

## POMAKS AS A BALKAN COMMUNITY AND EVIDENCE OF TURKISHNESS IN THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF IDENTITY\*

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### ABSTRACT

Many nations have been affected by this negative process, but not as much as Pomaks... Because in the geography of the Balkans, there is not any community other than Pomaks that grows by maturing in fierce conditions for the sake of protecting their identity. Pomaks, who were accepted as Islamised Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Serbian etc. in their countries without looking at how they perceived themselves and were under severe pressure, cruelty and policies of assimilation, are unfortunately still grappling over these primitive practices today. This community, called as Pomak, Torbesh, Gorani etc. in the countries where they live, is Muslim in essence and it considers itself Turkish. Therefore, it is a humanistic and scientific necessity to search for elements of Turkishness in the cultural codes and history of this community which has never given up and been deterred from its Muslim-Turkish identity by resisting all kinds of pressure, torment and policies towards their identity in a period of centuries and to put them forward with scientific criteria. Since perception is about the cultural identity, consciousness of relativity and accumulation of an individual or a community above all things, it is necessary to go over Pomak communities from these aspects. If the elements of Turkishness in the Pomaks' perception of identity can be put forward with concrete examples, it can be easily understood why they persistently put emphasis on "Turkishness". In this study, the analogy between customs such as birth, death, marriage, food culture etc., and the social and collective memory, of the community which has been discussed in ethnical aspects such as Pomak, Gorani, Torbesh etc. and that of Turkey & Central Asian Turkishness will be pointed out. Thus, it will be seen that claims attributed to them as "Islamized Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian and Serbian" remain in the air, and on the contrary, the view that they belong to Turkish history and culture, and their Turkishness will grow stronger.

**Keywords:** Pomaks, Gorali, Torbesh, Balkans, Turk, Bulgarian, Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia, Kosovo, Identity.

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## BİR BALKAN TOPLULUĞU OLARAK POMAKLAR VE KİMLİK ALGILAMALARINDA TÜRK LÜK BULGULARI

### ÖZET

Balkanlar coğrafyasında, Pomaklar kadar kimliklerini koruma adına âdeta ateşte pişerek yeşeren bir başka topluluk yoktur. Onların kendilerini ne şekilde algıladıklarına bakılmaksızın, yaşadıkları ülkelerde Müslümanlaştırılmış Bulgar, Müslümanlaştırılmış Yunan, Müslümanlaştırılmış Makedon, Müslümanlaştırılmış Sırp vb. kabul edilen ve üzerlerinde bin bir baskı, zulüm ve asimilasyon politikaları uygulanmış olan Pomaklar, maalesef bugün de bu çağ dışı uygulamaların girdabında çırpınmaktadır. Yaşadıkları ülkelerde Pomak, Torbeş, Goralı vb. adlarla anılan bu topluluk, esas itibarıyla Müslümandır ve kendilerini Türk kabul ederler. Bu sebeple, yüzyıllarla ifade edilen bir süreçte, kimliklerine dönük her türlü baskı, işkence ve politikalara direnerek Müslüman Türk kimliğinden vazgeçmeyen, vazgeçirilemeyen bu topluluğun tarihinde ve kültürel kodlarında Türklük unsurlarını aramak ve bunları bilimsel ölçütlerle ortaya koymak, insani ve bilimsel bir zorunluluktur. Algı, her şeyden önce bir birey veya toplumun birikimleri, mensubiyet şuuru ve kültürel kimliği ile ilgili olduğuna göre, Pomak topluluklarına bu açılardan bakmak gerekir. Pomakların kimlik algılamalarındaki Türklük unsurları somut örneklerle ortaya konulabilirse, onların ısrarla niye “Türk” vurgusu yaptıkları da kolayca anlaşılabilir. Bu çalışmada, etnik anlamda üzerlerinde fırtınalar koparılan Pomak, Goralı, Torbeş vb. adlarla anılan topluluğun toplumsal ve kolektif hafızası demek olan doğum, ölüm, evlilik, yemek kültürü vb. gelenek ve göreneklerinin Türkiye ve Orta Asya Türklüğü ile olan paralelliklere dikkat çekilecektir. Böylece, onlara atfedilen Müslümanlaştırılmış Bulgar, Yunan, Makedon ve Sırp iddialarının ne kadar havada kaldığı görülecek, buna karşılık Türklükleri, Türk tarih ve kültür dairesine ait oldukları görüşü güçlenecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Pomak, Goralı, Torbeş, Balkanlar, Türk, Bulgar, Bulgaristan, Yunanistan, Makedonya, Kosova, Kimlik.

### 1. THE GEOGRAPHY WHERE HISTORY BLENDS NATIONS: THE BALKANS

Let it be admitted that the Balkans which is the residence geography of Pomaks-object of thesis study- is one of the most beautiful but troublesome geographies in the world.

