, while the population of

<sup>28</sup> Totally, 160 thousand Muslims were in Georgia who are non-Azeri and non-Kist Muslims (Geostat, 2016a).

<sup>29</sup> Different sources are used to generate this table: Geostat, 2016a; Geostat, 2016b; RFE/RL, 2013; Geostat, 2003: no: 6, 28, 29; Geostat, 2018: 15-16.

\* There is no accurate data regarding religious affiliation in Ajaria and Georgia.

\*\* 'Other' row in this table includes such other religions as Jehovah's Witnesses, Yazidis, Protestants, Judaism in addition to the 'other,' 'none,' 'refusal,' and 'not stated' categories in the census 2014 (Geostat, 2016b). For the census 2002, 'other' row includes other religions and 'none' (Geostat, 2003: no: 28, 29).

\*\*\* Of Ajarian population.



Ajaria decreased from 376,016 to 333,953 until 2014 (Popovaite, 2015; George, 2009: 142; Geostat, 2002).

There are a couple reasons behind the population decrease in Georgia, one of which is migration. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, out-migration of non-Georgian groups toward their titular countries such as Russia, Armenia, Greece, and Israel increased. In addition, Georgians and other ethnic groups left the country for labour due to economic and social hardships, a trend observed among the citizens of other neighbouring countries. Finally, because of the territorial disputes and wars with Abkhazia and in South Ossetia, large numbers of people were displaced from their settlements (Badurashvili, McKee, Tsuladze, Meslé, Vallin, and Shkolnikov, 2001).

#### **1.4 Methodology**

This research is a qualitative-design study, employing semi-structured in-depth interviewing. The interviews were conducted with Bulgarian, Georgian, Pomak, and Ajarian experts and elites in addition to ordinary members of both Ajarian and Pomak communities. Interviews in Bulgaria were conducted in Sofia, different districts of Blagoevgrad, and Smolyan, and interviews in Georgia were conducted in Batumi and Khulo districts in Ajaria and Adigeni and Akhaltsikhe in Samtskhe-Javakheti. Semi-structured interviewing is used, for it allows flexibility and spontaneity both for the interviewer and the respondent and helps probe additional questions during interviews and conduct additional interviews with key informants, when necessary. Moreover, in-depth interviews help explore the research topic thoroughly and clarify misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and vagueness instantaneously (Darlington and Scott, 2002: 49-50). Participant observation, though limited, was used during the field research in Bulgaria and Georgia. In addition, documentary research was performed covering legal regulations, official documents, and population statistics.

Data collection instruments in qualitative research methods include in-depth interviewing, participant observation, focus group interviewing, and the document-text analysis (Chouinard and Cousins, 2014: 118). According to scholars, interviewing is “the predominant mode of” (Greeff, 2005: 287) or “the most commonly used” (Darlington and Scott, 2002: 48) data gathering approach in a qualitative research (Bryman, Teevan, and Bell, 2009: 158; Holstein and Gubrium, 2004: 140; Legard, Keegan, and Kit, 2003: 138). Berg identifies three types of interviews: “the standardized (formal or structured) interview, the unstandardized (informal or non-directive) interview, and the semistandardized (guided-semistructured or focused) interview” (Berg, 2001: 68). Moreover, with the effect of postmodernism, feminism, and constructivism, different and new forms of interviewing such as creative, dialectic, Heuristic, biographical, narrative, life history, and oral history interviews have been developed (Legard, Keegan, and Kit, 2003: 140-141).

Kvale distinguishes two different approaches to knowledge production through interviews. In one, the interviewer acts as a “miner” according to whom knowledge is a “buried metal and the interviewer is a miner who unearths the valuable metal ... The interviewer digs nuggets of data or meanings out of a subject’s pure experiences, unpolluted by any leading questions” (in Legard, Keegan, and Kit, 2003: 139). In the other, the interviewer acts as a “traveller,” according to whom knowledge is created through negotiation between the interviewer and the interviewee. He/she “asks questions that lead the subjects to tell their own stories of their lived world, and converses with them in the original Latin meaning of *conversation* as ‘wandering together with’” (in Legard, Keegan, and Kit, 2003: 139). Similar to Kvale, other scholars also conceive interviews as co-constructions. For Neuman, (2006: 406) field and/or in-depth interviews are collectively created and “joint production[s].” Holstein and Gubrium consider the interviewing process not as arbitrary or one-sided but as an active, meaning-making process (Berg, 2001: 49, 68; Darlington and Scott, 2002: 49). It is not a one-way informational street but “a two-way conversation” between the interviewer and interviewee (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004: 143).

Interviews may be criticised for being subjective, but according to Schwandt and Cash (2014: 14):

*Subjective* does not mean biased or unreliable ... Rather, subjective is used to indicate that these perceptions come from the subject - they represent the personal view of an individual or the subject's point of view based on his or her (or their) historical, political, cultural, social, material lived experience.

Researchers conduct interviews to discover and understand the perspective, feelings, experiences, personal accounts, and understanding of past events of the subject. In other words, researchers develop an interest in other people's stories, experiences, and the meaning emerging out of these experiences because they consider they are worthy (Seidman, 2006: 9).

For scholars, the flexibility of in-depth interviews is their greatest strength (Legard, Keegan, and Kit, 2003: 141; Darlington and Scott, 2002: 49); they "respond to the direction in which interviewees take the interview" (Bryman, Teevan, and Bell, 2009: 159). Furthermore, they enable the interviewer to inquire beyond the predetermined fixed questions (Berg, 2001: 70). In fact, interviewers may choose to begin with predetermined questions and may proceed with spontaneous questions that may emerge during the interview. The researcher may also choose to add these new questions to the question list for the remaining interviews. Moreover, additional interviews can be made with key informants (David and Sutton, 2004: 87; Neuman, 2006: 407). In addition, semi-structured interviews allow the respondents to express themselves freely, giving the researcher the chance to grasp the whole picture. "The flexibility inherent in the semi-structured interviews," which Martínez-Rubin and Hanson point out (2014: 209), "allow[s] the inclusion of spontaneous conversation to establish rapport between interviewer and interviewee." When other data-collection options, e.g., direct observation, are unavailable, interviews together with diaries and other records, offer the optimum method of shedding light onto an individual's perceptions of the past (Darlington and Scott, 2002: 50).

#### 1.4.1 Field Research in Bulgaria and Georgia

This research, as mentioned earlier, employs semi-structured qualitative interviewing. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with experts like representatives of NGOs, academicians, members of the elite in Bulgaria and Georgia, and ordinary people in the rural regions of Rhodopes and Ajaria. Elites of the studied communities, whose religious affiliation is an interlocutor selection criterion, are the leading and influential figures of their groups. They have privileged access to their groups. Experts, on the other hand, irrespective of their religious affiliation, are those who have systematized knowledge, expertise and experience on the studied communities. Elites and experts are valuable informants as they have deep knowledge of their fields, enjoy leading positions in their communities, and provide valuable access to first-hand information (Aydingün and Balım, 2012: 8). Indeed, to a certain extent, they represent and present the social ‘reality’ and processes of which they are a part more skilfully than others, although this is from their own perspective. Rather than focusing solely on the elite-expert perspective, the present research intends to listen to those whose voices would normally be inaudible. Thus, besides elites and experts, this research also probes perspectives of ordinary members of the two communities.

The first set of interviews were conducted in Bulgaria with Bulgarian, Pomak, and Turkish experts, academicians, representatives of NGOs, and with elites affiliated with *Muftiate* in Sofia, as well as in other localities in Bulgaria, where Pomaks are concentrated. In Bulgaria, a total of 27 interviews were carried out in September 2018. One of them was conducted with two, and one with three participants in Sofia. Two of the interviewees were women: one Pomak NGO affiliate and one academic of Turkish origin. Of the 27 interviews, 16 was conducted in Sofia, ten in Blagoevgrad, and one in Smolyan. In Sofia, interviews were carried out with nine *Muftiate*-affiliated people: two were Pomak men of religion and others, except one Turk, were Pomak employees or staff in *Muftiate*. The other interviews in Sofia included one Pomak white-collar worker, one Pomak post-graduate student, one translator/post-

graduate-student, one half Pomak half Turkish physician, three literati of Turkish origin, two academicians one being Bulgarian/Turkish and one having Turkish origin, and one Bulgarian researcher. Furthermore, as Pomak population is dense in Western and Central Rhodopes, interviews were conducted with Pomaks living in Satovcha and Garmen municipalities of Blagoevgrad province, and Smolyan. Eleven interviews were carried out in these places. Interviewees included four villagers, three men of religion, two teachers, one NGO affiliate woman, and one post-graduate researcher. In addition, one interview was conducted with a Turkey-born Pomak in Istanbul, Turkey and one was social media interview with a representative of a Pomak NGO, European Institute-Pomak, who resides outside Bulgaria.

In Georgia, interviews were carried out with Ajarian experts (e.g., a representative of a local NGO, the Georgian Muslims Union), elites affiliated with *Muftiate* of Batumi, and members of the Muslim clergy based in Batumi and Khulo, where there are large concentrations of Georgian Muslims. In Georgia, totally 27 interviews were carried out in August 2018. Of them, 17 was carried out in Ajaria and ten in Samtskhe. In Batumi, 14 interviews were carried out with five academicians, three businessmen (one was Turkish origin), one woman shop employee, one taxi driver, one local NGO chairman, one former *Mufti*, and two men of religion.

In addition to interviews with the elites and experts, local villagers and ordinary people were interviewed in rural regions during visits to Khulo in Ajaria, Mokhe and Chela villages in Adigeni municipality, and Akhaltsikhe in Samtskhe-Javakheti region. Three interviews were conducted in Khulo with an acting man of religion, a student in Tbilisi, and a young local resident. Three interviews were made with a group of local Georgian Muslims including one acting man of religion in Chela, a blue-collar worker, and a local resident in Mokhe. Georgian Muslim migrant communities from Ajaria that now live alongside Orthodox Georgians in Samtskhe were interviewed to obtain information on the disturbances and conflicts between the Muslim and Christian Georgian communities that have been occurring since 2013. Moreover, seven interviews were made in the city of Akhaltsikhe with local Georgian Muslims

(two of which were with local Meskhetian Turk returnees, two were from Khulo, others were descendants of those who once migrated from Ajaria). In addition, two interviews were made with two Georgian scholars in Oxford, the United Kingdom. In total, 58 interviews were conducted for this dissertation. Of them, 27 were made in Bulgaria and 27 in Georgia. Two interviews were made in the United Kingdom and one in Turkey. One interview was carried out through social media.<sup>30</sup>

The questions formulated to lead the field research were related with the two hypotheses discussed above: how Ajarians and Pomaks describe their minority identity as well as the identity of the majority, how they perceive the state policies towards themselves and other ethnic and religious minorities, how their identity is treated in public spaces, how they experience their identity and public visibility, how relevant is religion to national identity construction in Georgia and Bulgaria, and finally how Ajarians and Pomaks' identities, being both Muslim and Georgian or Bulgarian, are perceived by the majority, and what are the consequences of this state of 'both...and.' To preserve anonymity, names of the interviewees and villages are not revealed throughout the text.<sup>31</sup> However, when it is necessary especially if the interviewees speak of proper names, e.g., names of their relatives within quotes, these names have been replaced by dummy names. Interviews usually lasted one to two hours. A tape recorder was used in some of the interviews in accompany with a 'gatekeeper,' especially with Pomaks, but most were conducted without it. Notes have been taken by the author during the interviews without a 'gatekeeper.'

#### **1.4.2 Limitations of the Field Research**

As an outsider who endeavours to access to the field, a network of previous contacts and acquaintances in Georgia that was established after some field research in this

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<sup>30</sup> In addition, nine interviews that were conducted during various field research in Georgia in 2015 and 2017 are used.

<sup>31</sup> Letters in parentheses such as (V), (O), and (N) in place of village names are randomly chosen to distinguish the interviewees.

country was utilized. In Bulgaria, however, I had to create all from scratch. Even though I was a member of Turkish migrant family born in Bulgaria, I still needed some contacts and gatekeepers to ensure the first motion, to open up the field, and build rapport with my would-be interlocutors. Thanks to some helpful Bulgarians, Pomaks, and Turks who were enthusiastic to help and with a bit of coincidence and touch, I managed to proceed with the data collection process in Bulgaria.

First and foremost, one of the most essential limitations of the field research is related to language. The interviews with elites and experts in Bulgaria were mostly conducted in Turkish. They were in Turkish, and partly in English and Russian, in Georgia; interviews with Ajaris and Pomaks who live in rural regions were conducted with the help of Georgian and Bulgarian translators, and sometimes in Turkish and Russian. Receiving support from translators is both a problem and an advantage. Using a translator might be seen as a kind of deficiency, *traduttore - traditore*, yet a local translator who is familiar with the region and is acquainted with the local people became an advantage in reaching people and gaining their trust especially in Bulgaria. Secondly, gender of interviewees posed a limitation. The representation of women in the interviews remained limited since it is difficult for a male researcher to interview Muslim women in villages. Thirdly, since Ajaris and Pomaks are the focus of the study and the questions are designated for them, it was quite difficult to reach the perception of ordinary Orthodox Christians. Still, this gap can be filled with those interviewees that are part of and may be considered as representing the majority community.

## **1.5 The Outline of the Dissertation**

This thesis consists of six chapters. Following the Introduction, the second chapter, after summarizing the literature on Pomaks and Ajaris, focuses on the theoretical perspective that is adopted in the thesis. The literature on nationalism left religion and the influence of religion over nationalism out of the scope since it was not relevant during the emergence of nationalism in the West. However, in the non-

Western world, with the decolonisation period after World War II (WWII) and in the post-Soviet and communist periods, religion came to the fore as a distinguished source of national identity and became a topic of interest in the literature. This chapter presents an overview of the literature on religious nationalism to shed light into the prevailing type of nationalism in Bulgaria and Georgia and its role in the marginalisation of Pomaks and Ajarians.

The third chapter, entitled “Two Countries-Two Minorities,” presents a history of Bulgaria and Georgia focusing mainly on Pomaks and Ajarians. It is a comparatively presented history starting from the establishment of state formations of the two countries in the Balkans and the Caucasus where Eastern Orthodoxy is accepted as a religion instead of other alternatives. It continues with the emergence of Muslim Ajarians and Pomaks during the Ottoman era. The conditions under which these two Muslim groups came into being and embraced Islam are discussed. Then, a turning point for both groups, the effects of Russo-Turkish War in 1877-1878, the disengagement of these minorities from the empire, its consequences, and the subsequent periods are elaborated. Especially, the adventure of both communities from the late nineteenth century until the late twentieth century is dwelled on to better explain their transformation.

The fourth chapter covers the issue of the transformation of Pomak and Ajarian identities from religious identity, an influence of the *millet* system of the Ottoman period, to national identities of Bulgaria and Georgia. To that end, it focuses on name changes as part of state policies targeted at Muslim Ajarians and Pomaks and considers them as decisive in their transformation and ‘nationalisation’ throughout the twentieth century. The fifth chapter discusses the revival of religion in post-Soviet and post-communist space. During the social and political transition in this part of the world, religions and their established institutions managed to survive and consolidated their space in spite of vacuums in every field of life. This period witnessed proselytizing efforts for vulnerable minorities both in Bulgaria and Georgia. Especially Georgian Orthodox Church came forward in this effort. Proselytizing



efforts show us that, although Ajarian Muslims embraced the Georgian ethnic identity, this does not mean that they are readily accepted as Georgians by the majority. Reactions of Orthodox Christians against non-Orthodox Christian denominations in Georgia in 1990s seemingly gained a new direction towards Muslim Georgians in 2000s, and Georgia witnessed intercommunal conflicts between Muslim and Christian Georgians. These conflicts show that their distinct religious adherence is not settled down and Muslim Georgians' in-betweenness is not tolerated in the peripheries of Georgian society even though they embraced Georgian ethnic identity. Therefore, Adigeni, where conflicts reiterate between communities, is taken as a case study. In addition, because of the policies of two countries, Pomaks have multiple group identities while Ajarians adopted a stable, although not unproblematic, Georgian consciousness. The sixth chapter concludes the findings of the research and presents a discussion anchored in the adopted theoretical framework.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE LITERATURE ON POMAKS AND AJARIANS AND THE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

#### **2.1 Review of the Literature on Pomaks and Ajarians**

A number of studies have analysed the conflicting relations between the titular nationalities of Bulgaria and Georgia and the ethnic and religious minorities. Some research have also focused on the discordant positions of these minorities vis-à-vis the national ideology and the lack of a national consciousness after the Ottoman rule in the early decades of the contemporary regimes (Neuburger, 2004: 181; Blauvelt and Khatiashvili, 2016: 371-373). The ethnic and religious minorities of Bulgaria and Georgia have also been subject to an increasing number of studies by local-native scholars in their respective countries, as well as by scholars from within and outside the region. For example, many studies have been conducted about the Pomak communities, particularly between 1998 and 2002 (Todorova, 1998; Turan, 1999; Neuburger, 2000; Zhelyazkova, 2001; Brunnbauer, 2001; Georgieva, 2001; Brooks, 2002). These studies concentrate not only on the Pomaks in Bulgaria, where most of them live, but also on those in Greece, Macedonia, and Turkey. Of these, the Pomaks in Greece have been documented both separately and comparatively with the Pomaks of Bulgaria (Seyppel, 1989; Demetriou, 2004; Srebranov, 2006; Aarbakke, 2012). Interestingly, studies analysing this specific minority have increasingly been taking a comparative approach, particularly covering the Pomaks living on both sides of the Bulgarian-Greek border region in the Rhodope Mountains (Steinke and Voss (ed.), 2007; Karagiannis, 2012; Brunnbauer, 2001; Apostolov, 1996). While the

Pomaks in Bulgaria tend to embrace various identities, the Pomaks in Greece, for some scholars, tend to affiliate themselves with the Turkish population (Oran, 1994).

Pomaks, who have scattered through the Balkans, became objects of interest for their peculiar affinities with some communities in the region, and they were claimed as Turks, Greeks and so on by states and their academies (Günşen 2013; Memişoğlu 1991; Pavlos Hidiroglu in Apostolov, 1996: 738). However, the main focus of the research on Pomaks is how their identity has transformed (Todorova, 1998; Papadimitriou, 2004) and has become contested (Brunnbauer, 1999), multi-layered, and ambiguous as a consequence of the various state policies aimed at transforming them (Apostolov, 1996; Karagiannis, 1999; Neuburger, 2000; Brunnbauer, 2001; Eminov, 2007; Myuhtar-May, 2013). A growing number of studies indicate the emergence of a distinct ethnic identity among the Pomak communities (Osterman, 2013; Boboc-Cojocar, 2013; Brooks, 2002).

Ajarians are studied mostly in terms of their status as a Muslim minority in Georgia, alongside other such minorities as Azeris, *Ahıska*/Meskhetian Turks, and Kists<sup>32</sup> (Aydingün and Asker, 2012; Aydingün, 2013; Sanikidze and Walker, 2004; Balci and Motika, 2007), although there are also studies dealing specifically with the transformation of the Ajarian identity (Liles, 2012; Hoch and Kopeček, 2011; Derlugian, 1998). Another theme is the proselytization of Ajarian Muslims in Georgia since the 1980s (Pelkmans, 2002), which has slowed down recently according to the testimonies made during the interviews. Pelkmans' (2003) analysis of Ajarian identity at the borderlands of cultures and civilisations makes a valuable contribution to the study of minorities in the South Caucasus. As in the case of the Pomaks, the comparison of Ajarians with other groups, i.e. Kyrgyzs, began to take the lead on the specific issue of proselytizing (Pelkmans 2010; Pelkmans, 2014). Furthermore, given their perceived deviation from Georgianness in the eyes of many Georgians due to the strong link between Orthodox Christianity and the Georgian identity, the

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<sup>32</sup> Kists are a subgroup of the Vainakh people, who reside in the Pankisi Valley in northeastern Georgia. The large majority of them are Sunni Muslims.

Georgianness of Ajarians is increasingly being discussed (Khalvashi and Batiashvili, 2011; Zviadadze, 2018). Between 2012 and 2016, a number of incidents between the Orthodox Christians and Muslim Ajarians in Georgia were reported.<sup>33</sup> These inter-confessional conflicts have drawn the attention of both NGO research and scholarly articles (Mikeladze, 2013; Mikeladze, 2014; Kahraman, Katliarou, and Anaç, 2016).

Methodologically, some scholars like Kiel (2013), Lory (1990), Gözler (1999), Radushev (2008), and Minkov (2004), from the perspective of history profession, focus on the Islamisation of the local population in Bulgaria and certain parts of Pomaks' history by mainly drawing on different archives, state reports, and especially Ottoman registers. Many other scholars like Konstantinov (1992c), Konstantinov and Alhaug (1995), Krăsteva-Blagoeva (2006) followed an ethnographic and/or sociological research agenda, and some like Turan (1999), Neuburger (2004), Myuhtar-May (2014), and Zelengora (2017b) followed a hybrid approach, utilizing both archives and conducting field research. After Pelkmans' (2003) anthropological research on Ajarians, research based on field research seem to become more popular (Baramidze, 2010; Khalvashi, 2015; Liles 2012; Zviadadze, 2018). In addition, research of Özel (2010), Arslan (2014), Yıldıztaş (2012), Kasap (2010), and Blauvelt and Khatiashvili (2016) focused on different periods of time and aspects in the history of Ajaria and Georgian Muslims.

Considering the locality of this dissertation, in Turkish universities many research were conducted on Ajarians and Pomaks since 1990s. At least 18 MA and PhD theses specifically have dealt with Pomaks' history, culture, music, religious and social life in Bulgaria and Turkey (excluding the theses upon Turkish minority and Muslims in Bulgaria). Many were based on field research and a significant number of them were written by those Muslims from Bulgaria (most were Pomaks). As regards the theses upon Ajaria and Ajarians that have been accepted in the universities in Turkey, they

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<sup>33</sup> These inter-confessional/inter-communal conflicts took place in Nigvziani-Lanchkhuti (Guria) in 2012, in Tsintskaro-Tetritskaro Municipality (Kvemo Kartli) in 2012, Samtatskaro-Dedoplistskaro (Kakheti) in 2013, Chela-Adigeni (Samtskhe-Javakheti) in 2013, Kobuleti (Ajaria) in 2014, Mokhe-Adigeni (Samtskhe-Javakheti) in 2014, and Adigeni-Adigeni (Samtskhe-Javakheti) in 2016.

are quantitatively less than theses on Pomaks and most of them are history and international relations theses including some transcriptions to modern Turkish.

As stated, a number of studies have compared different Pomak groups that are spread across the Balkans and the conversion in Ajaria with those in Kyrgyzstan (Brunnbauer, 2001; Pelkmans, 2014). However, further comparative research is needed focusing on different minorities at the fringes of cultures and civilisations in the Black Sea region, particularly on the state policies applied and society's reactions to them. This study has theoretical significance in social sciences in that, it contributes a comparative research to the literature related to minorities. Some works exist on Pomaks and Ajarians, and their respective regions in Bulgarian literature (Popova, 2010; Angelova and Piskova, 2010<sup>34</sup>). However, this thesis is one of the first comparative studies which comprehensively focus on Pomaks and Ajarians, who, as borderland minorities, came into being during the imperial era and became minorities in their new habitats, but whose religious differences have since then posed difficulties in their countries. It also compares and contrasts state policies of Bulgaria and Georgia towards minorities. Finally, rather than looking at the Black Sea region through the viewpoint of energy and high politics, this research concentrates on the social dynamics in the two countries, analysing the social, political, and strategic issues faced by these societies by including the perspectives of minorities.

This research considers state policies targeted at Pomaks and Ajarians as decisive in their transformation throughout the last century and the name changes as an important common policy put into practice by the two regimes. This is extensively elaborated in the fourth chapter. Name-changing has been studied in the literature by many considering its intimate link with transformation, identity change, acculturation, and assimilation (Law, 2003: 14-15; Bursell, 2012; Clifton, 2013; Panagiotidis, 2015). States, on the one hand, restricted the name change process of their subjects and regulated their name-surname acquisitions throughout history,

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<sup>34</sup> The regions, in which Pomaks and Ajarians concentrated, i.e. Blagoevgrad and Batumi, have been sister cities for some decades.

and on the other hand, they decreed name changes for their subjects, or would-be subjects, to homogenise the nation and clarify the boundaries between ethnic groups (Law, 2003: 14-15). Since names are regarded as identity markers, nationalising states forced the minorities to change their names to create a uniform nation. Since a name is considered as a symbol of national or ethnic attachment, “[c]hanging it hence becomes a national statement. In history, it was mainly ‘nationalizing states’ engaging in assimilatory ‘identity politics’ that requested or enforced the changing of personal names” (Panagiotidis, 2015: 857). Moreover, name-change was historically associated with identity change because change in name is assumed to precipitate change in identity. In Schimmel’s words, “to change one’s name means indeed to change one’s identity: and hence the importance of a change of name in the case of conversion” (1995: ix).

Four scenarios in terms of name changing (-giving) are described by Gerhards and Hans (2009: 1103-1104): forced acculturation and segregation vs. voluntary acculturation and segregation or ethnic maintenance. Scassa (1996), however, defines three scenarios on the name policies of states, namely, segregation, assimilation, and name policy as part of nation-building, two of which overlap with Gerhards and Hans’ forced acculturation and segregation. For Gerhards and Hans, forced name changes of Turks in Bulgaria during the ‘revival process’ and of Kurds in Turkey, who were forbidden to pick Kurdish names between 1983 and 2002, are examples of forced acculturation, whereas Jews, who were banned from picking names other than Jewish origin names in the Nazi Germany, is the most typical example of forced segregation. In voluntary scenarios, some ethnic or minority groups may incline to preserve and express their identity by adopting ethnic and traditional names as a way of ethnic maintenance. However, by adopting names which sound similar to those of the majority of their host countries, ethnic groups signal voluntary acculturation as in the case Chinese students in the USA. In other words, those who have similar names with the majority may mean they wish to assimilate into the majority, and those who do not have similar names with the majority may be resisting assimilation, a sign of maintenance of identity. For

Gerhards and Hans (2009: 1108), the reason why some migrants choose acculturation while others voluntary segregation depends on the cultural boundaries between the host and origin countries.

Accordingly, these people might acquire new names that sound more like names of the majority community to escape from discrimination associated with their names. As Khosravi asserted, especially in the cases of stigmatisation of religious or ethnic groups, “[n]ame-changing thus becomes a strategy to cope with and manage stigmatisation and discrimination” (2012: 66).

Research demonstrate that the majority group members feel closer to the non-majority group members if they have names akin to themselves (Zhao and Biernat, 2017). The relationship between migrant names and preferential treatment or the discrimination in public space and labour market is a trendy topic in the literature (Arai and Thoursie, 2009; Bursell, 2007; Khosravi, 2012; Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2004; Biavaschi, Giulietti and Siddique, 2017; Zhao and Biernat, 2017). These studies have revealed varied results about the effect of minority groups’ preferring the majority’s names. African-Americans whose names sound less similar to White names are prone to discrimination in labour market (Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2004), and migrants who have changed their names to American-sounding names are more likely to experience increase in their earnings (Biavaschi, Giulietti, and Siddique, 2017). Moreover, Chinese students who arrived in the USA who take ‘Anglo’ names are more likely to receive replies to their requests from professors in the universities (Zhao and Biernat, 2017: 65). Name change tendencies to avoid discrimination, stigmatisation, and barriers to upward mobility may also be observed among migrants in European countries such as Sweden and Netherlands (Arai and Thoursie, 2009; Bursell, 2012; Blommaert, Coenders, and Tubergen, 2014).

As will be extensively discussed in the fourth chapter, name changes in the last century were enforced on Pomaks and Muslim Ajaris to assimilate them to the majority groups so that uniform nations would be created. The state policies

regarding name changes in this period can be seen as 'forced acculturation' as discussed by Gerhards and Hans (2009). However, it does not necessarily mean that 'voluntary' name changes did not take place. They did especially among the local intelligentsia and nomenklatura in Ajaria and Rhodopes. However, voluntary ones were not widespread. After 1989 and 1991, Pomaks and Muslim Ajarians adopted strategies to cope with discrimination, and they mostly had names from the name reservoir of the majority. Indeed, they preferred names of the majority for official use and traditional names for home-use. Another group of Pomaks and Muslim Ajarians, however, tended to take only their traditional personal names for themselves and their children to maintain their identity.

## **2.2 Civic Nationalism vs. Ethnic-Religious Nationalism: Western Europe vs. Eastern Europe and Post-Soviet Space**

According to the literature, two different types of nationalism emerged in Europe. Such categorisation goes back to Meinecke's 'political or state-nation' and 'cultural nation,' and Kohn's 'Western' and 'Eastern' types of nationalism in Europe (Brubaker, 1999). Cultural nations, as Meinecke (1970: 10) suggests, "are primarily based on some jointly experienced cultural heritage" while political nations "are primarily based on the unifying force of a common political history and constitution," with cases that can apply to both. The political nations emerge primarily through the efforts of states in addition to self-determination of people, while cultural nations are created through the shared assets of a nation: language, literature, and religion (Meinecke, 1970: 10, 13).

The first type of nationalism, which is represented by the French model, favours the civic virtues, civic patriotism, and common citizenship. In this model, the link between people and the state was ensured through the bond of citizenship; in other words, citizenship rather than spoken language or vernacular is the prime criterion of nationality (Hobsbawm, 1990: 19-22). Moreover, it considers the nation as a modern phenomenon and assumes that national identity will negate the pre-modern traditional identities such as ethnic identity (Calhoun, 1993: 221). This type of



nationalism was generally defined as 'Western,' 'civic,' 'liberal,' 'universalist,' or 'rational,' which are all evidence of a very Western-centric naming tendency in the literature. Nations, as Smith argues, are based on a common civic culture in this model. They are culture communities rather than ethnic communities which are based on common descent (1991: 11). The nation is territorially defined in this model, according to which people and territory belong to each other. People dependent on a single authority in a demarcated territory are subjected to "a common code of laws" and legally equal before the law (Smith, 1991: 10). Rather than 'common descent' or 'vernacular culture,' common values, laws and 'historical memories' bind the people together.

The second type, which is mostly represented by the German model in the West, presupposes that nations have pre-modern roots and that cultural elements of nations, i.e. common language and ethnicity, are of prime importance. This model was inspired by the nationalisms that may be called as 'non-Western,' 'Eastern,' 'illiberal,' 'ethnic,' 'organic,' 'new' or 'later' (Smith, 1991: 80; Little, 1995: 289; Kohn, 2008: 330; Merdjanova, 2000: 234). In the German idea of nation, the organic bond of an individual with the nationhood, especially through linguistic, cultural, and ethnic-racial bonds, has prime importance, while in the French one, political bond through citizenship is critical (Brubaker, 1994). As Calhoun (1993: 221) states, "German nationalists from Herder and Fichte forward have emphasized ethnic rather than 'political' or 'civic' criteria for inclusion in the nation." The German model of nationalism, which is based on both language and blood-based national identity, grew out of Germany's conditions in the nineteenth century, lacking political unity and comprising non-German minorities, and as Hastings indicated, it set an example for other emerging nationalisms (1997: 109-110). Discussing the distinct types of nationalism and nationhood according to the French and the German, Brubaker points out that the French idea of nation is "state-centered and assimilationist" while the German one is "*Volk*-centered and differentialist" (1994: 1). He also indicated the ethno-cultural character of German view of nation, draws those who are ethnically and culturally Germans into citizenship. For Hobsbawm, ethnic-linguistic nationalism

developed between 1870 and 1914 among groups in Eastern Europe, where ethnic and linguistic ties were important (1990: 102). Unlike in the civic version of nation, in the ethnic version, language and ethnicity or other cultural bonds and affiliations become the key criterion of nationality (Hobsbawm, 1990: 19-22).

Kohn argues that nationalism in politically and socially less-developed Central and Eastern Europe emerged later, so it initially had a cultural rather than political character. The term political here refers to the existence of a nation-state in which a particular national consciousness has developed. Put differently, the cultural character of nationalisms in Eastern Europe refers to “national consciousness developed outside of and in opposition to the framework of existing states” (Brubaker, 1999: 63). Moreover, even though these new nationalisms were influenced by Western nationalism, subsequently they turned out to be contrary cases based on sentiments, myths, and heritage of the past, and they prioritized the concept of fatherland rather than the nation and citizenship as seen in the case of Germany (Kohn, 1965: 29-30; Kohn 2008: 229-330; Kohn in Merdjanova, 2000: 241-242).

A three-stage nationalism in Europe, rather than two, was proposed by Schieder: first, the early comers of Western European states like France and England; second, late comers of Central European states like Italy and Germany; finally, the last comers of Eastern European states like Greece, Bulgaria, and Romania. He discusses that the idea of a people in German nationalism (Central European), unlike in France, was not politically formulated; rather it existed before the emergence of the state. In contrast to the Western type, adherence to folk community and language is substantial to be part of the nation. Finally, he interprets the Eastern European nationalism through the term ‘disjunction,’ which refers to the separation of the national states of this region from their masters in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries during the course of their liberation. Since they arose through disjunction instead of unification of their separated parts, their political consciousness displays certain “militant, aggressive traits” (Schieder in Merdjanova, 2000: 242-243). Although two-type

classification of nationalism, as scholars argue, is 'useful,' contemporary nationalisms are hardly associated with one single type as they may bear the attributes of the both (Little, 1995: 290; Roudometof, 2002: 16-17; Brubaker, 1999). Actually, as Smith (1991: 13) explains, ethnic elements and civic components may alternate to hold sway, or they may together influence a nationalism. Finally, Brubaker, who finds the civic-ethnic division of nationalism 'problematic,' offers an alternative: 'state-framed' vs. 'counter-state' nationalism (1999: 67-69).<sup>35</sup>

While language was regarded to have a key role in nation-building specifically in the ethnic version, religion in the European type of nationalism was overlooked, and its role over the origins of nationalism was ignored by most scholars (Rieffer, 2003). Nationalism was developed in the West as a "modernizing force" (Jaffrelot, 2009), and identities other than national were bound to cease. Religion was seen as irrelevant or transitory in the civic or modernist version of nationalism. Moreover, according to the presumptions of conventional modernisation paradigm, traditional societies, would drop their 'irrational' burdens such as ethnicity and religion on the path to modernisation. Religions and other sources of identity would dissolve or be replaced by nationalism and national identity. The former would be a matter of the private realm or conviction (Brubaker, 2012: 15; Smith, 1981: 96), and the latter would be "shaped by civic and secular forms" (Spohn, 2003: 267).

Religion is rarely conceived as a dimension or element of national identity. For Guibernau, national identity exceeds identities such as class, religion, and gender. Common language is a more fundamental base of nationality than religion. Indeed, Weber considers language as "the normal basis of nationality" (cited in Guibernau,

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<sup>35</sup> In fact, two-type classification of nationalism has increasingly been criticised. As argued by Kymlicka (1995), 'civic' nationalisms are not necessarily and inherently good, nor are they more conflict-proof, peaceful, and democratic than ethnic ones. Both forms have cultural components and may be open to forcible inclusion of minorities, which can be seen in the cases of the US and Turkey. Civic nationalism in the West mostly suggests patriotism and implies to a 'good' or 'positive' form of nationalism (Xenos, 1996: 217; Billig, 2017). It is described as free of passions and may take more "banal," rather than "fiercely expressed," forms unlike in the non-western examples (Billig, 1995: 16). However, nationalism in the West, which has mostly been overlooked and gone unnoticed, albeit in banal forms, is far from being innocent and benign (Billig, 1995: 7, 8; 2017).

1996: 33). While religion became a private matter of the individual in Europe, language was not solely a personal choice; it gained political significance (Calhoun, 1993: 220). This brought also “secularization of the public sphere” (Jaffrelot, 2009) in different degrees in the Western countries, changing from more radical to moderate forms. Intellectuals in the West divorced from the religion, and as Hayes (1966) argues, adopted civic or lay religion, i.e. nationalism. National identity became more significant than religious identity for European people. In other words, while nationalism began to take a firm grip on people, religion lost its sway in Europe. As Emerson argues, for the Western European countries, except maybe Ireland, religion never was “the central significance for the formation of nation and state in the nineteenth century” (1967: 158). In other words, when modern nations emerged, as Borowik (2007: 655) remarked, “religion did not serve as a line of ethnic division and conflict in Western Europe; nor was it a factor in nation building. No religion was associated with any particular nation or national consciousness.”

To the east, however, a different development occurred. As Sugar argues, nationalism which distances itself from the original centre, namely, Western Europe, disrobed its original dress and characteristics, and complied with the conditions of the new environment (Sugar, 1995: 8) outside Western Europe.<sup>36</sup> Religion, in Eastern Europe and in due course in Asia, came to the ‘fore’, and sometimes it was in the core of nation formation and sometimes functioned as “a driving force” (Emerson, 1967: 158). It turned out to be a substantial national identity marker in the Balkans and the Caucasus. For instance, for Mentzel (2000: 202) “religion ... was an important factor in the development of the different Balkan nationalist movements.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Hobsbawm (1990: 67) also acknowledges that religion and national consciousness can overlap as seen in the Irish and Polish cases, even though he conceives religion and nationalism as opposing notions.

<sup>37</sup> The case of Albania, however, presents an exception, for religion did not constitute a unifying force nor was it an essential factor in the development of Albanian nation. On the contrary, it might have represented a source of division due to the multiplicity of different religious orientations among Albanians (Sulstarova, 2002: 10-11). Therefore, language together with common ethnic origin and homeland became the unifying characteristics of Albanian nation. Faith was in the mottos of Albanian awakeners but not as a specific religion but as a belief, either in God or in Albanianism itself (2002: 14-19).

In Pomaks' and Ajarians' respective states, Bulgaria and Georgia, nationalism bears the characteristics of ethnic nationalism, in which either religion or language, or both are the prime influence. Thus, the two minorities have become a challenge to these nationalisms because of their inconsistency with these countries' ethno-religious nationalisms. Some scholars argue that religion is the prime marker of national identity in Bulgaria, while others, like Todorova (1996: 67), suggest that language holds greater significance. Both of these approaches actually refer to the ethnic version of nationalism. However, language and religion are actually both effective, sometimes with and sometimes without a value sequence. For example, the Georgian language and Orthodox Christianity are the prime markers of Georgianness.

Todorova accepts the importance of religion and language in the formation of identity during the initial period of Balkan nationalisms in the nineteenth century, and she does not consider the role of religion superior to that of language. Indeed, she states that "the marker for national identity became language rather than religion in Bulgaria" (Todorova, 1998: 471). However, she also says that in Bulgaria "the question of language' never acquired the importance it did" in other Balkan countries and it "was overshadowed by the more vigorous and incentive struggles for a national church and political emancipation, which were going on at the same time" (Todorova, 1990: 440).

For Karagiannis (1999), however, religion rather than language had a prior effect in Bulgarian national identity. For him, it is historically related to the Ottoman *millet* system, in which different groups were administratively divided according to their religious adherence, and language was trivial. He argues that it is not language as an objective criterion of national affiliation but "political selection of the language as a criterion of national inclusion" that motivated Bulgarian nationalism (Karagiannis, 2012: 20). As a matter of fact, Pomaks were linguistically akin to Bulgarians, yet they never were accepted a natural part of Bulgarian nationality because of their adherence to Islam. They had to convert to be accepted as Bulgarian. Karagiannis adds that "the attempts to establish language as the most relevant criterion for the

Bulgarian nationality ... were, and still are, highly unsuccessful” (1999: 3). Papadimitriou also considers denomination or Eastern Orthodoxy as the prime Bulgarian national marker and symbol of identity, and the Bulgarian language as secondary. He argues that conversion to Christianity is the only way for Pomaks to be “full members of the Bulgarian nation” (Papadimitriou, 2004: 225).

Bulgarian nationalism utilized such ethnic elements as language, common culture, custom, life-style and rituals similar to Pomaks’ Christian neighbours to integrate Pomaks into the Bulgarian nation and prove their Bulgarian origins. Moreover, the *Rodina* (homeland) movement of the 1930s, dominated by Pomak intellectuals, favoured “language-based concept of the nation” (Neuburger, 2000: 187) to spread Bulgarian consciousness among Pomaks.

As in Bulgaria, the national identity in Georgia is constructed around essentialist notions, and the boundary of Georgian ethnicity was framed by Georgian language and Eastern Orthodoxy. The importance of religion and the church in this construction has crystallized since independence. Religion and related topics have been topics of growing interest in the literature on Georgia (Gurchiani, 2017a; Aydingün, 2013; Chelidze, 2014; Pelkmans 2002; 2010) at least for a decade. For instance, Gurchiani (2017a: 11), who has studied religion and its practices in Georgian public schools, states “ethnic identity was so closely connected to religious identity [that] every attempt to remove religion from the classroom was perceived as an attack on identity as well. In many cultures, religion stands as a proxy for ethnic identity” and “Orthodox Christianity has become a true marker of identity in recent decades in Georgia.”

Things have not always been so smooth for religion and the church in Georgia. People were subjected to repression about the religious matters in the Soviet Union, and religion, as some authors claimed, was a marker of Georgian identity to a lesser extent, especially compared to the Armenian case (Dawisha and Parrott, 1995: 119; Figes, 1997: 74-75). Wixman refers to Chavchavadze’s famous holy trinity of

‘fatherland, language and faith’ with respect to the basis of Georgianness. The first two parts of the trinity, i.e. Georgian language and Georgian land, had a much greater role than religion on Georgian identity, a view depicting the period of the Soviet Union, during which influence of religion was weakened. In addition, it is probably impressed by the protests against removing the Georgian language as the state language in 1978 in Tbilisi.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, for Wixman (1982: 150), the confessional heterogeneity among the Georgians (Orthodox Christian, Sunni, Shiite, Jewish, and others) undermined religion’s influence. Besides, the Georgian Orthodox Church was going through troubled times, suffering from internal degeneration, corruption, and immorality accusations from the nationalist Georgian dissents in the 1960s and 1970s (Reddaway, 1975; Jones, 1989; Johnston, 1993: 248-249). However, even though the church’s position was ambivalent then, it started to regain its reputation with the inauguration of Ilia Shiolashvili, a metropolitan respected by his parish even before he became the Patriarch of Georgian Orthodox Church in 1977. Moreover, the church’s reputation improved during the 1980s and boosted especially in the aftermath of the April 9, 1989 tragedy<sup>39</sup> (Jones, 1989: 311). During the coming decades, especially after the turn of the millennium, major developments took place on the ground in Georgia, which also attracted the attention of the academia. In fact, Georgian Orthodox Church accelerated its influence over individuals, society, politics, and education, which culminated after the constitutional agreement in 2002,<sup>40</sup> and

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<sup>38</sup> Like the scholars in the last century, some contemporary researchers have claimed that “a (re)turn to the language-centered” Georgian nationalism takes place. That is, minorities, regardless of ethnic origin, have begun to be considered as equal to ethnic Georgians if they have command of state language (Berglund, 2016).

<sup>39</sup> During the anti-Soviet pro-independence demonstrations in Tbilisi, many protesters were killed, and hundreds were left injured by Soviet Russian troops. April 9 is remembered as the day of National Unity in the country.

<sup>40</sup> With the constitutional agreement, also known as Concordat, signed between the Georgian state and the Georgian Orthodox Church, the Church acquired the status of legal entity of public law, which the religious organisations representing other faiths in the country had not acquired until 2011. Georgian Orthodox Church also ensured such privileges as tax exemption, ownership of orthodox churches and monasteries and their remains all over Georgia, involvement in teaching Orthodox religion in schools, and exemption of clergy from military service. For more information, see (Begadze, 2017; Parunashvili, 2013).

began to dominate the nationalist discourse, promoted itself as the soul of the nation, and emerged as a political force.

Nationalism in Bulgaria and in Georgia, which resembles that in the Black Sea region, bears the characteristics of ethno-religious nationalism. The close relationship between nationalism and religion, crystallisation of faith in the national identity, and definition of citizen membership to the state in terms of primordial terms such as ethnicity rather than civic terms put minorities in these countries in a fragile position. The groups who are perceived as “not-entirely-Bulgarian” (Georgieva, 2001: 306) or Georgian despite shared cultural traits are not readily accepted to the nation (Gurchiani, 2017b: 517; Khalvashi and Batiashvili, 2011; Mikeladze, 2014). As Aydingün (2013) argues, the religion-based national identity jeopardizes the national integrity of multi-religious and multi-ethnic countries like Georgia. Besides, fusing Georgian identity with Eastern Orthodoxy marginalizes Muslim minorities.

Finally, as previously stated, some studies focus on religion and ethnicity but some regard language as the primary constituent of national identity in Georgia and Bulgaria. It is hard to identify which one is more essential in defining national identity. In fact, their importance in determining identity is not static but changing and time-bound. The research data collected for this thesis demonstrate that, while the place of language is not undermined, established churches and religions are more powerful in the post-Soviet and post-communist period and had a stronger status than that in the past.

### **2.2.1 Significance of Religion for Nationalism and National Identity in Eastern Europe and in the Post-Soviet Space**

National identity and confessions are closely connected in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. As von Lilienfeld points out, national identity in these regions is perceived to be based on language, religion, common history or historical fate, and finally culture (1993: 220). Moreover, churches emerged or promoted their new images as the ‘souls’ and ‘cradle’ of their nations after 1989. Henceforward, the peculiarities of



nationalism in the ex-communist Eastern European countries and in the post-Soviet space are discussed with special emphasis on the 'religious factor,' which has regained its place as part of a global trend in the late twentieth century.

Scholars often refer to a kind of correlation between the revival of religion and the multifaceted crisis, which took place in the post-communist and post-Soviet space. Many authors discuss from their own perspectives that the world witnessed a religious revival, resurgence, renewal, or recovery of religious identity in these regions starting with the 1980s. They mostly link this process of revival to an 'ideological vacuum' (Huntington, 1997: 96), a political vacuum, or a social crisis (Juergensmeyer, 1996), a 'moral crisis' (Ivekovic, 1997), an institutional and identity crisis (Agadjanian, 2001), an outcome of 'traumatic transition' (Curanovic, 2013) or globalism (Keddie, 1998). Religion, which had faced non-linear and fluxional treatment from the communist and socialist regimes and which was mostly suppressed by them, returned to the public space in the *glasnost* era to expand its presence and capacity upon national identity, society, and politics in varying degrees (Curanovic, 2013: 330). For many, established religions were the only legitimate institution to fill the moral or ideological vacuum referred above. However, as Batalden (1993: 7) noted, "the speed with which this linkage between confessional and national identity has reasserted itself in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Empire" was remarkable, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union "has been paralleled by the rapid resurfacing of underlying confessional and national identities. In this process, the recovery of national identity remains powerfully grounded in religious and confessional symbols."

Agadjanian (2001: 474) asserted that the outcome of the process of entropy in social meanings and symbols, and the anomie in the social and political domains of life were enhancing the ethnic, linguistic, and religious identities. This gradually took forms of ethno-nationalism in the post-Soviet space. Acknowledging the relatedness of secular and religious-based national identities with 'civic' and 'ethnic' elements within a nation, he states that ethno-nationalism is not unlikely to include religious

identity as some cases like North Caucasian Muslims and Greek Catholic Ukrainians demonstrate in the post-Soviet region. However, he also emphasised that most instances have characteristics of secular ethno-nationalism (2001: 479).

Many scholars, who discuss the role and function of religion and religious identity for the peoples who went through massive transformations, reflect on religion's assistance in that it somewhat gave a feeling of protection and security, social unity and meaning, and provided new social networks for people. In addition, religion helps elites legitimize their political ends as well as giving them a mobilization force (Huntington, 1997: 97; Agadjanian, 2001: 476; Curanovic, 2013: 330; Khutsishvili, 2015: 60-61; Balci and Motika, 2007: 338; Filetti, 2014: 223-224). Moreover, as Agadjanian argues, it also becomes one of the active elements of ethnicity and "one of the major cultural boundary markers" (2001: 477). In a similar vein, Tishkov (1997: 107) noted that religion in the post-Soviet period became a "differentiating marker that serves to strengthen ethnic cohesion" and was at the same time an element of division and exclusion.

The former Soviet Union, as Slezkine (1994) asserted, was 'a communal apartment,' in which almost every nation, nationality, and ethnic group defined through their cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and historic differences held a separate room. As soon as groups were bestowed their own territorially-defined political units distinct from others, they could develop their cultures, native literary languages, literature, histories, and their indigenous cadres. Most national entities came into being for the first time in history to develop a territorially-defined, distinct ethnic and national identities throughout the Soviet era. When the Soviet Union seceded from the scene and the ideology linked to it waned, what remained for the ethno-territorial units was the "long practiced language of nationalism," which had its basis on ethnic identity and/or elements (Slezkine, 1994: 451). Therefore, national elites in the post-Soviet space worked on the template inherited from the former period. In addition, they sought out elements within the national repository, i.e., their 'raw material', to build up their new identities. They firstly brought back religion, which had been part

of national cultures for centuries (Ivekovic, 1997). Similar to Slezkine, Agadjanian (2015: 29) related the resurgence of religious and ethno-national identities in the South Caucasus to the legacy of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union promoted, on the one hand, a unitary Soviet identity and socialist culture, but on the other hand, it enhanced ethnic borders and promoted the territorially and linguistically defined concept of nationality.

Two conflicting approaches or projects trying to affect the formation of national identity in post-Soviet countries can be identified (Agadjanian, 2001, 2015; Janelidze, 2015; Sabanadze, 2010). Although civic-secular concepts or elements ensured their place on the constitutions and legislations, and nation-building was initially considered to have adopted the Western model of citizenship, such as a sovereign government, one language, and a defined territory, it is ethnocentric at the same time. National identity is defined on the basis of 'other,' namely ethnic others as can be observed in the South Caucasus. In other words, ethnic and civic elements are competing to affect the national identity (Agadjanian, 2001; 2015: 24-25). Agadjanian emphasized in one of his works that, even though 'civic' perspective was kept in the national agenda, 'primordial bonds,' namely, ethnic, linguistic, and religious identities, which are "related to collectivities rooted in the past and oriented backward," acted as important constituent of the nation building (2001: 474). For instance, Janelidze (2015: 75-77) asserts that two distinct discourses and/or nationalisms which influence the community co-exist in post-Soviet Georgia: religious nationalism and civic nationalism. Religious nationalism, according to which Orthodoxy and Georgianness are considered the same, or idiomatically two sides of a coin, is promoted by Georgian Orthodox Church, which places itself at the centre of Georgianness. The church attributes itself a determining role on whom the notion of Georgian is based. Accordingly, Georgians are those who adhere to the 'Georgian idea.' Eastern Orthodoxy is at the heart of the term, and those who do not adhere to it are placed outside Georgianness (Janelidze, 2015: 75-76). This kind of definition of Georgianness obviously endangers the place of non-Eastern Orthodox Georgians within the concept of Georgian. On the other hand, civic nationalism was promoted

by the Saakashvili governments between 2004 and 2012 and advocated the Western-oriented values. However, its narrative was not as 'well-integrated' as the Church's, so it was gradually overshadowed by it (Janelidze, 2015: 77). Similar to Janelidze, Zedania (2011) also describes the tension between the two contrasting and contesting perspectives defining national identity and Georgianness, which were advocated by the Georgian state and the Georgian Orthodox Church. Furthermore, Zedania presents an alternative interpretation of the nationalist discourses that compete with each other in Georgia and refers to the national project initiated by the Georgian state after 2003 as 'revolutionary,' and 'a distinct form of nationalism.' This project aimed at transforming the whole society and offered a new type of political identity based on citizenship, defining Georgianness in more modern and dynamic terms. However, at the same time, church-dominated religious nationalism's antipathy towards the modernisation project of revolutionary nationalism grew (Zedania, 2011: 124). Similar to Janelidze, the author argues that affiliation or adherence to Orthodoxy was considered as a prime factor in determining national identity: "'Georgianness' lies in 'being Orthodox'" (Zedania; 2011: 125). Similarly, Tevzadze (2009) refers to the competition between conflicting nationalisms or nationalist projects depicted above but with different concepts. In his description, religious and national ideologies seem to compete to gain the mastery of national-political identity. In line with others, Tevzadze remarks that a religious feature was attached to the Georgian national ideology in the 1980s, which expanded the influence of religious ideology and the church on national ideology (Tevzadze, 2009: 17-18). Finally, Sabanadze (2010: 112-113), identified two competing nationalisms, namely ethnoreligious and liberal, that emerged as a result of the impact of globalism on Georgia. The ethnoreligious nationalism developed as a reaction to the forces of globalisation, which were perceived as threats to the Georgian national culture and identity, while the liberal nationalism was more pro-Western and globalist (Sabanadze, 2010: 109).

Religion in the post-Soviet and post-communist space came to be equated with identity alongside ethnicity, and took, as Agadjanian (2015: 26-27) claims, 'ethnic

forms.’ It affected the formation of national identity in varying degrees from being ‘key’ and ‘central’ to ‘powerful’ marker of nations if religion’s role in national identity is defined in value judgement terms. In the South Caucasus too, religions, mostly Orthodox Christianity and also Islam, undertook a central place in national narratives. Moreover, churches, claiming their status in constitutional terms, presented themselves “as holders of an essentialized ethnic identity” for a long time especially at times when there was no state authority to take care of the nation (Agadjanian, 2015: 27-28).

The post-Soviet states resemble the Eastern European countries with regards to the influence of religions and churches over societies, politics, and national identities transforming after a half-century of communist ideology. Many scholars believe that religions and established institutions of confessions had played substantial roles in nation-building in Central and Eastern Europe. Although nations were inspired by the secular nationalism of Western Europe, nationalism developed here laid much stress on cultural, ethnic, and linguistic features and was particularly imbued with religious affiliations (Merdjanova, 2013: 8). Following to Luckman, who coined the term ‘invisible religion,’ which refers to the phenomena that religion, its presence, and visibility takes new forms and draws back into the private realm as a result of modernisation, Merdjanova argues nationalism that developed in Eastern Europe can be seen as ‘secular-religious.’ Unlike the civic nationalism discussed above, the ‘new’ or ‘later’ nationalism in these countries emerged within the religious arsenal and “was based to a great extent on religious-cultural differences” due to the historical, social, and political peculiarities of Eastern European countries (Merdjanova, 2002: 70-71; 2000: 234).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Nationalism, according to Brubaker (2012: 6-8), was shaped by particular religions in such places as the Balkans, Poland, and Northern Ireland, and in contrast to the conventional understanding that nationalism flourished when religion declined, religion contributed to the development of nationalism. In the Irish case, it is the religion rather than language that is the main ethnic marker, unlike in the case of other European forms of nationalism. Catholicism and Irish nationalism are actually intermingled, and the Catholic Church’s unconventional position as the creed of the majority was recognised in the 1937 Constitution, although this was later revoked (Coakley, 2011: 108). Moreover, the Irish had been able to conserve their national consciousness through Catholicism even though most of them lost their native language (Kerr, 1992: 22).

Borowik (2007: 654-657) identified five reasons for the role of religion in distinguishing Central and Eastern Europe from other parts of the continent: (1) late arrival of Christianity in Central and Eastern Europe compared to the Western Europe, reflecting the long-term influence of paganism on this region, (2) plurality of centres of religious influence in the region, namely Eastern Orthodoxy from the Byzantine and Latin Christianity from Rome as well as other confessions of Christianity and Islam, (3) consolidation of religions during the same national and state building processes in Central and Eastern Europe serving “as a tool of building and preserving identity,” (4) similar persecution faced by religions in the communist era, and (5) collapse of communism, which transformed the role of religion and religious institutions in society. Furthermore, Borowik argues that, in Eastern European countries, “religion served as a tool for the integration of identity ... and the differentiation of each nation from the others” (2007: 655). Moreover, the national churches of Eastern Europe including Bulgaria are described as the preservers of the nation, national identity, language, tradition, and literature at a time when no organized authority existed to take on this specific role. This non-existence of political authorities over centuries enhanced the special role of churches in their communities. For instance, during the Ottoman era, as Petkoff (2005) stated, the head of the Orthodox Church was spiritually and politically the head of the religious community, and national churches in the post-independence era were regarded as an element of what Petkoff described as ‘community-building’ in new states.

Two functions of nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe, both of which are related to the churches’ increasing and altered roles in the period subsequent to 1989, may be identified. As Hoppenbrouwers (2002) discusses, first, they acted as ‘a marker of identity.’ The churches began to fill the gap caused by the demise of communist ideology, which had provided a collective identity. They also presented themselves as “the soul and core of the nation” (Hoppenbrouwers, 2002: 312). Secondly, they functioned as an ideology distributor and interpretative filter. The churches in the post-communist period began to determine “what is true and what is false” for their

communities (Hoppenbrouwers, 2002: 313). For instance, the 'true' comprises "indigenous Christian culture," "Christianized values," and politicians who respect traditional values, while the 'false' includes whatever comes from the West such as liberal democracy and foreign missionaries (Hoppenbrouwers, 2002: 313). For historical reasons, Zrinščak (2011: 179), interpreting Borowik's list, argues that religion is more involved in social processes in Central and Eastern Europe than in Western Europe, while East and West Europe have similar church-state relations. Discussing the prime role of religions and churches in shaping national identities and in preserving national languages and cultures of the South Caucasus as well as constituent parts of Yugoslavia, Ivekovic (1997) claims established religions were entrusted political roles in the period after 1989. He further argues that the peoples of post-Soviet and the Balkan countries in general witnessed the 'desecularization of politics' as well as of societies initiated by churches and religious activists after the demise of communist entities. This type of religious nationalism, which he terms as 'religious fundamentalism', conceives of religion, society, and the state "as one inseparable and immutable entity" (Ivekovic, 1997: 30).

Spohn (2009: 364) highlights the impact of faith on the formation of a national identity in Eastern European countries and the consolidation of the relationship between the state and the church, as well as the privileged status of Orthodox Christianity over other religions and the resulting discrimination of minorities. He also argues that the contemporary rise of religion, religious nationalism from the multi-modernity perspective, and the rise of religious nationalism should not be seen as part of a transition to the western national, civic and secular identity formation, nor a reaction to the supremacy of the West. It should instead be considered "part of multiple modernisation processes in different world regions" (Spohn, 2003: 281).

Contrary to the modernisation paradigm, which presumes dissolution of religious and ethnic identities on behalf of modern, civic-secular national identities and replacement of religion by nationalism, the revival of ethnic and religious identities in post-Soviet, post-communist space and elsewhere demonstrates that such

identifications do not lose ground. Furthermore, the universalizing tenets of the modernisation were increasingly criticized by its opponents such as “sociology of religion,” according to which “religion ... remains a constitutive basis of national identity and nationalism” (Spohn, 2003: 269). As stated above, religion in the post-Soviet era has revived and become a remarkable phenomenon although the modernisation theory predicted the opposite. The discussion of nationalism types in Western Europe and Eastern European and post-Soviet countries demonstrates that nationalisms in these countries, in general terms, are distinguished from each other by ethnic and religious characteristics’ effect on the identity in the Eastern European and post-Soviet cases. However, the two types of nationalism have somewhat been reconciled in recent decades, and in almost every case, religion began to display its influence on the cultural and national identity. The next section elaborates a subtype of nationalism: religious nationalism.

