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FORCED TRANSCULTURAL MEMORY: THE EXILE AND RETURN OF THE BULGARIAN TURKS

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ABSTRACT

During the communist regime the Bulgarian government developed a consistent policy of “integration” and assimilation towards the minority of Bulgarian Turks, which culminated in the so called Revival Process (in the sense of revival of Bulgarian origin). The latter started with renaming of Turks with Slavonic names (1984-1985) and finished with expulsion to the “homeland” Turkey (1989).

What were the main reasons of the interviewees to return home and to understand those who settled in Turkey? To what extent the memory of exile justified the collective and individual projections of the worthy and prosperous life of the minority in local and global context? How did the remembrance of the “expulsion” turned into a kind of membership in open, democratic and cosmopolitan society?

In search for the answer of these questions and discussing 20 in-depth biographical interviews with Bulgarian Turks, who returned to Bulgaria after the “big excursion” at the end of the 80s and the beginning of the 90s, the present paper examines the specific dynamics of remembering of the leaving and going “back home”, which transforms the negative experience of exile into a kind of promise for the survival and advancement of the minority in the modern global world.

Last but not least the paper focuses on the networks, created by the Bulgarian Turks, which exchange memories and cultural models of (re)integration in “host” or “alien” society. Sharing stories about the traumatic past and the prosperous present of the migrant, the interviewees projected themselves as members of a big and cohesive transnational family thus reconfirming the split, but original identity of the minority.

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THE STORY OF THE 'BIG EXCURSION'

Despite pronouncing the equality of all citizens within the 'international proletariat' regardless of their gender or ethnic group, the Bulgarian communist regime pursued a strong policy of assimilation and discrimination towards the Turk/Muslim minority. From the late 1950s the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) planned and took 'measures for raising the political and cultural level of Bulgarians of Mohammedan faith' (Gruev and Kalionski, 2008, p. 26). These measures varied from actions against the main elements of the traditional Muslim clothing such as feredje (cloak), yashmak and shalwars to criminalization of the sunnet (circumcision) and campaigns for renaming with Slavonic names. But the most notable and extreme expression of this policy was the so called 'Revival Process', which started with massive renaming under the control of the army and police (1984-1985) and finished with expulsion to the 'homeland' Turkey (1989).

The first ideological uses of the term 'Revival Process' clearly revealed the 'perverted logic' and dynamics of the BCP's propaganda discourse, which transformed the claims for modernization into a project for ethnic assimilation and blended social/socialist engineering utopia with a nationalistic inclination. At a meeting of the first regional committee secretaries of the BCP on 18 January 1985, Georgy Atanasov reported: 'During the last ten years considerable successes were achieved in reinforcing the unity of the Bulgarian socialist nation and its ethnic homogeneity. In the early 1970s the names of people from Smolyan region and from large parts of Pazardjik and Blagoevgrad regions among others, who are decedents of Bulgarians, forcibly converted to the Mohammedan faith, were restored to their Bulgarian originals. In this way the start of the 'Revival Process' was set up – the start of the purification and stabilization of the Bulgarian national consciousness of this

population and of its much more active participation in the building up of the socialist society' (Atanasov, 2003, p. 7).

Very soon the conception of resocialization in ethnic terms, which Atanasov defended, embraced all dimensions of the culture/cultural identity of the minority and was validated by various kinds of documents. In the original definition of Bulgarian historians Gruev and Kalionski the 'revival' was conceived as a real 'cultural revolution' as could be observed in another report from 22 February 1985: 'The revival process, which is running now in the country, is an expression of the deep change in the mentality of the citizens, who revived their Bulgarian names. It shows the depth of the changes in their way of life, customs, culture and traditions..., that have happened during the years of the people's power' (Report 'For Further Unfolding...' 2009, p. 238).

