

# MICRO CON

A MICRO LEVEL ANALYSIS  
OF VIOLENT CONFLICT

## Experience, Memory and Narrative: A Biographical Analysis of Ethnic Identity

**MICROCON Research Working Paper 29**  
**Teodora Karamelska and Christian Geiselman**

**June 2010**

Correct citation: Karamelska, T. and Geiselman, C., 2010. *Experience, Memory and Narrative: A Biographical Analysis of Ethnic Identity* MICROCON Research Working Paper 29, Brighton: MICROCON

First published in 2010

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ISBN 978 1 85864 940 4

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# MICRO CON

## **Experience, Memory and Narrative: A Biographical Analysis of Ethnic Identity**

**Teodora Karamelska<sup>1</sup> and Christian Geiselmann<sup>2</sup>**

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**Abstract:** In the first part of this paper, we will introduce the theoretical framework for analyzing autobiographical narratives as it has been developed by the German sociologists Fritz Schütze and Gabriele Rosenthal<sup>3</sup>, and later has been adapted by Koleva, Popova and others.<sup>4</sup> In the second part we will use this methodology to analyze empirical data that have been collected as part of our MICROCON study on ethnic identity and the risk of inter-ethnic conflict in Bulgaria. We focus on the question of how people belonging to the group of “ethnic Turks” in Bulgaria define their ethnicity, between the competing contexts of the past (in the form of their experience) and the present (in the form of what they remember and how they re-actualize it in their biographical narratives). The paper is based on the analysis of two (out of a sample of 120) narrative autobiographic interviews.

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<sup>3</sup> Schütze [year not indicated]: Biography Analysis on the... (full title see the bibliographical notes at the end of this paper).

<sup>4</sup> Koleva 1999, Koleva 2002, Koleva 2007, Krāsteva 1998, Popova 1994.

## **1. Autobiographical data as a source for sociological studies**

Analyzing autobiographical data became part of the methodological tool-box of sociologists especially from the late 1970s on.<sup>5</sup> An interesting subject (not only) for sociologists is the ways in which individuals deal with their life experience. Dealing with life experience typically includes three steps: 1) the experience itself 2) memory, 3) and the act of re-arranging experience and memory into something new: a diary, a picture, a movie, a novel, etc. Particularly interesting in this context are autobiographical narratives.

### **1.1. Biographical Gestalt and biographical whole**

In telling their life history from their own perspective (and possibly without being interrupted by questions or being preliminarily restricted to a certain part of their life) people can, in a spontaneous way, form narratives which are self-sufficient, or, in other words, are in a specific way *integral* (although, of course, they always consist of selected events, and never can deliver a full report). Such a self-sufficient reconstruction of a life history is constitutive of the current identity of the respondent (the person who tells his or her life story) and his or her place in society. We call this a *biographical Gestalt*.

For interpreting the elements of *biographical Gestalt*, Schütze (and others) have developed a methodology which will be outlined below. Following Schütze's terminology, the researcher interpreting a *biographical Gestalt* creates a *biographical whole* [German: *biographische Gesamtformung*]. This is in order to differentiate between what the respondent has produced (the *biographical Gestalt*), and what the researcher derives from it (*biographical whole*).

In order to come to a *biographical whole*, the researcher first describes the chronology of the respondent's life. Second he produces a structural description of contents ("strukturelle inhaltliche Beschreibung") which means, he analyzes what topics are particularly important for the respondent, which ones he or she mentions with less emphasis or casually, and which ones he or she does not mention at all. As a last step, the researcher compares all elements which have been found in the narrative and shows what are the dominating structures, beginning with the past, and step by step approaching the present (c.f. Schütze 1983: 288).

### **1.2. The present as the leading temporary structure for the past**

In his narrative, the autobiographer actualizes his interpretation of the past (Koleva 2007: 11-13). His life experience is a specific form of knowledge, accessible only

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<sup>5</sup> See Koleva 1999: 7-30; Želeva 2006: 193; Džamdžieva 2008: 49-52; Eliot 2005: 22-27; Bryman 2008.

through remembering. Orienting the remembering of the past (and forming the narrative), however, is the present, with its markers for success/failure, normality/deviation etc. Hence the present becomes the dominating order for restructuring the past. (This includes also expectations for the future, since they have their own impact on how the individual acts in the present.)