The Balkans have been the intersection point of many languages, religions, races and cultures in every period of history; and as a natural result of this, it has become a geography where a bright and rich heritage has been found. While the brightness and richness built on these differences gave the best examples of comfort and tolerance during the peace period when political-military power and stability dominated; it turned into a desert with the smell of

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blood and gunpowder where the primitive idea evoking the most savage emotions of human race, that is, “I must destroy those who are not of my nationality and who are not like me” was used during the period when political stability got lost.<sup>1</sup>

Because of its geopolitical and geostrategical location, the Balkans has witnessed events which can rip through a geography such as immigration, settlement, war, invasion and conquest. This historical process has turned the Balkans into a field of constant battle so that, according to Maria Todorova, a Bulgarian historian, this period far from peace and comfort created the term of “becoming Balkanized”, which was added to the curse repertoire of Europe in the early 20s, meaning the same as “not only the shattering of big and viable political units but also the return to tribalism, reactionism and barbarism”.<sup>2</sup>

### 2. THE BALKANS AS TURKISH CULTURE GEOGRAPHY

The Balkans is a majorly mountainous territory. The terminus “Balkan” is a Turkish word meaning “steep and forested mountain chains”.<sup>3</sup> Today, it is a territory where approximately 55 million people live in an area of 500.000 square kilometres.

“The oldest residents of the “Balkan Peninsula” are the Celts, Ilirs and Thracians. As well as, Macedonians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Romanians and Slavic people settled on the land in question.”<sup>4</sup> The Balkans is at least an important geography like Anatolia and Central Asia for the Turkish and their own history. Because if Scythians, whose Turkishness has been discussed, is left out, the history of various Turkish tribes (such as Avar, Bulgarian, Patzinak, Kipchak/Kuman, Uz communities), notably Huns descend back into the 4th century in Europe and a specially in the Balkans.

The Huns who passed Tuna in 378 and moved forward to Thrace, dominated over the Balkans by prevailing in the whole Balkans and a major part of Thrace after 395. After the Huns’ power over the Balkans was diminished and their management was set an end with the death of Attila in 453, Avars (mid-6th century), Tuna Bulgarians (7th century), Hungarians and some Turkish tribes (9th century), Patzinak, Kipchak (Kuman) and Uz Turks (9th-11th

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<sup>1</sup> Özçelik, Selahattin, *Balkanlar’da Kimlik Arayışı Bulgar Terör Örgütünün Anatomisi*, İlgi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2006, s.10.

<sup>2</sup> Todorova, Maria, *Balkanları Tahayyül Etmek*, (translated by) Dilek Şendil, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2006, s.17.

<sup>3</sup> Türkçe Sözlük, Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Alp, İlker, *Pomak Türkleri (Kumanlar-Kıpçaklar)*, Trakya Üniversitesi Yayınları, Edirne, 2008, ss.1-2.

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centuries) and lastly Ottoman Turks (14th century) settled in the Balkans respectively, and dominated the region politically and culturally.<sup>5</sup> Contrary to popular belief, the Turks have not been a neighbor to the Balkans; but they have been directly natives of the area since 1640.

There are Turks from Anatolia who came to the Balkans from south before the Ottomans. Izzettin Keykavus, the Sultan of Seljuq, who escaped the Mongols and took shelter with the Byzantines in 1261, was settled in Dobruca in 1263 by the Byzantine Emperor and 40 Turkish nomadic groups who were led by the famous sufi Sari Saltuk. This Anatolian Turkmen groups under the patronage of Nogay, Commander of Golden Horde, built other towns here with the town of Baba Saltuk. The Arabic traveller İbn Battuta, who was there in 1332, refers to the town of Baba as “a city inhabited by the Turks”.<sup>6</sup>

Before the arrival of the Ottomans in the Balkans, the historical role and existence in the territory of the Patzinak, Kipchak/Kuman and Uz Turks who migrated to the Balkans in the 11th-12th centuries must especially be emphasized. It is understood that Kipchak/Kumans preserved their existence and were active politically and culturally until the 15th century. The best witness to this is the work “Codex Cumanicus”, which was written by German priests and Italian merchants, and whose only copy remains in Saint Marcus Library in Venice. This work, which was written in Kipchak Turkish and the date 11.07.1303 was written on, includes not only dictionaries of Latin-Persian-Kipchak Turkish-Kipchak Turkish-German, German-Kipchak Turkish; but also carols about Christianity, riddles and grammar rules.

Turkish communities such as Huns, Avar, Bulgarian, Patzinak, Kipchak/Kuman, Uz etc. who came the Balkans from north before Ottoman Turks, have been subject to culture change or perished under other Balkan communities after they lost their political dominance. While the Bulgarians lost their language and culture; Huns, Avar, Patzinak and Kipchak/Kuman Turks remained under the influence of other communities and changed their language. These are the ancestors of today’s communities like Pomaks, Torbesh, Gorali etc.<sup>7</sup> because it cannot be said that these Turkish communities evaporated. As a matter of fact, village and location names today such as Kumanova in Macedonia, Kumantsi in Sofia, Kumanca in Nevrokop (Gotze Delchev), Komana

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<sup>5</sup> Kafesoğlu, İbrahim, Türk Milli Kültürü, Boğaziçi Yayınları, İstanbul, 1992, s.52.

<sup>6</sup> İnalçık, Halil, Türkler ve Balkanlar, BAL-TAM Türklük Bilgisi 3, Balkan Türkoloji Araştırmaları Merkezi, Prizren, ss. 20-21.

<sup>7</sup> Alp, age., ss.2-3.