The 'deep changes' didn't occur only on paper. According to official statistics around 850 000 people were renamed with Bulgarian names (Buchsenschutz, 2000, p. 79) They were accompanied by restrictions on performance of religious rituals and prohibition to use Turkish language in public spaces among others. The Turks reacted with individual and collective protests, open demonstrations and revolts, consequently followed by waves of arrests and violence. Local and international organizations raised their voice in defense of the minority rights. The last 'measure' of the Bulgarian communist government was the expulsion to Turkey. On 29 May 1989 the head of the Bulgarian communist state Todor Zhivkov made an official announcement, broadcasted on the national radio and television. He called on the Turkish state to open the border for Bulgarian migrants. Around 360 000 people crossed the border between its opening four days after the announcement and its closing in October. Although the government insisted on the 'voluntary character' of the 'visit' to the 'homeland Turkey', which was reflected in the preposterous term 'big excursion', popularized in the media, what actually happened was a typical example of a forced migration. Those who had been declared 'descendants of Bulgarians' and renamed with Bulgarian names, were now treated as 'fanatics', dangerous for the national security and expected to leave the country for the common good (Gruev and Kalionski, 2008, pp. 185-193). Men and women of all ages, social positions and world views were compelled to desert their homes in one or two days or to sell them at ridiculously low prices. Persecuted and threatened by the local authorities with jail and violence they left behind not only properties and possessions, but also various kinds of relationships, personal achievements and cultural habits. But very soon, more than 150 000 of them returned to Bulgaria to the end of 1990 (Ibid, p. 193), regardless of the suffering they endured in the recent (socialist) past. The rest of them settled in Istanbul, Bursa, Izmir and cities located mainly in Western Turkey. On 11 January 2012 the National assembly of Bulgaria adopted a declaration that

'declare the expulsion of over 360 000 Bulgarian citizens of Turkish origin in 1989 a form of ethnic cleansing, performed by the totalitarian regime'.

What was the individual and collective memory of the 'Revival Process'? What were the main reasons of the migrants to return and to understand those who remained in Turkey? To what extent did the remembrance of expulsion justify the collective and individual projections of the worthy life of the minority in a local and global context? In searching the answer of these questions the present paper discusses 20 in-depth biographical interviews with Bulgarian Turks, conducted in Bulgaria in 2007-2008¹. It concerns the specific dynamics of remembering of the leaving and going back home. The interviewees as a whole switched between expressions of suffering under the 'Revival Process' and images of a peaceful coexistence of Bulgarian and Turks, between vivid pictures of the hardships on the road to the new life in Turkey and joyful stories about visiting relatives or working abroad (not only in Turkey, but for example in Germany, Belgium and Spain, as well). At the same time they reflected their first encounter with 'foreign' reality as a testimony of a split and 'contested', but original cultural identity: *In Turkey we are called Bulgarians* (Nevin, Bulgaria); *I'm a person of Turkish origin, but my homeland is Shumen* (Nurten, Bulgaria).

It is precisely this kind of articulations and rationalizations of the experiences during the 'big excursion' that led certain Bulgarian and Turkish scholars to apply the notion of 'transnationality' in explaining biographical narratives of the migrants. They analyze the territorial attachments and the links between the societies of origin and settlement, considering the positive aspects of being homeless and the place of national(istic) discourses in individual projections of ethnicity. Thus Magdalena Elchinova talked about 'cultural hybridity' and a 'transborder way of life' as a strategy for social realization (Elchinova, 2012a) and Ayse Parla explored the 'tensions between the phenomenological experience of dislocation and the discursive formations of nationalism that shape and limit those experiences' (Parla, 2013, p. 3). Although both researchers relied on oral testimonies and life stories among other sources, only Elchinova highlighted the importance of the work of memory for the development of transnationality/transnational consciousness. In her words she was interested in the self-identification strategies of the stories about the past (Elchinova, 2012b). In a similar way the Bulgarian anthropologists Hicolay Vukov saw the trauma of the expulsion as 'a main

¹ The interviews were taken under the framework of 2007-2010, MICROCON ('A Micro Level Analysis of Violent Conflict'), a five-year research programme funded by the European Commission.

pivot point of the collective memory', assisting the appearance of self-representations, in which the 'the community of Bulgarian Turks' was compared and even merged with the 'community of migrants' (Vukov, 2012, p. 40). Going a little bit further I aimed at discussing how the mnemonic experience of repressions on ethnicity and of forced migration at a biographical level played a crucial role in the construction of transcultural identities. The main thesis is that the individual recollections of the traumatic past of the Bulgarian Turks split between the socialist agenda of 'cultural revolution' and the current social framework of mobility, cosmopolitanism and free and open labor market. Furthermore, they transformed the negative meanings of the exile into positive knowledge about the contemporary social realities thus strengthening the double consciousness of the minority group and providing a unified/unifying version of what it meant to be a Bulgarian Turk.

