

***The Pomaks in Greece and Bulgaria: A Model Case for Borderland Minorities in the Balkans* (Südosteuropa-Studien 73). Ed. by Klaus Steinke and Christian Voss. Munich: Verlag Otto Sagner/Südoosteuropa Gesellschaft. 278 pp.**

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A better title for this collection would have been *Slavic-speaking Muslims in the Southern Balkans*, since in addition to eight articles on Pomaks in Greece and Bulgaria, the volume includes four articles dealing with Slavic speaking Muslims in Albania, the Republic of Macedonia, and Turkey. The articles themselves – seven in German and five in English – consist of four on history and ethnology, all concerned with the Rhodopes, i.e., the mountain chain on the border between Greece and Bulgaria, four on language and identity, of which three look at Rhodian dialects and one compares Pomaks to ethnic Macedonians in Greece, and four labeled “comparative,” one looking at the Gorans of Albania, one at the Slavic-speaking Muslims of the Republic of Macedonia, and two at Balkan Muslims in Turkey (one Pomak, the other those expelled from Greece in the so-called exchange of populations mandated by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923). The topic is certainly a timely one, not only with the increased focus on Islam in the US and EU but also because of recent efforts in Greece to achieve some level of Pomak autonomy, and the failure of such autonomy in Bulgaria.

The introduction by Klaus Steinke and Christian Voss (pp. 7–13, in German) gives an overview of the papers, which were originally present-

ed at a conference in 2005 with the same title as the published volume, as well as some references to recent books concerning Pomak issues. The editors also contrast the situation of the Pomaks with that of Bosniaks and the Albanians of Macedonia and Kosovo. They write that a basic thesis of the conference agenda was the incomensurability of the Bosniak model of nation building with the experiences of other Slavic speaking Muslim groups. This assertion, however, misses the point that some Bosniak nation-builders have claimed all Slavic speaking Muslims as Bosniak – complete (among some) with a mythology of common origin as Slavicized Turks (or even Arabs) rather than Islamicized Slavic speakers. Their success has spread not only to the former Sandžak of Novi Pazar but also to Gora in Southwestern Kosovo and, to a lesser extent, to the Republic of Macedonia. The authors point to the Pomaks’ “flexibility” vis-à-vis Greece and Bulgaria in contrast to the national politics of Albanians in Macedonia and Kosovo or that of Bosniaks. Missing from this formulation is the pressure on Pomaks to assimilate linguistically to Turkish, an assimilation which has already occurred in much of Greek Thrace as well as on the Bulgarian side of the border (and also among some Macedonian speaking Muslims in parts of western Macedonia). While the editors fret about outside field workers imposing categories on a group, other groups with which the Pomaks are in everyday contact have no such scruples.

The first section, *History and Ethnology* (pp. 15–137), contains four articles: “Ecology, Society and Culture in the Rhodopes: Christian and Muslim households in the late 19th and early 20th centuries” (pp. 15–47, in German) by Ulf Brunnbauer; “‘Silence’ as an Idiom of Marginality among Greek Pomaks” (pp. 49–73, in English) by Fotini Tsiibiridou; “Tradition vs. Change in the Orality of Pomaks in Western Thrace: The Role of Folklore in Determining Pomak Identity” (pp. 74–114, in English) by Nikolaos Kokkas; “Education and Power relations within a Slavic-Speaking Muslim Group in Greece: The Case of the Pomaks of Xanthi” (pp. 115–136, in English) by Domna Michail. The article by Brunnbauer is the only one in this section to treat Bulgarian Pomaks and is also the only historical one. Brunnbauer’s and Michail’s articles both examine socio-economic issues, insofar as the former is concerned with questions of profession and household size among Christians and

Muslims in the Bulgarian Rhodopes, while Michail looks at access to education as a resource among Pomaks in Thermes (Lădžata) Community, Xanthi (Skeča) Prefecture in Greece. Both articles utilize statistical data, the former showing that Pomaks were much more likely to live in extended families and engage in agriculture than Bulgarian Christians, in part because land ownership was easier for Muslims under the Ottomans. While the practices of levirate marriage and polygamy might have had some small effect on household size, the basic determining factor was economic, extended families being able to work more land. While many Pomaks remained in the Rhodopes after independence, some villages underwent dramatic demographic shifts from Muslim to Christian.