Forming a holistic autobiographic narrative (a biographical *Gestalt*) does not mean just linking a number of events one to each other. The biographical narrative is not (solely) directed towards the past. Also, it is not – as another common misconception would hold – the mere result of present circumstances influencing the individual. Rather the autobiographic narrative should be seen as an attempt (and ability) of the individual to re-contextualize the past (and past events), including the various social roles the individual once had, and currently has. (Alheit 1997: 944). An individual who lives in multiple social worlds has to act in various roles, and has nevertheless to preserve his or her identity. Re-interpreting one's own biography is an opportunity to internalize new approaches to one's life. This opens the door for new ways to act and make plans. Such a re-actualizing of events (relevant for the individual), may lead to restructuring (partly, totally, or with respect to a certain situation) the self-conceptualisation of the individual, and the way in which it positions itself in the world. It may even lead to a shift of personality. In other words, a *biographical Gestalt* is not so much a constant and deliberately constructed entity. Rather it is an act of dynamically linking of three strata: the sedimented experience of events, the remembering of events, and their reproduction in form of a life history narrative. (Rosenthal 1995: 20). We could call this linking of the three elements a linking of *temporary layers*.<sup>6</sup>

### **1.3. Remembering as a selective activity**

For the purpose of interpreting biographic data, we propose that remembering is a process composed of several steps (Rosenthal 1995). The construction of an autobiographical narrative (i.e. creating a *Gestalt*) starts from reflective remembering. Remembering the past (in form of circumstances and events) in the course of an autobiographical narrative includes, as a rule, various types of transformations such as *blending* experience and emotions, *aggregation* of diverse ideas into a unified order, and *suppression / selection / interpretation* of events. Hence one might be sceptical about the “objectivity” of an autobiographical narrative. However, those transformations can help us uncover the *motives* which shape the process of creating the autobiographical self-construction. An autobiographical statement will be meaningful for the researcher not so much because of the factual information it offers. More important is *how* the respondent (who tells us the story of his life) forms a consistent, holistic narrative by selecting and (re-)arranging various remembered

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<sup>6</sup> Schütze, in his English papers, uses *temporary structures*, or *temporary structures of the biographical storytelling*.

events or circumstances of his life, which then appear as *sequences* in the narrative (Bohnsack, Marotzki, Meuser 2006: 17). The act of creating the narrative may be called a *biographical action*.

A *biographical action* uses *time frames* (meaning: for any given element of his life story, the respondent himself decides what he sees as the starting point and the end point<sup>7</sup>), and it is shaped by the decision of the autobiographer to preserve, uncover or neglect *spaces of action* (physical places where his actions took place) and *life options* (opportunities to choose between one or another way to act). In his *biographical action* (which is, in plain words, the act of telling one's life) the individual uses both his (or her) experience and expectations. Thus, the autobiographer develops a specific attitude towards the flow of events in his life. It is exactly this concept of an attitude, which made Schütze introduce the notion of *biographical action schemes* (Schütze 1984). (On biographical action schemes, see below).

## **2. A model for interpreting biographical narratives**

### **2.1. Biographical process structures**

From Schütze's perspective, the key elements of biographical narratives are *biographical process structures* [German: Prozesstrukturen]. Schütze identifies exactly four different types: a) *institutional expectation patterns* b) *biographical action schemes* c) *trajectories of suffering* and d) *creative metamorphoses of biographical identity* (Schütze 1982: 67). They are four basic models of how people, when forming their *biographical Gestalt*, arrange and interpret the elements of their narrative. In what follows we will briefly discuss the four types of *biographical process structures*.

#### **a) Institutional expectation patterns**

The phases of a life cycle are usually predetermined by a dominating cultural model which ties the life of the individual to certain (societal) institutions. This model generates expectations what *phases* a life cycle should have, and what would be "success" or "failure" of a given phase. Such phases may be school education, military service, starting a family, upbringing of children and professional career. (And we find exactly such phases in the two interviews which will be analysed later in this article.) They are legitimized (and regulated) through institutions such as school, army, family, or economy. They are marked by rituals of transition. So-called *conflicts of expectation* may appear when the standard path of personal development is obstructed, for example through unemployment, health problems, or political

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<sup>7</sup> For example, when talking about emigration to another country, the respondent himself decides whether the living conditions in his home country are part of this process or not.

restrictions. *Conflicts of expectation* are discrepancies between the moral concepts of the individual, and reality.