In her recent article on the new directions of memory studies Astrid Erll defined the notion of the transnational and transcultural memory in regard to the research interest in 'the forms of remembering across nation and cultures' and in 'negotiation of colonialism, decolonization, migration, cultural globalization and cosmopolitanism in literature and other media' (Erll, 2011a, p. 2). Sharing the same interest I will try to show how this notion could be applied to the biographical narratives and how the perspective 'from below' of the oral history could work for the better understanding not only of the individual, but also of the collective mode of re-membering of and dwelling in different cultures/cultural pasts.

TWO STORIES OF A 'CONFLICT SITUATION'

What did those, who returned to Bulgaria from the 'second' homeland Turkey remember most? Were there any essential similarities or differences in their representations of the time spent abroad and in the meanings attached to the encounter with the 'new' countrymen? The cases of Zuhtu and Ilknur clearly show the 'common places' and routes of memory of forced migration.

Zuhtu is a 63-years old paramedic from Rakovski (a small village in the north-east of Bulgaria). Man of good fortune, married with two daughters at the age of 5 and 7, he was a convinced communist and atheist, respected by his local community for his medical skills when the 'Revival Process' caught him. He defined himself as an educated and 'intelligent' person. His story lacked any awareness of the forced nature of the 'big excursion'. He indicated the depopulation of his village and the expected support of the 'big family of 260 people in Turkey' as the main reason for leaving the homeland in 1989. The only thing that marked the complicated ethnic situation just before and

during the fateful year was the note about the strong wish of his brothers and sisters to move to Turkey.

'At this time we carried only suitcases, much luggage was not allowed. My sisters and brothers ran here and there, ran through Bulgaria and I was swearing all the time. What can I tell you, suitcases stories. The suitcases...they [i.e. the siblings] also left before me, maybe weeks before me, but finally when I looked around the village – only Gypsies had remained. And when my brothers emigrated and nobody was around I said: 'Come on, Boyanka [his wife] and took the passports, and was in Istanbul on the 4th of July.'

In contrast to his 'amnesia' of the repressive apparatus behind the 'big excursion', Zuhtu demonstrated perfect memory of the misfortunes across the border and of the distressing co-existence with the 'new' countrymen. The eleven months spent in Turkey he presented as series of miscommunications and mistranslations, which uncovered irrenconciable cultural differences. Thus Zuhtu related the difficulties in understanding local dialects and his reluctance to satisfy the recommendation of some fanatics to make his daughters read the Koran. He also said how the local people wanted to send his wife to a whore house, because of her indecent clothing. Responding to the request to describe the local attitudes towards the Bulgarian Turks, he mentioned the following:

'Hey, Giaour, Giaour' [an old Turkish word for non-Muslim with offensive connotation]. My brothers got used to it, because they are not very intelligent, they got used to their approach to us. The local population of Turkey – they are very nasty and insidious. Everybody is trying to screw you...

Ilknur is a 35-old teacher in music from Razgrad (a town in the north-east of Bulgaria), married to a Bulgarian, with one child. She defined herself and her parents as 'intellectuals' (the father was a dental mechanic; the mother was a teacher), who gave her nonreligious education and who approved of the communist system.

Ilknur called the 'Revival Process' 'a real nightmare' and 'an unbearable sadness'. Already in 1984 her father was 'mobilized' as an army reserves soldier and was sent to another city. Five years later the whole family was on the road to Istanbul, under the influence of 'a mass psychosis' and 'an euphoria of freedom'.

Ilknur's interview is a clear example of an articulation of a traumatic experience. She recalled various details related to the material and physical parameters of the violence over the everyday world with almost mathematical accuracy: crowded banks at eight o'clock in the morning of

departure; houses, sold at very low prices; sick old people, lying on suitcases; the right of one family to occupy a spot of only 80 centimeters in the cargo wagons, etc. The pictures of the clash with the foreign/other culture were no less vivid and naturalistic. Ilknur remembered how she took traditional tea, which the Turks drank at any time of the day, for cognac. Similarly she found quite unusual the long queues in front of shops and institutions. The departure from Turkey after a 9-month stay she explained with her father's pride and honesty. He declined an offer of a rich relative (an owner of a leather factory, with a daughter, studying in England) to give him money for opening a dental technician practice. Lastly, the interviewer's question for the reasons of departure unfastens emotional and broad comments on the double identity of the Bulgarian Turks:

“The treatment of our community in Bulgaria and Turkey will always be connected to a conflict situation, regardless of where you are. We are people who never feel at the right place. First, there we were called Bulgarians. We are Turks in Bulgaria, we are Bulgarians there. Turkey is a special country for us, no other country like it in the whole world. But Bulgaria for us is one more special country and this is an eternal conflict. Things can only be better or worse.