### **2.2.2 Religious Nationalism**

The relation between nationalism and religion is discussed in the literature and Brubaker (2012) points to various relations between nationalism and religion. As in Hayes’ analysis, in Brubaker’s analysis, nationalism may be seen as a lay religion, or some particular religions embody specific forms of nationalism. Moreover, nationalism can be fused with a particular religion so that religion may be nationalized. In other words, religion is so intertwined with nationalism that the boundaries of the nation are drawn with a specific religion even though the religion is not limited to that specific nation and religion can become the main distinguishing feature of the nation. Finally, religion may breed an explicit type of nationalism, religious nationalism, which posits itself as an alternative to secular nationalism (Brubaker, 2012). Eastwood and Prevalakis (2010: 97-98) group major views regarding the relationship between religion and nationalism. This comprehensive grouping includes views varying from nationalism as a form of religion to those predicting the demise of religion, and from religious nationalism as a subtype of nationalism to nationalism that displaces religion. The relation between nationalism



and religion is ambiguous. Whether religion comprehensively affects nationalism or whether religion and religious identity are tools that elites use to mobilize the masses may be ambivalent. For some scholars, religion and established churches, such as those in the Balkans, were not the agents that preserved the national core but hindered nationalism (Stokes, 1979). For others, religion nurtures nationalism or is counted as a pillar of national identity (Hastings, 1997; Murphy, 1998), especially in non-Western cases. For instance, Kerr (1992: 19), argues that religion reinforces ethnic consciousness and national identity and claims that Balkan churches contribute to the preservation of national identity.<sup>42</sup>

Some authors like Juergensmeyer (1995, 1996), Keddie (1998, 1999), and Friedland (2001) mostly define religious nationalism principally in political terms, e.g. 'politicization of religion,' and from the angle of security-threat relationship, e.g. through terrorism, rather than identity or cultural terms. Juergensmeyer (2010: 271), defining religious nationalism as "the attempt to link religion to the idea of the nation state," claims that religion is becoming dominant even in developed countries and challenges the secular nationalism. Moreover, he portrays religious nationalists as individuals who combine their views of religion with their nation's destiny (Juergensmeyer, 1994: 6). These types of nationalists struggle for "new forms of national order based on religious values" (Juergensmeyer, 1995: 379). He defines two types of religious nationalism: 'ethnic' and 'ideological' religious nationalisms. The former regards religion as part of ethnic identity, and it conflates with people's destiny bound together by race, history and culture. He also indicates that "religion provides the identity that makes a community cohere and links it with a particular

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<sup>42</sup> Van der Veer probes religious nationalism in his work on Indian nationalism and argues that religious nationalism, according to which religious community overlaps with the nation, builds on previously constructed forms of religious identities (1994: 80), even though existence of such nationalism may be contested by the supporters of the Western discourse on modernity, which assumes a universal one-way street to modernity and secularisation. However, the Indian case is depicted as a case of rising "religious activism in politics" (Van der Veer, 1994: 12). Religious nationalism, or *communalism* as it is called in India, assumes common religion as the basis of group identity (1994: 22). In fact, Indian nationalism developed as a combination of religion, Hinduism, and national identity since *Hindutva* -Hinduness- refers to and combines both religious and national identities (Van der Veer, 1994: 1; Rieffer, 2003: 234).

place” (Juergensmeyer, 1996: 5). The second type of religious nationalism has ideological foundations based on religious beliefs and ideas, and the religious ideology adopted by the nationalists designs the state authority for the goals and ideals of these nationalists.<sup>43</sup>

Religious nationalism may also be defined as the antagonism of one particular group, which identifies its nationalism with a particular religion, towards another group (Keddie, 1998: 702). Based on the empirical data on religious nationalist (communalist) cases, Keddie (1998: 710-711) claims that communalist movements, a term she interchangeably uses in lieu of religious nationalism, generate hostility against other groups in an attempt to reinforce their communal groups and establish their control over the territory and the centres of power. Moreover, in most ethnic and religious nationalist context, an ‘other,’ ‘alien other,’ or ‘enemy’ is generated because threat from other nations and groups is perceived during the formation of religious identity. Barker (2009) indicates that, in Greek and Bulgarian religious nationalism, the main ‘other’ is the ‘Turk’ and the ‘Muslim.’ While in the Hindu case, it is the ‘Indian Muslim’ and after that the ‘Christian’ (Keddie, 1998: 705; 1999: 12,15; Rieffer, 2003: 234; Van der Veer, 1994). For the Jewish case, the ‘Arab’ and the ‘Muslim’ stand for the primary ‘other.’ Furthermore, Triandafyllidou (1998: 594, 609) suggests that the identity of a nation is shaped by the influence of internal and external ‘significant others,’ namely other nations or ethnic groups that are perceived to be threats to the nation, its purity, distinctiveness, authenticity, and independence. For instance, Ottoman and then the modern Turkey and Turks have been the foremost categories that pose a threat to Greek identity. Such groups as Bulgarians, Albanians, and modern Macedonians of Northern Macedonia are also considered significant others to the Greek nation. Moreover, in most cases of Eastern

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<sup>43</sup> Juergensmeyer (1996: 19) attributes the global increase of religious nationalism to the vacuum or political and social crisis that the world went through in the 1980s and 1990s. Instead of embracing foreign models of nationhood, namely liberal and socialist options, nations returned to their cultural repository. Furthermore, Keddie (1998: 699-700) links the rise of ‘religiopolitics’ to the global trends—the adverse sides of globalism which caused insecurity, inequality, and cultural homogenisation targeted on national identity.

Europe, nations boosted “strong negative stereotypes of the other nations,” which mostly adhered to different religions and which are conceived of as inimical to their independence (Borowik, 2007: 655). Therefore, religion served as a unifier agent of identity.

Religious nationalism develops in certain instances according to Rieffer (2003: 225), who describes the term as “fusion of nationalism and religion.” For instance, religious homogeneity in a given territory facilitates the emergence of religious nationalism as well as the territory’s sacred character. In case of religious heterogeneity in a given territory, i.e. when more than one religious group engage with others, the perception of threat from each other’s existence and identity (together with the hostility that is kindled between these groups) instigate religious nationalism. Furthermore, when a religious community is surrounded by distinct religious communities and perceives a threat from them, religious nationalism can emerge. Finally, according to Rieffer, the oppression of a religious community by the majority can also trigger the development of this type of nationalism (2003: 225-226). She, however, makes a distinction between (religious) nationalism, in which religion holds a central and essential position in the nationalist movements, and instrumental pious nationalism, in which religion holds a subsidiary or secondary role in the unification of a population. In the second type, religion is an auxiliary but useful source for nationalist movements and national leaders to gain legitimacy and unify the population. She cites seventeenth and eighteenth century Britain, Poland, Ireland, and Iran as examples of the former type, and Russia and Saddam Hussein-era Iraq as examples of the latter (2003: 224-231).

According to Barker (2009: 182), two fundamental factors, namely religious frontiers and threats, are necessary for a religious nationalism to arise in a country. He indicated that factors of threat and religious frontiers of Catholic-Protestant in Ireland, Catholic-Eastern Orthodox in Poland, and Eastern Orthodox-Muslim in Bulgaria and Greece shaped the national and religious identities of these peoples. For instance, since the Bulgarian nation perceived threat from Islam, an intense religious

identity developed among Bulgarians. In addition, Bulgarian identity was constructed in opposition to Turkish identity (Barker, 2009: 153). During the communist period, even though religion and the Church were suppressed, Orthodoxy remained an essential part of Bulgarian identity. In the post-communist era, with the end of a three quarter anti-religious policy, religious activities and the manifestation of Orthodox identity increased. Orthodoxy is also constitutionally recognized as a 'traditional religion' (Barker, 2009: 153-154).

In Barker's definition of religious nationalism, identity is in a central place. Religious nationalism is not a national movement that barely intersects with religion, nor is it personal adherence to a faith and observance of a particular faith or a form of state-church relation. Instead, it is how religion suffuses the national identity. Therefore, it is related with the extent to which religion is central in national identity (Barker, 2009: 13-15). Furthermore, differently from Rieffer, who suggests that religious nationalism arises in religiously homogenous instances, Barker asserts that homogeneity does not cause religious nationalism but religious nationalism culminates in homogeneity. In other words, religious nationalism leads to religious homogeneity, while religious heterogeneity in a given territory is likely to impede religious nationalism. Still, the interaction between them can be complex (Barker, 2009: 185).<sup>44</sup>

In religious nationalism, a religious institution, according to Roy (2013), needs to be identified with a state and a people. However, a close or strong link between them is not sufficient. In his reflection, religious nationalism necessarily includes the exclusion of other religions as well as peoples as a result of the embodiment of a religious institution with the people (Roy, 2013: 90).<sup>45</sup> Moreover, "the most explicit

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<sup>44</sup> Friedland (2001: 144), opting for the institutionalist approach to illuminate religious nationalism, emphasises that religious nationalism flourished in places where religion or religious authority has institutional authority and was not subordinated to the state. Accordingly, that is why this nationalism was observed in, say, Iran and India, but not in Japan, China or Korea.

<sup>45</sup> Mihelj (2007) suggests an alternative religious nationalism between secular nationalism, which presupposes decline of religion, and religious nationalism, which is critical to secular nationalism: modernist religious nationalism. Between two extremes it reflects the alliance between the secular state and religion or religious nationalism. Mihelj, challenging the conviction that secular nationalism is hostile to religious nationalism, argues that both types of nationalism can engage with the same nation

forms of religious nationalism are to be found in Christian Orthodoxy, where the identification between Church and people relies on a close link with the state” (Roy, 2013: 91). As he points out, there are historical roots of the close link between the church and state, which goes back to the Byzantine traditions. Furthermore, even though Eastern Orthodoxy is not ethnic in doctrinal terms, ethnic and national character of religion prevail as can be seen in Russian and other orthodoxies. This can be attributed to historical traditions like the autocephalous principle of Eastern churches (Roy, 2013: 91-92).<sup>46</sup>

In summary, this thesis extensively reviews the literature on nationalism, the main distinguishing feature of which is religion. It relates to religious nationalism to explain the peculiarities of nationalism in Bulgaria and Georgia. In this nationalism, religion determines the group identity and who are to be included and excluded based on faith, so national and religious identities are combined and inseparable. In other words, ethnic identity and religion of the majority are inseparable in Bulgaria and Georgia, and the privileged and special position of the established churches over other faiths as well as identification of the church with a people are accepted and supported. Therefore, it causes exclusion and discrimination of minorities, for the

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(2007: 279). Therefore, the suggested version of secular nationalism does not hinder the alliance between the state and religion, as religious nationalism linked to Protestantism is seen in many instances like Britain and Germany. Many scholars of sociology of religion accept that an enduring cooperation between religion and nationalism exists, as well as co-optation of religions and religious beliefs by secular states especially in cases of national crisis (Mihelj, 2007: 268-269).

<sup>46</sup> The strong bond between religion or church and state may currently be encountered in Eastern Orthodoxy. (The case of Greeks would be a relevant example. Although Patriarchate in Istanbul was led by Greeks, the newly established Greek state in the nineteenth century formed its national autocephalous church instead of submitting to the Patriarchate, which was under the influence of a distinct monarch and a state, the Ottoman.) However, in a broader perspective, it is actually a Mesopotamian tradition, in which rulers were inclined to have a national god or a creed for their subjects which was intended to prevent the external influences. Eventually, however, this ensures the identification of a particular, nationally or territorially established, religious authority, which has a distinctive vernacular with associated with a certain culture and people. In other words, “religion and nation coincide with each other” as Grosby (2005: 82) puts it, and “such a [territorial] religion sustains the nation, because the worship of such a god, as the ‘god of the land,’ unifies the land and its inhabitants into the culturally relatively uniform territorial community of the nation.” However, the relation between deity and the land has somewhat transformed from worshipping a common God, namely ‘god of the land’ (Grosby, 2002: 29-30, 39), to being adhered to a common national church or ‘the church of the land.’ Additionally, Ukraine’s endeavour to have its national church approved and create its own ‘church of the land’ may be seen a contemporary example of it.

religion of the majority defines the boundaries of the nation and those who do not adhere to the faith of the majority are excluded.

As presented in the introduction, a distinction is made among minorities, between those 'complete or significant others' such as Turks in Bulgaria and *Borchali* Turks/Azeris in Georgia and those 'less others' or 'not-exactly' Bulgarians or Georgians like Pomaks and Ajaris. As has been argued, although minorities face exclusion and religious nationalism generates others and aliens, the 'less other' minorities, namely minorities having more commonalities with the majority were reluctantly regarded as Bulgarians and Georgians, for religion defines the boundaries of the nation and they have not adhered to the faith of the majority. Relatedly, the concept of ethnodoxo, superimposing a group's ethnicity with its dominant religion, is further probed and the motives behind the differential treatment for Ajaris and Pomaks are explained. The following section discusses Karpov, Lisovskaya, and Barry's (2012) conceptualisation of ethnodoxo that when popular beliefs fuse ethnicity and faith of a group it invokes intolerance against members of the outgroups.

### **2.3 The Concept of Ethnodoxo**

Pomaks and Ajaris, as previously stated, are treated differently from other minorities by their respective countries because of these minorities' ambiguous state. The reason for this different treatment is mostly related to Eastern Orthodoxy's national character, which is conflating the faith with an ethnicity. National churches of Bulgaria and Georgia have come to be identified with Bulgarians and Georgians living under their jurisdiction, and at the same time peoples of these countries have come to be identified with Bulgarian and Georgian Orthodox Churches, in due course conflating Eastern Orthodoxy with Bulgarianhood and Georgianness. In other words, Bulgarian and Georgian Orthodox Churches transformed into the churches of their respective lands.

The Pomaks and Ajarians went through similar processes during the Ottoman era and faced similar ethno-religious nationalisms and rejection in the post-Ottoman era. The concept of ethnodoxo, (Karpov, Lisovskaya, and Barry, 2012), fusing a group's ethnicity with its dominant faith, may help understand the policies of Bulgaria and Georgia towards the minorities, with which they bear the closest resemblance. Despite their cultural closeness, these minorities were seen as 'apostates' rather than full members of the nation and would remain so unless they converted to Eastern Orthodoxy.

The identities of these minorities transformed as a result of state policies in Bulgaria and Georgia, and the concept of ethnodoxo's application in the case countries can be stimulating for this study. As Barry (2012: 34) argues, subsequent to the collapse of European communism in 1989 and 1991, new forms of identities, of which religion and ethnicity were a part, emerged, and so there is a point in applying the concept of ethnodoxo in such cases. Karpov, Lisovskaya, and Barry (2012: 644) define ethnodoxo as

a belief system that rigidly links a group's ethnic identity to its dominant religion and consequently tends to view other religions as potentially or actually harmful to the group's unity and well-being and, therefore, seeks protected and privileged status for the group's dominant faith.

They drew on the notions of social identity theory at the micro level of their theoretical framework to explain the emergence of "ethnoreligious identities" and their consolidation. They say, according to the social identity theory, "individuals categorize themselves with a social group" (Karpov, Lisovskaya, and Barry, 2012: 641). The group identity, in their case related to the ethnodoxo, consists of two blended identities: ethnic and religious identities. In other words, individuals "categorize" themselves into and identify with two social identities at the same time. As to the social identity theory, they explain how "social categorization" enhances group boundaries as well as "ingroup solidarity" therewithal enmity toward the outgroups (Karpov, Lisovskaya, and Barry, 2012: 642).

Karpov, Lisovskaya, and Barry explain six empirically observable characteristics of ethnodoxo, starting from what they call “presumption of inborn faithfulness” (2012: 642). It means a group’s identity is intertwined with a religion, so members of the same group should adhere to the same religion, which is seen as a sufficient prerequisite of belonging to the group. For instance, an ethnic Bulgarian or Georgian is supposed to be an Eastern Orthodox Christian, regardless of his/her actual commitment to the faith. If this Bulgarian or Georgian converts to another religion, he/she presumably faces exclusion from their compatriots and is not regarded as a ‘full’ member of the group. Karpov, Lisovskaya, and Barry call this second component of ethnodoxo as “exclusion of apostates” (2012: 642). By contrast, in case of a conversion of an outgroup member to the religion of the group of interest, which they define as “marginalization of converts,” the newcomer to the group is likely to be marginalized by their new fellows on the ground that he/she cannot be fully loyal to the group. Moreover, when the group accords “a sacred dimension” to the group identity, or when religion becomes “the sacred component of ethnic identity,” it attributes a kind of exceptionality and mission to the group which the authors term as “religious superiority” (Karpov, Lisovskaya, and Barry, 2012: 642-643). While all components one way or another aim at preserving the well-being and security of the group, the last two are directly in pursuit of these, which are called by the authors as “presumption of harm” and “privilege and protection seeking.” The former can be defined as group members’ perception of external threat from the ethnically and religiously distinct outsiders, and the latter as a quest for assurance of the group in response to the “presumption of harm” (Karpov, Lisovskaya, and Barry, 2012: 644). They finally gather these six characteristics around three themes: values of in-group belonging, exclusion and presumption of harm, and privilege and protection seeking (Karpov, Lisovskaya, and Barry, 2012: 645).



Based on their research on Russian population, Karpov, Lisovskaya, and Barry (2012) demonstrated that there is “widespread” ethnodoxy among ethnic Russians.<sup>47</sup> They also highlight the correlation between three themes of ethnodoxy and orientation of the respondents towards religious exclusion, prejudice, and intolerance towards those who fall outside the group (2012: 650, 652). Moreover, Barry (2019) explores in his article the relationship between ethnodoxy and xenophobia as well as intolerance as an aspect of xenophobia toward groups outside Russia and points out the positive association between ethnodoxy and xenophobia. Interestingly, religiosity or religious beliefs do not precipitate intolerance or xenophobia, yet the manipulation of “beliefs about religion” does (Karpov and Lisovskaya, 2008: 370; Barry, 2019: 233-234). In addition, Karpov and Lisovskaya (2008: 370-371) argue that ethnodoxy is one of the predictors of intolerance along with people’s beliefs about other religions and ethnic prejudice against ethnicities in Russia. According to them, ethnodoxy as a belief system “creates an explosive fusion of religious and ethnic identity and leads to intolerance” (Karpov and Lisovskaya, 2008: 370). Thus, the exclusion of religious minorities, Pomaks and Ajarians in Bulgaria and Georgia, can be related to the strong ethnodoxy, namely popular beliefs fusing Bulgarian and Georgian ethnicities with Eastern Orthodoxy and discriminating the ‘nonstandard’ groups in these countries. This also explains the inter-religious incidents between Georgians in Georgia between 2012 and 2016. In line with the arguments in this dissertation, i.e. ethno-religious nationalism causes intolerance towards minorities formerly Orthodox Christians or, as Karpov, Lisovskaya, and Barry (2012) would coin it, ‘apostates’ and the minorities deemed most similar to the majority suffer more from exclusion, so application of ethnodoxy to Bulgaria and Georgia and the two minorities may help further explore these cases.

As Karpov, Lisovskaya, and Barry (2012) point out, relevant cases in which ethnic identity and the dominant faith are entangled exist in other parts of Europe. The town

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<sup>47</sup> It seems ethnically or culturally non-Russian Orthodoxes, especially those forced to convert to Orthodoxy such as Tatars, were rarely regarded as ‘genuine’ Russians. As Roy points out, they were ‘foreign converts’ and ethnically and culturally ‘the other’ (2013:77).

of Koden in Eastern Poland is a good example in which Catholic and Orthodox Christianity meet. Joyce (2017) demonstrated in her research on Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians in Eastern Poland that religion and ethnicity were perceived as fused among the members of the two groups. Eastern Orthodox believers, who represent the disadvantaged side in the conversion 'process' as Joyce puts it, have deep concerns that conversions from Orthodoxy to Roman Catholicism, adoption of Catholic rituals, and training of the next generation in accordance with Catholicism endanger the Eastern Orthodox community. The converts to the new faith are positioned outside their kin, although they continue their interplay between both religious communities. From the Catholic side of the phenomenon, the converts have "failed to embrace their new faiths fully" (Joyce, 2017: 125). From the other side, once they convert, their relation with the Orthodox Church is interrupted even though they do not fully abandon Eastern Orthodoxy. The Eastern Orthodox converts or new Catholics in Eastern Poland are not necessarily 'marginalized' by their new community, yet they do not completely fit into either group (Joyce, 2017: 125). Moreover, they are positioned outside their kin and Eastern Orthodoxy, from which side they are probably considered as 'apostates.' As regards belief in the fusion of ethnicity and religion, the case of Koden is another example of the popular belief that change in faith also brings the shift in ethnic identity. It also provides a strong in-group belonging, some sort of marginalization and exclusion of converts by the respective sides.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Religious nationalism in India, for example, as argued by Van der Veer (1994: 28), equates the religious community with the nation and assumes a particular religion, Hinduism, as "a natural given" or "native religion" in India, consequently disregarding other religions and religious minorities as part of the Indian nation. He also emphasises that control over religious spaces in religious nationalism is of prime importance. The states' endeavour to control the religious centres is the characteristic of all religious nationalisms since they are the "foci of religious identity" (Van der Veer, 1994: 11). Hindu nationalism, similar to what Karpov, Lisovskaya, and Barry (2012) argue for the Russian case, "demands that the state be the instrument of the political will of its Hindu majority" (Van der Veer, 1994: 10). By demanding control over religious centres and state help for the Hindu majority, Hindu nationalism seeks 'privilege and protection' for Hindus against the groups who do not adhere to Hinduism and who are considered as hostile and dangerous for the majority (Keddie, 1998: 707). Religious nationalists seek preferential treatment from the state only for the group they endorsed and refuse to give any concession and favourable treatment for other groups or minorities. As seen in the period of religious pluralism with the demise of the Soviet Union (Agadjanian, 2001: 475), established religions are irritated because they lack sources and power to protect their religious domain against the newly imported or foreign religions or sects. Therefore, they sought an alliance with the state in pursuit

Karpov, Lisovskaya, and Barry argue that the link between ethnodoxy and nationalism can be differentiated on a case-by-case basis. That is to say, the superposition of the two depends on the context and may be empirically identifiable. For instance, “in countries with clearly dominant ethnoreligious groups ... ethnodoxy translates into strong ethnoreligious nationalism” as in Catholic Poland (Karpov, Lisovskaya, and Barry, 2012: 645). The cases in which “a dominant ethnoreligious group coexist with sizable ethnic minorities that practice different faiths” can be more problematic and contested in terms of “‘translation’ of ethnodoxy into ethnoreligious nationalism” as in Russia (2012: 645). Finally, in ethnoreligiously mixed cases such as Iraq, one can find “multiple ethnodoxies claiming their ‘fair share’ of the state protection.” Bulgaria and Georgia can be classified into the second type with respect to their sizable religious minorities, who profess distinct faiths from the majority. However, at the same time, it seems obvious that a dominant ethnoreligious Georgian Orthodox majority, a dominant and an all-powerful church, and an ethnoreligious nationalism exist in the country. Bulgarian case probably slightly differentiates from Georgia with its church, which struggled with the schism in the post-communist Bulgaria (Broun, 1993; 2000) and has relatively weaker religiosity and stronger laïcité, but functions within a clearly dominant ethnoreligious Bulgarian Orthodox majority nonetheless.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter first dealt with the literature on Pomaks and Ajarians and discussed whether religion or language is characteristic in Bulgarian and Georgian nationalisms. Moreover, having covered the types of nationalism in Europe, namely ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ nationalism, it placed a special emphasis on the difference of nationalism in Eastern Europe and post-Soviet space with regard to Western Europe. As discussed by scholars like Agadjanian, Janelidze, Zedania, and Merdjanova, who focused on post-Soviet, Georgian, and Eastern European cases, two conflicting approaches or perspectives, namely secular-civic and ethnic religious perspectives, compete to

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of help and support of the state and greater control and surveillance of the activities of non-traditional religions in the religious field (Curanovic, 2013).

influence the course of societies, modernity, and discourses on national identities in these regions. However, due to historical reasons, there has always been a strong connection between religions, religious institutions, and national identity in these regions. Nationalism in Eastern Europe and post-Soviet Eurasia was depicted or identified in accordance with this specificity, even though there is a variety of appellations in the literature describing nationalism in this geography such as 'ethnic', 'ethnonational' (Agadjanian, 2015; Coakley, 2002), 'religious' (Roy, 2013; Barker, 2009; Ivekovic, 1997; Janelidze, 2015, Zedania, 2011; Hoppenbrouwers, 2002), 'ethno-religious' (Sabanadze, 2010; Karpov, Lisovskaya and Barry, 2012), and 'secular-religious' (Merdjanova, 2013).

As previously stated, nationalism in Bulgaria and Georgia is identified as ethno-religious in this thesis. The major characteristics of this type of nationalism is that its ethnic and religious identities are regarded as intertwined and inseparable. Enhanced identification of the church, nation, and state entailing the autocephaly principle in Orthodoxy brings about the ethnic character of religion (Roy, 2013), or ethnicization of religion (Aydingün, 2013). Moreover, in most ethno-religious instances, the national identity is influenced by the threatening of 'others', and the perceived threat by groups shape ethno-religious identities. Furthermore, religion is not only perceived as faith or dogma, but it also represents culture and tradition (Roy, 2013; Metreveli, 2016; Mchedlov, 2005). The influence of religion over identity does not rest on the strength of faith or dogma, but as noted by Metreveli, religion's identification with culture and tradition makes it. Additionally, when religion penetrates to the community, it does so through tradition, culture, and history. Therefore, if one leaves behind the faith or the church, it means he/she leaves behind not only the faith itself or church, but the totality which refers to the cluster of culture, tradition, and ethnicity that merged with religion. Religion transcends itself as the dogma and theology, rendering itself an immutable part of the culture and tradition of an ethnic group. Finally, ethno-religious nationalism and ethnodoxo, being corroborating concepts of one another, are more likely to lead to intolerance,

exclusion, and discrimination against other communities and especially against those who are the most acculturated to the majority as argued in this thesis.

## CHAPTER 3

### TWO MINORITIES - TWO COUNTRIES

#### 3.1 Pomaks and Ajarians throughout Bulgarian and Georgian History

Bulgaria and Georgia are two states of the Black Sea littoral, on the western and eastern coasts, respectively. They are at the same time parts of two different mountain ranges, the Balkans and the Caucasus, which gave them distinct cultural characteristics, habits, and ways of life. While Bulgaria is divided by the mountain ranges of the Balkans to north and south, Georgia is split by an east-west range, which has had a deep impact on the country's political formations. The political centre of gravity shifted to the west in Bulgaria, while it stayed in the east in Georgia despite the existence of many principalities in most of its history. Throughout history, both were ruled by multiple hegemony who maintained uneven relations over time. On the eastern side of the sea, Georgia was caught up in the struggles between Persians and Romans, followed by those between the Persians and Ottomans and Russians, as a result of which Georgia was finally annexed. On the other side of the sea, Bulgaria had had austere relations with the Eastern Romans until its final subordination by the Ottomans in 1396. Then, it ceased to exist as a political entity until the treaty of Berlin in 1878, which resulted in the creation of the Bulgarian Principality.

Having migrated to Bulgaria from the east, the Bulgarians are not autochthonous in the Balkans, unlike the Georgians in the Caucasus. The territory of Bulgaria was first settled by Thracians, after which it was colonized by Greeks and then ruled by Romans, and was dominated by Eastern Rome from 395 onwards. The Goths, Huns,

Avars, Slavs, and Bulgars came to the region during the sixth and seventh centuries, followed by the Pechenegs and Cumans between the tenth and thirteenth centuries (Turan, 1998a: 15-16). The so-called proto-Bulgars arrived in the Danube region after the demise of their state in the north of Caspian Sea and the Caucasus (Karatay, 2010), and integrated with the local Slavs, who had arrived in the region prior to them. Their first state was formed in the Danube region in 681 by Asparukh Han (681-701),<sup>49</sup> and over the next 200 years, the Bulgars were absorbed by Slavs and came to accept Orthodox Christianity (Kayapınar, 2002a). The first Bulgarian king, who had adopted Christianity in 864, was Boris (Crampton, 1987: 2-3), but it was under the rule of his son Simeon (893-927) that Bulgaria became the dominant power in the Balkans (Miller, 1923b: 238) during a reign that was marked by a cultural Golden Age. However, this domination did not last long as the territory got divided into two - East and West Bulgaria. Bulgaria was invaded by Kievan Rus and was finally annexed by the Byzantine Empire, with Eastern Bulgaria falling first in 971 and the remaining part in 1018 (Miller, 1923b: 240-242). The second Bulgarian Kingdom was established by the Asen brothers in 1187 and would reach its zenith during the reign of John Asen II (1218-1241) (Kayapınar, 2002b).<sup>50</sup> He restored the Bulgarian Patriarchate, which had been reduced to an Archbishopric after the annexation of the country by the Greeks in 1018 (Miller, 1923b: 243; 1923a: 522-523); however, this state also declined as a result of domestic power struggles between Bulgarian feudals, *bolyars* and the Greeks, Serbs, Wallachians, Bulgarians, Hungarians, Russian, and Tatars on the Balkan peninsula. Finally, Bulgaria fell under the dependency of Serbia in 1330 (Miller, 1923a: 538), with three Bulgarian principalities emerging prior to the Turkish conquest of the country: Vidin, Tarnovo, and Dobrudja. The subordination of the Balkans to the Turks began after 1352, and these three principalities accepted Ottoman suzerainty in 1371 to remain incorporated into the Ottoman state until the end of the century (Turan, 1998a: 18; Crampton, 1987: 7).

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<sup>49</sup> The years in parentheses hereafter refers the dates of reign for the rulers.

<sup>50</sup> The second Bulgarian state was highly influenced by the Cuman presence in its formation and development, and Asen brothers are described to have Cuman origin (Kayapınar, 2002b).

Georgians are one of the autochthonous communities of the Caucasus. The Surami ranges of the Caucasus Mountains divide Georgia geographically into eastern and western regions, which partially explains the politically fragmented nature of the Georgian territory. The split geography encouraged the rise of multiple polities in Georgian-occupied territories. Most of the time, the country has been a buffer zone between empires, if not a war zone, with the Southern Caucasus being a battle ground for the empires to the east and the west of Georgia and the nomads who traversed the region. In history, the Kingdoms of Kolhida, Lazika/Egrisi, and Imereti were established in the west; the Kingdoms of Iberia, Kartli, and Kakheti were formed in the east, and Kartli was the core and the unifier of the country. Ajaria was part of Kolhida and, later, of Lazika and Egrisi, which included the current western and southwestern regions of Georgia such as Abkhazia, Ajaria, and Samtskhe (Gugushvili, 1936: 56-57). The region of Batumi might have temporarily been occupied by the Caliphate (Quelquejay, 2012), yet the western Georgia was not part of the Caliphate territory (Vacca, 2017: 59). It became part of the unified Georgian kingdom at the end of the tenth century and governed by Georgian Eristavis, after which it became part of the Georgian princedom Taoklardjeti in the ninth century. After the disintegration of Georgia, in the post-Golden Age period, Ajaria was governed by Gurian princess (Quelquejay, 2012).

Georgia was one of the first nations in the east to adopt Christianity, which occurred under the reign of King Mirian in the first half of the fourth century<sup>51</sup> and the influence of Eastern Roman/Greek Christianity. Georgians formed their national church, and over time seized autocephaly. After centuries of disintegration, Georgian polities were unified during the reign of David IV. The Golden Age of the country continued throughout the eleventh and thirteenth centuries until the Mongol occupation of the country. David IV (1089-1125), qualifying his title, *Aghmashenebeli* [the builder], rebuilt and restored Georgia by carrying out reforms (Meskhia, 1968:

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<sup>51</sup> The legend has it that during a hunting party, the day, all of a sudden, turns dark, and the King begs for help from the God of Nino from Cappadocia, proselytiser of Georgia, because he had yielded none from his pagan gods. After the God of Nino helps him, he and his household embrace Christianity, which becomes then the state religion in the country.



13). He first handled his challengers like lords, princes, and higher clergy who also fulfilled temporal authority, unified the country, and displayed its power to the neighboring foreign entities. After the reign of David IV, a repeated pattern is observed in the Georgian history: while nobles and other centrifugal forces strove to decentralise power, the royal power in the centre endeavoured to control and unify the country (Meskhia, 1968: 14).

Following the Mongol occupation as of the early fourteenth century, Georgia achieved political unity after a century, although it persisted half a century only until Timur entered the historical scene, which turned out to be devastating for the country (Meskhia, 1968: 25). New entities such as Kingdoms of Kartli, Kakheti, Imereti, and principality of Samtskhe emerged. In the final decades of the fifteenth century, Ottoman armies began to penetrate the southwestern part of Georgia and implemented mandate over Batumi, its surrounding region, Ajaria, and Akhaltsikhe (Samtskhe/*Saatabago*).

### **3.1.1 The Ottoman Period**

Upon its foundation, the Ottoman *beylik* (principality) enlarged rapidly in northwest Anatolia at the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of fourteenth century. Throughout the fourteenth century, Ottomans subjoined the lands of Byzantine in Anatolia and Thrace. First, the Ottoman suzerainty over the Bulgarian Princedoms was established, and then the princedoms were incorporated into the Ottoman state. The Ottomanization of Bulgaria accelerated after 1402 (İnalçik, 1986: 1303). The Muslim population moved out of Asia Minor through exiles and voluntary migrations to settle in a sedentary life in Bulgaria (Turan, 1998a: 19). In the meantime, the Ottoman administrative system was being established, and the country was divided into six *sanjaks* (district), with Sofia being appointed as the centre of *Rumeli*

*Beylerbeylik* (province). With the setting up of the *Timar* system,<sup>52</sup> the Balkan military class was attached to the Ottoman military apparatus.

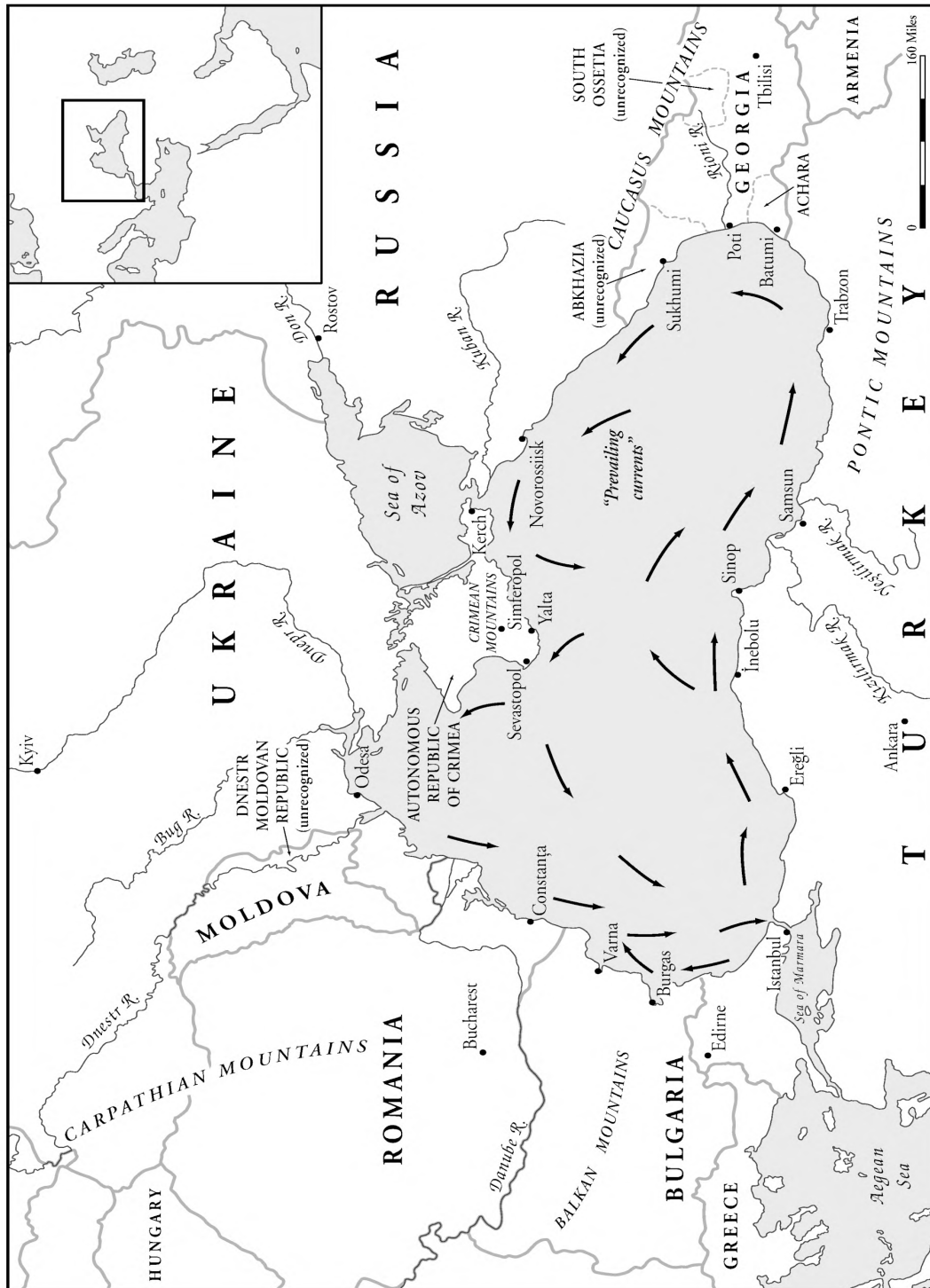
The Ottoman rule in southern Caucasus was established later on the Balkan Peninsula. The Ottoman Turks and western Georgians first encountered at the end of the fifteenth century, and over the following 100 years, the territory encompassing the contemporary Ajaria, Batumi, and the surrounding regions shifted continuously between the Ottomans and Georgian princedoms. After 1627, Batumi and the region became part of the Ottoman Empire (Quelquejay, 2012). In the meantime, Georgia and the southern Caucasus became a battleground and a frontier between Safavid Iran and Ottoman Turkey, although the Georgian kingdoms, unlike those in Bulgaria, endured, though under Ottoman or Persian suzerainty. A Georgian historian commented on this situation as follows: “On this side the Ottoman Turks; on that - the Kizilbashs were ravaging the country, and, between these two powerful states, the Georgians had to ply their swords, beating back the invaders” (Meskhia, 1968: 26).

The seventeenth century was described by some Soviet Georgian writers as “the most disastrous period in the Georgian history”; as a result of Shah Abbas’ campaigns of 1614 and 1619, the country was destroyed, and thousands of souls were either perished or were resettled in Iran (Lordkipanidze and Katchanava, 1983: 15; Meskhia, 1968: 27). The Ottoman or Persian suzerainty over Georgia had remained until the Russian Tsardom dismissed the East Georgian (Kartli) Royal family, the Bagratians, in 1801. Georgia’s status in the Ottoman Empire was different from that witnessed in the territories between the Danube and Euphrates (İnalçık, 2014: 15), and as long as the eastern Georgian kingdoms followed Ottoman suzerainty and paid their taxes, they enjoyed a certain authority.

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<sup>52</sup> Timar is a land system in which land-holding rights are granted to the military class. Timar holders, timariots, were responsible for providing the cavalry to the army as well as for the collection of taxes.

Map 2: Black Sea (King, 2005: xvii).



During the times of Ottoman rule over the Balkans and the Caucasus, indigenous Muslim communities emerged, as well as traditional Muslim peoples like Turks, Arabs and Persians. The Islamisation of the Balkans and the Caucasus occurred through

colonisation and the adoption of Islam by the local individuals or groups, e.g., Bosnians, Albanians, and Bulgarian/Slavic-speaking Pomaks and Torbeshes in the Balkans (Todorova, 1998), and Cherkeses, Ajarians and Hemshins in the Caucasus. Those who converted to Islam in groups retained their languages, which applied to the Pomaks and Ajarians, while those who adopted Islam individually were assimilated into the dominant Muslim community and adopted the Turkish language (Todorova, 2004: 141-142; Todorova, 1996: 64; Zhelyazkova, 2002: 227). As Kiel (2013: 388) argued, Pomaks, Slavic-speaking Muslims, retained their language due to “the very long drawn out process of their conversion” and also the scarcity of Turks around them to linguistically Turkify them.

### **3.1.1.1 Islamisation of Pomaks and Ajarians**

The Islamisation of the natives on the Balkan Peninsula started after the conquest of the peninsula by Ottoman Turks, and Slavic and/or Bulgarian speaking Muslims began to emerge in Bulgaria in the fourteenth century, although the term ‘Pomak’ did not appear in records until the nineteenth century. The conversion of Pomaks is not well documented (Bajraktarević and Popovic, 2012; Todorova, 1998: 474), and there is a lack of authentic sources on the Islamisation of the Rhodopes (Kiel, 2013: 324). However, it is known that, following the Ottoman annexation of the Bulgarian principalities in the late fourteenth century, the conversion of the upper classes, nobility, and Bogomils began (Inalcik, 1954: 114-115; Bajraktarević, 1995: 320), and it continued into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Inalcik, 1986: 1304).

There are two major arguments on the nature of the Islamisation of the Balkans: colonisation of the Balkans by Turcoman Muslims and forced conversion of the Balkan peoples including in the form of *devshirme*.<sup>53</sup> The former was mostly supported by the Turkish scholars, whereas the latter, by the national Balkan

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<sup>53</sup> *Devshirme* was a system in which Christian boys from the Christian subjects of the empire were collected and placed with Turkish families to spend some time with them and adapt to Turkish culture and Islam. They were, then, submitted to the service in janissary corps, in Palace, and the administration (Ménage, 2012).

historiographies (Antov, 2016: 36-40). However, in contrast to the early accounts of native and communist Balkan historians, contemporary experts on Balkan history generally claim that Islamisation was not a compulsory and brutal process. Indeed, they describe the conversion of the Balkan Christians to Islam as a relatively smooth transition rather than a rapid proselytising effort backed up by the state (Eminov, 1987: 284-286, 289; Radushev, 2008; Kiel, 2013; Antov, 2016: 46-47).<sup>54</sup> Gözler (1999: 1418, 1430), whose work was based on *tahrir defterleri* [Ottoman tax registers], argues that Islamisation of Lovech Pomaks, for instance, has been a gradual process extending over a century, which refutes the Bulgarian narrative of forced conversion. The conversion which extended over centuries, was mostly stimulated and encouraged, rather than pressed. For instance, the integration of the pre-Ottoman Balkan upper classes into the Ottoman system took place through the *timar* system (Inalcik, 1954: 114-115), in which the Ottoman rulers allowed them to maintain their status in the new *status quo* rather than alienating them. This Islamisation of the upper strata spread gradually to the lower classes (Zhelyazkova, 2002; Anagnostou, 2005: 67-68; Filipovic, 1978: 308-309), and the same occurred in South Caucasus among the Georgian nobles (Uludağ, 2016). The Christian nobles realized the benefits and stability brought by the Ottoman land policy and the *timar* holdings designated to them, which eased their Islamisation and allowed them to rise further in the Ottoman state apparatus. For Karpát (1992: 29), the relatively smooth transition to Ottoman Turkish rule in the Balkans may be attributed to social, political, and cultural reasons. For instance, the feudal peasants were introduced to a new land regime that brought about the demise of the feudal land system and the burden of the forced labour for their lords. Instead, they were required to pay *ispendje* tax, or poll tax.

In addition to the discussions regarding voluntary and forced Islamisation, historians also discuss the motives behind conversion of Christians in South-eastern Europe and South Caucasus. The superficiality of Islamisation and/or crypto-Christianity among the converts in the first place are also elaborated in the literature (Skendi, 1967;

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<sup>54</sup> However, some scholars refer to exceptional forced conversions in some isolated cases (Bieber, 2000: 21-22; Minkov, 2012).

Sanikidze and Walker, 2004: 7; Manning, 2012: 148-149). Some propose economic reasons for conversion such as avoiding the tax burden on *reaya* or *rayah* (non-Muslims) and gaining worldly benefits (Skendi, 1967; Apostolov, 1996: 727; Zhelyazkova, 2002: 243; Minkov, 2004: 10). Radushev (2008: 9), who basically draws on Ottoman archives and registers, disagrees with the local historiographies which depict Islamisation of Balkan Christians as a forced and rapid phenomenon. For him, it was a process which was underpinned by some subsequent social and economic factors. Radushev considers the conversion more like a social phenomenon than religious. He refers to the economic factors and asserts that non-Muslims' being obliged to pay higher amounts of taxes than Muslims is the prime reason for conversion of Balkan Christians to Islam (2008: 15, 19). Antov (2016: 51) indicates that worsening economic conditions also played their role in acceleration of the conversion especially among mountainous populations as those of Rhodopes. However, based on the Ottoman registers, Kiel argues that the economic argument on the Islamisation "has to be taken with great reserves" (2013: 337) because, as settlement in Chepino and its villages demonstrate, while one village converted to Islam, the other did not although they were under the same conditions and authority. Kiel points to the gradual and voluntary nature of conversion, which occurred in two and a half centuries in this settlement, emphasizing that it was not rapid and state-interfered (2013: 340).

Sugar focuses on 'folk Islam' and its commonalities with the folk culture and religion in the Balkan region in addition to *dervishes* (members of Sufi fraternity), who were masters of fitting local customs on the frontier (1996: 52-53). Pertaining to the early mass conversions of Balkan peoples to Islam, Sugar insists that the closeness between folk varieties of Christianity and Islam, rather than economic reasons or heretics' endeavour (Bogomils and Paulicians) to become the masters of their former oppressors, better explains the conversion phenomenon. For him, the conversion process was an easy transition from one folk form of religion to another, like passing over "a similar but more secure folk version of Islam" (1996: 54). Based on the archival data, he argues that a mass conversion heavily took place between 1489 and

1530 in urban centres, where Bogomils were outnumbered by others (1996: 54). Sugar also added that Bogomils were not the spearheads of conversion process despite adopting Islam (1996: 54).

Stavrianos (2000 [1958]: 106) states that a number of factors including local circumstances, cultural assimilation between the Muslims and Christians, escape from *devshirme*, and taxes for *reaya* contributed to the conversion of the Balkan peoples during the Ottoman period. For instance, in Bosnia, Bogomilism, and in Crete, the tolerance of the Ottoman rule overshadowing the Venetians contributed to Islamisation. Stavrianos asserts that despite the “various disabilities and discriminations” and “arbitrary exactions and occasional violence” Orthodox Christians experienced under the Ottoman rule, the situation of Orthodox people in the Balkans was better than the religious minorities in Europe (2000 [1958]: 105-106). He further states that “the Balkan Christians were never subjected to systematic and sustained proselytism. They never experienced the persecution that Moslems and the Jews suffered in Spain” (2000 [1958]: 107). Minkov (2004: 108-109; 2012) also discusses the causes and stages of Islamisation from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries in the Balkans, as well as the concerns for the preservation of privileges, religious syncretism, and Bogomilism.

Bogomilism triggered the formation of religious factions, and opponent and proponent groups in the territory of Bulgaria. Some believe this eased the Turkish conquest of Bulgaria (Miller, 1923b: 238). A number of Bulgarian writers argue that the ones who embraced Islam in Bulgaria were mostly Bogomils and other heretics like Paulicians,<sup>55</sup> who were Catholic Bulgarians (Raichevsky, 2004). Although how and to what extent Paulicians influenced Bogomils is ambiguous, as Vryonis stated, it is certain that they played some role (1971: 63), for the remnants of Paulicians were transplanted to Thrace. Appellations of the groups in Anatolia and the Balkans

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<sup>55</sup> Perkowski (1994: 104) comments that “The Bulgarian Paulicians are not direct descendants of the earlier and primarily Armenian Paulicians of pre-Bogomil times. They are rather the surviving residue amalgam of earlier Paulician, Massalian, Bogomil and other Balkan heretical Christian sects.”

resemble remarkably, e.g., *Phundagiagitai* [carriers of a sack or purse] and Torbesh (the Turkish word *torba*, bag). Referring to a monk in Istanbul, Vryonis stated sectaries in tenth and eleventh centuries were called either as *Phundagiagitai* or Bogomil in Phrygia, in Anatolia (1971: 61-62). Skendi (1967: 234) also contends that one of the first groups who converted to Islam in Bulgaria was the religious sects of the Bogomils and Paulicians, who were long suppressed and alienated by the church, state, and the majority of Bulgarians, and “the Pomaks—as the Islamised Bogomils are generally called—” who embraced Islam either right after the conquest or in time.

Whilst historically Balkan Muslims’ Islamisation has been increasingly associated with Turks and the Ottoman state, the interviews in this study revealed some interviewees believe that Pomaks already had adopted Islam when Ottoman Turks arrived in the Rhodopes and Balkans. This view is based on the Muslim tombstones, which supposedly belonged to the pre-Ottoman period. One interviewee, for example, stated the following:

Prior to the Turks, Ottomans came to Bulgaria, there were Muslims in Rhodopes. Recently some tombstones were found in some villages. This shows that before Ottomans arrived in [Bulgaria], Islam had already been there and a group of Pomaks were Muslims. When Ottomans came, they [Pomaks] supported the Ottoman state because their religion was same.<sup>56</sup>

In her research, Myuhtar-May also refers to this claim and to the supporters of it among Pomaks thanks to the local Pomak historians and scholars (2014: 107).<sup>57</sup> Cambazov also comments on the historical background of Arab-Bulgarian relations, which go back to the eighth century. According to him, Dorsunski, a local writer, takes, without any concrete archival or any other historical evidence, the Islamisation of the Rhodopes further back to the period of Arab-Byzantine wars in the eighth century and afterwards (Cambazov, 2013a: 43, 64). This assertion of Pomak

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<sup>56</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion, Sofia, 11 September 2018.

<sup>57</sup> The hypothesis that Pomaks’ Islamisation dates further back to pre-Ottoman period may be quite widespread among the community, for some other field research also points out to this (Bozok and Yükselsin; 2016: 423).



interviewees may be interpreted as a counter-argument of the claim about Pomaks' forced conversion by Turks. This implicitly means that Pomaks already embraced Islam and, when the Turks came, they helped them.

The presence of Islam in the southern Caucasus goes back to the seventh century. However, Islamisation of Georgians extensively took place after the Ottoman conquest of the region in the post-sixteenth century, especially after Batumi and the adjacent territories permanently became a part of the Ottoman Empire in the seventeenth century (Quelquejaj, 2012). However, for some academic sources, intensive conversion of Georgians took place in the nineteenth century (Sanikidze and Walker, 2004).

Ajarians' Islamisation, like Pomaks' in the Rhodopes, is also poorly documented. Similar to the Balkans, nobility in Ajaria led, and lower echelons of Ajarian society followed and accepted the new creed (Aydingün, Köksal, and Kahraman, 2019: 293). Conversion of the nobility was inspired by such economic and political advantages as the willingness to maintain the already existing political careers and land, acquire new ones, and pay lower taxes (Pelkmans, 2002: 254). According to Ottoman sources, the Ottoman rule resorted to various incentives. For example, Georgian elites and rulers were given gifts and privileges, and were granted the use of lands and villages (Yıldıztaş, 2012). Some members of the ruling family of *Saatabago* (Samtskhe), which cooperated with the Ottoman Empire in its campaigns in the region since 1479, adopted Islam in 1561-1562 (Kırzioğlu, 1998: 45-46). Manuchehr (Mustafa in his Muslim name), son of Dedis Imedi, the queen of Samtskhe, became the governor of *Childir Beylerbeylik* in 1579.<sup>58</sup> Many Georgian nobles together with their subjects in the southwest Georgia adopted Islam and were given timariots (Gümüş, 2000: 142-143). In fact, the Ottoman Empire pursued a policy of approximation of local Georgian

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<sup>58</sup> It is argued by some Turkish scholars that ruling family of *Saatabago* (Atabeg, Turkish in origin, means the tutor of Turkish princes) were the descendants of Kipchak (a Turkic nomadic group also known as Cuman and Polovtsi) soldiers who were brought by King David IV and his successors in Georgia for helping in their struggles against Seljuk Turks. With the passage of time they went over to Orthodox Christianity (Kırzioğlu, 1998: 85-86; Zeyrek, 2001: 127-128, 133-134).

lords to Ottoman rule by keeping them in office (Aydın, 1998: 83). After 1550, the ruler of Ajaria, Bejan, recognised the Ottoman sovereignty; in return, his right to govern was approved by the empire. In 1564, he was re-assigned after he converted to Islam and received the name *Mehmed* (Aydın, 1998: 293; Shashikadze, 2002: 1043-1044). Newly converted families started sending their children to religious schools in Turkey, resulting in a pro-Turkish orientation especially among the clerical elite (Sanikidze and Walker, 2004: 7).

Similar to the case of conversion of Slavic-speaking Muslims in the Balkans, two views exist about Islamisation of Ajarians, revolving around whether it was a forceful or voluntary process which extended over a couple of centuries. According to the already existing narrative in Georgia regarding Islamisation of Georgians, which has been developed during the Soviet Union, Islam was grounded in Ajaria and the surrounding regions as a result of forceful conversions during Ottoman period (Aydingün, Köksal, and Kahraman, 2019: 305). Moreover, one of the Georgian interviewees, a historian, argued that Islamisation of Ajarians was accelerated by Turkey in the nineteenth century as a precaution against the expansion of Russian Empire to its eastern borders at the South Caucasus. For him, Turkey resorted to such economic methods as introducing uneven taxes based on faith and granting land for converts to encourage Islamisation of the local people.<sup>59</sup>

Nevertheless, some contemporary researchers describe Islamisation as a voluntary and gradual process which continued over a few centuries (Meiering-Mikadze in Pelkmans, 2002: 254). According to Uludağ (2016), a descendant of Georgian *muhajirs*,<sup>60</sup> an Ajarian belief is that Islamisation took place upon a royal invitation in

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with a Georgian/Ajarian historian at the Department of History, Archeology and Ethnology at the Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University and Ajaria Archives Administration, Batumi, 14 August 2018.

<sup>60</sup> *Muhajir* is the person who performs the migration, *hijra*. Up to modern times, *hijra* is conceived as in-migration from non-Islamic to Islamic lands and becomes a religious duty if individuals suffer or feel they will suffer.

the form of letter (*nâme*) sent to local lords.<sup>61</sup> Uludağ also states that the dissemination of Islam in Ajaria took several centuries, but only in the eighteenth century did Ajaria become a Muslim settlement. However, this does not mean that the situation in Ajaria had always been peaceable. Especially when the central state authority was weakened in the nineteenth century, violence against the rights, property, and offspring of Georgians increased. For instance, when Georgian *aznavurs* (nobles), Turkish soldiers, governors, and such external forces as Abkhazians tyrannized over local Muslim and Christian Georgians, the Sublime Porte (the government of Ottoman state) ordered the border governors and local lords to take measures against these tyrants and looters (Yıldıztaş, 2012: 55, 61, 103, 119, 163). The Sublime Porte also banned enslaving of children of Georgian subjects and ordered protection of the rights of *reaya*, the non-Muslim Georgian subjects (2012: 73, 125).

As Kiel argues, the conversion of a part of indigenous people in Bulgaria to Islam “is still shrouded in mystery” (2013: 323). This is even more applicable to the conversion of Georgian Muslims in southwest Georgia. Actually, the more mysterious it is, the more fabricated myths we encounter. The conversion was a forceful undertaking for the national historiographies of both countries. In Bulgaria, the authenticity of the sources that underpinned the narrative of forceful Islamisation of the Rhodopes was highly questionable (Zhelyazkova, 2002: 262-264; Kiel, 2013: 323-325) as they were also supported by the communist historiography (Markova, 1981; Gandev, 1987: 165; Gandev in Zhelyazkova, 2002: 229-230). These fabricated sources depicted burnt villages, towns, churches, tortured and massacred people and families, and raped pregnant women since they refused Islamisation (Cambazov, 2013a: 67-70). In Georgia, it has been generated by the Soviet era historiography and promoted by the church since the 1980s. People who have something to say about the conversion of Ajarians, ordinary or the educated, all narrate the same miserable stories about

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<sup>61</sup> The same narrative, Islamisation through *nâme*, was shared with the author during fieldwork in Nasakirali, Guria, by a Meskhetian Turk who settled to the region before the Soviet Union collapsed (Interview with a group of Meskhetian Turks, Nasakirali (Georgia), 27 October 2015).

executions over the bridges and the scenes of bloody rivers that resulted from resistance to conversion.<sup>62</sup> The same narrative was voiced by the Georgian scholars as mentioned by Zeyrek (2001: 147-148). As an interviewee asserted, not all Georgian Muslims agree on the narratives which they know from the teachings in schools: “[they say] Ottomans beheaded our grandfathers, there was bloodshed. They tell lots of crap in official history.... ‘if you do not become Muslim, I cut off your head’ type of nonsense.”<sup>63</sup> Another Ajarian especially mentions the scenes of bloody rivers as follows:

They recount very horrible stories. [They tell] Ottomans made people Muslim by force with sword. It is full of tale. No real historians agree on this.... There is an old arch bridge from twelfth century over Ajarian water [Ajaristskali]. They put a so-called cross or icon on the bridge and [forced people to] spit on it. Whoever spat, they released him. Whoever disobeyed, he was beheaded to the river, which turned to red for this reason. These are fabrication.<sup>64</sup>

The contemporary phenomenon of conversion of Ajarians to Orthodox Christianity, which has generated two distinctive and opposing narratives as Aydingün, Köksal, and Kahraman (2019) explain, is conceived of as a voluntary and genuine return to Christianity by the Church. However, non-converting Muslims regarded it as a pragmatic response to proselytization, which took place under pressure.

### **3.1.2 Nineteenth Century: National Awakening Processes of Bulgaria and Georgia**

#### **3.1.2.1 Independence of Bulgaria**

The nineteenth century was such an age of nationalism that Ottoman Empire, as any other empire, could not exempt from its influences. Accordingly, national minorities in the Balkans, starting with the Greeks, began to fight to get control of their destiny.

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<sup>62</sup> Interview with a Georgian/Ajarian scholar at the Niko Berdzenishvili Institute at the Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi, 20 August 2018; Interview with a Georgian Muslim, Akhaltsikhe, 23 August 2018; Interview with a Muslim Ajarian woman shop employee, Batumi, 20 August 2018.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with a Muslim Ajarian chairman of an NGO, Batumi, 15 August 2018.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with an Ajarian Businessman/Translator, Batumi, 15 August 2018.

Bulgarians, whose revival process and independence lagged behind the other Balkan nations, were one of the last nations to get their independence due to a number of factors such as geographical proximity to the centre, thus to the surveillance and control of Sublime Porte. The other factors included the double domination of the Ottoman political and Greek cultural and ecclesiastical control, educational backwardness and the mass illiteracy of the population, absence of trading links with West, lack of direct contact with the European states and a central institution like church around which people could unite (Jelavich, 1983: 335; Stavrianos, 1963: 57; Palmer, 1970). However, Stavrianos argues that mass illiteracy of the Bulgarian population prevented them from Hellenization unlike the educated Bulgarians, who were mostly Hellenized. He further asserts that “if illiteracy saved the Bulgarians from the Greeks, religion saved them from the Turks,” for religion functioned as a barrier between them (2000 [1958]: 368).

Bulgarian historiography starts the initial steps of the national revival of Bulgarian people with Paissii of Hilendarski (1722-1773), a monk in Mount Athos, and his 1762-year book *Slavo-Bulgarian History*, in which he reminded Bulgarians of their glorious past and language, told them not to be ashamed of being a Bulgarian, and invited them to prevent Hellenization and to oppose the defamations of Greeks and Serbs against Bulgarians at the time (İnalçık, 2017 [1943]: 20). Another religious figure was Sofroni, who also strove with the Greek clergy; he endeavoured to arouse Bulgarians in sermons and writings (İnalçık, 2017 [1943]: 21). However, the major progress took place with the initiatives of a different class.

As the Bulgarian history shows when a developing merchant class get into alliance with the ideologically equipped intellectuals, they achieve the national revival. The former brings the capital, the latter the mind. National awakening of Bulgarians began in the nineteenth century by the efforts of the national-minded middle-class traders, artisans, and intellectuals. The Bulgarian traders’ class emerged thanks to the increasing trade between Ottoman Balkans and Europe. Following the Greek revolt in 1820s and the fadeaway of the Greek merchants, Bulgarian traders and

colonies boosted their size and enjoyed the market of the empire (Jelavich, 1983: 338). As McCarthy (2001: 40) contended, Christian merchant class was the “natural conduit of nationalist ideas into the Ottoman domain.” As they spoke European languages and had commercial networks with Europe, they acted as intermediary on the trade between Europe and the Ottoman Empire. They encountered European systems, ideologies, and political philosophies (2001: 40). Bulgarian émigré settlers like Lyuben Karavelov (1834-1879), Hristo Botev (1848-1876), Stefan Stambulov (1854-1895), and Marin Drinov (1838-1906) were influenced by Europeans and Russians in Bulgarian settlements or colonies in Bucharest, Odessa and Kharkov outside the Ottoman territory. Being impressed by what they encountered in Europe, the newly emerged merchant class endeavoured to implement them in their native land and contributed the intellectual development in the home land, for example, by supporting intellectual property written in native language and encouraging education abroad (Stavrianos, 1963: 16-17). As a result, the richer Bulgarians sent their children to Romania, Russia, and other foreign countries to be educated. Such developments also spread the nationalistic and liberation feelings in Balkans as well as Bulgaria (Barkley, 1877: xvii).

