



**Contemporary Southeastern Europe**

An Interdisciplinary Journal on Southeastern Europe

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Research Article

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*Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, 2022, 9(1), 47-64

DOI 10.25364/02.9:2022.1.4



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# What would have been my name? The Post-Memory of the “Generation After” the Revival Process in Bulgaria

Francesco Trupia\*

**Abstract:** This research paper looks at the “generation after” the so-called “Revival Process” (1984–89) in order to explore the intergenerational transmission of memories of family traumas related to the largest assimilation campaign in Communist Bulgaria, which was implemented in the 1980s. To investigate how young Turks and Muslims hold, recollect, and contemplate family memories, this qualitative empirical research was conducted through in-depth interviews complemented with a semi-structured and theme-guided questionnaire. Adopting an ethnographic sensibility, this study unravels an inconspicuous yet present web of family memories about the Revival Process and its aftermath, and an accompanying narrative that is verbalised in the most intimate spaces of everyday life. At a personal level, it turns out that the Turkish and Muslim generation of post-memory does not ransack the history of the Revival Process for political profit. Instead, it argues that there is a lack of self-examination with respect to the recent past in Bulgaria.

**Keywords:** Bulgaria, Revival Process, Turkish minority, post-memory, generation after

## Introduction

As the spectre of interethnic turmoil began to fade in the early 1990s, Bulgarian scholarship failed to register a similar interest to that expressed in relation to the unprecedented human rights violations and civilian casualties in the successor states of the former Yugoslavia. Moreover, democratic institutions did not deem a self-examination of the Communist experience necessary; nor did they establish or sponsor institutions to research the domestic factors and events that drove Bulgaria out of the Eastern bloc. Bulgarians tried to understand how the system they had lived in, which seemed strong and stable, came to such a rapid demise. While retrospective interpretations and reproductions of the Communist past were underway,<sup>1</sup> interest in that past was motivated by the concerns of the day. Socio-economic and political changes occurred so quickly that there was no

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<sup>1</sup> Koleva, Daniela. 2011. *Homo Sovieticus Surviving Democracy? Post-socialist Nostalgia in Bulgaria*, in *Cultural Transformation after Communism in Central and Eastern Europe*, edited by Törnquist-Plewa, Barbara and Krzysztof Stala. Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 153-57.

opportunity for professional historians to soberly assess them. While history became an arena of ideologically driven attempts to cover up crimes,<sup>2</sup> a relatively new trend of research began nevertheless to interest academics and scholars within the country. Among others, the “Revival Process” (*Vazroditelen protses*), which euphemistically denotes the largest, merciless campaign of assimilation implemented domestically by the Bulgarian Communist Party, soon became a subject of research and multidisciplinary investigation.<sup>3</sup>

The so-called Revival Process (1984–89) was orchestrated by the Communist authorities, with their nationalistic views, against the Turkish and Muslim population. This assimilation campaign was not new in Communist Bulgaria. Between 1964 and 1972, ethnic Pomaks were similarly targeted<sup>4</sup> by Party authorities and militias for “healing” from “the wounds of Turkification”.<sup>5</sup> Between 1981 and 1984, about 900 Muslims were targeted for violence<sup>6</sup> and about 50,000 names were changed.<sup>7</sup> Undoubtedly, the Revival Process was the largest state-run attempt to impose a Slavonic “ethnic code” upon Turks and Muslims of other ethnicities (e.g. Pomaks, Tatars, Roma and Alevis). In forcing people to renounce their “misguided” religious and ethnic identity, both Turks and Muslims were expected to change their Arabic-sounding names and accept new Bulgarian/Christian ones.<sup>8</sup> Those who refused to comply with such a forcible name-changing faced exile, imprisonment, and even death. 1,200 Turkish dissidents were imprisoned in the labour camps of Belene and Lovech,<sup>9</sup> while others were forced to emigrate to Western Europe.<sup>10</sup> Although the data is contested, according to the Sofia-based Hannah Arendt Centre, 160 were killed during mass street demonstrations.<sup>11</sup> The most violent escalations took place between November

<sup>2</sup> Baeva, Iskra and Evgenia Kalinova. 2010. *Bulgarian Transition and the Memory of the Socialist Past*, in *Remembering Communism: Genres of Representation*, edited by Todorova, Maria. New York: Social Science Research Council, 58-59.

<sup>3</sup> Among others: Mikhailov, Stoyan. 1992. *Vazroditelniat protses. Teza-Antiteza. Otritsanie na otritsaniето*. Sofia: M&M; Stoianov, Valeri. 1998. *Turskoto Naselenie v Balgaria mezhdu polyusite na etnicheskata politika*. Sofia: Lik;Gruev, Mikail and Alexey Kalyonski. 2008. *Vazroditelniat protses: Komunisticheskiat rezhim i myusyulmanskite obshtnosti*, Sofia: CIELA; Marinov, Tchavdar. 2009. *Ot “Internatsionalizam” kam Natsionalizam. Komunisticheskiat rezhim, Makedonskiat vapros i politikata kam etnicheskite i religioznite obshtnosti*, in *Istoria na Narodna Republika Balgariia. Rezhim i Obshtestvoto*. Sofia: CIELA, 481-516; Kamusella, Tomasz. 2019. *Ethnic Cleansing during the Cold War. The Forgotten 1989 Expulsion of Turks from Communist Bulgaria*. London/New York: Routledge; Penkov, Miroslav. 2012. *The Night Horizon*, in *The East of the West – A Country in Stories*, edited by Penkov, Miroslav. London: Spectre, 167-92.

<sup>4</sup> Myuhtar-May, Fatme. 2014. *Identity, Nationalism, and Cultural Heritage under Siege: Five Narratives of Pomak Heritage - From Forced Renaming to Weddings*. *Identity, Nationalism, and Cultural Heritage under Siege*. Leiden: Brill, 95-97; Marinov, Ot “Internatsionalizam”, 500-05.