Michail paints a grim picture of the Thermes Gymnasium (middle school) as well as the hypocrisy of Pomak elites (hodzhas and imams), who discourage their villagers from sending their children to the local gymnasium but send their own children and grandchildren to the gymnasium in Xanthi (pp. 120–121). The problems encountered by students and teachers are exactly those encountered in many low income, minority schools in the United States, pointing to the significance of economic factors and social marginalization in producing comparable results in different societies.

Tsibiridou's and Kokkas's studies are qualitatively ethnographic. Tsibiridou discusses various magical practices and the general oppression of Pomaks. It is clear from her article how Pomaks in Greece suffer from both social and economic deprivation, and one result is what she identifies as "practices of embodied silence" (p. 70). She concludes her article on the hopeful note of the appearance of the Pomak newspaper *Zagalisa* 'love' in October 1997 has given the Pomaks a voice in their own language. A search on the web (<<http://pomaknews.com/?p=2964>>, accessed 9 July 2011) indicates that the paper is still being published, but assimilation to Turkish is also continuing. Kokkas's article is rich in illustrative material from interviews, as well as tales and song texts given in both Pomak and English. This article also makes clear the difficulties Pomaks face as a minority within a minority, i.e. Muslims in Greece who do not speak Turkish.

The second section, *Language and Collective Identity* (pp. 139–192) likewise has four articles: "Is There a difference between Muslim

and Christian Rhodopian dialects?” (pp. 139–147, in German) by Klaus Steinke; “The Dialect situation in the Rhodopes” (pp. 149–159, in German) by Georgi Mitrinov; “Vocabulary Building among the Pomaks in Northern Greece” (pp. 161–175, in German) by Maria Manova; “Language Ideology between Self-Identification and Ascription among the Slavic Speakers in Greek Macedonia and Thrace” (pp. 177–192, in English) by Christian Voss. Steinke informs us, unsurprisingly, that Bulgarian dialectologists reject the idea that there is any significant difference between Christian and Muslim Rhodopian dialects, aside from some lexical items. He uses the term *Konfessiolekt* in his discussion of Pomak and makes comparisons with the Catholic Banat Bulgars and the Bosniaks of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The only data in the article, however, are from German, where in some dialects *Guten Tag* is the Protestant and *Gruss Got* the Catholic greeting formula.

Mitrinov’s article goes into some detail, with concrete data, concerning mostly lexical differences in mixed villages in Bulgaria. Some of these differences are really phonological rather than lexical, e.g. in Avrem (Krumovgrad) the Christian/Muslim forms for ‘beak’ are *kûlhûnj/kûlfûnj*, ‘dinner table’ *sinîja/sinje* (p. 152), and ‘stove pipe’ is *burûja/burúe* (p. 151). Mitrinov also gives a brief list of phonological and morphological differences (pp. 153–154). In his discussion of tendencies in the Rhodopian dialects on both sides of the border, Mitrinov makes the point that the dialects on the Greek side have been more conservative owing to the absence of influence from standard Bulgarian, and that items considered typical Pomak features in Greece such as *vrit* ‘all’, *kiná* ‘what’ are used by both Muslims and Christians on the Bulgarian side of the Rhodopes. He concludes the article by stating that the Rhodopian dialects constitute a unified part of the Bulgarian speech area, and that the term *Pomak language* is based on extra-linguistic criteria.

Manova spends the first part of the article discussing whether or not Pomak is a “language” and if so what kind. She then turns her attention to the topic in her title. For the most part, this is an analysis of the work of Nikolaos Kokkas, who has published a number of textbooks in Pomak. Theokharidēs’s Pomak-Greek and Greek-Pomak dictionaries figure in her bibliography, but do not appear to have been utilized in the analysis. The bibliography lists two works by Kokkas dated 2004.

