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THE ROLE OF THE RELIGION IN THE IDENTITY FORMATION PROCESS: THE CASE OF BULGARIAN MUSLIMS (POMAKS)¹

Abstract: The goal of my study is to argue that the identity of Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks) is not a unified category but just the opposite, it is in a constant change and involve contradicting elements. This reality emphasizes the fact that identities are constructed in particular discourse and power relations and when we talk about identities, we could not anymore reduce or interpret them only as prescribed attributes and meanings but as an attempt to separate and exclude. Furthermore, my analysis provides arguments that Bulgarian Muslims rely on the religious tradition to build their cosmos and thus to place themselves in the social reality. In its essence this is a process of identity formation but at the same time it is also a process of differentiation and closure. Being aware of the fact that the identity includes prescribed meanings, Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks) refuse to accept the established and try to create new subject positions for themselves in which they are valued for their sociocultural specifics stemming from their religious and cultural tradition.

Key Words: Bulgarian Muslims, Pomaks, Representation, Identity, Religious Tradition.

Introduction

The aim of the paper is to draw the attention to the identity formation and transformation processes that take place in specific power relations and

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discursive practices. I will pay attention to the fact that identities include prescribed meanings on the one hand and on the other they define subject positions. Furthermore the paper seeks to analyze the problem of “ambiguous” Pomak identity and the influence of religion upon the identity formation process. The paper is based on literature review on the problem and empirical data collected through in-depth interviews conducted in Smolyan province in the period 2016-2017. The field work is conducted in the framework of the project “The role of the communication in the integration process of Bulgarian Muslims” supported by the *Program for career development of young scientists, BAS*. The model of the sample is prepared after an analysis of different variants of the sampling methodology. 60 interviews are conducted altogether in three cities – Smolyan, Rudozem and Madan. The distributions are fixed according to the most significant variables for the study including sex, age and education.

The object of my research is a religious group called Pomaks, which resides on the territory of different countries including parts of Bulgaria, Turkey, Macedonia, Greece, Kosovo and Albania. Bulgarian, Greek, Pomak or just Muslim are only few of the identities they declare. As reported by the official documents they are considered to be descendants of Bulgarians who converted to Islam during the Ottoman ruling and therefore they are named Bulgarian Muslims. Currently their exact number is not known because there is no specific statistics. According to the assessments of a number of prominent researchers of the group including Y. Konstantinov (Konstantinov 1997), E. Karagiannis (Karagiannis 2012) and V. Bosakov (Bosakov 2010) their number in Bulgaria is around 200-220 000/ 250 000 people.

In 2012 a few imams, representatives of the group of the Bulgarian Muslims from Smolyan region were accused for spreading nondemocratic ideologies and radical ideas that threaten the security of the country. Public figures, analysts, researchers and politicians claimed publically that we all witness the renewal or revival of the religion among the members of the group. The reason for that is the work of different Arabic and Islamic foundations and organizations that function in the region. According to the analysis of the researchers, the organizations in question manage to spread radical religious ideas and new political nondemocratic Islam among Bulgarian Muslims mainly because of the fact that group members possess fluctuating identity. This instability regarding the identity makes them embrace influences from outside and hides risks for radicalization. This representation of reality raises two essential questions: How can we explain such a religious revival and what is the role of the identity in this process?