<sup>5</sup> Neuburger, Mary. 2000. Pomak Borderlands: Muslims on the Edge of Nations. *Nationalities Paper* 28(1):181-98, 190.

<sup>6</sup> Eminov, Ali. 1990. *There Are No Turks in Bulgaria*, in: *The Turks of Bulgaria: the history, culture and political fate of a minority*, edited by Kemal, Karpat . Istanbul: İsis, 27.

<sup>7</sup> Gruev and Kalyonski, *Vazroditelniat protses*, 129.

<sup>8</sup> Şimşir, Bilâl. 1988. *The Turks of Bulgaria (1878-1985)*. London: K. Rustem & Brother, 267.

<sup>9</sup> Dobre, Claudia-Florentina. 2015. *Use and Misuse of Memory. Dealing with the Communist Past in Postcommunist Bulgaria and Romania*, in *European Memory: Eastern Perspectives*, edited by Małgorzata Pakier and Joanna Wawrzyniak. New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 308.

<sup>10</sup> Baev, Jordan. 2015. *De-Stalinisation and Political Rehabilitations in Bulgaria*, in *De-Stalinising Eastern Europe*, edited by McDermott, Kevin and MatthewStibbe. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 164.

<sup>11</sup> Hannah Arendt Center in Sofia / Sharlanov, Dinyu and Venelin I.Ganev.. *Crimes Committed by the Communist Regime in Bulgaria* (accessed 20 February 2022).

1984 and January 1985 in the northeast and southernmost part of Bulgaria, particularly in Karzdhalı (Turk. *Kırcaalı*) and villages nearby, where 800,000 people had been forced to change their Muslim names to Bulgarian ones.<sup>12</sup> In the wake of 1984–85, the events of May 1989 brought the Communist authorities to allow the “unpatriotic citizens” to leave the country. A wave of freedom walks, hunger strikes and protests was organised by Turks, demanding civil rights and free emigration.<sup>13</sup> With about 360,000 Turks and Muslims heading to Turkey between June and August 1989,<sup>14</sup> the Revival Process culminated in a *de facto* ethnic cleansing.<sup>15</sup> The Party’s nationalist rhetoric euphemistically depicted the mass-migration as “the great excursion” of tourists (*Goliamata Ekskurzia*).

While many former Turkish and Muslims escapees returned to Bulgaria even before the collapse of Zhivkov’s regime, about 100,000 struggled to reintegrate themselves into post-1989 Bulgarian society.<sup>16</sup> Those who could not flee the country continued to be targeted by militias and officials in the late 1980s.<sup>17</sup> Throughout the 1990s, the process of reconciliation almost ground to a halt,<sup>18</sup> sparking criticism in the wider public,<sup>19</sup> and achieving no consensus among circles of academics. In other words, the establishing of a historical truth about the Revival Process did not go smoothly.<sup>20</sup> Among others, the poet Edvin Sugarev classified the events of the 1980s as a genocide against a precisely identified ethnic and religious community in Bulgaria.<sup>21</sup> Vildane Özkan coined the term “namecide”<sup>22</sup> to better describe the mechanisms of name-changing. On 1 November 2002 the Bulgarian Orthodox Church defined *all* victims of the Bulgarian Communist regime as martyrs, sacred martyrs and holy martyrs of Bulgaria, thereby equating at least a third of Turkish, Pomak, Roma and Muslim victims as Bulgarian and ascribing them a Christian identity. In this way, the victims of the Revival Process were crowded out of Bulgaria’s official memory landscape.<sup>23</sup> However, on 11

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<sup>12</sup> Baeva and Kalinova, *Bulgarian Transition*, 68.

<sup>13</sup> Atasoy, Emin and Abdullah Soykan. 2011. Freedom Walk of the Turks in Bulgaria: the Events of May in 1989 and their reflections. *Procedia Social and Behavioural Science* 19, 116; Baeva and Kalinova, *Bulgarian Transition*, 68.

<sup>14</sup> The number of Turkish and Muslim escapees was also confirmed by the Bulgarian Parliament in the recognition of an “ethnic cleansing” on 11 January 2012 (Deklaratsiia, Osüzhdashta opita za nasilstvena azimilaziia na Bülgarskite Miusliuma); See also Gruev and Kalyonski, *Vazroditelniat protses*, 193.

<sup>15</sup> Kamusella, *Ethnic Cleansing*.

<sup>16</sup> Avramov, Rumen. 2016. *Ikonomika na „Vazroditelnia Protsets”*. Sofia: Centre for Advanced Study Sofia 264 & 405.

<sup>17</sup> Eminov, *There Are No Turks*, 70.

<sup>18</sup> Kamusella, *Ethnic Cleansing*, 111.

<sup>19</sup> Kalinova, Evgenia. 2014. *Remembering the Revival Process in post-1989 Bulgaria*, in *Remembering Communism. Private and Public Recollections of Lived Experience in Southeast Europe*, edited by Todorova, Maria / Dimou, Augusta and Stefan Troebst. Budapest: Central European University, 576.

<sup>20</sup> Karamihova, Margarita. 2021. *Exploring Memories of Communism in Bulgaria*, in *Studying the Memory of Communism. Genealogies, Social Practices and Communication*, edited by Rigels, Halili / Granzinetti, Guido and Adam F. Kola. Toruń: Wydawnicstwo Nauko Uniwersytetu Mikolaja Kopernika, 258.

<sup>21</sup> Kalinova, *Remembering the Revival Process*, 567-94.

<sup>22</sup> Özkan, Vildane. 1998. Namecide and Resistance in Socialist Bulgaria. *Akademik Tarih ve Düşünce Dergisi* 5(15), 94-114.

<sup>23</sup> Kamusella, *Ethnic Cleansing*, 111-15.

