"Grandma, What's Your Name Now?": Life-Narratives, Portraiture, and Reclaiming Identity in the Balkans

Daria Borislavova White, James Madison University
Andrew P. White, Eastern Mennonite University

Fatma Moolova (Pomak, Filipovo, Bulgaria)

I don't remember what year I was born. I do know I am 96 years old, from a big family – four brothers, a sister, mother, father. I married at 23. At the wedding they gave my groom fireworks. When he lit them up, they exploded in his hand. He lived to 82, without one of his hands.

Her eyes fill with tears. Long silence.

I had five children. The youngest one was killed by a truck. He was 23. A boy. The other four are all here. I have, the Lord has given.

They changed our names, I remember. I was with a young one. I gave birth to Mustafa in 1953. They renamed him Rumen. In 1975 they changed the names again, but by that time I already had a Bulgarian name. They named me Kipra. We call ourselves by our own names. I can't go ask – "Grandma, what's your name

> now?" Not my job to remember her new name. Her name is what her mother named her. The children were with two names. Here in the village my son is Mustafa, outside – Rumen. There was nothing to be done about it…
>
> *Another pause.*
>
> We hid in the vineyards when I was little. We had no idea who was passing by here. A child would cry out, someone would cough, but we would climb up into the hills and hide. We were silent. The king can speak, but you can't. If you speak too much you will get a good beating.
>
> *Long silence. What gives you strength to live?*
>
> The strength that keeps you is in the heart and lungs.[1]

Fatima Moolova was born in 1915. She sat outside her little house on the steps and looked with eyes holding almost a century of history… and no trust. She told disconnected stories, stopped herself to look into the world only she knew and at times stared at me — the stranger, the "other-faith" one. Fatma is the oldest member of Filipovo, the only Muslim village in the Bansko Municipality of southwest Bulgaria. Seven hundred people live in the village; most of them are ethnic Bulgarian Muslims, commonly known as "Pomaks." The preceding excerpt is brief, but there are multiple, complex layers of historical and personal trauma that merit unpacking because they express a perspective often silenced and forgotten by the dominant Slavic Orthodox culture in Bulgaria.

In this paper we will closely examine the life-histories (conveyed through structured interviews) of three Muslim *babas*[2] in the Pirin region of southwest Bulgaria — two Pomak women from the village of Filipovo, and a Roma Muslim woman from Bansko — in the context of Bulgarian nation-building in the twentieth century. We explore the impact of historical trauma on these women as concrete examples of the marginalization that all peoples of Muslim heritage suffered in Bulgaria in the last century. We investigate how these women have processed these experiences and exhibited post-traumatic growth, the process of making sense of the past and transforming trauma. We use the tools of portraiture (both interview-based biographical sketches and actual photography) to create three-dimensional images of women from the Muslim minorities of Bulgaria, sharing their unique voices and perspectives with a wider global audience. Ultimately, when larger historical and cultural narratives are read through the lens of these women's life-stories, new ways of understanding and interpreting the past and present can emerge.

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[1] This excerpt is taken from a series of interviews conducted by Daria Borislavova White in the summer of 2010, in southwest Bulgaria. The theory and methodology of these interviews will be outlined later in the paper. Some twenty elderly women were interviewed and had their portraits taken as part of a larger project on transgenerational change and trauma in the southeast Balkans.

[2] The most literal translation of the Bulgarian word *baba* is "grandmother." However, the term has wider meaning than this translation. Particularly in villages, *baba* suggests a woman who is like a collective grandmother, someone whose life and experience brings a matronly presence to the entire community. In this sense, a village baba could be said to belong to the entire village, not to one particular family.

To frame the historical trauma that Muslim women have experienced in twentieth-century Bulgaria, we will begin with an overview of the history of Bulgarian nationalism as it took shape following the Balkan Wars (1912-13), World War II, and into the Communist period (1944-1989). Particular focus will be placed on the Zhivkov-era (1956-1989), in which the Communist party attempted to erase all markers of Muslim identity, including Turkish dress (hats, veils, pants) and Turco-Arabic names. Following this overview, we will outline two theoretical approaches we are taking to interpret the life-story (interview) samples we provide. First, we briefly discuss historical trauma, examining the ways in which it can become internalized oppression. This is followed by a consideration of post-traumatic growth (as developed by Tedeschi and Calhoun), which raises the potential for transformation of a traumatic past. We then overview the theory and methodology which informed the interviews and photographs using a theory of portraiture developed by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis. With this contextual framing, we analyze a sampling of three oral life-history transcripts from women of Muslim heritage in Bulgaria, including the interview at the beginning of the paper.