Context

The identity formation process takes place in a specific discourse practices and power relations that should be taken in consideration. In order to get a deeper insight into the phenomenon in question, we need to analyze the real relations in their wider historical context. On the ground of previous research (Tahir 2017) dedicated to investigate the image of Pomaks I argue that they are presented as a group of people who almost “escape the reality of the civilization”. During the period of Communist regime (1945-1989) institutionalized discourse reveals Muslims as backward individuals who must be changed. The concept of M. Foucault “individuals to be corrected” describes the actual state of the Muslims during the regime. The relations between different groups in the society are strained and mistrustful during the period in question since Bulgaria and Turkey are part of opposing blocks - Warsaw pact and NATO. Under these circumstances the Muslim minorities in the country are perceived as a “fifth colony” used by Turkey to achieve political goals. The reality of the Cold war sets the conditions for suspicions and paves the way to the belief that the Turkish state is advancing in arming in order to enter the territory of Bulgaria. If this scenario turns into a reality the Turkish state will rely on the Muslims minorities in Bulgaria. Concerned with the possibility of potential armed conflict, the regime revised its technology and decides to accelerate the process of assimilation. The idea that the economic development will lead to the abolishment of the classes and the achievement of the ideal of a developed socialist society is now defined as a very long way to the ultimate goal. Since the uniformity is the prime feature of the imaginary society, the solution to this situation is the rapid assimilation which will “erase” not only the idea of the self but will eradicate the memories connected to the self. The fear of cultural autonomy of the Turkish minority is the activator of the policy, which aims the limitation of the influence of culture and language.

In order to justify the adopted actions the Party leaders engage academic representatives who bring arguments in defense of the thesis that Turks and Pomaks are Bulgarians who are Islamized during the rule of the Ottoman Empire. So the task of the Party is to revive the assimilated Bulgarian identity again by violence and assimilation. It sounds not only irrational and somehow reveals the arrogance of a man who is intoxicated with power and thinks that everything is possible. “Normal men do not think that everything is possible”, only those who give way to their fantasy can assume such a possibility. In this case, as H. Arendt states, the difference between human and nature is blurred (Arendt 1958:303). Man takes the place of the nature and thinks that he can play with the lives of the others. One of the main results from this period of

intense ideological propaganda is the deformation of the attitudes and beliefs concerning the Muslim communities. Constant suspicions and the mistrust have a long-lasting impact on the relations between different groups. The most important tool used by the totalitarian regimes is the ideological propaganda through which the control over the population is realized. Beliefs concerning the enemy in the face of the Muslim communities, the scenario of territorial claims, cultural autonomy, demographic dominance are just part of the propaganda which attempts to take control over the imagination of the individuals and to imply on them what is possible and what not. This is the “tribal nationalism” in H. Arendt terms which insists that the people are surrounded by enemies and in order to protect them exceptional measures need to be undertaken. In the particular case the measures are directed toward the Muslim communities which are represented as an enemy, as a “fifth colony” and betrayer of the homeland. The implied atmosphere is one of mistrust and constant suspicions concerning the loyalty of the Muslim groups. What is striking in the case of Muslim communities is the fact that in the contemporary reality the vocabulary used to approach problems of these groups is still dominated by concepts such as security threat, autonomy and independence, stuck to old traditions, fanaticism etc. It follows that the truth effect of the discourse is there and it is still controlling our imagination. H. Arendt’s words provide us with a precise definition of this reality, in which “modern masses do not believe in anything visible, they trust only their imagination” (Arendt 1958: 351).

Between tradition and modernity

Analyses dedicated to the period after the democratic changes in the country (1989) focus on the relations between tradition and modernity. The accession of Bulgaria to the European Union (EU) put the issue of minority integration on the agenda. This reality push forward studies which investigate the influence of the membership of the country in the EU on the minority groups. The term “integration” is mostly interpreted in the context of the integration of a part into the whole. In some analyses, integration is associated with the fact that Pomaks claim Bulgarian identity. Thus the identification of Pomaks as ethnic Bulgarians and the use of Bulgarian names is defined as an integration strategy. Other authors talk about integration as a modernization, which requires European rules and norms of behavior.

According to A. Zhelyazkova (Zhelyazkova 2012) modernization is perceived as a process of introducing European laws, rules, patterns of behavior, values and freedom of thought. I. Kurkchieva (Kurkchieva 2004) relates the process of modernization to certain changes in the infrastructure, the housing,

the livelihoods and the employment as well as the rituals practiced by the Pomaks. According to the study, Bulgarian Muslims from Teteven consider themselves as an integral part of the modernization process. The uniqueness of this modernization process which flows among the group members is related to the fact that the traditional kinship relations retain their power. The influence of the tradition is essential in terms of clothing, customs and rituals, which is interpreted as a strategy to avoid the cultural assimilation during years of dynamic changes.