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in Nigbolu (Nikopol) are just a few examples of the names Kipchak/Kuman Turks left in the Balkans.<sup>8</sup>

As it is known, the most stable and peaceful era of the Balkan geography was the reign of Ottomans, who ruled over the Balkans from mid-14th century until early 20th century, after the era of the Roman Empire. During this time, the Ottomans reconstructed Balkan geography and imprinted their seals to the Balkans both materially and morally. Therefore, Maria Todorova –Bulgarian historian- is right to say that: “It is absurd to look for Ottoman heritage in the Balkans, because the Balkans itself is a heritage of the Ottomans.”<sup>9</sup>

The era of the Ottomans undoubtedly became the time for peace of the Balkans. However, the period after the Ottomans was not so bright for the Balkans. Because it turned into an area of tension and battle between nations and cultures after the Ottoman Empire was weakened by signing Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699. Balkan nations were constantly under internal and external pressure, and lived without peace and comfort during this process.

### 3. AN EXCLUSIVE AND MODEST BALKAN COMMUNITY: POMAKS

The origin of Pomaks whose identity and ethnic roots have been scientifically and politically discussed for the last century is the subject of this study. Have the Pomaks who are considered to be Aren/Achiryan, Torbesh/Türkbaş and Goralı etc. and have the same language, culture and belief a local Islamized or are they a Turkish community, who live in the Balkans?

It should be admitted that communities with a background of different races and cultures have been mixed and merged so much in the Balkans where language, religion, culture and nationalities blend together that it has become very difficult to distinguish them with sharp marks. Therefore, it is never true to take into account only one element such as race, language and religion in the Balkans which was characterized as “a geography not producing history, but consuming it” by Winston Churchill, the English politician. Besides, how true and scientific it is to define “nationality” as solely based on “language” or “religion”?

As mentioned above, some detections have been made with regards to the context of nation and nationality in the Balkans where races, languages, religions and cultures were mixed together and effected each other through the history; and history and science branches such as ethnography, social science,

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<sup>8</sup> Uzunçarşılı, İ. Hakkı, Osmanlı Tarihi, C.1, TTK Yayınları, Ankara, 1988, s. 183.

<sup>9</sup> Todorova, age., s.46.

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linguistics, literature, art history, archaeology etc. should be seen as the laboratory of languages, religions and cultures referred as “the other” and their data should be used.

If these languages, religions and culture differences of the community considered as “the other” are not respected and these differences become a battle of hostility and power, dark clouds cover that geography and never-ending battles and struggles take the place of peace and comfort. This is the kind of tough and heavy atmosphere that the Balkans spent their last hundred years. Unfortunately, today, as we are in the 100th anniversary of Balkan Wars, the Balkans have still seen as a geography where forced migration, ethnic cleansing, despotism, repression, pressure of religion and nationality exchange by force, and genocide took place for Turks and their relative communities.

Many nations have been affected by this negative process, but not as much as Pomaks... Because in the geography of the Balkans, there is not any community other than Pomaks that grows by maturing in fierce conditions for the sake of protecting their identity. Pomaks, who were accepted as Islamised Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian, Serbian etc. in their countries without looking at how they perceived themselves and were under severe pressure, cruelty and policies of assimilation, are unfortunately still grappling over these primitive practices today.

This community, called as Pomak, Torbesh, Gorani etc. in the countries where they live, is Muslim in essence and it considers itself Turkish. Therefore, it is a humanistic and scientific necessity to search for elements of Turkishness in the cultural codes and history of this community which has never given up and been deterred from its Muslim-Turkish identity by resisting all kinds of pressure, torment and policies towards their identity in a period of centuries and to put them forward with scientific criteria. Since perception is about the cultural identity, consciousness of relativity and accumulation of an individual or a community above all things, it is necessary to go over Pomak communities from these aspects. If the elements of Turkishness in the Pomaks’ perception of identity can be put forward with concrete examples, it can be easily understood why they persistently put emphasis on “Turkishness”.

In this study, the analogy between customs such as birth, death, marriage, food culture etc., and the social and collective memory, of the community which has been discussed in ethnical aspects such as Pomak, Gorani, Torbesh etc. and that of Turkey & Central Asian Turkishness will be pointed out. Thus, it will be seen that claims attributed to them as “Islamised Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian and Serbian” remain in the air, and on the contrary, the view that they belong to Turkish history and culture, and their Turkishness will grow stronger.

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Pomaks live in Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania and Turkey under the names of Pomak, Torbesh, Goralı, Agaryan/Achryan etc. They live mostly in Rodophes, Pirin and Vardar Macedonia in the Balkans mostly. Lofça (Lovech), Plevne (Pleven), Teteve, Rahova in North Bulgaria; Plovdiv in Middle Bulgaria; Thessaloniki in Greece; Manastır (Bitola) in Macedonia; İşkodra (Shkodra) in Albania; and Kosovo are some of the territories where Pomaks have lived with different names.<sup>10</sup>

After the Ottoman-Russian War in 1877-1878, a major part of the population migrated to Turkey as did other Turkish and Muslim communities. Today, these Balkan immigrants live in cities such as Edirne, Kırklareli, Tekirdağ, Çanakkale, Balıkesir, Bursa, Sakarya, Manisa, Eskişehir etc.