Bulgaria, Identity-Shifting, and Ethnicity

In the last century and a half, peoples of the Balkans have faced massive social, economic, and political upheaval on a scale that many in the West would find difficult to fathom. Five hundred years of Ottoman occupation had a major cultural impact on the peninsula as Muslim and Christian religious worldviews clashed, coexisted, and intertwined with each other in local community life. As independence movements gained force, Western European representations of the "East," filtered through their own homogenizing nationalisms, influenced the way fledgling Balkan nations shaped their collective identities. The West categorized Balkan countries as a variation of the oriental "Other," molded by a backward, decadent Ottoman Empire, the "sick man of Europe."[3] Nation-builders in the Balkans, having imbibed the intoxicating liquor of Western Romantic nationalism, were inspirited to dissociate from the Ottoman past and create a new identity that was European in orientation.

In the nineteenth century, a time of national "revival," of self-conscious nation-building in Bulgaria, "Bulgarianness" was most closely associated with Orthodox Christianity — "the Bulgarian language and Bulgarian customs survived [during 500 years of Ottoman rule] under the protection of the Bulgarian Church, and more particularly its monasteries and convents."[4] Leaders of the nationalist "revival" movement "defined the nation as having 'individuality' (*samobitnost*) characterized by such features as common descent, a single language and a shared religion, a cultural tradition (of folk songs, proverbs, beliefs, etc.), [and] common material conditions of life and customs."[5] This "individuality" was notably Turkophobic in character; anything that smacked of the

[3] For a fuller discussion of this East / West dilemma for Balkan nation-states, see Maria Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans.*

[4] R. J. Crampton, *The Balkans Since the Second World War (*London: Longman, 2002), 50.

[5] Roumen Daskalov, *The Making of a Nation in the Balkans: Historiography of the Bulgarian Revival* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 14.

Ottoman past (including furniture, copper kitchenware, hats, veils, and surnames) — which was associated with backwardness and primitiveness — was denounced.[6] Many were confused by this vision: Bulgarian nationalists had difficulty awakening others to the notion that they "constituted" a community that was distinct, particularly in the region of Macedonia.[7] This was primarily due to the hybridity of the Ottoman millet system, in which national identity was not defined by common dialect or geographical borders, but rather by the membership of the individual within a particular religious community.[8] When people in Macedonia were asked by Bulgarian nationalists, "Are you Bulgarian or Greek?" some replied in confusion: "We are Christian. What is 'Bulgarian' and 'Greek'?"[9]

The geographical formation of the modern Bulgarian state was a complex process. With substantial aid from the Russian army, Bulgaria gained its independence from the Ottoman Empire through the Treaty of San Stefano (1878), after several years of bloody conflict, most notably in the Stara Planina mountain range (in north central Bulgaria). Other European powers, however, were alarmed at the massive amount of Ottoman territory allotted to Bulgaria by San Stefano. Fearing excessive Russian influence in the region, with the Treaty of Berlin (1878) they pared down Bulgaria's borders, dividing it into the Principality of Bulgaria (northern Bulgaria, fully independent) and Eastern Rumelia (southern Bulgaria, which united with the principality in 1885). Most of the contested Macedonian region was returned to Ottoman control. Bulgarian nationalists were outraged and vowed to regain Macedonia, an obsession which defined Bulgaria's military actions and alliances through the Second World War.

With the two Balkan Wars (1912-13), which immediately preceded World War I, the complications of Bulgarian national identity came into sharper focus, particularly in reference to Muslim minorities in the country. The Pomaks,[10] the second largest Muslim

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[6] As Mary Neuburger notes, "Nation building demanded a negation of all that was Eastern within — an explicit rejection of Bulgaria's Ottoman past and its Muslim minority presence" (*The Orient Within: Muslim Minorities and the Negotiation of Nationhood in Modern Bulgaria*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2004), 3.

[7] Roumen Daskalov, *The Making of a Nation in the Balkans: Historiography of the Bulgarian Revival* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 14. "Macedonia" is a notoriously sticky designation. In this context, it refers to Bulgarian (or Pirin) Macedonia, Greek Macedonia (particularly the Rhodope region), and the present-day nation of Macedonia.

[8] Victor A. Friedman, "The Modern Macedonian Standard Language and Its Relation to Modern Macedonian Identity," in *The Macedonian Question: Culture, Historiography, Politics*, ed. Victor Roudometof (Boulder, Colorado: East European Monographs, 2000), 176.

[9] Mark Mazower, *The Balkans: A Short History* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 39.