In order to estimate the impact of the accession of Bulgaria to the EU on the identity formation process experts like G. Lozanova and M. Haydiniak (Lozanova, Haydiniak 2006) conducted a case study in region of Smolyan and Kardjali. According to the report based on the results from the fieldwork the education is the key factor regarding the ongoing processes among Pomaks. Only 2.7% of the respondents have university degree which makes them uncompetitive on the labor market. The lack of educational qualification puts them in a catching up position in the context of the integration process. But, at the same time, the relations between minority and majority are based on a partnership, claim the authors of the study. On the contrary, a number of researchers (Telbizova-Sack 2000) declare that the group of Pomaks encounters social isolation. The survey "The attitudes of Muslims in Bulgaria" carried out in 2011 confirms this trend. Furthermore, the report shows that the modernization flows together with the encapsulation process. This trend is characterized by the gradual decline of the trust in others. The results confirm the existence of growing tendency to exclude, differentiate and separate from other groups by inventing new identities. According to E. Ivanova (Ivanova 2014) the diversity of narratives about the origin of Pomaks and their real ancestors is a result of the fluctuating Pomak identity. The existence of various narratives about the real origin of Pomaks further nourishes the fear of "Islamism" in which the group is constantly suspected. In this reality, the variety of narratives is seen as an essential prerequisite for the distribution of extreme religious beliefs, which paves the way for the extensive study of the fluctuation phenomenon in terms of identity.

Identity and identity formation process

Identity is a concept which provokes the interest of many scientists from different fields and disciplines. Variety of theories, definitions and approaches are applied in the study of identity question, but this diversity of interpretations leads to confusion and inconsistency in the used terms. Since the identity is ambiguous concept, the identity formation process contains the

same pitfalls. Scientists try to explain the process within which the identity is created and what are the main factors, which influences the process. Furthermore, scientists try to operationalize the concept and measure the identity through different methods, relating the identity to the roles individuals play in their everyday life. In analyzing the identity formation process, researchers emphasize the importance of the social context in which the process flows.

The importance of the religion in the identity formation process is not argued by researchers, despite the fact that there is no clear explanation about what kind of mechanisms relate religion and identity and how the process flow. In the attempt to study the phenomenon, researchers reduce identity to a collection of identities or relate it to the unity of roles. Thus, the focus is placed on the study of religious identity and its measurement.

In the *Oxford dictionary of Sociology* the history of the concept of identity is widely explained in terms of different approaches applied in the study of the self. Sociologists, philosophers and psychologists make efforts to reach clear and precise explanation of the concept but these endeavors do not lead to the expected results.

“There is, therefore, no clear concept of identity in modern sociology. It is used widely and loosely in reference to one’s sense of self, and one’s feelings and ideas about oneself as for example in the terms “gender identity” or “class identity”. It is sometimes assumed that our identity comes from the expectations attached to the social roles that we occupy and which we then internalize, so that it is formed through the process of socialization. Alternatively, it is elsewhere assumed that we construct our identities more actively out of the materials presented to us during socialization or in our various roles.”

(Scott 2009:333)

Scientists as E. Goffman even raise the question is there any real identity or a collection of many identities which we evoke in different contexts and in the process of interaction with others. Postmodernists talk about multiple identities emphasizing the fact that identity is constructed from distinct domains which are activated under different social contexts. Poststructuralist approach defines identity as category which has “performative basis in actions and gestures” (Dunn 1997: 688). These actions and gestures are constructed within particular discourse and power relations and furthermore within unstable linguistic framework. Identity is seen as a vague structure of discourse.² According to the poststructuralist view identity is not possible without language but at the same time language is defined as unstable because individuals use

² Discourse refer to formalized way of thinking, or as stated by Judith Butler, “the limits of acceptable speech” or possible truth.

concepts which do not bear the same meaning. This fact leads to misunderstanding and substitution of concepts.