January 2012 the Bulgarian Parliament defined the Revival Process as an “ethnic cleansing” (*etnichesko prochievane*), although neither a single former party member nor a single rank-and-file official was sentenced.<sup>24</sup>

Paraphrasing David Rieff, sooner or later the brute reality of the passage of time guarantees that a new set of difficulties will arise; no matter how much time has elapsed, an official act of remembering and commemorating will definitely provide a moral imperative for a society to come to terms with the past.<sup>25</sup> With this in mind, this article aims to contribute to the field of memory studies in post-socialist Bulgaria. Knowingly avoiding a historical reconstruction of the specific events of Revival Process and its aftermaths, this study looks at those subjects of Turkish origin and a Muslim family background who only have knowledge of the 1980s. The decision to involve young Turks and Muslims was taken in an attempt to show how, on a personal and collective level, family traumas related to the Revival Process are held and enacted through generations.<sup>26</sup> In fact, it is here contended that a long-lasting mnemonic trajectory of family traumas remains still painful and is transmitted across generations. Therefore, the main scope of this article is to shed light on an inconspicuous circuit of *intra-* and *trans-*generational transmission of memories of family stories in order to scrutinise how young Bulgarian citizens of Turkish origin and/or Muslim family background care for, contemplate upon, and deal with the traumas of the Revival Process. Hence, this perspective “from below” aims also at understanding the ways they speak up beyond their intimate family circles. In doing so, this article investigates a potential sense of confusion, anger and mourning *vis-à-vis* Bulgaria’s official amnesia.<sup>27</sup> This scholarly perspective on this “generation after” seeks to (re)consider the viability of the notion of post-memory in a postsocialist minority context in Southeastern Europe in order to advance the state-of-the-art research in the field of memory and minority studies.

### Theoretical Framework

When it comes to self-examinations of the past, Bulgarians have neither questioned whether a certain mentality has survived Communism, nor what kind of society they themselves had between 1944 and 1989.<sup>28</sup> It is telling that different meanings are still ascribed upon “communism” and “communists”.<sup>29</sup> Imbued with the passage of time, Bulgarians’ nostalgia is more likely to stem from a

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<sup>24</sup> Kelbecheva, Evelina. 2020. *A Chronicle of an Anachronism: The Struggle for Adequate Education about the Communist Past*, in *Constructions and Instrumentalization of the Past. A Comparative Study on the Memory Management of the Region*, edited by Mörner, Ninna. Stockholm: Centre for Baltic and East European Studies, CBEEES, Södertörn University, 155.

<sup>25</sup> Rieff, David. 2016. *In Praise of Forgetting. Historical Memory and its Ironies*. New York/London: Yale University Press 79.

<sup>26</sup> Hirsch, Marianne. 2012. *The Generation of Post-Memory. Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press, 6.

<sup>27</sup> Kamusella, *Ethnic Cleansing*, 42.

<sup>28</sup> Kelbecheva, *A Chronicle of an Anachronism*; Karamihova, *Exploring Memories*, 258.

<sup>29</sup> Tocheva, Detelina. 2020. Vernacular Entanglements: Islam and Communism in Bulgarian Village. *Balkanologie. Revue d'Études Pluridisciplinaires* 15(2), 1-22, 2.

process of constant renegotiations between official ideology and alternative outlooks, as well as between versions of present legitimisation and delegitimisation of the past based on the political situation.<sup>30</sup>

While some argue that, without experiences, memories cannot be considered memories, others consider educational and cultural experiences as a punctum of the unheard and the unseen. Marianne Hirsch’s notion of the “generation of post-memory” speaks of such a secondary memory – one not based on direct experience, but mediated by “hinge” family stories and images,<sup>31</sup> whose transmission and acquisition occur within the most intimate moments and space of quotidian life.<sup>32</sup> In general, studies on post-memory bear upon Arlene Stein’s, Eva Fogelman’s and Bella Sovran’s research on the “second generation” of Jewish children of Holocaust survivors living in the 1970s. There is little doubt that post-memory is not identical to memory, but it can turn into another form of memory that is simply “post”. At the same time, it approximates memory in its affective force and its psychic effects.<sup>33</sup> Although post-memory can neither fully replace nor directly refer to historical materials and sources, it can nonetheless contribute to completing missing pictures of a historical event that has been hopelessly disconnected from the present. In other words, post-memory sheds light on a generational structure of projections of stories and images inflecting the broader transfer and availability of personal and collective remembrance.<sup>34</sup>

Since cultural practices of representation, writing, mapping, and ethnography will be less and less practicable as time passes,<sup>35</sup> the choice to look at the Turkish and Muslim generation of post-memory with regard to the Revival Process takes up the issue of remembrance, reconstructions of memories and rewriting the official history in Bulgaria. In the attempt to take testimony from members of the older generations who suffered under the Party’s nationalist campaigns of assimilation, much has been written from both national and local perspectives.<sup>36</sup> Yet, the troubling continuity of memories and traumas may evoke and entail the juxtaposition of inequalities and injustices between two temporalities – namely, between the communist and post-communist period. Thus, recollection of memories among the “generation after” may also prove to be harmful, or at least risky,

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<sup>30</sup> Olick, Jeffrey K. 2008. *From Collective Memory to the Sociology of Mnemonic Practices and Products*, in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, edited by Erll, Astrid and Ansgar Nünning. New York: De Gruyter, 151-162; Halbwachs, Maurice. 1992. *On Collective Memory*, edited and translated by Coser, Lewis A. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>31</sup> Hirsch, Marianne and Leo Spitzer. 2009. The Witness in the Archive: Holocaust Studies/Memory Studies. *Memory Studies* 2(3), 151-70, 157.

<sup>32</sup> Hirsch, *The Generation of Post-Memory*, 63.

<sup>33</sup> Hirsch, *The Generation of Post-Memory*, 99.

<sup>34</sup> Hirsch, *The Generation of Post-Memory*, 35.

<sup>35</sup> King, Anthony. 2004. *Spaces of Global Culture. Architecture, Urbanism, Identity*. New York: Routledge, 57.