[10] "Pomaks" are ethnic Bulgarians (descendants of the Slavs and Bulgars who speak Bulgarian) who converted to Islam under Ottoman rule. They are to be distinguished from Turkish Bulgarians (though in the past they were often referred to as "Turks" because of their religious affiliation), the largest Muslim ethnic group in Bulgaria, who are ethnically Turkish (and speak Turkish), and whose ancestors settled in the region during Ottoman rule.

community in Bulgaria after Turkish Bulgarians, experienced pressure from Bulgarian authorities to assimilate into the newly formed nation-state. After Bulgaria's victory in the First Balkan War, a conversion campaign was initiated by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church to consolidate its territorial gains, particularly in the region of Macedonia.[11] To prove their conversion to the "true" Bulgarian religion and their loyalty to the Bulgarian government, Pomaks were forced to give up fezzes, turbans, and veils for Bulgarian hats and scarves.[12] Ultimately, this campaign failed. With the heavy losses (lives, territory, and reparations) that Bulgaria experienced in the Second Balkan War, Pomaks were allowed to once again practice Islam and to wear "Turkish" dress, including fezzes and the veil.[13]

After Bulgaria's hopes of regaining Macedonian territory were crushed in the First and Second World Wars, the communist regime turned its nation-building focus inward. Immediately after World War II, Georgi Dimitrov briefly considered forming a federation with Yugoslavia that would bring together Macedonian territories of both nations, which contained substantial Muslim populations. Some in Bulgaria secretly hoped that the country could secure greater influence over all of Macedonia with such a union. However, this negotiation ended after Yugoslavia was expelled from Cominform in June 1948.

With the "Great Leap Forward" plan outlined by Todor Zhivkov, the post-Stalinist premier who dominated Bulgarian politics from 1956 to 1989, policies towards minorities — particularly ethno-religious groups like Turkish Bulgarians, Pomaks, and Roma — became more restrictive.[14] Minorities had already suffered under Communist rule, before Zhivkov's rise to power, during the era of forced collectivization which saw resistance from Pomaks and Turks, and led to some 150,000 fleeing Bulgaria between 1950 and 1951. But in the late 1950's and early 1960's the Bulgarian government moved towards "total assimilation," which included an aggressive "Rebirth Process" (*Възродителен Процес*) for minorities with the goal of creating a homogenized nation-state.[15] According to this policy, there were no official minorities in the country, except Jews and Armenians.

Assimilating the Pomaks and Roma

One of the primary targets of Zhivkov's assimilation campaign was the Pomaks, who had ethnic and linguistic ties to Bulgaria (though, alarmingly for the authorities, some Pomaks had become Turcophones) but religious ties to Turkey and the Middle East. Initially, the government focused on eradicating "Turkish" dress, including the veil and *shalvari*

[11] Antonina Zhelyazkova, "Bulgaria's Muslim Minorities." In *Bulgaria in Transition: Politics, Economics, Society, and Culture after Communism*, ed. John D. Bell (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998), 170.
[12] Mary Neuburger, *The Orient Within: Muslim Minorities and the Negotiation of Nationhood in Modern Bulgaria* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2004), 92.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Antonina Zhelyazkova, "Bulgaria's Muslim Minorities." In *Bulgaria in Transition: Politics, Economics, Society, and Culture after Communism*, ed. John D. Bell (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998), 167.
[15] Ibid., 168.

(colorful, baggy pants) worn by Pomak women.[16] In time, however, attention was turned to Turco-Arabic names which came to be viewed "as one of the most formidable obstacles to social progress and national integration."[17] Pomaks were informed that if they changed their names they could regain the true Bulgarian identity that had been taken away by Ottoman coercion.[18] Initially, name changes were voluntary. But efforts intensified. By 1964, a list of bona fide Bulgarian names, approved by the government, was given to local authorities, but this measure was met with violent resistance. The totalitarian Communist Party was surprised by this level of obstinacy and temporarily halted the campaign. In 1970, name changes for Pomaks became a top-agenda item for the Party, and between 1970 and 1974 the majority of Pomaks in the country were forced to change their names from Muslim to Bulgarian alternatives, often with units of the Bulgarian army overseeing and enforcing the process.[19] There were numerous protests, but the government policy prevailed.[20] Most Pomaks had their Muslim names restored by 1991, several years after the fall of the Zhivkov regime. However, some prefer their Bulgarian names, as they meet with less prejudice when interacting with the Bulgarian majority. With the 1992 census ethnic indications were reintroduced for the first time since 1965, but there was no category for Pomaks.[21]

The third largest Muslim minority in Bulgaria are the Roma; around 40% consider themselves to be Muslim, though their beliefs are syncretized with pre-Christian Roma traditions and Christianity.[22] Muslim Roma suffered from the same "Rebirth Process" that traumatized ethnic Turks and Pomaks. In 1958, the Council of Ministers ruled that nomadic Roma must settle down, and confiscated their horses and carts, a process that was