A CULTURE IN EXILE

The above presented cases have much in common with each other, such as similar mapping of the social framework of the situation of departure, negative projections of the Turkish cultural order, importance of the family bonds and strong sense of strangeness and uncertainty in the new environment. Both Zucht and Ilknur did not show any discontent with the communist regime and saw their participation in the ‘big excursion’ more as an unfortunate coincidence, triggered by an unfamiliar vicious power than as a manifestation of the totalitarian rule and as a political/state repression over the minority group they belonged to. The story of ‘revival of Bulgarian origins’ as violence on the century-old family traditions or on the dignity of the community was almost missing in their interviews. Like the other interviews they found difficulties in remembering repressions on the religiosity or on the use of Turkish language in public spaces. They simply talked about ‘nightmares’ and ‘suitcase stories’. Furthermore, Zucht pointed out that in his childhood he had a Bulgarian nickname, which he liked very much and that he didn't find anything wrong to ‘be assimilated’ until the emergence of armed units in his native village. In her account of the ‘Revival Process’, Ilknur described herself as being more terrified by the ‘mobilization’ of her father and the crowded trains than by the renaming with Bulgarian name. Although they admitted the injustice of

the exile, using one and the same expression 'It was a great mistake', a kind of trust in and interiorization of certain ideological constructs (of the regime) could be observed even in their narratives of the unsuccessful adaptation to the reality abroad. Both Zuchtu and Ilknur opposed their intellectual background to the specific combination of primitivism, religious prejudices, and material values of Turkish society. Ilknur found the mustaches of Turks 'very funny'. Zuchtu described the Turkish village, he stayed at, as 'a recreation place, where however the intelligentsia was not welcome'. An unabashed atheist, he refused to give his daughters religious education, promoted by the local community. Ilknur confused the tea with cognac, to a great extent, due to the lack of any knowledge about the basic Islamic norms of everyday behavior such as the prohibition of alcohol consumption. Early in the interview she said that just like her father and mother she was not religious. The two interviewees also neglected, although not explicitly, the money and 'materialism' of the non-socialist world. Ilknur well understood her father for his reluctance to accept the generous offer of the rich relative and Zuhtu was delighted of his 'villa like' spacious apartment at the seaside combined with 'incapacity to get used to their customs'.

The lack of serious political or any other explanations and evaluations of the 'Revival Process' was compensated by imagining the happy and untroubled co-existence of Bulgarian and Turks before and after the crucial event. Ilknur didn't remember any tensions between Bulgarians and Turks in school and just like her, her mother and father were surrounded with care and attention by plenty of Bulgarian friends. Zuhtu appreciated very much the custom in his native village priests and hodjas (teachers in Islam) to meet at and to celebrate together the great Christian and Muslim holidays.

The stories of Ilknur and Zuhtu not only share one and the same narrative perspective towards the 'big excursion', they are also quite exemplary for the whole sample of the interviews of those, who returned to Bulgaria. Their memory of the exile was structured by several key complex oppositions, which mark the symbolic borders between the Bulgarian and Turkish societies from the end of 1990s: *religious vs. non-religious, inexplicable repressive behavior of Bulgarian communist state vs. manifestations of hostility by the local Turkish people, material and high standard life vs. intellectual and honest life.*

Another important opposition, which partly appeared in Zuhtu's talk and which was typical of the majority of the interviews, was the *gender division of the access to public spaces vs. freedom of women to express themselves.* There were many stories about the restrictions over some women's activities: they were not supposed to walk alone in the streets, to visit places of resorts, to walk bareheaded

(not to wear headscarves) among others. All these impressions of the time spent in Turkey were very often articulated by one and the same figures of speech and were summarized by statements, repeated with a particular persistence by almost every interviewee: 'We are not Turks for them' or 'We were not welcome there'. Furthermore, the constructions and the representations of the contested identity were not bound to a particular gender, social status, professional position or worldviews. The paramedic Zuhtu and the teacher in music İlnkur provided very similar observations and interpretations of the 'otherness' in/of the Turkish society, based on the general contradistinction of the (dis)advantages of the socialist and capitalistic world.