The individual (the respondent) typically believes that his cognitive and emotional orientation is similarly valid for those with whom he interacts. This expectation should be seen as another dimension of *institutional expectation patterns*.<sup>8</sup> Social groups constitute themselves through historical events which have (or are believed to have) common biographical relevance to all members of the group. This mechanism allows us to typologize individual biographies by finding such common elements (Nohl 2005). Starting from a detailed description of the processes in question (or in other words: the events in which the respondent took part, with special respect to their singularity), we try to isolate their common characteristics and thus to understand their inner structure (Bohnsack, Marotzki, Meuser 2006: 47; Schütze 2006: 161).

#### b) Biographical action scheme

In an autobiographical narrative, *biographical action schemes* describe an individual's *purposeful long term activities*. An example for such a long term activity might be the concept of a vocational career, starting with apprenticeship, continuing with some 30 years of work and ending with retirement. Through *biographical action schemes* the individual is able to actively control his or her life. A *biographical action scheme* includes four elements: defining an objective; choosing the means to reach it; decision to implement the scheme; and implementation.

Further characteristics of *biographical action schemes* are:

1) They are interactive: they are oriented towards the partners of social interaction (by anticipating their expectations) and thus may play a role in adjusting the self-definition of a person.

2) They have a specific *assessment structure*. For example, an event or activity, which did not seem particularly important at the time it occurred, may appear in the autobiographical narrative as a key event with particular meaning either for life before, or life after.

3) Their implementation follows a specific structure. For example, in the case of emigrants this would be something like: preparing the obligatory documents, selling the house and other real estate, organising the travel, etc., good-byes with friends and colleagues, arriving in the new country, adapting oneself to the socio-cultural environment, organising one's everyday life and setting up new social networks.

4) The individual evaluates the results of the *biographical action scheme* and tries to legitimize it. For example, this may be done by emphasizing one's improved social or financial status and by presenting this as a consequence of following the *action scheme*. (Schütze 1982: 70-85).

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<sup>8</sup> On the link between the life cycle and normativity of societal expectations see Koleva 2002.

5) *Biographical action schemes* are not monologues: Their meaning becomes clear when we reconstruct the structures of the family, the group or the organisation which the respondent of an interview used to belong to. (Rosenthal 2005: 195).

### c) Trajectories of suffering

Schütze believes that *life time* is an important dimension for the social activities of the individual, since a person's identity changes in the course of life. Changes in the patterns of his activities appear when the individual is exposed to processes which alienate him (or her) from the *institutional expectation patterns* so that there appear discrepancies between expectations, implementation plans and the factual development of life (Schütze 1982: 89, 145).

However, there are also events and processes which disturb the order of everyday life without leading to immediate action.<sup>9</sup> One such process is *suffering*. *Suffering* remains undisclosed in the sphere of individual experience of a person, grows into a general emotional disposition (or mood) and thus accelerates the transformation of identity. (An extreme form would be the complete disintegration of a person's ability to act.)

It is characteristic for *trajectories of suffering* that in a given situation a person's psycho-social resources become ineffective. This restricts his (or her) ability to act or react. In the case of *suffering*, the individual abandons the purposeful form of experience and activity (which is constitutive for social action) for a *conditioned* behaviour ("conditioned" meaning here that the individual is exposed to external influences beyond his or her control) (Schütze 1983: 288). These may make the individual restructure his or her basic attitudes and his or her ways of managing everyday life. In other words: *Negative events* means: the room for social action is restricted, and social competencies are reduced. *Positive events* means the opposite: there is more place for social action, and new and better social positions can be achieved (Schütze 1982: 90).

*Trajectories of suffering* are an interesting object for the sociologist as far as they have an impact on the collective attitude and the social understanding of what is *order* (or rightfulness), and thus are able to contribute to the emergence of social tension or even conflict, respectively conflict between ethnic or other groups in society, or societal strata.

What Schütze calls *trajectories of suffering*, is described in Rosenthal (1997, 2003) as *traumatic experience*. According to Rosenthal, traumatic experience can be found for example when respondents

- talk emotionally about dramatical situation, or when they mention them only fragmentially

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<sup>9</sup> An example would be the change of names which was forced upon the Bulgarian Turks during the 1980s. The victims – in fact the entire population of Bulgarian Turks – endured this without a considerable reaction. Years later, however, they left Bulgaria, in a sudden mass exodus. These events are one of the key topics of the case studies which are presented below.



- switch between different time lines (present, past, etc.), (which can be confusing for the interviewer)
- ignore violent episodes in the past
- describe other people's traumatic experience (and avoid talking about their own)
- speak in a lot of detail about single traumatic experiences
- avoid "dangerous" topics by dwelling on topics or events of secondary importance.