[16] Mary Neuburger, *The Orient Within: Muslim Minorities and the Negotiation of Nationhood in Modern Bulgaria* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2004), 75.
[17] Ibid.
[18] R. J. Crampton, *The Balkans Since the Second World War* (London: Longman, 2002), 178. This was not the first time that Pomaks were forced to change their names. Some had been compelled to do so after the First Balkan War, in 1913, during the conversion campaigns organized by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. During World War II, in July 1942 a law was passed by fascist government which compelled Pomaks to change their names. Given the turmoil of wartime politics, however, this measure did not have widespread effect. The new communist effort was more systematic and thoroughly enforced.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Later, and more famously, this same process was applied to Bulgaria's Turkish minority (in 1984-1985), leading to widespread atrocities (beatings, torture, property confiscation, rape, and murder) and a massive refugee crisis (around 350,000 Turks fleeing to Turkey) in 1989.
[21] Stephan E. Nikolov, "Perceptions of Ethnicity in Bulgarian Political Culture: Misunderstanding and Distortion," in *The Macedonian Question: Culture, Historiography, Politics*, ed. Victor Roudometof (Boulder, Colorado: East European Monographs, 2000), 210.
[22] Ibid.

as traumatizing as collectivization for Bulgaria's rural poor.[23] In addition, there were concurrent campaigns to change their names from Turkic ones to Slavic variations. There was also a clampdown on Romany cultural expressions and language – the post-war "Gypsy theater" in Sofia, known throughout the Balkans, was closed down by the late 1960's, and Romany-language textbooks were banned.[24]

In 1989, the fall of Communism fundamentally changed the geopolitical and ethnic realities of the Balkan Peninsula. The old pre-Communist narratives that were pushed under the surface for forty years were reawakened by new radical leaders who called for a return to old glories and national pride, reminding their people of the suffering they had endured under Turkish rule. Yugoslavia witnessed ethnic cleansings in Bosnia and Kosovo as it dissolved into smaller separate states. Countries like Bulgaria went unnoticed in their transition, seemingly escaping rising ethnic tensions and slipping into post-socialist democracies. Economic struggles continued and deepened: young people emigrated, searching for better opportunities, and older people reminisced about the order and safety of the Communist past. Bulgaria and Romania joined the European Union in 2007, having to prove new loyalties, bring corruption cases to public justice, and build a system for addressing minority rights.

In 2005, the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC) measured the attitudes of Bulgarians toward Roma, Turkish, and Jewish minorities. Bulgarians are not generally tolerant towards non-Slavic Orthodox Bulgarians; according to the BHC report, "ethnic Bulgarians are most commonly racist, xenophobic and anti-semitically prejudiced," showing high levels of prejudice toward the Roma and Muslims over time."[25] One out of five Bulgarians wants Bulgaria to be for the "pure" Bulgarians only.[26] Age, class and education do not seem to make a major difference in the public attitudes of individuals. Attitudes toward the Roma are particularly troubling. Eighty-six percent of the interviewed Bulgarians feel that Roma people are "lazy and irresponsible," and attribute their poverty to inherent traits, overlooking centuries of discrimination against Roma.[27] Roma could not be trusted, according to 85% of the interviewed; 82% do not distinguish them as individuals, saying "all Roma are alike." The BHC also measured public attitudes towards other ethnic minorities, noting mistrust toward Bulgarian Turks and Bulgarian Jews.[28] However, the Pomak ethno-religious minority was not even mentioned in the BHC study. According to Zhelyazkova, Kosseva, and Hajdinjak:

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[23] Antonina Zhelyazkova, "Bulgaria's Muslim Minorities." In *Bulgaria in Transition: Politics, Economics, Society, and Culture after Communism*, ed. John D. Bell (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998), 171.

[24] R. J. Crampton, *The Balkans Since the Second World War* (London: Longman, 2002), 177.

[25] Bulgarian Helsinki Committe (BHC),"Five Years Later: The Nongovernmental Projects for Desegregation of Roma Education in Bulgaria" [Пет години по-късно: Неправителствените проекти за десегрегация на ромското образование в България]. (Sofia: BHC, 2005), 40 [www.bghelsinki.org].

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 41.

[28] Ibid., 45, 48.