How could the (un)subtle nostalgia for the space and time of the socialist citizenship be explained? Why was an awareness of the repressive character of the renaming and respectively of the communist regime more or less absent in the interviews and why did they lack stories about the restrictions on performing religious rituals while at the same time the 'big excursion' was presented as a highly traumatic event?

In her recent study on the legacy of 'Revival Process' Magdalena Elchinova focused her attention on an interesting discrepancy between the biographical and public narratives of Bulgarian Turks, dedicated to the crucial event. The first ones tend to 'forget' the arrests and persecutions and to focus on the 'big excursion' as revealing the potential of the minority to survive in and adapt to extraordinary social/cultural conditions. Contrary to this, the second ones such as for example the statements in the media and at anniversaries of the event portrayed in details the collective martyrdom and victimhood of the inhumane assimilation campaigns of the Bulgarian communist government. Elchinova imputed this contrast between the two types of narratives to the different interest groups and social strategies behind them. If ordinary people aspired to a positive image of the Bulgarian Turk in order to unite the past and present in a nontraumatic way and to (re)confirm the meaningful continuity of the individual and collective life, the intellectuals and public figures of the minority demanded retribution and justice on behalf (of recognition) of certain political and cultural agendas (Elchinova 2012b: 28-29).

Another possible explanation of the interviewee's reconciling approach to the experienced cultural repression and the nostalgia for the recent socialist past, embedded in the above discussed oppositions, is their deep rootedness in the (inter)national communist propaganda discourse of scientific atheism, equal and multifunctional education and discard of 'the selfish accumulation of capital'. Furthermore, to a certain extent they could also be seen as a result of the interiorization of the nationalistic socialist prescriptions and standards of life, imposed on the culture of the minority

and as a long-term effect of the assimilation policy of the BCP. At the beginning of the regime Bulgarian Turks were a relatively capsulated ethnic group, with low social mobility, low level of education, strong patriarchic attitudes, adhering to the Muslim traditions and religiosity and closed for the challenges of the modern global world. The family and the land were the main social values for the group. In contrast to Roma people they rarely changed the places of living and worked predominantly as farmers and builders. (Buchsenschutz, 2000; Yalamov, 2002). As the interviews clearly showed in the decades after the collapse of the regime Bulgarian Turks preserved their respect to the family and land, kept the Muslim rituals, but without serious concern of their religious contents and without following the basic religious prescriptions such as the restrains of consumption of alcohol and pork meat. They were much more secularized, educated and mobile, divided by possessions of various kinds of economic and social capital.

What happened in-between? The democratic changes in 1989 and the following overall liberalization of the economy and the public life was one of the main factors for the transformation in the Bulgarian Turks' mentality. Long before that time they were exposed to the efforts of the communist state to turn them into 'progressive and loyal members of the Bulgarian socialist society', efforts which were not limited only to forced assimilative measures. The 'fight with Islam' (the campaigns against the traditional Muslim clothing and the sunnet) was conducted in parallel with 'elimination of the illiteracy' and raising up the level of education of the minority. In 1950 a 'Central Action Committee' for leading the campaign for mass literacy, was created, headed by the Minister of Education K.Dramaliev' (Gruev and Kalionski, 2008, p. 24). One year later, there was quota admittance for adolescents from Turkish origin to the institutions for secondary and higher education. During 60s special cultural programs for 'integration' were developed: literature, dedicated to Turkish folklore was promoted, as well as Turkish-language publications, mixed marriages were encouraged and access to the party structures was expanded. In 1966 the Department of the CC of BCP for the national minorities resumed its work in order to attract the Turkish population to the socialist mass organizations (Marinov, 2010). Those who chose to become party members were given different privileges for education and work.