One, 2004a, is identified only as *Úchem se* [sic] *Pomátsko*. There are two books by Kokkas published in that year with the title *Úchem so Pomátsko*, an elementary school grammar and a bilingual Pomak-Greek reader. The material cited by Manova (p. 171) is from the elementary school grammar (N.B., 19 should be 119 in her page reference). The other citation for Kokkas, 2004b, is given as *www.tripod.com* with no date when accessed. Unfortunately, this is simply the URL for a web site that permits one to build a blog and so is not a useful reference.

Voss's article attempts to demonstrate that "Language turns out to be a crucial factor in hampering transnational identifications" (p. 190). In order to support his claim, Voss ignores all manifestations of Macedonian linguistic nationalism from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (e.g., Pulevski 1875: pp. 48–49, Misirkov 1903: pp. 132–135, Upward 1908: pp. 202–206 – see also Friedman 1999, 2000). He likewise fails to mention active eastern Bulgarian opposition to Macedonian dialects as well as the campaign of terror directed by the Greek government against Macedonian-speakers on the territory it acquired in 1913 (Friedman 2000, 2009, 2010, Lithoksoou 1998). This campaign has not ceased (see <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L40kQfnFuik&feature=related>> accessed 11 July 2011), and the European Court of Human Rights has found the Greek government guilty of harassing Rainbow, the Macedonian cultural and political organization in Greece (Vinožito 2006). Moreover, Voss's attempt to portray that party as alienated from the Republic and its standard language is a gross exaggeration, judging from my consultants' in that same party, and those claims are belied by the party's publications (Vinožito 2006). Voss's claim that Pomak "is not threatened at all" is downright wrong. My consultants told me of the enormous pressure exerted by Turkish authorities against the use of Pomak in any written or formal medium, and the fact that Pomak today survives only in a fraction of the region where it was once spoken is a direct result of Turkish assimilatory pressure (see also Adamou 2008:213). Given the successful linguistic oppression that Greece has imposed on its Macedonian speaking minority and that the Turkish minority in Greece has exerted on the Pomak minority, a more accurate conclusion would be that language is a crucial *target* in hampering or creating transnational identifications. In the case of Macedonians in Greece, their position as

EU citizens and the Republic of Macedonia's decades-long victimization by Greece over the so-called name issue is a major component in discouraging transnationalism, while in the case of the Pomaks, it is Turkey rather than Bulgaria that provides the transnational element.

The final four articles, in a section entitled *The Comparative View of Balkan Muslims* (pp. 193–278), are “Language and Identity among the Slavic Speaking Gorans of Albania: ‘*Nie sme našinci*’” (pp. 193–200, in German) by Xhelal Ylli; “Between Hammer and anvil: The Slavic Muslims of Macedonia” (pp. 201–225, in German) by Jordanka Telbizova-Sack; “The Presence of Pomaks in Turkey” (pp. 227–234, in English) by Thede Kahl; “Change in Settlement and Agricultural Geography in the Province of Bursa (Turkey) during the Exchange of Populations 1923/24” (pp. 235–278, in German) by Johannes Holsten.

Ylli's article begins with a useful, detailed survey of the Slavic speaking villages of Albania and a brief demographic history of Gora. To Ylli's brief discussion of Goran materials published by Gorans themselves we can add the works of Ramadan Redžepari (2005, 2006a, 2006b 2008) as well as at least one Goran web site <<http://gora8.tripod.com/id51.htm>> (accessed 9 July 2011), which has various features including stories in Goran. There follows a brief discussion of the various names Gorans use including, for their language – *našinski*, *goranski* (in Kosovo), *gorançe* (in Albania) – and for themselves – *našinci*, *makedonci*, *turci*, *albanci*. I can add that in Macedonia they also use the term *torbeš*. The article closes with a few linguistic observations, including the toponymic evidence for an older Aromanian layer and two tables with historical demographic data from the Goran villages in Albania. We can add that Steinke and Ylli (2010) now gives a detailed description of the Goran dialects of Albania.