I do not want to explain the origins of the names Pomak, Torbesh, Aren/Achiryan which have torn the Balkans into pieces with hostile nationalism policies and dreams of “Great Bulgaria, Great Greece, Great Serbia, Great Macedonia...” These attitudes towards Balkans region are results of ideas and attitude that make this area uninhabitable for all nations without discriminating religion, language and nationality for over a century. It is clear that the claims of origin for most of these local names, if not all of them, are forced, cannot solve the identity problem of the communities mentioned above and cause no benefits in regards to identity perception. The bibliography at the end of this study shows the claims and studies on this topic.

Ironically, the countries who regard Pomaks as their own adopt the idea that they are not Turkish, but each one of them reject the claim of the others. For instance, like the Greek, Macedonian and Serbian, the Bulgarians claim that “Pomaks are not of Turkish origin”; but separate themselves from the “Islamized Greek”, “Islamized Macedonian”, “Islamized Serbian”, even “Islamized Russian” and even struggle against them because they consider them as “Islamized Bulgarians”. In this case, regarding the fact that there is not any common conviction accepted by scientific authorities to the various ideas reflecting national policies of each claimant country until now.

### 3.1. The Mistake of Calumination to the Ottoman

To emphasize again, Pomaks/Torbesh/Achiryan/Goralı is a community who consider themselves as Turks even though they are called as Pomak in Bulgaria, Torbesh in Macedonia, Goralı in Kosovo, and Pomak or Achiryan in Greece.

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<sup>10</sup> Memişoğlu, Hüseyin, *Balkanlarda Pomak Türkleri*, Türk Dünyası Yayınları, İstanbul, 1999, s.11.

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The phrase of “being Islamized by force” shows that the Ottomans, who were the symbol of peace in the Balkans, were not treated fair. It is a historical fact that the Ottoman Empire, who employed a nationality system based on religion, did not interfere in the languages, religion and cultures of the nations under their patronage. No further discussion is necessary. If the Ottoman Turks had limited the free use of language, religion and other freedoms of these nations and assimilated them, how could many nations protect their individualities until now and continue their existence as a separate nation? If we can talk about nations such as Bulgarian, Macedonian, Greek, Romanian, Serbian, Albanian etc. this is only because the Ottoman Empire gave these nations freedom for religion, language and other areas. Because Muslim Turks did not even try to assimilate the nations living in countries they conquered by force or progressively. In order to do so, they did not interfere in the religion, language and nationality of the diversely ethnical Christians. The words of Ottoman Sultan Mahmut the Second, “I would like to see my people in mosque, Christians in church, the Jewish in synagogue” should not be forgotten.

There’s a saying in Turkish: “A spear does not fit in a sack.” The truth cannot be hidden and dissembled for a long time. As a matter of fact, Bulgarian historian Stoyan Dinkov expresses the tolerance of the Ottomans in his book “Ottoman-Roman Empire, Bulgarians and Turks” As follows:

*“Bulgaria was a part of a big country. 52 nations were under the dominance of the Ottoman Empire. All these countries are independent, modern states. These states were a part of the Ottoman Empire for about 400 to 600 years and also preserved their own faith, living style and traditions. There are no nations being assimilated under the patronage of the Ottoman Empire. There are no nations losing their ethnical origins because of the Ottoman Empire. Our nation was protected once Bulgaria came under the patronage of the Ottoman because our nation was under a heavy state during this time. It had little land, it was powerless and was divided into three in the 14th century. Hungary had its eye on Vidin Bulgaria. Serbia and Romania also had their eyes on Bulgaria. If the Ottoman hadn’t come, Bulgaria would have had what happens to the weak coming to them... What would have been left of us? Nothing. Our ethnical identity retained it unlimited union with the arrival of the Ottoman, even though it was a part of the great Ottoman Empire.”<sup>11</sup>*

If the political objectives of the Ottomans were to Islamize the Christians, they would turn the Gagauzians who were of Turkish origins and knew no other language than Turkish firstly. Because this would have been easier. As it is known, Gagauzians carry on their existence as Orthodox

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<sup>11</sup> <http://balturk.org.tr/stoyan-dinkov-bizi-yok-olmaktan-osmanli-kutardi/>, (24.01.2012).



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Christians today. Therefore, the claims of the Greek, Bulgarians, Macedonians and Serbians on the Pomaks/Torbesh/Gorali being Islamized by force are unsound and are merely malediction.

### 3.2. Are the Pomaks/Torbesh/Gorali of Turkish Origins?

As a Turkish researcher, while these groups claim that they are Turkish reliable, which thesis do we believe in? Before expressing our opinion, it should be stated that the most correct information and result on the community referred as Pomak/Torbesh/Gorali etc. whose identity has been discussed about, will be obtained by objective and unbiased scientific researches.

In the case that scientific methods will be used in objective and unbiased researches and investigations, firstly, it will be understood that the claims that Pomak, Torbesh and Gorali are Bulgarians, Greek, Macedonians and even Russian are put forward in relation to political plans and projects.

I would like to share a personal observation. These nations being called as Pomak, Torbesh and Gorali, who were claimed to be Bulgarians, Macedonians, Greek and Serbian as a means to an end, perceive them as an insult and don't like being remembered with these names.

As a Turkish researcher, it is questionable to suggest that these nations are Turks without being biased and presenting other scientific data as much as the Pomaks are Muslims assume themselves as Turks. I will not be ignored as well.