<sup>36</sup> Among others, see: Karakusheva, Slavka. 2021. Memory Practices and Memory Politics in the Town Fest of Dzhebel. *Ethnologia Bulgarica. Yearbook of Bulgarian Ethnology and Folklore* VII(1), 62-76; Vodeničarov, Petar / Popova, Kristina and Anastasia Pashova. 1998. *Iskam chovekut da e vinagi priaten i da si pravim moabet...: Rechevo povedenie i zhizneni svetove na balgari mohamedani ot Gotsedelchevsko i Razlozhko (Autobiografii i Izledvaniya)*. Blagoevgrad: Sanra Buk Trust; Hamdiev, Sabri. 2009. *Patiat kam svobodnia sviat*, Plovdiv: izd. Kontekst; Nuretdim, Mehmed. 2016. *Deliormanda Sevar Köyünda Sallandi Beşigimiz*. Ruse: izd. Avangard Print.

especially when they are transformed into phenomena that pose little or no concern to the societies and politics to which they were once so toxic.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, they contribute to (re)framing a historical remembrance that could be considered valuable insofar as it is of service to society.

In performing a qualitative empirical work on a micro-level, in-depth interviews were complemented with a semi-structured and theme-guided questionnaire comprised of three open questions. During in-depth interviews, a group of young Turks and Muslims (n=30) holding Bulgarian citizenship, answered the following questions:

- 1) What do you remember from the Revival Process?
- 2) From whom was this memory passed, and where was it acquired?
- 3) Why is there almost no space in Bulgaria to openly debate the Revival Process and its aftermaths?

The first question was posed to explore how young Turks and Bulgarian Muslims recollect their *first memory* from family stories and personal experiences. Granted that they have neither consciousness nor experience of the 1980s, the second question was raised to investigate the structure of *inter-* and *trans-*generational return of memories and knowledge of the Revival Process. This question attempted to discover in which intimate places the transmission of stories was mediated and accompanied by a narrative of family or community members. As a method for the study of and research into post-memory, this second part of the in-depth interview was also characterised by the interviewee's spontaneous recollection of the family photos and/or personal objects that did most of the cultural work.<sup>38</sup> Lastly, the third question aimed at exploring young Turks' and Muslims' willingness to discuss the Revival Process and its aftermaths outside their private sphere. Hence, the aim was to understand whether (or not) the family burden of the past holds traction on each interviewee in the Bulgarian public realm.

This attempt to explore the *quality* of post-memories does not lie in a normative approach focusing solely on issues of political legitimacy and representation.<sup>39</sup> Instead, it has the scope of contributing to the scholarship of the Revival Process from the perspective of postsocialist minority groups of Bulgaria. The involvement of interviewees and their web of personal memories indicates an emic approach that sheds light on an understudied collective of subjects who *can* remember differently from those who experienced the past. During the in-depth interviews, the respondents' post-memory shows how the past and its legacies are reinterpreted and renegotiated.<sup>40</sup>

Although they were limited in number, they were carefully selected to create a coherent and similar "casing". Thus, features of age, ethnicity, religion, and good

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<sup>37</sup> Rieff, *In Praise of Forgetting*, 24.

<sup>38</sup> Hirsch, *The Generation of Post-Memory*, 62.

<sup>39</sup> Brusaporci, Gianfranco. 2015. European Citizenship and Youth in Bulgaria: A Qualitative Comparative Analysis between Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks. *Contemporary Southeastern Europe* 2(1), 1-23, 7.

<sup>40</sup> Hirsch, *The Generation of Post-Memory*, 82; Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*; Olick, Jeffrey K. 2008. "Collective Memory": A Memoir and Prospect, in *Memory Studies* 1(1), 23-29.

knowledge of English language were taken into consideration along with residence and education criteria. Among all respondents, there are 12 males and 18 females, of whom only one was born and grew up in Turkey after the family migrated from Communist Bulgaria in 1989; only one respondent is of Roma origin with a Muslim family background, while all others self-identify as ethnic Turks *from/of* Bulgaria. Respondents are between 20 and 40 years of age: four respondents were born in the late 1980s but have neither consciousness nor memories of the Revival Process, as they were too young to grasp its complex dynamics. All others were born after 1989.

It should be here pointed out that interviews were conducted remotely due to pandemic restrictions. At that time, only two interviewees were temporarily residing in Turkey and Bosnia and Herzegovina, respectively, while all others were in Sofia, Plovdiv, Kardzhali (Turk. *Kırcaali*) and nearby towns and villages. All respondents hold at least a bachelor’s degree, with the set presenting a diverse range of subjects (e.g. technical, humanities, art and social sciences) and they were employed in a wide range of sectors (e.g. business and academia, as well as art and civil society organisations). It goes without saying that both education profiles and personal career are an important specificity for two reasons. First, the respondents’ post-memories do not reflect the marginalised positionality that is often assumed of ethnic and religious minority members. Second, their perceptions as well as knowledge and attitudes reflect a high level of education and good political and cultural knowledge of Bulgaria.

This nuanced selection of “casing” implies the adoption of an ethnographic sensibility, which was employed as a way of knowing rather than collecting and later writing about information.<sup>41</sup> Pursuing this line of enquiry, the main goal is to prepare and execute a qualitative study that explores the *quality* of post-memories about the Revival Process and its troubling mnemonic legacy. Without pursuing a kind of intellectual effort to elaborate a “thick description” of and about a human community in a context subjected to law,<sup>42</sup> yet another aim of this research approach was to avoid the political narrative of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (*Dvizhenie za prava i svobodi*) and its political control over the memories of minorities.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, this ethnographic sensibility is first and foremost adopted to become more responsibly aware of deep inequalities and to better understand the social forces that cause suffering.<sup>44</sup>

Last but not least, it should be clarified that all respondents agreed to participate voluntarily in the in-depth interview after having received and carefully read an Interview Consent Form (ICF) and a Participation Information Sheet (PIS). While the latter was handed out in order to highlight the overall research and its purposes, the former was the official document by which each potential inter-

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<sup>41</sup> Simmons, Erica S. and Nicholas Rush Smith. 2017. *Comparison with an Ethnographic Sensibility*. *PS: Political Science & Politics* 50(1), 126-30, 129.