The rise of national consciousness in Bulgaria involved a cultural revival, raising interest in the glorious past, history, national folklore, songs and so on. In the first half of the nineteenth century people increasingly showed interest in education and reading books in vernacular as well as translations from other languages (Jelavich, 1983: 337). The first European-type Bulgarian school, *Aprilov* High School (Kılıç, 1989: 15), was established in Gabrovo in 1835 with the help of merchants in Bucharest and Odessa and the initiatives of Vasil E. Aprilov (1789-1847), a son of a Bulgarian merchant settled in Moscow. *Aprilov* high school served as a model for other schools, where the medium of education was Bulgarian, and the number of such schools throughout Bulgaria exceeded 50 in ten years (İnalçık, 2017 [1943]: 22-23). The Greek-Bulgarian schools where Bulgarians learned Greek gradually embraced the Bulgarian medium of instruction. These schools mediated spread of nationalist views in the Balkans among the Slavic peoples including Bulgarians (Aydın, 1993: 123, 125).

Bulgarians, being politically under the Ottoman rule and cultural, ecclesiastical, and linguistic ascendancy of Greeks, firstly, struggled to differentiate themselves from Greeks and stop Hellenization by developing the native literary language and create a national church by achieving independence from the Patriarchate in Istanbul (Skendi, 1980: 33; Turan, 1994: 1101). Once Bulgarians established their autonomous church in 1870, they concentrated on the political independence from the Ottoman Empire. After 1453, the Bulgarian Church was subordinated to the Greek dominated Patriarchate in Istanbul. Bulgarians were under the influence of the Patriarchate, and the Patriarch was the head of the Orthodox *millet* in the empire. Accordingly, the Greek language, culture, and clergy held sway over the Bulgarian people in the centuries to come. For instance, the upper clergy, who had judicial and administrative powers in many other fields in addition to the matters of faith, was Greek, so the church liturgy was conducted in Greek as Bulgarian was banned (Skendi, 1980: 33, 195-196). Moreover, Bulgarian church schools were shut down, even a library that belonged to Bulgarian patriarchs was burned (İnalçık, 2017 [1943]: 18-19). This brought about the Hellenization of certain elements of Bulgarian society such as the notables and merchants.

In 1870, Bulgarian autonomous church/exarchate was established by a *firman* of the Sultan. Its jurisdiction included Varna, Plovdiv, and the Balkan Mountains (Jelavich, 1983: 344). It became “the power-house of Bulgarian national sentiment, serving the patriotic cause as the bishops and clergy of Greece had done half a century before” (Palmer, 1970: 82). Within the following eight years, a series of uprisings was organised by the Bulgarian revolutionaries, and the April Uprising of 1876 held the most important place in the history of Bulgaria. Rather than siding with the insurgent Bulgarians in the events, Pomaks, led by such Pomak beys as Ahmed Aga of Tamrash and Ahmed Aga of Barutin, fulfilled some roles and helped the state authorities crush them in some localities in the Rhodopes (Lory, 1990: 185-193; Myuhtar-May, 2014: 77-79). Hence, Pomaks along with Turks, were associated with deeds and atrocities during the events (Zafer, 2014: 360), and the notables were demonized in the

Bulgarian literature. After the 1877-1878 war, the Bulgarian Principality was established in 1878 by the Treaty of Berlin.

### **3.1.2.2 National Awakening of Georgia under Tsarist Russia**

Georgian rulers considered Russia as a protector against the two Muslim empires in the Caucasus and accepted the Russian protectorate with the Georgievsk Treaty signed in 1783, yet it could not escape the fate of losing its own administration and the thousand-year-old rule of Georgian royal family in Eastern Georgia in 1801. Moreover, in a decade, Georgian Orthodox Church was subordinated to the synod of the Russian Church, which promoted Russian language in churches in Georgia while Georgian followed a reverse conduct (Abashidze, 2006: 52). It was not until more than a century later prior to the formation of independent Georgian republic in 1918 that the Georgian Orthodox Church restored its autocephaly, and emancipation from the Russian Orthodox Church was only accepted in 1943.<sup>65</sup>

As in the case of Bulgarian and many other national revivals in the nineteenth century, the development of a Georgian nation was the work of the elites, “who first revived interest in the national language and historical past and later mobilized popular sentiment toward a reconceived national whole” (Suny, 1989: 122-123). Similar to Bulgarian awakeners or enlighteners, the emerging Georgian nationalist-minded intellectuals received their education outside Georgia, mostly in Russia, where they were introduced to the European revolutionary and liberal ideas. As Lang argues, influenced by Russian radicals, the emerging intelligentsia of Georgia became critical of Tsarist policies and the miserable situation of the Georgian serfdom at the time (1962: 99-100). Some Georgians, influenced by the Decembrists of Russia,

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<sup>65</sup> Even before they inaugurated their national states, Bulgaria and Georgia endeavoured to create their autonomous church structures unbound from the Patriarchate in Istanbul and Moscow, respectively. Many medieval and contemporary examples illustrate that having and creating a national church is an important characteristic of Orthodox nations as having a national church remarks the independence of a polity and peculiarity of a nation.



attempted to overthrow the Russian rule in Georgia, but it doomed to fail because of the intervention of authorities in 1832 (Salia, 1983: 369-371).<sup>66</sup>

The first generation of Georgian intelligentsia was comprised of writers and poets from aristocratic as well as other social backgrounds. With the expansion of schools and improvement of education in Georgia in the second half of the nineteenth century, Georgians increasingly continued their education in Russian universities. Those who went to the north to Russia for education and returned to Georgia are called *tergdaleulni* (literary, those who had drunk from the river Terek- located at the border with Russia-) or Georgians of the sixties (Suny, 1989: 125-126). Russia provided Georgians with education opportunities in the Russian universities to employ them in Georgia, yet they returned from Russia as nationalists.<sup>67</sup> The generation of the sixties such as Ilia Chavchavadze (1837-1907), Akaki Tsereteli (1840-1915), Giorgi Tsereteli (1842-1900), Niko Nikoladze (1843-1928), Iakop Gogebashvili (1840-1912), and Rafael Eristavi (1824-1901) gathered around the newspapers like *Tsiskari* (Dawn), *Sakartvelos Moambe* (Georgian messenger), *Droeba* (Time) in 1866, and the magazine *Iveria* (Iberia/Georgia in Ancient Greek) in 1877, and endeavoured to awaken people and develop national consciousness (Salia, 1983: 381-382, 400; Abashidze, 2006: 60). They mostly followed a moderate way, different than the following generation, and concentrated on culture, education, journalism, and literature (Suny, 1989: 127). In 1879, the Society for the Spreading of Literacy among Georgians was formed. Teachers like Gogebashvili, who studied in Kiev University, struggled to spread education among Georgians and help the revival of the national language and literature. His book, *Deda Ena* [Mother Language], an introduction to the Georgian for children, became quite popular upon its publication in 1876 (Lang, 1962: 111).

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<sup>66</sup> In the following decades, the discontent of Georgians towards Tsarist Russia's policies caused some revolts in Guria, Mingrelia and Tbilisi respectively in 1840, 1857, and 1865 (Salia, 1983: 373-374, 378-379).

<sup>67</sup> Interview with a Georgian historian, Oxford (the United Kingdom), 12 November 2018.

As part of Tsarist Russia, Georgian people, peasantry, and the serfs shared the same severe conditions of those in Russia proper and showed their discontent through a series of revolts in 1857, 1862, 1863, and 1864 throughout Georgia (Lang, 1962: 99). They had their supporters within intelligentsia, most of whom were from aristocratic families. The life of peasantry was depicted in such ground-breaking works as Daniel Chonkadze's (1830-1860) *Surami Castle* and Rafael Eristavi's *The Suppliant to his Judge* (Lang, 1962: 100). Other Georgian intellectuals who passed over the Terek river also wrote about the social themes of their ages in the journals of *Tsiskari* and *Sakartvelo Moambe* (Lang, 1962: 100-101). According to Wardrop (1888: 151), Chavchavadze, a prominent figure among the Georgian intelligentsia of his age, and his works which dealt with the contemporary problems of Georgian society as part of Russia, e.g., miserable conditions of peasants, their toilers, and idle nobles, were effective in awakening the Georgian people. The early Chavchavadze in 1860 coined *mamuli* (fatherland), *ena* (language) and *sartsmunoeba* (faith) as three treasures that Georgians inherited from the past, which became the famous formula summarizing the Georgian nationhood. Even though he used it in a different context and did not elaborate on it afterwards, it became the slogan of the Georgian nationalism that emerged in the late 1980s as Nodia (2009: 88) argues. Chavchavadze considered faith and church as substantial elements of Georgian consciousness (Alasania, 2006: 128), and emphasized this in one of his texts on the King David IV published in the magazine *Iveria* in 1888: "The Georgian church who has always been a faithful protector of our nation has never forgotten the glory of the nation" (cited in Razmadze, 2012: 55). In addition, as contended by Metreveli (2019: 910), "religion was an agency of nation-building" for Chavchavadze and he "through his work fused the concepts of nation and religion in order to further translate this fusion into nationalist claims for independence."

Subsequent to Ajaria's incorporation into Georgia in 1878, Georgian intellectuals sought ways of incorporating Muslim Ajarians into the Georgian nationhood and tried to use the common points Christian Georgians shared with Muslim Georgians like language, cultural traits and habits (Khalvashi and Batiasvili, 2011: 8) when Ajarians

had nothing but religious identity (Bubulashvili, 2006: 168). With the gradual unification of Mingrelia (1857), Svaneti (1858), Abkhazia (1864), and finally Ajaria (1878) with Georgia proper under Russian rule, Chavchavadze modified his trinity by announcing the unity of history as a more genuine unifier or creator of a group sense for different Georgian groups whose tongues and religious affiliations were not similar (Nodia, 2009: 91).

Generation of sixties gradually was divided into fractions, one of which was 'late *tergdaleulni*' including Ilia Chavchavadze and Akaki Tsereteli, whose ideas focused on the unification of Georgians regardless of their social and ideological background (Salia, 1983: 401-402). They pursued a moderate approach, suggesting traditional harmony among Georgian people (among nobility and peasantry) and rejected the idea of antagonism between classes, which was supported by the emerging group of leftists in Georgia (Suny, 1989: 133). Moreover, on the language issue, they defended the use of Georgian vernacular in the literature, the language of the ordinary Georgians or peasants which was regarded as true Georgian (Suny, 1989: 129).

The second generation of Georgian intelligentsia, *meore dasi*, was more radical and energetic in their efforts and liberal in their solutions to the problems of Georgian society (Suny, 1989: 131-132). Georgians like Sergei Meskhi (1845-1883) and Giorgi Tsereteli, editors of *Droeba*, were questioning aristocracy and Orthodoxy unlike the previous generation (Rayfield, 2012: 303). However, neither group of Georgian nationalists demanded independence from Russia due to the insecure situation in the region, where Georgia was historically encircled by two Muslim states. In other words, they needed a kind of security shield. Therefore, they opted for cultural autonomy in Russia,<sup>68</sup> where Georgian language, culture, and traditions were respected (Rayfield, 2012: 303).

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with a Georgian historian, Oxford (the United Kingdom), 12 November 2018.

Wardrop (1888: 159-160) stated in his work on Georgia that Georgian language increasingly prevailed over other dialects in the country, which also stemmed from the growth of the literature and periodicals. Whilst it was suppressed for some time, Georgian language was taught in schools, and spread of literacy and education among Georgian peasants was supported by Georgian intellectuals. These efforts created and developed a national feeling which overcame the older tribal affiliations as well as controversies. As Suny (1989: 114) argues, until the end of the nineteenth century, the sense of national identity for many Georgians had been the national identity replacing regional, religious adherences and other medieval loyalties.

Russia, according to Salia (1983: 397), implemented a policy of Russification in Georgia by restricting printing books, newspapers, and journals in Georgian in the second half of the nineteenth century. After 1871, the Georgian language which was taught in schools together with Russian downgraded and became optional, while Latin-Greek was mandatory. In the following year, Georgian was forbidden in the Seminary, where Georgian clergy was educated (Lang, 1962: 108-109). In the last decade of the nineteenth century, the use of Georgian language in schools, even in primary schools, was severely restricted, so education was mostly conducted in Russian (Salia, 1983: 402). The oppressive regime of the tsar Alexander III (1881-1894), Russians' nationalist policies, and their attitudes which were treating others as secondary in the periphery created resentment and anti-Russian feelings.

While Bulgarians were under the Greek influence in cultural, religious, and linguistic matters, and under Turkish rule politically, Georgians were under the influence of the Russians in all aspects since 1801. Due to the colonisation of Georgia by non-Georgian elements of the Russian Empire such as Armenians, Germans, Greeks, and Russians (sectarians like Molokans, Dukhobors, and others) starting from the early nineteenth century (Salia, 1983: 372; Abashidze, 2006: 52), Georgia's ethnic and religious picture became more varied. In addition, after the emancipation of serfs in 1861 and construction of roads, communication lines, telegraph and railways, Georgians migrated to the urban centres, where an urban class of Georgians emerged in the

second half of the century. Thus, Georgians' contact with other ethnicities dramatically drew, so did their stress on national identity (Suny, 1989: 144).

In the cities, Georgians interacted with Russians and especially Armenians, who economically dominated the Georgian urban centres like Tbilisi, generated an urban bourgeoisie as they were entrepreneurs, and were engaged in trade and other economic activities (Suny, 1989: 114-115). Since the positions in the administration was staffed by Russians, and the commerce, industry, guilds and trade by Armenians, Georgians stuffed working class (Suny, 1989: 116-117).<sup>69</sup> The working class found its ideological supporters from Georgian intellectuals, who were influenced by Marxism. These young Georgian intellectuals, who were called as the third generation, *mesame dasi*, of the Georgian intelligentsia after 1894, began to affiliate themselves with Marxism by the last decade of the century. They did not belong to the established urban intelligentsia, but were coming from the periphery, mostly from western Georgian regions such as Guria (Suny, 1989: 156). Accordingly, western Georgian cities were bestowed by both Georgian workers in cities and Marxists such as Noe Zhordania and Pilipe Makharadze (Forsyth, 2013: 303). These Georgian Marxists, namely the third generation of the Georgian intelligentsia, mostly sided with the Menshevik fraction of the Russian social democracy in 1905. They were eventually achieved the temporary revival of Georgian statehood after 1917.

South Caucasus was a battlefield between Russians, Turks, Georgians, Germans, and Armenians during the World War I (WWI). After the war, following an unsuccessful attempt at unifying South Caucasians under the name of Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic in early 1918, Georgians established an independent state on May 26, 1918, first of its kind after 1801 and also the first experiment of statehood in the twentieth century. However, it lasted only three years, literally 1028 days (Kobakhidze, Silakadze, and Vacharadze, 2016: 5). Just after the first constitution of Democratic Georgia was adopted by Georgian Parliament in Batumi on 21 February

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<sup>69</sup> Ethnic Georgians were minority in Tbilisi at the end of the century and had not become majority until 1960s (Altman, 2015: 68-69).

1921 (Kobakhidze, Silakadze, and Vacharadze, 2016: 41; Aleksidze, 2018: 137), Tbilisi was captured by the Red Army. As a result, Georgia fell into the hands of Bolsheviks, and the Democratic Georgian government fled to Europe.

As regards why Bulgaria achieved its independence while Georgia did not during the age of nationalism and national revivals, it could be argued that Bulgarian national liberation movement had a supporter while her Georgian equivalent did not. Bulgarians had Tsarist Russia as a retreat from Ottoman rule, whereas Georgia had Russia as its own oppressor. Put differently, while Russia was a supporter of Bulgaria on its cause to independence, it was a hindrance for an independent Georgia. Moreover, international conjuncture and the geographical location of Georgia, surrounded by stronger neighbours in South Caucasus, also had prevented Georgians from taking serious steps towards a national state until the Russian revolution took place. Finally, unlike the Bulgarian case, there was no Bulgarian equivalent of the Georgian merchant class, which backed the Georgian national revival because of the social and economic peculiarities of Russian Georgia. Armenians mostly seized the trade and manufacture activity in the urban Georgia, and Georgians, as stated, filled the emerging working class. Additionally, initiators of the short-lasting Georgian statehood were associated with Marxist Georgian intelligentsia or Mensheviks.

### **3.1.3 The 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish War and the Migrations of Pomaks and Ajarians**

The Russian Empire declared war to Ottoman Turkey in June 1877, and until the early of 1878, Russian armies advanced to Yeşilköy/San Stefano, the outskirts of Istanbul, where the Turkish side declared armistice. The war game was played on either side of the Black Sea, and Bulgarians and Georgians combatted alongside the Tsars' soldiers against Sultan's army while Muslim Ajarians and Pomaks fought against Russians (Turan, 2011; Özel, 2010: 487-488). The war was decisive for the destiny of Bulgarians, who after the war established their autonomous principality between the Danube and the Balkan ranges in the Treaty of Berlin. However, the bulk of Pomaks still remained outside the territory of the Bulgarian principality, and they only

became the subjects of Bulgaria after the Balkan Wars. It was also decisive for Muslims in Ajaria, which were subjugated by Russia, resulting in the unification of Georgia proper. Georgians welcomed the unification of Muslim Ajarians with Georgia. Chavchavadze's words on this development summarises the feelings of Georgians at the time: "Berlin Treaty provided us one benefit, it returned to us our brothers, our blood and meat, heart of our old knowledge, education, our old Georgia."<sup>70</sup> However, Russian rule in Ajaria was not received by Muslims as enthusiastically, nor were the Muslim Pomaks in Bulgaria. Hundreds of thousands of Turks and Muslims of the Balkans and the Caucasus along with Ajarians and Pomaks flocked to Turkey. A number of reasons may be cited for the migrations of Muslim populations from the Balkans and the Caucasus. In the Balkans, the leading reason was the war-time atrocities of Russians, Cossacks, and Bulgarians against Muslim population.<sup>71</sup> As Turan (1998a: 120-135) argued, Russians firstly followed an extermination policy against Muslims and Turks by the hands of Cossack and Bulgarian armed bands to create a country for Bulgarians after the war. Secondly, Muslims in Bulgaria were forced to leave their lands (1998a: 135). In fact, migration policy of non-Bulgarians has been pursued to create a unified Bulgarian nation since independence (Eminov, 2007: 2). Since Pomaks were identified with Turks and Muslims until 1920s and 1930s, their migration was also encouraged (Eminov, 2007: 9; Brunnbauer, 2001: 42). For instance, Zelengora (2017a: 215-216) gives the specific example of Orehovo, a mixed village in *nahiye* (subdistrict) of Rupchoz, and argues that, because of intermittent pressures and discriminations, they left their village and migrated to Turkey between 1879 and 1925.<sup>72</sup> None had been remained in the village by 1925, except for the Pomaks who converted to Orthodoxy, and he holds local Bulgarians responsible for Pomaks' migrations as they urged them to migrate to take possession of their properties and estates after they fled (2017a: 217).

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<sup>70</sup> It is from the exhibitions of the Adjara Museum regarding the 1977-1878 War (Author's visit to the Adjara Museum, Batumi, 19 August 2018).

<sup>71</sup> *Mufti of Zağra*, Stara Zagora, Hüseyin Raci (Efendi, 2007), an eyewitness to the tragedies of war in 1877-78 and migrations, describes the atrocities of Russians and Bulgarians against Muslims in his memoirs.

<sup>72</sup> For more on Pomaks' migrations after the Balkan Wars, see (Zelengora, 2014).

In the Caucasus, Russians' policy of Muslim-free border zone with Turkey forced Muslims to leave behind their home in Ajaria. In return, Armenians from Anatolia were settled in the border region. The non-Islamic character of the new rules, after the war, might have also had a role in peoples' leave from their lands in both countries. Both in Bulgaria and Georgia, the churches attempted to convert Muslims, Pomaks, Ajarians, and Turks (Turan, 1998a: 189-191; Gnolidze-Swanson, 2003). In Bulgaria, forced conversions were intensely applied during the Balkan wars (Halaçoğlu, 1995: 42; Aĝanoĝlu, 2001: 84-86).

### **3.1.3.1 Migrations of Pomaks to Turkey**

The war with Russia in 1877-1878 triggered a wave of Muslim migration from Bulgaria as well as throughout the Balkans. In addition to Turks, Tatars and Circassians, and Slavic-speaking Muslims including Pomaks commenced a long journey to Turkey. Cognizant of the atrocities of Russians, Cossacks, and Bulgarian armed bands against Muslims in the Southern Balkans, inhabitants of the Rhodopes launched an armed resistance against Russians and Bulgarians after the San Stefano Treaty left the region to Bulgaria in March 1878. The fighting between Pomaks and Russians took place in different places of northern Rhodopes, namely in districts between Plovdiv and Tatar Pazardzhik (Turan, 2011: 515-516). In May 1878, the inhabitants of the Rhodopes sent a delegation to the representatives of Great Powers in Istanbul for the investigation of the situation in the Rhodopes (Turan, 2011: 516). The mountaineers were still in arm and resisting (2011: 531-532) during the congress of Berlin, which negated the provisions of the San Stefano and gave the southern Rhodopes to Ottoman rule and the north Rhodopes to the Eastern Rumelia.<sup>73</sup> However, some 17 villages in *nahiye* of Rupchoz in Plovdiv and four villages from Tatar Pazardzhik, today's Smolyan and Plovdiv, did not subordinate, but they, led by some Pomak notables, Ahmed Aga of Tamrash being the prominent ones, revolted against the Eastern Rumelian government, to which these villages finally were given by the

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<sup>73</sup> Eastern Rumelia was established by the Treaty of Berlin as an autonomous province covering Plovdiv and the surrounding area between Rhodopes, Balkan range and the Black Sea.



Treaty of Berlin in 1878 (Lory, 1990: 193-196). They even declared their government, the so-called Tamrash Republic, which survived until 1886, when the new border between Bulgarian Principality and the Ottoman Empire was demarcated after the autonomous Eastern Rumelia had been subjugated by Bulgarian Principality in 1885 (Turan, 1998a: 163). The 'republic' ceased to exist, and the insurgent villages remained a part of the Ottoman Empire until 1912.

Map 3: Boundaries after the Treaty of Berlin, 1878 (McCarthy, 2011: 430).



Muslims who stayed after the 1877-1878 war became subjects of Bulgaria, and they had to adapt to a new rule, a Christian state, and cultural environment. They were required to pay a new land tax, which increased their economic burden. The landscape of the towns began to change with the destruction of Muslims architecture or alteration of their functions to stores, museums and so on. For instance, a number of mosques were blown up in Sofia and only one left untouched (Turan, 1998a: 194-197; Crampton, 2007: 426-428) as recounted by an interviewee:

The real destruction began after the war of '93 [the war of 1877-1878]. The Russian General sees 'the forest of minarets,'<sup>74</sup> one on the top of another. The

<sup>74</sup> The Russian contemporaries, soldiers after the war, described the Ottoman city of Sofia as 'forest of minarets' (Turan, 1998a: 194), for the mosques covered the landscape.

general asks whether there was no rainy and thunder stormy nights in Sofia. In a rainy night, seventeen mosques were blasted.<sup>75</sup>

As argued by Turan (1998a: 194-201), whose research is based on British and Ottoman/Turkish archives, throughout Bulgaria, many Ottoman buildings, mosques, tekkes [dervish lodges], dargahs [dervish convents], cemeteries were either destroyed or converted into depots, hotels, barracks, public houses, police stations, pleasure grounds and so on in accordance to the newly adopted city plans in the Bulgarian Principality. They were some of the factors that exacerbated these people's alienation and accelerated their migration.

When the autonomous Bulgarian Principality was established after the Treaty of Berlin, few Pomaks were part of this entity. Besides, some Pomaks who were under the principality migrated from Danube region and Rhodopes to Turkey after 1880. Indeed, as they were seen as Turks, in the period between the wars of 1877-78 and the Balkan Wars in 1912-1913, Pomaks' migrations were encouraged so that their real estate property and lands would be transferred to Bulgarians (Zelengora, 2017b: 18-22). After the unification with Eastern Rumelia in 1885, some Pomaks migrated southward (Eren, 1964: 575; Bajraktarević and Popovic, 2012). According to the Bulgarian statistics, Pomaks' migration from Rhodopes and the Balkan Mountains took place uninterrupted during the next two decades and between 1893 and 1902, as a result of which almost five thousand Pomaks left their homelands (Zelengora, 2017b: 28-33).

The Balkan Wars triggered another wave of Muslim migration in 1913 and 1914 (Crampton, 2007: 430). Pomaks' migration took place in two waves. The first one was at the very beginning of the war, during which, for instance, Pomaks from Tamrash,<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> The interviewee also gave the number of mosques in Sofia as 53, together with masjids the total number of places of worship were 133 (Interview with a Turkish writer, Sofia, 14 September 2018).

<sup>76</sup> In the first Balkan war, the village of Tamrash was entirely destroyed by the Bulgarian army and looted by Bulgarian population in the vicinity (Lory, 1990: 200-201).

Barutin,<sup>77</sup> and Lovech were obliged to leave their lands. After the forced conversion campaign, many Pomaks also headed to Turkey because of the intrusions and massacres of Bulgarian bands and assimilation policy (Zelengora, 2017b: 34-38).

During the interim period between the two world wars, many Pomaks migrated from Bulgaria to Turkey in 1927, 1933, and 1935 although many returned as they were disappointed by the life in Turkey (Crampton, 2007: 432). However, as Crampton (2007: 432) put it “[m]any Pomaks felt that the Bulgarian, Christian state discriminated against them, and they were also frequently exploited economically by local merchants, shopkeepers, landowners, and employers.” According to the local testimonies in the Rhodopes, near the Greek border, sporadic flees from the region to Greece and Turkey took place in the interim period (Zelengora, 2017b: 70-71). In addition, following the establishment of *Drujba Rodina* (Homeland Fraternity) society (1937-1944) and advancement of Bulgarianisation policy after 1937 more migrations were performed under the guise of family visits to Turkey (2017b: 75-76).

Even though Pomaks’ migration was not allowed by the new regime after 1944, many Pomaks, especially in border regions with Greece, intended to seek refuge in Greece and Turkey, and some Pomak armed bands, called as Bands of Mountaineers, which existed between 1944-1956, helped this illegal border cross (Zelengora, 2017b: 80-83). For instance, according to a testimony of an interviewee, around 27 families migrated to Turkey through Greece from a 35-family village in the Bulgarian-Greece border between 1945 and 1947.<sup>78</sup> Some 5000 Pomaks, who had been resettled to Northern Bulgaria at the end of 1940s as part of the measures against illegal border cross and armed Pomak bands, also joined the first big migration of Turks during the communist period in 1951 by disguising themselves as Turks (2017b: 83-85). According to Zelengora (2017b: 85-86), at the time of trouble years of 1960s and 1970s, during which the Bulgarian state launched forced name-changing campaigns,

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<sup>77</sup> Barutin is a recurring name during the forced name changes in 1970s.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with an elderly Pomak in a village (V) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018.

Pomaks' will to migrate increased. However, few people succeeded to cross the border.

As a result of the domestic protests by Muslims in different towns, international pressure and bilateral agreement between Turkey and Bulgaria in the last years of the communist rule in Bulgaria between 1984 and 1989, passports began to be issued for those who wanted to leave Bulgaria after May 1989.<sup>79</sup> Hundreds of thousands of Turks and Pomaks applied for passports. However, most of the Pomaks were denied the right to have passports, though not stated explicitly, on the grounds that they were not Turks. Nevertheless, according to the official statistics, out of 370,000 Pomaks who applied for immigration only 125,000 were given documents to go abroad, and 111,336 Pomaks left the country starting from the early June 1989 (Myuhtar-May, 2014: 137-138). Finally, Zelengora (2017b: 86-87) contends that many Pomaks, the victims of the revival process, especially those from settlements like Kornitsa, Brezhnitsa, and Ribново (from Blagoevgrad Province) settled in Turkey in 1990s.

Bulgarian academia of distinct periods has produced similar definitions on the motives behind the migrations of Pomaks since the nineteenth century: fanaticism of Pomaks and propaganda of Turkey. These arguments could be observed among Georgians as well regarding Ajaris' flee after 1878. The real reasons, however, according to Zelengora (2017b: 14), should be sought out in the ethnocentric approach that existed in Bulgaria, according to which Pomaks were regarded as nothing but as Turks and/or Muslim and as a mean of enrichment by the greedy first capitalist generations, who wanted to get rid of them and seize their property at giveaway prices.

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<sup>79</sup> Prior to the process of 'Great Excursion' in 1989, some were notified and dispatched from Bulgaria immediately after the notification contrary to their wish.

### 3.1.3.2 *Muhajiroba*: Migration of Chveneburi

Here is Ajaria, too. The roads are lined with those who are emigrating. They leave their homes, their lands, and those places, where they grew up in their adolescence, which are precious to them; they flee, God knows where? (Bavreli in 1879 cited in Manning, 2012: 109).

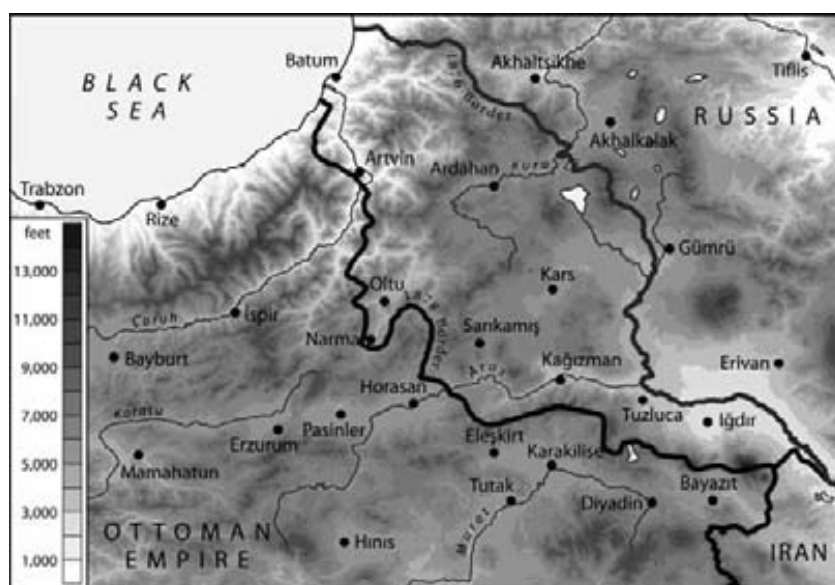
Similar to the case in the Rhodopes, Ajarians also reacted against the rumours that the Batumi region would be handed over to Russians by the Treaty of San Stefano. The local population of three cities in the Eastern Anatolia including Batumi wished to stay under the Ottoman rule since they resisted the Russian forces in the war, during which Batumi was not occupied by Russia (Tanrıverdi, 2011: 454, Özel, 2010: 488).<sup>80</sup> They sent a petition to the Congress of Berlin and demanded that Batumi not be delivered to Russians (İpek, 1991: 104). Nonetheless, with the Treaty of Berlin, Batumi was left to the Russian Empire together with the Eastern Anatolian cities of Kars and Ardahan. By the congress, the locals' desire to migrate to Turkey had already been intense. When the Russians entered Batumi on 7 September 1878, 5,500 people had already migrated and thousands of them, who had poured into Batumi, were waiting to migrate because of the lack of marine transportation between Batumi and Trabzon (İpek, 1991: 111). Ottoman authorities and Muslim elites in Batumi encouraged and organized people to migrate (Özel, 2010: 488). Muslim migration from the Batumi region including Kobuleti, Livana, Machaheli, and Gonye did not take place at once but extended over years (Kodaman and İpek: 1992: 115; Yıldız, 2006: 59). People sold their real estates and gathered around the Batumi port waiting for their ships that would take them to Anatolia (Özel, 2010: 479). The treaty between Turkey and Russia in 1879, according to which residents in the territories newly ceded to Russia could sell their properties and leave Russia for the coming three years (Phillipson, 2008: 404), provided those who wished to leave Russian Batumi with an opportunity. Muslim migrants, *muhajirs*, from Batumi mostly used the sea route and settled along the coastline of Black Sea, particularly Trabzon, Samsun, Ordu, Sinop,

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<sup>80</sup> However, some of my scholar-interviewees in Ajaria argued that Ajarians wished to be part of Georgia and, thus, were sided with Russians against the Ottomans during this war. However, historical facts and the migration after the war tell a different story.

Düzce, and Istanbul (Tanrıverdi, 2011: 461-462; Özel, 2010: 481; Arslan, 2014; Yıldız, 2006: 59). Within five-years after the war, 150,000 to 200,000 people are estimated to have migrated from Batumi to Anatolia (Özel, 2010: 479, 493-494). However, migration of Ajarians continued until 1890, when Russia began to prevent people from leaving Batumi (Arslan, 2014: 45). After that, people tried to pass the border illegally to go to Anatolia. For instance, Russian soldiers shot a group of Muslims who were boarding a ship in Batumi in an attempt to emigrate illegally (Meyer, 2007: 20).

Map 4: 1876 and 1878 Borders in Caucasus (McCarty, 2011: 441).



Due to the adaptation problems, disputes with the locals, and lack of food, some *muhajirs* demanded to return to their homeland (Özel, 2010: 467-468, 472-473), and some have managed to do so (Badem, 2014). However, Russian authorities in the first stage hindered their return by threatening to exile them in Siberia (Tanrıverdi, 2011: 473). Armenians who were on the other side of the border in Eastern Anatolia were encouraged to settle in Batumi. In some Black Sea towns, *muhajirs'* arrival was not welcomed; it destabilized the local order and caused tensions between them and the locals (Özel, 2010: 463, 480-481). Their arrival in Anatolian towns also triggered out-migration of non-Muslims to the Caucasus, where they were resettled by Russia (Özel, 2010: 481). According to Pelkmans (2003: 41), few years later, with the pressure of Georgian intellectuals, who opposed to the migration of Ajarians, more

than half of *muhajirs* returned to their homeland after they were given certain guarantees by Russian authorities.

According to *Trabzon Vilayet Salnamesi* (Yearbook of Trabzon Province) (1870-1874), the male population of *sanjak* of Lazistan (Batumi) was 71,681 before the war in 1877-1878 (Tanriverdi, 2011: 457). Özel (2010: 494) estimates the total population to be between 200,000 and 250,000. After the *muhajirs'* migration to Anatolia and the colonisation of the region by Christians (mostly by Armenians and Russians), the population of Batumi oblast reached 183, 100 in 1918 (Tanriverdi, 2011: 456); İpek indicates that the Muslim population in Batumi was 161,000 in 1914 (2006: 38). Migration from Ajaria continued during WWI and afterwards. In the early 1930, probably related with the collectivisations, a group of 1745 people migrated to Turkey (Arslan, 2014: 59, 61).

Migration of Ajarian Muslims subsequent to the war in 1877-78 was called as *muhajiroba* in the Georgian history, and Ajarian Muslims in Turkey were named as *chveneburi* (ours).<sup>81</sup> *Muhajiroba* was a traumatic process for Georgians, who considered Ajaria as the cradle of Georgian spirituality and Muslim Ajarians as brothers. *Muhajiroba*, migration of Ajarians to Turkey, came as quite a shock to the contemporary Georgian intellectuals then, for they had welcomed the integration of Ajaria with Georgia. Chavchavadze described Ajaria's importance for the nation as follows: "Our past life first bloomed in here, our life used to run as a stream in here, the power of our spiritual life hoisted its famous flag in here, this is almost the cradle of our spiritual predominance and this tends to be the grave of our thy past humanity" (Aroshidze, Phutkaradze, Shalikava, and Surguladze, 2013: 106).<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> According to Kasap (2010: 25), while Christians called Georgians who embraced Islam as Tatar, Muslims called themselves as Chveneburi, which was used in place of Georgian or Kartvel.

<sup>82</sup> According to the writer of *A Short History of the Georgian Church*, P. Ioselian (1866: 8-10), Apostle Andrew came to Caucasus through the Black Sea coast, and "he first preached the Gospel in the town of Didatchara" [a village in upper Ajaria] and continued his mission in other Georgian settlements. Having based on this myth, Georgian Orthodox Church created a discourse in which Ajaria was depicted as a foothold and a gateway for Christianity. Based on this discourse, at the time of conversions of

Moreover, as Pelkmans (2003: 40-41) stated in his thesis on Ajaria, the reasons for the migration were broadly debated in the press by the intelligentsia. According to them, the reasons were about the religious differences and the non-Islamic character of the new rule, which were propagated by local clergy, some economic and political factors associated with the local notables who lost their rights after the war, and the Ottoman policy of incitement for migration.

Post-socialist Georgian historiography mostly held the policies of Tsarist Russia and the Ottoman Empire responsible for the migration of Georgian Muslims. Migration of Muslims from the Turkish borders meant clearing of the 'unreliable' elements from near the border by Russia and on the vacant land for the colonisation of Slavic and Christian groups in south western Georgia. For Ottoman Turkey, it meant populating the non-habitable territories or regions evacuated by non-Muslims. The local elites also struggled for the migration for their own interests (Aroshidze, Phutkaradze, Shalikava, and Surguladze, 2013: 96-98; Aroshidze, Phutkaradze, Shalikava, and Surguladze, 2015: 48; 50-51). Tsarist Russian authorities were concerned with the existence of a Muslim minority in its border with Turkey, since they were perceived as Turks rather than Georgians because of their religious adherence (Aroshidze, Phutkaradze, Shalikava, and Surguladze, 2015: 48, 56). Therefore, Zeyrek (1999: 39) argues that Russian authorities, rather than the Ottomans, stimulated Muslim migration, as is depicted in the following verses produced by them.

Mind the words of ulama,  
Why are you waiting, migrate!  
Duty it is for believers  
Why are you waiting, migrate!<sup>83</sup>

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Ajarians to Orthodoxy in the early 1990s, Ilia II puts that 'not Georgia should convert Ajaria to Christianity, but Ajaria us [Georgia]' (Nikiforova, 2012).

<sup>83</sup> Dinle ulema sözünü  
Ne durursun hicret eyle  
Mümin olanlara farzıdır  
Ne durusun hicret eyle (Zeyrek, 1999: 39) (Translated to English by the author).



Both sides seemed to have various motives for moving the local population, and therefore encouraged them to migrate using religious factors and geostrategic concerns. According to the local narrative, which is not unified and affected by the national historical narrative, *muhajiroba* was the policy of Russia and Turkey. As a local scholar argued, whilst many Ajarians supported Russia in the war and wished to be part of Georgia, Russia pursued a policy of migration and Muslim-free Ajaria afterwards.<sup>84</sup> It was propagated at the time that Russians were approaching and would change people's faith. This obviously affected people, causing many to leave their settlements and migrate to Anatolia. However, Georgians and especially some local notables considered this strategy of emptying the villages as hazardous<sup>85</sup> and endeavoured to prevent it (Şenol, 2018: 22).

Georgian historiography also portrays some local notables and *beys* as Ajarian heroic figures and national liberators, who struggled for the unification with Georgia and/or favoured Russian rule over the Ottoman. Historically most Muslim Ajarian families allied with the Ottoman rule during the Russo-Turkish wars in the nineteenth century (Sanikidze, 2015: 492-493), and some prominent members of the leading families in Ajaria with Russia or Georgia as in the case of Abashidze brothers (Zeyrek, 2001: 21-22; 83) and some members of the Khimshiashvili family (Şenol, 2018: 187) in the first quarter of twentieth century. For instance, the Khimshiashvili family, particularly Selim and Sherif/Sherip Khimshiashvili, are two of these historical figures, whose deeds are presented as part of 'national liberation movement' and resistance against the Ottoman rule and exalted by Georgian historiography (Aroshidze, Phutkaradze, Shalikava, and Surguladze, 2013).<sup>86</sup> Ottoman historical records might shed light on the questions, who were the Khimshiashvili family (*Hamşizade* or *Hamşioğulları* in

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<sup>84</sup> Interview with a Georgian/Ajarian scholar at the Niko Berdzenishvili Institute at the Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi, 20 August 2018.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with a Muslim Ajarian chairman of an NGO, Ankara, 14 April 2017.

<sup>86</sup> For instance, the Adjara Museum presents Selim Khimshiashvili as he raised "the national liberation flag" against the Ottomans by his riot (Author's visit to the Adjara Museum in Batumi on August 19, 2018). One of the biggest streets in Batumi was named after Sherip Khimshiashvili, and a memorial house-museum was opened in his village.

the Turkish version) and how their acts were perceived and treated by the Ottoman centre. Firstly, the Khimshiashvili was an influential family, whose members took local offices and served in the local services in upper Ajaria and Akhaltsikhe for the Ottoman Empire across generations. Secondly, the local service did not stop them from following their own goals and local interests, which in almost every generation resulted in rebellion against the empire in the region throughout nineteenth century. Selim Pasha (1755-1815), who was the governor of *eyalet* (province) of Childir (Akhaltsikhe), which included Ajaria in the early century, was beheaded in 1815 after he rioted against the Ottoman Empire.<sup>87</sup> His son, Ahmed (1781-1836), the governor of *eyalet* of Childir, also rioted against the empire, was forgiven, and struggled against Russian and Georgian forces in the Caucasus during the war in 1828-29 (Yılmaz, 2014: 614-615; Nazır, 1993: 93-95). It was a common conduct for Ajarians, who “were renowned for their fierceness and, according to Cevdet, their ambition to fight in the corps of the Janissaries”<sup>88</sup> (Ursinus, 2000: 45), to attack western Georgian lands of Imereti (*Açıkbaş* or *Başıaçık* in Ottoman parlance) (Cevdet, 1972: 339). Another son of Selim, Kör Hüseyin *Bey*, also revolted twice in 1840 and 1846 (Yılmaz, 2014: 616). Sherif Khimshiashvili (1829-1892), who had been the ruler of Ajaria (Yılmaz, 2014: 635; Emiroğlu, 1995: 189), had fought against Russia during the Crimean War in 1856, yet he allied with Russia in the 1877-78 war. He personally converted to Orthodoxy and took Russian service in his remaining life. Admittedly, some members of the family embraced the Russian side, while others migrated to Turkey after the war (Kopuzlu, 2011: 48-50). His one son, Temur Pasha (1860-1921), joined the Baku campaign of Nuri Pasha in the WWI (Özçelik, 2017). Descendants of the Turkish branch of the family, the elderly who were born in upper Ajaria, are understandably Turkified, and they even refer to the Turkish roots of the family, rather than its Georgian descent. One member of the family, grand sister of Sherif, testified one Turkish writer that she was born in Khulo in 1920s, when they did not speak Georgian

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<sup>87</sup> Ajarian poet Pridon Khalvashi penned a poem regarding his execution and a play on Selim Khimshiashvili (Halvaşi, 1988: 41-42).

<sup>88</sup> Janissaries are elite infantry corps of Ottoman army, who were staffed through devshirme system. This unit was dissolved in 1826.

at home but Turkish, referring to the bilingualism among the Ajarians inherited from the Ottoman rule (Zeyrek, 2005).

There was a strong inclination for the local rule, or rule by local lords among Ajarians under the Ottoman rule in the nineteenth century; thus, Ajarians did not give up right away when the Sublime Porte strove to change the rules of the game in the borderland especially after *Tanzimat* reforms,<sup>89</sup> which eroded their hereditary rights (Yilmaz, 2014: 634). As Pelkmans (2002: 254) points out, Ajaria was 'peripheral' and largely remained outside the control of the Sublime Porte, which implemented an indirect rule there and the South Caucasus, leaving Ajaria to the hands of competing families and *derebeys*. In general terms, although the noblemen of the borderlands, which were underpinned by their families, allied with the Ottoman Empire, they did employ their duty under some conditions. Especially when the influence of the Sublime Porte in borderlands diminished, they drew on their distance to the centre and, being in the borderlands, took advantage of these to maximize their interests (Ursinus, 2000: 42). Accordingly, they endeavoured to establish their personal rule rather than seek 'national liberation' because, as anachronistically put by the Georgian historiography, there were no traces of national feeling among Ajarians and no independent Georgia to be united.

#### **3.1.4 Post-Ottoman Period**

Following the Ottoman retreat from the east and west of the Black Sea region in the nineteenth century, the Ajarians and Pomaks, as well as other Muslims groups, became minorities.<sup>90</sup> This retreat put them in an awkward position due to their religious affiliations, rendering them a problem in the nation-state building projects of their respective countries, which were based on unity of religion and language.

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<sup>89</sup> *Tanzimat* [reorganisation] was an era of reforms, modernisation, and transformation in the history of Ottoman state between 1839 and 1876.

<sup>90</sup> Slavic/Bulgarian speaking Muslims scattered through Balkans states, Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia and Turkey due to wars, migrations, and border delimitations in Balkans. Georgian Muslims in Ajaria remained within the borders of Soviet Georgia after the Kars and Moscow agreements.

While their languages were similar, their religious affiliations differed from the majority. Accordingly, both religious minorities were exposed to conversion raids, pressures from the state, and name-change campaigns, and their status shifted between included and excluded from/ and to the majority and national identity formation efforts.

#### **3.1.4.1 Initial Attempts at Conversion of Pomaks in the Balkan Wars**

In the *millet* system Ottoman era, different nations, groups, and communities were able to maintain a religious consciousness and identity of their own. Pomaks were no exception, but during the Kingdom and communist eras of Bulgaria, they were forced to erase their pre-liberation identity formations and adopt the Bulgarian identity. The journey of the Pomaks in independent Bulgaria began in 1912, and during the twentieth century, they were forced to embrace the Bulgarian national identity and Orthodox Christianity, and obliged to change names as part of periodical forced name-change campaigns.

In 1908, having benefited from *coup d'état* taking place in the centre of the Ottoman Empire, Bulgarian Principality declared independence. Four years later, five Balkan states formed a coalition against their former imperial master. Until then, the majority of Slavic-speaking Pomaks had been out of the jurisdiction of Bulgarian state in the Rhodopes, albeit small number of Pomaks in Lovech had become part of the Principality after 1878. During the initial combats in the Balkan wars, the Ottoman army retreated from the region. The Muslims were left to the mercy of Bulgarian army, armed bands and the church, and the latter launched forceful baptism of Pomaks to Orthodoxy, changing their names to Christian and Bulgarian, and replacing their traditional fezzes with hats.<sup>91</sup> As McCarthy states, Pomaks were subjected to forcible conversion more than any other Muslim groups and “Bulgarians singled them out to be baptized. Those who refused were beaten or killed” (McCarthy, 2001: 94).

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<sup>91</sup> Just like Rhodope Pomaks, Lovech Pomaks were sent Orthodox missionaries to proselytise them after 1881 (Bayraktarova, 2009: 13; Zafer, 2014: 359).

Trotsky, who was a war correspondent of *Kievskaya Mysl* during the Balkan Wars, confirmed the atrocities of Bulgarian army against Pomaks in the Rhodopes during the war. He referred to the annihilation of an entire Pomak village by Bulgarian artillery fire and other massacres done by Bulgarian legions (Trotsky, 1980: 283, 310).

The Commission of Carnegie Endowment wrote a report documenting the forced conversion of Pomaks by the Bulgarians during the war after an inquiry performed between August and September 1913.<sup>92</sup> Not being an impartial commission, which was comprised of members who had biases against the Ottoman Empire (Arslan and Irkışatal, 2014: 733-743), it recorded atrocities against Pomaks and Muslims at the time (McCarthy, 1995: 153, 167-168). However, the report makes some fallacious deductions from the toponyms of the Pomak settlements and repeats the Bulgarian narrative of forced conversion of Pomaks to Islam (Carnegie Endowment, 1914: 77), an argument which was used by the church as an excuse for the atrocities that took place in this period (Carnegie Endowment, 1914: 77-78). According to the same report, the conversions of Pomaks in the 1912-13 winter and spring were systematic and conducted by the church with the support of military and civil authorities as well as armed bands (Carnegie Endowment, 1914: 77). Moreover, according to Bozov<sup>93</sup> (2010), Bulgarian bands and soldiers committed crimes against Rhodope Muslims in many localities and villages such as Sivino, Smilyan, Izvorite, Baltacı, Pechinsko, Daridere/Zlatograd, Chepintsi, and others in Middle Rhodopes. The armed bands were responsible for violent atrocities against Pomaks such as the Zhizhevo massacre in February 1913.<sup>94</sup> According to the local narrative, almost all men in this village

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<sup>92</sup> After Ajaria was incorporated into Georgia through Russian Empire, the missionary activity for proselytism of Muslims in Ajaria was held with the help of the Society for Restoration of Orthodox Christianity in the Caucasus as an imperial policy. However, the missionary did not achieve the intended results, because of the great influence of the Muslim clergy among Ajarian Muslims. Indeed, in a ten-year period between 1888-1899, only 23 Ajarians converted to Orthodoxy (Gnolidze-Swanson, 2003: 15-16, 19).

<sup>93</sup> Salih Bozov is a Pomak resident of Rudozem (Smolyan). He is the writer of the book, *V imeto na imeto* I-II [In the name of Name], which recounts proselytization and name changes of Pomaks in the twentieth century.

<sup>94</sup> Commemoration of Zhizhevo massacre was held by Bulgarians and Muslim community after a century and five years later in the village on February 17, 2018.

were exterminated during the incident.<sup>95</sup> The tragedy was also recounted in a book written in 1960 by a Bulgarian writer who narrated his trip to Southwestern Rhodopes probably early in the 1950s.<sup>96</sup> During his trip to the region, he passed through Zhizhevo, where he came across an old Pomak man named Islam. They began talked on this and that, on pears and vineyards, after which they deepened the conversation. The old man, Islam, who seemed to hesitate to talk in the first place, began to recount the old bright vivacious days of the village in particular and the region in general. The bright days of the village came to an end with the war in 1912 when armed bands along with priests came over every village and forced Pomaks to get baptised. As the old man puts it, “Who was Muslim – became Christian...who was called Salih – were renamed Slavcho, who was Mehmed – became Metodi” (Божинoв, 1960: 43). In the mean time, residents of Zhizhevo dealt with an armed band which came to their village and paid money in exchange for their faith. However, a few days after the payment, another group of band, named after Hadji Marvak,<sup>97</sup> who was described by the old Pomak as bloodshedder, visited the village, assembled the people, and demanded them to be baptised. Villagers refused to convert. In return, the band led almost all the adults and the married men to a house in the village and slaughtered them. Then, they burned the house. Few men could survive. Women ran out of the village, yet they were doomed to suffer similar events wherever they took refuge according to the story (Божинoв, 1960: 46). As the old Pomak recounted, the village never became as lively as before, and its population dramatically shrank first because of the slaughter and then because of migration.

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<sup>95</sup> Interview with a Pomak researcher in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018.

<sup>96</sup> My thanks to A. R. for drawing my attention to this article.

<sup>97</sup> According to Zafer (in Zelengora, 2017b: 62), affiliated with VMRO, he was famous for his cruelty and responsible for atrocities and crimes against Pomaks in Nevrekoп (Gotse Delchev) in 1912-1913.

Map 5: Rhodope Mountains in Bulgaria (Myuhtar-May, 2013: 332).



The above report also draws on the accounts that describe the baptism incidents of Pomaks (Carnegie Endowment, 1914: 155-156). One is about an incident when Muslims were assembled, divided into groups, and given some names associated with the Bulgarian church or history. It tells a Bulgarian priest stood in front of each group, sprinkled them water, and gave them meat to eat, which is a ceremony symbolising their initiation to Orthodoxy and renouncing Islam. Those baptised were also given a certificate, which follows removing the fezzes and headcovers. In Bozov's oral history accounts, such scenes are repeated. For example, a Muslim from the Rhodopes describes the following:

They gathered us at the mosque [which was turned into a church] in order to convert us to Christianity. They hang icons, crosses, and candles. They also hang a big bell to the huge cherry tree [in the yard]. They put some water in a cauldron, prepared packs of basils and brought candles. I had touched my face to the priest's stinky clothes while they made me passed by him. The priest on one hand censed, on other hand sprinkled holy water and called the people by their new names. They called me as Kolyo (Bozov, 2010: 91).

In the conversions during the Ottoman period, at least in the Balkan context, a Christian could convert to Muslim normally, taking a Muslim name (Antov, 2017: 255-

256) and receiving a certain amount of money, *kisve bahası*, to buy Muslim clothes (Minkov, 2004: 127-128). In the Ottoman *millet* system, part of a greater Muslim world, groups were divided by their religions, and each religious group had its distinct appearance marked by ethno-religious clothes. Therefore, a would-be convert was expected to change his/her clothes following the conversion. Picking a name and changing clothes constituted the external aspect and an initial step in their journeys to Islam (Antov, 2017: 255). There are some interesting accounts (Bozov, 2010: 113-114) that right after the forcible conversion accompanied by the Bulgarian priests during the Balkan Wars, some Pomaks changed, secretly buried their clothes in the woods, and washed themselves before they entered their houses. Apparently, it symbolised re-Islamisation. Changing clothes and names always represented a kind of initiation to the new creed both in the conversions during the Ottoman period and afterwards during the twentieth century name changing and conversion campaigns, which were implemented by Bulgarian regimes.

In this first forced change of names of Pomaks, they were not allowed to choose names akin to their old names as we will also see in the following name-change campaigns. They were given pure Christian names, particularly those of saints, since name change came after baptism by the Orthodox clergy. This was not applied in the following forcible name changes (Krăsteva-Blagoeva, 2006: 64-65). The conversion and name changes in the 1912-1913 period were the first of its kind, which was repeated under different Bulgarian regimes many times throughout the century as a first step to influence Pomaks' consciousness.<sup>98</sup> However, Bulgaria did not benefit the Balkan Wars, nor did other many parties in the war. Bulgaria lost some of its gains during the war, except north of Rhodopes, where Pomaks inhabited. With the Istanbul Treaty, Muslims' political, civil, and religious rights were granted. During the new liberal government of Radoslavov in Bulgaria after the war, the practices of forced conversions and name changes were annulled, and Pomaks began to return

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<sup>98</sup> For a Pomak school teacher, fourteen name changes took place in Bulgaria with the last name change in 1984-86 (Interview with a school teacher in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, on September 17, 2018).



to Islam and acquire their names (Koyuncu, 2013: 181).<sup>99</sup> However, as Myuhtar-May argues, forced conversions of 1912-13 “had a lasting impact on the Pomak identity,” for it set a precedent for consecutive Bulgarian regimes that would follow the same approach in assimilating Pomaks and more importantly it shook the foundations of Pomaks’ religious identity by the Bulgarian nationalist epithet of ‘descendants of forcibly converted Bulgarian Christians’ (2013: 354-355), which has chased Pomaks ever after.

Following this first attempt, the second mass name changes took place during the 1930s and the first half of 1940s, when the *Drujba Rodina* movement was active. It was the first time pro-Bulgarian Pomak intellectuals favoured the Bulgarianisation of Muslim Pomaks’ religious identity. In the communist period, they were not free from the state pressure regarding name changes, either, which will be discussed in the following subchapters.

#### **3.1.4.2 Socialist Georgia and the 1929 Uprising in Ajaria**

Under the Russian rule starting from 1878, Ajaria integrated to Georgia, and Batumi oblast was formed at the turn of the century. Batumi, with the construction of Baku-Tbilisi-Batumi oil pipeline and the railway, became an important export port, and the city expanded and became populated with migration of different ethnicities of Russia. The number of people in Batumi oblast was 170,377, of whom 70,918 were Ajarians (Quelquejay, 2012).

As stated before, the South Caucasus was a battlefield between different nationalities during the WWI. Following the Russian revolution in 1917, Georgia

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<sup>99</sup> Celal Bey (Perin) of Nevrekop (today, Gotse Delchev), a Muslim native to West Rhodopes and an MP in the 17<sup>th</sup> National Assembly of Bulgaria between 1914-1919, visits West Rhodopes during post-conversion-and-forcible name-change process in a mission to announce Pomaks that they can acquire their faith and names when they were still being repressed and forced to follow Christian clerics (Perin, 2000: 19-36). In his memoirs, he describes post-conversion practices Pomaks were forced to follow: they were to visit mosque-turned-churches every day and eat braised pork meats and kiss the icons. Women were also subjected to dress code control by the priests (Perin, 2000: 29-30).

declared independence on 26 May 1918. During the war time and afterwards, Ajaria and Batumi were occupied by different parties including Ottoman and British forces. In this period, there were disputes over which side Ajarians should be allied with. Some Ajarians, as *Sada-yi Millet* (Voice of Nation) Movement and *Jemiet Islam* (Islam Society), inclined to be with Turkey while others with Georgia as in the case with Abashidze brothers and the Committee for the Liberation of Muslim Georgia or *Mejlis of Ajaria* (Tsurtsumia, 2017; Sanikidze, 2018: 250-251). After all these war time quarrels and the termination of Democratic Georgia in February 1921 by the Bolsheviks, Batumi and Ajaria stayed under the Soviet Union, namely, Georgia. An autonomous entity was established in Ajaria in July 1921, and Ajarians' rights were guaranteed by the treaties of Kars and Moscow in the same year.

Map 6: Ajaria (Atlas of Adjara-Wikipedia)



In early March in 1929, upper Ajarian peasants revolted against the anti-religious and de-Islamisation efforts of the Soviet authorities including removing veils of women and closing religious schools, and took hostages of some of local communist

leadership.<sup>100</sup> In the first months of that year, a decree on removing the veils of Muslim women was issued by the central authorities and the closure of religious schools was decreed by the party in Georgia (Suny, 1994: 243-244). Similar to other Soviet policies such as indigenisation, collectivisation, and purges of 1937-38, it was a part of a union-wide campaign and was named as *khudzhum* [attack] in Central Asia. The immediate goal of such campaigns in Muslim concentrated regions was to ensure the emancipation of the women, yet the primary and long-term aim was to erase the remnants of the past and ensure the penetration of Soviet rule to these regions by getting rid of the elements of traditional way of life. During the campaigns in Central Asian republics, thousands of women abandoned their veils and burnt them on the International Women's Day in 1927 only to put them on back the next day (Childers, 2012: 41). Obviously, like in Ajaria, they were harshly opposed in the region, yet such similar 'attacks' continued afterwards (Anderson, 1993: 217).

As regards Ajaria, the Soviet regime mostly suppressed the uprising until the end of March 1929, capturing 41 alive, two wounded, and six dead. Some of the rebels managed to flee to Turkey by crossing the border (Blauvelt and Khatiashvili, 2016: 359-360). The uprising was reported outside the Soviet Union only after it had ended (*The Times*, April 9, 1929). The correspondent of *The Times* commented that the uprising broke out due to the 'ceaseless anti-religious campaign among the peasants' implemented by the local young communists to whom peasants showed 'signs of resistance' (*The Times*, April 9, 1929). S/he also stated that fighting between armed peasants and the Soviet soldiers continued until April (*The Times*, April 12, 1929). It was not until the Russian soldiers were sent to the region because Georgians refused to engage in fighting against the rebelling peasants that the fighting was suppressed and 150 Ajarians crossed over Turkey (*The Times*, April 12 and May 3, 1929).

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<sup>100</sup> Kvantchiani draws attention to the economic factors behind this revolt as well as people's discontent with the religious policies of the Soviet Union. People in Ajaria were dissatisfied with the policies of confiscation of lands and imposition of over taxes and cash taxes for agricultural produce. For instance, the authorities levied a hog tax for Muslims in Upper Ajaria, where such a husbandry was not practiced (Kvantchiani, 2017: 317-318).

According to Suny (1994: 244), the centre obliged the local cadres, who had their opponents, to carry out the campaign against the veil in Ajaria.

This was the last recorded uprising of Muslims in Ajaria during the Soviet period, and due to the lack of information from the region, very limited and indirect information on Ajarians reached outside the Soviet Union. For instance, based on this scarce information, Akiner (1983: 244) claimed that, after the uprising in 1929, many (if not all) Ajarians were deported from Ajaria. During the purges of 1937-1938, Ajarians too could not escape from persecutions. Approximately, 11,000 people in Ajaria were arrested, and 4,000 of them were liquidated on the pretext of smuggling, people trafficking, and espionage (Kaiser, 2015: 180).

#### **3.1.4.3 Communist Bulgaria and Years of ‘Revival Process’**

The second attempt of Bulgarian regimes to Bulgarianise Pomaks took place under the guise of *Drujba Rodina* movement (1937-1944), and mandatory name changes were carried out during the World War II. This also involved the Pomaks who inhabited the occupied regions in Thrace, Greece. However, after the war, all were restored by the new regime. After a period of revival of minority rights in the country, Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) tightened its grip of the country after the April Plenum in 1956, which declared assimilation of minorities a state policy (Rechel, 2008: 119). However, between 1948 and 1952, some Pomaks in the southern borderland with Greece in the Rhodopes were resettled in the north inside the country allegedly for ‘work, development and improvement’ (Mollahüseyin, 1984: 139) but probably to stabilise the borders. In addition, the people who seemed to be a threat to the new regime were sent to hard labour in mines (Konstantinov, 1992a: 346-347). The relocation of Pomaks in interior Bulgaria is, for some, “a punishment for resisting government efforts to assimilate them” (Eminov, 1997: 101). In the meantime, the regime’s assimilationist policies were getting stricter, causing Pomaks to identify themselves with Turks to preserve their identity. This caused anxiety among the rulers of the communist regime which resorted to some measures in

1960s (Eminov, 1997: 101). Communist Bulgaria's initial assimilationist campaigns were targeted at Roma, Tatars, and then Pomaks. For some,

The so-called 'revival process' was begun with the Gypsies. People don't know this. The world struck when the name changes were initiated against the Turks in 1984. But for thirty years before this, slowly—in an unknown way—in various districts and factories, and by administrative and legal means, Gypsies were assimilated (Manush Romanov in Helsinki Watch Report, 1991: 8).