The words of Dr. Ebubekir Sofuoğlu, from Sakarya University who decided to study studying on the Gorali after meeting them as he was working in the University of Prishtina/Kosovo in 2005-2006 academic year show the effective way to define the term "Gorali":

*"I started collecting data on every area in the light of scientific style and discipline during my time here. The notion that the Gorali were not Serbian, Bulgarian or Macedonians under the light of data in this process. The works that were continued in this style highlighted the ideas on the Gorali of being Turkish. According to the data that we collected, I decided to organise a scientific trip to Gora, isolating myself from my thoughts on this topic to become definite even though the idea on the Gorali of being Turkish was almost certain to us."*<sup>12</sup>

Turkish researches observe the Balkans with the same methods for the last 3 years. Our opinions have developed on the same direction as long as we can collect information and documents with biased and scientific methods and

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<sup>12</sup> Şar Dağlarının Tepesindeki Kaya Gora Abidesi, ed. Ebubekir Sofuoğlu, Fsf Print Hause, İstanbul, 2008, Önsöz.

interpret these information and documents with the same methods presenting them to the world community as they are. However, it should be also indicated that if Pomaks request to be a part of big Turkish family it should be respected as a historical relative community is considered.

Because, “*Societies do not change very easily. Although there are some changes in the appearances of these societies and communities, when we look upon the **social genetics** and dig down deep on their stigmas, it can be witnessed that many things have been practised since the early ages. This is called collective memory.*”<sup>13</sup>

In this study, we will back up the claims of this community referred as Pomak/Torbesh/Gorali etc. with data in the context of their rituals and beliefs (birth, marriage and death, etc. that is collective memory) rather than historical information and documents, thus showing that their perception of Turkishness is not futile. In order to do so, we will approach the information and documents including written sources and personal observations under these topics:

### **3.2.1. Appearances of Turkish Culture in Pomak/Torbesh/Gorali Communities**

### **3.2.2. Abstract Cultural Heritage: Customs, Traditions and Folk Beliefs**

A number of popular beliefs, customs and traditions living in the collective memory of Pomak/Torbesh/Gorali show that they had in relations with not only Turks of Turkey, but also older Turks who were members of pre-Islamic religion of “Gök Tanrı”. This takes us to the opinion that they were the member of Turkish communities that came to Balkans with this belief and converted Islam later. Indeed, the information and findings<sup>14</sup> of sociologists and folklorists who collect information through observation and qualitative data analysis about such communities show that other than Turkey Turks, they have many similarities and partnerships, especially with Kazakh and Kyrgyz communities in Central Asia, starting from folk beliefs, rituals and traditions about food and cuisine culture to birth, marriage and death.

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<sup>13</sup> Taşdelen, Musa, and others, “Goralıların Âdetleri Üzerine: İlk Tespitler”, Şar Dağlarının Tepesindeki Kaya Gora Abidesi, (ed.) Ebubekir Sofuoğlu, Fsf Print Hause, İstanbul, 2008, s. 12.

<sup>14</sup> For the information in detail, please see: Kalafat, Yaşar, Balkanlardan Uluğ Türkistan’a Türk Halk İnançları, Berikan Yayınevi, Ankara, 2006; Kalafat, Yaşar, “Karşılaştırmalı Gora/Goralı Halk İnançları”, 2023 Aylık Dergi, Sayı: 123, ss. 46-49; Aksoy, Mustafa, “Makedonya’da Balballar, İskitler-Türkler”, Türk Dünyası Tarih Kültür Dergisi, İstanbul, Eylül 2011, ss. 9-13.

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### 3.2.1.1. 1. Natal Customs

In Pomak/Torbesh/Gora communities, as the case in Anatolian Turks, a new born baby is washed with salty water. In Anatolian and Central Asian Turkish communities, boys are preferred to girls. Because the idea of pursuing the bloodline and controlling the family is more dominant. With the occasion of birth, rich families cut of sheep or goat, give feasts, distribute gifts and gratuities. These celebrations that reflect the joy of the new born are called “babina” by Torbesh people in Macedonia, “simidal” by Pomak people that migrated to Izmir, Turkey from Plovdiv, Bulgaria. We see similar customs in Kazakh and Anatolian Turks.<sup>15</sup>

In Pomak/Torbesh/Gorali communities, on the 40th day of baby’s birth, dinner is given, and religious ceremony is done. After the 40th day, they put lucky charm on the baby in order to protect him/her. The eldest woman in the house puts the baby in his/her cradle. In Kazakh community, after the baby is 40 days old, all neighbours and villagers are gathered together by the baby’s grandparents or parents and they give a cradle ceremony.<sup>16</sup> Here, we should mention that the number “forty” has a very special and important place in Turkish folk culture and belief.