> The issue of Pomak identity has been a controversial one ever since the establishment of independent Bulgaria in 1878 and has yet to be resolved. The widespread belief is that Pomaks are not a separate ethnic group as the only difference between Pomaks and other Bulgarians is religion. Very often, Pomaks are seen as "lesser" Bulgarians — [an] inseparable part of the Bulgarian family-nation, but blemished by the "wrong" Muslim religion.[29]

With the current Bulgarian government, there is a combination of religious tolerance and pronounced intolerance toward Pomaks. Although Pomaks are allowed to freely practice their religion, denial of an inherent Pomak identity marks Bulgarian institutional, media, and public reactions toward Pomaks, hindering any attempts of self-identification and claims of difference.[30]

Theories of Change and Post-Traumatic Growth

As Slavic Orthodox Christian Bulgarians maneuvered to re-orient themselves towards a Euro-centric identity, Muslim minorities were caught in the middle, the "Orient within" that could not be assimilated or eradicated.[31] Through name changes and other campaigns to extirpate all things Turk, minority groups in the Balkans experienced the direct impact of "historical trauma." Historical trauma has been described as "soul wounding," a process which leads to internalized oppression of self-devaluation and desire to destroy what has been hated through self-harm, violence and/or devaluation of others.[32] Tedeschi and Calhoun define trauma as a "seismic event" that reverberates throughout a person's life, overwhelming their coping strategies, causing distress and posttraumatic responses of helplessness and terror.[33] A wide range of trauma could lead to posttraumatic growth: bereavement, rheumatoid arthritis, HIV infection, cancer, bone marrow transplantation, heart attacks, coping with the medical problems of children, transportation accidents, house fires, sexual assault and sexual abuse, combat, refugee experiences, and being taken hostage.[34] With trauma playing such an important role in communal identity and memory formation of the Muslim population in the country, what is the mechanism of meaning-making and transforming the past?

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[29] Antonina Zhelyazkova, Maya Kosseva, and Marko Hajdinjak, "Tolerance and Cultural Diversity Discourses in Bulgaria: Bulgarian Ethnic Model – Parallel Cohabitation or Multicultural Recognition?" (European University Institute: ACCEPT Project, 2010), 25.
[30] Ibid., 23.
[31] Mary Neuburger, *The Orient Within: Muslim Minorities and the Negotiation of Nationhood in Modern Bulgaria* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2004).
[32] Eduardo Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound: Counseling with American Indians and Other Native People* (New York: Teachers College, 2006).
[33] "Posttraumatic Growth: The Positive Lessons of Loss." In *Meaning Reconstruction & the Experience of Loss*. Robert A. Neimeyer, ed. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association (2001): 157-172.
[34] Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun, "Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Evidence, *Psychological Inquiry,* 15:1 (2004): 1-18.

"Posttraumatic growth" is a concept describing how people grow after trauma and transform its meaning.[35] Individuals may expand their horizons in five distinctive domains: changes in self-perception; changes in interpersonal relationships; changed philosophy of life; seeing new possibilities; and greater appreciation of life.[36] The *changing sense of self* is experienced as a paradoxical growth; the individual feels more vulnerable yet able to cope with life's circumstances. *Relationships are changed* through an increased sense of connectedness with others and greater empathy for those who suffer. A person enhances his/her *spiritual and religious life* as existential questions and feelings of abandonment and meaningless arise in the aftermath of trauma. The event becomes pivotal in developing a new identity and understanding of life. A greater *appreciation of life* in general and envisioning of *new possibilities* are also signs and domains of posttraumatic growth.

The process of posttraumatic growth involves the traumatic event, the personal experience of it, and the domains of posttraumatic growth.[37] Personality characteristics like extroversion and openness to experience are predictive of growth. The personal ability to manage distressing emotions and engage in "grief work" fosters the experience of growth amidst trauma. The support of others and a safe place to disclose encourage survivors to incorporate new perspectives and re-author their narratives. The new perspective integrated in survivors' thinking and narrative could be described as attainment of wisdom.[38] Affirmed and affirming narratives, such as *oral life-histories*, are a means of returning traumatized individuals to the community where healing happens, and harnessing those individuals' strengths and gifts to heal the community itself.

Muslim Baba Narratives and Analysis

Using the foundational premises of posttraumatic growth as developed by Tedeschi and Calhoun, we examine three life-stories from the Muslim minority in the country; two are Pomak women and the other a *Kurbatka*, a Muslim Roma.[39] Why babas? These Muslim women have lived through decades of personal and historical "happenings" which they have interpreted through a particular communal identity and value system. They embody the integration of self and story, which the larger ethnocentric Bulgarian (and Balkan) story needs to more accurately reflect the complexities of the region. Second, Bulgarians have traditionally regarded old people with great respect. In an age when the old are being forgotten and abandoned in the villages, we want to amplify their voices through

[35] Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun, *Trauma and Transformation: Growing in the Aftermath of Suffering.* Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 1995.

[36] Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun, "The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory: Measuring the Positive Legacy of Trauma." *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 9 (1996): 455-471.

[37] Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun, "Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Evidence, *Psychological Inquiry,* 15:1 (2004): 1-18.

[38] Ibid., 12.