The decree on 'measures against the Turkish Self-identification of Gypsies, Tatars and Bulgarians professing the Mohammedan Religion' was promulgated by the Bulgarian Politburo, so the third name change attempt after 1912 was made between 1962 and 1964 mostly in Western Rhodopes, which faced fierce resistance from the Pomak community. The Politburo Decree conceived of these groups' potential assimilation to Turkish community, for they inhabited the common localities with Turks, received religious services and education in Turkish, married with Turks, and had Turco-Arabic names (Eminov, 1997: 191-192). Therefore, the politburo decided to take a number of measures such as preventing migration of these groups to Turkish regions, prohibiting education in Turkish language, and abolishing religious service provided by Turkish religious personnel, and promoting the right to change names to Bulgarian, to limit the Turkish influence upon these groups. Brutal implementation of the measures, namely replacing names of Pomaks with Slavo-Bulgarian names, received resistance by the Pomak people, whose names were restored in the end (Eminov, 1997: 106). This was seemingly an experimental campaign since the government receded temporarily until the decisive blow in 1972-1974. It was the beginning of *vazroditelen process* (revival process), which culminated in mid-1980s and during which all ethnic groups were forced to adopt Slavo-Bulgarian names. After the adoption of the Zhivkov Constitution, named after the first secretary of BCP, in 1971,<sup>101</sup> harsher policies were adopted such as blockade of Pomak villages with tanks,

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<sup>101</sup> Zhivkov constitution, was named after Todor Zhivkov, the 'first man' or 'No. 1' of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP), which had neither any referring to the minorities of any sort but citizens of non-Bulgarian extraction or origin nor to their right to develop their national culture (Article 45 of Constitution of the People's Republic of Bulgaria: May 18, 1971, Oxford Constitutions of the World; Pundeff, 1990: 558) unlike the Dimitrov Constitution in 1947, named after Georgi Dimitrov, first

gendarme, and police, and Bulgarian state changed Pomaks' Muslim names to Bulgarian. In some settlements of Blagoevgrad during the encounters of the state, things had turned bitter for the people who resisted the campaign; a dozen of Pomaks were killed or injured. Some were detained. Some Pomaks escaped to Turkish regions, which they considered safer and convenient to keep their names. The last phase of the campaign, which also signified the peak of the 'revival process,' focused on the Turkish community as they were the biggest national minority in the country in 1984, when Bulgarian authorities declared no more Turks existed in the country. Until the great exodus of 1989, Turkish and Arabic origin names were changed, the use of Turkish in public and private places was banned, and Islamic rituals and practices like circumcision were prohibited.

Over the following months after the Turkish exodus, Todor Zhivkov (1911-1998) was ousted from his posts by *coup d'état* on 10 October 1989, and the new government declared on 29 December 1989 that all rights would be restored (Bulgaria after Zhivkov, 1990: 7). On 5 March 1990, the Bulgarian parliament passed a legislation restoring all Muslims', including Pomaks', names which had been compulsorily changed (Bulgaria: Selected Issues and Recent Developments, 1990: 5-6). Additionally, the Central Committee announced that the assimilation policy implemented after 1984 was "a grave political error" (Bulgaria after Zhivkov, 1990: 7).

To sum up, the whole Muslim community in Bulgaria was "under the joint brutality of exacerbated nationalism and Soviet-style 'scientific atheism'" as Popovic stated (in Kettani, 1988: 381). The communist Bulgarian policy for Muslims included such practices as keeping Muslims under surveillance through control of *Muftiate*, cutting off the community from each other, changing names, and eliminating education in Turkish and Turkish press (Kettani, 1990: 229-230).

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Secretary of BCP between 1946-1949, which referred to the minorities and the right to learn their own native tongues (Article 79 in Rechel, 2008: 119).

### **3.1.5 Post-Communist and Post-Socialist Periods in Bulgaria and Georgia**

With the collapse of the Eastern European Peoples' Republics and the Soviet Union in 1989 and 1991, established religions embarked on strengthening their grip, taking advantage of the ideological vacuum left behind the departure of the communist ideology. During this period, the Orthodox Churches of Bulgaria and Georgia encouraged religious minorities to identify with Eastern Orthodoxy, as the religion of majority. As Wesselink (1992: 5) noted "Since 1988, religious life [in Georgia] has gone through a period of renaissance. Churches are restored and hundreds of young men have chosen the priesthood." A similar trend also took place amongst Muslim Ajarians. Mosques were either restored or rebuilt, and people sought religious knowledge. Most went for abroad for spiritual education. At the same time, while Christianity became 'fashionable' in the eighties in Georgia (Wesselink, 1992: 5), some Ajarians converted to Christianity. The conversions of Muslim Georgians in Ajaria that began in the final years of the Soviet Union continued during the 1990s and also in the new millennium, while the non-acceptance of a Muslim Georgian identity and its visibility in the public space generated inter-community conflicts between Muslim and Christian Georgians in Ajaria and in other parts of the country.

Subsequent to the fall of the communist regime, in various occasions in 1997, 1998, and 2006, some Bulgarian politicians including a Bulgarian president and a prime minister, apologized for the wrongdoings and the Bulgarian atrocities against the Turks. In 2012, the Bulgarian parliament issued a declaration condemning assimilationist policies against the Muslim minority in the so-called 'revival process' and the expulsion of thousands of Turkish origin Bulgarian citizens in 1989 as a form of ethnic cleansing (Loizides and Kutlay, 2019: 149-150). In addition, Muslims in Bulgaria, including Pomaks, acquired new rights, and the policies implemented under the 'revival process' were corrected, including the forced Bulgarianisation of names. However, research has shown that most Pomaks chose not to change their names, for various reasons, which may indicate that the Bulgarian consciousness and ethnic identity were embraced by some Pomaks in this period. Indeed, some scholars have

identified a new trend in some segments of the Pomak community: A distinct Pomak ethnic identity, unlike the case of Ajarians in Georgia, started to develop.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter commits to compare the millennial journey of two countries and two minorities in historical perspective starting from Pomaks and Ajarians' initial appearance on the historical stage as minority, their embrace of Islam, and the progress of Bulgaria and Georgia in history. Both Pomaks and Ajarians arose during the Ottoman period, and their Islamisation probably followed similar tracks, with the exception of Pomaks' Bogomil connection, which might refer to Balkans' more heterogeneous picture in terms of religion. In other words, oppositional movements and the discontented groups who had problems with the Order in the Balkans, organized around the movements like Bogomils, also known as Bulgarian heresy in medieval Europe. However, in Georgia, there are no signs of such movements which challenged the medieval rules. Moreover, Pomaks emerged in a region where the influence and the control of the centre can hardly be compared with that of the Western Georgia, i.e. Guria and Ajaria. In other words, while Bulgaria was an integral part of the state, heartland of the Ottoman Empire, the western part of Georgia was by all means periphery to the empire and its loose control over the region was ensured through intermediaries and subdued rulers. This has affected Pomaks and Ajarians' relations with their respective states and their identity formations in the long run. That is to say, Pomaks would have a group, namely Turkish minority, with which they could ally and refuge if necessary as the Bulgarian history in the twentieth century demonstrated. For instance, during the name changes in the post-WWII period, some Pomaks chose to migrate to Turkish regions and refuge in Turkish minority, who were seen as 'untouchable' (Konstantinov and Alhaug, 1995: 29-32). Ajarians, however, would be on their own without a group to work with in Georgia. Therefore, cutting off ties with Turkey and deportation of Meskhetian Turks in 1944 accelerated Ajarians' Georgianisation process. In general, both Pomaks and Ajarians were forced to erase their former identity formations through forced and fostered



conversions and name changes in the post-Ottoman period. Finally, their existence as distinct groups and peculiarity have not been accepted by their states, which is obvious in their non-representation in the censuses.

## CHAPTER 4

### TRANSFORMATION OF IDENTITY: 'NATIONALISATION' OF POMAK AND AJARIAN IDENTITIES IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Identity as discussed in the literature is not fixed but constantly changes. Likewise, the identity of the religious minorities in this thesis transformed from a predominantly religious identity in the late nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century into an ethnic identity and was assimilated into the dominant national identity of their countries by the end of the twentieth century. In other words, the Ajarians and Pomaks' self-consciousness and group identity have evolved over time from a religious/Islamic identity, which is different and incompatible with Bulgarian and Georgian identity, to a Georgian and Bulgarian national identity in general terms.

For instance, a nineteenth century Georgian account states that Ajarian Muslim Georgians

are true Muslims with all their dispositions, character, traditions, heart and soul; moreover, they are uncompromising in their faith. Knowing nothing about nationality, they call themselves Tatars. If you ask them about Georgia, they will all but curse it, as they can make no distinction between being *Georgian* and *Christian Orthodox*. (*Droeba*, 1878, in Bubulashvili, 2006: 168 [italics in original]).

After three decades in Russian rule, prior to the Soviet domination established in Batumi and Ajaria after WWI, some Turkish contemporaries who visited the region made similar observations regarding Ajarians and their identity. For instance, Riza Nur pens in his memoirs that "Ajarians are called as Georgian by us. [However,] call them Georgians, they will shoot a bullet at you. They consider this word as a great

insult” (Zeyrek, 2001: 50). Mehmed Edip Bey, a Batumi Deputy in the Turkish Parliament in 1920,<sup>102</sup> writes in a newspaper that, in Batumi and nearby, Georgian means Christian and, for Muslims, it as insulting as *giaour* (infidel). He also points out that Batumi population was called as Islam (Muslim). Even though they spoke a kind of Georgian, they were not identified as Georgian (Zeyrek, 2001: 41).

Blauvelt and Khatiashvili’s research (2016) illustrate that Muslims in Ajaria in the late 1920s still make a distinction between them and (Christian) Georgians, identifying the latter as Christians and themselves as Muslims. Furthermore, Muslim Ajarians from Upper Ajaria considered the Soviet policies in the late 1920s as offensive to their Georgianisation, and Georgianisation as a form of conversion. Although there were also pro-Georgian tendencies among especially urban Muslim Georgians at that time, Islamic identity was rooted in Ajaria, and it surfaced itself as a reaction against the Soviet policies in the late 1920s in Upper Ajaria as described in Chapter Three.

Similar accounts regarding Pomaks may also be found in the same period. For instance, Bulgarian scholars like Vasil Kanchov (1862-1902), Jordan Ivanov, and Stoyu Shishkov (1865-1937) claimed that Pomaks’ identity was religiously defined and they called themselves as Turk even though they did not speak Turkish (Koyuncu, 2013: 144). Koyuncu (2013: 144), on the other hand, argues that Pomaks did not have a distinct ethnic or national consciousness and identity. They rather had a religious, Islamic identity at least until the turn of the last century.

The state policies on the minorities in both countries were decisive in shaping group identities. The Soviet Union policies had broken off the relations between Turkey and Ajaria and gradually eradicated Muslim elites. Ajarians were exposed to the effects and policies of the local Georgian communists and Moscow. During the Soviet period and afterwards, people in Ajaria embraced the Georgian national identity regardless of their religious affiliation, so Georgian ethnic consciousness spread through all

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<sup>102</sup> In the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, which was formed in 1920, five deputies represented Batumi.

strata of Ajarian community. Especially in the 1970s and also 1980s, when proselytising efforts were overtly conducted in the autonomous region, a policy of comprehensive Georgianisation of Ajarians were carried out towards Ajarians (Cornell, 2001: 163-164). Consequently, anti-Georgian consciousness, which had once prevailed in the first decade of the Soviet rule, disappeared.

“Although Ajar[i]ans were not ethnically different from their Georgian counterparts and spoke Georgian and Turkish interchangeably,” as Khalvashi (2015: 19) pointed out, “they did not associate themselves with Georgians in the beginning. Instead of preserving their religious identities through the Kars Treaty, the Soviet authorities thus used the condition of autonomy to nationalize Ajar[i]ans.” As Nodia (2005: 50) argues, in the Soviet system, autonomy did not refer to freedom but privilege. However, Ajaria, whose autonomy was based on religion rather than ethnicity, did not benefit from the privileges given by the autonomy, unlike Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Because the Soviet system was based on ethnic federalism of constituent parts rather than religious and Ajarians did not constitute a distinct ethnicity, Ajarian case followed a different path in Georgia. Moreover, while autonomy gave a starting ground or cause for independence in the cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, it did not function similarly for the case of Ajaria due to Ajarians’ ethnic and linguistic proximity and their lack of elites, who would generate alternative nationalistic programs to that of Georgians’.

Moreover, as Jones (1988) asserted, indigenisation (*korenizatsia*) policy during the New Economic Policy years in 1920s, that is, policies for the cultural, social, and economic advancement of locals and getting in charge of themselves in their political units, benefited Georgians, Abkhazians, and South Ossetians. However, it brought about the ‘nationalisation’ or Georgianisation of Ajarian identity. Besides, by 1937, Georgians had already avoided the designation of Mingrelians, Svans, Lazes, and Ajarians as different from the Georgian nation but rendered them as subgroups of it as mentioned in the introduction chapter. This success was partly thanks to the

swings of the nationality policy, which in due course began to favour the titular and larger ethnic groups over the smaller ones.

As stated, Muslim Pomaks showed no trace of Bulgarian national consciousness (Neuburger, 2004: 181), but it became the opposite as a result of the state policies, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century. However, the Pomak case is more complicated than the Ajarian case. Indeed, in Bulgaria, the communist regime followed the policies of *ancien régime* after a short break in the 1940s<sup>103</sup> and resumed with the Bulgarianisation of Pomaks, first, through the application of a dress code, in which the traditional elements like *fezes* (felt hat), *shalvari* (loose trousers) and *feredzhes* (veil) were banned. Then, the Islamic rituals of circumcision and burial in Muslim cemeteries were banned, name changes were enforced during the revival process in 1970s (Brunnbauer, 2001: 46-47; Turan, 1999: 77; Apostolov, 1996: 732-733). 'Nationalisation' of Pomak identity in Bulgaria and the elimination of Turkish influence on them took place simultaneously. As demonstrated in *Drujba Rodina* subchapter below, this process started before the war and continued afterward.

This thesis considers that the name change policy, part of general state policies, targeted at Muslim Ajarians and Pomaks was decisive in their transformation and 'nationalisation' throughout the twentieth century. Naming represents a form of power that states exerted on its citizens to control and assimilate them. Scassa (1996: 169) identifies naming things and people as "a power to shape or reshape reality." Similarly, Bourdieu (1991) argues that "one of the elementary forms of political power should have consisted, in many archaic societies, in the almost magical power of naming and bringing into existence by virtue of naming" (1991: 236). States uses

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<sup>103</sup> Communist Bulgarian regime replicated the Soviet indigenization policy for a certain period in the late 1940s and early 1950s and bestowed some cultural and educational rights upon the Turkish minority to foster their integration and cultural and social advancement - i.e. Turkish schools, a Turkish Studies department at Sofia University, teacher training institutes, newspapers, books, radio stations, and theatres in Turkish were opened (Ivanova, 2017: 41; Eminov, 1987: 293-294). These certainly did not include political rights such as regional autonomy as in the case of Soviet examples. This period was very short-lived and did not expand over Pomaks and retrospectively defined as Tulip Period by a Turkish poet.

its power on naming in two ways according to Scassa (1996: 171): by granting the individuals the power to name and by applying restrictions on their name choice. They applied nationalising policies especially on minorities' names and surnames, by almost always enforcing language purification and name change.

#### **4.1 Name Change Policy as a Way of 'Nationalisation'**

"What's in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet." With this two-line phrase from Shakespeare's famous play, *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet implies that their love has nothing to do with the names of their families, who have enmity to each other. However, names matter more contrary to what Juliet said to his Romeo. Personal names and surnames define who we are, *nomen est omen*, and give a sense of belonging. We are transformed by name from anybody or nothingness into somebody (Clifton, 2013: 403; Bursell, 2012: 484). Furthermore, as many would agree, names can be deeply and historically associated with ethnic and religious groups and reveal one's group affiliation (Khosravi, 2012: 65), so they are markers of one's identity and ethnic origin (Panagiotidis, 2015: 857).

'Nationalizing states' regulated the language of names of their subjects and enforced mostly minorities to change their names as part of nation-building to create homogenised and uniform nations. Name-changing, as is discussed in the literature review chapter, has been studied by many considering its intimate link with state policies of acculturation and assimilation, and transformation of ethnic identity. Research argue that, probably as a reaction to the state policies, minority members tend to adopt new names that sound more like the names of the majority community to avoid social and economic discrimination that they have faced related with their names.

Several studies, as elaborated in Chapter Two, suggest that it is basically in the name. Name change policies of the revival period in Bulgaria and in Soviet Georgia, which are illustrated later in the thesis, are possibly forms of forced acculturation as

Gerhards and Hans elaborated in their research (2009: 1103-1104). However, in the post-Soviet and post-communist period, Pomaks' and Muslim Ajarians' name-giving strategies seem to be more complex between 'voluntary acculturation' (or may be termed as 'pragmatic assimilation') and 'voluntary segregation.' That is, both tendencies may be observed. There are some voluntary segregation/maintenance of Islamic identity instances in both groups, in which parents select single Muslim names for their children. Some even try to change their children's existing names to Muslim ones.<sup>104</sup> In contrast, some Pomaks and Ajarian Muslims have only Bulgarian and Georgian names. Some minority members in Bulgaria, both Turks and Pomaks, tend to maintain their Bulgarian names in the post-communist period, even though they have a chance to do otherwise. Moreover, in some instances, some Pomaks who took Muslim or Turkish names after 1990 re-changed their names to Bulgarian ones especially prior to their migration inside and outside Bulgaria in search of employment and education.

Some Pomaks strictly identify the language of names with being Pomak, their Pomakness, and being Bulgarian. A Pomak man of religion described this as follows:

[Some says] "name does not matter, but what matters is how you feel, and we [Pomaks] should be Bulgarian like others." This is so wrong. Name matters in Bulgaria as much as religion. When one says "I am Ahmet" he is [considered] as Muslim. If he says "[I am] Dragan," then [he is] Christian, not Muslim. Therefore, name is very important in Bulgaria.<sup>105</sup>

When this participant was asked to elaborate whether an ethnic Bulgarian could be a Muslim with his own name, he approved this and said "possible." He expressed that every year 25-30 Bulgarians converted to Islam. However, while these newly converted Muslims could keep their original names, what is unacceptable for him is Pomaks' Bulgarian names because "once they had Bulgarian names, they hardly reveal their Muslim identity."<sup>106</sup> Even in that case, he was not willing to abandon

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<sup>104</sup> Personal observation both from Akhaltsikhe and the Rhodopes.

<sup>105</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion, Sofia, 11 September 2018.

<sup>106</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion, Sofia, 11 September 2018.

these Pomaks whose names are Bulgarian and stated “if he dies [with Bulgarian name], we will go to bury him but I do not approve this.”<sup>107</sup>

Even though names, language of names, signify belonging to which ethnic groups in both countries, from the perspective of Ajarian Muslims, this is less obvious. It is mostly because names do not really constitute the primary marker of religious affiliation in Ajaria. However, this does not mean that names do not matter in Ajarian context. On the contrary, they do. However, as in the cases of Muslim Ajarian elites, most of them use double names. Besides, adopting Georgian names and surnames were not experienced so traumatically in Ajaria. Moreover, regardless of their religiosity and social status, they describe themselves as Georgian even if they have double names, or only Georgian or Muslim names. The chapters below further examine each individual case regarding their perspective on state policies.

#### **4.1.1 *Drujba Rodina*: A Movement from Within?**

In the absence of visible racial differences between Christians and Muslims in the Balkans, “names are one of the primary indicators of ethno-religious affiliation,” as noted by Neuburger (2004: 143), and consecutive Bulgarian regimes resorted to name changes as an initial effort for assimilation of Pomaks. The second major wave of name change after 1912-1913 took place during WWII, and this time Pomaks themselves were at the forefront of the campaign.

A group of Pomaks and Bulgarians, such as Arif Beyski, Adil Hodzadzikov, Mehmed Isharliev, and Petar Marinov established a cultural and educational charity organisation named as *Drujba Rodina* (Homeland Fraternity) in Smolyan, in the Rhodopes, on 3 May 1937. It became a template for others which were founded in various localities in the region. According to its statute, the objective of *Rodina* society is to work for mutual understanding, rapprochement, and support between

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<sup>107</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion, Sofia, 11 September 2018.



Bulgarian Muslims and Christians in the Rhodopes as well as to awaken and develop national spirit amongst Bulgarians of Muslim faith (Дружба Родина, 2009: 41). As a first organisation formed by pro-Bulgarian Pomak individuals and intellectuals who were backed by Bulgarians such as Petar Marinov and Hristo Karamandzhikov, their principal aim was to 'nationalise' Pomaks whose identity was basically religion-oriented. They basically underpinned the idea that being Bulgarian and Muslim at the same time was not something mutually exclusive, contradictory, or incompatible. They initiated Bulgarianisation of Pomaks, beginning with change in personal names, traditional dresses, morals, customs, habits, language, and life style which hampered rapprochement of Pomaks with Bulgarians (Hristov, 1989: 69-70).

At the same time, they tackled the issue of Turkish influence between Pomaks as mentioned in their statute (Memişoğlu, 1991: 61). In this period, *Rodina* affiliates offered Pomaks religious independence from the *Muftiate* of Muslims of Bulgaria and introduction of Bulgarian language to religious education. All the measures and changes proposed at the time aimed at ending alienation of Pomaks from Bulgarians and drawing them to the latter (Nacheva, 2009: 497). As Karagiannis (2012: 21) argued, Bulgarian state pursued the policy of distancing Pomaks from the Turkish minority, preventing Turkish influence on them, and implanting Bulgarian national consciousness.<sup>108</sup>

Members of the movement such as Arif Beyski and Mehmed Dervishev took Bulgarian names (Kamen Bulyarov and Svetoslav Duhovnikov respectively) for themselves and their family members and also encouraged, or sometimes forced, Rhodope Muslims to do the same (Сборник Родина, 1944: 2, 10-11; Bozov, 2010). *Mufti* Duhovnikov, encouraging other Pomaks to change their names, stated "It is our interest wholeheartedly to have Bulgarian names. I, as your spiritual leader, assure you that this is not an insult to our Mohammedan religion and Allah" (Bozov, 2010: 163).

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<sup>108</sup> A similar policy of distancing Pomaks from Turkish minority was also implemented in Greece (Demetriou, 2004: 107-108).

Some *Rodina* members persuaded Pomaks to pick names that were derived from Rhodope dialect of Pomaks such as Kamen, Plaven, Trendofil, Latinko, and Karanfil rather than typical Christian-Bulgarian names so that Pomaks' own traditions and customs would be preserved (Bozov, 2010: 166-167). Beyski seems to share this view, for he picked *kamen* (stone) as a name for himself. They in the first place mostly preferred to have non-religious folk names to traditional Christian names and names of the saints since these names were alien to Pomaks. Otherwise, it would be a repetition of the mistake made during the first name changes in the Balkan Wars, during which mostly saint names were given to Pomaks (Krăsteva-Blagoeva, 2006: 65). In other words, *Rodina* leaders promoted, as Krăsteva-Blagoeva (2006: 66-67) argued, historical names for men and flower and plant names for women- a pattern not necessarily followed by Bulgarians. As a scholar from Turkish descent in Bulgaria pointed out, active proselytization did not occur at that time, rather a policy of Christianisation (or Bulgarianisation) of Islam and Islamic practices was pursued.<sup>109</sup> As stated by him, mutual points between Islam and Christianity were acknowledged, and performance of daily prayers was Bulgarianised.

During the years of WWII, name changes, which had been formerly voluntary, were operated in mass and forced campaigns by the regime and *Rodina* members after a law decreeing name changes of Pomaks was passed in 1942 (Neuburger, 2004: 151). Then, names of 60,000 Pomaks were Christianised and Bulgarianised, and they were forced to abandon their traditional outfits (Crampton, 2007: 432-433). In the same period, Pomaks in the occupied territories in western Thrace and Serbia encountered similar assimilative practices.

As a cultural organisation, *Rodina* focused on cultural and educational activities such as conferences, reading nights, and exhibitions as stated in its statute (Memişoğlu, 1991: 61). The works, poems, and articles of leading Pomak individuals who were affiliated with the movement were assembled in *Rodina's* printed organ with the

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<sup>109</sup> Interview with a Turkish scholar-researcher, Sofia, 5 September 2018.

same name between 1939 and 1944. Due to *Rodina's* endeavour to revive Rhodope Muslims' cultural activities, it was also called as *kulturata* or *kulturasa*. They were cynically called as proponents of *kulturata*, revivalists, and awakeners especially by their opponents, who did not approve their pro-Bulgarian fellows' propagation (Bozov, 2010).

After the Bulgarian communists took over the country's control, *Rodina* movement was condemned as a fascist organisation, and its leaders and affiliates were punished. For instance, the leader of the movement, Kamen Bulyarov, was charged with espionage for Greece and executed in 1951.<sup>110</sup> Others received varying penalties including concentration camps (Alagöz, 2017: 33). However, the history of *Rodina* does not end here. The late Bulgarian communists might have realised that *Rodina* movement and themselves actually shared the same objective, i.e. 'nationalisation' or more accurately Bulgarianisation of Pomak identity. As argued by Petar Marinov, the mastermind of *Rodina*, the work of *Drujba Rodina* was resumed by the communist regime and literally carried out by the regime itself (cited in Neuburger, 2000: 194). *Rodina* members were rehabilitated in the late Communist Bulgaria. During the peak of the 'revival process' in 1980s, the late communist regime began to describe *Rodina* with no mention of its former persecution, as a dedicated organisation, whose members were patriotic public figures and which "cope[d] with tremendous difficulties, many prejudices and vestiges of the past" (Hristov, 1989: 70) with the shared goal of helping "Bulgarian Muslims to realise their national identity" (Hristov, 1989: 69).

Seventy-two years after its initial establishment in 1937, *Drujba Rodina* was re-installed in 2009 with the same motive and objective. According to their statements,

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<sup>110</sup> Arif Beyski and his friends in *Drujba Rodina* resemble Mehmed Abashidze and his group, Committee for the Liberation of Muslim Georgia, in Georgia in that both groups pursued rapprochement between Pomaks and Bulgarians and Ajarians with Georgians, for they shared common language, origin, lifestyle, culture and history, despite religious difference. However, there were also groups who opposed them such as Sada-yi Millet in Ajaria and the clergy in the Rhodopes. Interestingly, Beyski's and Abashidze's destinies coincided with each other; both were executed, Abashidze for charges of treason during the purges in 1937 and Beyski for espionage.

“The patriotic Bulgarian Muslims from the Rhodopes and Pirin Mountains, who are underpinned by their Christian brothers, restored the old principles of *Drujba Rodina* under the same name and geared towards the same goals and tasks” to achieve the rapprochement between Bulgarians with distinct faiths.<sup>111</sup> This new version of *Rodina*, too, aims to raise the national consciousness of Pomaks and eradicate the Turkish influence on them.

Evaluating the *Rodina* movement and its legacy in Bulgaria is a very controversial issue. It has supporters and opponents. As in the past, some Pomaks are wary of their activities since the *Rodina* movement does not accept Pomak identity but intends to ‘Bulgarianise’ it. The field research revealed that those who oppose Bulgarianisation of Pomak identity also oppose *Drujba Rodina* and conceive of it as a Bulgarian plot or an organisation, in which Pomaks were put in the front stage.<sup>112</sup> In addition, Ivanova (2017: 40) draws attention to the connections of some *Rodina* personnel with the church and to the fact that the organisation itself was funded by the state to underscore the actual mastermind to *Rodina*. For most of the interviewees, too, both the original and the resurrected *Rodina* masks the assimilation of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims rather than being a genuine and spontaneous movement developed from inside. A village resident in Blagoevgrad region stated the following:

People, everybody here [in the village] define themselves as Pomak. However, since the communist period as well as now, some Bulgarian organisations, the most famous one is *Drujba Rodina*, have been working on changing how people should define themselves like not as Pomak but Bulgarian Muslim. This has been an ongoing struggle. There are some Pomaks who work with them [Bulgarians], call themselves as Bulgarian rather than Pomak.<sup>113</sup>

For Zelengora (2017b: 181), an expert on Pomaks in Turkey, *Rodina* was revived by those ultranationalist academicians who had been formerly affiliated with Bulgarian

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<sup>111</sup> ‘Za Nas’, *Drujba Rodina*, <http://drujbarodina.org/about/>, accessed 11 November 2019.

<sup>112</sup> Interview with a Pomak and a Turk functionary in *Muftiate*, Sofia, 5 September 2019.

<sup>113</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018.

intelligence. It receives serious state support and still works on the assimilation of Pomaks. In addition, Pomak writers such as Bozov, who collected accounts of Pomaks regarding forced conversions of 1912-1913 and *Rodina* years in his books, *в името на името* I-II, regards *Rodina* and the ideas of its members as unfavourable and “a huge blow directed on the soul and morality” of Pomaks and Rhodope Muslims (Bozov, 2010: 180). Hadzhi (2007: 110-112), the acting chief *Mufti* of Bulgaria, furthermore, considers *Rodina* movement as a reflection or an extension of the Bulgarian policy of incorporation of Pomaks into Bulgarian nation and elimination of Turkish influence on them.

Legacy of *Rodina*, despite what its opponents claimed, was remembered and promoted by such a publishing house as *Tangra TanNakRa*,<sup>114</sup> which dedicated some of its books such as *Drujba Rodina-Recollections for the Future*, *Kamen Bolyarov - The Founder of Drujba Rodina*, *Series of One of Drujba Rodina- Simeon Fisinski*, *Svetoslav Duhovnikov*, and *Stoil Kumetsov* to the organisation and its distinguished members. One interviewee drew attention to this printing house, which is allegedly underpinned by the state, for the publications of *TaNagRa* reflect the official view of the state on Pomaks and repeat the existing arguments, i.e. they are Bulgarians (more specifically Bulgarian Mohammedans) who were forcibly Islamised during the Ottoman period.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, some literary and scholarly circles still consider the forced conversions and name changes of Pomaks in 1912 and 1913 as spontaneous and voluntary acts of Muslims and restoration of their rights afterwards during the Radoslavov government as treachery (Сахатчиев, 2007: 23). They also describe the ban of *Rodina* in 1944 as an ‘insane nihilistic policy’ (Markov in Дружба Родина, 2009: 488; Сахатчиев, 2007: 23).

To sum up, *Drujba Rodina* may be described as an intermediary ‘nationalising’ agent which was staffed by Pomaks themselves and aimed at transformation of Pomak

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<sup>114</sup> *Tangra* (*Tengri* in proto-Turkic) is an ancient word for God among proto-Bulgars. According to the web-site of the publishing house, *TanNakRa* consists of *Tan* (*universe*), *Nak* (*human*), and *Ra* (*God*).

<sup>115</sup> Interview with a Turk lecturer/doctor at history, Sofia, 6 September 2018.

community from inside. It was initially distinguished by its methods, which were different from those resorted to in the Balkan Wars and in 1960s and 1970s. Nevertheless, the Bulgarian state returned to forced and assimilative methods by passing over *Drujba Rodina*.

#### 4.1.2 Name Changes in Ajaria in Soviet Georgia

After the revolution in Russia, the Russian model of naming, which comprised of personal first names, patronymic of the father, and surnames with such suffixes as -ov, -ova, was enforced. For instance, the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz changed their names in accordance to the Russified naming model (Madieva and Tayeva, 2014; Hvoslef, 2001). Due to various reasons, people changed their names and surnames in the course of time. One reason was the change in the meanings of some names in time. This trend was also affected by the revolutionary process, during and after which some words like *kulak* (wealthy peasant), *bogach* (rich man), *Zhandarmov* (Gendarme), *Saldatov* (soldier), *Serzhantov* (sergeant), and *kucher* (coachman) were to be associated with *ancien régime*, petit bourgeoisie, and land lording, and regarded as inappropriate or unfavourable, therefore abandoned (Selishchev, 1979: 87-88). At the same time, as Selishchev (1979: 86) stated, after 1917, a process of ethnic awareness in terms of surnames was raised amongst the ethnic groups and nationalities of the Soviet Union.

Name changes of Ajarians has been of little interest in the literature, probably because name changes did not create much reaction in the region and were not traumatically experienced unlike in Bulgaria. "Nowhere in the Eastern Bloc did names come to mean as much or face such intense programmatic attack as in the Bulgarian context," writes Neuburger (2004: 153). Indeed, a different process occurred in the Soviet Union. Unlike the Bulgarian case, no village raids accompanied by tanks, gendarme, and police were reported, nor were there any riot-like struggles against the Soviet power after 1929. After Georgians ultimately triumphed over debates such as Ajarians' being removed from the census lists as a separate group after 1937, their

Georgianisation accelerated. Some Soviet organisations' underpinning an Ajarian nationality separate from the Georgian nation in 1920s and 1930s was fiercely opposed by Georgians including Beria at the time (Hirsh, 2005: 289).

Names and surnames of Georgian Muslims most likely began to be changed in the 1920s or 1930s. Indeed, a Georgian interviewee, a senior researcher, argued that after the Soviet Union installed its power in the region, a process of re-georgianisation of family names began after 1921, until which Ajarians were using Ottoman family names like *Imamoglu*, *Bayraktaroglu*, and *Topaloglu*.<sup>116</sup> They replaced their family names with the ones used before Ottoman era or translated them to Georgian. Uludağ (2016) takes name and surname changes of Muslims in Ajaria as late as 1920s. In fact, 1930s was a period, during which laws on personal names were issued and name changes occurred in some European countries such as Bulgaria, Nazi Germany, Greece, Romania, Soviet Union, and Turkey. In Bulgaria, it started with the changes in Turkish toponyms such as village names after 1934 (Hacisalihoğlu and Özcan, 2013: 1338) and then personal names of Pomaks were changed under the guise of *Rodina* movement. In Greece, a 1936 law enacted Hellenization of all Slavic personal names (Murphy, 1998: 386). It was a policy conducted on and off after 1913, when Southern Macedonia, where Slavic-speaking Macedonian minority live, was occupied by Greece and even the names of the deceased on the gravestones were impinged (Danforth, 1995: 53, 69, 162). In Nazi Germany, Jews were only allowed to pick names from the Old Testament to segregate them from ethnic Germans. This was different from other contemporary name practices (Rennick, 1970). In Turkey, in addition to non-Muslim minorities such as Armenians, Greeks, and Jews, Muslims who speak languages other than Turkish, including Pomaks (Tali, 2017 [1934]: 131-133, 195), were encouraged to speak Turkish in their everyday life by successive 'Citizen, speak Turkish' campaigns during 1920s and 1930s. Bali (2005: 287-289, 379), for instance, indicates that Turkish Jews gradually adopted Turkish personal and family names in this period, especially after

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<sup>116</sup> Interview with a senior researcher at the Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi, 14 August 2018.

the surname law in 1934.<sup>117</sup> Türköz (2007: 901) argues that non-Muslim minorities chose to acculturate their names to Turkish by a number of methods like removing suffixes such as *-yan*, *-is*, and *-pulos*, which reveal their ethnicity, from their names. They also picked up “innocuous,” namely, purely non-ethnic and neutral, names like *Çiçek* [flower] (as Pomaks did in Bulgaria), translated their names to Turkish, and most interestingly kept one syllable of the old name in Turkifying their names.

As some sources indicate, personal name-change campaigns in the Soviet Union also accelerated (Kobaidze, 1999: 162; Medieva and Tayeva, 2014), but the decisive name changing seems to be carried out after WWII.<sup>118</sup> Ajarian poet Pridon Khalvashi (1925-2010), who was educated in Gorky Literature Institute in Moscow during 1950s, pens a poem, *In the house of Nazım Hikmet*, over a memory of a conversation with the Turkish poet Nazım Hikmet (1902-1963). In this poem, Khalvashi portrays a cold snowy Moscow morning as he was chit-chatting with Nazım in his apartment. Nazım asks Khalvashi why he himself and Ajarians changed their names, for Khalvashi had changed his first name from Hemid to Pridon in 1950s (Khalvashi, 2015: 173). After a reflection on past and history of Ajarians, Khalvashi responds as follows: “Nazım Hikmet, my big friend, this may upset you, but I have not changed my name but acquired my real name” (Halvaşı, 1988: 39). In other words, he tells that Ajarians did not change but restored their names,<sup>119</sup> reflecting more of their Georgian and Christian background (Kulejishvili, 2018: 88).

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<sup>117</sup> Some Turkish Jewish intellectuals supported the Turkification of minorities. For instance, Moiz Kohen (Tekin Alp) issued a list of ten commandments for Turkification of Jews. The first four included Turkification of personal names, some prays in synagogues, and schools, and speaking Turkish (Bali, 2005: 149-150).

<sup>118</sup> While personal names of Muslim Ajarians were Georgianised, a process of changing non-Georgian place names was also initiated in Georgia. Especially toponyms in Azeri populated regions were Georgianised during the Stalinist years and afterwards it was repeated a number of times in 1990s and 2010s (Gordón, 2017).

<sup>119</sup> Similarly, he responds to a question regarding the reason for his conversion in 1995 by saying that he had not changed but acquired it back (Khalvashi, 2015: 67).



During the name change campaigns, last of which probably took place in 1960s (Hoch and Kopeček, 2011), the booklets for ‘accepted names’ were in circulation, as pointed out by some interviewees. It seems that name changes in Ajaria, which followed a law that issued name changes, did not occur suddenly but gradually. An interviewee explained the name change process with the following words:

In the communist era, communists did not allow [people to pick] Muslim names...when a child was born, you go to register it. There he [civil servant] asked what the child’s name was. There was a name book in which people picked names. [The name] Ahmet was not allowed. Those who were religious gave their children Muslim names, too. [But] official names were Georgian. [For instance] Yusuf at home, Guram in the passport. That happened after 1960.<sup>120</sup>

Not only names, but also surnames were changed in the Soviet era as the same interviewee stated. For instance, his grandfather’s last name was Alibabaoglu, which was changed to the current Georgianised version. Another interviewee who is an academician in Shota Rustaveli University in Batumi stated that, after a law which was passed before 1960s, the existing names began to be changed, and Ajarians had to pick ‘pure Georgian’ names like Giorgi and Zurab instead of already existing naming patterns amongst Muslims.<sup>121</sup> Surnames like *Demircioglu* and *Kalaycioglu*, which were taken after the profession of the person and associated with the Ottoman period, were Georgianised, or people were made to reclaim their old Georgian surnames.<sup>122</sup>

An interviewee stated that,<sup>123</sup> similar to what Pomaks followed during the name changing process, Muslims in Ajaria gave their children Georgianised names from the

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<sup>120</sup> Interview with an Ajarian man of religion, Khulo, 16 August 2018.

<sup>121</sup> Interview with a Georgian/Ajarian scholar at the Niko Berdzenishvili Institute at the Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi, 20 August 2018.

<sup>122</sup> Interview with a Georgian/Ajarian scholar at the Niko Berdzenishvili Institute at the Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi, 20 August 2018. According to the Ottoman population register of *Sanjak* of Upper Ajaria in 1835, such family names may be observed as Ceylanoglu, Yedibelaoglu, Kürdoglu, Mahlukanoglu, Yetimoglu, Kondakçioglu, Küçükoglu in various villages such as Khulo, Gorcomi, Chanckhalo, and Tsablana (Başaoğlu, 2019: 40).

<sup>123</sup> Interview with an Ajarian former *Mufti*, Batumi, 13 August 2018.

New and Old Testament like Solomon, Mikhail, Jakob, Isaac, and Soso as diminutive of Ioseb/Joseph, and names which sounded more neutral like Tariel, Malkhaz, Roman, and Rugzar. They also took such Persian, Arabic, and Turkish origin names as Bejan, Zurab, Avtandil, Mirian, Archil, Ramazi, Tengiz, Temur, Aslan, and Otari, which are all Georgian names.

Ajarian pupils with Muslim names were banned from registering to schools. An Ajarian who had a similar account with the Pomak teacher below told that he had to pick a name other than his Muslim name after he was denied to register at the very first day of school. He recalled returning home crying. After he chose a Latin origin name of a famous Ukrainian footballer, he was accepted to the school.<sup>124</sup>

Moreover, a Muslim Ajarian interviewee pointed out that traditional Muslim names began to be banned during the Soviet Union because there were policies of Georgianisation and atheism and because they revealed one's identity, Muslim identity in this case. Therefore, Muslim names were changed into Georgian and Russian names especially in Ajaria. As he stated, "they would allow in [Samtskhe-] Javakheti but not in Ajaria."<sup>125</sup> In another interview with him, he further commented that "they would not allow and register names like Kemal and Djemal in Ajaria. Yet, people still had Muslim names inside the family. However, they put famous Georgian, even Russian, names for outside use as official names...the latter name would not be circulated, except in paper, and even unknown to many."<sup>126</sup> In addition, the academician above attributed the relation between names and identity to why names were changed. For instance, his father's name is Djelal, but it is Irakli [not his real name] in the passport. Since names like Djelal are Islamic, as the interviewee indicated, and revealed the bearers' identity, they needed to be changed to purer Georgian names.

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<sup>124</sup> Talk with a taxi driver, Batumi, 22 August 2018.

<sup>125</sup> Interview with a Muslim Ajarian chairman of an NGO, Ankara, 14 April 2017.

<sup>126</sup> Interview with a Muslim Ajarian chairman of an NGO, Batumi, 15 August 2018.

In addition to Ajarians, other Muslim groups in Ajaria and the adjacent regions, such as Samtskhe-Javakheti, were also urged to Georgianise their names and surnames. For instance, Soviet (Georgian) authorities urged Muslims in Samtskhe-Javakheti (Meskhetian Turks) to adopt Georgian surnames and Georgian suffixes like *-dze* and *-shvili* from time to time since 1920s (Buntürk, 2007: 180-181). Lastly, they suggested that they should Georgianise their names and register as Georgians instead of Turks prior to the 1939 census, yet most of them declined it as claimed by Natmeladze (Sumbadze, 2007: 291). However, registration of Georgian surnames for Meskhetian Turks was implemented in 1944 months before they were deported from Georgia<sup>127</sup> (Kaiser, 2015: 94).

The Laz in Ajaria were also made to abandon their Turkish-sounding surnames and pick more Georgian-sounding or pure Georgian ones like Abuladze and Memishishi rather than Abduloghli and Memishoghli for a more Georgian impression (Pelkmans, 2006: 48, 50). Pelkmans' research displays examples of name transformation through three generations of two Laz families in Ajaria. The members of the first two generations, who were born or grew up before WWII, have predominantly Muslim names like Osman, Muhammad, Ferie, Ali, Padime, Heva and Hasan, whereas the last generation who grew up after the war between 1960s and 1980s have mostly Georgian names like Asiko, Kakha, Irakli, and Nino (Pelkmans, 2006: 46-52). Furthermore, during the fieldwork of this study, a family tree of an Ajarian Muslim family was accessed. Here, almost all the names from the nineteenth century are Islamic/Quranic names such as Mehmed, Osman, Suleiman, Ali, and Mikhail,<sup>128</sup> whereas newer generations either have double names or single Georgian names like Malkhaz, Beka, and Bejan.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Most Meskhetian Turks abandoned these Georgian surnames after the deportation, but some kept them. Those who did not give up Georgian surnames and were allowed to return to Samtskhe-Javakheti were easily granted citizenship as an interviewee's family history approves (Interview with a Meskhetian Turk returnee/Businessman, Akhaltsikhe, 24 August 2018).

<sup>128</sup> The most popular male names were Mehmed, Ali, Osman, Süleyman, and Ahmed in villages of *Sanjak* of Upper Ajaria (eyalet of *Childir*) in 1835. Such rare names as Sunani, Tantu, Kesum, Reso, and Muti were also used (Başaoğlu, 2019: 200).

<sup>129</sup> Interview with an Ajarian former *Mufti*, Batumi, 13 August 2018.

In fact, common examples show that location matters regarding personal names. A number of interviewees referred to the same matter of locality of Muslim names. For instance, a Georgian researcher said: “This is very funny process ... how we can explain it ... connected with totalitarian system ... because you can be Mohammad in Middle Asia but not in Ajaria.”<sup>130</sup> While parents were able to give Muslim names to their children in other parts of Georgia, such as in Svaneti, Gori, or Samtskhe, despite exceptional cases, Muslim names were not welcome in Ajaria.<sup>131</sup> In fact, what these names signified mattered. In other words, Muslim names were seen affiliated with Turkish and Turkey. When they mean Muslim names, it was actually Turkish names that were forbidden as an interviewee contended.<sup>132</sup>

#### **4.1.3 *Vazroditelen Protses* (Revival Process) in Bulgaria and the Name Changes of Pomaks**

Pomaks, as argued in this thesis, who were deemed the most similar to the majority, suffered significantly more persecution than groups, such as Turks in Bulgaria, which were considered less similar. Following the bitter experiences of 1912-1913 and *Drujba Rodina* experiment, they continued to suffer under the Communist regime, during which two more campaigns targeted them first in 1960s and then early 1970s.

The national revival (*Vazrazhdane*) era in Bulgaria originally and historically is used for the period of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, during which Bulgarian awakening and renaissance occurred and political independence took place (Vezenkov and Marinov, 2015: 406-407). The revival process, which encompassed the 1970s and 1980s, was also defined as rebirth, or regenerative process. In this period, the national minorities went through ‘Bulgarianisation’ through their amalgamation to the Bulgarian nation. In other words, they were meant to be ‘regenerated’ or

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<sup>130</sup> Interview with a senior researcher at the Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi, 14 August 2018.

<sup>131</sup> Interview with a Turkish expert of Georgian descent, Tbilisi, 4 April 2017.

<sup>132</sup> Interview with a Muslim Ajarian chairman of an NGO, Batumi, 15 August 2018.

'reborn' as Bulgarians (Crampton, 2007: 276) following an initiation rite, namely, adopting new names and rechanging their garments.

The first secretary of Bulgarian Communist Party, Todor Zhivkov (1997: 444), elaborated in his memoirs on the absurdity of nationality policy, which led to a multinational Bulgaria before his era, especially under his predecessors Dimitrov and Chervenkov. Apparently, he embarked on reversing and correcting this policy, which for him costed the disintegration of Bulgarian people, isolation of minorities, and fostering of Pan-Turkism. Under his governance, the so-called neglected aspects of national question were begun to be taken care of starting with Pomaks and then Turkish minority. Ivanova argues that, by the 1960s, the Communist regime started resorting to "new modes of integration that prioritized nation over class" rather than vice versa since 'proletarian internationalism' had lost its credibility (2017: 41). In this period, the policies targeting Pomaks were the same as the previous policies of *ancien régime*; name changing was enforced, and the traditional outer apparel of Pomaks such as *fezzes* of men and *shalvari* of women were forbidden (Neuburger, 1997).

In 1962, the Central Committee of the BCP approved the 'activities against the Turkization of Gypsies, Tatars and Bulgarians who were Muslims by Religion' (Ivanova, 2017: 41), which gave momentum to the name-changes, which had already begun in some parts of the Rhodopes as early as 1960 and slowly progressed until the spring of 1964 (Neuburger, 2004: 154-156). Different parts of Rhodopes which Pomaks inhabit experienced this cycle of name changes distinctively and reacted differently. For instance, some villages such as Ribново in Blagoevgrad province, Western Rhodopes, reacted it strongly. In some parts, e.g. Blagoevgrad, name changes were implemented more proactively (Neuburger, 2004: 156), whereas in others they were not so vigorously as argued by some interviewees in Bulgaria.

When the campaign reached Ribново in highlands, a fierce resistance took place. A local village resident, who was 14 years old then, told about those days: "In 1964,

there were rumours that something was coming. Village headman also told that names would be changed, and told us not to resist.”<sup>133</sup> According to him, soldiers surrounded the village at night and came to the village mosque during the morning prayer. People and the soldiers came face to face, and a fight between them broke out. Villagers resisted the soldiers since they knew their intention. Another senior Pomak argued that it was obvious that they had come with wicked intentions, for they stationed in the adjacent village at night and surrounded the village in the dark.<sup>134</sup> After the soldiers disclosed their purpose, people rebelled, captured some police, put *fezzes* on them, and threatened them saying Turkey would come to their help.<sup>135</sup> The previous interviewee gave further details on the events: “Once people realised that bullets were not real but rubber bullets, they took their guns and began to hit them by gunstocks”<sup>136</sup> until the soldiers scattered. He also said that villagers destroyed the communication lines and the only wooden bridge, which gave access to the village. People set night watch and waited for a few days in the village centre until someone in charge appeared. According to him, someone from the ministry of internal affairs arrived to the village and literally shouted from the other side of the broken bridge, assuring them by saying “I brought you freedom. Ivan will remain as Ivan and Asan as Asan. Everyone will keep his name.”<sup>137</sup> Indeed, after the intrusion of the forces into the village and the reaction of people against it, the Bulgarian state receded. Having heard of resistance, even Zhivkov criticised those actions for being misfeasance, and the Central Committee issued a directive regarding the abuses among the Pomak population in Blagoevgrad province (Eminov, 2007: 12). Pomaks in affected regions got back their names. They for some time kept their names until the final campaign between 1971 and 1974, when almost all Pomaks’ names were changed. However, the so-called organizers or leaders of the village, who took active

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<sup>133</sup> Interview with a Pomak in Ribnovo, Blagoevgrad province, 16 September 2018.

<sup>134</sup> Interview with a Pomak in Ribnovo, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018.

<sup>135</sup> Interview with a Pomak in Ribnovo, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018.

<sup>136</sup> Interview with a Pomak in Ribnovo, Blagoevgrad province, 16 September 2018.

<sup>137</sup> Interview with a Pomak in Ribnovo, Blagoevgrad province, 16 September 2018.

part in the events, were not forgotten according to an interviewee from Ribnovo, and they were punished for a while later. They received years of imprisonment or deportation from the settlement. Some even died, not during the events, but because of beating and torture afterwards.

In 1970, the final phase of assimilation of Pomaks was launched by the BCP 'Resolution for the Purification of the Class and Party Consciousness and the Patriotic Upbringing of the Bulgarian Mohammedans' (Konstantinov, 1992c: 409). Unlike the campaign in 1960s, which was unsystematically conducted affecting only a small part of Pomaks (Neuburger, 2004: 156; 2000: 193), namely, 24.000 Pomaks' names were changed (Alagöz, 2017: 36), almost all of Pomaks were affected in the renaming campaign of 1971-1974. This time, no such resistance occurred in Ribnovo as the interviewees put, but the red resistance flag was raised by other settlements and Pomaks. As in the previous cycle of the campaign, harsher reactions and hostility against name changes were shown in southwestern Rhodope settlements like Yakoruda, the villages of Kornitsa, Lazhnitsa, and Brazhnitsa in Blagoevgrad as well as Dospat and Barutin further eastward in the Western Rhodopes within the province of Smolyan. The regions further in the east like Madan and Rudozem in the province of Smolyan showed less resistance, and Lovech Pomaks were only slightly affected since their names had already been Bulgarianised (Konstantinov and Alhaug, 1995: 31-32). Especially in the events in Barutin, Dospat, and the villages of Kornitsa, Lazhnitsa, and Brazhnitsa, encounters between the police and people led to many casualties. Some protesters were detained and sentenced to years of imprisonment, and some were killed or wounded (Turan, 1999: 77; Apostolov, 1996: 733; Neuburger, 2004: 160-161; 2000: 193-194; Zafer, 2018: 3-6). Some people were resettled in the remote parts of the country, and around 500 people were sent to Belene concentration camp (Alagöz, 2017: 42-43). During the events in Kornitsa, village people even took control of the settlement for more than two months and declared a 'republic.' Even a Turkish flag flied over the centre until the Bulgarian forces crashed over the resistance (Neuburger, 2004: 161; Alagöz, 2017: 42).

Some Pomak regions, especially the Chech region between Mesta Valley, in the southeast of Blagoevgrad, and Dospat-Barutin line, the west of Smolyan province, and the westward region including the three villages of Kornitsa, Lazhnitsa, and Brazhnitsa in the west of the River Mesta, vigorously resisted the name changes both in 1960s and 1970s compared to other Pomaks further in the east and north. This region, as stated before, remained part of Ottoman borders because of the Rhodope resistance against Bulgaria after 1877-1878 and was incorporated to Bulgaria only during the first Balkan War. In a way, it took over the legacy of resistance from Tamrash and continued as Ribново, which is sarcastically called as the 'Pomak Republic', and Kornitsa. Moreover, in this region, Drujba Rodina in 1930s and 1940s was hardly effective (Todorova, 1998: 490). In the post-communist period, this time some Pomak villages in Yakoruda municipality, Blagoevgrad, displayed a form of passive resistance declaring their identity as Turk in the census of 1992. Pomaks of this region were the spearheads of distinct Pomak consciousness.

Unlike the first forced renaming in 1912 and 1913, during other renaming campaigns, Pomaks were usually given an option to choose a name from a list of official names (Poulton, 1991: 111). According to the testimonies and eyewitnesses, name changes in the early 1970s were overseen by the party officials and armed personnel. An aged Pomak described it as such: "It [renaming] was very easy. The soldiers occupied the village. They visited every house, typed a name, and had the paper signed, which read he-she voluntarily changed his name. However, it was not voluntary, they changed it in force."<sup>138</sup>

Field research revealed that, in some areas like V....., a village on lower altitude, men were asked to come to the village administration and sign the name-change petition in 1972. In addition, people were gathered in town centres and were made to select names from the name list which was put on a table in open air, hand their identity

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<sup>138</sup> Interview with an aged Pomak in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 16 September 2018. Similar name-change petitions were forced to be signed by Turks in 1984 to demonstrate that it was a voluntary act of people.



cards in old names over the officials, and receive the new ones (Poulton, 1991: 112). Gustav L. Veigand's *българските собствени имена произходъ и значения* [Bulgarian proper names origin and meaning], published in 1926, or Stefan Ilchev's *Речник на личните и фамилни имена у българите* [A Dictionary of Personal and Family Names of the Bulgarians], published in 1969, are examples of such guides. One of the interviewees,<sup>139</sup> from the village V..... in Blagoevgrad, recollected his name changing experience:

On 12 April 1972, they first knocked on our door. People realised that soldiers had surrounded the village at night and that something was coming up. Everybody went inside their houses and locked themselves ... I was 19 years old at that year... ten to twelve people began to knock doors and ours as well. "Open it!" they shouted. We kept quiet. They forced the door. I told dad that they would break and enter into the house anyway, then we opened it. They said "you and your father come to the school." We were first to come there. One guy from K....., and one police from D..... were there. The police said "Listen! What is he going to say to you?" The other guy said "we are here to change your names." "Aaaah! [I was baffled] How will you change my name?" I responded. "Listen! Sulo [aga]! Here is the book, pick a name. Otherwise both they beat you and change your name" one said. My father replied "how will I change it? I do not know, maybe others will react to this. I am the first here. If I give in, how will others react? I do not change my name." Police turned to me: "Kid, you will change your name, here is..." This struggle continued almost two hours. [In the end] I looked through the book, Salim, Salim [not his real name] ... Smil, not Ivan, not Goshu [I took Smil]. When we left out, [I was wondering] what they [villagers] had done. Did they resist? But, "orere!" [Geez!] I realised they [officers] were in the playground already finishing their duty. They [already] changed the names by stopping at every house. I supposed that I was the weakest man of the village, but I was the one who resisted the longest. I was the toughest.<sup>140</sup>

From the fieldwork and observation at tombs in Pomak cemeteries, it can be concluded that they especially wanted some sort of similarity between their original names and the names they had to pick during the campaigns. As some scholars

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<sup>139</sup> During the interviews, it was not possible to ask Pomak interviewees' Bulgarian names, but some of them preferred to disclose. For some, the elderly mostly, it is still a disgrace.

<sup>140</sup> Interview with an elderly Pomak in a village (V) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018.

demonstrated, they paid importance to phonetic similarity while choosing names (Konstantinov, 1992b: 78; Krăsteva-Blagoeva, 2006: 69).

One teacher from a neighbouring village went on describing the name change event as follows:

Since some police were killed and such an event occurred during the campaign in a village close to ours, in P....., the suspects refuged to their relatives in our village. The village was surrounded by the military, military police, and party forces. The animals were stuck in the village, and nobody could go to work and to their fields. The village was on a lookout, and it was divided into districts, for which ten to fifteen officials were responsible to check the area house by house. Nobody wanted to have these names but they had to. Otherwise, there was arrest, beating, and violence. People got afraid and accepted the names that were given by them. There was fear, horror, stress, crying, and tear. They were helpless and desperate. They [officials] came with a name guide and offered a name. People did not choose, but they were given. This resulted in [subsequent to the campaign] that people did not know what names were given to them. You did not know who you are [your name] because they did not produce any official document at that time. Later, when you needed an official document, you could learn your name. The old ones became useless and taken back when you were issued the new one.<sup>141</sup>

Some refused to select, but could not evade having a new one since their old identity papers became invalid, depriving them of public, education, and banking services (Poulton, 1991: 112). For instance, the Pomak teacher from the Blagoevgrad region, a student then, recalled his experience during the very first day of high school: “In 1972, I was at eighth grade and graduated on 15 June, but I was not issued a diploma [because of my name]. I was supposed to continue to the school on 15 September but was not given a diploma. At the very day, they gave me a name from the Bulgarian name guide to make me eligible to begin school.”<sup>142</sup> His story resembles the Ajarian interviewee’s account above, in which he was accepted to school only after he had adopted a new name.

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<sup>141</sup> Interview with a Pomak school teacher in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 17 September 2018.

<sup>142</sup> Interview with a Pomak school teacher in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 17 September 2018.

During the forced name changes in 1960s and 1970s, Pomaks tended to adopt names that sound familiar to the existing ones or names without any Christian connotations. When they were given a choice, as some of my interviewees did, they preferred 'neutral' names from the nature, rare Bulgarian names, and even foreign names that they thought sounded akin to their names (Krăsteva-Blagoeva, 2006: 68-69).<sup>143</sup> Nonetheless, the inscriptions in gravestones in Pomak cemeteries demonstrate that there were still Bulgarian-Christian names among them. Overall, however, they managed to follow their own naming preferences and practices different from or rare amongst the Christian Bulgarians. The same strategy was more or less followed by Turks during the last phase of the so-called 'revival process' in 1984 and 1989. When they were given a chance to choose a name, and mostly they were, they usually picked those names that they considered as 'less Bulgarian' and non-Christian, were common in both groups, and approximate to their own names in spelling.

Muslims whose names had been changed against their will regained the right to have their old names in 1990. A Pomak interviewee recounted how he felt upon this: "Todor Zhivkov used to say 'the wheel of history cannot be rolled back' but it did by the grace of God. The event in 1989 seemed like a joke for us but we reclaimed our names."<sup>144</sup> The Pomak teacher whose views are shared above explained how important it was for him to keep his name and the relation between his name and his identity as follows:

I am glad to bear a name given by my parents. It is a divine right to bear a name that was given to you by your mother and father in this world. I think if a person gives up his own name, he renounces, abandons his kin ... Sometimes the government might be mightier than us. However, no one can seize your soul and heart. Your name and faith remain in you down to the grave.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> As Krăsteva-Blagoeva pointed out, the name Harry was very popular among Pomaks from the village Chepintsi, Rudozem.

<sup>144</sup> Interview with a Pomak tradesman in a village (O) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 16 September 2018.

<sup>145</sup> Interview with a Pomak school teacher in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 17 September 2018.