Telbizova-Sack provides a detailed discussion of Muslims in the Republic of Macedonia (with a substantive footnote on the Gorans of Kosovo, many of whom have migrated to Macedonia in recent years). She provides both a thorough historical background and interesting present day data based both on censuses and field work. This is a balanced and nuanced presentation. I could add a couple of details from my own field work, such as the fact that in 1944, prior to the liberation of Skopje, the Torbesh village of Gorno Vranovci was the location of the work that

would lead to the standardization of Macedonian, and on 29 October 1944 the first issue of what became the main Macedonian daily newspaper, *Nova Makedonija*, was published there. According to my consultants, the Torbesh were especially sympathetic because they had been badly treated by the Bulgarian occupiers. My consultants also blamed the communist party's precipitous enforcement of the ban on the *zar* and *feredže* (Muslim women's veils) for alienating the majority of Macedonian speaking Muslims. And indeed, as Telbizova-Sack observes, for the Torbesh, Macedonian ethnic identity is more Christian than linguistic. We can add that the current Macedonian government is encouraging this association of language and religion, thus further alienating Torbesh into assimilating as Turks or Albanians. It would have been useful if one or two of the articles in this volume had given a similarly thorough and detailed overview of the history of the Pomaks in Greece and Bulgaria.

Kahl gives a brief survey of Pomaks in Turkey and notes "Pomak was spoken with fewer misgivings than in the Pomak villages in Greece" (p. 323). He also notes that some Pomaks in Turkey can write their native language freely using the Turkish alphabet, as opposed to the situation in Greece, where Pomaks have been convinced by the Greeks that Pomak and other minority languages "are impossible to write" (p. 233). The article concludes, however, with the observation that Pomak language and culture are disappearing in Turkey as the younger generation assimilates to Turkish identity.

Holsten's valuable article on Bursa is the only one in the collection with a resume, and it is in a different language from the article. The practice would have been appropriate for each article in the collection. The article gives a detailed account of the emigration from and immigration to Bursa Province as a result of the 1923/24 exchange of populations mandated by the Treaty of Lausanne in terms of demography, ethnicity, and economy. There is historical background, a series of statistical tables, and five maps. According to the author the map of the formerly Greek and Armenian villages in Bursa Province is the first publication of its kind. Unfortunately the reproduction of the map is so reduced as to be mostly illegible. The accompanying table, however, is helpful.

The book's subtitle "A model case for borderland minorities in the Balkans" raises the question of whose model is being invoked. Appar-

ently not one that is concerned with the preservation of linguistic diversity and minority rights, and certainly not one connected with language rights or the separation of church and state. The history of Bulgaria's treatment of its Pomak minority is appalling (see Neuberger 2004), while the study of Pomak dialects in Greece is so fraught that Adamou (2008: p. 123) writes that even today it is difficult to conduct linguistic field work among them. Unlike the study of Macedonian dialects in Greece, which the Greek government continues to discourage and even prevent, in Greek Thrace it is the Turkish minority authorities who harass the study of Pomak dialects. My own Pomak consultants have also complained about this. The articles in this collection, especially those on Greece, repeatedly point to the marginalization, deprivation, and assimilation of Pomaks. I suppose if the editors' model is aimed at elimination or merely subordination to state injustice, then indeed the fate of the Pomaks is a sort of model. Perhaps the "model" the authors are thinking of is one that does not involve potential irredentism, which potential is indeed eliminated by the Bulgarian state's association with Christianity and the Turkish domination of Islam in the Eastern Balkans. Still, given all the problems faced by Pomaks in both Greece and Bulgaria, the "model" seems flawed. Leaving aside this unfortunate formulation, however, and the uneven quality of some of the articles, the overall value of the collection is quite high. The articles contain much valuable data, and the book overall is a very important contribution to the study of Southeastern Europe as well as to discipline-specific areas of study.

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