According to J. Cote the concept of identity is used in so many different meanings that in some cases the used terms exclude each other (Cote 2009:3). The notion is used to indicate culture, language, even it could be reduced to the matter of traditional clothing. Identity is only a “self-definition”, a meaning which we ascribe to ourselves, sometimes it is used to accentuate the difference and put stress on what the person is and what is not. Other researchers use the term to apply sameness over time. So identity could be the sameness of the person over time and the difference which he makes, comparing to other people. Although the identity studies is a field, which evokes interest and lay the ground for so many researches on the topic, J. Cote states that when someone looks at the papers he can see that identity is a concept used in so various ways that one could not even link them to each other (Cote 2009:7).

In “Who needs identity?” S. Hall set forth that although the identification process is a vague concept as much as identity by itself is, it is assumed that identity relates to recognition of common origin and shared characteristics with other persons or group and the solidarity which stem from this fact. Since the identification process is a construct, it is seen as never ending process. This process refers to making boundaries and constructing the image of others who consolidate the process of solidarity. According to S. Hall, identities are not unified but just the opposite they are constantly in process of change and can involve antagonistic elements (Hall 2000:17). He emphasizes the fact that identities are constructed in particular discourse and power relations, thus when we talk about identity, we could not anymore reduce or interpret them only as prescribed attributes and meanings but as attempt to separate, differentiate and exclude. Identities are always evoked to show the difference and put line between the outside and the self. This is distinct view which focuses not on the integrating power of the identity which categorizes the person as a member of a group or part of larger agency but accentuates the identity more as a tool to draw demarcation line between us and the others and to point explicitly out what is distinct and not part of the self. Thus dealing with exclusion, we always put categories in a hierarchy which presupposes power relations. This, according to S. Hall, is just part of the “process of closure” (Hall 2000: 5). So identity is “the meeting point between the discourse and practices” which makes us subjects of discourse (Hall 2000:19). Identities are subject positions; they are positions which the subject as such should take up, knowing that they are representations. At the same time the representation is defined by the same author in this way:

“Representation is the production of meaning through language. Representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. [...] To

represent something is to describe or depict it, to call it up in the mind by description or portrayal or imagination; to place a likeness of it before us in our mind or in the senses. To represent also means to symbolize, stand for, to be a specimen of, or to substitute for. [...] There are two processes, two systems of representation, involved. First, there is the 'system' by which all sorts of objects, people and events are correlated with a set of concepts or mental representations which we carry around in our heads. [...]"

(Hall 1997: 17)

It follows that identity in its essence is a subject position which exists in a social hierarchy and power relations. What is more, this position corresponds to a representation; build from the place of the other, which plays essential role in the meaning production process. In this line of reasoning identity is just the way to exclude and build boundaries between the self and the other on the one hand and on the other it is a way to produce meaning and to categorize in a hierarchy.

The role of the religion in identity formation process

Agents build their understanding of the self or their identity within a historically accepted and constituted world view. According to T. Luckmann, one of the most prominent theorists who study the topic of religion, the world view is a form of religion per se, because it serves to legitimate the status quo and to integrate individuals in the already established social order. "The world view is an objective and stable social fact", it is a historical matrix of meanings by which individuals relate themselves to others and to the social order as a whole (Luckmann 1967: 69). Since the world view is a constructive element of personal identity, it follows that the personal identity is a "subjective expression of historical world view". What is more the subjective system always refers to the objective sacred cosmos and thus legitimates the subjective priorities that are constructive for personal identity. It is important to be stressed that neither the world view, nor the sacred cosmos are internalized as concepts but as meaning that determine patterns of priorities which individuals obey in their interaction by others (Luckmann 1967: 71). As indicated by P. Berger in *The social reality of religion* individuals seek to justify the meaning they ascribe to themselves in the framework of social reality comparing them with the objective ones (Berger 1973).

The autonomy and the consumer orientation of the individuals in the industrial societies on the one hand, and the specialization of religion on the other, leads to the transformation of religion and makes it private matter. The individual is independent consumer who selects from an assortment of meanings

without the mediation of any institution, because he has a direct access to the “religious market” (Luckmann 1967: 102). So the individual decides which themes are important and builds his own system of significance. This phenomenon is defined as “privatization of religion”, because the official model is set aside and no institution is engaged in a mediation role, but just the contrariwise, the individual by his own selects in what to believe. It follows that the process of selecting in what to believe in its essence is a process of identity formation.