Although most Pomaks and Turks regained their names, some left them untouched for various reasons. Some Pomaks even re-changed their recovered names by retaking the Bulgarian names in 1990s. These Pomaks' naming preferences reflected their sensibilities as well as 'tastes' and followed the pattern applied by Pomaks in 1970s. That is, they tended to choose non-Christian-sounding Bulgarian names. For instance, some interviewees insisted that there are not Pomak 'Ivan' or 'Angel', which were perceived by some Pomaks as more Christian connotations. A fieldwork conducted in 1990 in Hadzhiyska reveals three name giving inclinations among Pomaks in this settlement. Of the participants, 46 percent predominantly chose Turkish-Islamic names, 39 percent names used by both Turks and Bulgarians, and 14 percent only Bulgarian names (Poulton, 1991: 115).

#### **4.1.4 Double Name Phenomenon: Legacy of the Past**

The practice of name changes of Pomaks applied by consecutive Bulgarian regimes and that of Ajaris applied by Soviet Georgia in the last century produced a dual or double name phenomenon, which affected these groups ever since. Members of these groups frequently choose two names for their children: one traditional Muslim name and one national name from the name reserve of the majority.<sup>146</sup> They use the former within the community, and the latter, namely the official, state, civil, or passport names, for outside the community for official purposes. The double names are by no means unique to minorities like Pomaks and Muslim Ajaris; as far as has been encountered in the literature, double name practice is widely observed among such groups as Macedonian minority in Greece and, for a certain period of time, Kurds in Turkey.<sup>147</sup> In Greece, the policy of linguistic Hellenization and bans on Slavic names implemented since the first quarter of the last century also caused a 'double

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<sup>146</sup> While Pomaks and Turks acquired two names for domestic and official contexts, Roma in Bulgaria used three names. In addition to domestic (Roma) and official (Bulgarian) names, they adopted a Turkish name for circulation among Islamic minorities (Konstantinov and Alhaug, 1995: 89).

<sup>147</sup> Since antiquity, people have used double names, one from the traditional background and one from the dominant culture (Horsley, 1987: 1-3). Double names have sometimes developed out of suppression as well as conformity to the dominating culture.

name' phenomenon among the Slavophone Macedonian minority. Similar to other cases mentioned in the text, they have two names: official Greek names given to them at baptism (Macedonians are not allowed to take on Slavic names at baptism at church) and Slavic names circulated among their fellows (Danforth, 1995: 161-162). The Turkish name policies followed after 1972 and especially subsequent to the military coup in 1980 brought about the practice of double name among Kurds in Turkey, namely one registered official name that appeared on ID cards and one unofficial name bestowed by parents that were used among family and friends.<sup>148</sup>

In the Soviet context, the dual system of naming emerged and existed during the Soviet period amongst the groups like the Kyrgyz, after the introduction of the Russian model of naming by the Soviet government. Parents gave their children Soviet-style names, which were generated from the names of the leading Communist ideologists and Bolsheviks, for pragmatic reasons to facilitate their relations with the new regime in addition to other motives. The Russian model and the Soviet-style new names were used in official settings, especially by the rural Kyrgyz, whereas the Kyrgyz version was confined to private settings (Hvoslef, 2001: 89-90). Same trends may be observed among immigrants who reserve their original names for their families and fellows, and use the newly adopted ones for their new acquaintances and neighbourhood in the host country (Drury and McCarthy, 1980: 311; Bursell, 2012: 483).<sup>149</sup>

#### **4.1.4.1 Pomaks: 'Name is Identity'**

Neuburger (2004: 160) argues that double-naming phenomenon among Pomaks appeared right after the name changes that began in 1970s as a silent and covert way of resistance, wherein people kept on using Muslim names domestically. It prevailed

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<sup>148</sup> In Russia, as part of tradition in some regions, people continued to take on two names, one official name received at Baptism and one 'street name,' which is extensively used (Nikonov, 1971: 183-184).

<sup>149</sup> Some religions, such as Islam (and among Christians, the Protestants), compromised on this issue, permitting a certain freedom in the choice of names. On the other hand, the Orthodox Church introduced a list of names and categorically prohibited all others (Nikonov, 1971: 186).

until 1990, when the 'revival process' ended and names were reverted. However, in the post-communist period, double names have also been prevalent among Pomaks. Some people chose to keep their official Bulgarian names, and some who changed after 1990 retook Bulgarian names as an alleged strategy to find jobs in big cities and obtain visa. Some Pomaks believe that, in 1990s and afterwards, Pomaks took on Bulgarian names simply to find employment in Bulgaria and abroad and to avoid discriminatory and governmental problems (Turan, 1998b: 237).<sup>150</sup> For instance, a senior Pomak said during the interview that "some Pomaks did not give up their Bulgarian names, for they are second-class citizens in Bulgaria. They find jobs with difficulty after university. [He thinks] if he introduces himself by his Bulgarian name he can easily find a job."<sup>151</sup> For another interviewee, "some Pomaks have the mentality that to be successful you should have a Bulgarian name or be Bulgarian [in Bulgaria]. I know a professor who told that hadn't he had a Bulgarian name he would not be a professor. Pomaks continue to have such views. Yet, they [Bulgarians] do not ever accept them as their own [flock]."<sup>152</sup>

Almost all the interviewees expressed views on the possible reasons for name changes in this period. They mostly have friends who have Bulgarianised their names to succeed in social life and at school or who feel that their Pomak names constitute a barrier to their upward mobility and cause them to be discriminated against. A Pomak NGO affiliate from Smolyan explained this issue:

If a Pomak has a Muslim name, s(he) has difficulty finding a good job. I want to retain my name [and be a director], but they do not wish to see me as a director because I have a Muslim name. Should I say I am Magdalena, it is ok then. Should I say my Muslim name, then it is a problem. They do not want to hear my Muslim name. Assimilation is under way, no democracy [exists] for Muslims [in Bulgaria] even though we are part of the European Union.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion and a Pomak functionary in *Muftiate*, Sofia, 11 September 2018.

<sup>151</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion, Sofia, 5 September 2018.

<sup>152</sup> Interview with a Pomak functionary in *Muftiate*, Sofia, 11 September 2018.

<sup>153</sup> Interview with a Pomak NGO representative, Smolyan, 17 September 2018.

Similar research outcome may be found in other fieldworks conducted by Bulgarian scholars, according to whom Pomaks (re-)pick Bulgarian names pragmatically to find better jobs or get visa more easily. According to these Pomaks, who retook Bulgarian names in the post-communist era, names given by their parents, or the Turco-Arabic names, are their real names, whereas Bulgarian names are their 'state' names (Krăsteva-Blagoeva, 2006: 73-74).

Some interviewees stated Pomaks have still mistrust of the state and continue to have double names to hide their Pomakness.<sup>154</sup> The fear of the state and prejudices of the public prevent them from revealing their identity. A Pomak interviewee from Sofia recalled his studentship in the university, during which some Pomaks changed their names to avoid the mocking attitude of friends and second-class treatment.<sup>155</sup> A Bulgarian scholar who specialized on Pomaks attributes contemporary name changes of Pomaks to the need to overcome discrimination:

I think Pomaks are still scared. They are very poor in Rhodopes. They migrate abroad for work ... There is no job [there]. They change their names before they come to Sofia and adopt Bulgarian names... It is not compulsory, no one says 'change names' but they alter it to find a job easily. I know a few people like this... [He knows] If he comes with Hasan, he shall hardly find a job. They are anxious in villages.<sup>156</sup>

Even though they are free to take on a name they wish, the state policies they have been historically exposed to and the uncertainty they feel have taught them to act cautiously. An interviewee says, "we have the right to choose our personal names in the present time," but also adds "for how long I do not know" as he claims names have been changed more than a dozen times in Bulgaria since the nineteenth century.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Interview with a Pomak post-graduate student, Sofia, 5 September 2018.

<sup>155</sup> Interview with a Pomak white-collar worker, Sofia, 18 September 2018.

<sup>156</sup> Interview with a Bulgarian researcher on Pomaks, Sofia, 4 September 2018.

<sup>157</sup> Interview with a Pomak school teacher in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 17 September 2018.

A senior Pomak from a village in higher Rhodopes, which has been famous for its resistance to the government in 1960s and preservation its traditions, claimed that “Everybody retook their names [after 1990]. There is no such thing [double name] here like on plain. Everybody here has Turco-Muslim name. There are no people with double names. It [double names] exists everywhere but not here.”<sup>158</sup>

Although for some Pomaks, ‘name is identity’ and having Muslim names is related with being part of the Muslim community as well as showing a degree of religiousness, for some others, names are a secondary issue. For instance, in the period of communism- to quote from a Pomak interviewee:

Everybody had a Bulgarian name. Then, everybody changed their names. In some places, exclusion occurred. [Some said] “Let him be called as Atanas in workplace, we will anyway call him Ahmed at home. He not faces hardship.” In some places this is not so much at people’s agenda. People say “Names do not so much matter, but what matters is inside [how he feels].” Double naming came with communism.<sup>159</sup>

A Turkish scholar pointed to the fact that, even though Pomaks have Bulgarian names, they are distinguished in a way from ordinary Bulgarians, who celebrate their names after patron saints in name days. However, Pomaks do not celebrate that feast even though they have Bulgarian names. He added that Pomaks do not “consider the name in that way. Passport name is not given so much importance. In such instances this difference becomes visible. That is, it becomes perceptible that s/he is not one hundred percent Bulgarian.”<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion in a village (O) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018.

<sup>159</sup> Interview with a Pomak white-collar worker (*Mufiate*), Sofia, 3 September 2018.

<sup>160</sup> Interview with a Bulgarian/Turk scholar from Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, 18 September 2018.



#### 4.1.4.2 Ajarians

In the Soviet context, Ajarians were forced to pick and use non-Muslim names, even though they continued to be known by their Muslim names within their neighbourhood and villages, a fact mostly true for those from the upper Ajarian villages. During the field research, for instance, an Ajarian activist and chairman of a Batumi-based NGO, who is recognised by Georgian public by his official name, said that he was known by his Muslim name by his fellows in his village in upper Ajaria rather than by his official name, which is unknown to his villagers.<sup>161</sup> Another Ajarian NGO member also pointed out that he officially could not bear his Muslim name in Soviet Georgia. However, in the post-Soviet era, he gradually began to use it.<sup>162</sup> Similar accounts which reveal the necessity of having an accepted official name may be found in other works. Here is an account of an Ajarian Muslim from Akhaltsikhe in 1990s: “Ömer is the name given by my mother. Abuladze Rezo is my official Georgian name. Neither would I get a diploma nor find a job if I had not used this name. I would be destitute” (cited in Zeyrek, 1999: 55).

As far as the interviewees in both countries are concerned, parents in general terms, whose ‘tastes’ might have been affected by the mass media and popular culture (Lieberson, 2000: 55), have begun to break with the customary naming practices and given non-traditional or foreign names to their children. In theory, neither Pomaks nor Ajarians are prohibited from giving the names they wish to their children after 1991, but both groups face some challenges in giving Muslim or non-Georgian and non-Bulgarian names to their children, which indirectly forces them to dual naming.

Still, some religiously motivated parents struggle to give their children only one name on their own wish despite the official authorities who resist to register it. An Ajarian interviewee said, “A Hodja [three years ago] struggled for one month to name his

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<sup>161</sup> Interview with a Muslim Ajarian chairman of an NGO, Ankara, 14 April 2017.

<sup>162</sup> Interview with a Muslim Ajarian NGO member, Batumi, 26 October 2015.

daughter Irem [not her real name], finally he succeeded. They said that such a name did not exist, this could not be [written down]. Irem does not make sense to them. They do not say they do not accept it because it is an Islamic name.”<sup>163</sup> Another interviewee from Akhaltsikhe who has three children said that he gave only one name of his wish for his second and third child, whereas his first-born had to have double names because “they would not accept [Muslim names] in 2006.”<sup>164</sup>

As Ajarian interviewees indicated, during the formalisation of names, a struggle takes place between the two sides, one of which declines to register parents’ wishes. Holding official power, civil servants decline names that sound like non-Georgian but particularly like Muslim and Turkish. As one interviewee stated, as in the Soviet era, they still tend to accept any name but Muslim. He kept on as follows: “My children have two names. [Since I was outside the country] my son was named as Alexander. [When I returned to Georgia] I put Hasan as his second name. I picked names of Sara and Leila for my other children.”<sup>165</sup> Another interviewee said: “I was living in Akhaltsikhe. My son was born and I asked for a birth certificate. [I wished to give] Mehmed. [The officer said] give up these *husikmusik* [meaningless names] and I would not register [Mehmed]. He is registered as J.....”<sup>166</sup>

Most religiously devoted interviewees both in Bulgaria and Georgia attached special importance to adopting Muslim names and associated it with the degree of religiousness. For them, those who have non-Muslim names or have resumed to use names given by the communist regime are not religious. In Georgia, men of religion denounced the practices of double names and urged people to take on only one name, namely a Muslim name (Pelkmans, 2006: 122-123). In Bulgaria, reactions against double names or to single Bulgarian names mounted in early 1990s; some

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<sup>163</sup> Interview with a Georgian Muslim, Akhaltsikhe, 23 August 2018.

<sup>164</sup> Interview with a Georgian Muslim, Mokhe (Adigeni), 17 August 2018.

<sup>165</sup> Interview with two Ajarian men of religion, Batumi, 20 August 2018.

<sup>166</sup> Interview with two Ajarian men of religion, Batumi, 20 August 2018.

Pomak men of religion in some regions rejected burying them when they were dead (Georgieva, 1994: 158). However, it did not become widespread, for it backfired due to the reactions of Pomaks who menaced Muslim authorities with conversion and church building in their neighbourhood.<sup>167</sup>

The generational differences and transformation of Ajarians regarding this matter can also be traced in the interview data. For instance, a historian interviewee who defined himself as Ajarian, Georgian, and atheist, said that he had also two names, one religious, Muslim, name and one civil name. He added the following:

Some say, one is for home-use and one is for outside ... I practically do not use the second name, I use only my civil name. I used to be called with my second name. My children have only one name. Some people in higher regions in Ajaria may use the second name.<sup>168</sup>

Another interviewee recounted that “it reads Mustafa in my grandfather’s I.D. card. My father has two names, Tamazi and also a Muslim name, so do I. Irakli is in my I.D. card and I have also Muslim name but I am not called with that. Everybody calls Irakli. I was born in the 1990s and no one calls me with my Muslim name.”<sup>169</sup> Not everybody is willing to get into a dispute with the authorities over name issue; some would rather embrace their official names in order to better integrate to community. Moreover, in line with “trendy” and “modern” perception of Orthodoxy after independence and the negative perception of Islam in Georgia, Muslim names are not actually prestigious. Some interviewees obviously hesitated to refer to their second names and felt ‘shame’ about them (Khalvashi, 2015).

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<sup>167</sup> Interview with a Pomak tradesman in a village (O) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 16 September 2018.

<sup>168</sup> Interview with a Georgian/Ajarian historian at the Department of History, Archeology and Ethnology at the Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University and Ajaria Archives Administration, Batumi, 14 August 2018.

<sup>169</sup> Interview with an Ajarian Businessman/Translator, Batumi, 15 August 2018.

#### 4.1.5 Other 'Double's

Pomak and Ajarian cases alike show us that different forms of 'double's have been generated throughout the twentieth century and experienced thereafter. As in the case of names and name-giving practices, they were forced to draw a clear line between the domestic and the external/official contexts. They kept, or in some cases still keep, their identity as a secret and maintain dual lives. The data collected from the interviews conducted in Ajaria and Rhodopes revealed these dualities in clothing, greetings, and prayers. The participants recounted that they were hiding their identity and presenting themselves as someone else under the authoritarian regime and after it.

The repression of religious activities and practices in the Soviet Union resulted in confining them basically to the private space and inside the houses. However, as Muslim Ajarians recounted, they were not totally free, for their private space was also being monitored, checked, controlled, and violated from time to time. This situation urged people to lead different lives and develop split identities, namely an interior identity and an external one for public space, school, or work. As Pelkmans (2010: 116) indicated, they "'act'[ed] Georgian in public and Muslim at home." For instance, one interviewee recalled those days in the Soviet Union as follows:

We were a religious family, but were atheist outside. We followed a religious life inside home, but atheist life outside ... Our two grandfathers were *hodja* and disappeared in 1937. We do not know their end. We constantly used to be in fear. We were double-faced. My father used to warn me that I would declare I did not believe in God, I did not know God at school but I should say I was Muslim at home. I was the most successful during the inspections at school [in concealing my own face].<sup>170</sup>

As some Ajarian NGO affiliates and officials argued that, some Muslim Ajarians especially those who hold a post and office position still pursue this doubleness not

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<sup>170</sup> Interview with a Muslim Ajarian chairman of an NGO, Batumi, 15 August 2018.

to lose their privileges; they are Christian in public and Muslim at home.<sup>171</sup> Similarly, Muslim interviewees of other ethnicities argued that Muslim Ajarians hesitate to disclose their identity in public.

In case of Pomaks, the duality can be observed in double identities. Both in the communist era and now, some Pomaks conceal their identity and Pomakness, introducing themselves as Bulgarian, if they are away from their intimate circles and environment.<sup>172</sup> Some interviewees even stated that some Pomaks conceal their Pomakness from offsprings. In other cases, however, they give up combatting the hardships of these dualities and embrace their Pomakness. An interviewee from a Pomak village in the southern Blagoevgrad region summarised the transformation of Pomaks had gone through referring to his personal metamorphosis:

We lived 18 years with Bulgarian names. There were Christians down there [on plain]. While we were working and arguing with them, they would say 'mother of these Pomaks' as an insult. We both had Bulgarian names, but he [they] knew I was Pomak. During the youth age, I used to hide my Pomakness but a certain time came when I began accepting my Pomakness in Muslim name. I gave up pretending to be a Bulgarian with a Bulgarian and Christian name.<sup>173</sup>

As further discussed in the next chapter, Pomaks' concealment of their identity prevails in Bulgaria. Maintaining double identities, introducing themselves as a Bulgarian to strangers, being Pomaks with Pomaks, and carrying double names help them protect against discrimination and prejudices. Pomaks who leave Bulgaria as labour migrants in the EU continue this practice. As Deneva (2008) argues, they have carried the double-name practice with them to their new environment, Spain in this case, and continue to identify themselves, with their Bulgarian names against strangers and with their Muslim names in their own community. Ironically, in their

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<sup>171</sup> Interview with a Muslim Ajarian chairman of an NGO, Batumi, 26 October 2015; Interview with a Muslim Ajarian MP, Batumi, 30 October 2015; Interview with a Muslim Ajarian chairman of an NGO, Batumi, 15 August 2018.

<sup>172</sup> For more on Pomak double identity, see (White and White, 2017: 99).

<sup>173</sup> Interview with a Pomak tradesman in a village (O) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 16 September 2018.

new milieu, on the absence of the identity signs such as name, dress, religious feasts, they “are able to achieve Bulgarian status and recognition as Bulgarians only outside Bulgaria. In this sense, immigration grants them a space of freedom which they have not benefited from in their home state” (Deneva, 2008).

In both countries, the dominant cultures have set the rules and defined what and who is modern, civilized, and prestigious. Pomaks and Ajarians who continue their traditional way of life, behaviour, and everyday conduct were seen as uncultured or uncivilised and not accepted in urban settings. Thus, they eventually had to adopt more Georgian and Bulgarian ways of conduct. In other words, when they went out or left their milieu and settled in the city, they would follow or adopt the dominant culture of the majority, which represented the modernity, since their traditional, brighter, and more colourful, outfits and Turco-Arabic greetings were seen as backward. For instance, people who live in the upper Rhodope mountain villages pursue more traditional ways of life and carry the conventional proper outfit suitable for the village life. They, especially women, are mocked by their Pomak compatriots who are proud to follow the modernity and have already exchanged their traditional outfits with the modern ones.<sup>174</sup> Therefore, when women from an upper Western Rhodope mountain village travel to the city or town centre, they carry spare modern dresses along with them and change clothes when there. On the way back, they wear the everyday village costumes.<sup>175</sup> Similarly, they modify their everyday greetings in the city from traditional, which is enriched with Turkish, Arabic, and local forms, to Bulgarian. This is also the case in Georgian periphery in Samtskhe, to which Ajarians migrated. In fact, in both communities, especially in the highland villages, their greetings, salutation, and thanking phrases have Turco-Arabic loan words such as ‘Alhamdulillah çok güzel’ [It’s beautiful, praise be to God], ‘Hoş geldin’ [Welcome], ‘Allah razı olsun’ [God bless you], ‘Çok şükür’ [Thank heaven], ‘Selamaleykum’ [Hello, peace be with you], ‘helal olsun’ [enjoy it, congratulations!], and ‘sag olun’ [Thanks].

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<sup>174</sup> For examples on the differences between villages, see (Troeva, 2013: 80).

<sup>175</sup> Interview with a Pomak researcher in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 16 September 2018.

However, they are replaced with Bulgarian or Georgian equivalents in the city. As a Muslim Georgian stated, they are supposed to say greetings in Georgian in the city rather than what they say in their own environment.<sup>176</sup>

This duality in the Pomak community stems from the varying degrees of exposure to and adaptation of modernity in high altitude and lower altitude Pomak villages as Georgieva (2001: 310) describes. Villages in the higher parts of the mountains were exposed to modernisation and therefore adapted to it later than the villages in plain, which created a kind of difference between communities. Such a difference might be observed between high altitude villages and lowland settlements in Ajaria as well (Baramidze, 2010). While lowland settlements embraced Georgian life-styles through mixmarriages and the changing demographic composition of Ajaria during and after the Soviet period- a condition that facilitated their identification with Christianity afterwards-, Upper Ajaria has continued to be identified with Islam (Pelkmans, 2003: 56).

#### **4.1.6 Graveyards and Gravestones as Spaces of Identity Manifestation**

“Graveyards not simply are the homes of the dead but also mark out the homeland of the living” (Bouchard, 2004: 346).

“... graves and memorials — testaments of identity, in some respects — are not unchanging points in a static landscape” (Jenkins, 2014: 19).

Name changing campaigns by successive Bulgarian regimes and the Soviet Georgia are considered in this dissertation as ‘nationalisation’ of minority identities. In both countries, similar other policies were implemented like the closure of places of worship and schools, persecution of elites, prohibition of traditional feasts, forbidding wearing of traditional clothes, and banning of traditional Muslim funerary rites. Believers in Bulgaria, especially during the so-called revival period, had great difficulty with burying their deaths in their own graveyards. They also experienced

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<sup>176</sup> Interview with a Georgian Muslim, Akhaltsikhe, 23 August 2018.

the closure of graveyards and mutilation of the Muslim gravestones with Turkish-Arabic inscriptions on them (Eminov, 1999; Troeva, 2013: 81-82).

An analysis of the literature shows that, in the modern times, initially fascist regimes in Europe commonly implemented such repressive acts toward the deceased, and other oppressive regimes followed the same track.<sup>177</sup> In 1920s, for example, during the re-Italianisation policy of South Tyrol, where German speakers inhabited, Italian authorities not only enforced Italianisation of the names of the living but also required Italianisation of the names of the deceased upon gravestones (Scassa, 1996: 175). Similarly, Euskeran, Basque language, names were obliterated from the gravestones and elsewhere under Franco Spain (1996: 176). Moreover, Macedonian minority in Greece also faced troubles until 1990s regarding inscribing their Slavic names on their gravestones; this practice was not allowed in the country (Danforth, 1995: 162).

Graveyards and gravestones, as seen, were time to time the target of ethnic hatred and aggression against minorities in many countries including Bulgaria. Since the Russo-Turkish War in 1877-78, Muslim cemeteries in Bulgaria, a part of the Muslim heritage in the country, have sometimes been destroyed by Bulgarian regimes (Holt, 2013: 67, 96; Ertürk, 2013: 80-81). For instance, as Turan (1998a: 199-201) stated, many Muslim cemeteries were destroyed and converted into parks and pleasure grounds, and new buildings were built instead. However, graveyards and gravestones were symbolic places in the struggle between Muslims, e.g., Pomaks, and the communist regime in revival period. The communist regime, or more accurately its representatives in the local level, not only changed the Muslim names of the living but also of their deceased relatives in the records during the campaigns (Bajraktarević and Popovic, 2012). They also obliterated their names on the gravestones or simply

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<sup>177</sup> Such acts and changes as obliteration and re-inscription of names and destruction of tombs are not unique to the modern times; at least since the time of ancient Egypt, this type of measures have been implemented for different purposes, including erasing the memory of an unwanted personality or a period (Wilson, 2005).



smashed them.<sup>178</sup> As Eminov (1997: 60) noted, Muslims were also obliged to daub cement on their relatives' headstones to obstruct the Turco-Arabic inscriptions and symbols. As the Pomak interviewees claimed, some people who came to know what was going to happen hid their relatives' gravestones, but those who were not so lucky were affected by the destruction.

Pomaks coped with the communist regime's cruel practices on cemeteries with a couple of strategies. First, they escaped the name change simply by not inscribing a name on the stones. To avoid engraving their official Bulgarian names to the stones, they just installed formless natural stones as headstones without names (or with initials in some examples). The formless tombstones are not atypical in Muslim communities, especially among rural communities. Although it could also be simply related with the resources of the region and economic conditions, this implementation was a passive form of resistance. In any case, this type of formless tombstones came with a price in the long run as expected. Although Pomaks could escape from inscribing an unwanted name on their gravestones, in the long run, after a few generations passed, identification marks of the graves were lost or forgotten. Secondly, some headstones from 1970s and 1980s which only had initials of the deceased persons inscribed. This act of using the first letters of the names shows us that Pomaks rejected to bury their family members by a name other than their Muslim names.<sup>179</sup>

The last group of gravestones, which deserve attention, carry marks of renaming and 'correcting' of the past. On such headstones, names were intentionally obliterated either to the very first letter or to the end, and Muslim names were inscribed or

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<sup>178</sup> After 1984, during the peak period of the 'revival process,' cemeteries and gravestones in Turkish villages were also targeted. Already installed gravestones were either painted over with new names or destroyed. The new ones were obliged to be inscribed in Bulgarian only (Trankova, 2012b: 162, 171; Alagöz, 2017: 45-46).

<sup>179</sup> This practice was followed by Turks as well after 1985. In a Turkish village cemetery in north-eastern Bulgaria, which was only used five or six years after 1985, there were only gravestones with initials, except for a few reinscribing done by the families in the post-communist period.

painted. In addition, there are some headstones which bear new name plaques and repainting works on them. Apparently, these tombstones were initially installed with Bulgarian names during the revival period, but then, names were scraped out and 'corrected' by their family members in the post-communist period.

In addition, rather than making deletion on the stones, some families installed new gravestones or placed additional headstones with Muslim names without removing the old one. Therefore, some graves have two headstones, and they constitute a historical and an archival record inscribed onto the stone. One of the headstones represents the official name of the deceased and depicts reactions against the intrusions of the regime to their private space, and the other represents the real name and identity, with which he/she was remembered by the family. However, in these rare examples, the new headstone almost obstructs the old one. Very occasionally, though, a few headstones with Bulgarian names remain untouched from 1970s.

Pomaks, who developed several types of coping strategies against forcible name changes even in the particular cases of gravestones, mostly retained Muslim names on the gravestones in this region. This was probably because they considered these places as private and sacred spaces, belonging to the community. Even though there has been a voluntary and ongoing trend of picking Bulgarian names as official names among Pomaks for basically pragmatic reasons since 1990s (e.g., finding a better job in the city, going abroad for employment, and applying for a university), they continue adopting Muslim names for private or domestic use, including cemeteries and grave stones.<sup>180</sup> After all, they corrected the legacy of the past by correcting the names on the gravestones, which is actually a sign of reflecting their marginal status in the Bulgarian society and stressing their distinctiveness.

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<sup>180</sup> This does not mean that there are no gravestones with Bulgarian names, but they are few. Only one new grave with Bulgarian name exists in one of the villages visited.

Although the relation between names and faith is not strictly specified in Islam, i.e., there is no rule about having a specific name from a specific language to be a Muslim, the historical practice proves just the opposite. As the Pomak example demonstrates, there is a strong correlation and perceived relation between names and cultural-religious identity especially in the context of cemetery. Therefore, when Pomaks put “there are no Pomak Ivan or Angel,” namely a Pomak whose name is Ivan or Angel, although the opposite is true, they have a point. Tombstones, whether re-inscribed and altered, or untouched as in some instances, become representation of the alive no less than the deceased. They are also perceived as markers of the Muslim presences just like minarets, as will be seen in the fifth chapter.

On the other hand, in contrast to the case with Pomaks, the Ajarian interviewees did not report any hardships or conflicts between them and the state regarding the naming on the tombstones and cemeteries, while they referred to the difficulties on name-giving during the Soviet Union and afterwards. The religious practices were constantly persecuted during the Soviet period albeit occasional relaxations, as Ajarian interviewees pointed out. Even when they were not persecuted, as a member of NGO in Tbilisi recounted her memories, Christian Georgians were also hiding their visits to churches. It was not forbidden to go to church, but if it was known that you are a religious person, a church visitor, you would not get position at work nor would you be a member of the party.<sup>181</sup> Similar accounts which involve discrimination, harassment, and assaults are confirmed by the literature (Keep, 1995: 301-304).

The anti-religious policies in the Soviet Union (Sorokowski, 1989: 34-35, 42, 59), destruction of the religious buildings and elimination of the religious personnel, increasingly compelled the religion and religious practices to the private space and confined them inside the houses and the individual self, who gradually gained more control over religious roles and activities. According to Dragadze (1993), it is a process that resulted in the ‘domestication of religion.’ Biddulph (1979: 424-425) notes that

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<sup>181</sup> Interview with a Human Rights Lawyer and a Georgian expert on religious minorities from Georgian Democracy Initiative (GDI), Tbilisi, 4 April 2017.

rather than 'going public' and being identified, some Soviet citizens covertly made their religious practices on their own or privately with other people through socialisation. As Ro'i (2000) indicated, however, the authorities spared the death, graveyard, and funeral rites to a certain extent. Some kind of pressure was also felt by Muslims in Ajaria. An interviewee recalled these: "in some time, people prayed at nights or went [cemeteries] and buried at nights. There were such periods in Soviet time. In the late times [of the Soviet Union when it] began to weaken, people gradually eased."<sup>182</sup> Since cemeteries are generally at secluded and off the road places, they were sometimes used for different rituals including sacrifice and praying during repression.

In the post-Soviet period, however, Muslim cemeteries and places of worships symbolised challenges to the virtual ownership of the public spaces. As discussed in the fifth chapter, cemeteries and other settings like places of worship are seen by Muslim Georgians and Christian Georgians as signifiers of the identity of the people on that land. Both Muslim and Christian Georgians seem sensitive in showing their existence in and ownership of the landscape through these identifiers. As the intercommunal conflicts between Muslims and Christians demonstrate, both groups are in a kind of contest in their commonly lived places through building and possessing of cemeteries and religious sites.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter tries to demonstrate that transformation of Ajarian and Pomak identities from religious identity to national or distinct group identity are mostly associated with the state policies implemented by different Bulgarian and Georgian regimes throughout the last century. Once Muslim Pomaks' and Ajarians' identity was defined in religious terms in the beginning of the last century, their consciousness have been clarified and Georgianised and relatively Bulgarianised in due course until the end of

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<sup>182</sup> Interview with an Ajarian former *Mufti*, Batumi, 13 August 2018.

the century. This chapter considers name changes as a determinant factor of Pomaks and Ajarians' transformation and a way of absorbing them to national identity, which explains the states' determination in altering names in consecutive name changing attempts. As Neuburger (2004: 153) discussed, for the Bulgarian case, "Turco-Arabic personal names, therefore, remained the most conspicuous mark of Turkishness — of all that was backwards and barbaric— a reminder of the Turkish yoke." Therefore, consecutive Bulgarian regimes endeavoured to erase this reminder. It is also applicable to Ajarian case in Soviet Georgia.

Despite certain fluctuations, overall, a consistent policy of conversion and assimilation of Pomaks was implemented by consecutive Bulgarian regimes. In the post-WWII period, communist regime of Bulgaria pursued a policy of trial and error in absorbing Pomaks. It divided minorities in the country into pieces, first minorities with smaller sizes and no external patrons like Roma, Tatars, Pomaks, and finally Turkish minority, who were regarded as untouchable by others.

As discussed earlier in this thesis, minorities having more commonalities with the majority are subjected to differential treatment and the ethno-religious nationalism causes intolerance towards these minorities. This complies with the fact that Pomaks in Bulgaria and Muslim Ajarians in Georgia, as can be seen in several name changing attempts, have faced more exclusion and suffered significantly more persecution than groups such as the Turks in Bulgaria and *Borchali* Turks (Azeris) in Georgia, which are considered less similar or no similar at all. For instance, an NGO-affiliated Pomak in Smolyan contended that "Pomaks' names were changed thirteen times, [but] Turks' only once. Assimilation of Pomaks was more [severe than Turks]." <sup>183</sup> Another interviewee, whose grandparents migrated to coastal regions of the Eastern Bulgaria from Smolyan, confirms this referring to one of his grandfathers, whose name was changed ten times between Ali and Alyosha during his life time. <sup>184</sup> In fact, unlike

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<sup>183</sup> Interview with a Pomak NGO representative, Smolyan, 17 September 2018.

<sup>184</sup> Interview with a half Pomak half Turkish physician, Sofia, 13 September 2018.

Pomaks, Turkish minority in Bulgaria directly experienced assimilation and such measures only once after 1984 whereas Pomaks had been regularly experiencing them starting from 1912. A former journalist of Turkish background also put forward this difference and argued that, although Bulgarians resorted to many methods to assimilate both groups, “[Bulgarians] understood [in the communist era] that they would not Bulgarianise us [Turks, but] they exert severe pressure on Pomaks.”<sup>185</sup> In fact, Pomaks were considered as ‘less foreign’ Muslims due to their closeness in terms of language, folklore, and other pre-Islamic traditions- the characteristics which are always emphasised by Bulgarian scholars to prove the closeness between Christian Bulgarians and Pomaks. Therefore, Pomaks received close attention from consecutive Bulgarian governments throughout the last century because Bulgarians considered that they could more easily be “won over” (Karagiannis, 2012: 21).

Similarly, *Borchali* Turks in Georgia have been more comfortable than Muslim Ajaris. Since they have no attributes that would mark them out as ethnic Georgians, they feel less pressure, and their identity is tolerated to some extent by Georgians unlike the religious minorities whose in-betweenness causes unacceptance and exclusion from Georgians. Moreover, while the state policies in Bulgaria and Georgia have consequently generated double name phenomenon among Pomaks and Ajaris and the members of these minorities still usually have two names in the post-communist and post-socialist period, such double names do not exist among *Borchali* Turks in Georgia. However, some Turkish minority members prefer to keep double names as they do not want to be in a disadvantaged position in their relations with the Bulgarian state.

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<sup>185</sup> Interview with a Turkish writer/former journalist, Sofia, 12 September 2018.

## CHAPTER 5

### REVIVAL OF RELIGION AND ETHNO-RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES IN POST-SOVIET GEORGIA AND POST-COMMUNIST BULGARIA

Religion, especially traditional religions, which returned to the public space in the 1980s, expanded upon the national identities, societies, and politics at varying degrees after the collapse of the communist and socialist regimes in the Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union as stated in the theoretical discussions. For many, traditional religions became the legitimate institution to fill the moral or ideological vacuum left by *ancien régimes*. Revival of religion included not only rise in religiousness and observance but also, as Roy (2013: 3) indicates, rise in religious visibility. Religion also appeared to be an efficient source of identities (Shterin, 2004: 80). Religions became a natural part of their societies and a component of national identities at varying degrees soon after the removal of repression on them. Peoples also showed increasing interest in their traditional faiths. Even though some do not have a particular faith in religion or God and follow the requirements of the creed, they increasingly identified themselves with their traditional faiths and, to a lesser extent, with the new comers, i.e. new religious movements from overseas.

In both Bulgaria and Georgia, religious life, albeit in varying degrees, saw a period of renaissance in terms of mass baptisms, religious observance, daily church attendance, and their identification with Eastern Orthodoxy. Religions increasingly displayed themselves through the construction and restoration of worship places. The young, especially in Georgia, have been interested in Orthodoxy and the Georgian Orthodox Church since independence. According to different research, the youth tended to be religious, identified themselves with the traditional belief of

Georgia (Zviadadze, 2014; Filetti, 2014: 225) more than in countries in the world including Bulgaria (Pew Research Center, 2018b: 64, 65, 70, 72). In fact, the Bulgarian case, in quantitative terms, varies from most Eastern Orthodox Balkan and the Caucasian countries, particularly Armenia, Georgia, and Greece, in terms of the importance of religion, religiosity, church attendance, and identification with Orthodoxy or the Church. However, Bulgaria has become more religious in the last three to five decades, and affiliation with Orthodoxy also increased (Pew Research Center, 2017).

In the early 1990s, just after the end of the communist rule, it was known that religiosity among Christian Bulgarians was low, which was also confirmed by many interviewees. Despite lower levels of religiosity and observance compared to other Eastern Orthodox societies and the Muslims in the country, identification with the Eastern Orthodoxy among Bulgarians was high (Mitov, 1994: 218-220). Nevertheless, the 'idea of Orthodoxy' did not gain as much support in Bulgaria as in Georgia, where Eastern Orthodoxy was intermingled with Georgianness. In due course, however, religiosity and the importance of religion for individuals as well as identification with and the adherence to the traditional belief of the country rose up. For instance, the share of Bulgarians who identified themselves with Orthodox Christianity increased to 75% in 2015 from 59% in 1991 (Pew Research Center, 2017). In addition, those who considered being Orthodox Christian as the key component of national identity was as high as 66%, albeit behind other such Eastern Orthodox countries as Romania, Greece, Serbia, Georgia, and Armenia (Pew Research Center, 2018a).

The trend the minority religions followed was analogous to that of dominant religions. In both countries, mosques were restored and rebuilt, and people sought religious knowledge. They mostly headed for the outside (re-)sources and help of Muslim countries, so they went abroad for spiritual education. In the Georgian case, while the Georgian Orthodox Church was financially supported by the Georgian state, Muslim Ajarians neither had an educated clergy nor were they financially backed by the state (Pelkmans, 2003: 54, 56). Therefore, they resorted to outside support,



particularly from Turkey. Pomaks went through a similar process, and many of them went to different Arabic countries and Turkey for education. Many such religious organisations as *Irshad* Foundation, Muslim World League, *Tayyibetü'l- Hayriye*, and *Vakfu'l- Islami* from the Muslim world poured into the Balkans including Bulgaria and undertook the construction of places of worship in Pomak settlements until their actions were restricted after 9/11.<sup>186</sup>

Pomaks and Ajarians who returned from such Muslim majority countries as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Turkey brought the understanding of Islam, which was not always consonant to the local Islam in Bulgaria and Georgia. In both fieldworks, some interviewees mentioned the conflicts that occurred between the parish and the overseas-educated young after the latter initiated to alter the local practices.<sup>187</sup>

Meanwhile, the titular communities of Bulgaria and Georgia were in a transition period, and minorities were rediscovering their traditional faiths; the minorities deemed most similar to the majority, namely, Pomaks and Ajarians, were encouraged to adopt Eastern Orthodoxy as the religion of majority. As discussed in the theoretical chapter, the only way for both groups to be accepted as 'full,' rather than 'not-entirely,' Bulgarians and Georgians and to avoid exclusion and discrimination related with the ethno-religious nationalism was conversion to Eastern Orthodoxy. The previous chapter focused on the assimilative state policies targeting Pomaks and Ajarians during autocratic regimes of Bulgaria and Soviet Georgia. In this chapter, minority policies of Bulgaria and Georgia in the democratic period are discussed.

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<sup>186</sup> Interview with a Pomak researcher in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018.

<sup>187</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion in a village (O) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018; Interview with a Pomak researcher in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018; Interview with a Georgian/Ajarian scholar at the Department of Philosophy at the Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi, 21 August 2018.

## **5.1 Minority Policies in Bulgaria and Georgia: Pomaks and Ajarians**

After the collapse of the communist rule, which started in 1989, Bulgaria initiated democratisation and the integration the Western organisations. First, it became a member of the Council of Europe (CoE) in 1992, which was followed by the memberships to NATO in 2004 and European Union in 2007. Bulgaria took some steps for the protection of minorities in the country, the first of which was the signing of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) in 1997. It is considered as one of the most comprehensive treaties protecting the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. In the meantime, the state created a consultative body for minority issues, whose title was changed a few times after its inauguration in 1997. Currently known as the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues, it represents ethnic minorities through their NGOs (Council of Europe, 2012b: 4-5). However, the council is criticized by the Advisory Committee of the Council of Europe for its limited capacity to represent minorities since it does not include Pomak and Macedonian NGOs and its lack of power in the decision-making of the state (Council of Europe, 2014: 8).

Following the first state report submitted to the CoE, the monitoring of the Advisory Committee of the Council of Europe began in 2003. According to the reports, which are called as opinions in the CoE terminology, Pomaks were suffering because they could not use their traditional names and their identity was not recognized by the authorities, who called them 'Bulgarian/Bulgarian-speaking Muslims' (Council of Europe, 2014: 9, 29). While Pomaks' self-identification was prioritised in the reports of Advisory Committee and Bulgarian authorities were advised to accept Pomak identity, Bulgaria has denied the existence of a Pomak ethnicity in all three monitoring cycles up to now based on the so-called objective (distinctive identifying features such as language and history) and subjective criterias (self-identification). Bulgaria defended the view that Pomaks are no different from the majority in terms of both objective (Council of Europe, 2006b:4-5; Council of Europe, 2012a: 15), and subjective criteria since not all members of the group commonly identify themselves

as different. In other words, according to state reports, Bulgaria does not take into consideration only the individuals' choices and preferences or group members' self-identification, i.e. subjective criteria, but cumulatively subjective and objective criteria which 'objectively' considers identifying characteristics of groups (Council of Europe, 2006b: 3-4; Council of Europe, 2012a: 15; Council of Europe, 2012b: 6). For that reason, Bulgaria does not recognize Pomaks (as well as Macedonian minority) as national minority and does not include them within the framework of FCNM unlike Turks and Roma minority (Rechel, 2007: 353; 2009: 80-81). However, Pomaks defend their distinct identity, for they have "distinct differences in their life styles, culture, religion, work traditions, dress and use of language" when compared to other groups in Bulgaria (Council of Europe, 2012a: 15). To sum up, in the three opinion reports and the governments' comments on these opinions, the Council of Europe and the Bulgarian state subtly contradicted with each other about the recognition and the denial of Pomak (and the Macedonian) minority, and the process has become a vicious circle in the framework of similar recommendations and the counter arguments during almost two decades.

Seemingly having become the integral part of this Muslim minority, Pomaks still suffer from using their traditional names and are worried about keeping them decades after they were allowed to restore their names with a law issued in 1990. After the name law, 600,000 Bulgarian citizens of Turkish, Pomak, and Roma descent restored their original names in a year (Vassilev, 2010: 300). As stated in the interviews, many did not change. Moreover, due to the various reasons such as increasing the prospect of finding jobs and avoiding discrimination, many people re-changed their original names to Bulgarian (Ibryamova, 2013: 358). In an interview with a group of Pomaks, a Pomak staff in *Muftiate* elaborated the issue:

In recent years, Bulgarian names are on the rise. Most of the young take Bulgarian names. The main reason is prejudices. If one introduces himself with a Muslim name like Ahmed or Mehmed in a hospital, university, or bureau, people stare at [give a dirty look] even though it [Muslim names] is legal on

paper. If one is introduced with a Bulgarian name, he is favoured and given priority. There is still discrimination. This is the reason for name changing.<sup>188</sup>

As to minorities in general and Muslim Ajarians in particular in Georgia, their course of journey in the new period is mostly associated with the course of Georgian nationalism. Georgian nationalism found a fertile ground to revive in the late 1980s, after the *glasnost* policies of Gorbachev had arrived in the periphery. Georgian national identity was being constructed around primordial national attributes, and being an Eastern Orthodox Christian became the primary identifier of Georgianness in post-Soviet era. This put other Georgians and ethnic minorities in a fragile position, since they either were not affiliated with the Georgian Orthodox Church or were stylized as 'guests' and even 'fifth columns.' Therefore, minorities' positions eroded, and they experienced alienation from the Georgian society. At the same time, a campaign was launched by the Georgian Orthodox Church in cooperation with the state authorities to convert Muslim Ajarians to Orthodox Christianity (Aydingün, Köksal, and Kahraman, 2019: 295).

After the early 1990s, the rhetoric on minorities softened. The real change took place only after 2004 as the Georgian national identity came to include both civic and ethnic elements and minorities were encouraged to integrate into the nation. Georgia became a member of the Council of Europe in 1999 and signed the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 2000, but it was ratified under the Saakashvili administration in 2005. The National Concept for Tolerance and Civic Integration was accepted in 2009 as an action plan to protect the rights of minorities, and the Law of Georgia on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination was adopted in 2014. However, there were serious problems regarding the implementation of these regulations until 2015 as the reports of Advisory Committee and Ombudsman of Georgia showed (Gürsoy and Katliarou, 2016: 214).

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<sup>188</sup> Interview with a Pomak staff in *Muftiate*, Sofia, 13 September 2018. During interviewing, the term 'discrimination' was not placed within the questions in order not to direct interviewees.

As regards Muslim minority's religious organisations and personnel, and their relations with their states, the study revealed a similar picture, in which surveillance and control have been the distinctive colours. The Bulgarian case being the first, Muslims' affairs along with other faiths began to be shaped with the provisional regulation of 1880 (Turan, 1998a: 167-169). The Bulgarian state intended to monitor and control the Muslim community through their prime religious organisation, the Grand Muftiate, since the provisional regulation, which was issued for Muslims' religious administration (Turan, 1998a: 182, 184, 187-188) and followed by others in 1919, 1945, and 1951.

As Turan (1998a: 186) argued, Muslims' religious affairs and their religious organisation were never stabilised because of the interferences of Bulgarian authorities into Muslims' administration during the period of Bulgarian Principality between 1878 and 1908. In fact, the 'stabilisation' had never been achieved up until 2010s. The regional and chief *Muftis* were appointed, dismissed, or approved by the prince or king until WWII, and after 1944, by the Directorate of the Religions under the Foreign Ministry and courts. Even though the regulations explicitly had given rights to Muslims to select some of their representatives, e.g. those who would elect chief *Mufti*, in practice they were appointed by the Foreign Ministry and Religious Affairs, which doomed the election process to fail (Cambazov, 2013a: 167, 246; Ivanova, 2017: 38-39). Since the commencement of *Muftiate*, *Muftis* were state appointees and employees one way or another. In the communist period, the new administration redesigned the religious field and Muslims' affairs. Muslims initially were regarded as a uniform community regardless of their ethnic differences. In the same period, Muslim clergy continued to be state employees, and even their physical movement in their realm of religious jurisdiction depended on the ministry's permission (Cambazov, 2013b: 35). As Shakir (2018: 104) stated, although the law for denominations in 1949 granted Muslims the right to choose their religious representatives, "to choose a chief *Mufti* remained only an unfulfilled wish" in this period. Moreover, after the 1950s, for the first time in the history of Muslims in Bulgaria, Muslims were divided based on their ethnic background, and the Grand

Muftiate in Sofia began to represent only Turks and Roma (Cambazov, 2013b: 58). Accordingly, a separate *Muftiate* was created for Pomaks (Shakir, 2018: 104-105). According to an interviewee, this was to divide and weaken Muslims and estrange Pomaks from other Muslims, especially from Turks.<sup>189</sup> Only in the democratic Bulgaria, the estrangement policy between Pomaks and Turks came to an end, and regional Pomak *Muftiates* incorporated in the central organisation of Muslims and Pomak increasingly held the posts of local *Muftis* and chief *Mufti*. For instance, for the last 15 years and 18 in total, Mustafa Hadzhi has been the Chief *Mufti* in Bulgaria.

In the post-communist period, Bulgarian authorities overtly continued to interrupt and lead Muslims' affairs. As in the period of Bulgarian Principality (1878-1908), Muslims' religious affairs and their religious organisation were unstabilized during the first two decades in the history of democratic Bulgaria. The Muslim community had struggled with the interventions of the state, the Directorate of the Religions under Foreign ministry, and courts into their affairs as well as the internal turmoil caused by the infamous, self-appointed communist-era *Mufti* Nedim Gencev. Muslims also organised numerous national Muslim conferences and statute conferences to fix up the administrative problems. For most of this era, Muslims had two parallel *Muftis* and administrations (Ivanova, 2017: 43-44): one elected by the community and the other self-appointed but officially recognized. Muslims' elected representatives had not been officially recognized and allowed to register, so were even occasionally declared to be holding the post unlawfully. At other times, the Muslim community was represented twice by a tripartite commission elected by the ministry or a court (Cambazov, 2013b: 131-135, 194-196). Since 2002, when a new law for religions was promulgated, all groups who meant to be religions, except the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, have been required to register in the Sofia City Court and got approval for their elected leader. The decisions and refusals of the Bulgarian courts over years fed the turmoil inside the Muslim community.

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<sup>189</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion, Sofia, 5 September 2018.

Muslims in Georgia as part of Muslims in the South Caucasus were represented by two, a Shi'i and Sunni, men of religion, headquartered in Tbilisi in the 1820s, as Tbilisi was the political, cultural, and economic centre of the region. It was only after 1872 that they were institutionally organised and the Administration of the Transcaucasian Muslim Clergy of the Shiite and Sunni Teachings was formed. This entity was designed to control Muslim clergy by managing their sources of income and monitor the whole Muslim community (Huseynov, 2014). Since they were state appointees, their legitimacy remained weak among Muslims (Sherry, 2003). Following the October Revolution, this administration was moved to Baku and remained inactive for more than two decades. During the WWII, it resurrected in Baku as the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Transcaucasia (DUMZ) in 1944. Georgian Muslims, including Ajarians, remained under the religious jurisdiction of DUMZ and the Caucasus Muslim Board (CMB) in Baku, the spin-off of DUMZ, during and after the Soviet period until 2011.

As the literature related to the religious management of Muslims in Georgia shows, Muslims' institutions were more strictly supervised than their Orthodox equivalents (Pelkmans, 2003: 60). However, the Georgian state embarked upon regulating and institutionalising its surveillance over the Muslim community only after 2011 by creating a legal environment and allowing them to be registered as a legal entity of public law. Thereafter, a new administration called as Administration of Muslims of All Georgia (AMG) was inaugurated by three laymen from Kvemo Kartli. In due course, it included three religious leaders who represented the two different *madhabs* of Islam, Sunni and Shi'i schools of Islamic law (Aydingün, Köksal, and Kahraman, 2019: 297; Prasad, 2012: 20).<sup>190</sup> In 2014, a State Agency on Religious Affairs was formed as a mediator between the state and religious groups, except Eastern Orthodoxy, in 2014. However, many Georgian NGOs and research question

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<sup>190</sup> Interestingly, one of the founders was allegedly Christian (The Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center, 2019a). This allegation was also mentioned by some of the interviewees. Equally interesting is that, along with three religious leaders, AMG has an executive director position that represents the administration but also holds one of the key organs in AMG (The Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center, 2019a).

its control and surveillance capacity (Aydingün, Köksal, and Kahraman, 2019: 297-298). Indeed, similar to its predecessors, Muslim clergy affiliated to AMG are state employees, thus state representatives for the community and not vice versa, which diminishes their credibility and provokes criticism among the community. However, the Georgian government intends to diminish the influences of the neighboring Muslim countries by forming its own religious institutions for Muslims and keep them under control (Kahraman and Tulun, 2016: 145). Apparently, by doing so, Georgia has returned to the Russian and Soviet style of management and control of her religious minorities.

### **5.1.1 Ethno-Religious Discourse in Bulgaria and Georgia on the Conversion of Ajarians and Pomaks**

In the post-communist and post-socialist period, as seen throughout the Eurasian region, people began to be overtly interested in their traditional religions before the communist takeover occurred. At the same time religious groups began proselytising activities. In addition, new religious movements (NRMs) or different Protestant sects entered these regions, in Bulgaria and Georgia. They began to be seen as competitors and threat to the traditional religions and churches. In Bulgaria, for instance, Islamic transnational sects or movements, which were once perceived non-identical to the local Islam in Bulgaria, such as Vahhabis and Ahmedis (Hacı, 2000: 59-60), were considered as threat to the native Islam and ethnic-religious fabric. Both Christian sects and Islamic movements were conceived of as dangerous (Hasan, 1998: 247-249). Similar reactions shown to NRMs in Georgia and religious pluralism or marketplace gave rise to dissatisfaction (Kahraman and Tulun, 2016: 148-149; Kahraman, 2018: 118-120). Albeit in differing volumes, Pomaks and Ajarians faced a conversion process. In Ajaria, mass conversion of Muslim Ajarians took place toward Georgian Orthodox Church whereas some Pomaks in Rhodopes embraced the new religious movements, the Uniate Church, and Bulgarian Orthodox Church (Grouev, 1996: 99).



Conversion, as a personal and social experience, is likened in the literature to a journey with clear starting and ending points or to a continuing transformation of believers. Pelkmans (2009: 12-13), however, suggests that it should be conceived of as a 'movement' involving boundary crossing and creating in the process. It is also an interaction between religion and identity and involves redefinition of identity (Aydingün, Köksal, and Kahraman, 2019: 291). Converts not only withdraw from their religion and embrace another one in this process but they get also disengaged from their ethnic identity, or at least, it would be the case from the perspective of their ex-fellows. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, change in faith also brings a shift in ethnic identity. As Karpov, Lisovskaya, and Barry (2012) argued, converts to another faith are no longer perceived as part of the ethnic group by their former co-religionists. Similarly, many Pomaks defined their Pomakness based on a religious affiliation to Islam and those who abandoned it as 'no longer Pomak.' In the Georgian context, the category of Ajarian, for Ajarians themselves, does not refer to religious belonging any more after the mass conversions in 1990s. Nevertheless, it still represents the 'atypical' nationwide. Therefore, even though conversion to Orthodoxy does not impinge on Ajarian identity, Muslim Georgian identity is not accepted.

The states instigate policies of conversion for their minorities, mostly for those located in borderlands by using identical or similar historical justifications. They are using history as an excuse to assimilate and target the hybrid and diverse character of the borderland minorities. Since Orthodoxy is weak in missionary activities, namely conversion of non-Christians, because, as Roy (2013: 91-93) asserted, it has become a territorial religion, so it basically deals with conversion of minorities which ethnically and linguistically were regarded as part of nation but somehow distanced from it. Therefore, the only endeavour of the national churches of Orthodox Georgia and Bulgaria in terms of proselytising is to get these minorities back to the bosom of the nation.

### 5.1.1.1 Proselytism in the Rhodopes: A Pomak Convert in Charge

After 1989, Bulgarian Orthodox Church did not directly launch the proselytization campaign, for it was preoccupied with internal affairs and schism during the 1990s. However, as also stated by some interviewees, it indirectly supported proselytism among Pomaks especially through Pomak converts like Boyan Sariev- a priest with Pomak origin who dedicated himself to conversion of Pomaks in post-communist Bulgaria. However, NRMs seem to be more active in the field as a Pomak blue-collar stated during an interview with three Pomaks, a blue-collar and staff in *Muftiate*, and a translator:

There is not much proselytism in *Provaslav* Church (Bulgarian Orthodox Church). It is passive, except Boyan Sariev. (But) Evangelists work. The state allows them to be active, as long as Pomaks are not Muslim. The Missionary came to my father's village 20 years ago and proselytised half of the village, which was a pure Pomak village. They influenced the leaders of the community and others with provisions and food aid.<sup>191</sup>

For a Pomak teacher, they mostly target the poor and needy, but in his village "the mass of populace refuses this activity and take away from these people. They do not want to be in the same environment. This is the reality."<sup>192</sup> All the same, in Pomaks' conversion, Pomak converts seem to be on the frontstage.

Boyan Sariev, a former police officer in the communist period, who came into prominence as a controversial figure in the post-communist Bulgaria, committed himself to proselytise Pomaks. Born into a Muslim Pomak family in Kardzhali, the Eastern Rhodopes, he converted to Eastern Orthodoxy and became a priest in 1989. He formed an organisation named the Movement for Christianity and Progress 'St. John the Baptist' in 1990 (Kalkandjieva, 2008: 424). In the early 1990s, he launched mass baptism of Pomaks, and according to his testimonies, he converted thousands

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<sup>191</sup> Interview with a Pomak blue-collar in *Muftiate*, Sofia, 13 September 2018.

<sup>192</sup> Interview with a Pomak school teacher in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 17 September 2018.

of Pomaks to Orthodoxy (Merdjanova, 2013: 26). Sariev's proselytism activities mostly targeted Pomaks in the settlements like Zlatograd, Nedelino, Startsevo in Smolyan, and Kardzhali in the Central and Eastern Rhodopes. His organisation, which was supported by the state, focused especially on the children of Pomak, Turk, and Roma origin from orphanages (Hadzhi, 2007: 114, 119-12). Similar to the Ajarian case, mixed faith families emerged from conversion of Pomaks. A Turkish interviewee explained this as follows:

There are brothers, one side is Muslim, the other is Christian. The Christian one has a Bulgarian name, say, Angel, who lives as Christian. The Muslim Ahmed lives as Muslim. There is both mosque and church in the village. Both Christian and Muslim exist in the same family.<sup>193</sup>

As Hadzhi (2007: 121) points out, Sariev's Bulgarian nationalism is intertwined with religion. He propagates the view that anyone who lives in Bulgaria is Bulgarian and Bulgarians are only to be Christians as would be suggested by ethnodoxy, which is described in the theoretical framework. Sariev stated that he himself experienced exclusion when he was at the police academy and at service because of his Pomak identity. Therefore, he believed that the only way for Pomaks to be identified with the Bulgarian identity and be relieved of their ambiguous identity, which he later defined as 'national hermaphroditism' (Todorova, 1998: 483), was to 'return' to the Bulgarian roots by accepting Christianity (Todorova, 1998: 495).

Even though he used to be a much more publicised figure in the past as an interviewee stated, Sariev is still active at least as a mediatic figure. Although he has been a figure in proselytism of Pomaks in Bulgaria, some of the interviewees regard him and his activities as state-controlled due to his background as a former police and his inability to operate without state support. For instance, one of the Pomak interviewees described Sariev's proselytism efforts as follows:

We cannot say that there is no success in Christianisation. People have distanced themselves from religion [Islam]. There are two-three Pomak origin priests in Kardzhali, one of whom has an interesting background: Sariev,

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<sup>193</sup> Interview with a Turkish writer/former journalist, Sofia, 12 September 2018.

Boyan. Bayram is his Muslim name, born in 1956. He became a priest in the communist period and after that embarked upon proselytism among Pomaks. Some people followed him, some reverted. The state fervently supports [him/his activity]. The state policy continues and is still uniform: policy of Christianisation [of Pomaks]. Different policies were adopted in due course, all with the same intention.<sup>194</sup>

Some research suggest Pomaks' conversion may have been easier as they had never been accepted as proper Muslims by Turks (Kalkandjieva, 2008: 425). Many interviewees referred to this situation and the instances when Turks cynically regarded Pomaks as 'regenerat' (regenerated) during the name-change process in 1970s since their personal integrity was perceived to be distorted by the name change. The term also applies to the alternative naming for the revival process, after which Pomaks were believed to be regenerated through name changes. An interviewee recalled those times: "I was working in D..... in 1975. Turks began to call us *regenerat*."<sup>195</sup> What they meant actually was that Pomaks were 'degenerated' or overhauled, for their names were changed in a few years back. And he continued: "Turks supposed that they would be spared and shown mercy. Yet, their names were changed, too. They used to laugh at us rather than lending a hand to us."<sup>196</sup>

The daily relations between Pomaks and Turks that were intimate before the name changing campaigns of 1960s and 1970s<sup>197</sup> later got broken according to the view of an interviewee from the Kardzhali region.<sup>198</sup> However, there are some reasons for this emotional distance between Turks and Pomaks. Pomaks were let down by Turks during the name change campaigns. For some, Turks's attitude is eloquently

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<sup>194</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion, Sofia, 5 September 2018.

<sup>195</sup> Interview with an elderly Pomak in a village (V) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018.

<sup>196</sup> Interview with an elderly Pomak in a village (V) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018.

<sup>197</sup> Interview with a Pomak white-collar worker, Sofia, 18 September 2018.