<sup>42</sup> Micheelsen, Arun and Clifford Geertz. 2002. “I Don’t Do Systems”: An Interview with Clifford Geertz. *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 14(1), 2-20, 8.

<sup>43</sup> Leview-Sawyer, Clive. 2015. *Bulgaria: Politics and Protests in the 21st Century*. Sofia: Riva Publishers, 110.

<sup>44</sup> McGranahan, Carole. 2018. Ethnography beyond Method: The Importance of on Ethnographic Sensibility. *Sites: New Series* 15(1), 1-10, 3-7

viewee could agree to participate in the in-depth interview, be aware of the possibility of withdrawing anytime, remaining anonymous, and to edit any comment or script during the data collection. Relatedly, the following sections will only refer to some stories whose information and value judgements are exclusively extracted from the interview material and linked with the post-memory of the respondents. In order to avoid any implication that each respondent might be exposed, all interview material was anonymised or, in some cases, pseudonymised.

### **The Personal Burden of a Family Trauma**

When respondents were asked about their *first memory* of the Revival Process, the large majority of them evoked the violent practices of name-changing. Other subtler forms of violence, such as the prohibition on speaking Turkish in public, as well as the prohibition on going to the mosque and reading the Qur'an, were expressed second most commonly. These two genres of post-memories were introduced through long-lasting personal dilemmas and issues of self-identification with the legacy of violent actions that grandparents and parents had suffered. In the eyes of the respondents, the imposition of "being forcedly renamed" was largely understood as a reinforcing practice of domination over a group of "inferior" and "backward" citizens. A respondent argued that "after communism, Bulgarians continued to address family members with their Bulgarised names, although [Bulgarians] knew what had happened to them". Another articulates such an issue by admitting to having "two names: one of Arabic origin given by the mother, and the Bulgarised one". Similarly, a third respondent recollects the personal experience of discovering the fact of having two names at the local hospital. "[The] doctor could not understand my personal name since the Bulgarian healthcare digital system showed two different ones – one Bulgarian and another one Turkish. The doctor then asked whether [the respondent] was married in spite of the young age [...] he himself was embarrassed for asking such a question."

Tellingly, these personal cases show the punctum of memory fixated around puzzling and problematic everyday circumstances after which the respondents came to know the traumas of their families. A few interviewees remembered having had to choose one of two registered names in order to receive a personal security number on an ID card (*Lichna karta*), or going through complicated bureaucratic procedures for "simply applying for the passport because of the presence of two names", or also finding it extremely difficult to "open a second bank account – a very suspicious demand for a double-named person". Post-memory here reveals the early years of the postsocialist transition and the struggle for the restoration of civil rights of ethnic Turks and Muslims. Although on 5 March 1990 the Bulgarian government passed a law restoring the original names, a number of nefarious legal formalities *de facto* prevented any quick, mass restoration of them.

Another genre of *first memory* was recollected from respondents' childhoods at school. At kindergarten, for example, a respondent recollected the discomfort "to remember [my Bulgarian name], which confused all other classmates, too". At primary school, another respondent was puzzled at "being called Maria, and not Meryem", adding that "teachers did very little for teaching history and literature

classes differently and thereby avoiding some discomfort”. Yet another respondent was “surprised about the history textbook and the definition [of] ‘Ottoman Yoke’ [*Osmansko robstvo*]”. Without asking the teacher, the respondent consulted with the father at home, thereby discovering “the Turkish origin of the family” and getting the father’s opinion: “there was not [a] yoke, but only the [Ottoman] empire”. These post-memories confirm that Bulgarian schools practically refused to offer knowledge of the main socialist events, often reinforcing some Communist rhetoric in the postsocialist period. Socialism was not included in the school curriculum until the mid-1990s<sup>45</sup> – the period in which some respondents (n=16) attended primary school. Only in 1996 was one text published by Open Society that contained a lesson on Communist Bulgaria’s minority issues between 1944 and 1989.<sup>46</sup>

Also, these post-memories reveal how the burden of family trauma and identity dilemmas lasted throughout the postsocialist transition in Bulgaria and beyond. In this regard, in fact, a respondent born and raised in Turkey shared a profound connection with Bulgaria and the Revival Process. “[Mother] was pregnant when everything happened. After spending a couple of weeks in a refugee camp in Turkey, just a few kilometres away from her birthplace in Bulgaria, [the respondent] was born.” “This is why,” the same respondent added, “Bulgaria is the country I feel the most connected with.” Two other respondents confessed to “having different birth certificates with different names”. Among them, “the one with the ‘civic name’<sup>47</sup> used to be hidden” by the parents in the 1990s. These certificates constitute a series of time-bound documents telling the family and personal story at the same time, bringing the respondents back to what really happened to them and their families. Another respondent recollected the image of “a tank entering the village of [the] grandmother, who had taken to the hills together with all other villagers because [they were] fearful of being forced to change their names”. The tank is nothing more than a flash in the respondent’s image recollected after having heard the story of the grandmother and other relatives about “some rank-and-file officials arriving in the villages for [the purpose of] changing all people’s names”.

All these cases of post-memory also show how post-memory acts to hinge – across generations – family histories and knowledge passed through objects and photos that can be tangibly and visually engaged with to support active listening. As recollected during in-depth interviews, the three birth certificates and the history textbook, as well as the tank or the healthcare system, display the point at which (post)memory begins with recollection. In fact, the past is located in the photos, imaginations, documents, and objects which activate a latent, repressed and/or dissociated memory that would otherwise remain nonverbalised or concealed within older generations.<sup>48</sup> Here, it is instructive how a respondent, at the age of 6, being fluent in Turkish and able to read in Bulgarian, took their father’s

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<sup>45</sup> Baeva, Iskra and Petya Kabakchieva. 2014. *How is Communism Remembered in Bulgaria? Research, Literature, Projects*, in *Remembering Communism. Private and Public Recollections of Lived Experience in Southeast Europe*, edited by Todorova, Maria / Dimou, Augusta and Stefan Troebst. Budapest: Central European University, 74-76.