The concept of religious identity and its measurement

Researchers do not have precise idea how and what kinds of mechanisms establish the positive relations between identity and religion. Some of the scientists such as Hans Mol suggest that religion provide flourishing framework in which the integration of the identity is possible. Others as M. Yinger states that every person has different need for religious explanations and it should be emphasized that everyone is religious in different level. One of the explanation of this tendency is that to be religious or to seek religious explanation is something “we learn to need” during the socialization (Yinger 1957: 91). It follows that the need to be religious is something we owe to our upbringing and training. So the differences in personal religiosity are not due to differences in individual characteristics but are more part of the culture and socio-cultural processes which influences the persons. Thus the religious identity is related to the importance one ascribes to being religious and is inclined to evoke it in different contexts. According to Burke, identities are organized in hierarchy and when a particular identity role is situated higher in the hierarchy, the possibility to be invoked in distinct situations is greater. Thus the term “salience” is used to indicate the possibility one identity role to be invoked and refers to the individual’s commitment to this particular role. Stryker and Serpe define the “salience” as the location of the identity in the hierarchy of identities which construct the self, so “the location of identity in this hierarchy is by definition a salience” (Stryker and Serpe 1982: 206).

The case of Pomaks: Building boundaries through religion

Religion is important for identity construction process although scientists have no precise explanation about the nature and the form of interconnection between these two categories. On the one hand, religion provides social framework for the construction of identity, and on the other, helps people to

locate themselves into the wider context. Individuals use religion to build and define their identities, to create meaning and draw boundaries in order to accentuate their distinctiveness and uniqueness. The case of the Pomaks in Bulgaria affirms that identities are dynamic and changes over time occur as a result of outside interventions and constant rejection. Furthermore, the relationships between different groups in the society create particular context in which identification process develops. We need to bear in mind that the context is crucial for the identity construction process. As a consequence in certain situations the choice of identity is determined more by the context rather by the role commitment.

Nowadays the Pomak identity is still at stake which results in the intense production of various versions about the real origins of the group members. The identity formation process is a way to produce a meaning in the framework of which the individual chooses in what to believe. This is a never ending process by the help of which the individual builds boundaries and try to show the difference between distinct groups. The most important feature of this process is the fact that the constructed identity is at the same time a subject position which indicates a particular place in the social hierarchy. This position corresponds to a representation build by others and implies a particular meaning. I argue that the reason for the religious revival of the group is not the fluctuating identity but the subject position ascribed by the identity itself. Somehow the Pomak term becomes a symbol which came forth with particular meanings.

My experience during my field work has led me to assume that the Pomak notion produces emotional reactions among respondents because it is loaded on the one hand with positive but on the other with negative meanings. Some of them accept Pomak term as an offense whereas others declare that they are proud to be called Pomak. Many respondents avoid talking about Pomaks but others find motivation to do it in narratives justifying their ancient roots. Under these circumstances the focus was set on the Pomak notion which makes a lot of respondents feel uncomfortable. The problem with the notion stems from the fact that Pomaks were described in many official documents, including archives, scientific papers and collection of documents issued by the State Security Agency in the period 1949-1989, as people who are not aware of their own identity. The representation of Pomaks is constructed on the grounds of concepts such as backwardness, slave psychology, fanatically religious, unwilling to build and maintain relationships with people outside their own group, apathetic to life, following old traditions, unable to make difference between nationality and religion etc. The act of naming is in its essence an act of representing thus identifying someone as a Pomak means that we ascribe to him the whole collection of negative attributes which put the subject in an unfavorable social position. The subject is obliged to take this

identity up; knowing that it is a representation constructed by the position of the other and thus can never be identical to what the subject has put in it.