<sup>198</sup> Interview with a staff (Turkish origin) at *Muftiate*, Sofia, 13 September 2018.

explained by the proverb “the stone that lieth not in my way, need not offend me.”<sup>199</sup> Moreover, as some interviewees indicated, name changes of Pomaks were executed by Turks in some Pomak inhabited regions, whereas Pomaks were used as executors by the communist regime when Turks’ names were changed after 1984. An active man of religion of Pomak origin argued that the state’s use of Turks in the name change campaign of Pomaks in 1972 created disgust among Pomaks against Turks in the region: “In return, Pomaks were hired in 1984-86 during the name change campaign for Turks. There is a huge gap between them in Kardzhali.”<sup>200</sup> Obviously the regime meant to estrange the relations between the two groups. Moreover, Turks considered Pomaks as neither ‘Turk’ nor proper Muslims, for they did not speak Turkish but the language of Bulgarians, and avoided mixed marriages (Merdjanova, 2013: 25; Troeva, 2013: 80). Turks despised Pomaks and Roma, behaving arrogantly and seeing themselves superior<sup>201</sup> in everyday life (Yumerov, 2010: 56; Troeva, 2013: 83-84). All these had an impact on their relations. Turks’ ‘rejection’ of Pomaks actually stems from the fact that Turkish ethnic identity (language and names) in Bulgaria has been considered highly intertwined with Islam since they historically represent Islam in the country, which refers to the state of high ethnodoxy among Turks.

#### **5.1.1.2 Conversions in Ajaria**

A Western contemporary described Muslim Ajarians in early 1990s as a “loosely organized, self-centered community, with an overrepresentation of elderly people” (Wesselink, 1992: 40). Because of the anti-religious policies in the Soviet Union, Islam was greatly impinged, and the relationship between people and the Muslim clergy in Georgia, who survived the Soviet period with minimal religious knowledge, weakened (Köksal, Aydingün, and Gürsoy, 2019: 334-335). Furthermore, although

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<sup>199</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion, Sofia, 11 September 2018.

<sup>200</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion, Sofia, 5 September 2018.

<sup>201</sup> Interview with a Pomak blue-collar in *Muftiate*, Sofia, 13 September 2018; Interview with a Pomak NGO representative, Smolyan, 17 September 2018; Interview with a Turkish writer/former journalist, Sofia, 12 September 2018.

religions were tolerated during the glasnost period, “a new campaign against Islam” was launched in Georgia (Wesselink, 1992: 39). Supported by the state and the local authorities, Georgian Orthodox Church launched a mass proselytization campaign in Ajaria, and thousands of local Muslims were baptised (Pelkmans, 2002: 262-263; Nikiforova, 2012). Even though conversion lost its momentum over the years, as some interviewees argue, it continues individually.

As to the reasons and motives behind the individuals’ conversion, 70 years of Soviet rule might have profoundly affected the society in Ajaria, beginning with local elites who increasingly identified themselves with the Georgian identity and the Christian values. In addition, the local Muslim clergy waned in this period, and Islam was increasingly identified with the “powerless” and “low educated-workers” (Pelkmans, 2002: 269). For instance, a human rights defender from the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD) argued that “the idea among young Ajarians is ‘to be Christian is more prestigious’ because Muslims are rather backward.”<sup>202</sup> In fact, in Georgia, adherence to Orthodox Christianity was becoming a “trend” (Köksal, Aydingün, and Gürsoy, 2019: 332), which especially grew among the young after the independence. However, even though they converted to Orthodox Christianity, some did not completely abandon Islamic practices for some time and pursued a syncretic religion (Zviadadze, 2018: 35). Conversion is seen by non-converts as an instrumental act or a pragmatic response to proselytising (Aydingün, Köksal, and Kahraman, 2019: 310), and many of the converts are regarded as non-observant and ‘showcase’ Orthodox Christians.

For many, the lack of religious knowledge of Ajarians and the religious nationalist discourse of ‘Georgians should be Christians,’ which has circulated in Ajaria since the 1980s, account for conversion of local Ajarians in the post-Soviet period. An Ajarian interviewee summarized the views of many others with the following words:

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<sup>202</sup> Interview with an expert from the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development in Tbilisi on May 28, 2015.

It is easier to fill the empty cup rather than draining it. It means the generation of my father lacked religious knowledge since it was forbidden to get religious education at that time. Therefore, I automatically lack religious knowledge, and my generation after the dissolution of the USSR was uninformed about religion. And Christian proselytization was introduced through a nationalist discourse, which put forward the Christian history of Georgia, its struggle against Ottoman [Turkey] and Iran.... Therefore, those youngsters who had no knowledge about their religion and fathers' faith turned towards this discourse. But whomever you will ask in Ajarian region, Christians in Ajaria have Muslim grandparents, uncles and so on but he himself is Christian.<sup>203</sup>

In addition to these, the country's economic conditions, which hit every region regardless of its ethnic and religious background, and Ajaria's own territorial characteristics such as land scarcity and landslides also played their role indirectly and caused conversion. For instance, land scarcity in rural upper Ajaria enforced, especially, the young to migrate, and this, as Liles (2012, 9) asserts, lead to "an indirect catalyst for conversion."

The conversion phenomenon has produced multi-religious families in Ajaria and divergent views regarding its effect on families. Some argue that members of religiously mixed families "quarrel bitterly with each other. It is not only that some people argue. Both sides are suffering, and will suffer, this problem."<sup>204</sup> For some, however, because of the tolerance in the Georgian society, it does not harm the coexistence between people and families of different religions.

Conversions of Ajarians and Pomaks during the transition period in both countries bear some similarities as well as differences. One commonality regarding the conversions in the Ottoman period was the narrative of forced Islamisation as discussed before. Therefore, the narrative of forced conversion is depicted as an excuse and moral force to convert Ajarians and Pomaks. Moreover, the current conversions were presented as 'a return to the faith of their ancestors' or their

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<sup>203</sup> Interview with an Ajarian Businessman/Translator, Batumi, 15 August 2018.

<sup>204</sup> Interview with a Muslim Ajarian Businessman, Batumi, 29 October 2015.

authentic religion rather than a conversion. Furthermore, both communities were presented as either the bearer of the purified or more authentic versions of the majority's culture as in the case of Pomaks (Seyppele, 1989: 42), or as the original bearers of Georgian spirituality and the initial proselytisers of their fellows as in the case of Ajarians. Ajaria was depicted as a gateway for Christianity in Georgia since Apostle Andrew is believed to preach his faith in the upper Ajaria for the first time among Georgians and, since the national revival in the nineteenth century, Pomak was considered through linguistic and cultural purity (Grannes, 1996: 2; Eminov, 2007: 11). In short, the pureness of Ajarians and Pomaks in some respects exemplify their Georgianness and Bulgarianness and urge their incorporation to the bosom of their nations through conversion.

However, some differences between these two cases also exist. While proselytism in Ajaria in 1990s was a state-and-church-supported campaign and a widespread process that was especially implemented in urban Ajaria and lower land villages, it was not explicitly supported by state and church in Bulgaria. It rather seemed as a personal initiative of ex-Pomak Boyan Sariev although he was allegedly supported by the state, for he had affiliation with security structure in Bulgaria being a former police officer. It was not a mass movement unlike in Ajaria, probably because Muslims in Bulgaria had just left behind the decades-long 'revival process' in 1990s and already experienced three forced name changes in the last five decades. Therefore, conversion might be regarded as another overt attempt of Bulgarian authorities to deal with their identities. However, as some research indicate, conversion of Pomaks, despite being individually, is still an ongoing process (Lozanova, 2009: 152; Benovska-Sabkova, 2015: 55). In regard to the final situation of conversions in Ajaria, interviewees evaluated the conversion phenomena in various fieldworks that I have been part of since 2015. Some accepted with disapproval and sorrow that it is a continuing process, and some stated that it has already slowed down and even ending thanks to the progress of Georgian Muslims. In the following part, Bulgarian-speaking Muslims' various identity inclinations and single national identity of Georgian Muslims are explored.



## 5.2 Multiple Identities of Pomaks vs. Single Georgian Identity of Muslim Ajarians

### 5.2.1 Multiple Identities of Pomaks

As also discussed in the literature, Pomaks quite remarkably have not arrived at a consensus regarding their ethnic consciousness and identity. As Poulton (1991: 115) puts, there is still “an element of confusion and uncertainty in their self-identity.” Some elite from kin groups to Pomaks in the Balkans also refer to this confusion. For instance, on the uncertainty on their identity and disunity, Sherif Ayradinoski, a Torbesh from Macedonia, referred to them as “the people do not reveal how they feel” (Ayradinoski, 2014: 12). Sadik Idrizi, a Goran from Kosovo, responds to the critics on the uncertainty of their identity with these words: “we may not know what we are, but we know what we are not” (Idrizi, 2014: 12).<sup>205</sup> These words boldly depict Pomaks and similar groups in the Balkans, but fall short of drawing the entire contemporary situation. In other words, they may implicitly point out that they do not belong to the groups which assert claim on them, e.g. Bulgarians, Macedonians and so on. However, they do not reveal clearly their ethnic belonging either. In addition, there are various distinct inclinations among them such as Muslim, Pomak, Bulgarian, Bulgarian Muslim, Turk, and even Arab depending on the region, regional experiences of ‘revival process,’ and generations. In fact, ambiguity and uncertainty would best describe Pomaks’ identity in Bulgaria.

Despite the abundance of identity choices, Pomaks’ inclinations may be grouped under three. The largest group covers those who define themselves through the perspective of faith as Pomak, Muslim, and Bulgarian Muslims which followed by those who call themselves Bulgarian. The final group consists of those who express

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<sup>205</sup> Gorans, Torbeshes and Pomaks were increasingly seeing each other as one and the same people with extending contacts and called themselves as *нашенец*, *Nashenets*, (ours) (Brunwasser, 2013: 3). It interestingly resembles Ajarian Muslims in Turkey calling themselves as *chveneburi* (ours).

themselves as Turk.<sup>206</sup> For instance, Ivanova (2017: 37) asserts that Pomaks largely define their identity as ‘hybrids.’ Accordingly, 69% of them identify themselves as Pomak, Bulgarian Mohammedans, Bulgarian Muslims, and Muslims only, 26% as Bulgarians, and remainders as Turks. Regionally, those in west and central Rhodopes, where part of the fieldwork of the present study was conducted, largely incline to identify themselves as Pomaks and Muslims. Bulgarian and Bulgarian Muslim identity was mostly espoused by those in east and central Rhodopes. Identification with Turks is mostly declared in the west.

The highly ramified tendencies in the community taken into consideration, search into how Pomak interviewees in the field define themselves and what Pomak means for them was pursued. Initially, which term best defines themselves was asked. The most frequent response was ‘Pomak,’ which was often accompanied by a reservation of ‘but’ and/or a ‘because’. Here are some of the explanations. “It is hard to draw all Pomaks under the same line,” as a senior Pomak put it, because there are various identity orientations among Pomaks, “but we should call this group as Pomak” he added.<sup>207</sup> Another Pomak interviewee stated “you can encounter different inclinations [among Pomaks]. Some call themselves Pomak, some as Muslim, some others as Turk, but mostly Pomak is used. However, no one identifies himself as Bulgarian [in our neighbourhood in Rhodopes], [but] either Muslim or Pomak.”<sup>208</sup> A graduate student in Sofia also referred to the diversity among Pomaks as follows:

For me it is Pomak ... [but] every individual Pomak could give this a different answer. For some we are different, we are Pomak. For others we are Bulgarian, our religion is different. For me, I do not know. It is a tough question. In the modern era, people do not care so much. Many nationalities live in the same country, work in a corporation, graduate from the same university. It is not so important [what you are].<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Some research classify Pomaks’ self-identification as Muslim, Bulgarian Muslim, and Pomak. Kertikov (2001: 74) groups them as Bulgarian, Turk, and Pomaks, who distinguish themselves from the first two.

<sup>207</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion, Sofia, 5 September 2018.

<sup>208</sup> Interview with a Pomak white-collar worker, Sofia, 18 September 2018.

<sup>209</sup> Interview with a Pomak post-graduate student, Sofia, 5 September 2018.

Although he initially was clear on the matter and said he was Pomak, he shifted and reacted to it as a difficult matter as most do.

A scholar who is Turkish by descent claimed that the ethnic and religious consciousness of Pomaks are pretty much complicated and categorized three identity inclinations among them, which was based on a self-conducted research with Pomak students and his observations. According to him, the first group includes those who define themselves as Muslims who supposedly received Islam directly from Arabs rather than Ottomans. They also consider themselves as different from Turkish Muslims. The second group includes Pomaks who say 'We are Muslim but Bulgarian Muslims,' and the last group involves those who think themselves as Pomak. However, they would not explain what Pomak meant to them, seeing it only as a peculiar ethnic group distinct from others.<sup>210</sup> As another Turkish interviewee indicated, Pomaks "cannot articulate their identity, [but] in any case they consider themselves different. Even they say 'we are Bulgarian,' they are both different from Bulgarians and Turks."<sup>211</sup> In fact, in recent years, more and more Pomaks began to espouse Pomak as a separate ethnic group (Yalimov, 2016: 247).

#### **5.2.1.1 Identity Differences: Generational and Regional Varieties**

Many interviewees pointed out that generation gap as to ethnic consciousness is widening. While the old rigidly deny to be affiliated as being Bulgarian, an appellation that they think label them as an out-group, the young is more inclined to be identified as Bulgarian. A Pomak village resident in the Blagoevgrad region, who draws attention to generation differences between Pomaks, further explains the variety of identity trends among Pomaks with these words: "If you asked the seniors, they would say Turk [themselves]. The young say they are Bulgarian but they do not say

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<sup>210</sup> Interview with a Turk researcher, Sofia, 5 September 2018.

<sup>211</sup> Interview with a Turk academician, Sofia, 06 September 2018.

they are Christians. They define themselves as Muslim. Probably they do not say they are Turk, for they do not know Turkish. Some identify as Pomak.”<sup>212</sup>

Another Pomak from a mountain village in Rhodopes, a resident of Sofia, elaborated on the issue: “Our grandfathers used to be angry with us when we use this [Bulgarian]. Once I uttered ‘Bulgarian Muslim’ [on an occasion] he [grandfather] was offended. The elderly used to say Pomak Muslim, not only Pomak.”<sup>213</sup> For the old, the boundary between Muslim Pomaks and Bulgarians, which is defined on the religious ground, is quite distinctive and impermeable. Therefore, as one interviewee put it:

The term Bulgarian is an insult for the elderly. If you addressed somebody as Bulgarian, it meant *giaour* (infidel). It is how it was, and still is, perceived. Since they very much suffered from this nation, they do not accept Bulgarian identification. The olds rather defined themselves as Turk, which still continues [among the old Pomaks]: ‘I am Turk because of the faith [they say].’ ... The elderly rather react to this.<sup>214</sup>

For the younger generations, however, things are not so much explicit, and religion is replaced with Bulgarian national identity. The interviewee also argued that especially the younger generations would also say they are Bulgarians with only that “they are in a different religion, just simple. For instance, if you ask these young people in the café [where the interview was conducted] they would say they are Bulgarian.”<sup>215</sup>

In addition to generation differences, regional varieties exist among Pomaks. As a Pomak from Sofia indicated, every city, village, and locality which Pomaks inhabit has its own atmosphere, character, and inclination. As he said, “People in some villages

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<sup>212</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 16 September 2018.

<sup>213</sup> Interview with a Pomak white-collar worker, Sofia, 18 September 2018.

<sup>214</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018.

<sup>215</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018.

are calm ... but some regions are very fiery ... some villages are dedicated to religion, [but] some villages are Bulgarianised, away from religion.”<sup>216</sup> Likewise, another interviewee indicated that regional differences affect Pomaks’ self-identification; some Pomaks from Western Rhodope identify themselves as Turk, whereas Central Rhodopes, which is more complex and mixed, as Muslim and Muslim Bulgarian, and the Eastern Rhodopes as Muslim Bulgarian or just Bulgarian.<sup>217</sup> They have embraced the Bulgarian consciousness in the east, whereas the Muslim identity is stronger in the west.<sup>218</sup> Different regions where Pomaks are concentrated adopt the idea of Pomakness differently. Some regions are more active, and some are less in terms of recognition of Pomakness (Osterman, 2013). For instance, Pomaks from Smolyan, where *Drujba Rodina* headquartered, have been more integrated to Bulgarian identity than Pomaks from the Western Rhodope. This might be because the latter case experienced the ‘revival process’ much more bitterly while in Smolyan, the ‘revival process’ was milder. Neuburger (2004: 156-157) too asserts that local Communist leadership in Blagoevgrad followed a ‘particularly proactive approach’ in the name changing campaign of 1964. Relatedly, as some interviewees indicated, the attitude of local communists in Smolyan toward Pomaks was more reasonable than that of the communists in Blagoevgrad to Pomaks in Western Rhodopes. The revival process was harsher in the latter, during which some Pomaks perished, whereas Smolyan for the communist regime was an ideal case, in which bloody encounters did not occur.<sup>219</sup> Moreover, Pomaks in the city of Smolyan were given special importance by the late communist regime. The city was rebuilt and economically developed. Pomaks were intended to be integrated to the Bulgarian society (Grouev, 1996: 96-97). Furthermore, according to an interviewee, urbanization is the prime

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<sup>216</sup> Interview with a Pomak white-collar worker (*Muftiate*), Sofia, 3 September 2018.

<sup>217</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion, Sofia, 5 September 2018.

<sup>218</sup> Interview with a Turkish writer/former journalist, Sofia, 12 September 2018.

<sup>219</sup> To avoid overgeneralisation, it is important that a distinction be made between the city of Smolyan and Smolyan province, for Pomaks protested name changes and bloody encounters that occurred in such towns and localities as Madan, Rudozem, and Dospat in the province after 1970 (Neuburger, 2004: 159; Zafer, 2018: 3-6).

reason behind the differences between Pomaks in different localities.<sup>220</sup> Cambazov (2013a: 44-45) categorizes the regional differences of Pomaks under two models, namely, Blagoevgrad and Smolyan models. In the former, people mostly identify with being Turk, whereas, in the latter, as Bulgarian. However, these models are too broad to comprise the distinct inclinations and preferences in the two regions. After a thorough and in-depth conversation with Cambazov's interlocutors and examination, according to Cambazov, even those who identify themselves as Bulgarian began to acknowledge that they were actually Pomaks and those who say they are Turks say it because they are Muslims. Pomak, losing its previous degrading meaning and religious references, began to be used by the group members as an ethnonym of the group who distinguish itself from both Bulgarians and Turks (Cambazov, 2013a: 445).

#### **5.2.2.2 Embrace of Pomak Ethnicity: Revelation vs. Concealment of Pomak Identity**

Like some instances elsewhere in the world (Tajfel and Turner, 2004: 280), Pomaks began to acquire a 'positive group identity' with the positive change in the meaning of Pomak and developed an ethnic identity. Some of the interviewees argued that Pomak identity is going through a process of activation and becoming more salient. An interviewee of Turkish origin even referred to the development as a kind of Pomak ethnos and nationalism.<sup>221</sup> For some, being Pomak is becoming a matter of honour and proud instead of resentment.<sup>222</sup> The interviewee of Turkish origin said that "mostly they express their identity as Pomak. There is a thick Muslim inclination among them, which is now turning into Pomakness. Pomak nationalism is being developed. They say they are Pomak, son of Pomak, and are not ashamed of it."<sup>223</sup> A Pomak interviewee, who is not as straightforward as the previous interviewee, stated

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<sup>220</sup> Interview with a Pomak NGO representative, Smolyan, 17 September 2018.

<sup>221</sup> Interview with a Turkish writer/former journalist, Sofia, 12 September 2018.

<sup>222</sup> Interview with a Pomak teacher in a village (O) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018.

<sup>223</sup> Interview with a Turkish writer/former journalist, Sofia, 12 September 2018.

Pomakness is a hybrid of ethnic and religious identity and agreed with the assertion that Pomak consciousness is getting revealed:

Pomak was not viewed as an ethnic identity until recently. It is currently becoming an ethnic identity. It is somewhere between ethnic and religious identity. Some scholars point out that ethnic identity [of Pomaks'] is slowly forming. However, Bulgarians are uncomfortable with it.<sup>224</sup>

As the pejorative and humiliating meaning of the term Pomak gradually faded, many Pomaks began to identify themselves as only Pomak, as members of a distinct group. However, as claimed by an interviewee, it depends on the context and on the person who used the term Pomak. The same interviewee said that they define themselves as Pomak within the group but “when a Bulgarian tells [us Pomak] we are annoyed ... still people abound espouse and are proud of being this [Pomakness] ... In social media, there is a special group entitled ‘I am Pomak, I am proud of being called Pomak.’”<sup>225</sup> Another interviewee approved the transformation the meaning of the term went through; it used to be like an insult, but they got used to it over time. He went on to say that “The majority is not offended by the term Pomak. It is reality now. What is more dangerous is that those who bear and live with Bulgarian names. However, they are also called Pomak.”<sup>226</sup> Still, old prejudices die hard. Even though they call themselves Pomak, when it is expressed by someone who is not Pomak, they could be irritated. They are not annoyed by the term itself but how the interlocutor says and what he implies with it.

#### **5.2.2.2.1 A Peculiar Pomak Ethnicity: Neither Bulgarian nor Turk - Indigenous People of the Rhodopes**

The ramified tendencies depending on locality and generation within the members of Pomak community taken into consideration, it was observed that Bulgarian-

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<sup>224</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion, Sofia, 5 September 2018.

<sup>225</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 16 September 2018. For such social media groups and discussions, see (Osterman, 2014: 29-30).

<sup>226</sup> Interview with a Pomak tradesman in a village (O) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 16 September 2018.

speaking Muslim interviewees in Sofia, Blagoevgrad, and an interviewee in Smolyan defined themselves as Pomak and/or Muslim. Although the Pomak ethnic identity is not a fully-fledged developed identity, most of Pomaks tend to distinguish it from other ethnicities.

How they define themselves and what Pomak meant for them were probed in the study. An elderly Pomak, a village resident of Blagoevgrad region, was approached. Upon the question what Pomak meant for him, he asked with what theory he should explain. After he was assured that no hypotheses speculated about the origins of Pomaks and that only his feelings and views were sought for, he stated “we are ‘Jerli’ in here [from ‘here’], there is such a term [being from here]. Pomak, we are ‘Jerli.’”<sup>227</sup> At this point, it was critical to understand what ‘Jerli’ or ‘being from here,’ in other words, being the indigenous population of Rhodopes might mean for the interviewees. This, indigenesness, together with other assertions made by Pomaks regarding their existence in the region, their origins and acceptance of Islam seem to be about their attempt to reinforce the argument that they are distinct from other groups in Bulgaria. ‘Being from here’ is pretty much associated with being ‘mountain people’ who have a living distinct culture. The same culture still exists and is preserved in the remote villages like Ribново as an interviewee implied,<sup>228</sup> according to whom, Pomaks, as aboriginal people of the Balkans, have been here for longer period of time than any other group. For instance, when they say “the Ottomans came, they [people in the Rhodopes] were here” or “Ottomans came, there were Muslims in Rhodopes,” they stress this distinctiveness. Even proto-Bulgars and Slavs are the late comers compared to Pomaks as some implied during the interviews, and Turks are obviously latecomers. Statements like “These Turks from this village and

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<sup>227</sup> Interview with an elderly Pomak in a village (V) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018. Being from here or being ‘Jerli’ is a fact that is also held true for Muslims (Meskhetian Turks) in Samtskhe-Javakheti. According to some Georgian scholars, they also called themselves ‘Jerli’ to differentiate themselves both from ethnic Turks and Christian Georgians (Kobaidze, 1999: 159; Sumbadze, 2007: 313, 316).

<sup>228</sup> Interview with a Pomak researcher in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018.



nearby villages are from Konya or Karaman”<sup>229</sup> or “Three villages are inhabited by Turks, they are settlers”<sup>230</sup> refer their origin to Anatolia. Pomaks, however, are original people of this land like in the sense of *pueblos originarios* of Latin American natives and peoples that existed before the European colonisation of Americas (Crossley, 2011: 239).

Pomak interviewees in the Blagoevgrad region mostly disagree with both theses about their Bulgarian and Turkish origins. However, the two contradictory inclinations may be observed among the interviewees regarding Pomaks’ Turkish origin; one culturally embraces Turkishness of Pomaks, and the other rejects this. Those who live and interact with Turks, as in Sofia, and who are bilingual tend to feel close to Turkishness, whereas ordinary Pomaks who have limited contact with Turks, as in Blagoevgrad, tend to reject Turkishness. For instance, a village resident near the Greek border rejects the views that Pomaks have Turkish background. For him, “an intellectual Pomak, who knows his history, cannot define himself as Turk because we do not have any roots from Turkey. We do not come from Turkey. If we had, it would have been transferred from generation to generation. There is no such narrative.”<sup>231</sup> He was further asked how an intellectual Pomak defines himself or herself, and he replied “it depends on his views. If a Pomak has a firm view and knows his religion, he defines himself as Muslim.” He and many other Pomak interviewees in nearby villages associate being Pomakness with Muslim religious identity. He continued by saying “otherwise, he may define in different ways: Bulgarian Muslim or other.” Similarly, an NGO-affiliated Pomak in Smolyan argued that most Pomaks wish to be called as only Pomak despite other inclinations that exist among Pomaks. She told that Pomaks were not Slavic, nor were they proto-Bulgar, Turk, or Iran[ian],<sup>232</sup> but

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<sup>229</sup> Interview with a Pomak researcher in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018.

<sup>230</sup> Interview with a Pomak and a Turk functionary in *Muftiate*, Sofia, 5 September 2019.

<sup>231</sup> Interview with an elderly Pomak in a village (V) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018.

<sup>232</sup> Iranian origin issue refers to one of the current debates in Bulgaria regarding Bulgarians’ origin, according to which Bulgarians originated from Iran. This was shared by some other interviewees too.

she also told “I do not know who we are [our origin]. But I know that we were Muslim prior to Ottomans. There were Muslims before the Ottomans came.”<sup>233</sup> She also asserted that, since both Turks and Bulgarians urge Pomaks to approximate themselves either through absorption into Turkish culture or proselytizing Christianity, Pomaks are stuck in the middle.<sup>234</sup>

Moreover, those who advocate Pomak ethnicity reject the myths defended by Bulgarian authorities, according to which Pomaks are ethnically Bulgarians and forcibly Islamised. Therefore, the thesis of ‘Pomaks are Bulgarian’ is also criticized during interviews, and many interviewees shared the view regarding distinctiveness of Pomaks, their origin, and uniqueness of their identity different from both Bulgarians and Turks.<sup>235</sup> For instance, one of the interviewees who criticizes the Bulgarian thesis on Pomaks’ origin referred to one Bulgarian scholar’s research and arguments on Pomaks to grand his views. According to him, the fact that names of the villages in the Pomak region have not changed in the last five hundred years and the bulk of the population had Slavic names since then are insufficient to prove Pomaks’ Bulgarian origin.<sup>236</sup> The interviewee went as far as to argue that Pomaks have genetic links with Thracians, who had also links with peoples further north. He said “Then DNA came up, which would destroy the assimilative histories in the world. DNA showed that the ancestors of Pomaks in Rhodopes are Thracians.”<sup>237</sup> He backed his arguments with *Veda Slovena*,<sup>238</sup> a collection of folk songs, which, according to its

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<sup>233</sup> Interview with a Pomak NGO representative, Smolyan, 17 September 2018.

<sup>234</sup> Interview with a Pomak NGO representative, Smolyan, 17 September 2018.

<sup>235</sup> Occasionally, some Pomaks, despite their numbers are marginal, opt for Arab as their origin.

<sup>236</sup> In some cases, village names and the ethnic and religious composition of these villages do not match. That is to say, some Slavic-named villages were inhabited by Muslims and some Turkish-named villages by Christians or they were mixed villages (Özünlü and Kayapınar, 2017: 23).

<sup>237</sup> Interview with a Pomak researcher in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018.

<sup>238</sup> *Veda Slovena* is a collection of folk songs from Rhodopes gathered by Bulgarian teacher Ivan Gologanov and published by Stefan Verkovic in Belgrade in the second half of the nineteenth century. The issue of the collections’ authenticity is a controversial one and has its own supporters and opponents. It is generally considered as a fabrication in Bulgaria.

supporters, allegedly proves the Thracian origin of Slavic-speaking Muslims in Rhodopes. He argued that neither Christianity nor the Slavic culture and the *tengrism* of proto-Bulgarians exist in this collection of songs and legends. However, according to him, *Veda Slovena*, which is seen as a forged collection and mystification by Bulgarian nationalists, simply provides evidence to the Thracian link of Pomak Muslims in this region.<sup>239</sup>

In fact, the hypothesis regarding the connection of Pomaks with Thracians has a long history, and there exist supporters as well as opponents of it in Bulgaria<sup>240</sup> (Eren, 1964: 573). What is interesting here is that an educated Pomak, based on his DNA-test results from an international company, argued that his ancestors were from the contemporary East Germany and Polish border, which was Pomaks', namely, Thracians' home. Later, they came to Rhodopes from there 5000 years ago. He further detailed that Pomaks have kin relations with East Germans and the Poles and said "In brief, the oldest ethnic group in Bulgaria is Pomaks, namely Thracians. Then Bulgars and Slavs arrive.... [Moreover,] Thracians' DNA only came out from Pomaks, no Thracian DNA can be associated with Bulgarians. This is very interesting."<sup>241</sup> On a visit to a cultural-historical site of Thracians in Rhodopes, he added:

Thracians lived in this region and did not leave here, they kept attached to the land and became Pomak. Here they are, Pomaks are also attached to the land, for 5000 years. There is bloody nothing here but they stay here. The same tradition and logic continue through Pomaks. Even though a Pomak goes to the UK, he builds [renews] his house here. The same mindset, nothing is changing.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Interview with a Pomak researcher in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018.

<sup>240</sup> Apologists for the Thracian origin of Pomaks supported their view that Slavic-speaking Muslims may be locally called also as Ahriyans in some regions in Rhodopes and a Thracian tribe named Agrianes exist (Papadimitriou, 2004: 228). Agrianes connection is also used to prove Pomaks' Greekness, for Agrianes got involved in fighting in the Alexander the Great's army (Demetriou, 2004: 106). There are some other interpretations which link the term Ahriyan to 'Greek-Ahriyani' or Turkish word 'ahi' (Turan, 1999: 70).

<sup>241</sup> Interview with a Pomak researcher in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018.

<sup>242</sup> Interview with a Pomak researcher in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018.

What is interesting here is not the scientific validity of the arguments presented by him and other interviewees regarding Pomaks' origin but his persistent effort to relate Pomaks other than Bulgarians, be them Thracians and Polish,<sup>243</sup> to prove Pomak to be the oldest group in Rhodopes by securing their historic connection with the land. Interestingly, DNA argument was also used by Bulgarian and Greek scientists and scholars to prove Pomaks' origin as Bulgarian or Greek (Eminov, 1997: 102). This time, the interviewee resorts to the same 'scientific' method of DNA but not to link Pomaks to Bulgarians or Greeks but to find older connections. He may partially be right on his hypothesis, yet this research is not concerned with the origins of Pomaks, their millennial ethnic roots, and their kinship with other groups. Instead, what should be taken into consideration here is what some Pomaks think of and how they reveal their origin and identity. It should be noted that what they reveal is explicit yet multifaceted. That is to say, they think they are different and remark their distinctiveness. They also reveal that there are many views amongst Pomaks and some Pomaks have different views on their origin and identity.

There are plenty of speculations, views, and arguments regarding Pomaks' ethnic origin as well as the origin of the word Pomak as previously mentioned. Some well-known approaches and common views were also shared during the fieldwork, and they opted for the one best suited for them. For instance, a village resident man of religion referred to circulated views:

There are different views among Pomaks. One part of them relates the term Pomak to Bulgarian word '*помачен*' meaning faced hardship and defends this view. The most trusted and acceptable view is that [the term Pomak is more likely related with the term] *pomagach*, namely, helper, since the local people assisted the Ottomans, when they came —there were some Muslims prior to Ottomans. I also agree with the latter view, since they helped Ottoman soldiers.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Lory (1990: 180) expresses the concerns of Bulgarians over Polish propaganda on Pomaks in the nineteenth century.

<sup>244</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018.

For those who reside away from their homeland, outside Bulgaria, and who boldly and independently stress their group consciousness, the common appellation for similar and approximate groups in the Balkans is Pomak, too. For a Pomak activist and European Institute-Pomak<sup>245</sup> (NGO) representative, who has been compelled to reside outside Bulgaria, “Pomaks have many geographic names [such as] Ahriyans, heroes, Torbeshes, Arnauts, but the determinant is Pomaks.”<sup>246</sup> He defined Pomak as “a separate and ancient nation formed of different tribes” such as Thracian, proto-Bulgarian, Bogomils, Arnaut, and even Persian and Arab.<sup>247</sup> According to the same Pomak NGO representative, Pomaks are a multimillion, transnational, and European community scattered to six Balkan countries. They are neither Turks nor Christians (i.e. Bulgarian).<sup>248</sup> He also defined Pomak as the first Muslim people in the Balkans and Europe by supporting the pre-Ottoman Islamisation hypothesis: “the correct name for all old Muslims in the Balkans is Pomaks. All other names are invented and used by the Pomaks’ enemies. The Pomaks are the first Muslims in Europe since the time of the Prophet.”<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> It was a Smolyan-based NGO, but according to the testimony of a representative of the NGO, European Institute-Pomak carries its activities outside Bulgaria due to various hardships experienced in Bulgaria. He claims that it is the only organisation in Bulgaria, official and unofficial, working for the Pomaks. He also noted the Institute “preserves and promotes traditions, customs, and the rich folklore of the Pomaks. It protects their rights and works for the official recognition of Pomaks. It manages and prepares the strategy for the unification of the Pomaks in the Balkans and around the world” (Interview with a Pomak activist affiliated with European Institute-Pomak, based in a European country, via social media, 3 December 2018).

<sup>246</sup> Interview with a Pomak activist affiliated with European Institute-Pomak, based in a European country, via social media, 3 December 2018.

<sup>247</sup> Interview with a Pomak activist affiliated with European Institute-Pomak, based in a European country, via social media, 3 December 2018.

<sup>248</sup> “Pomaks? Who are we?,” *European Institute Pomak*, <https://www.eipomak.org/pomaci>, accessed 05 April 2020.

<sup>249</sup> Interview with a Pomak activist affiliated with European Institute-Pomak, based in a European country, via social media, 3 December 2018.

A Pomak whose ancestors migrated to Turkey after 1877-78 described Pomak as a two-to-three-thousand-year-old Balkan community who is Muslim and speak the Pomak language, a South Slavic language.<sup>250</sup> He continued:

For my view, [proto-] Bulgarian tribe arrived in the Balkans as a Turkic tribe, we, Pomaks, were already there. We have been living together for 1300 years. [Proto-] Bulgars were a Turkish tribe whose characteristics disappeared after a hundred years. Pomaks' [origin] are not associated with this Turkish tribe. As for Turks, they are a Central Asian community, we are a Balkan community. Our homeland is the Balkans [but] we have been living together for six hundred years, and cooked in the same pot with Turks.<sup>251</sup>

Despite some minute differences in explaining and defining Pomaks' history, origin, and language, the shared Pomak ethnic identity seems to become the common identity for Pomak groups in Bulgaria, Turkey, and to a lesser extent, in Greece. Because the members of the community who dispersed to at least three countries, the only viable identity appears to be Pomak. For those in Turkey and Greece, Bulgarian national or ethnic identity is not applicable, whereas Turkish identity is espoused by few Pomaks in Bulgaria.

Pomak identity choices also have their reflections in the (dis)organisational or elite level. For the Rhodope Muslims who see themselves as Bulgarian and Bulgarian Muslim, for example, new *Rodina* movement might be seen as a reflection of their choices. As for pro-Pomak option, they basically suffer from disorganisation or lack of organisation in political or other terms in promoting Pomakness. Pomaks' attempts to organise and openly promote their identity are continuously hindered by the Bulgarian state as many interviewees pointed out. For instance, an attempt to establish a political party by Pomaks was prevented, and Efrem Mollov, the initiator of this political movement, also the chairman of European Institute-Pomak, was harassed various times, sued, and brought to court for writing a book on Pomaks' history. Because of the pressures in Bulgaria, he continued his activities outside the

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<sup>250</sup> Interview with a Turkey-based NGO-affiliated Pomak, Istanbul, 30 August 2018.

<sup>251</sup> Interview with a Turkey-based NGO-affiliated Pomak, Istanbul, 30 August 2018.

country. Pomaks in Turkey have begun organising under cultural associations in different cities, but their influence upon Pomaks in Bulgaria seems minimal although relations are improving. Some Pomak origin Turkish citizens, whose representation in Bulgaria is non-existent, operate in European countries. Pomaks also established relations with other Slavic-speaking groups in the Balkans such as Torbeshes and Gorans, who are also considered as Pomaks by many of the interviewees. However, Pomaks lack of a unifying organisation which represents the entire community at national as well as international levels. In addition to obstacles put by the Bulgarian state in the way of Pomaks' organisational capacity, different ideological orientations of these Pomaks that mostly headquartered outside Bulgaria and are up for the self-appointed leadership of Pomaks, also hinder their influence.

As stated during the interviews, many Pomaks began to identify themselves as only Pomak, a distinct ethnic identity. However, at the same time, Pomaks are hesitant about disclosing their identity. They reveal their identity depending on the context and to those who uttered the term Pomak. Many interviewees stated that most Pomaks, especially those who leave their region and settle in big cities, clandestinely live their identity and keep it secret among Bulgarian majority.<sup>252</sup> For instance, a Pomak man of religion stated the following:

[Even though] They have Pomak consciousness, if they meet a Bulgarian, they introduce themselves as Bulgarian. They do not introduce themselves as Pomak, for they are ashamed of using it [the appellation Pomak]. [But] It is not a thing to be ashamed of. Students in Sofia and Blagoevgrad while studying keep secret their identity and never disclose that they are Pomak. Most have changed their names, almost 80-90% Muslims.<sup>253</sup>

Another Pomak interviewee interrupted at this point and added that some Pomaks keep secret their identity throughout their lives. "It is a huge trauma. Each family has

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<sup>252</sup> For clandestine identity, see (Konstantinov and Alhaug, 1995: 52).

<sup>253</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 16 September 2018.

its own traumatic history,"<sup>254</sup> he stated. The same interviewee told two particular stories, in which Pomaks concealed their identity and confessed at some point that they had introduced themselves as Bulgarian. However, actually they were not Bulgarian but Pomak. What is moving is that one of the heroes of the narratives reveals the real identity of himself and background of the family to his children, namely, being Pomak, only in his deathbed.<sup>255</sup>

Some interviewees argued that Pomaks hide their identity because of the fear of the state and the prejudices in the Bulgarian public against them.<sup>256</sup> Due to the existing misperceptions and prejudices between Bulgarians towards Pomaks regarding their physical hygiene, appearances, and character, Pomaks hide themselves and introduce themselves with Bulgarian names as normal Bulgarians.<sup>257</sup> The Bulgarian scholar whose views are shared above also pointed to the variety of views among Pomaks for their identity and argued that some Pomaks do not want to be different.<sup>258</sup> He recalled a particular observation of himself in a Pomak village where Pomaks cynically identify themselves as BMW (Bulgaris Myusyulmansko Veroizpovedanie - Bulgarians whose faith is Islam). According to him, Pomaks feel suffocated. They do not want to talk depending on the context because they do not know what is going to happen to them if they say they are Bulgarian, Turk, or Pomak. Therefore, they fear talking on this issue.

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<sup>254</sup> Interview with a Pomak researcher in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 16 September 2018.

<sup>255</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 16 September 2018.

<sup>256</sup> Interview with a Pomak white-collar worker, Sofia, 18 September 2018; Interview with a Pomak school teacher in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 17 September 2018.

<sup>257</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018; Interview with a Pomak man of religion in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 16 September 2018.

<sup>258</sup> Interview with a Bulgarian researcher on Pomaks, Sofia, 4 September 2018.



### 5.2.2.3 Pomak: A Dialect or a Language

The natural extension of debates on the identity issue is into the field of vernacular of Pomaks, and a number of views and inclinations regarding whether Pomak is a language or a dialect may be distinguished among Pomaks. Some Pomak interviewees consider it as a dialect of Bulgarian, others as language. Those who strictly consider Pomak as a distinct group mostly consider Pomak as a language, may it be a (South) Slavic language, or even a completely different and peculiar Balkan language, but not Bulgarian. One highly motivated Pomak activist, who believed that Pomak is nothing but a language, argued that

Pomaks speak neither Slavic nor Bulgarian. They speak an ancient language we call - an old Balkan language. This language comes from the old Balkan civilisation, almost destroyed by the flood in the Black Sea 7,500 years ago. Contemporary Bulgarian and Slavic languages come from it.<sup>259</sup>

Similarly, an NGO-affiliated Pomak defined Pomak as language, for she also defined Pomak as different from Bulgarian, relating it to neither Bulgarian nor Turk:

I am neither Bulgarian nor Turk, only Pomak. Pomaks' religion is Islam, their language is Pomak. They say it is a Bulgarian dialect, but it is not. There is difference. They say we [Pomaks] are Bulgarians because the language [Pomaks speak] is Bulgarian language, but it is not true. We consider Pomak as a distinct language, they say it is a dialect.<sup>260</sup>

However, some others who distinguish themselves from ethnic Bulgarians also regarded Pomak as a dialect of Bulgarian.<sup>261</sup>

In linguistic terms, Pomaks' spoken language is affiliated by the Bulgarian scholars with Slavic languages used in Southeast Europe, close to Macedonian, Bulgarian, and

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<sup>259</sup> Interview with a Pomak activist affiliated with European Institute-Pomak, based in a European country, via social media, 3 December 2018.

<sup>260</sup> Interview with a Pomak NGO representative, Smolyan, 17 September 2018.

<sup>261</sup> Interview with a Pomak white-collar worker, Sofia, 18 September 2018; Interview with a Pomak white-collar worker (*Muftiate*), Sofia, 3 September 2018; Interview with a Pomak school teacher in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 17 September 2018.

medieval Bulgarian (Adamou and Fanciullo, 2018). However, as a scholar of Turkish origin noted, “Pomaks’ Bulgarian is a very special dialect, akin to old, medieval Bulgarian of fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Their dialect has grammatical categories-characteristics different from contemporary Bulgarian.”<sup>262</sup> In fact, as observed during the interviews, Pomaks’ vernacular is to some extent enriched with Turkish and Arabic loan words widely used in greetings, thanking, and appreciation words, and some conjunctions. However, due to the assimilation and nationalising processes in Bulgaria, the locally used Pomak dialect, or as some argued, language has been replaced by the contemporary Bulgarian language. For instance, upon the question whether he speaks Pomak or Bulgarian within their community, a Pomak resident of Blagoevgrad replied as follows:

In Bulgarian we talk. Now in fact Pomak is a Slavic-based language. The origin of the Pomak is a big issue. People here talk in Bulgarian among themselves. Pomaks in Greece and Turkey were able to keep their dialects, they use it. People here speak in official Bulgarian, for they learn it in school. Old village dialects almost disappeared. In old dialects there were many Turkish words, plenty. None remained because they read in Bulgarian. Pomaks in Greece and Turkey use interesting words [that are forgotten here].<sup>263</sup>

Observations during the fieldwork revealed that the use of Pomak dialect/language is quite limited in Bulgaria and people largely adjusted to using the Bulgarian language as their medium of communication among themselves and with others. In that, speakers of Pomak have a role, for they seem not to transfer Pomak to younger generations, probably due to the disesteemed situation of Pomak dialect/language in today’s Bulgaria (Adamou and Fanciullo, 2018). In addition, assimilation and ‘nationalisation’ processes in Bulgaria caused many peculiar and distinct characteristics of Pomak culture to vanish including the local Pomak dialect/language, which was replaced by the Bulgarian language. Although some

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<sup>262</sup> Interview with a Bulgarian/Turk scholar from Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, 18 September 2018.

<sup>263</sup> Interview with a Pomak researcher in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018.

peculiar traces of this culture were preserved and still exist in remote villages like Ribnovo, they already disappeared in plain.

#### 5.2.2.4 The Contest over Pomaks

Pomaks, who scattered through the Balkan states, are regarded as part of the dominant ethnicity in their host countries, and accordingly were claimed as Bulgarian Muslims, Pomak Turks, and Hellenic Muslims. The Pomak issue in Bulgaria, as one of the interviewees described, is complex and cannot be scientifically explained nor can it be objectively resolved because of the non-existence and degeneration of original historical records – if ever existed –regarding their origin. Furthermore, it has been political for a long time, and the struggle upon the Pomak issue covertly hovers around such rhetoric like ‘winning over’ and losing. As the same interviewee argued, Bulgarian scientific and political elites follow such a covert accord regarding Pomaks that, no matter what it takes, Pomaks should stay within the premises of what constitutes Bulgarianness and not be lost for Turks<sup>264</sup> because Turkification of Pomaks has been the worst scenario for Bulgarians (Brunnbauer, 2001: 47). Therefore, Bulgarian scientific and political circles emphasise their Bulgarian origin and call them as ‘Bulgarian Muslim.’<sup>265</sup> In fact, for the Academies, the asserted historical origin of Pomaks and the theses on the etymology of the term Pomak determine their contemporary belonging. In other words, the so-called historical affiliations retrospectively determine Pomaks’ current ethnic affiliation. In Bulgaria, for instance, a Bulgarian/Turk academician from Sofia argued, “as a speculation, without any scientific nature, it has been hypothesised that Pomak is associated with the word *помачен – измъчен*, [tortured], which is currently the widely accepted meaning of the term.”<sup>266</sup> Greeks also have some origin theses for Pomaks, according

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<sup>264</sup> Interview with a Turk researcher, Sofia, 5 September 2018.

<sup>265</sup> Interview with a Bulgarian/Turk scholar from Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, 18 September 2018.

<sup>266</sup> Interview with a Bulgarian/Turk scholar from Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, 18 September 2018.

to which the Pomak is derived from the words *apomahos*, draft evader, or *poma*, a person who drinks a lot or produces of wine. Pomaks were the Hellenic tribe named 'Agriyans,' who joined Alexander the Great in his Asian campaign. Therefore, they are descendants of Alexander who were Islamized by the Ottomans (Çavuşoğlu, 1993: 107). An NGO-affiliated Pomak, however, opposed all these arguments and explained the issue with the following words:

How Bulgarians call me? They do not accept we are Pomak. They call us Bulgarian Muslim, Bulgaro-Mohammedan. I demand to be accepted as Pomak. Communist regime made assimilation [here]. They do not want us to be Pomak, but first Bulgarian, then Muslim ... Pomaks live in six countries, and they were subjected to assimilation in all of these countries. The same occurs in Turkey. They wish us to be Turk, but we are not Turk, but Pomak. Greece does the same.... Bulgarians are heavily afraid that if Pomaks know Turkish, they will say they are Turk. I speak Turkish, but I am no Turk, but Pomak. We are a different ethnic group. We have different songs, a different language, Pomak, which is not a dialect.<sup>267</sup>

As to Turkish side, some Turkish researchers and scholars strongly advocate that Pomaks are descendent of various Turkic groups including Pechenegs and Cumans, who were settled in the Balkans prior to the Ottoman era (Bahtiyar, [1928] 2009: 487,495; Çavuşoğlu, 1993: 106). For instance, Memişoğlu (1991: 7), who is the prominent defender of this hypothesis in Turkey, argues that "Pomak Turks are the grandchildren of [C]uman Turks [who] dwelled in Pirin Macedonia and Rhodope in the XIth century." Such Turkic groups as Cumans,<sup>268</sup> Pechenegs, Uzes, Turcopoles, and Seljuks were recruited as mercenaries in the Byzantine Empire, and they operated in the Balkan Peninsula and the Asia minor against other Turks (Ayönü, 2009). As Kiel (1994: 307) argues, some members of these groups, Pechenegs in Didymoteicho/Dimetoka in this case, settled in the Balkans and converted to Islam as the language similarity facilitated the conversion after the Ottomans came. The Turkic origin of Pomaks is noteworthy in that many Turkic groups had been present

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<sup>267</sup> Interview with a Pomak NGO representative, Smolyan, 17 September 2018.

<sup>268</sup> Cumans operated in various armies in the Eurasian steppe because they were treated as mercenaries in the Byzantine armies and also in the Caucasus. Thousands of Cumans were invited by Georgian kings and settled in Georgia. They were used against Seljuk Turks in Anatolia.

in the region before the Ottoman Turks came. Some decisively determined the inauguration of the second Bulgarian Kingdom as Cumans. Some settled and were assimilated here as the Turcoples. Besides, there are some similarities between the group appellations - e.g., Ahriyan for Pomaks and *Agarenoi* for Turks (Özünlü and Kayapınar, 2017: 26-27).<sup>269</sup> However, the origin of Pomaks in particular was out of the scope of this research, which basically considered how the group members itself described themselves.

However, according to Gözler (1999: 1397-1398), this term, Pomak Turks, is a later product and by no means used by the people themselves. Nevertheless, some Pomak interviewees advocated the term as it refers to cultural affinity with ethnic Turks.<sup>270</sup> Also, it should be included that some Pomaks, especially those in Yakoruda, identified themselves as Turks or affiliated with being Turk in different occasions including the census in 1992, which triggered quarrels in Bulgarian public (Memişoğlu, 1991: 40). Likewise, the Bulgarian thesis of Pomaks' origin is debatable, for linguistic argument does not suffice to link it to Bulgarian as argued by Pomaks themselves. Besides, many urban ethnic Turks use Bulgarian in their daily life.

### 5.2.3 Georgian Identity of Muslim Ajarians

While the Pomak example is very colourful and multiple inclinations regarding identity exist, Muslim Ajarians' Georgianness is taken for granted by Muslim Ajarians themselves. In other words, unlike the various tendencies and hybridity encountered among Pomaks regarding their ethnic-national identity, only one trend is observed among Muslims of Ajaria and nearby localities, to which they had migrated: Georgian ethnic and national identity. As stated in the previous chapter, initially this was not the case, and "cultural politics of the Soviet Union" was responsible for the change in

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<sup>269</sup> Savvides (2002: 68-70) argues that *Agarenoi* is associated with the word Agar/Hagar, the mother of Prophet Abraham's first son. The term was firstly used for Arabs and Muslims, but then mostly for Turks and Turcomans in the Byzantine/Greek parlance.

<sup>270</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion, Sofia, 5 September 2018; Interview with a Pomak white-collar worker (*Muftiate*), Sofia, 3 September 2018.

the national identification of Muslim Ajarians (Pelkmans, 2010: 116). As the older generation of Pomaks in Bulgaria identified themselves with only Islam and make a clear distinction with Bulgarians, elders of Muslim Ajarians during the Soviet Union, as interviewees mentioned, differentiated themselves from Georgians. For instance, a middle-aged man of religion in Batumi stated that “the olds used to say ‘We are not Georgians’ because Georgian meant *giaour* (infidel) but this view is too wrong, stemmed from ignorance.”<sup>271</sup> Similarly, a young Ajarian recalled his grandmother’s perception of Georgian and its conflation with Christianity:

My grandmother used to say ‘It is Georgian custom-practice, don’t do it’ [if she was not pleased with my conduct].... It is not only my grandmother, that [old] generation reacted conducts against Muslim customs as being Georgian custom, a Georgian way of conduct. However, what they meant was not actually Georgian but Christian. Because Georgians too had defended the view that Georgians were no one but Christian. Therefore, [the old generation of Muslims thought] it is Georgian, namely, Christian, and we, Muslims, should be away from it.<sup>272</sup>

This quote explicitly contains the references to ethnodoxy. The grandmother and her contemporaries make a distinction between what is Muslim and Georgian/Christian conduct and who is Georgian.

Consequently, however, from the perspective of Muslim Ajarian interviewees, being Muslim and Georgian have begun to be regarded as not contradictory with each other in due course. Accordingly, the new generation of Muslim Georgians, who follows a different track from the old generation, do not distinguish being Georgian from being Ajarian or Muslim. Even religiously devoted Muslim Ajarians consider themselves as Georgian, while this cannot be said for the Pomak case. For instance, interviewees in Ajaria responded to my related question mostly as follows: “We are *pure* Georgians,”<sup>273</sup> “We are Georgians *Alhamdulillah* [praise be to God],”<sup>274</sup> or “I am

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<sup>271</sup> Interview with two Ajarian men of religion, Batumi, 20 August 2018.

<sup>272</sup> Interview with an Ajarian Businessman/Translator, Batumi, 15 August 2018.

<sup>273</sup> Talk with a taxi driver, Batumi, 22 August 2018;

<sup>274</sup> Interview with a Georgian Muslim resident, Mokhe, 17 August 2018.

Georgian into my blood.”<sup>275</sup> Furthermore, a Georgian Muslim man of religion in an interview with a group of locals in Adigeni emphasised his Georgian identity comparatively through the attitude of the older generation, who called themselves as Turk:

Being Georgian and Muslim is not contradictory, yet Georgian Muslim and Georgian Christian is. Our ancestors who were ignorant used to say ‘we are Turk,’ similarly Christians used to say ‘you are Turk.’ [However,] we are Georgian, Georgian Muslim. Those ignorant used to say we are Turk, but they did not know who is Georgian, who is Muslim.<sup>276</sup>

The quotation above firstly refers to identity transformation that took place among Ajarians in the last century. It secondly reveals that, even though in such a country as Georgia where ethnodoxy is quite strong, Georgian Muslims, even devoted Muslims and men of religion, in ethnic and national terms identify themselves with Georgian—a circumstance not observable among Pomaks. In fact, not a single Ajarian denied his Georgian identity, even though they emphasised their religious identity. For instance, a blue-collar and already retired Georgian Muslim from Akhaltsikhe put emphasis on his being Georgian but also his Muslim identity: “Those who believe in cross is Georgian. Our language is one. But we don’t believe in cross. There is Muslim Georgian. We are Muslim Georgian. They are only Georgian. We are Muslim Georgian.”<sup>277</sup> As other research also indicate, people who are religiously devoted and from rural localities largely refer to and stick with their religious affiliation, while in Batumi, unless he is from upper Ajaria and has strong affiliation to Islam, religious identity becomes marginal, less stringent than the national one.

Although Muslim Ajarians consider themselves as Georgians, the way they are perceived by other Georgians is also remarkable, for a Georgian is supposed to be an Eastern Orthodox as the term ethnodoxy envisaged. As Uludağ (2016), who is a Turkish citizen of Georgian descent, argues,

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<sup>275</sup> Interview with an Ajarian former *Mufti*, Tbilisi, 26 May 2015.

<sup>276</sup> Interview with a Georgian Muslim man of religion, Chela, 17 August 2018.

<sup>277</sup> Interview with a village resident/Retired Georgian Muslim, Akhaltsikhe, 23 August 2018.

Non-Muslim Georgians do not consider Muslim Ajarians as Georgians (Kartveli), they exclude Ajaria and Ajarians by calling them Satatrete/Turkeli and Tatari/Tatarebi. For non-Muslim Georgians, a Muslim cannot be a Georgian (Kartveli). To be a Georgian, one needs to be an Orthodox Christian and speak Georgian. For this reason, since Kartveli means 'Christian Georgian,' Ajarian Muslims do not accept that they are Kartveli, which they use for 'non-Muslim.' They call themselves 'chvnebuli' [ours] 'Muslim Ajarians, Ajarian Muslims.' (Translated from Turkish by the author).

In fact, Georgian discourse toward Muslim Ajarians has been mostly ambivalent (Manning, 2012: 148), constantly swung between acceptance (or rather acceptance with a reserve) and refusal of Ajarians arguing their accession to Georgianness. Religion has been a roadblock in their way to full accession to the privileged 'club' of Georgians. During the Russian period, "Georgians were careful to speak of 'Georgians who have become Muslim' when emphasizing the opposition between secular and religious identity, in informal contexts these were simply Tatars" (Manning, 2012: 150). Even though there were attempts, as contended above, like that of Chavchavadze to formulate Georgian nationality by focusing more on the 'unity of history' as a more effective unifier of various Georgian groups who religiously and linguistically diversified in course of time, Georgianness was predominantly associated with Christianity. Manning (2012: 150) points out that "Georgians spoke of the inhabitants of Ottoman Georgia not in terms of secular nationality or language, but in confessional terms of Ottoman *millet*."

In the post-Soviet period, when religion was forefront and Christianity getting entangled with being Georgian, Muslim identity of Georgians in Ajaria was seen as odd pairs. The Muslim-Georgian category was estranged in Georgia and even avoided by Muslim Ajarians themselves. An Ajarian Muslim described his personal experience in this period:

In an academic conference in Tbilisi in 2003, I greeted the audience on behalf of 'Georgian Muslims' at the beginning of my speech. It caused stirrings. Outside the hall, after my speech, people said 'You made a historical mistake.'



You pronounced the words Georgian and Muslim together in front of the scholars. We were abstaining from this for years.<sup>278</sup>

Due to their religious adherence, they were seen as ‘different Georgian’ or ‘not full Georgians’ (Zviadadze, 2018: 36), not to mention that they were called ‘Tatars’ for a long time. To quote Pelkmans (2006: 140), “Ajarians were partly included and partly excluded from the Georgian national imagery. In this imagery, Ajarian Muslims were not complete ‘others’ but were rather ‘incomplete selves’; they were simultaneously brother and potential enemy.”

Nonetheless, Georgian Muslims, together with other Georgians who are not Eastern Orthodox, struggle to prove that they are Georgians too (Kahraman, 2020). As a young Ajarian Muslim put it, “Some considers Georgian as Christian. It is wrong. A Georgian can be Muslim.”<sup>279</sup> Regardless of their religious adherence, in their understanding, they are Georgians and religious belonging does not and should not impinge on their accession to Georgianness. In a similar vein, liberal Georgians and urban/secular Ajarian intellectuals define Georgianness through adherence to Georgian ‘idea’ and a common culture. They do not necessarily neglect Eastern Orthodoxy’s role in its intimate relations to being Georgian. However, they even consent not to include language to the list as long as one adheres to the Georgian idea and considers himself as Georgian<sup>280</sup> which actually perhaps echoes Chavchavadze’s description of Georgianness as a matter of ‘inner essence’ and ‘of the heart’ rather than outward forms as language (Manning, 2012: 52-53).

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<sup>278</sup> Interview with a Muslim Ajarian (NGO) expert in Batumi on October 28, 2015.

<sup>279</sup> Interview with a Georgian Muslim, Akhaltsikhe, 23 August 2018.

<sup>280</sup> Interview with a Georgian/Ajarian scholar at the Niko Berdzenishvili Institute at the Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi, 20 August 2018; Interview with a Georgian/Ajarian scholar at the Department of Philosophy at the Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi, 21 August 2018.

### **5.2.3.1 Intercommunal Conflicts between Muslim and Christian Georgians: The Adigeni Case**

Although they are all Georgians, Muslims and Christians increasingly confronted with Muslim Georgians' religious demands in the last decade. However, in the beginning of the post-Soviet era, there were not sectarian or cultural conflicts in Ajaria and the neighboring regions between Muslims and Christian Georgians as stated by the scholars in late 1990s (Derlugian, 1998; Crawford, 1998: 8-9). Similarly, religious rivalry or animosity was considered to hold a minor role in conflicts in the region, so it did not become a major political issue as the international contemporaries acknowledged and noted. However, some reports also referred to the potential tensions in the future (Wesselink, 1992: 7). For instance, an International Alert report noted in the early 1990s the following:

Religious animosity is not seen as a major contributing factor to violent conflict in the region and religious affiliation has not become a major political issue, despite the existence of deep suspicions between some Christians and Muslims. However, clouding the horizon is a mix of religion and extreme nationalism on the part of some Georgian Orthodox leaders which could lead to heightened tensions in the future, particularly if there are attempts to constitutionally establish Orthodox Church as the state religion in Georgia (Conflict in the North Caucasus and Georgia, 1993).

In post-Soviet Ajaria, when Christianity and the Church gained a prominent position in public space, Islam was re-pushed to private and domestic domain (Pelkmans, 2003: 64), and some local confrontations took place between Muslim and Christian Georgians in Ajaria. However, these local confrontations that were only limited to Ajaria in 1990s spread over other regions like Guria and Samtskhe-Javakheti, where the two communities coexisted for decades. Unlike the 1990s, Muslim Georgians, who once resorted to 'silent resistance' against the policies and measures of the state, became more active and responsive, after which they became internally more organized and solidary and established alliances with other religious minorities, nation-wide Georgian NGOs, and civil societies in the country as the intercommunal confrontations after 2012 demonstrate.