<sup>46</sup> Angelov, Petar. 1996. *Istoria na Balgaria za 11 klas*. Sofia: Otvoreno Obshtestvo. 497-99.

<sup>47</sup> The respondent alludes to the Bulgarian name chosen by the parents in 1985 in compliance with the new imposition.

<sup>48</sup> Hirsch, *The Generation of Post-Memory*, 90.

school photo booklet to work on improving their reading skills. After visually spotting “him among his classmates, [the respondent noticed that] his name was missing on the bottom of the photo. After asking him, [the] father explained that his name was written there, Milen, the Bulgarian name he had to choose in 1985.” Given the young age, the respondent could not understand that “weird explanation”, and began to ask everyone, “So, what would have been my name?” A similar story was remembered by another respondent who, during childhood, “suffered from not having a Bulgarian name so much [that the respondent resorted to] inventing one for playing with friends”.

Accompanied with oral histories, photos, and objects mark the truth-values and symbols of the Turkish “generation after” in Bulgaria whose post-memories embody and incorporate knowledge that fills the gap of a never-experienced event.<sup>49</sup> In the case of the birth certificates “it is no possible to ignore [an official document functioning as] a personal reminder of what happened to many other Turks”. Likewise, the absence of the father’s original name on the photo reveals an unreported community of subjects whose heritage and traumas remain yet-unnoticed in the present. If it is proven true that the *first memory* places a burden on each interviewee, it is also true that the recollection of family traumas is deeply rooted and intertwined with the fate of an entire community. A precise comment was made in this regard: “A large number of ethnic Turks and Muslims living in Communist Bulgaria were anytime ready to flee the country,” a respondent argued, thereby referring to traditionally “handmade thick blankets and buckets that Turks had to collect their belongings quickly and leave”. This utterance recollected the image of “Turks quickly collecting their belongings in order to leave their homes”, since migration to Turkey was known to the community even before the 1980s. Between 1968 and 1978, about 115,000 Turks had emigrated to Turkey as an established policy of family reunification signed between Sofia and Ankara.<sup>50</sup>

### **“Arda would bring us where we come from”**

After discussing the genealogy of the *first memory*, the second question mapped out intimate places where a web of oral histories was mediated by and transferred across generations. All respondents think of both spatial and imaginary milieus where personal and familial memories were actively reconstructed and transmitted. During the interviews, it quickly turns out that knowledge of the 1980s was transmitted and absorbed through not only a series of intimate objects and family photos, but also story-telling during special family occasion and quotidian meetings.

While some express bitterness about “the generations of grandparents and parents who were lost in the postsocialist condition” during the early 1990s, others recollect stories and family traumas directly from the 1980s. Since the first step of officials was to fire those who did not express willingness to comply with the new name-changing policy,<sup>51</sup> respondents speak of family members “hiding in

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<sup>49</sup> Hirsch, *The Generation of Post-Memory*, 208.

<sup>50</sup> Dragostinova, Theodora. 2021. *The Cold War from the Margins. A Small Socialist State on the Global Cultural Scene*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 76.

<sup>51</sup> Yalimov, Ibrahim. 2002. *Istoria na Turската Obshtnost v Balgaria*. Sofia: SUDTL-BOOK, 389.

the hospital [to not be] found by Communist officials”; “being obliged to work as builders after losing [a] teaching position at the local school”; “being arrested only for cheering [...] in Turkish for the birth of the daughter”, and so forth. Tellingly, a respondent expresses a deep sense of sorrow in “remembering the 1990s [...] when thousands of Turks went through difficult times, from working in poorly maintained factories to living in isolated villages and old blocks”. One of the most touching stories was about the song of “Arda Boyları,<sup>52</sup> which [one respondent’s] grandmother used to sing while cooking; often she cried since Arda is the name of the river flowing through her birthplace in Bulgaria”. Although years have passed, the respondent feels “that sadness roaming around” even though, as the grandmother used to say, the stream of the “Arda would bring us where we come from”.

In these samples, the family environment is being involved as a troubling space that allows self-identification with the Revival Process and its traumatic legacy. The image of the Arda river is yet another punctum of (post)memory that activates an act of cultural memory rather than a simple act of remembering.<sup>53</sup> It is no surprise that respondents’ post-memories hinge upon an accompanying narrative that refers to the Revival Process as a historical event. For instance, “only after [the] grandfather passed away, [the respondent came to know] his personal story” from the mother who stressed his “good soul [since] he saved many family members during the 1980s in Bulgaria”. Moreover, a few respondents were in discomfort while remembering unpleasant experiences. “Once on Shipka during a school trip, a student shouted out: ‘Let’s throw all Turks down!’”, alluding to a famous painting from the history textbook. That took by surprise the respondent, who “immediately stepped back, saying that it was not the right place to stay”. From then on, all classmates came to know of the respondent’s Turkish origin. During a wedding party in Turkey, a respondent was addressed as a “Bulgarian girl”. According to a childish understanding of the events, the respondent “did not escape from the Bulgarians and became one of them”. Later, the respondent “asked what [the cousin] exactly meant, forcing both parents to tell what had happened to them, to other family members and friends as well”.