[...] The Pomaks are treated as second-class people. Others do not have a good opinion of Pomaks. For example, I remember that many of my colleagues hide that they are Pomaks. I suppose that they were concerned about the others' reactions.[...] (M, 47, Madan)

[...] Maybe we are not right in doing something in a way we do it. Someone has to show us, what and how to do it. The Pomaks are not like the Gypsies, but they are still treated as second class people. [...] (F, 40, Rudozem)

[...] Maybe being a Pomak or Muslim will affect my place in the social hierarchy in a negative way because the majority of people don't have good opinion of us but this does not bother me. [...] (M, 22, Smolyan)

[...] In fact others treat us as a second class people, and we worry to say who we are. [...] (F, 57, Smolyan)

[...] Being treated as a second class citizen makes me unconfident about whether others respect me for who I am. [...] (M, 69, Smolyan)

A number of interviews testify that respondents are not aware whether others recognize their sociocultural specifics and respect their choices to believe in one or other narratives of origin. The rejection of any narrative is in fact a rejection of the meaning communicated by it. Resisting the attempt to dismiss the subject position imposed by the others leads the communication between the parties to dead end. At the same time, under these circumstances Pomaks try to convince others that they deserve to occupy different subject position by inventing various narratives of origin. Somehow they try to construct particular narrative reality in which they are descendants of the first Muslims who have lived in Smolyan province. In this way they are not the betrayer who were converted to Islam any more but bearers of ancient knowledge.

Besides other meanings, the term Pomak denotes specific geographic region and people who leave there. So when the respondent gives an answer to the question "where are you from" he knows that in the eyes of the other party it is obvious that he is Pomak. In other words, the respondents claim that they could not escape this reality and explicating their place of living or the place of their birth means that they are automatically categorized under the category "Pomak". They could not break away from the symbolic violence, applied by the term itself. In this line of thought the term works under erasure, because it implies a chain of attributes anyhow even though it is not used. The respondents try to demonstrate that they are not interested in the "game of naming" and act as they are not concerned when Pomak issue is in question

but this silence do not help them to combat the symbolic violence, the term applies on them.

In order to change their subject position ascribed by the notion Pomak which is doubtless unfavorable, respondents identify themselves just as Muslims. They make the religious identity salient which liberates them from the negativity accumulated during the years. This strategy is in its essence a revolt against the symbolic violence and the marginal position that result from the widely communicated damaging image of the group. In respondents view to be identified just as a Muslim is more general but, at the same time, positive and what is more they avoid the necessity to explain and argue who they are and to prove their loyalty claiming that they are first of all Bulgarians and after that Muslims. It is more than clear that respondents try to reject the implied subject position which is attached to the Pomak identity, to reject the negativities that are prescribed to them as a group of people, to erase the term Pomak at all. In this reality they search for a term or concept which works for their image and interests not against them. Even though the respondents put all the efforts to diminish the effect of the notion and the subject position it prescribes, it is still there and evokes discomfort and anger, provoking at the same time fierce debates about the history of the origin of Pomaks.

[...]In this city we are Pomaks, Muslims. I prefer to be called just Muslim because we are Muslims although we speak Bulgarian. If I say that I am Bulgarian you will not know that I am a Pomak, right? [...](M, 59, Madan)

[...] There are people who don't like neither Pomaks nor Muslims. For example one of my professors made such a statement in front of all my colleagues. This doesn't bother me at all I declare that I am a Muslim above all. [...] (M, 25, Madan)

[...]The Pomaks, we are the first Muslims in this area and we managed to preserve our religion. That is why I prefer to be called just Muslim. Certainly being Muslim means being man with good virtues. I could not say the same for being Pomak because the notion contains some negative traits. [...] (M, 22, Smolayn)