Adigeni, located next to upper Ajarian district of Khulo, became home to many Ajarians who had migrated to the region decades ago. Adigeni is chosen as a case study, for it hosted a number of intercommunal incidents after 2013. However, it is by no means the only place where ownership of the public spaces was contested. The dispute over the second Batumi mosque is also related with this. The Christian majority in the city do not want to see another Muslim temple, for they do not want Batumi to outwardly transform into a 'Muslim city' and Muslims to be visible as NGO affiliated Muslims argued (Kahraman and Tulun, 2016: 139-140).<sup>281</sup> They were concerned about it because, the mosque, minarets, and azans would eventually seal the Muslim presence in the locality. Minarets normally hold two functions: to broadcast azan, the call for prayer and to show that the area is Muslim-inhabiting thereby indicate Islamic presence in the region. However, thanks to the technological development in broadcasting, the first function of minarets is overwhelmingly carried out by speakers. However, the second function of them has become more valid, especially among the non-Muslim environment.

In Muslim countries, minarets are part of cultural heritage and tradition, and azan functions similarly to the bell of Christian churches. Thus, in non-Muslim countries, broadcasting azan out of the mosque is rarely allowed. For instance, during the communist era Bulgaria, some mosques like *Banyabashi* in Sofia were allowed to operate, as Eminov (1997: 60) pointed out, for propaganda purposes, but azan was silenced, only allowed to be heard inside the mosques. In Soviet Georgia, similar to Bulgaria, the Batumi mosque was let function for propaganda purposes since Batumi has a port which was visited by people from various Muslim countries. In post-Soviet era, broadcasting of azan five times a day in Batumi mosque has been gradually allowed only in recent years without any serious public controversy as some interviewees stated. However, in Adigeni and some other localities which Muslim Georgians inhabit, the controversy over opening up Muslim houses of worship and

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<sup>281</sup> Interview with a Muslim Ajarian deputy of an NGO, Batumi, 26 October 2015.

installing minarets with azan broadcasting became bitter and Muslim, and Christian inhabitants of these localities, Muslims, and the police came face to face.

The first encounter between the two communities took place in Guria in 2012 and then spread over other regions like Kvemo Kartli, Kakheti, Ajaria, and Samtskhe-Javakheti although most of the encounters occurred in the neighboring region of Ajaria, the Adigeni municipality of Samtskhe-Javakheti.<sup>282</sup> The first dispute in Adigeni region took place in August 2013 in the village of Chela. This was “the biggest operation in the history of Georgia,” as was described by an Ajarian interviewee (Kahraman and Tulun, 2016: 135). The metal construct minaret of the village mosque, which was imported from Turkey, was installed by the Muslim community and dismantled by the state authority after the protests of the Christians. During the dismantling operation, clashes took place between Muslims and police forces, wherein some Muslims were injured, and some detained and charged. One year later, this time confrontation broke out over a disputed site in the village of Mokhe, which is not far from Chela. Muslim Georgians demanded restoration of the building in ruin which they claimed had been a mosque since the time of Meskhetian Turks. by contrast, Christians and the Georgian Orthodox Church claimed the site had been a church. Muslims opposed to the deconstruction works launched in the site and encountered with the police, during which some of them were arrested. The last controversy in the premises of the Adigeni municipality occurred in the village with same name, Adigeni, over Muslims’ demand of a separate plot to be used as a Muslim cemetery in 2016, which was opposed by Christians on the ground that this would be followed by other demands including a mosque (Tolerance and Diversity Institute, 2016b).

Christian and Muslim Georgians in the villages of Adigeni municipality are both largely settlers from the regions of Racha, Samegrelo, Imereti, and Ajaria. Some were settled after WWII following the forced migration of Meskhetian Turks in 1944, and some

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<sup>282</sup> Since conflicts were discussed elsewhere in detail (Kahraman and Tulun, 2016; Kahraman, 2020), the focus here is on the encounters that occurred in the Adigeni municipality.

like those from Ajaria were eco-migrants who migrated after 1980s.<sup>283</sup> Some Ajarians also voluntarily or involuntarily migrated to this neighboring region throughout the years after WWII due to land shortage in Ajaria.<sup>284</sup> When they settled in their new environment they found Meskhetian Turks' places of worship, which were used for various purposes such as library, club, and depot during the Soviet Union. In the post-Soviet period, they claimed and restored these buildings as mosques, constructed new ones, and renovated private houses as places of worship. For instance, the Chela mosque, which was shared by Muslims from the three villages of Chela, Checla, and Sairme, was constructed in 2007 without a minaret, and a private house/mosque was built and used in Mokhe in 2006-2007 until they claimed the site from Meskhetian Turks to be restored in 2014 as mentioned by a Georgian Muslim man of religion.<sup>285</sup> At this point, when Muslims demanded the restoration of the already existing building as mosque in a central point in Mokhe and installation of a minaret to the active mosque in Chela, and usage of a separate plot as Muslim cemetery in Adigeni, they had to face the opposition of Christians and the clergy of the Georgian Orthodox Church.

An analysis of the rhetoric of both the Muslim and Christian residents in these villages reveals that it is a contest for the virtual ownership of the public space and landscape. Christian residents of Mokhe legitimize their arguments and oppositions to the demands of Muslims based on the ownership and property of the land which is Georgian and Christian (Gavtadze and Chitanava, 2017; Tolerance and Diversity Institute, 2014). Similarly, Christians of Chela categorize Muslims in Chela as guests and diminish the existence of the Georgian Muslim category, for Georgians should only be Christian (Nikuradze, 2013). Moreover, the struggle for the public space is a

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<sup>283</sup> Due to the avalanches that hit Ajaria and the high birth rates in Ajarian villages, as some sources pointed out (Ivanova, 1990: 9), Ajarians also moved to the regions where Greek villages were located. Young Ajarian families bought houses of the leaving Greeks or built new houses.

<sup>284</sup> Interview with a blue-collar worker/Georgian Muslim, Mokhe, 17 August 2018; Interview with a village resident/Retired Georgian Muslim, Akhaltsikhe, 23 August 2018.

<sup>285</sup> Interview with a Georgian Muslim resident, Mokhe, 17 August 2018; Interview with a Georgian Muslim man of religion, Chela, 17 August 2018.

present as well as a future pursuit as Christian Georgians stress. As Christian Georgians say, Muslims currently want this, then will want this, but ‘this is Georgia’ and needs to be protected (Kahraman, 2020: 11-12; Tolerance and Diversity Institute, 2016b).

As to Muslim interviewees, they perceive this process with analogous terms. They say, “It is the road here [Chela] and the mosque is seen from there,” and “they [Christians] do not want [the mosque in Mokhe] because it is in the centre. Thus, they would demolish it.”<sup>286</sup> That is, Muslims think that Christians do not want to see a symbol at the most visible spots in villages, which challenges Christianity in the rural landscape as mosques and minarets are markers of Islam and Muslim presence. For similar reasons, Muslims endeavour to have these architectural structures built in more visible spots. In other words, they want to make the region a ‘Muslim settlement’ again as at the time of Meskhetian Turks.<sup>287</sup> Therefore, as an interviewee, a Muslim Georgian cleric, put “the mosque needs a minaret, it is not a mosque without it.”<sup>288</sup> He means that otherwise how one could know that there are Muslims in a settlement.

What Muslims want is more than a place to pray. Muslims wish to assert their visibility and their existence and demand room in the public space. They want to demonstrate that they exist and that there are Muslims in Adigeni villages. Indeed, they strive for their power in the public space. As Pieterse defines, “mosques without minarets” in Europe are as religion without power (1997: 197), Ajarian Muslims in Adigeni engage in struggle to dominate the public space just as their Christian neighbours do. Christians, however, oppose any construction to show their neighbourhood as anything but Christian, especially any structure to be erected in the centres of their places as Mokhe or very visible spot of Chela. Thus, all these

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<sup>286</sup> Interview with a Georgian Muslim resident, Mokhe, 17 August 2018.

<sup>287</sup> Interview with a Georgian Muslim resident, Mokhe, 17 August 2018.

<sup>288</sup> Interview with a Georgian Muslim man of religion, Chela, 17 August 2018.

represent solid challenges for Christians, whose numerical and physical visibility have started to be overshadowed by their Muslim fellows as some interviewees pointed out.<sup>289</sup>

For sure, mosques together with minarets would transform the rural, and probably with a lesser speed, the urban landscape in the Georgian periphery, with its churches, Soviet-style buildings, bus stops, bars and so on. They represent a challenger in this landscape. Especially for the Georgian Orthodox inhabitants of villages, where these encounters mostly occur, post-mosque landscape would not be the same. Nevertheless, Christian Georgians are not against the existence of Muslim Georgians, at least outwardly, but concerned about the visibility of their existence in terms of mosques, azans, minarets, madrasahs (Islamic religious schools), and Muslim graveyards. As depicted in some research (Mikeladze 2013; 2014; Kahraman, Katliarou, and Anaç, 2016; Kahraman, 2020), as long as Muslims stay “within their boundaries” (Sartania, 2017), do their praying in private spaces like homes, and do not demand more, their existence is tolerated.

As to the attitude of the authorities towards Muslims during the confrontations, most NGO experts and Muslims interviewed would argue that state authorities, like the Religious Agency, do not act as impartial mediators when it is the demands of Muslims. They rather defend the interests of the majority, especially those of the church. During interviews with two experts at the Georgian Democracy Initiative (GDI), an NGO, one of the them made references to the increasing number of incidents and problems of Muslims such as Chela, Mohe, and Kobuleti starting from 2012:

The government does not exercise its power and does not protect the right of other religions equally. And from 2012, the problems of Muslim population rose. There are tensions between Orthodox and Muslim population in specific regions, and government [had] not taken effective steps to find a solution. For

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<sup>289</sup> Interview with a Georgian/Ajarian scholar at the Niko Berdzenishvili Institute at the Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi, 20 August 2018; Interview with a Georgian Muslim resident, Mokhe, 17 August 2018.

example, we have five or six incidents like this. People do not have a place to pray. It was one case I don't remember which village [Adigeni] that Muslim population was not given a place for a cemetery. And Orthodox Christians said that they shouldn't have their separate cemetery because if we give them a cemetery they would ask for other things.<sup>290</sup>

They also argued on the attitude of Christian population toward Muslims and said Georgianness of their Muslim fellows is not well embraced by Christians. Christian population is also apathetic to their needs as the GDI expert pointed out:

Muslims have huge problems. It is not only Mokhe because the same problem [also exists] in Batumi.... they don't have a place to pray, and the government did not provide a place. They are aware what the problem is. Batumi people who live there don't support their Muslim brothers. They live next to each other, and they consider like they [Muslims] are somehow not a part of them, not part of the society. This is very big problem ... because they have a kind of historical roots because of the Russian propaganda which said that Muslim brothers are not Georgians [but] called them Turkish people and all the Muslims who live in Georgia.... The government always openly support Orthodox Christians there is a very sad thing and that is why we fight for that. [We need to explain] this population ... that these are all brothers. They are equally members of the society. The freedom of religion is the human right and we have to admit that and protect them. It is just the huge influence of Georgian Orthodox Church.<sup>291</sup>

Accordingly, many local Georgian Muslim interviewees highlighted the role of the local Orthodox clergy and the church as catalysts in the confrontations. For some, Christian Georgian residents were supported and provoked against Muslims by the clergy.<sup>292</sup> Lastly, for instance, hectares of pastures, which were owned and used by Georgian Muslim peasants in the same Adigeni municipality, were transferred to the Georgian Orthodox Church because of the existence of an old shrine in the locality. According to the Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (2019b), this

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<sup>290</sup> Interview with a Human Rights Lawyer and a Georgian expert on religious minorities from Georgian Democracy Initiative (GDI), Tbilisi, 4 April 2017.

<sup>291</sup> Interview with a Human Rights Lawyer and a Georgian expert on religious minorities from Georgian Democracy Initiative (GDI), Tbilisi, 4 April 2017.

<sup>292</sup> Interview with Georgian Muslim man of religion, Chela, 17 August 2018; Interview with a Georgian Muslim resident, Mokhe, 17 August 2018; Interview with a Muslim Ajarian chairman of an NGO, Batumi, 15 August 2018; Interview with a Georgian Muslim, Akhaltsikhe, 23 August 2018.



transfer of land pastures, which is vital for the peasants' livelihood, put them in difficult situation.

Unacceptance of Muslim Ajarian's attachment to Georgianness and refusal of their demands and exclusion on them, as elaborated in the theory part, are highly related with the religious nationalist character of current Georgian nationalism, which prioritizes Eastern Orthodox Georgians over Georgians who profess other faiths. In addition, based on the rhetoric of Georgian Christians during the confrontations (Kahraman, 2020) and the interviews, one can notice the 'in-group belonging,' as discussed in ethnodoxy. Eastern Orthodox Georgians are privileged, and Muslim Ajarians not belonging to the religiously defined 'in-group' are disenfranchised, so their demands are ignored.

To review the final situation and how the disputes were solved and ended up, minaret in Chela was restored to its place as a result of the reactions from the European Union and the local civil society. The conflict in Chela has taught Muslims in Georgia that their demands and problems are fulfilled only after their internationalisation. Despite the most enormous operation in Chela that Georgia had ever seen, they were allowed to reinstall it only after the conflict was internationalized and their cause was supported from outside Georgia. Two years after the conflict in Mokhe, after negotiations and the involvement of state authorities like the Religious Agency, Administration of Muslims of All Georgia, and allegedly the Security Service (The Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center, 2019a), the Mokhe commission, which was formed to solve the dispute, decided the site remain as it is and be protected, and Muslims be allocated a plot to build their mosque by the state fund. However, many were discontent about this decision, and Muslims continued to pray outside the disputed site for some time (Tolerance and Diversity Institute, 2016a). During the fieldwork in Georgia in 2018, the land allocated to Muslims in Mokhe and the mosque under construction were observed. Although they wished to see it with

a minaret, “for the time being,” as the interviewee said, “it is like this.”<sup>293</sup> Unlike the disputed site, which is centrally located and was fenced at the time, the new mosque is in the fringe of the village. Finally, the cemetery dispute was peacefully solved, and Muslims in Adigeni village were offered a certain place next to the existing cemetery by a Christian resident (Human Rights House Foundation, 2016).

Similar to what the Adigeni case demonstrates, construction of places of worship by Muslims and Pomaks in Bulgaria after 1990s is less about having physical places to pray than manifestation of their identity and expression of Muslim heritage (Lutov, 2006: 91). Accordingly, but from the reverse perspective, challengers of this endeavour to give Christian appearance to Pomak and Muslim villages to facilitate acculturation with Europe as well as conversion of them (Hadzhi, 2007: 118).

### **5.3 Ethnodoxy and Intolerance to Pomak and Georgian Muslim Identity**

Muslim Pomaks and Ajaris, as is discussed previously, face differential treatment by their respective countries because of these minorities’ ambiguous state and being linguistically affiliated with the dominant ethnicity while unaffiliated in terms of religious adherence. The reason for this differential treatment is mostly related to Eastern Orthodoxy’s peculiarity, which is conflated with the ethnic identity of the dominant group. Although they are the most similar to the majority among other minorities in some respects, Pomaks and Ajaris are not accepted as full part of the group unless they accept the creed of majority Bulgarians and Georgians. Therefore, they faced assimilation attempts. Relatedly, the concept of ethnodoxy envisages that, in cases of group identity is blended with ethnic and religious identities, or a group’s ethnic identity is intertwined to its dominant religion, so those who religiously depart the group were excluded by the group itself and regarded as ‘apostates’ rather than full members of the nation. Accordingly, as discussed by Karpov, Lisovskaya, and Barry (2012), ethnodoxy leads to the intolerance toward and exclusion of outsiders.

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<sup>293</sup> Interview with a blue-collar worker/Georgian Muslim, Mokhe, 17 August 2018.

Traditionally, Bulgarian and Georgian identities alike are associated with Eastern Orthodox creed of Christianity. Similarly, despite the variations between the two examples, Pomak, Turk, and Muslim Georgian interviewees defined being Georgian and Bulgarian overwhelmingly as being adhered to Orthodoxy. For that reason, Muslim Ajarians, as many asserted, are not seen as Georgians although they have always insisted they are Georgians as already discussed above. Pomaks interviewed, however, hesitated to identify themselves as Bulgarian, Bulgaro-Mohammedan, and Bulgarian Muslim, for these terms sound like Bulgarian, which means Christian for them. Now, it is necessary to focus on how the interviewees define Georgian and Bulgarian national identity, and then how the Muslim component of their identity is hardly accepted.

The findings of the present and earlier field research conducted in Georgia manifest that NGO-affiliates and most academicians, namely the liberal part of the Georgian society, consider religion and religious adherence as neither a necessary nor a unifying agent for Georgian nationality although the dominant perception in the Georgian society is otherwise.<sup>294</sup> A young Georgian researcher explained the causal relationship between Georgianness and Orthodoxy as he perceived in his childhood and afterwards; non-Orthodox people were not fully seen as Georgians:

Since I was a kid I heard the idea that being a Georgian means being an Orthodox Christian. I do not know exactly when this precise formula emerged, I do not know about it but it was there when I was growing up. This formula of ethnic Georgians are necessarily of Orthodox ... There were [people] who are belonging to other nationality, other religions, Muslims living in Georgia, other religious minorities. They are not considered ... Georgians. There is a certain perception that non-Orthodox Georgians are not fully Georgians. That's what I could see when I was a kid, I have noticed this since I was a young man.... To a large extent they [non-Orthodox Georgians] are considered as less than full Georgians because there is a causal situation between Georgianness and Orthodox Christianity.... I have neighbours in the same building, Jewish Georgian neighbours, Georgian Jews. I could see. I mean they were respected and [we had/have] good relationships. I could see since I was a kid, no one could directly tell me about it, but I could feel that there was something different about them. That's the perception in the neighbourhood, they were

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<sup>294</sup> Interview with a Georgian researcher, Oxford (the United Kingdom), 26 November 2018.

different.... I do not know, I cannot remember anyone ethnic Azeris, Armenians in my childhood. But again, they were obviously around, still I am sure that not the relationship, but the perception of Azeris and Armenians of Georgians were quite similar to the perception of Jews. So, they are kind of not full Georgian citizens.<sup>295</sup>

Considering that the interviewee is in his late 20s or early 30s, he lived his childhood and the youngster years during the 1990s and later, the Georgian Orthodox Church boosted his narrative as the preserver of the Georgian nation, language, and national identity, which gained almost unchallenging domination on the ground. It also advocated, as elaborated in the theoretical framework, religious nationalism implanted Eastern Orthodoxy into the heart of Georgianness. Georgian ethno-religious nationalism put minorities in a fragile position and marginalized them by placing them outside the 'Georgian idea.' They were depicted at best as 'guests' and, in the worst case, even as 'fifth columns,' during which Gamsakhurdia's 'ethnocentric discourse' gained ground. The Georgian society's perception of the minorities whose religion is different than Orthodoxy was probed. The interviewee responded, "suspicious I would say." He commented that Georgians were suspicious about them and considered them as *aliens* and *foreigners*. To be more exact, he argued that minorities were seen as "basically some kind of a *graft*, you know, on your skin, rather than full part of your organism."<sup>296</sup>

It was inquired how Georgians react to a Georgian who converted to non-Eastern Orthodoxy such as Roman Catholicism and whether s/he is considered full Georgian. He responded as follows:

I think Georgians would not like the idea [of conversion], and they would feel that that person somehow betrayed something important about being Georgian. But yeah again it depends on the context. But predominantly I think it won't be an innocent move from the perspective of the average Georgians.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Interview with a Georgian researcher, Oxford (the United Kingdom), 26 November 2018.

<sup>296</sup> Interview with a Georgian researcher, Oxford (the United Kingdom), 26 November 2018.

<sup>297</sup> Interview with a Georgian researcher, Oxford (the United Kingdom), 26 November 2018.

Betrayal to Bulgarianness and Georgianness has been a common theme which described Islamisation of Pomaks and Ajarians. It was not only equated with abandoning of the former religion but also nationality itself. More remarkably, conversion to Orthodoxy does not necessarily guarantee the full acceptance of the person to the 'club' of Georgians as described with the 'marginalization of converts' of ethnodoxy (Karpov, Lisovskaya, and Barry, 2012). Rather converts continue to remain to be somehow as outsiders. As a matter of fact, it was inquired how a non-Georgian person who converts to Orthodoxy is treated and whether s/he is accepted fully as a Georgian. This response was obtained:

So I do believe that there will still be ... you mean Muslim Georgian[s] convert to Christianity ... there will still be some kind of alienation between every Georgian and Azeri on the basis of nationality. So nationality would still play a significant role. It is not that we call Georgian everyone who is Georgian Orthodox. If he or she is not a Georgian Orthodox, but converted to Orthodox Christianity and wants to live in Georgia, he or she will be respected but remain a foreigner to some extent. [Even though] it means a lot [for Georgians] to see someone converting to Orthodox Christianity, there will be something.... In terms of neighbourhood, I guess there will remain something... at the end of the day, this person will not be a full Georgian.<sup>298</sup>

A Georgian Muslim similarly responded that a convert to Georgian Orthodox Church would still be regarded as a stranger by the community, only s/he is brother-in-religion. Only after a period of communal 'forgetting' of his/her past, his descendants would be considered as Georgians.<sup>299</sup>

Interview results showed that, in Georgia, intellectual and liberal Georgian interviewees do not conceive that religion is a matter of identity. Rather they prioritize language, culture, adherence to Georgian 'idea,' and more universal concepts such as democracy, equality, and citizenship as a requirement of living together and being part of a nation. Nonetheless, they also acknowledged that some

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<sup>298</sup> Interview with a Georgian researcher, Oxford (the United Kingdom), 26 November 2018.

<sup>299</sup> Interview with an Ajarian Businessman/Translator, Batumi, 15 August 2018.

Georgians, as described by one interviewee, are 'dark minded'<sup>300</sup> and have different views. Even though they do not agree with what is currently prevalent in Georgian society, they admit that being Georgian is overwhelmingly described by being adhered to Georgian Orthodox Church. Therefore, national identity of those Georgians who are Muslims are questioned.

As can be seen in the rhetoric of Christian Georgians about Georgian Muslims in the intercommunal conflicts between 2012 and 2016 (Mikeladze, 2014: 29-30), peculiar Georgian Muslim identity of Ajarians is hardly accepted and tolerated, whereas Azeris, who traditionally represent Islam in Georgia, are tolerated by the majority (Kahraman, 2020). Georgian Muslims who defend the Muslim component of their identity, however, disagree with those who only define Georgianness by referring to the dominant faith in the country. In varying ways and arguments, they oppose the general understanding that being Georgian is superposing religion onto ethnic identity. Therefore, as they are Georgians, for the interviewees, this should not be an issue at all. Similarly, the secular urban Ajarian intellectuals, for instance, overzealously defend the view that Ajarians, despite Muslims, are real Georgians.<sup>301</sup>

According to a PEW survey, Georgians overwhelmingly (81%) agree with that to be 'truly Georgian,' one must be Georgian Orthodox (Pew Research Center, 2017). Similarly, surveys indicate that the number of Bulgarians who cite dominant religion as important for national identity is on the rise (Barry, 2020: 83; Pew Research Center, 2017). Indeed, 66% of Bulgarians cite adherence to Eastern Orthodoxy as important to be Bulgarian. In a similar vein, in this research, interviewees argued that since Bulgarianness is characterised by Eastern Orthodoxy, Pomaks' Islamic identification is hardly accepted, which echoes intolerance of Georgian Muslim identity in Georgia. A Bulgarian/Turk scholar argued as follows:

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<sup>300</sup> Interview with a Georgian historian, Oxford (the United Kingdom), 12 November 2018.

<sup>301</sup> Similar to Muslim Ajarians, Fereydani Georgians (Khalvashi, 2008: 38) and Ingiloys also experience unacceptance by their Christian fellows, for they also profess Islam.

There are two things that are very much intertwined with each other among Bulgarians: Bulgarian nationalism and Christianity. Hence a real Bulgarian is both Bulgarian and Christian. Therefore, they do not except Pomak faithfully [as Bulgarian], for Pomaks are Muslim. Should he become Christian, he can be a real Bulgarian. For instance, Armenians are not like that. They have different churches, Gregorian, Protestant, and Catholic churches. They did not use to be affiliated with the Orthodox Church in Istanbul, they were a different *millet*. Yet, it is not possible to leave the history behind. If all Pomaks convert to Christianity, Bulgarians still pursue to have that they are Pomaks. There are plenty of prejudices which hardly be passed over.<sup>302</sup>

Conversion, apparently, does not automatically ensure their places in the ‘club,’ which requires a communal forgetting process. Pomak interviewees also agree, and some even resent, that religion defines Bulgarianness:

Bulgarian nationalists always react against Muslims. They argue that being Bulgarian means being Christian. Bulgarian state policy is Orthodox Christian policy. Another faith is not accepted as the state religion. Muslims have been here for 500 years, why do they make discrimination? We do not accept discrimination, being Bulgarian should not be equal to a particular religion.<sup>303</sup>

Intolerance for Pomaks’ Muslim identity and their Bulgarian identity as well is a recurring theme among Muslim interviewees. The quote below presents Bulgarians’ attitude of refusing to accept Pomaks as Bulgarians. The interviewee, who considers Pomakness as a distinct ethnic group, makes a self-classification of ethnic hierarchy in Bulgaria: Bulgarians, Armenians/Jews, Pomak/Turk, Roma, and finally refugees. He also remarked, “Even though our youngsters insist that they are Bulgarian, the Bulgarians themselves do not accept it. They consider Pomaks as second class ... Pomaks [in the cities] endeavour to act like ‘we are similar to you.’”<sup>304</sup>

In fact, Bulgarians’ reactions toward Pomaks and Georgians’ towards Muslim Ajarians are parallel and resemble to an extent. Both minorities are regarded as “brothers”

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<sup>302</sup> Interview with a Bulgarian/Turk scholar from Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, 18 September 2018.

<sup>303</sup> Interview with a Pomak post-graduate student, Sofia, 5 September 2018.

<sup>304</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 16 September 2018.

and “strangers” at the same time (Pelkmans, 2016: 140; Trankova, 2012a: 36). Therefore, pendulum swings between tolerance and intolerance, acceptance and alienation (White and White, 2017: 93). In an interview with a group of Pomaks (a blue-collar and staff in *Muftiate*, and a translator), a Pomak staff in *Muftiate* who told that Pomak is a distinct ethnic group referred to this conflicting attitude of Bulgarians regarding Pomaks:

We mark *drugie*, other, in official forms [when needed]. Even though the state does not recognise us, we feel different. Our religion, tradition, and language is different. We are different from Turks, we do not know Turkish. We are close to Bulgarians in terms of language, and close to Turks in terms of religion. The fact that Bulgarians do not consider us to be Bulgarian proves that we form a distinct ethnic group but at the same time makes us believe that we are Bulgarians.<sup>305</sup>

As elaborated in the theoretical chapter, the ethno-religious nationalist view lead to intolerance against minorities. According to some research, intolerance and xenophobia to minorities are not uncommon in Bulgaria (Bulgarian Helsinki Committee in White and White, 2017: 92). Minority members brought up the intolerance against minorities:

Diversity is very natural. People are not supposed to be similar with each other. Bulgarians do not easily accept diversity. They should say ‘ok, we are Bulgarian, [but] others also exist, Muslim Bulgarians, Turks etc.’ They also do not welcome [the existence of] Bulgarian Catholics and Protestants. This is how Bulgarian Orthodoxes are. They largely do not welcome those who are different. They do not accept that others also have the right to live [in Bulgaria]. They are not tolerant.<sup>306</sup>

Ethno-religious identities in Bulgaria are overwhelmingly established and fixed. Similar to Bulgarian-Christian superposition, Turkish identity has also been coupled with Islam for a long time since the Ottoman period when *millet* system entailed religious identities. For the Pomak identity and/or the newly emerging ethnic identity of Pomaks, religion holds an identical function. That is, being Pomak is characterised

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<sup>305</sup> Interview with a Pomak staff in *Muftiate*, Sofia, 13 September 2018.

<sup>306</sup> Interview with a Bulgarian/Turk scholar from Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, 18 September 2018.



with adherence to Islam. Although Pomaks are not mostly clear on ethnic and national identity of themselves (Darakchi, 2018: 2), interviewees are certain about at least one thing: faith is the prime and distinguishing marker of their group identity. For instance, one interviewee stated that “the fundamental identity characteristic of Pomaks is the religion. Nationality consciousness among Pomaks is not precisely established as it is for Turks [in Bulgaria].”<sup>307</sup> “Pomak without Islam cannot be possible,”<sup>308</sup> otherwise, in case of conversion, he trespasses to the other side or ceases becoming a Pomak.

## Conclusion

A comparative analysis of Pomaks and Muslim Ajarians’ identity perceptions reveals two distinct approaches: “We are Georgians but they do not see us as Georgian” approach of Muslim Georgians vs. “we are different, we are Pomak and even though they say we are Bulgarians, they actually do not consider us as Bulgarian” approach of Pomaks. Muslim Georgians have begun to claim their national belonging is nothing but Georgian, a national identity without any reference to religion, and they especially react to the general understanding of Georgianness which entails adherence to Orthodox Christianity. However, on the other side, their Georgianness has not been so readily accepted. Paradoxically, Georgian national discourse has been in a constant effort to prove and make Ajarians’ Georgianness accepted by Ajarians themselves. For sure, what contemporary conservative Georgian discourse means by the term Georgian and Muslim Georgians prefer to understand from it disassociate from each other.

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<sup>307</sup> Interview with a Pomak man of religion in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 15 September 2018.

<sup>308</sup> Interview with a Pomak functionary in *Muftiate*, Sofia, 11 September 2018; Interview with a Pomak functionary in *Muftiate*, Sofia, 11 September 2018; Interview with a Pomak man of religion in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 16 September 2018; Interview with a Pomak blue-collar in *Muftiate*, Sofia, 13 September 2018; Interview with a Pomak school teacher in a village (N) in Rhodopes, Blagoevgrad province, 17 September 2018.

As this research and others as well demonstrate, being Muslim and being Georgian is not something contradictory to each other from the perspective of Muslim Georgians. However, this is mostly not the case for Pomaks. The picture in the latter becomes distinct, more colourful, and complicated. There are at least three bold identity inclinations, namely, Pomak, Bulgarian, and Turk. The diversity on the origin of Pomaks has reflections over the contemporary identity of individuals. Those who have positive look on Turkish thesis are more religiously-oriented but may also embrace Pomak identity. Those who lean towards Pomak ethnicity differentiate themselves from Turks and Bulgarians, and they may support Thracian or aboriginal origin thesis. The defenders of Thracian thesis may seem marginal, but this view gains ground among the educated Pomaks. The Cuman thesis of Pomaks' origin means that they are not aboriginal but settlers, whereas Thracian connection means they are autochthonous and other ethnic groups including Bulgarians are late-comers.

Everything associated with Pomakness is in fact politicised. If Pomak language/dialect is in fact Bulgarian, then they will need to accept that Pomaks are Bulgarian. Therefore, they say Pomak is Slavic or an ancient Balkan language. The research focus on Pomaks are destined to have low representation since the group has very distinct and fluid identity choices depending on regions, generations, and socio-economic peculiarities of the country. That's to say, regional inclinations regarding identity options may be peculiar to a specific locality and may not apply to others, and even generations in the same locality may follow distinct adaptations. The heterogeneity among Pomaks in terms of deciding their origin, history, and agreement on the group identity should certainly be well-considered in any research on this minority.

Because the Bulgarian category is fused with Orthodoxy, many Pomak interviewees refrained from ethnically and nationally being identified with being Bulgarian. Similarly, the category of Turkish in Bulgaria as in other localities in the Balkans means Muslim regardless of being a believer, and linguistic identification, at least for some, determines one's religious identification as well. Hence, the fact that Pomaks do not know Turkish makes their religious affiliation problematic in the eyes of Turks. As

some Pomak interviewees point out for Turks, if someone is Muslim, then one should speak Turkish. Otherwise, his Muslim identification becomes shaky for Turks. For this reason, Pomaks feel ambiguous, for they are Muslim but do not know Turkish. Language seems to represent a barrier to improving intercommunal relations between Turks and Pomaks. Besides this, Turks' national chauvinism and mocking with Pomaks as 'degenerated' or distorted influenced the relations adversely between the two groups in some localities.

After indicating the heterogeneity and the complicated nature of Pomak case, it is time to proceed with the question why the Pomak minority followed different paths from, and culminated at a different point to, Ajarians. That's to say, it needs to be explored why Soviet Georgian and post-Soviet Georgian policies produced a single national identity, that is Georgian, among Ajarians, while policies of different Bulgarian regimes, namely kingdom, communist, and democratic, triggered many identities, including an ethnic Pomak one, among Pomaks. As discussed in this thesis, state policies have a prominent role in this. For many decades, Bulgarian authorities executed inconsistent policies toward Pomaks, from considering them as Turk to accepting them as Bulgarians and assimilating and oppressing them (Eminov, 1997: 99-100). Also on the continuum are persistent but non-violent, yet severe policies of the Soviet Union and Georgian SSR with regard to its minorities, as against inconsistent and violent assimilatory policies of consecutive Bulgarian regimes to Pomaks. Georgians, it seems, are far more successful in integrating Ajarians to Georgian identity as put by Derlugian: "The assimilation of Ajaria was arguably among the greatest successes of the Georgian national project" (1998: 279); however, it is far from being perfect. Georgians were more delicate in their efforts as there were no brutal conversions in the pre-Soviet era. In the Soviet Union, cultural assimilation efforts were implemented without serious reactions unlike the Bulgarian case.

However, the existence of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria deserves special attention as an additional factor upon the difference of Pomaks. In other words, one of the fundamental differences that is conceived of between Ajarian Muslims and Pomaks

is the (non-)existence of a group, with which they could ally in Georgia and Bulgaria. The Turkish variable, being the bearer of Islam in the Balkans, or, Turkish anchor, had an effect on Pomaks, so they have managed to adopt various distinct identities in Bulgaria including a Turk identity. On the other hand, non-existence of such an anchor or variable for Ajarian Muslims in Georgia has played its role, resulting in a single Georgian identity for Ajarian Muslims. As Kettani (1980: 96-103) asserted, 'social interaction' among group members and organisational ability are two measures that minorities could resist to prevent the social absorption of the majority. Social integration should not be thought as limited within Pomaks but within Muslims. Therefore, the degree of relations and social interaction between Muslim Ajarians and Muslim Azeris in Georgia have always been low due to a number of reasons including historically being part of distinct states, geographical distance, and religion since they followed different *madhabs* of Islam.<sup>309</sup> In Bulgaria, in one way or another social interaction between Pomaks and Turks has always continued; in some regions they lived together, and Grand Muftiate of Muslims in Bulgaria and its local branches kept them intact. In the post-communist period, two groups have been involved in a coalition under the Movement for Rights and Freedom, while Ajarians lacked such an option. First, Azeris also followed a segregated life, and both groups lacked organisational capacities and elites in 1990s. A kind of a nucleus of Muslim Ajarian elite has only recently come into existence. However, relations between two groups are still limited.

In addition, it is noteworthy that Bulgaria has been vigilant on the influence of the Turkish minority upon other Muslims, Pomaks in particular, and considered it as a threat and endeavoured to interrupt their relations. One of the prime goals of the assimilation campaigns of the Bulgarian state throughout the last century was to hinder the so-called Turkish 'propaganda' and influence over Pomaks. While Muslim Ajarians were isolated from the rest of Muslims and Turks, Pomaks were able to make

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<sup>309</sup> Shi'i-Sunni difference, which was once trivial among Muslims of the Soviet Union, especially among Muslim Azeris in Georgia, was resurrected, causing dissociation after 1991 with the intervention of religious groups from Iran and Turkey and further complications with the involvement of Salafis.

alliances with Turks to a certain extent. Since Pomaks inhabit Rhodopes with Turks in some localities, existence of Turkish community in the country hindered the Bulgarian policy of isolation and assimilation of Pomaks.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS

This research has comparatively focused on two Muslim groups, i.e. Pomaks and Ajaris, who came into existence in the fringes of Christian and Islamic civilizations in the Black Sea region and their states, Bulgaria and Georgia, which were historically influenced by the same imperial powers in the region. A Bulgarian poet once described his love for his homeland in a poem, in which he made an analogy between Bulgaria and the palm of a hand to describe the smallness of the land, but then he adds 'who needs more.' Georgia is even smaller in territorial terms, but both are located on very strategic land at either side of the Black Sea and historically received interest from other peoples. Even though their imprint was underestimated and ignored, centuries-old Islamic rules culturally, linguistically, and geographically influenced Bulgaria and Georgia, whose ethno-religious fabric was also affected in the meantime. Pomaks of Bulgaria and Muslim Ajaris of Georgia, the two constituents of that fabric, have been given little attention, so this research has intended to make a modest contribution to the body of studies on minority politics in this region.

This research revolved around two arguments: (1) In countries where religion and ethnic and national identity is superposed, especially in countries like Bulgaria and Georgia where there is a strong influence of Eastern Orthodoxy and the Church on nationalism, people whose faith is not Orthodox Christianity, are subjected to intolerance. That is, ethno-religious nationalism causes intolerance especially towards minorities who were considered as formerly Orthodox Christians. Therefore, (2) minorities having more commonalities with the majority and believing in other

religions suffer more than other minorities do. Known to share too much with the majority ethnic groups, Pomaks and Muslim Ajarians have especially been less fortunate than other minorities like Turks in Bulgaria and Borchali Turks (Azeris) in Georgia, who have few, if any, commonality with the majority group.

### **Ethno-religious Nationalism and Ethnodoxy**

To address the above mentioned arguments and to explain the differential treatment and peculiar state policies towards Pomaks and Ajarians, the thesis has considered ethno-religious nationalism, and relatedly the concept of ethnodoxy, namely fusing a group's ethnicity with its dominant faith, as the theoretical framework. As mentioned earlier, in these cases, nationalism is identified with a particular religion, and the common religion determines the group identity and who are to be included and excluded. In addition, identification of a religious institution, namely the national church, as 'the church of the land,' with a people, entails further exclusion of others. A certain kind of 'other' generated from what the group perceived a threat. Since in-group belonging is defined by membership to a particular religion, namely Eastern Orthodoxy in Bulgaria and Georgia, Pomaks and Muslim Ajarians, who profess non-identical or 'other' religions, have faced differential treatment, exclusion, and intolerance. Because the religion of the majority defines the boundaries of the nation, those who do not adhere to it are excluded. Unlike the Bulgarian case, in which the 'other' is as solid as Turks, the Georgian case represents the multiplicity of others, Turks, Iranians, and recently Russians, but historic loneliness, being selfless, and sense of being surrounded are more explicit and easily caught in the interviews with elites and experts in Georgia.

The findings of the study suggest that, in both countries, religious and ethnic identities are fused and seen as inseparable from each other. Being Bulgarian and Georgian, albeit in varying degrees, are overwhelmingly defined by adherence to Eastern Orthodoxy. This also refers to the existence of ethnodoxy in both cases. For that reason, neither groups' attachment to national identity as Muslim Pomaks and Ajarians is readily welcome unless they accept an initiation rite to Georgianness and

Bulgarianness, which requires conversion, change in outfit, and name change. This means that ethno-religiously defined Georgianness and Bulgarianness cause intolerance towards Pomak and Ajarian minorities, as ethnodoxy predicted intolerance and exclusion of 'apostates' and religious outsiders. Therefore, considered as formerly Islamised Christians, Pomaks and Ajarians are not fully accepted as part of Bulgarian and Georgian organisms; as expressed by an interviewee through a metaphor, they are rather a kind of graft on the organism. However, this did not hinder various Bulgarian and Georgian regimes to make these minorities part of their 'organisms' as showed in the study. They faced assimilationist state policies in the form of religious conversion, name changes, and resettlements in some cases.

Fusion of ethnic and religious identities, and relatedly exclusion of others, may be seen in other examples as Russia. However, in Bulgaria and Georgia, ethnodoxy and exclusion seems to be harsher, more severe as independence and emancipation movements, especially in Bulgaria, took place against the imperial other. Moreover, subordinated to other hegemons, Bulgaria and Georgia lacked effective national state authorities for centuries. Instead, the role and capacity of the churches, which maintained the only national authority, were enhanced in these countries. As a result, the churches gained the reputation of being the 'preservers' of the nation, national cultures, and vernacular, and being the sole 'national' authority in a particular region made it easy for them to meld with Bulgarian and Georgian identities, i.e. facilitated the identification of Orthodoxy with the people.

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that Pomaks in Bulgaria and Ajarians in Georgia, as they are the most similar to the majority among other minorities, were subjected to differential treatment by their states and faced more assimilationist pressures and persecution than Turks in Bulgaria and Borchali Turks in Georgia. For instance, four major assimilation cycles were deployed for Pomaks, not to mention the minor ones, and names of some individuals were changed many times in the last century. The Turkish minority, however, experienced only one cycle of



assimilation. The optimum solution for the Turkish minority problem in Bulgaria was their migration to Turkey until 1980s. Pomaks, however, were barred from this option no matter how much they wished to have it. In addition, Pomaks still suffer from denial of their identity in the post-communist period, whereas Turks are recognised as a national minority within the framework of FCNM. As the research results display, the name issue has not been solved; Pomaks today 'have to' adopt double names due to pragmatic concerns. Interviewee results show that having a Bulgarian name in their identity cards and passports grants them social mobility as it is their entry ticket to reach better jobs, go abroad, and avoid discrimination and bullying.

In Georgia, Azeris have been dealing with significant problems such as difficulty to integrate to the society. This mostly stems from a series of problems they have suffered since the independence despite the counter policies to restore them: the lack of command of the state language, poor education, unemployment, poverty, and the segregated existence in their milieu. Nevertheless, as opposed to Muslim Ajaris, they have experienced neither conversion campaigns nor name changes during and after the Soviet Union. Clearly, Pomaks and Muslim Ajaris' difficulty results from their religious identity. Identity and existence of Azeris and Turks in Georgia and Bulgaria, respectively, however, were tolerated to some extent since they had no attributes to mark them as Bulgarian and Georgian- except probably the last phase of revival process in Bulgaria, during which Turks were regarded as 'forcibly Islamised Bulgarians.' Both in Bulgaria and Georgia, Turks' and Azeris', who traditionally represent Islam in their host countries, their religious practices, and their representation of Islam are accepted and tolerated by the majority as they cannot become 'proper' Georgians and Bulgarians due to their ethnic, linguistic, and cultural affiliations. Pomaks' and Ajaris' Muslim identity and religious practices, on the other hand, are not tolerated and create concerns. That is, the more a group is culturally distinct from the majority, the more it is accepted by the latter.

## **Transformation of Identity**

The thesis has primarily proceeded with similarities between Pomaks and Ajarians as they share many commonalities such as the way they came into existence with the centuries long imperial influence and the national policies they were exposed to in the post-Ottoman period. It has comparatively sought to understand how their formerly distinct religious identities have been transformed since both Ajarians and Pomaks arrived at their contemporary self-consciousness as a result of state policies; Ajarians' religious identity has been Georgianised, while Pomaks have developed many/multi-layered identities, including an ethnic one.

The transformation of identities of these groups is apparently the result of state policies, which were targeted firstly at names and outfits of the people as they are the most visible identifiers. Name changes in general are a common practice of assimilative policies of nationalising states, and they should be seen as integral to assimilation processes inaugurated by states. However, the cause of these changes in two cases is the construction of the national identity in terms of primordial ethnic and cultural affiliations, and the goal was to return those 'deviators' to the bosom of the nation after an initiation rite. In the socialist and communist period, name and outfit change was seen as adequate to be a Bulgarian and a Georgian; prior to this period and after that, religious conversion was the norm of the initiation. Name replacement was an interruption to the entire identity development from birth to death, and assimilative state policies in the two examples produced an additional double name phenomenon among the Pomaks and Ajarians.

Despite many similarities between the two groups, there is one bold difference between Pomaks and Ajarians: the heterogeneity among the members of the Pomak community concerning their origin, history, and identity. Rather than one fundamental line, various inclinations and lines as to localities and generations exist among Pomaks. As the field research and discussions throughout the thesis show, some segments of Pomaks, especially those in the west and central Rhodopes, have begun embracing a distinct ethnic Pomak consciousness and identity. Some Pomaks

interviewed defend the idea that Pomaks are different and their ethnicity and 'race' is distinct from other peoples of Bulgaria. To the item which inquires the term that best defined themselves, the most frequently given response was 'Pomak'. For them, Pomak ethnicity represents the mainstream within the group and is shared by the overwhelmingly majority of the Pomaks interviewed. It does not seem to be a strategy used by some Pomaks to gain advantage over others, for being Pomak is still not prestigious and an accepted category in the eyes of the Bulgarian majority. Amid this reality, a certain ethnic consciousness has developed among Pomaks, and Islam appears to be a sufficient criterion for Pomak membership. Therefore, religious adherence defines who is 'in' and 'out' in the Pomak case too.

While most Pomaks espouse Pomak identity and identify themselves with it, some have other preferences. For instance, the Bulgarian identity choice of Pomaks, which in fact is embraced mostly by the Pomaks in the east and central Rhodopes, has sometimes emerged indirectly during the interviews. Pomak interviewees did not say they are Bulgarian. Instead, they used expressions like "some Pomaks, 'such as those in the café or those sitting there [they were mostly young],' would say they are Muslim Bulgarians," which explains the generation gap among the group members. In fact, the communist regime in Bulgaria (when the Bulgarian communist party and its policies were in effect) succeeded, to a certain extent, in spreading the Bulgarian identity among Pomaks and achieved to complete linguistic Bulgarianisation among Pomaks in certain regions. In addition, some Pomaks converted to Eastern Orthodoxy in the post-communist era.

Rarer as it is, another identity option for them appears to affiliation with Turks in particular places Pomaks inhabit, mostly in the western Rhodopes. Identification with Turks may be explained with Pomaks' religious consciousness and their cultural closeness to Turks rather than their ethnic identification as Turks. It also appears to be a reaction against the assimilation policies of the Bulgarian state as in the case of the 1992 census. The term 'Pomak Turks' was only used during the interviews by some Pomaks who coexisted with Turks as those in Sofia. Other than these Pomaks,

the term 'Pomak Turks' is not circulated. The Pomaks interviewed, especially those in the Blagoevgrad region, draw a bold line to stress the difference of being Pomak and being Bulgarians and Turks. They identify ethnic Bulgarianness as an out-group. However, as a national identity, being citizens of Bulgaria, they acknowledged that they are Bulgarians.

It does not necessarily mean that all Pomaks during the interviews had a clear and comprehensive understanding regarding their ethnicity and ethnic identity. Indeed, some were confused it with national identity and citizenship. However, they mostly stressed their differences and distinguished themselves from other ethnic and national groups. Moreover, this research does not suggest that Pomaks unanimously have a distinct ethnic consciousness and defend the Pomak identity. On the contrary, heterogeneity can be noticed among them. In fact, without politicisation of the Pomak identity, proposing Pomak as their distinct language and alphabet, combining many identity trends into one, and sharing an 'imagined' origin myth whether it is Thracian, Bogomil, or Rhodopean, Pomaks who support a distinctive Pomak ethnic identity are far from creating a fully-fledged Pomak ethnicity in the near future although some of the interviewees believed Pomak is becoming an ethnicity and/or ethnos.

As to Ajarian Muslims, there is neither such abundance in terms of identity preferences nor heterogeneity in terms of origin and history. Ajarians *naturally* accepted Georgian national consciousness unlike Pomaks, who did not embrace the Bulgarian identity so naturally. Even those Ajarian elites including Ajarian Muslim clergy, who struggle for the rights as Muslim Ajarians, have the Georgian consciousness and identify themselves as Georgian. In fact, they identify themselves as 'pure Georgians' and Muslims as well, and the term Ajarian came to be understood as a regional identity rather than an ethnic category. In addition, Georgian Muslims who inhabit in different regions of the country after a migration keep their links and identify themselves as Ajarian too.

The existence of religious identity, which once prevailed among Ajarian Muslims, was pacified with Georgianisation over time in the Soviet Union. It left its place to national identity, and Georgianness became the only (national) identity option for Ajarians even among the most religiously observant persons. For the Muslim Georgian interviewees, whether a Muslim can be a Georgian is a futile discussion, for they are already Georgians. The question of a famous Ajarian poet, Pridon Khalvashi, which he raises in the title of his book 'Can a Muslim be a Georgian,' can be answered with a clear 'yes' for Muslim Georgian interviewees in Ajaria. They successfully distinguish national identity from the religion. Nevertheless, they suffer from not being accepted by other Georgians based on the ethnodoxy among Georgians. Although Ajarians identified with Georgianness in the post-Soviet era, their Muslim identity was not accepted since the national narrative designed Christian Orthodoxy as the primary marker of Georgian identity. Their Georgianness is constantly questioned by their counterparts and criticized. Complaints such as 'they do not see us as Georgians because we are Muslims' are commonly expressed in the interviewees. Moreover, their Muslim identity became ambivalent in public spaces and religious nationalist rhetoric, which was backed by the clergy, created conflicts over and contest for public space in the countryside between Muslim and Christian Georgians.

Being Muslim groups, Pomaks and Ajarians went through similar state policies in the last century, but their course of transformation has resulted in differing outcomes. The following question therefore has arisen: How have Ajarians reached this century by embracing the Georgian national identity in Georgia, while Pomaks developed ramified group identity tendencies approximately over the same stretch of time. To the most extent, state policies were the determinant of the differentiation in the two cases. Bulgarian policies on Pomaks were severe and even violent, but inconsistent, gradually evolving and periodically fluctuating. They swung between considering Pomaks as Turks, Bulgarians, and even as a nationality itself. Compared to the Georgian case, for instance, names of Pomaks were changed and restored almost a dozen times in a century. Eventually, the Georgian identity was actually literally absorbed by Ajarians, while an obscure picture exists in the Bulgarian case.

In addition, while discussing the two cases, a partial responsibility could be assigned to the role of a variable: the (non-)existence of a minority with which Pomaks and Ajaris could ally and engage in social interaction. This indirectly produced this picture. In Bulgaria, the Pomak minority had the opportunity to maintain a kind of social interaction with the Turkish minority, the bearer of Islam in the Balkans, and ally with them to resist the social absorption of the majority. In both Bulgaria and Georgia, Turkish connection and the influence of Turkey upon these groups has been a source of concern, so the links were intended to be interrupted. In Bulgaria, the policy of separating Pomaks from the Turkish minority under different Bulgarian regimes was clearer, yet it was hard to implement due to the existence of the populous Turkish minority. Therefore, the existence of Turkish minority in Bulgaria made it possible for Pomaks to socially interact with them and find refuge inside the Turkish community. By this way, they could embrace the Turkish identity or resist against the social absorption of the majority to a certain extent. Various Bulgarian regimes instigated measures to restrict this interaction. For example, they created *Drujba Rodina* movement and local religious administrations exclusively for Pomaks in Pomak regions and promoted linguistic Bulgarianisation. Still, Pomaks and Turks kept social interaction despite the alienation that emerged between the two groups after 1970s. The contrary influences of the Turkish anchor for Pomaks, however, should also be noticed. It both hindered Pomaks' conversion to the Bulgarian identity and alienated them from Turks. After all, Turks never fully embraced Pomaks as Turks on the ground that they do not have a command of Turkish and that they were 'regenerated' by Bulgarians through name changes even though they are Muslims. Pomaks were let down by Turks during the forcible name changes though they had always endeavoured to prove their Turkishness by their Muslim identity.

In Georgia, however, the influence of and links with Turkey were successfully hindered after the 1920s through restrictions on the crossings for education, trade, seasonal transhumance, and husbandry in the border. In addition, during the last phase of the WWII, Meskhetian Turks were *en masse* deported from Samtskhe-Javakheti to Central Asian Soviet republics. Therefore, Ajaris did not have a group

they would socially engage with and show solidarity to when resisting the social absorption of the majority. The degree of relations and social interaction, let alone solidarity, between Ajarians and Borchali Turks, who constituted the bulk of Muslim population in Georgia, was low due to geographical disconnection and doctrinal reasons. Azeris were located in the south eastern part of the country mostly following the Shi'i branch of Islam, and both groups followed a segregated life and lacked organisational capacities. Ajarians had a clear advantage in that they had their autonomous entity, yet this too did not bring them the anticipated advantages in keeping and developing their peculiarities due to the specificities of the Soviet system, in which Ajarian case was an anomaly. Also, they lost their elites and intellectuals due to mass and individual migrations which exacerbated after wars, social disturbances, and purges. In the meantime, those Soviet-educated local elites and the intelligentsia increasingly favoured the Georgian national project. Thus, they also lacked the organizational capacity, which would exclusively prioritize their rights.<sup>310</sup>

While Muslim Ajarians compactly live in Ajaria and have expanded to adjacent regions, Pomaks' settlements are quite scattered through Rhodopes, both in Bulgaria and Greece, and inner Bulgaria like Lovech. Thus, they interacted with other groups like Turks and Bulgarians in Bulgaria, and Greeks and Turks in Greece. This also diversified the inclinations among Pomaks. The Rhodope region had been either home or a crossing point for different groups throughout history. It was a region where Bogomilism developed and Paulicians existed. Thracians had settled in this geography and left some worshipping places. Therefore, Pomaks' speculations about their origins have historical references other than Bulgarian and Turkish origin myths. Put differently, Rhodopes seems to bear far more historical, cultural, and ethnic diversity than Ajaria. This might explain the variety and diversification as well as ambiguity of Pomak identity.

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<sup>310</sup> Pomaks and Ajarians, unlike Turks in Bulgaria and Borchali Turks/Azeris in Georgia, neither accepted as a national or ethnic minority and had no patron state next to border to be nationally associated. Therefore, the only national identity option for Pomaks and Ajarians was being Bulgarian and Georgian respectively, except Turkish identity for Pomaks, to a certain extent.

To conclude, both Pomaks and Ajarians are idealised in their countries. Pomaks are depicted as if they are the bearers of linguistic and cultural purity in Bulgaria and Ajarians and Ajaria as if they are the gateway of Christianity to Georgia. Neither group is meant to be lost to the competing narratives. For the Georgian case, Ajarians represent a success story, albeit far from perfect, for they still strive to be both Georgian and Muslim combating the idea that “to become a Georgian one should be an Eastern Orthodox.” Pomaks, far from being a success story, represent a challenging case for the Bulgarian national project since they mostly defend their distinctiveness from Bulgarians. As national identities in Bulgaria and Georgia are increasingly identified and fused with their national religions in a world where ethnic and religious atrocities were resurrected, hybridity and in-betweenness of Pomaks and Ajarians are not tolerated in their countries. Nonetheless, thanks to the positive and integrating side of globalisation, with the increasing means of communication and opening up of the borders, Pomaks and Muslim Georgians have begun to communicate and building up relations with their kin groups across the borders, which have interrupted their convergence for decades. Muslim Ajarians formed new relations with *cheveneburi* and others in Turkey and Pomaks with other Pomaks and kin groups in the neighboring countries. This might mean new opportunities for them to secure their identities.



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## APPENDICES

### A. APPROVAL OF THE METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ  
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER

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08 AĞUSTOS 2018

Konu: Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi: İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu


Sayın Prof.Dr. Ayşegül AYDINGÜN


Danışmanlığını yaptığınız doktora öğrencisi Alter KAHRAMAN'ın "*Muslim Minorities of Bulgaria and Georgia: A Comparative Study of Pomaks and Ajarians*" başlıklı araştırması İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülerek gerekli onay **2018-SOS-142** protokol numarası ile **08.08.2018 - 30.12.2018** tarihleri arasında geçerli olmak üzere verilmiştir.

Bilgilerinize saygılarımla sunarım.

  
Prof. Dr. Ş. Halil TURAN


Başkan V

  
Prof. Dr. Ayhan SOL  
Üye

  
Prof. Dr. Ayhan Gürbüz DEMİR  
Üye

  
Doç. Dr. Yaşar KONDAKÇI  
Üye

  
Doç. Dr. Zana ÇITAK  
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Doç. Dr. Emre SELÇUK  
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Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Pınar KAYGAN  
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## B. CURRICULUM VITAE

### PERSONAL INFORMATION

Surname, Name: Kahraman, Alter  
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### EDUCATION

Degree	Institution	Year of Graduation
MA	Middle East Tech. University (METU)- Eurasian Studies	2014
MA	Istanbul University - Pol. Sci. and International Relations	2011
BS	Kadir Has University. - International Relations	2007
High School	Dede Korkut Anatolian High School, İstanbul	2002

### WORK EXPERIENCE

Year	Place	Enrollment
2018- Present	Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University	Research Assistant
2011-2018	METU Department of Eurasian Studies	Research Assistant
2010- 2011	Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University	Research Assistant

### FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Advanced English, Intermediate Russian, Beginner Georgian



## PUBLICATIONS

1. (Forthcoming) (2020). "Azeris and Muslim Ajarians in Georgia: The Swing between Tolerance and Alienation." Nationalities Papers, <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2020.7>
2. Aydıngün, A., Köksal, P. and Kahraman, A. 2019. "Conversion of Muslim Georgians (Ajarians) into Orthodox Christianity: Contrasting Narratives and the Politics of Proselytizing in Georgia." *Europe-Asia Studies*, 71 (2): 290-314.
3. Kahraman, A. 2019. "Lenin Bayrağı: 'between two fires.'" *bilig*, 88: 169-188.
4. Kahraman, A. 2018. "Küreselleşme ve Güven(lik)sizleşen Coğrafyalar: Gürcistan [Globalisation and Georgia]." *Küresel Güven(likesiz)lik [Global Insecurity]*. (Eds.) Yiğittepe, Levent and Güzelipek, Yiğit Anıl. İstanbul: Hiperyayın.
5. Asker, A., Kahraman A. 2016. "Gürcistan'da Devletleşme, Kimlik İnşası ve Müslüman Topluluklar." (Der.) Aydıngün, Ayşegül, Asker, Ali ve Şir, Aslan Yavuz. *Gürcistan'daki Müslüman Topluluklar: Azınlık Hakları, Kimlik, Siyaset*. Ankara: Terazi Yayıncılık.
6. Kahraman A., Tulun, M. O. 2016. "Post-Sovyet Gürcistan'da Azınlık Hakları: Uluslararası Örgütler ile Uluslararası ve Ulusal Sivil Toplum Kuruluşlarının Bakışı." (Der.) Aydıngün, Ayşegül, Asker, Ali ve Şir, Aslan Yavuz. *Gürcistan'daki Müslüman Topluluklar: Azınlık Hakları, Kimlik, Siyaset*. Ankara: Terazi Yayıncılık.
7. Kahraman, A., Katliaoru, Y. and Anaç, Ö. 2016. "Müslüman Acaralılar: İslam, Din Değişirme ve Dinî Haklar." (Der.) Aydıngün, Ayşegül, Asker, Ali ve Şir, Aslan Yavuz. *Gürcistan'daki Müslüman Topluluklar: Azınlık Hakları, Kimlik, Siyaset*. Ankara: Terazi Yayıncılık.
8. Kahraman, A. 2015. "Crimean Tatar Diaspora in Free World." *Crimean Historical Review*, 2: 28-49.
9. Kahraman, A. 2008. "Hazar Ekseninde Boru Hatları Diplomasisi." *Stratejik Öngörü (TASAM)*, 12: 133-144.

## HOBBIES

Photography, Hiking, Turkish Archery

### C. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKE ÖZET

Bu tez, Osmanlı Devleti'nin Balkanlar ve Kafkasya coğrafyasından çekilmesi sonrasında, azınlık durumuna düşen Pomakların ve Acaralıların dâhil oldukları yeni devletlerde (Bulgaristan ve Gürcistan'da) maruz kaldıkları politikaları, yaşadıkları kimlik dönüşümlerini, bu dönüşümün aşamalarını, sebeplerini ve uygulanan politikaların sonuçlarını karşılaştırmalı olarak incelemektedir. Çalışmada, Pomakların, Acaralıların ve vatandaşı oldukları devletlerin karşılaştırılması yoluyla Bulgaristan ve Gürcistan'ın azınlık politikaları, azınlık-çoğunluk ilişkilerinin dinamikleri ve bu iki ülkede yaşayan azınlık grupları arasında farklılıkların olup olmadığı ortaya konmaya çalışılmıştır.