Of particular interest is a series of spontaneous reflections that respondents shared on the issue of victimhood. In this instance, they blur the historical linearity of the perpetrators-vs-victims paradigm over the Revival Process. They begin by thinking of their grandparents and parents otherwise. Taking for granted that the older generations were hit the hardest, respondents face the challenge of rationalising the acquiescence of their grandparents during the first stages of the Revival Process. A cognitive dissonance begins to haunt a couple of respondents whose grandparents and parents renounced their original names without being forced to or without taking alternative actions to resist. Although all of them knew that no-one in their families was trained to enforce the name-changing on the ground, they nonetheless reflect upon whether their family members were unwitting collaborators or simply bystanders. More precisely, it turns out that some of a respondents’ grandparents were “approached by Communist officials and convinced to renounce their Turkish names. Others were not

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<sup>52</sup> This song speaks about a “forbidden love” between Recep and Zeynep – a young Turkish couple living in the villages within the Bulgarian region of Kardzhali/Kırcaali.

<sup>53</sup> Hirsch, *The Generation of Post-Memory*, 159-61.

found to have been particularly concerned about giving up their original name.” “Many Turks,” a respondent recollected from the grandfather’s experience, “went peacefully to choose a new Bulgarian name. They simply underestimated it, or perhaps miscalculated that new imposition, considering it ridiculous and only temporary.” One of the most detailed stories confirms the easiness with which some Turks decided to change their name: a “grandfather was even annoyed by his wife’s behaviour, [the respondent’s grandmother], who changed her new name a few times. She simply gave no importance to it.” While some “easy collaborations” could have been instrumental due to some benefit, such as a salary raise of 50 Leva,<sup>54</sup> the large majority of Turks and Muslims who unconsciously “collaborated”, could not have known that some of them would have been expelled from their villages, or that the militia would have stormed houses and harassed them publicly.<sup>55</sup> In fact, not all “collaborations” went smoothly. Three respondents recollect precise stories of intimidations “against all family members”, or imprisonment “for participating in peaceful resistance”, or “being subjected to blackmailing”. Yet another respondent confessed that the “grandfather, who acted as a local mayor [in the village where he resided], was overnight woken up by rank-and-file officials who forced him to follow them to the police station. He was forced to change his name together with all other family members. Upon this difficult decision,” the respondent argues in sadness, “depended the fate of his family and that of many Turks and Muslims from the village, too.”

In both cases, reflections about the actorness of the victims did not go further. When respondents thought otherwise, they simply realised how subtle the acceptance of “being renamed” was, and how personal decisions could establish in-group dynamics. More than ten respondents confess that what happened during the 1980s is still a taboo subject and barely verbalised. Two respondents repeat by heart what their grandparents used to say: “In order to forgive, you need to forget.” As confirmed by respondents themselves, this sentence is telling for two reasons: firstly, it is assumed by the older generation that forgetting would be beneficial, meaning that grandparents are conscious of having transferred knowledge of traumas that may affect their grandchildren. Secondly, respondents navigate between either the dilemma of forgiving-and-forgetting in their realm of everyday life, or that of naming-and-blaming relatives in the public and private sphere. Beyond any doubt, the personal burden of the past lies in trying to rationalise and make sense of events of violence, murder and deportation against family members, relatives and friends.

### **Reckoning with unfinished business**

Following up on the previous questions, the answers to the third immediately offer a glimpse of the willingness of the post memory generation to galvanise the debate about the Revival Process and its aftermaths. Although public space has

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<sup>54</sup> Zahariev, Bozhidar. 2004. *The Treatment of Ethnic Turks by the Bulgarian Communist Party and their Status Quo*. New York: Ithaca College Catalogues, 17.

<sup>55</sup> Eminov, *There Are No Turks*, 27.

been shrinking, cultural activities have recently been organised to raise awareness about the historical events of the Revival Process.<sup>56</sup> Unlike the older generations of Turks and Muslims who came to terms with the past on a personal and private level, respondents are eager to speak up about events that have been too rapidly liquidated and instrumentally overlooked.<sup>57</sup> A respondent of Roma origin with a Muslim family background called openly for a “moral rehabilitation and a public apology by the Bulgarian authorities for the 1980s”. Regretting that many Roma Muslims, included the mother, tried to resist during Communism<sup>58</sup> and after 1989 campaigned for original names to be reinstated, the issues of forgetfulness was considered a major concern. “Bulgarians born after 1990 know nothing about [the Revival Process] and what it meant for us,” a respondent argues. “While some may know about the Holocaust, albeit without a clear understanding of it, young generations [in Bulgaria] will no longer discuss the 1980s.” This rather pessimist answer is in line with that of younger respondents. Many confirm having never shared any thought with their course-mates at university, nor with their colleagues at work. By the same token, others point out that “at school, no-one talked about the Revival Process”; there were only a few small paragraphs mentioning the euphemistic term “the big excursion”. Among those who were born in the early 1990s, the general assumption is that there is no space for debating the Revival Process without hitting a nerve. This idea motivates the respondents “to find a way to lay an unfinished issue to rest”. While some argue that “Bulgarians do not recognise to have done something bad”, other respondents promptly pointed out that “Turks are still portrayed as the historical antagonists of Bulgarians, as the heirs of those who dominated the territory of Bulgaria for five centuries – due to whom Bulgarians could not exercise their self-determination, nor [...] develop their statehood, literature and arts.”

Nevertheless, the post-memory of the Revival Process does not merely impinge on an individual or collective issue of recognition or rehabilitation. It is also a matter of cultural, social and political recognition. For instance, with the exception of two, all respondents identify themselves either as Turks *of* Bulgaria or as Turks *from* Bulgaria rather than Bulgarian Turks. In this manner, respondents clarify that, in light of what happened to ethnic Turks throughout Communism, “the adjective *Bulgarian* conveys a wrong message” – namely, “Turks in Bulgaria have been subjected to Turkification during the Ottoman Empire, therefore they are not ethnically Turkish.” This identity-related specification discloses neither some form of enmity nor disloyal behaviour of ethnic Turks in Bulgaria. On the contrary, respondents recollect positive memories from their grandparents’ and parents’ neighbourly relations with Bulgarians prior to the Revival Process. The latter, however, “was undoubtedly a point of no return only if Communism would not have ended in the long term”, a respondent states.