In Pomak/Torbesh/Gorali communities, it is understood that, starting from pre-Islamic times to the present day, there has been a belief of protection from bad souls or ghosts -arised from old Turkish folk belief “kara iye”- known as “al karısı”, “incubus” and “al basma” which pesters newly delivered women in their postnatal periods. For this purpose, puerperant women tie their waists with a belt. During this forty-day postnatal period, puerperant women are not left alone and taken care of by someone else. Similar customs can be seen in Turkey and Central Asia. In this sense, the saying “Puerperant’s grave is open for forty days” shows the similarity and importance of the subject in Anatolian Turkishness.<sup>17</sup>

In Pomak/Torbesh/Gorali communities, a child’s first teeth extraction and also first words are important sources of pleasure. As well as “tooth toy” is done, gifts are given with the joy of the first words. In Kazakh communities, this situation is also an important reason of joy andit’s celebrated via grater rituals. When a child starts to speak his/her first words, a verbal ceremony is done so that he/she can speak quickly. Sheep are sacrificed; the child has to be

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<sup>15</sup> Taşdelen, and others, age., s.14; Kalafat, *Balkanlar’da Uluğ Türkistan’a...*, s.44; Çetin, Necat, “Rumeli Pomak Muhacirlerinin Kurduğu (İskân Edildiği) Osmaniye (Kavakalan) Köyü (İzmir-Bayındır-Çınardibi) ve 1904 Yılı Osmanlı Nüfus Sayımı”, 2011, <http://fikiryolu.net>, (14.02.2012).

<sup>16</sup> Taşdelen, and others, age., s.14; Kalafat, “Karşılaştırmalı Gora/Gorali..”, s.48.

<sup>17</sup> Aynı yerde.

feed with sheep tongue. Kazakhs feed the child with sheep tongue so that he/she can speak fluently. Gorali people feed their stammering children with sheep tongue so that they can speak fluently.<sup>18</sup>

In Pomak/Torbesh/Gora communities, as the hair and nail cuts of the baby are hidden, nail cuts are buried regardless of the child's age. By the Kazakh Turks where similar practises are seen, baby's hair and nails are buried. Burial of nail cuts is also seen in Anatolia.<sup>19</sup>

In Pomak/Torbesh/Gorali communities, they shave the baby's hair, but leave a bang on his/her head. If the baby is a girl, beads are attached to her bang. Kazakhs used to cut the boys' hair and leave a tuft of hair right in the middle of his head to protect him from evil spirit. Particularly bang release is not only just seen in Gorali and Kazakhs but also in some nomadic communities in Central Anatolia.<sup>20</sup>

In Pomak/Torbesh/Gorali communities, in Anatolian and Central Asian Turkish communities, the eldest man in the house is privileged to name the child. In this custom, each family has to know the names of the seven core ancestors. This is true also in Kazakh and other Central Asian communities. A striking point is that Gorali people, who know the names of their ancestors from seven generations backwards, give their children Turkish names such as "Arslan, Demir, Turan". Existence of these names associates the thought of their survival from pre-Islamic period to the present.<sup>21</sup>

### 3.2.1.1.1.2. Marriage and Wedding Customs

In Pomak/Torbesh/Gorali communities, unity of family has a male-dominated structure. Big and extended families are very common. In this regard, especially Kazakh family structure coincides with Central Asian Turkish family structure. Respect for the father and parental authority are extremely powerful in traditional family structure in Anatolia.<sup>22</sup> It can be stressed that that similar family structure is still maintained in those Pomak/Torbesh/Gorali communities who migrated to Turkey.

In Pomak/Torbesh/Gorali communities, with gradually decreasing rate, it is very common to marry by eloping with a girl, as it is in Anatolia and Central Asia Turks. Eloping with a girl was a necessary ritual for the legitimacy of the marriage until recently in Altai and Yakut Turks. Eloping with a girl, in Central

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<sup>18</sup> Aynı yerde.

<sup>19</sup> Taşdelen, and others, age., s.15.

<sup>20</sup> Aynı yerde.

<sup>21</sup> Taşdelen, and others, age., ss. 15-16.

<sup>22</sup> Taşdelen, and others, age., s. 17.

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Asian and Anatolian Turkish communities, can be considered as a ritual met with tolerance when occurred by means of marriage. Despite the prohibition of the Kazakhs, today it's a very frequently occurring form of marriage.<sup>23</sup>

It is obviously that there were not many differences between Pomak/Torbesh/Gorali weddings and Central Asian and Anatolian wedding rituals. In the weddings, the custom that groom is beaten up while entering the bridal chamber, accompanied by a drum and a clarion, continues to be practised in many parts of Anatolia. The tradition of letting the bride's hair (it may be rice, sugar and wheat) which is also a ritual known as a memory of pre-Islamic Turkish culture can be seen commonly in Anatolian and Central Asian Turkish communities.<sup>24</sup>

Also in Pomak/Torbesh/Gorali communities, a newly married girl rides a horse and to her husband's house with a group of close relatives. Another important ritual is that apart from the wedding ceremony, bride and groom's sides give presents to each other on special occasions like bairams. This is the case in Anatolian and Central Asian Turk communities.<sup>25</sup>

Another similarity between Pomak/Torbesh/Gorali communities and the other members of the Turkish cultural geography-Anatolian and Central Asian Turks is that the groom's side continues the tradition of giving bride price to the bride's father. Being more common in the past, today this ritual has begun to disappear. Bride price used to be a common custom in all Turkish communities. It was an important vital tradition. The most common geography of bride price is Central Asia. This tradition has passed to many communities from steppe people. In Kazakh community, marriage is based upon *kaliñmal* (*bride price*).<sup>26</sup>

Poor families who want to avoid bride price find a solution by being mutual mothers and fathers –in-law, is such a common ritual that is also seen in Kazakh and Anatolian Turks.<sup>27</sup>

In the Gorali community, leviratus marriage was applied in the past. The older or younger brother can marry the wife of a dead brother in this kind of marriage. This is a marriage type seen in both Anatolia and Middle East. When young and beautiful women's husbands died and they were widowed, the women became wives to the older or younger brother or a close relative.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Taşdelen, and others, age., s. 17; Kalafat, *Balkanlar'da Uluğ Türkistan'a...*, s. 45.