Bu çalışmada temel varsayımımız, etno-dinî milliyetçiliğin azınlıklara yönelik tahammülsüzlük ve dışlamaya neden olacağıdır. Özellikle, etno-dinî milliyetçiliğin hâkim olduğu çoğunluk toplumlarında dil, etnisite, tarih ve kültür olarak bu toplum ile ortaklıklar taşıyan ama tarihin bir döneminde çeşitli nedenlerle aynı çoğunluk toplumundan dinî aidiyet ve yönelim olarak farklılaşan azınlıkların, diğer azınlık gruplarına, yani çoğunluk toplumundan tamamıyla ayrılan azınlıklara nazaran, çoğunluk toplumu ile daha sorunlu ilişkileri olduğu varsayımı üzerinde durulmuştur. Başka bir ifadeyle, Pomaklar ve Acaralılar din ve etnisitenin birleştiği ve Ortodoksluk inancının hâkim olduğu Bulgar ve Gürcü toplumlarının birer parçası olarak diğer azınlıklara göre -etnik ve dinî olarak çoğunluk grubundan tamamıyla farklılaşan ve öteki olarak görülen örneğin Türk azınlığına göre- daha fazla ayrımcılığa, baskıya ve asimilasyona maruz kalmaktadırlar. Bu çalışmada açıklayıcı olduğu düşünülerek kullanılan etnodoksi kavramı (Karpov, Lisovskaya, ve Barry, 2012) bir grubun etnik kimliği ile baskın dinini birleştiren ve bunların birbirinden ayıramaz olduğunu savunan düşünce sistemidir. Buna göre Pomak ve Acaralıların toplumsal dışlanmasının ve onlara yönelik uygulanan asimilasyon politikalarının gerisinde

Bulgaristan ve Gürcistan'daki güçlü etnodoksi yatmaktadır. Bunun önemli gerekçelerinden biri, tarihsel olarak güçlü ve toplum üzerinde etkili millî, otosefal kiliselere sahip her iki Ortodoks toplumda da etnik ve dinî kimliğin birbirinden ayrılamaz olmasıdır. Bu anlayış 20. yüzyılda Pomaklara ve Acaralılara yönelik asimilasyon politikasının ardında yatan temel gerekçe olmuştur. Ayrıca Pomakların ve Acaralıların Bulgar ve Gürcü uluslarından zorla ayrıldıkları yönündeki söylem de iki azınlığa yönelik politikaların asimilasyon değil, 'öze dönüş' olarak değerlendirilmesini beraberinde getirmiştir.

Bulgaristan ve Gürcistan'ın iki dinî azınlık üzerine söylemi tarihseldir. Bu, Pomakların ve Acaralıların tarihsel olarak Bulgar ve Gürcü uluslarının birer parçası olması demektir. Bulgaristan ve Gürcistan'ın iki dinî azınlık üzerine söylemi etnik köken, din, dil, kültür, folklor olarak Pomak ve Acaralıların Bulgar ve Gürcü toplumlarının organik birer parçası olduğu varsayımı üzerine kuruludur. Hâli hazırdaki durumları ise tarihsel bir 'sapma'nın neticesidir ki 1912'den itibaren tüm Bulgar hükümetleri bu sapmayı düzeltmek yani Pomakları, Bulgarca konuşan Müslümanları Bulgarlaştırmak için politikalar üretmiştir. 1912'deki zorunlu din değiştirme, 1930'larda Pomakların da dâhil olduğu *Rodina* (Anavatan) hareketinin faaliyetlerinin desteklenmesi, Pomakların ülke içinde göç ettirilmesi, 1960 ve 1970'lerde zorla isimlerinin değiştirilmesi ve Türklerle bağlarını kesmeye yönelik tasarruf ve uygulamalar Pomakları 'tekrardan/yeniden Bulgar yapmak' gayesini gütmektedir. Tarihin araçsallaştırılması her iki örnekte de ortak bir unsur olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Tarih hem bir araç hem de meşruiyet kaynağıdır. İki azınlığın 'gerçek' aidiyet ve kimlikleri ancak tarih ve geleneğin ihdası yoluyla belirlenebilecektir.

Pomakların kökenlerine ilişkin -farklı görüş ve tezler mevcut olsa da- yaygın olarak kabul edilen görüş; 15. yüzyıldan sonra İslam'ı kabul eden, Slavca ve/veya Bulgarca konuşan yerli bir halk olduklarıdır. Pomak kelimesi yazılı kaynaklarda ilk kez 19. yüzyılda kullanılmıştır. Benzer dili konuşan farklı ülkelerde yerleşik Müslüman gruplar Torbeş, Gorani, Ahriyani gibi farklı adlarla anılmaktadır (Turan, 1999: 69-70; Apostolov, 1996: 727). Pomaklar yoğun olarak batı ve orta Rodop dağlarında,

Blagoevgrad, Smolyan ve Kırcaali'de yaşamaktadırlar, ayrıca orta Bulgaristan'da, Lofça'da da Pomak nüfusu mevcuttur. Pomaklar Bulgaristan devleti tarafından etnik veya millî bir grup olarak kabul edilmediklerinden nüfus sayımlarında Pomak ayrı bir kategori olarak bulunmamakta, dolayısıyla kesin sayıları bilinmemektedir. Bu nedenle, Pomakların nüfuslarına dair tahminlere ihtiyatlı yaklaşmak gerekmektedir. 1990'ların başında Bulgaristan'daki Pomak nüfusunun 210.000 ila 250.000 civarında olduğu tahmin edilmektedir (Eminov, 2007: 21; Bachvarov, 1997: 221; Zhelyazkova, 2001: 294; Anagnostou, 2005: 57, 73). 2001 nüfus sayımına göre kendini Müslüman olarak tanımlayanlar içinden 131.531 kişi ayrıca Bulgar ve/veya Bulgar Müslüman kimliğine sahip olduğunu belirtmiştir (Council of Europe, 2006b: 5). 2011'e dair yapılacak böyle bir tablolar arası çapraz hesaplama göre Pomak nüfusu 67.350'ye kadar düşmektedir (National Statistical Institute, 2011a).

Azerilerden sonra Gürcistan'daki en büyük ikinci Müslüman grup olan Müslüman Acaralıların İslamlaşması ise 16. yüzyılda bölgenin Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'na tabi olmasından sonra başlamış, özellikle Batum ve çevresi kalıcı olarak Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun parçası olduktan sonra 17. ve 18. yüzyıllarda gerçekleşmiştir. Acara bölgesi 1977-1878 Osmanlı Rus Savaşı neticesinde Çarlık Rusyasının, dolayısıyla Gürcistan'ın parçası olmuş; 1921'de ise Acara Özerk Sovyet Sosyalist Cumhuriyeti kurulmuştur. Günümüz itibarıyla Müslüman Acaralılar Acara Özerk Cumhuriyeti'nde, Hulo, Keda, Helvaçauri, Şuahevi, Kobuleti (Çürüksu) yerleşimleri ile Batum şehrinde ve komşu Guria ve Samtshe-Cavahetya bölgelerinde yaşamaktadırlar. Bunun dışında, farklı dönemlerde göçler neticesinde Gürcistan'ın çeşitli bölgelerine yerleşmiş Acaralılar da bulunmaktadır. 2014 nüfus sayımına göre Acara'daki Müslüman Acaralı/Gürcü nüfusu yaklaşık 132.000'dir, bunun önemli bir kısmı (84.101) kırsal alanlarda yoğunlaşmışken, geri kalanı ise (48.751) Batum ve Kobuleti gibi kentsel yerleşim yerlerinde yerleşiktir.

Osmanlı Devleti'nin Balkanlar ve Kafkasya'daki hakimiyeti altında Müslümanlaştığı bilinen Pomak ve Acaralıların Osmanlı sonrasındaki akıbeti de benzer olmuştur. Esas olarak her iki azınlık grubu da Bulgarlaştırma ve Gürcüleştirme politikalarının hedefi

olmuştur. Ancak, bu iki azınlık grubunun ulaştıkları nihai merhale nispeten farklıdır. Bu tezde Acaralıların neden tamamen Gürcü millî kimliğini benimserken; Pomakların Bulgar, Müslüman, Müslüman Bulgar, Pomak, Türk ve Arap gibi çok çeşitli dinî, millî ve etnik kimliklere sahip çıktıkları anlamaya çalışılmıştır. Bunda devlet politikalarının yanı sıra Pomak ve Acaralıların dayanışma içine girebilecekleri bir başka dinî-etnik azınlığın varlığının etkisi de tartışılmıştır. Ayrıca günümüzde Pomakların ve Acaralıların devletin politikalarına ve çoğunluğun kendilerine yönelik yaklaşımlarına karşı nasıl tavır ve stratejiler geliştirdiklerini görmek de bu araştırmanın amaçları arasındadır.

Osmanlı döneminde tedricen İslam'ı benimseyen Pomaklar ve Acaralılar, Osmanlı Devleti'nin 1877-1878 savaşı ve sonrasında Karadeniz bölgesinin doğusundaki ve batısındaki topraklarından çekilmesiyle Bulgaristan ve Rus Çarlığı'nın (Gürcistan) birer parçası hâline gelmiştir. Linguistik olarak Bulgar ve Gürcü uluslarının birer parçası olarak görülen, öte yandan tarihî süreç içerisinde Osmanlı döneminde 'zorla' İslamlaştırıldığına inanılan, dinî ve kültürel olarak tekrar Bulgar ve Gürcü uluslarına ilhak edilmesi amaçlanan iki dinî azınlık her iki ülkenin milliyetçi ideolojileri açısından çözülmesi gereken birer sorun olarak değerlendirilmiştir.

Bulgar ve Gürcü millî kimlikleri ortak dil (Bulgarca ve Gürcüce) ve ortak din (Ortodoksluk) unsurları temelinde şekillenmiştir. Bunda iki ülkenin tarihsel olarak millî, otosefal Ortodoks kiliselerine sahip olmaları da önemli bir faktör olmuştur. Öyle ki Bulgar ve Gürcü Ortodoks Kiliseleri milli devletlerinin ortadan kalkması nedeniyle toplumlarının koruyucusu, millî kültürlerinin ve dillerinin saklayıcısı olarak değerlendirilirler. Bunun yanında İslam ve onu temsil eden gruplar her iki ülkede de 'yabancı,' 'öteki' olarak kabul edilmektedirler. Pomak ve Acaralılar ise etnik ve linguistik olarak her iki ulusun birer parçası olarak değerlendirilmelerine rağmen İslam ile olan bağları nedeniyle ulusun dışına itilebilmekte, Müslüman olarak Bulgar ve Gürcü uluslarının tam anlamıyla birer parçası olarak görülmemektedirler. İki azınlığın bu durumu Bulgaristan ve Gürcistan'ın millî kimlik inşaları açısından hem birer sına hem de sapma olarak değerlendirilmektedir.

Bulgaristan teritoryal, kültürel ve dilsel bütünlüğünü sağlamış bir ulus-devlet olmak, demografik homojenleşmeyi sağlamak için temelde asimilasyon ve göç gibi iki yöntem izlerken (Eminov, 2007: 2), Gürcistan tedrici bir asimilasyon politikası izlemiştir. Bulgaristan, Bulgarca konuşan Pomakları Bulgarlaştırmak için 1912-1989 yılları arasında en az dört defa bu grubun mensuplarının adlarını ve/veya dinlerini değiştirme, Ortodokslaştırma teşebbüsünde bulunmuştur. 20. yüzyıldaki bu politikaların neticesinde, Pomakların kimlik algılarında belirli kırılma ve değişimler meydana gelmiş; grup içinde Pomak etnik kimliğini benimseyenlerin yanı sıra, Bulgar, Bulgar-Müslüman, Müslüman, Türk kimliklerini savunanlar da olmuştur. Acaralılar arasında ise Sovyet dönemi boyunca uygulanan milletler politikası neticesinde tek bir ortak Gürcü kimliğine eklemlenme sağlanmıştır. 1980'lerin sonu ve bağımsız Gürcistan döneminde de Ortodokslaştırma Acaralı Müslümanlar arasında önemli bir süreç olmuştur.

### **Araştırma Yöntemi**

Bu araştırmada nitel veri toplama yöntemlerinden derinlemesine mülakat yöntemi benimsenmiş, mülakatlar uzman ve seçkinlerin yanı sıra sıradan halkla da gerçekleştirilmiştir. Sosyal bilimciler için uzmanlar ve seçkinlerin görüşleri son derece önemlidir, zira seçkinler, statüleri gereği topluluklarında lider konumda olduklarından, uzmanlar ise kendi alanlarında derin bilgi birikimine sahip olduklarından sosyal bilimciler açısından ilk elden bilgi kaynağı sağlayabilmektedirler (Aydingün ve Balım, 2012: 8). Nitel araştırmada veri toplama yöntemleri genellikle derinlemesine mülakat, katılımcı gözlem, odak grup çalışması ve belge analizidir (Chouinard ve Cousins, 2014: 118). Nitel araştırmada hem veri toplama sürecinde hem de analiz sürecinde karşılaştırmalı analiz, söylem ve anlatı analizi, niteliksel içerik analizi gibi istatistiki olmayan yöntemlerden yararlanılır (Schwandt ve Cash, 2014: 8-9). Mülakat ise nitel araştırmada bilgi toplamak için en fazla kullanılan veya rağbet gören yöntemdir (Greeff, 2005: 287; Darlington ve Scott, 2002: 48; Bryman, Teevan ve Bell, 2009: 158; Holstein ve Gubrium, 2004: 140; Legard, Keegan ve Kit Ward, 2003: 138). Berg'in (2001: 68) işaret ettiği gibi sosyal bilimlerde başvurulan üç farklı mülakat

çeşidi bulunmaktadır: standartlaştırılmış (formel veya yapılandırılmış) mülakat, standartlaştırılmamış (enformel veya yapılandırılmamış) mülakat ve yarı standartlaştırılmış (yarı yapılandırılmış veya odaklanmış) mülakat. Bunun dışında post modernizmin, feminizmin ve inşacılık yaklaşımının (constructivism) etkisiyle yaratıcı, diyalektik, anlatı, hayat hikayesi ve sözlü tarih tarzı mülakatlar da gelişmiştir (Legard ve diğerleri, 2003: 140-141).

Yukarıda ifade edildiği üzere, bu çalışmada saha araştırması sırasında veri toplama yöntemi olarak yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine mülakat seçilmiştir. Araştırmacılar, derinlemesine mülakatın veri toplama süreci sırasındaki esnek yapısını onun başlıca artısı olarak değerlendirmektedir (Legard ve diğerleri, 2003: 141; Darlington ve Scott, 2002: 49). Buradaki esneklik hem görüşüne başvurulmuş kişinin mülakatı yönlendirebilmesini hem de mülakat sırasında görüşmecinin belirli soruların dışına çıkabilmesini, farklı sorular sorabilmesini içerir (Bryman ve diğerleri, 2009: 159; Berg, 2001:70). Bu tip derinlemesine mülakatlar birçok araştırmacının ifade ettiği gibi tek taraflı olmayan, mülakat yapan ile mülakat verenin beraber gerçekleştirdikleri, her iki tarafın da aktif olduğu mülakatlardır (Legard ve diğerleri, 2003: 139; Neuman, 2006: 406; Berg, 2001: 49, 68; Darlington ve Scott, 2002: 49; Holstein ve Gubrium, 2004: 143). Yarı yapılandırılmış mülakatlara daha önceden belirlenmiş sorularla başlanır, mülakat süresince yeni sorular ortaya çıkabilir ve bazı sorular önceden hazırlanmış soru listesine eklenebilir. Bunun dışında bazı anahtar kişilerle saha araştırması sürecinde yeni mülakatlar da yapılabilir. Bu tip mülakatlar, esnekliğin ötesinde, görüşmeci ile görüşülen arasında normal konuşma şeklinde ilerlediğinden iki taraf arasındaki güveni oluşturmaya yardımcı olur (Martínez-Rubin ve Hanson, 2014: 209).

Mülakat yöntemi kimi zaman öznel olmakla eleştirilebilir. Öte yandan, öznellik Schwandt ve Cash'in belirttiği gibi tarafgirlik veya güvenilir olmamak değildir. Öznellik burada öznenin, bireyin görüşüne, onun bakış açısına, deneyimine işaret etmektedir (Schwandt ve Cash, 2014: 14). Bireyin, öznenin bakış açısını, duygularını, deneyimlerini, olayları değerlendirme biçimini keşfetmek ve anlamak mülakat yapmanın en başta gelen nedenidir. Çünkü araştırmacı bireyin deneyimlerine, onun

deneyimlerinden ortaya çıkan anlam ve anlatıya ilgi duyar, bunların değerine önem verir (Seidman, 2006: 9).

Çalışmada, iki ülkedeki Pomaklara ve Acaralılara yönelik politikalar, bunların her iki azınlığın mensuplarının gözüyle nasıl algılandığı, etno-dinî milliyetçilik tartışmaları ve bunun azınlıklara etkisi, çoğunluk-azınlık ilişkileri gibi hususlar yöneltilecek soruların ana temalarını oluşturmuştur. Bulgaristan'da yapılan ilk grup mülakat Bulgar, Pomak ve Türk uzmanlar, STK mensupları ve seçkinlerle Sofya, Blagoevgrad (Yukarı Cuma) vilayetinde ve Smolyan'da (Paşmaklı) gerçekleştirilmiştir. Gürcistan'da ise mülakatlar yerel STK mensupları başta olmak üzere Acaralı Müslümanların önde gelen temsilcileri ile Batum, Hulo ve Adigeni gibi yerleşimlerde yapılmıştır.

İkinci grup mülakat ise sıradan halkın devletin kendilerine yönelik politikalarına, çoğunlukla olan ilişkilerine, kendi kimliklerine bakışını, değerlendirmelerini öğrenebilmek amacıyla Pomak ve Acaralılarının yoğun olarak yaşadığı bölgelerdeki köylerde yapılmıştır. Bunun dışında, saha araştırması süresince 2012-2016 yılları arasında yoğunlaşan Müslüman ve Ortodoks Gürcüler arası toplumsal gerginliklerin meydana geldiği Samtshe-Cavahetya bölgesinin Adigeni (Adıgön) ilçesi ve köylerinde de mülakatlar yapılmıştır. Son olarak 2015 ve 2017 yılında, farklı saha araştırmalarında Gürcistan'da gerçekleştirdiğim mülakatların verilerinden de bu çalışmada faydalanılmıştır.

2018 yılında Gürcistan ve Bulgaristan'da 54 mülakat yapılmıştır. Ayrıca, bir mülakat İstanbul'da, iki mülakat Oxford'da ve bir mülakat da bir Pomak ile sosyal medya üzerinden yapılmıştır. Bunlara ek olarak 2015 ve 2017'de, Gürcistan'da yapılan 9 mülakattan faydalanılmıştır. Görüşmeler sırasında mülakat konusunun hassasiyeti, yani her iki ülkede de Acaralılar ve Pomaklar konusunda yürütülen bir çalışmanın hassasiyeti nedeniyle kayıt cihazı kullanmak her durumda mümkün olmamış, görüşmenin verimli geçmesini, görüşme yapılan kişinin rahat konuşmasını sağlayabilmek için not tutulmuştur.



## Literatür Taraması

Balkanlardaki ve Kafkasya'daki etnik, millî ve dinî azınlıklar konuları sosyal bilimler literatüründe oldukça kapsamlı çalışılmaktadır. Azınlık kavramı ve olgusu; azınlık hakları, bireysel ve kollektif haklar, linguistik, kültürel haklar ekseninde incelendiği gibi, devlet politikaları ve bu politikalar neticesinde azınlık gruplarının etnik, millî ve dinî kimliklerindeki dönüşümleri de incelenmektedir. Yapılan literatür taramasında dinî azınlıklar üzerine mevcut karşılaştırılmalı çalışmaların çoğunlukla aynı dinî azınlığın, aşağıda belirtildiği gibi, farklı ülkelerdeki mensuplarını, temsilcilerini konu edindiği görülmüştür. Bunun yanında Bulgarca literatürde Pomak ve Acaralıları, bu azınlıkların yoğun olarak bulunduğu iki bölgeyi konu alan bazı çalışmalar mevcuttur (Popova, 2010). Bu tez çalışması ise İngilizce literatürde daha önce karşılaştırmalı olarak incelenmemiş Karadeniz'in iki yakasında yerleşik iki Müslüman dinî azınlığın - Pomakların ve Acaralılarının- kimlik algılarındaki dönüşümleri ve devlet politikalarını karşılaştırmalı bir şekilde ele almayı amaçlamaktadır.

Balkanlarda (Bulgaristan) ve Kafkasya'da (Gürcistan) milliyetçilik, Smith ve Jaffrelot'un tanımladığı gibi etnik milliyetçiliğin özelliklerine sahiptir. Dolayısıyla, bu ülkelerdeki milliyetçiliğin din ile olan sıkı ilişkisi, millî kimlik ve bilincin Ortodoksluk ve onun müesses kilisesine bağlılığı öncelenmesi, bireyin devlete olan üyeliğinin vatandaşlıktan ziyade milliyet, etnik aidiyet bağlamında görülmesi azınlıkların bu ülkelerdeki durumunu hassas bir konuma sokmaktadır. Aydınğün'ün (2013: 811, 816) ifade ettiği gibi din temelli millî kimlik Gürcistan gibi çok dinli ve etnili bir ülkede ulusal bütünlüğü tehdit etme riski taşımakta, ayrıca Gürcü kimliğinin Ortodoksluk ile özdeşleştirilmesi Müslüman azınlıkları marjinalize etmektedir.

Gürcistan'da Ortodoksluğun Gürcü milliyetçiliği ile olan sıkı ilişkisi, dinin millî kimlik üzerindeki belirleyici rolü, dinin millileşmesi, Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin siyaset, eğitim ve sıradan halk üzerindeki artan gücü gibi konular sıkça çalışılmaktadır (Aydınğün, 2013; Gurchiani, 2017a; Gurchiani, 2017b). Ayrıca azınlıkların Bulgaristan ve Gürcistan'daki durumu, azınlık hakları, linguistik, kültürel haklar, ayrımcılık vakaları

gibi konular da literatürde yerini almaktadır (Aydingün ve Asker, 2012; Vassilev, 2010; Mirkova, 2009). Bunun yanında, tarihsel ve güncel boyutlarıyla, Bulgaristan ve Gürcistan'daki azınlık ve çoğunluk grupları arasındaki ilişkileri ve iki azınlığın Osmanlı sonrası dönemde maruz kaldıkları politikaları ele alan çalışmalar mevcuttur (Neuburger, 2004; Blauvelt ve Khatiashvili, 2016; Rechel, 2007).

Bulgaristan ve Gürcistan'ın etnik ve dinî azınlıkları hem yerel hem de uluslararası bilim adamları tarafından çalışılmaktadır. Özellikle geçtiğimiz milenyumun dönümünde Pomaklar üzerine yapılan araştırma ve çalışmalarda artış kaydedilmiştir (Todorova, 1998; Turan, 1999; Neuburger, 2000; Zhelyazkova, 2001; Georgieva, 2001; Brooks, 2002). Pomakları konu alan çalışmalar salt Bulgaristan'da yerleşik Pomaklarla sınırlı kalmamakta, bu grup, yaşadığı Yunanistan, Makedonya ve Türkiye gibi ülkelerde de, bilimsel araştırma, makale ve tezlere konu olmaktadır (Kahl, 2007; Yumerov, 2010; Yozmerdivanla, 2015). Örneğin, Yunanistan'da yerleşik Pomaklar münferit olarak çalışıldığı gibi karşılaştırmalı olarak da incelenmeye başlanmıştır (Seyppel, 1989; Demetriou, 2004; Srebranov, 2006). Son zamanlarda Pomaklar üzerine yapılan karşılaştırmalı çalışmalar özellikle ivme kazanmıştır. Rodop dağlarının iki tarafında yerleşik, yani Bulgaristan ve Yunanistan'daki Pomaklar özellikle karşılaştırmalı şekilde yayınlara konu olmaktadır (Steinke ve Voss (ed.), 2007; Karagiannis, 2012; Brunnbauer, 2001; Apostolov, 1996). Pomak araştırmaları, bu grubun tartışmalı ve muğlak kimlik durumuna, yerleşik buldukları ülkelerde muhatap oldukları devlet politikalarına ve bunun sonucunda kimliklerinde meydana gelen değişimlere yoğunlaşmaktadır (Apostolov, 1996; Karagiannis, 1999; Neuburger, 2000; Brunnbauer, 2001; Anagnostou, 2005; Eminov, 2007; Myuhtar-May, 2013). Yine birçok çalışma da Pomak toplumunun bazı kesimlerinin farklı bir etnik kimlik geliştirdiklerine işaret etmektedir (Osterman, 2013; Boboc-Cojocar, 2013; Brooks, 2002). Azınlık gruplarının etnikleşmesi, daha önce olmayan etnik grup bilincine sahip olması, yani kimliğin siyasallaşması ile birlikte farklı bir etnik kimlik bilinci geliştirmesi veya bunun tam tersi diğer etnik-millî gruplar içinde erimeleri mümkündür. Öte yandan Bulgaristan, Pomakların (ve ülkedeki diğer bir tartışmalı grup olan Makedon azınlığının) objektif kriterlere göre etnik veya millî azınlık sayılamayacağı, Pomak dinî

azınlığını çoğunluktan ayıran objektif bir kıstas bulunmadığı tezini savunmaktadır. Yani salt kişilerin veya bir grubun bireysel beyan ve tercihlerini temel alan subjektif kıstası değil, hem subjektif hem de bir topluluğun belirgin ayırt edici özelliklerini gösteren objektif kıstası kümülatif olarak dikkate aldığı savunmaktadır (Council of Europe, 2006b: 3-4; Council of Europe, 2012: 15). Pomaklar ise, yaşam biçimi, dil, din, kültür farklılıkları nedeniyle diğer gruplardan farklı bir kimliğe sahip olduklarını savunmaktadırlar (Council of Europe, 2012: 15).

Pomaklar Balkanlarda dağınık olarak bulunmaları ve sınır bölgelerinde yerleşmeleri nedeniyle devletler ve hatta bilim insanları arasında tartışma konusu olmakta, farklı devletler tarafından sahiplenilmektedirler. Dolayısıyla Pomakların kimliği, etnik-dinî aidiyetleri üzerindeki iddialara ve mücadeleye odaklanan ve/veya iddiaları savunan çalışmalar da mevcuttur (Günşen, 2013; Memişoğlu, 1991; Hidiroglu, 1991). Pomaklar örneğinde grubun adlandırılması önemli bir akademik ve toplumsal anlaşmazlık konusu olduğu için hemen hemen her çalışma bu duruma atıfta bulunmaktadır. Yukarıda da belirtildiği gibi grup içinde, Pomaklar arasında da tek tip bir yaklaşım söz konusu değildir. Farklı etnik ve dinî kimliklere sahip çıkan yaklaşım ve tercihler söz konusudur (Georgieva, 2001). Bu yaklaşım ve tercihler coğrafi yerleşim, iktisadi gelişmişlik, eğitim düzeyi ve diğer etnik- dinî azınlıklarla ve çoğunlukla beraber yaşama durumuna göre farklılaşmaktadır.

Acaralılar ise çoğunlukla Gürcistan'daki Müslüman azınlıklar ekseninde, diğer Müslüman azınlıklar, Azeriler, Ahıska Türkleri ve Kistler<sup>311</sup> ile beraber incelenmektedir (Aydingün, 2012; Sanikidze ve Walker, 2004; Balci ve Motika, 2007). Bunun yanı sıra Acaralıların 20. yüzyılda geçirdikleri kimlik dönüşümleri üzerine yapılan çalışmalar yanında (Liles, 2012; Hoch ve Kopeček, 2011; Derlugian, 1998), Acaralıların 1980'ler ve takip eden dönemde deneyimledikleri din değiştirme ve Ortodokslaştırma süreci de çalışılan bir konudur (Pelkmans, 2002; Pelkmans 2010; Pelkmans, 2014). Ayrıca, 2012 sonrasında Gürcistan kırsalında, Acara'da ve Acara'ya komşu Samtshe-

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<sup>311</sup> Kistler, Gürcistan'ın kuzeydoğusunda yer alan Pankisi Vadisi'nde yaşayan Vaynah (Çeçen) kökenli çoğunluğu Sünni Müslüman bir halktır.

Cavahetya’da Müslüman Gürcüler ile Ortodoks Gürcüler arasında toplumsal olaylar meydana gelmiştir. Bu nedenle özellikle STK’ların saha araştırmalarına dayanan çalışmalarında artış olmuştur (Mikeladze, 2014; Popovaite, 2015). Sonuç olarak bu araştırma daha önce yapılmış araştırmalardan farklı olarak benzer politikalara maruz kalmış iki farklı bölgedeki iki sınır azınlığını karşılaştırmalı olarak incelemeyi amaçladığından bu konuda literatüre katkı sağlamayı hedeflemektedir.

### **Kavramsal ve Kuramsal Çerçeve**

18. ve 19. yüzyıllarda Batı Avrupa’da ortaya çıkıp gelişen milliyetçiliğin sonraki gelişimi tarif edilirken aslından, yani daha rasyonel ve siyasî temelli, vatandaşlık merkezli sivil milliyetçilikten uzaklaşıp özcü (*essentialist*) ve kültüre dayalı etnik milliyetçilik hâline geldiği 20. yüzyıl aydınlarınca ifade edilmiştir. Milliyetçilik doğuya doğru, yani imparatorluklara karşı bağımsızlık mücadelesi veren Doğu Avrupa’daki milletler arasında yayılırken Herder, Fichte gibi Alman düşünürlerin de etkisiyle daha romantik bir milliyetçiliğe dönüşmüştür. Farklı yorumlar olsa da en baştan itibaren din ve kiliseler bu milliyetçiliklerin gelişip serpilmesi için önemli bir işlev görmüştür.

Bu çalışma dinî milliyetçilik literatürünü Bulgaristan ve Gürcistan’daki milliyetçiliği, etnik ve dinî kimlik algısını, devletlerin azınlık politikalarını değerlendirmede önemli bir araç olarak görmektedir. Bu nedenle din ve milliyetçilik bağı üzerine odaklanan kuramsal yaklaşımlar benimsenmiştir. Brubaker’e göre (2012: 6-8) Balkanlar, Polonya ve Kuzey İrlanda’da milliyetçilik belirli bazı dinlerin etkisiyle biçimlenmiştir. Buna göre bu dinler, geleneksel anlayışın, yani dinin tükendiği noktada milliyetçiliğin başladığı anlayışının aksine, bu ülkelerdeki milliyetçiliğin gelişmesine katkıda bulunmuşlardır. Brubaker’in işaret ettiği din-milliyetçilik ilişkisini açıklayan bazı örneklerde din ile milliyetçilik öylesine iç içe geçer ki ulusun sınırları belli bir din ile tanımlanır ve din ulusun üyeleri açısından ayırıcı bir işaret teşkil eder. Örneğin, diğer Batı Avrupa milliyetçiliklerinden farklı olarak İrlanda örneğinde Katolik inancı ile İrlandalı kimliği öylesine bütünleşmiştir ki etnik kimlikler arası ayırıcı nişane dil yerine Katoliklik inancı olagelmıştır (Coakley, 2011). Kerr (1992: 22) İrlandalıların bir çoğunun dillerini

kaybetmelerine rağmen Katolik inancının etkisiyle millî bilinçlerini koruyabildiklerini ifade etmektedir. Kerr'e göre (1992: 19) din, etnik bilincin ve millî kimliğin kuvvetlenmesini sağlar, öyle ki Balkan kiliseleri hâkim oldukları coğrafyada millî kimliğin saklayıcısı, muhafazakârı olarak değerlendirilirler. Doğu Avrupa ülkelerinde hâkim dinler kendi bağlıları arasında ortak kimlik bilincini sağlayan bir araç işlevi görürken aynı zamanda uluslar arasında da farklılaşmayı sağlarlar (Borowik, 2007: 655). Tishkov da (1997: 107) Sovyet sonrası dönemde dinin hem etnik uyumu güçlendirdiğini hem de bölünme ve dışlamayı sağlayan bir unsur hâline geldiğini ifade etmektedir. Gürcistan ve Bulgaristan'da olduğu gibi 20. yüzyılın bir bölümünde totaliter sosyalist ve komünist yönetimler tarafından baskı gören dinler ve dinî yapılar 1989-91'den sonra üzerlerindeki baskının kalkması ile literatürde kullanılan tabirle yeniden canlanma sürecinden geçmişler ve yerleşik oldukları ülkelerde milli kimliğin önemli veya ayrılmaz birer parçası hâline gelmişlerdir. Bu dönemde modern devlet mekanizmasının ve iletişim olanaklarının da desteğini arkalarına almaya başlamışlar ve cemaatleri üzerindeki etkileri artmıştır. Gürcistan gibi bazı örneklerin gösterdiği gibi siyasi birer güç olarak da hükümetleri etkileyecek ve belki yönlendirecek duruma gelmişlerdir.

Jaffrelot (2009) ve Smith (1991) Batı dışı milliyetçilikleri sınıflandırırken bu kategorideki milliyetçilik anlayışının etnik temelli olduğunu ifade etmektedirler. Smith'e göre Batı dışı milliyetçilik modelinde ulus ortak bir kökene, ortak kültür ve dile dayanmaktadır. Jaffrelot da dinin kimliğin önemli bir unsuru olduğu milliyetçilik anlayışının etnik temelli olduğunu ve bireysellik ile materyalizmin nüfuz etmediği Batı dışı dünyada geliştiğini belirtmektedir. Ayrıca bu tip etnik milliyetçiliğin bazen dil bazen de İrlanda örneğinde görüldüğü gibi din merkezli olduğunu işaret etmektedir. Spohn (2009: 364) da Doğu Avrupa ülkelerinde inanç faktörünün millî kimlik formasyonu üzerindeki etkisine, kilise ve devlet arasındaki derinleşen ilişkilere, aynı zamanda Ortodoksluğun diğer dinler üzerindeki ayrıcalıklı konumuna ve bunun azınlıklara olan menfi etkisine işaret etmektedir.

Bu çalışmada Karpov, Lisovskaya ve Barry'nin (2012) kavramsal altyapısını oluşturmaya çalıştıkları etnodoksi kavramının, yani bir dinin belli bir etnisiteyle, etnik kimliğin dinî kimlikle iç içe geçmesinin, Pomak ve Acaralıların toplumsal dışlanmasının ve onlara yönelik uygulanan asimilasyon politikalarının gerisinde yatan nedenleri anlamamıza yardımcı olacağı savunulmaktadır. Etnik grup (ethnos) ve inanç (Yunanca *Doxa*) kelimelerinden oluşan etnodoksi Karpov ve diğerlerinin tanımına göre bir grubun etnik kimliği ile baskın dinini birleştiren bir inanç sistemidir. Etnodoksi Bulgaristan ve Gürcistan gibi etnik kimliğin çoğunluk grubunun bağlı olduğu baskın din ile, bizim örneğimizde Doğu Hristiyanlığı veya Ortodokslukla, bütünleştiği örneklerde bu dinden ayrı düşenleri, başka bir dine mensup olanları çoğunluk grubunun organik birer parçası olarak tanımlamayacağını, dışlayacağını öngörmektedir. Bu inanç sisteminin hâkim olduğu toplumlarda diğer dinler grubun birliği ve selametine zararlı telakki edilirler ve grubun hâkim dinî inancının diğer dinlere karşı korunması, ayrıcalıklı bir statüye kavuşması amaçlanır (Karpov, Lisovskaya ve Barry, 2012: 644). Aynı yazarlara göre etnodoksinin altı temel bileşeni vardır: doğuştan gelen bağlılık, dinî üstünlük, din değiştirenlerin dışlanması, aynı dini kabul edenlerin marjinalleştirilmesi, farklı dinlerin gruba zararlı olduğu varsayımı ve son olarak ayrıcalık ve koruma arayışı. Dinî olarak farklılaşıp başka bir inancı benimseyenler artık etnik grubun gerçek birer üyesi olarak görülmezler. Öte yandan aynı inanca sahip veya sonradan hâkim grubun inancını benimseyen ama etnik olarak farklılaşanlar da tam olarak grubun üyesi olarak telakki edilmezler ve marjinalleştirilirler. Buna göre etnodoksi grup içi bağlılığa vurgu yaparken etnik ve dinî olarak farklı olanları grubun gerçek mensuplarından ayırıştırır ve öteki olarak gördüğü gruplardan zarar geleceğini varsayar. Dolayısıyla gruptan farklılaşanlara karşı tolerans gelişmez. Bu bağlamda, Bulgaristan ve Gürcistan'daki dinî azınlıklara yönelik dışlamayı, Pomak ve Acaralıların tam olarak Bulgar veya Gürcü olarak görülmeşiğini, Gürcistan'daki Müslüman ve Ortodoks Gürcüler arasındaki gerginlikleri bu ülkelerdeki güçlü etnodoksi anlayışı çerçevesinde açıklayabiliriz. Etnodoksi kavramı iki ülkedeki dinî azınlıklara yönelik politikaları anlamamız için bir teorik çerçeve sunabilir.

## Sonuç ve Tartışma

Araştırmamız neticesinde, tezin argümanlarıyla da paralel olarak, her iki ülkede de dinî ve etnik kimlikler birbirinden ayrılmaz olarak görülmektedir, farklı derecelerde de olsa, Bulgar ve Gürcü olmak, ezici bir şekilde Doğu Ortodoksluğuna bağlılıkla tanımlanmaktadır. Bu aynı zamanda her iki durumda da etnodoksinin varlığına işaret eder. Bu nedenle, her iki grubun da Müslüman Pomaklar ve Acaralılar olarak Bulgar ve Gürcü millî kimliğine aidiyetleri isim ve din değişikliği gibi dönüşümlerden sonra kabul görmektedir. Aksi durumda Pomaklar ve Acaralılar, Bulgar ve Gürcü 'organizma'larının birer parçası olarak kabul görmemektedir.

Araştırma bulgularına göre, Bulgaristan'daki Pomakların ve Gürcistan'daki Acaralılarının, diğer azınlıklarla, örneğin her iki ülkedeki Türklerle veya Türk dilli gruplarla karşılaştırıldığında daha fazla asimilasyona ve baskıya maruz kaldıkları sonucuna varılmıştır. Geçen yüzyılda Pomaklar en az dört defa isim ve din değişikliğine maruz kalmışken Türk azınlık yalnızca bir defa benzeri bir süreci deneyimlemiştir. Komünizm sonrası dönemde de Pomaklar hâlâ kimliklerinin inkârından muzdariptirler. Araştırma sonuçları genel olarak tüm azınlıklar, özelde ise Pomaklar açısından isim sorununun çözülemediğini göstermiştir; Pomaklar ve Türkler çeşitli pragmatik kaygılar nedeniyle çift isim alma pratiğini sürdürmektedirler. Görüşülen kişiler, kimlik kartlarında ve pasaportlarında Bulgar isminin bulunmasının, onlara daha iyi işlere ulaşma, yurt dışına çıkma, ayrımcılık ve zorbalıktan kaçınma gibi konularda yardımcı olduğunu belirtmişlerdir.

Gürcistan'daki Azeriler devlet dilini bilmeme, eğitim, işsizlik, yoksulluk ve benzeri nedenlerle topluma entegre olma konusunda zorluklar yaşamalarına rağmen Müslüman Acaralılarının aksine, Sovyetler Birliği döneminde ve sonrasında ne din değiştirme kampanyalarının ne de isim değişikliği süreçlerinin hedefi olmuşlardır. Pomaklar ve Müslüman Acaralılarının deneyimledikleri zorlukların temel nedeni dinî kimliklerinden kaynaklanmaktadır. Gürcistan'daki Azerilerin ve Bulgaristan'daki Türklerin Müslüman kimlikleri, dinî pratik ve uygulamaları; bu gruplar etnik, dilsel ve

kültürel açıdan Bulgar ve Gürcü olarak nitelenmedikleri için büyük oranda tolere edilirken Pomakların ve Acaralıların Müslüman kimliği ve dinî uygulamaları hoş görülmemektedir.

Acaralı Müslümanlar 20. yüzyılın başında sadece Müslüman dinî kimliğine sahip, Slav ve Kartvel dil ailesine mensup birer grupken yüzyılın sonunda artık tamamen Gürcü kimliğine intibak etmiştir. Slavca/Bulgarca konuşan Pomaklar açısından ise farklı ve renkli bir tablo ortaya çıkmıştır. Buna göre Pomakların kabaca üçte veya dörtte biri Bulgar, Müslüman Bulgar kimliğini benimsemiştir. Ayrıca, kendilerini Türk kimliği ile tanımlamayı seçmiş ufak bir azınlık dışında, diğerleri ayrı bir etnik grup olarak Pomak kimliğini benimsemeye başlamışlardır. Benzer birçok Ortodoks ülkede olduğu gibi, Gürcistan ve Bulgaristan'da millî kimlik çoğunluk grubunun dinine bağlılık üzerinden tanımlandığı için bu iki grubun kendilerini Bulgar/Bulgar Müslüman ve Gürcü Müslüman olarak tanımlayan fertleri açısından Bulgar ve Gürcü olmak hassas bir konu hâline gelmektedir. Ancak Bulgar ve Gürcü Müslüman olmak Gürcü ve Bulgar olmayı dinî perspektifle açıklayanlarca sorunlu görülmektedir. 20. yüzyıl boyunca yaşanan zorunlu isim ve din değiştirme süreçleri de bu anlayışın bir tezahürü niteliğindedir: Pomakları Bulgar, Acaralıları da Gürcü yapmak. Bu da, Bulgar ve Gürcülüğe kabul (initiation), ancak belli bir kabul töreni ile mümkün olmaktadır. Komünist ve sosyalist dönemde isim ve kıyafet değişikliği yeterli olurken, bu dönemlerin öncesi ve sonrasında ise, bu iki unsura ilave olarak din değiştirme de sürecin asli bir unsuru olmuştur.

20. yüzyıl boyunca uygulanan asimilasyon politikaları neticesinde her iki dinî azınlığa mensup bireylerde çift isimlilik fenomeni ortaya çıkmıştır. Genel itibariyle çift isimlilik azınlıkların ortak bir meselesi olarak görünmektedir. Zira, dinî veya etnik azınlıklara karşı kültürel ve/veya dinî asimilasyon politikası uygulayan devletler isim değiştirme ve azınlıkların kendi istedikleri isimleri almalarını, gelecek nesillere bu isimleri vermelerini engelleme siyasetini benimsemektedirler. İsim değiştirme asimilasyon politikalarının olmazsa olmaz ilk önemli adımı olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. İsim değişikliği bir anlamda doğumdan ölüme kişinin bütüncül bir kimlik olgusunun



parçalanması demektir. İsim, kimliğin ve grup aidiyetinin önemli bir parçası ve göstergesiyken, mezar taşları ise bunun son halkasını temsil etmektedir. Mezar taşlarındaki isimler son tahlilde müteveffalar için bir önem arz etmezken onun yakınları ve geride kalanlar içinse elzemdir, onların kimliklerinin nihayetinde birer dışa vurumudur. Pomak mezarlıklarındaki mezar taşlarını incelediğimizde bu mezar taşlarının Bulgaristan'daki Türk mezar taşlarına göre daha fazla çeşitlilik arz ettikleri söylenebilir. Mezar taşlarının, taşlardaki 'soya dönüş' döneminde verilen isimlerin müteveffaların yakınlarınca silinmesi ve/veya yenilenmesi, köylerdeki birden fazla mezarlığın varlığı nedeniyle soya dönüş sürecinin izleri buralarda açık olarak belli olmaktadır.

Yapılan mülakatlarda belirtildiği üzere Pomakların kimlik tercihlerini tek bir çizgi ve tanım altına almak mümkün değildir, çok farklı Pomak grupları bu konuda farklı yaklaşımlar ve eğilimler sergilemektedir. Her bölge ve köyde farklı bir eğilim mevcuttur. Aynı bölgedeki köy ve yerleşimlerde dahi farklı kimlik eğilimleri gözlemlenmektedir. Bir yandan Pomakların etnik bir Pomak bilincine intibakı söz konusuyken, yani etnikleşme sürerken, öte yandan buna karşıt olarak bazı bölgelerdeki Pomaklar arasında Bulgar kimliğine intibak da devam etmektedir. Ayrıca kendilerini kültürel anlamda Türk olarak gören ve daha çok dinî ve kültürel bir yakınlığı vurgulayan bir tavır da bazı Pomaklar arasında mevcuttur.

Mülakatlarda kendilerini Pomak olarak tanımlayanlar Bulgarlarla olan farklarını öne çıkarma eğiliminde olmuşlardır. Örneğin dil konusu iki grup arasındaki farklılığın cephelerinden biridir.<sup>312</sup> Her ne kadar bazı mülakatlarda bir Bulgar ve Pomak kendi dillerini konuşarak anlaşılabilir yorumunda bulunulsa da bu anlaşmanın çok da kolay olmayacağı da eklenmiştir. Hatta Pomakçanın veya Rodop Bulgarcasının Bulgarlar nazarında anlaşılmaz olduğu dahi iddia edilmiştir. Bunda Rodop Bulgarcasında veya Pomakçada Türkçe kelimelerin olduğu gerçeğine atıf vardır. Bunun yanında tarafların

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<sup>312</sup> Burada Pomaklar tarafından konuşulan yerel dilin Bulgarcadan farklı mı yoksa Bulgarcanın bir ağzı mı olduğu konusunda bir taraf tutmamaya çalışarak Rodop Bulgarcası veya Pomakça denmesi yolu tercih edilmiştir.

ne konuştukları da önemlidir. İslam ve Pomakların inancı konulu bir konuşmada belki anlaşma zor olacaktır, zira bu saha birçok Türkçe ve Arapça kelime tarafından doldurulmuş durumdadır. Gündelik bir konu konuşulduğunda da benzer bir durum söz konusu olacak mıdır? Diğer bir faktör ise Pomakların 20. yüzyıl boyunca tamamen Bulgar diline adapte olmaları ve yerel dil veya lehçenin önemini kaybettiği gerçeğidir. Sonuç olarak, burada asıl vurgulanmak istenen mülakatlardaki Pomakların kendilerini dil, din, köken, kültür olarak Bulgarlar ve belli ölçüde de Türklerden farklı olarak tanımlamalarıdır. Pomakları Bulgar kimliği çatısı altında görmek isteyen Bulgarlar ise Pomaklar ve Bulgarlar arasındaki ortak yanları öne çıkarmakta ve mülakat yapılan Pomaklar buna karşı çıksa da Pomakların dil ve kültür olarak Bulgar olduklarını iddia etmektedirler.

Sofya’da yapılan mülakatlarda da tespit edildiği üzere Türklerle daha yakın ilişkide olanların kendilerini Türk olarak tanıtmaya, Türklerle bir yakınlık bağı kurma eğiliminde olmaları beklenebilir ve anlaşılabilir. Örneğin burada yapılan mülakatlarda bazı Pomakların tarihine yönelik Kuman-Peçenek tezine daha yakın durdukları söylenebilir.<sup>313</sup> Fakat benzer bir eğilim Türk bölgeleriyle bağı olmayan, Türkçe konuşmayan Batı Rodoplardaki Yakoruda gibi bazı Pomak yerleşimleri için de söz konusudur. Özellikle, 1992’deki nüfus sayımında bu eğilim büyük tartışmalara da yol açarak Bulgar Milli Meclisi’nde oturumlarda tartışılmıştı. 1992’deki durumun, bölge Pomaklarının komünist rejimin politikalarına karşı gösterdiği bir tepkiden kaynaklandığı yorumu yapılabilir. Günümüzde ise bir mülakat verenin dediği gibi artık kendini Türk olarak tanımlayan Pomak “ya çok az ya da yok”tur. Öte yandan Doğu Rodoplarda daha çok Türk çoğunlukla beraber yaşayan Pomaklarda ise Türklere karşı bir soğukluğun veya husumetin mevcut olduğu tekrarlanan bir görüştür. Bu durumun literatürce de sabit olduğu eklenmelidir. Mülakat veren bazı Pomaklar Doğu Rodoplardaki Pomaklar arasında Türklere karşı oluşan husumetin nedeni olarak 1970’lerde rejimin soya dönüş ve isim değiştirme süreçlerinde Pomaklara karşı bölge Türklerinin kullanılmasına işaret etmiştir. Diğer bir deyişle, rejim Pomakların isimlerini

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<sup>313</sup> Bazı Pomaklar arasında ise Pomakların Osmanlı’dan önce İslam’ı kabul ettikleri ve bunda Arap tacirlerin muhtemel etkisinin tartışıldığı da eklenmelidir.

değiştirirken uygulayıcı düzeyinde polis, memur olarak Türklerden yararlanmıştır. Bunun bir sonraki adımı ise 1984'te Türklerin isimleri değiştirilirken Pomakların kullanılması olmuştur. Sonuç olarak Doğu Rodoplarda Pomaklar arasında Bulgar ve Müslüman Bulgar kimlik tercihi öne çıkarken, Batıda daha çok Müslüman ve Pomak kimliği taraftar bulmaktadır.

Pomaklar da farkındadırlar ki Pomakların tarihine, kökenine yönelik tek bir açıklama, günümüzdeki kimliklerine yönelik tek bir yaklaşım mevcut değildir. Etnisitenin ne olduğu konusunda mülakat yapılan kişilerin düşüncelerinin net olduğunu iddia etmek zor görünmekte, hatta yer yer bu konuda bir kafa karışıklığının mevcut olduğunu belirtmek gerekmektedir. Buna rağmen, çoğu Pomak farklılıklarını ifade etmek amacıyla 'Evet, Pomaklar farklı bir etnisitedir.' ifadesini paylaşmışlardır. Bunun yanında Bulgaristan'da yaşadığı için Bulgar'ım diyen Pomaklar da olmuştur. Bulgaristan'daki etnik gruplar arasında bir tercih yapmak gerektiğinde Pomak'ı bir etnik grup olarak konumlandırmışlardır. Mülakat yapılan birçok Pomak kendilerini Müslüman ya da Pomak olarak ifade etmiş ancak özellikle genç Pomakların kendilerini Bulgar olarak tanımladığını belirtmişlerdir. Ancak kendini Bulgar olarak tanımlayanlar da bunu Bulgar etnik kimliğine sahip olmaktan ziyade yaşadıkları ve vatandaşlık bağı ile bağlı oldukları devlete bir mensubiyet olarak gördüklerini belirtmişlerdir.

Pomaklarla yapılan mülakatlarda öne çıkan bir diğer ortak nokta ise kimliklerini ifade etmede yaşadıkları çekingenlik ve devlete yönelik şüphe ve 'korku'dur. 'Korku' bir anlamda tekrarlanan bir duygu olarak karşımıza çıkmıştır ve bu korkunun, kimliklerini ifade etme konusunda onları engellemekte olduğu açıktır. Birçok mülakatta Pomakların iki isimli olmayı hâlâ sürdürmeleri, kimliklerini açıklamada yaşadıkları çekingenlikleri ve Pomak olmayanlara karşı bunu saklamaları olgusu 'korku' duygusu ile ilişkilendirilip açıklanmaya çalışılmıştır. Öyle ki bu durum bazı Pomaklarda bıkkınlık kaynaklı çeşitli esprilere dahi yol açmış durumdadır. Örneğin bazıları kendilerini tanımlarken ünlü bir otomobil üreticisinin ismiyle BMW (Bulgarca- *Bulgaris Myusyulmansko Veroizpovedanie*. Türkçe- Müslüman inançlı Bulgar) olarak tanımlayabilmektedirler. Bir yandan Pomak etnik kimliği Pomaklar arasında taraftar

bulur ve hatta bununla 'gurur' duyan bir kitle oluşurken, yani Pomak olmak grup üyeleri arasında normalleşirken, diğer yandan Pomak olduğunu ifade etmede çekingenlik ve kimliğini gizleme de rastlanılan bir davranış biçimi olarak kendini göstermektedir.

Acaralı Müslümanlar arasında ise Pomaklarla karşılaştırıldığında daha yeknesak bir tablo karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Ne kimlik tercihleri açısından ne de köken ve tarih açısından yukarıdaki gibi heterojenlik ve çeşitlilik söz konusudur. Acaralı olmak etnik bir kimlikten ziyade, zira ayrı bir Acaralı etnik bilinç söz konusu değildir, bölgesel bir aidiyeti ifade etmektedir. Bulgar kimliğini bu kadar doğal bir şekilde benimsemeyen Pomakların aksine, Acaralılar, Gürcü millî kimliğine bütünüyle intibak etmişlerdir. Müslüman Acaralıların hakları için mücadele eden Müslüman din adamları da dâhil olmak üzere Müslüman seçkinler Gürcü bilincine sahipler ve kendilerini Gürcü olarak tanımlamaktadırlar.

Bir zamanlar Acaralı Müslümanlar diğer birçok topluluk gibi kendilerini dinî aidiyetleri üzerinden tanımlarken, Sovyetler Birliği döneminde uygulanan politikalar neticesinde dinî kimlik yerini Gürcü millî kimliğine bırakmış ve zamanla Acaralılar arasında Gürcü kimliği yegâne seçenek hâline gelmiştir. Bununla birlikte, her ne kadar onlar açısından bir Müslümanın Gürcü olup olamayacağı anlamsız bir tartışma olsa da, dinî aidiyetleri nedeniyle Gürcülükleri diğer Ortodoks Gürcüler tarafından sürekli bir tartışma konusu olagelmiştir. Yapılan mülakatlarda 'Müslüman olduğumuz için bizi Gürcü olarak görmüyorlar' gibi şikayetler yaygın olarak dile getirilmiştir. Acaralılar 1980'lerin sonlarında başlayıp Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından sonra da devam eden Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi'nin din değiştirme kampanyasının hedefi olmuş, bu süreçte yer yer kitlesel olarak din değiştirmeler yaşanmıştır (Aydingün, Köksal ve Kahraman, 2019: 295). Sovyet sonrası dönemde Acaralıların Müslüman kimlikleri ile kamusal alanlardaki varlıkları memnuniyetsizlik yaratmaya başlamış ve bu durum Müslüman ve Hristiyan Gürcüler arasında Gürcistan kırsalında meydana gelen olaylarda kendini göstermiştir.

Pomaklar ve Müslüman Acaralılarının kimlik algılarının karşılaştırılması neticesinde iki farklı yaklaşım ortaya çıkmaktadır: Müslüman Gürcülerin “Biz Gürcüyüz ama bizi Gürcü olarak görmüyorlar.” yaklaşımına karşı Pomakların “Biz Pomak’ız, farklıyız ve/veya Bulgar olduğumuzu söyleseler bile Bulgarlar, aslında bizi Bulgar olarak görmüyorlar.” yaklaşımı. Müslüman olmak ve Gürcü olmak, Müslüman Gürcüler açısından birbiriyle çelişen bir durum değilken ve Gürcü olmanın Ortodoksluğa bağlılığı gerektirdiği görüşüne karşı çıkılırken Pomaklar arasında daha renkli bir tablo söz konusudur. Bu grubun bireyleri arasında Pomak, Bulgar ve Türk olmak üzere en az üç kimlik eğilimi göze çarpılmaktadır ve grubun kökeni konusundaki görüş ve iddiaların çeşitliliği bireylerin çağdaş kimlikleri üzerine yansımaları sahiptir.

Pomak örneğini farklı kılan nedir ve neden Sovyet dönemi ve Sovyet sonrası Gürcü politikaları Acaralılar arasında tek bir ulusal kimlik, yani Gürcü kimliğini oluştururken, farklı Bulgar rejimlerinin, yani krallık/çarlık, komünist ve demokratik Bulgaristan’ın politikaları Pomaklar arasında etnik Pomak da dâhil olmak üzere birçok kimliği tetiklemiştir. Bu iki grup arasındaki farklılaşmaya dair getirilmeye çalışılan açıklama, esas olarak devlet politikalarının burada belirleyici olduğuna yöneliktir.

Bulgaristan’ın tarihsel olarak azınlıklar ve özelde Pomak politikası dalgalı bir seyir izlemiş, isim ve din değişiklikleri örneğinde olduğu gibi gelgitlerin yoğun olarak yaşandığı bir süreç olmuştur. 20. yüzyıl boyunca müteaddit defalar Bulgar rejimlerinin Pomaklar üzerindeki baskıcı ve asimilasyon siyaseti kendini tekrarlamış ve bu politikaların sonucu olarak da Pomaklar Bulgaristan içinde Türk azınlığını ve dışarda ise en sonuncusu 1989’da olmak üzere göç ederek ulaştıkları Türkiye’yi sığınacak güvenli liman olarak görmüşlerdir. Birbirini izleyen Bulgar rejimlerinin Pomaklara yönelik tutarsız ve şiddetli asimilasyon politikalarına karşı, Sovyetler Birliği ve Sovyet Gürcistanı’nda azınlıklara ilişkin olarak şiddet içermeyen, ancak ısrarlı, tutarlı politikalar söz konusudur. Dolayısıyla Gürcüler, Acaralılarının Gürcü kimliğine intibakı konusunda başarılı olmuş ve Sovyetler Birliği’ndeki kültürel asimilasyon çabaları, Bulgar örneğinden farklı olarak ciddi bir tepki görmeden uygulanmıştır.

Öte yandan bu duruma devlet politikaları arasındaki görece farklılık gibi tek bir açıklama ile yaklaşmak kolaycılık olacaktır. Bunun dışında Türk faktörü veya Türk çıpası olarak ifade edilebilecek bir değişkenin varlığını da öne çıkartarak iki grup arasındaki nihai farklılığa bir başka açıklama getirmek mümkündür. Buna göre, Gürcistan ve Bulgaristan'da çoğunluğun asimilasyon çabalarına karşı bu iki grubun sosyal etkileşim içerisine girebilecekleri veya müttefik olabilecekleri bir grubun olup olmaması bu iki grup arasında farklılık yaratan bir diğer nedendir. Daha açık bir ifadeyle Pomaklar devlet politikalarına karşı bir tepki olarak kendilerini Türk olarak tanımlama, Türk bölgelerine kaçma gibi yöntemlere başvurabilmişken, diğer bir deyişle, Pomakların dayanışma içine girebilecekleri bir grup ve alternatif bir kimlik mevcutken, Acaralılar bu türden bir iş birliği veya dayanışmadan mahrum kalmışlardır. Bulgaristan'da, Pomaklar ve Türkler arasındaki sosyal etkileşim şu ya da bu şekilde her zaman devam etmiş, bazı bölgelerde birlikte yaşamışlar, Komünizm sonrası dönemde de iki grup Hak ve Özgürlük Hareketi altında bir koalisyona dâhil olurken Acaralılar böyle bir seçeneğe sahip olamamışlardır. Gürcistan'daki Müslüman Acaralılar ile Azeriler arasındaki ilişkinin ve sosyal etkileşimin seviyesi, ülkenin doğu-batı eksenli kesintili coğrafi yapısı, iki grubun farklı mezheplere mensubiyeti ve tarihsel olarak farklı devletlerin parçası olmak gibi bir dizi nedenden dolayı her zaman düşük olmuştur. Azeriler de tıpkı Müslüman Acaralılar gibi kendi içlerine dönük bir yaşam sürdürmüşler ve uzun yıllar boyunca örgütsel kapasiteden ve elitlerden yoksun olmuşlardır.

20. yüzyıldaki Pomak kimliğinin gelişmesi Pomak-Bulgar ilişkileri kadar Bulgaristan'daki en geniş millî azınlığı oluşturan Türklerin varlığı ve Pomak-Türk ilişkilerinin seyriyle de alakalıdır. Pomak ve Türkler arasındaki etkileşim ve sosyal ilişki bir yandan Pomakların dinî kimliklerine bağlanacakları bir çıpa görevi görmüş ancak öte yandan da Türkler, Pomakları dilleri nedeniyle tam Müslüman olarak görmediklerinden bu durum bir aşamadan sonra onları Bulgar kimliğini benimsemeye itmiştir. Türk varlığı veya Türk çıpası, Pomakların tamamen, yani Gürcistan örneğinde olduğu gibi, Bulgar millî bilincini benimsemelerine mâni olurken, Türklerin Pomakların devlet politikaları neticesinde adlarının defalarca değiştirilmesine karşı aldıkları

(umursamaz, ötekileştirici, zaten Pomakların Türk olmadıkları, 'dejenere' olduklarına yönelik) tavır Pomakları Türklerden uzaklaştırmıştır. Zira, Bulgaristan'da İslam'ı temsil eden Türk azınlığı tarafından Türkçe bilmediklerinden 'tam Müslüman' ve Türk olarak kabul görmemek Pomakları Türklerden uzaklaştırmıştır. Sonuç olarak Acara'da Gürcülük bilinci ve millî kimliğine intibak dışında bir alternatif oluşmazken, Rodoplarda daha parçalı ve seçenekli bir durum söz konusudur.

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