[39] *Note*: These interviews are taken from a larger project including interviews with twenty Christian and Muslim babas in the Pirin region of Bulgaria. An exhibit of portrait photography and interview excerpts (including dramatic readings) has been staged in the United States (Harrisonburg, Virginia and Washington, D.C.) and Bulgaria (Bansko).

portraiture. Their gerotranscendence (ability of old age to see through illusion) positions them as witnesses of history and as interpreters of devastating and oppressive events. According to Lars Tornstam, "if we listen to older adults we might hear them report a positive transformation in old age."[40]

The methodology of portraiture was implemented to structure the interviews. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, creating a portrait is about capturing "goodness" rather than historical correctness. It is the lived experience of another framed through an understanding of their full embodied humanity and presence.[41] In our analysis we construct emergent themes of trauma and post-traumatic growth following Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, paying particular attention to:

1. Repetitive refrains showing shared views between participants.
2. Resonant metaphors and emblematic expressions that illuminate the lived experience of the women.
3. Cultural and community rituals important in the women's context.
4. Themes experienced as contrasting and dissonant by the participants.[42]

The process of picking out key themes and creating a final story that would paint a "portrait" of each woman is connected to the notion of "voice." Voice is used as witness (standing on the edge and observing their reality); as interpretation — from their view and ours in the analysis; as autobiography; as listening to other voices and attending to silences; and, finally, as dialogue — creating meaning together in the genuine relationship that occurs between interviewer and interviewed.

Through this study (historical context, theory, interview excerpts, analysis, and photographs) we want to create a bridge between each narrator and the audience, bringing to the Bulgarian Orthodox Christian majority (and the outside world) the voices of minorities and their specific stories of marginalization. The photographs are immediate and vividly colored, establishing eye contact between the subject and the observer. The ultimate goal is to facilitate empathy through these verbal and visual portraits.[43]

The premises of posttraumatic growth theory shaped the questions used for the interviews. The opening question was: "As you think back at your life, what were the most significant life-changing events?" A follow-up question was: "What are the greatest hardships you and your family have gone through?" With each Muslim woman there was a question on the name changes: how did that impact them and their families, how did they cope with that, what sense did they make of the dominant reality and their minority

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[40] Quoted in Tzipi Weiss, "Personal Transformation: Posttraumatic Growth and Gerotranscendence," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* (July 2013): 4. doi: 10.1177/0022167813492388

[41] Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffmann Davis. *The Art and Science of Portraiture* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 142.

[42] Ibid., 193.

[43] As Currie has noted, "Stories could manufacture our moral personalities through an argument which operates through the manipulation of sympathy. We sympathize more with people when we know more about their inner lives, emotions and thought" (*Postmodern Narrative Theory* (New York: Palgrave, 1998, 17).

status? To find alternative, sometimes hidden layers of overcoming and transformation, the next questions included: "Reexamining the stories now, what do you think helped you and your people overcome what you faced? What lessons did you learn? Where does hope come from?"

Fatma Hodja, Pomak, Filipovo

I am 72 years old. We hurried to work in the fields, sometimes hungry… That was what we knew — misery. The rich can see a big world. We — nothing! We stayed here in the village. We wondered how we would make enough to raise the children.

I went to the fields yesterday. Didn't I weed it, didn't I water it — beans, potatoes, onions? I went to see where the wheat was grown. I cried there — this is our land, it has fed us through the years, and it has sustained us.

I have one son; my daughter died. She was 11 when she died. We didn't know what was ailing her – she coughed, coughed, coughed. She was in the village two years, then we took her to the hospital. She went on Friday and died on Sunday. My son got married, has children: two sons and a daughter. The sons got married. But the girl I lost will hurt as long as I live. For her the kindling burns. Even if I had 10 children, each one is precious.

It was spring. They [from the Communist government] beat up many people here. My father-in-law was 96 years old. My husband told them: "How could you change the name of an old man, change his religion?!" I was hiding upstairs when they came. The house was full of people, police from Bansko. This

> man from Obidim took out a gun and shot him. I heard the shots. Fear… The men ran outside the village to hide.
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> This is my great-grandson. Children gladden you.[44] Everything passes; you accept what comes. A person survives somehow. God holds all — strength is in God. Now it is Ramadan. It is a fast for forgiveness of sins, then a big gathering for a feast.

This excerpt is a compilation of Fatma Hodja's reminiscences of her love for the land, and the traumatic events of the death of her daughter and the murder of her father-in-law. There is personal and communal trauma in the narrative. Poverty overshadows the past ("That was what we knew — misery") — being stuck in the village, and raising children for an uncertain future. The death of a child is a traumatic event shared with many women of her era. When she narrates this story the pain of the loss is vivid for her, burning like "kindling" (a resonant metaphor, to use the phrase of Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis) and no amount of children and grandchildren can erase the loss. The traumatic story of forced name changing in the village of Filipovo is told with a sense of urgency, as if re-experienced in the moment of telling. Fatma is the voice of the witness and of the interpreter. The question of her husband hangs in the air unanswered: "How could you change the name of an old man, change his religion?" Her voice is intertwined with his voice in the past; she is repeating the question to the dominant Christian culture years later, still unable to understand. We imagine a woman huddled upstairs, terrified while the shots ring through her house. "Fear…" There the story ends abruptly, a stop to life as it was.