<sup>24</sup> Taşdelen, and others, age., s. 17; Kalafat, *Balkanlar'da Uluğ Türkistan'a...*, s. 48.

<sup>25</sup> Taşdelen, and others, age., s. 17.

<sup>26</sup> Taşdelen, and others, age., s. 17; Kalafat, *Balkanlar'da Uluğ Türkistan'a...*, s. 45; Kalafat, "Karşılaştırmalı Gora/Gorali...", s. 47.

<sup>27</sup> Taşdelen, and others, age., s. 17.

<sup>28</sup> Aynı Yerde.

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Although it has faded a little these day in Pomak/Torbesh/Gorali communities, the custom of performing marriage should be between families having relations up to seven generations back. This kind of marriage style (exogamy) is also valid in Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Bashkir, Altai, Yakut, Uighurs and other Turkish communities. What's interesting is that kin marriage was not approved by the Turks in the Balkans originated from Anatolia.<sup>29</sup>

The tradition of henna on the bride continues to exist in the wedding traditions of the Pomak/Torbesh/Gorali communities as in the Anatolian and Middle East Turks.<sup>30</sup>

The traditions of tying offerings to trees in order for young girls to get lucky; hanging flags in wedding houses; stepping with the right foot when the bride is entering the groom's house in the meaning of respect for good luck; splashing water onto the feet of the bride coming into her new house because water represents abundance, still continue to do so as in the Anatolian and Middle East Turks.<sup>31</sup>

### 3.2.1.1.1.3. Customs About Death

No food is cooked in the house of the dead in Pomak/Torbesh/Gorali community. Neighbors bring the food. Halvah is served out on the seventh day. Moreover, a chair is placed in front of the door of the dead house and a towel should cover it. The Qur'an is read, a religious ceremony is done on the 7th, 40th and 52nd days and the anniversary and food is served out.

These customs on death show great similarities with Anatolian and Middle East Turkish communities.<sup>32</sup> A knife or a scissors is put on the dead, as is in the Anatolian and Middle East Turks.<sup>33</sup>

### 3.2.1.1.1.4. Other Customs

There are other customs similar to Turkish culture geography other than those of birth, marriage and death which represent the three important phases in human life. It will be beneficial to summarize them as well:

The man of the house and his old mother, not the bride, sitting down at the table when there is a guest; counting the guest's step at the doorstep as an insult.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Taşdelen, and others, age., ss. 17-18.

<sup>30</sup> Kalafat, "Karşılaştırmalı Gora/Gorali...", s. 47.

<sup>31</sup> Aynı yerde.

<sup>32</sup> Taşdelen, and others, age., ss. 18-19; Kalafat, Balkanlar'da Uluğ Türkistan'a..., s. 47.

<sup>33</sup> Taşdelen, and others, age., s. 19.

<sup>34</sup> Aynı yerde.

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Seeing the game of jarevin throwing; which is common in some parts of Anatolia, especially in Erzurum, and Middle East communities; in Goralı community.<sup>35</sup>

Not cutting nails at night, counting sitting under the roof and at the doorstep as unlucky, believing that genies and fairies are found in secluded places.<sup>36</sup>

The spring holiday traditions of Turkish culture geography, that is the Celebration of Hidirellez, called as Sultan Nevruz and Curcevdin.<sup>37</sup>

Being afraid of the evil spirit's existence and itself, just like in the old Turkish beliefs, gathering mountain water and having a bath in this water in order for their wishes to come true before praying to God.<sup>38</sup>

Reading the Qur'an when there is a lunar eclipse and firing guns, playing the cans and making noises during the eclipse.<sup>39</sup>

### 3.2.1.2. Concrete Cultural Heritage: Substantial Culture Elements

As well as elements of abstract cultural heritage, concrete/substantial culture elements are quite important in order to detect a community's identity. Therefore, information and findings presented by science branches such as ethnography and archaeology whose subject is substantial cultural elements other than science branches as cultural history, cultural sociology and history in the Balkans should be benefited from according to Pomak/Torbesh/Goralı whose identity and existence have been discussed upon.

In the culture of Pomak/Torbesh/Goralı who generally lives in mountainous areas, the lifestyle of stockbreeding is more dominant than the culture of farming. This situation also presents itself in their cuisine culture. Especially cuisine cultures in which animal food such as meat, milk, cheeses, butter... are dominant show that they have migrated from Middle East moor culture to the Balkans and they are a society having nomadism features in their past. It is also seen that the cuisine cultures of the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, who are nomadic communities of Middle East, are mostly based on animal food. In the Pomaks/Torbesh/Goralı communities which have a pretty disciplined and conservative family structure, the other members of the house do not sit at the table and start eating unless the father as the elder of the house doesn't start. A

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<sup>35</sup> Aynı yerde.

<sup>36</sup> Taşdelen, and others, age., s. 20.

<sup>37</sup> Taşdelen, and others, age., s. 20; Kalafat, "Karşılaştırmalı Gora/Goralı...", s. 47.