On the one hand giving preference to a Muslim identity ensures movement upwards in the social hierarchy but on the other prescribes specific lifestyle. Respondents report that thanks to the religious leaders, mainly those educated abroad, people obtain knowledge that was inaccessible before. This phenomenon leads to the awakening of the interest in religious topics and desire to enrich and correct some aspects of the religious conduct. In T. Luckmann words, the individual selects from an assortment of meanings, because he has a direct access to the "religious market". So he decides what is important for him and thus builds his own system of beliefs. As C. Glock and R. Stark point out, the religious commitment refers to the adherence to a set of beliefs

associated with one's religious tradition, the ritual involvement, and the performance of public religious practices, experience, perceptions and religious knowledge (Glock, Stark 1975). Albeit the religious identity is mostly accentuated as main feature of the group members, they do not adhere strictly to the religious norms and practices and, what is more, not all of them do have sufficient religious knowledge. In addition, some religious rituals are practiced in accordance with the tradition even though sometimes their performance confronts the religious norms, prescribed in the sacred texts. Hence, the religious identity salience not always indicates high religious norms adherence and commitment. It follows that religion is important for the identity construction but religious identity salience depends on the context and its evoking is not always positively correlated to the religious role commitment.

In this regard D. Lee claims that, despite the conviction that people enact rituals because they share the same beliefs, individuals do not interpret the meaning of the rituals in one and the same way. Most people find different meanings behind the rituals (Lee 2005: 21). It is not the meaning of the ritual what is important but the fact that people are part of the larger agency and that they accentuate their affiliation in performing specific rituals. Thus rituals are used to demonstrate solidarity and loyalty, but it doesn't mean that they carry one and the same meaning for the people who perform them. The phenomenon also could be related to the internalized beliefs that society communicates to the group. These beliefs become part of the self-image of the group members over time. It is shared belief that religion is from immense importance and being Muslim is crucial for the Pomaks. Thus, although the group members do not adhere strictly to religious norms and practices, they claim that being Muslim is important in order to fit to the conditions and stress the distinctiveness.

The most important function of the identity is to categorize. In this particular case every attempt to intervene in identification processes evokes more severe adherence to distinct identity and rejection of the identity, imposed from above. In order to bring arguments in the defence of the decision to be called just Muslims respondents often refer to religious texts and Sunnah. In this way they justify their right to define who they are and what their place on the social hierarchy is. Thus the religious tradition become a source of objective arguments which group members use motivated by subjective concerns related to the subject position ascribed by their identity. The more religious knowledge they obtain, the more competent they feel to defend their decisions and to justify their position in the society. This reality determines the competitive attitude which leads to intensive religious ritualization. In the context of power relations this is just a step on the way to reject the subject position to which Pomaks are attached. So the religious identity is used not

only to accentuate the difference and to build boundaries but to change the subject position prescribed by another identity too.

In conclusion, the fact that identity construction and validation is a process which is endless and flows in the specific social framework, where power relations are present is a precondition for the problematization of identity. The fact that individuals have multiple identities which are related to different roles that they play in social reality is not problematic per se, but it grows to be an issue when the question is politicized and rejected by the majority.

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УЛОГА РЕЛИГИЈЕ У ПРОЦЕСУ ФОРМИРАЊА ИДЕНТИТЕТА:
СЛУЧАЈ БУГАРСКИХ МУСЛИМАНА (ПОМАКА)

Сажетак: Циљ мог рада јесте да покажем да идентитет бугарских муслимана (Помака) није јединствена категорија већ је, управо супротно, у сталној промени и укључује противречне елементе. Тиме се наглашава чињеница да се идентитети конструишу у посебном дискурсу и односима који могу бити да, када говоримо о идентитетима, не можемо их више сводити или интерпретирати само као приписане особине и значења већ и као покушај одвајања и искључивања. Штавише, наша анализа пружа аргументе да се бугарски муслимани ослањају на религиозну традицију да би изградиле свој свет и тако себе сместе у друштвеној стварности. У његовој суштини јесте процес формирања идентитета али у исто време је то такође и процес диференцијације и затварања. Свесни чињенице да идентитети укључују приписана значења, бугарски муслимани (Помаци) одбијају да прихвате успостављено и покушавају да створе нову позицију субјекта за себе у којој су вредновани на основу својих социокултурних специфичности које произилазе из њихове религијске и културне традиције.

Кључне речи: бугарски муслимани, Помаци, репрезентација, идентитети, религиозна традиција.