The lasting burden of the Revival Process is particularly acute among those respondents whose families decided to seek refuge in Turkey. They point out that

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<sup>56</sup> One of the last art works covering the events of the Revival Process, is a play „Nazovi me s moeto ime” (in English “Call me by my name”), written by Zdrava Kamenova and Blagoy Boychev; it debuted on 31 January 2021 at the National Student House in Sofia, Bulgaria.

<sup>57</sup> Troebst, Stefan. 1994. Ethnopolitics in Bulgaria: The Turkish, Macedonian, Pomak and Gypsy Minorities. *Helsinki Monitor* 5(1), 32-42, 34.

<sup>58</sup> See Stoyanova, Plamena. 2017. *Tsiganite v godinite na sotsializma. Politikata na balgarskata darzhava kam tsiganskoto maltsinstvo (1944-1989)*. Sofia: Paradigma.

their parents “could stay no longer than a couple of years in Turkey as they could not feel [at] home there”; after all, “they were not originally from Turkey, but they were afraid of going back to Bulgaria because [they were seen as] Turks”. This sense of liminality deepens in the minds of respondents when it is time to travel to Turkey to attend celebrations or visit relatives. The journey itself is reminiscent of the Revival Process because “those to visit are the same people who left Bulgaria in the 1970s and 1980s” and only sometimes do they “come back to their birthplaces in Bulgaria”. These stories converge on the pursuit of a common action of solidarity, but one that is outside the political arena. Speaking of politics, indeed, a single respondent defined Communism as “not a bad system in theory, but only in practice [compromised] by selfish politicians and their vested interests”. Perhaps affected by Stockholm syndrome,<sup>59</sup> this reflection does not stimulate any other comment on the Revival Process. Overall, none of the respondents ransacked the past for political profit. Those respondents who had at least once participated in a public commemoration for the victims of the Revival Process “did not really understand what happened in that place [because they were too young and therefore] incapable of linking the stories [from their] families with that commemoration”.<sup>60</sup> Interestingly, here suspicion falls on politicians and their parties for “not opening up a space for a serious debate”. Specifically, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) was accused of instrumentally playing with traumas of the older generations and the feelings of the “generations after” for its own vested interests. As respondents argue, “Some political parties tried in the past to raise the issue in order to open up a serious public debate.” Yet “they always fail” because they are “trapped in ‘right-versus-left’ division, [which] nullifies all possibilities [...] for remembering and coming to terms with the traumas of name-changing and mass deportation to Turkey”.

### Conclusion

This article shows that the period of the Revival Process still plays a relevant role among the “generation after”. In-depth interviews reveal that all respondents are capable of recollecting family traumas and stories by referring to a complex archive of vivid memories that can verbalise silenced stories from the recent past. Unlike the wait-and-see attitudes of the older generations, young Turks and Muslims recollect an inventory of (post)memories and display a diverse set of strategies for coping with the aftermaths of the Communist assimilation policies.<sup>61</sup> In particular, respondents demonstrate how everyday identity dilemmas can be pragmatically overcome in service of contributing positively to Bulgarian society, particularly in the potential pursuit of moral rehabilitation.

After the first and second questions have been asked, respondents begin navigating along different lines of mnemonic transmission by revealing intimate family spaces and personal identity dilemmas that bring to light their *first memory*. It should be pointed out that this array of post-memories is passed on and recollected thanks to a series of personal items that facilitate a partial and imperfect, albeit dynamic and vivid, transmission of memories to the present day.

<sup>59</sup> Kamusella, *Ethnic Cleansing*, 90-91.

<sup>60</sup> The respondent alluded to the commemoration organised yearly in Mogyliane by the MFR in memory of her 17-month-old Turk, Türkan Feyzullah, killed together with other two Turks by militias on 26 December 1984 during protests.

<sup>61</sup> Tocheva, *Vernacular Entanglements*, 2.

The qualitative perspective of this study reveals that the Turkish and Muslim generation of post-memory can remember the unexperienced, unheard, and unseen past. They preserve family memories of the Revival Process by holding them and reproducing related information through objects, photos and intimate spaces. More precisely, each object does more than merely display the respondent's punctum of (post)memory. Rather, it also constitutes either a spatial or tangible reminder of an unnoticed trajectory of troubling experiences intertwined with the recent history of Bulgaria. If juxtaposed with the post-socialist condition of minority groups in Bulgaria, it seems that all objects and photographs speak of a painful transition to democracy.

During the in-depth interviews, in fact, the past clearly overpowers the present. It is clear that the respondents' post-memory recollects the narrative of one or more family members transferring personal visions and experiences of the Revival Process. However, when respondents think of the role that their grandparents and parents had played between 1984 and 1985, they themselves understand the difference between what they are able to recollect from what the older generations remember. Though no revisionism is advanced with regard to the historical events of the Revival Process. Rather, it seems that the respondents' post-memory provides the lens for a deeper understanding of the late 1980s.

Moreover, neither disloyalty towards Bulgarian institutions nor revenge against Bulgarians is verbalised among the respondents. On the contrary, the in-depth interviews confirm the disinterestedness, or low predisposition, of young Turks and Muslims in Bulgaria to participate and engage in politics. At the same time, they are capable of recollecting stories of positive and pragmatic interethnic relations with Bulgarians on a local level. Yet, respondents share their concerns over their personal attempts to avoid misunderstandings on a cultural and political ground. Hence, they instead indicate the inability of some political actors to initiate a serious self-examination with the events of the Revival Process and its aftermaths during the 1990s.

To conclude, the above perspectives are of great relevance for deepening the scholarship of the Revival Process in contemporary Bulgaria and beyond. Rather than instrumentally politicising it, further studies on the generation of post-memory can unravel a variety of pragmatic attitudes and a system of values that can further advance the state-of-the-art research on a multidisciplinary level. In parallel with consultation of archive material and oral histories, indeed, Bulgaria's generations of post-memory can definitely reopen a serious discussion about the latest Communist policies of assimilation and their trajectories in the first decade of the transition to democracy.

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