<sup>38</sup> Kalafat, "Karşılaştırmalı Gora/Goralı...", s. 47.

<sup>39</sup> Taşdelen, and others, age., s. 20.

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similar family structure and behaviour is observed in Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Turkey Turks.<sup>40</sup>

Another important tradition for ethnologic research is the marking of family sigils to tombstones. A similar tradition is also seen by Kazakh Turks. The name, age, tribe and crew of the dead are written on their tombstones and their sigil is marked if there is one.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, personal observations in addition to written sources show that sigils stating the owners of animals by branding the ovine and stock farming.

Aksoy, who state in the Turkish culture researches in Europe or the Balkans that “concrete culture elements such as tombstones, textile samples and sigils used in textile, military materials, jewellery, horse harnesses are not evaluated as historical documents” emphasize the fact that the tombstones in Skopje and Kumanova museums in Macedonia, the animal stamps reflecting the culture of sigils unique to the Turks, women’s clothing which reflect national clothes bear traces of Turkishness.<sup>42</sup> This is a good example of presenting not to ignore concrete culture elements while researching the history and identity of Pomak community.

The concrete and abstract cultural heritage elements mentioned above show that Pomak/Torbesh/Gorali community lived in a tradition entirety with major similarities to those of both Anatolian and Middle Eastern Turkish communities. Of course, elements taken from Christians with whom they have been living together for centuries can also be found. I know very well that there are many Slavic culture elements in language and traditions of immigrant Turks living on the Balkans’ geography of the Turkish. However, no one has told us that we are Bulgarians, Greek, Macedonians or Serbians or we do not see ourselves as members of another Balkan nation.

### CONCLUSION

It is above all information that people in this community that are included in various nations and nationalities considered as Pomak/Torbesh/Gorali defining themselves as Turkish beside all this partnership and similarities. Because a person is from a nation where he feels he belongs to. There is no argument over this. The quote of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of

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<sup>40</sup> Taşdelen, and others, age., ss. 13-14.

<sup>41</sup> Taşdelen, and others, age., s.18.

<sup>42</sup> Aksoy, Mustafa, “Makedonya’da Balballar, İskitler-Türkler”, Türk Dünyası Tarih Kültür Dergisi, İstanbul, Eylül 2011.



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Turkish Republic “How happy is the one who says I’m Turk” should be remembered for the definition of Turkish nation.

However, it should be also noted that if Pomaks request to be a part of large Turkish family it should be respected when historic role of the relative community is considered and from the point that, under pressure in modern age, they take shelter in Turkey as their homeland. Eventually, the last decision on this issue will be the one that Pomaks make themselves.

Another point to be emphasized is that Pomak/Torbesh/Gorali Turks perceive themselves as Muslim-Turkish, and do not have an ethnical relation to Christian Balkan communities and also Muslim Bosnian and Albanians, see themselves separate from them. This situation was also detected by other researchers.<sup>43</sup>

It must not be forgotten what Pomaks think. As a matter of fact, the words of Pomak citizens in Turkey are very meaningful: “Bulgarian soul is distant to us, the concept of Bulgarian means “Orthodox Christian” for us. This perception is attitudes of Bulgarian towards us. Because they wanted to turn us into Christians many times, they tortured us, killed us, changed our names, banished us from our lands... Therefore, we bitterly laugh at their claims ‘You are Bulgarians, you were turned into Muslims by force...’ Yes, we are Pomaks, but it should not be forgotten, we are Pomaks because we are Muslims, we are Turks; and that’s it!” This words stress their basic distinction from Bulgarians, Greeks, Macedonians and Serbians.

Since identity and relation are the most important and distinctive possibility of existence and no community can preserve their existence without realizing their diversity and ethnical identity,<sup>44</sup> there is no point in further discussing the identities of Pomak/Torbesh/Gorali Turks. Above all, the error of bleeding their consciences by treating communities contrary to individual rights and freedoms, and ignoring their free will should be abandoned.

Pomaks in Bulgaria and Greece, Torbesh in Macedonia, Gorali in Kosova have been fed up with both social and political pressure since the Ottoman period, and they want to feel liberated. This humane request should not be considered too much for them.

It should not be forgotten that this community that have been referred with different names and connected to different nations put forth their identities clearly by expressing that they feel like they belong to Turkish people, not Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian or Serbian; preserving their Muslim-Turkish

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<sup>43</sup> Taşdelen, and others, age., s. 23.

<sup>44</sup> Taşdelen, and others, age., s. 12.

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identity; and taking refuge in Turkey which they see as their “motherland” even risking death most of the times.

If these Pomak, Torbesh and Gorali communities, who were claimed to be Islamized by force, were actually of Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian and Serbian origins, why were they tortured by their own nations, leaving their mainland and migrating to Turkey? How can this dilemma be explained?

There is a saying in Turkish: “No one is rich enough to do without his neighbour”. We have lived in the Balkans for centuries, and we will continue to do so. If we want to turn the Balkans into a geography which is ruled by peace and comfort instead of a place remembered with battles and disorder, we must respect the differences between people and let the Balkans be the ground for a common culture and civilization by cooperation. If we fail to do so as each Balkan country and nation in the 100th anniversary of Balkan Wars, I’m afraid we will have cast a shadow over our future. I salute you all with respect and gratitude and wishes for peace, comfort and brotherhood in the Balkans.

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