What the communist state succeeded in with all these efforts was to (re)direct the respect to traditions to the ideal of the modern, emancipated from religious and ethnic prejudices, socialist mode of life. Zuhtu wished 'to be assimilated' and felt equally proud as a member of a family of 260 people and as an intellectual, atheist and convinced communist. In the same way, Ilknur felt happy to come back home, remembering that:

Just as they [Roma people] tried to imitate us, we tried to imitate the Bulgarians. This was our goal, this was our desire, that's why I say that we followed the Bulgarian way. The only thing that separated us – as goals, desires and ideals – were our names...therefore, I don't think that the act of renaming was a state mistake.

In this biographical context the 'big excursion' appeared as a distortion of the half-modern, half-traditional, pro-Bulgarian consciousness, cultivated by the social(ist) engineers. The interviewees were forced to reflect on their double identity, firstly, from the perspective of the unexpected replacement of 'integration' with expulsion, and, secondly, from the perspective of the 'conflict cultural situation' in Turkey. As a result, the 'otherness' of the minority was reconfirmed, but the trust in some socialist values was preserved.

If we return to the above presented analysis of Elhinova one important question comes to the fore in regard to the interplay of the positive and negative images of the socialist past: Could the notion of the cultural trauma be applied to the mnemonic experience of the 'big excursion'? In his well known theory Jeffrey Alexander emphasized two key characteristics of the phenomena under review – the changing of the collective identity 'in a fundamental and irrevocable way' and the mediation of the memory of 'what happened' by different agents and 'carriers groups' with 'both ideal and material interests', who engaged in 'meaning struggle' in the media, radio, television, as well as on institutional and organizational level (Alexander, 2004).

In correspondence to Alexander's definition there are two difficulties in interpreting the memory of forced migration of the Bulgarian Turks as a memory of a cultural trauma. Firstly, as the interviews showed the nostalgia for the socialist past prevented the 'irrevocable transformations' of the minority's identity. Secondly, they didn't share one and the same corpus of representations with the public narratives. Furthermore, the interviewees declined to 'mediate' the repressive character of the 'Revival Process' and to provide coherent political evaluations of the 'big excursion'. Much more appropriate in this case is the broad and fluid conception of cultural exile. Although usually referring to the intellectual's or artist's experience of displacement, it puts the stress not on the representative strategies, but on the traumatic feeling of strangeness and living in/with the memory of homeland: 'Exile is predicated on the existence of, love for, and bond with, one's native place: what is true of all exile is not that home and love of home are lost, but that loss is inherent in the very existence of both' (Said, 2000, p. 148).

To paraphrase Eduard Said's words what the interviewees lost were not only their homes, but the positive recognition of their pro-Bulgarian cultural attitudes and models of public behavior, inherited by the communist regime. It is not a coincidence that most of them outlined the offensive meanings of 'Bulgarians' and 'Giaours' in Turkey. We could even talk about culture in exile. Having gone through repressions for their Turkishness 'at home' and 'not accepted for their Bulgarianness 'abroad', they found the best way to preserve the worthy life of the minority in admitting the contested identity and by transforming the 'otherness' in a kind of virtue and advantage in the global world. Ilknur's conclusion of the 'conflict situation', created by the 'Revival Process' was immediately added like this: *'This ethnic colourfulness brings much good for us, but at the same time this type of connection with others is very fragile and could be easily discontinued'*.

'RETURN' TO THE TRANSNATIONAL FAMILY

What prevented the 'ethnic colourfulness' of dissolving among the hardships and challenges of the life in an open and democratic society? If the 'big excursion' assisted the admitting of the ethnic duality in a more or less traumatic way, what exactly happened next when this duality was confronted with the experience of the community in non-totalitarian time and space? Did the interviewees distinguish and oppose 'then' and 'now', between 'forced' and 'voluntary' crossing of national borders?

The interview of Ilknur manifested a very interesting tendency of drawing together the traumatic past and the present life in a global context. The same tendency could be observed in the interview of Shukran, 33 years-old real estate agent from Razgrad . Shukran spent 5 months in Turkey in 1989, but in contrast to Ilknur, who had not been abroad since the return to Bulgaria, she worked for a year and more in Belgium and had visited France and Germany. Twice in the course of the conversation she switched without any discursive effort or clear logical reasoning from the memories of the 'big excursion' to an evaluation of the current transnational experience:

There we remained for five months. We had relatives, they met us, we stayed for five months, then returned to Bulgaria when the things calmed down. We like Bulgaria very much. We've seen much of the world - Germany, France, Turkey, Belgium, but Bulgaria we liked the most.