The plot of the oral life-history moves from the traumatic past to the present time; in the photographic portrait Fatma is holding her grandson tight in her embrace as she remembers the past. "Children gladden you." Meaningful relationships with family have kept her hopeful and connected to the present and the future, helping her to come to terms with the past: "Everything passes; you accept what comes." She also mentions Ramadan, the greatest Muslim celebration, a community ritual central to the lives of Bulgarian Pomaks. The fast for forgiveness of sins and the gathering feasts seem to summarize the experience of dealing with trespasses against the community, by those without and within, and the growth of all who gather together in overcoming them. Through posttraumatic growth, Fatma Hodja's view of life has expanded to reframe events and find redemption from the past. The deeper connection with others is expressed through the gathering with other Muslims, the understanding that life goes on through her great-grandson, and through the gracious truth-sharing with the interviewer who represents the dominant culture. The domains of posttraumatic growth — changed view of self, others, life, renewed spirituality and deepening of perspective and wisdom — are all-present.

Ramize Manova, Roma Muslim, Bansko, Bulgaria

[44] Note the "Cheerful Nature" graphic on the great-grandson's T-shirt, though Fatma does not read English.

My Christian name is Raina Georgieva Manova. My Muslim name is Ramize Sulumanova. I was born on April 9, 1930.

I traveled in my childhood. We lived in tents. My dad bought and sold horses. One week we would be in Obidim, one in Kremen, one in Gostun. That's how it was. Later we stayed in Bansko and made ourselves houses here. Nine children we were traveling, and we spent the winters in Bansko. We all sang, all of us musicians. My uncle played the accordeon, tamboura, and bozuk.

We were tinsmiths. Then, when we settled, we would go to the fields and use the empty land. What was free we would use. That's from my parents. We were honest. "Work honestly for your bread, so it would be sweet." And "he who steals is eating a hole." If you are honest, you are free, too. Feed your family. Nothing better than that.

We are Turkish Gypsies. We don't eat pork. We are Muslims. My Turkish name is Ramize, but then they christened me. Our family name was Sulumanovi. In Filipovo there was a mosque. The men would go there. We celebrated Bairam there. We fasted too. That's how I grew up. I'm named Ramize because I was born during Ramadan, during the day when no one was eating.

We Muslims are on this side of the street. On the other side are the Bulgarian Gypsies. There was no bad blood between us till they tried to change our names and we were obstinate.

This woman, an important person, told me: "Change your name or this guy will come and beat you badly. Not good to wait."

And I told her: "Miche, why don't you take my name 'Ramize'?"

She said: "I don't give up my name."

And so I said: "I don't give up my name either."

> But she changed our names without our knowledge so no harm would come to us. We found out later and didn't speak about it.
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> There is no more life for me. Let me tell you. No more life. I take medication now. They ask of me 150 leva for it. My foot and head are not well. I had a stroke six years ago. But I do have nail polish on. My little granddaughter did that. I told her, "I am old." But I let her do what she wants, may she be healthy. People stare at the different colors on my nails. I don't care.
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> I cleaned offices, shops, streets. Everything was poverty. If it weren't for God where should we turn?
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> Food is what gives me strength. A kilogram of meat and some milk. There is nothing better if you can afford it. I personally can't. But we help each other. People here help me. If they have a heart, they are human. If they don't, they aren't. Here in the heart [*she points to her heart*] is what is truthful. If something does not reach it, it is lost for good. I give you what I have wholeheartedly.

For each interview each woman was asked to introduce herself first with her full name. Ramize chose to make the introduction with both her Christian and Muslim names, revealing a double identity. There is a sense from the interview that with outsiders she prefers to use her Christian name, and within her community she prefers to use her Muslim name. This is similar to the son of Fatma Moolova (whose interview appears at the beginning of the paper) — "Outside you are Rumen, inside – Mustafa." Muslims had to conform to the dominant culture and even though they fought against the names given them, they experienced a split identity, or, to use the term of W.E.B. Dubois (in *The Souls of Black Folk*), a "double-consciousness."