Yes, there were people, who had been living in tents for months, where water was provided by tanks. And these people were compelled to live there, because they didn't have relatives, till the moment of receiving residence. And the schools were full of people. They had a really hard time, while we had relatives and they had villas and they put us up in the villas until we

found rooms and started from scratch. And generally speaking our Bulgarian people seem to always start from scratch, wherever they go. Regardless of their nationality - Bulgarian, Turkish or Gypsy. One goes to Belgium, another to Spain, a third one to the Netherlands and he always starts from the beginning. He comes back, again starts from scratch, then returns from there and so on. '

The intertwining and mingling the political with the economic migration, the seen and learned during the exile with the cosmopolitan openness towards new people and places was a characteristic of a representative number of interviews though the given remarks of Shukran elaborated it in the most direct way. Furthermore, the picture of the negative and positives aspects of being Bulgarian Turk remained valid for two different political and cultural contexts. When asked about the attitudes of the Turkish people towards the minority in the late 90s (during the 'Revival Process'), the 34-old Mucho from Razgrad started to comment on the present situation:

Interviewer: How did they receive you in Turkey?

Mucho: We are not very welcome in Turkey. They think we are Bulgarian.

Just like Shukran Mucho continued the comment with a story about his sister, who had got married in Istanbul and had lived there happily for five years, but then she returned to Bulgaria, because she couldn't adapt to the citizen's 'mentality'.

The easy shifting from retrospections of the hardships in the new homeland to the challenges of mobility and the merging of the meanings of the exile with the meanings of transnationality/transculturality became possible not only through (un)conscious reversals of the classification/label 'Bulgarian Turks', but also by revalidation of the kinship bonds on two different levels of remembrance. The first level was connected to a recollection of examples of the strength of these bonds and the second one – to the retelling of (un)successful abroad life stories². Thus Shukran's account the relatives made the stay of the expelled less painful and 'our people' succeeded to survive and develop in various national contexts. In the same way, the other interviewees talked enthusiastically about the family support during the exile in combination with listing lucky marriages, highly paid jobs and education of relatives in prestigious universities in

² Elchinova also discussed the representations of the exile as "success stories" (Elchinova 2012b: 25).

Europe among others. They felt obliged in one sense or another to 'remember' the transnational adventures of the minority regardless of their personal travelling experience. Ilknur was strongly impressed of the relative's daughter, studying in England. Nurten, director of a cultural club in Shumen noted: '*Our emigrants were called Giaours*'. The 64-old teacher Ismail went into details about the culture of the immigrants in Avjalar and their attempt to preserve 'the elements of the Bulgarian everyday routine'. In this way a kind of imagined transnational community of story-tellers was created, which (re)produced a metanarrative of an extended, transborder and cohesive family of the Bulgarian Turks, where everybody could 'return' and feel home regardless of the occupied social position or concrete place of living. These peculiar networks of memory stabilized the collective cultural identity and transformed the traumatic contents of the 'big excursion' in a basis for a deeper understanding of the positive and negative aspects of the migrants' life-course. With its function to transmit cultural knowledge/knowledge of different cultures they are very similar to the 'travelling memories' of Astrid Erll (2011b) or the 'transnational family' of Anne Heimo³ with one important difference. They did not weaken, but rather strengthen the images of the ethnicity and nationality.

The studies of forced migration pointed out the consolidation of the repressed ethnic group either as a reintegration in the society of origin or as an isolation/capsulation through various kinds of representations and negotiations of traumatic pasts. The case of the 'Revival Process' entirely fits into such a conception. It was debated by various political parties, represented in movies and TV broadcasting and was thoroughly examined by Bulgarian and Turkish scholars. But what remains hidden under the official/public consideration is the uncontrolled and intensive exchange of the mnemonic experience of the crucial event between the members of the Bulgarian Turks minority by the assistance of family/kinship networks. In this exchange the socialist past is connected to the democratic and cosmopolitan present and the exile is projected as a cultural destiny and a basic structure of the collective identity. The memory of 'big excursion' not only played the role of 'generator of biographies' (Karamelska, 2013), but also helped the minority to continue to be traditional in a modern, global and transcultural way.

³ See Heimo, A. Digital Memories of Migration, working paper.

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