Ramize talks about her youth with a sense of nostalgia. But it is not only her youth that has passed by, but a way of life. There is no bitterness in her storytelling; her language is colorful and her gestures are joyful. Though she is fond of the changeability and pace of her family life, she affirms the regular keeping of Muslim rituals and important festivals: going to the mosque in the village of Filipovo (where the two Pomak women interviewed in this paper are from) and fasting during Ramadan. Despite the general optimism of Ramize's narrative, there is historical trauma embedded in it. By the 1960's, the Communist government made Roma give up their semi-nomadic lives and forbade them from moving around freely, so they were forced to settle down. She mentions that her family settled in Bansko. The land is important, but does not function as identity-grounding in the same way that it does for Fatma Hodja. Ramize does not speak of owning the land, but using what is empty or unattended. By emphasizing her family's honesty, she is addressing the Bulgarian stereotype that Gypsies are dishonest and lazy, looking for every opportunity to steal from others. Compared with the Pomak women, the trauma of name-change is addressed in a more subtle, light-hearted manner. A concerned woman approached her and told her that her name must be changed. Ramize's retort is telling: 'Miche, would you take my name, Ramize?" In essence she asks this person, "How would you feel if you were in my shoes?"

In Fatma Hodja's narrative, poverty dominated the past. In Ramize's narrative, poverty dominates the present. She has to buy medication with her meager pension, which is not sufficient. Chronic illness and immobility are daily struggles. "But I have nail polish."

She smiles big and shows her hands — there is a different color on each nail, bright neon colors. She did not have the heart to stop her granddaughter from painting her nails. One imagines her sitting patiently while a little girl opens and closes a small bottle and paints her nails. "Children gladden you," a phrase from Fatma Hodja's interview, resonates. There is almost a feeling of going back to her youth, a kind of defiance in the face of aging. Her granddaughter has inherited some of the free spirit of the Roma: let's paint in all the colors of the rainbow and ignore old age. Extroversion to experience, predictive of posttraumatic growth, is evident in Ramize's personality and approach to life. From that cheerful, lighthearted manner of making conversation, Ramize answers the question about strength: where does it come from? "What gives strength is food." Even though food is sparse, she says that real people help each other. Food for Ramize is a symbol of human interaction; it is a concrete means of sharing a human bond, offering and receiving it. The rich values of her culture and family are intertwined with her personal experience, and we can trace posttraumatic growth and gerotranscendence in her insights about the human heart and what is truthful.

Conclusion

Identity-formation, whether national, communal, or individual, is both a tormented and tormenting process in the Balkans. Bulgaria, struggling to carve a national *samobitnost* out of the crumbling ruins of the Ottoman empire, defined itself in favor of Western ideals and in opposition to its Turkish past. Though only reflecting the perspectives of three elderly women, these stories make concrete the trauma that comes from a systematic, nationally-endorsed erosion of Muslim identity. Historical trauma and oppression made minorities feel silenced and invisible. But in tumultuous times, being invisible is a way to be safe. "We climbed up there and hid" (Fatma Moolova). "I hid upstairs," and "The men ran into the forest and hid" (Fatma Hodja). To be silenced is to be powerless. Those in authority are the ones who speak and act: "The king can speak, but you can't" (Fatma Moolova); "She changed our names in secret; we found out, but didn't say anything" (Ramize Sulumanova). Oppression becomes the norm; speaking of it is forbidden — in the story of Ramize restrictions against Roma are not described as such.

These extraordinarily resilient women, in their own individual ways, answer the following questions: How can you hold on to your integrity and humanity when it has been consistently degraded and even erased by the dominant Slavic Orthodox Christian culture? How can you know yourself when you are told that your name is not legitimate, and you are forced to take another? How can you accept, invite, forgive and connect with others? The domains of posttraumatic growth are interwoven within the fabric of their life-stories (though merely excerpted here), which richly demonstrate a breathing community in which individual identity only makes sense within the whole: working the fields, celebrating the feasts and festivals of Islam, embracing new generations of children and grandchildren (though touched by loss).

When these baba portraits are placed against the dominant narrative, which has trained people to adopt an identity that sets communities and people groups against each other, the hypocrisies of these national metanarratives are exposed. Exposure is not sufficient, however; hopefully, they can be corrected and made more inclusive (and richer

in the process). Conflict in Bulgaria and the Balkans has not been the result merely of misunderstanding, but of an inability of people entrenched within the discourses to step out of their own interpretive communities. The awareness of connection with others as a way of overcoming trauma is highlighted in each of the baba portraits, as seen in their love of children (and pain when they are lost), and through feasts for the forgiveness of past wrongs. The social and moral authority of these babas can provide a bridge between generations and groups that have been historically divided. As Bulgaria continues to struggle with its identity, having been shackled by communism and pressured by a rapidly changing world, it must embrace its diverse citizens, regardless of ethno-religious identity, and forge an identity that respects this diversity.