#### d) Creative metamorphoses of biographical identity

A biographical narrative is composed with regard to both the structures which used to determine the flow of life in the past, and the structures which determine the flow of life at present (Schütze 1982: 104). Through the *biographical Gestalt* the individual stabilizes itself and its identity; the *biographical Gestalt* is a kind of self-assertion of the individual. For creating it, the individual uses its *basic resources* (for example his or her creativity, or just material assets which are available such as a house, a vocation, commodities), *basic skills and dispositions* (which he or she tends to fulfil, as a result of origin or identity; example are a disposition to have children, to travel, or to create beautiful things), *basic attitudes* (ways to look at matters of everyday life), and *basic strategies of how to act*. If one of these is changed, this may cause a collapse of the hitherto dominating *life structures*.<sup>10</sup> This may result in shifting the perspective from which the individual constructs its *biographical Gestalt*.

Such a re-grouping of the layers of memory and of the basic *biographical Gestalt* may trigger self-deception (illusion) and ideologization. In cases when the alteration of the *biographical Gestalt* is painful, we find a tendency to (self-) disguising autobiographical narratives. This may occur in various ways. Memory can be complemented by imagination; the respondent can choose to not express every detail which he remembers at the moment when he tells his story; he (or she) can add elements which are not part of a concrete memory of the past, pieces of memory from other experiences, or arguments taken from other people's narratives (Rosenthal 1995: 90).

## **2.2. Generating the data: the narrative biographical interview**

The methodology of interpreting autobiographical narratives as we employ it in our study has been described in detail by Schütze and Rosenthal.<sup>11</sup> It is based on autobiographic narrative interviews which are recorded in a situation of an extended, relatively informal face-to-face conversation. A typical interview would last an hour

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<sup>10</sup> For example, losing his family may destroy the self-perception [identity] of a person as „I have family, I am a successful member of society, I am like others“.

<sup>11</sup> Rosenthal 1995: 186-207; Rosenthal 2005: 125-155; Rosenthal, Köttig u.a. 2006. The methodology usually is called *biographische Fallrekonstruktion* – biographical case reconstruction.

or more. An advantage of this way of generating data is that the researcher can trace (in the text corpus, after transcription) how the *models of interpretation* which the respondents use are linked to their *reconstructed life history* (Rosenthal 2005: 125-155).<sup>12</sup>

The basic idea is that the narrated life history is more than a sequence of randomly selected events from the respondent's life. Rather, the events which are used to form the narrative are selected with respect to a holistic system of interpreting the world (Popova 1985: 85). Similarly, the researcher, while emphasising the subjectivity of the individual's experience, is not so much interested in "what happened", than in "what does it mean to the respondent" in the context of his entire life and his situation at present (Koleva 2007: 11).

Therefore, in the first part of the interview, the interviewer will try to not interfere with any questions to clarify facts. Rather, he or she will try to encourage the respondent to find his own way to tell his life. The result is – if the interview is successful – a reconstruction of the life history, as it is constitutive for the current identity of the respondent, and his (or her) place in society. This is called a *biographical Gestalt* (Bohnsack 1991: 93). Established in this way, the biographical data show how people in fact behave (in their respective social environment), as opposed to what they tend to display as their intentions (Popova 1994: 84).<sup>13</sup>

Whereas in the first part of the interview the respondent should have the opportunity to create his *biographical Gestalt* without unnecessary interference by the interviewer, in the second part questions may be asked, aiming at a more precise reconstruction of those events which are important for the overall topic of the study. This helps avoid the risk that the interview becomes too poor a source of information because it is only up to the respondent to choose the topics of his narrative (Schütze 2006: 159; Holf 2008: 45).

Crucial for an autobiographical interview is the relationship between the interviewer and the respondent. It is the interviewer's task to provide an atmosphere which helps the respondent feel comfortable. Moreover, the interviewer should support the respondent to concentrate on telling *events* (narration), rather than giving his *opinion* about things (assessment) or *explain* his behaviour (argumentation). Only by re-actualizing as many details of events as possible the respondent will enable us to reconstruct his *strata of experience* which are decisive for his present identity.<sup>14</sup>

Additionally, concentrating on the description of events allows the reduction of the asymmetry of the interview situation. In interviews, respondents usually tend to seek

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<sup>12</sup> For example, a *model of interpretation* would be "everything in socialism was fine and well-done", whereas an element of *reconstructed life history* would be "the most important period in my life was when I was the secretary of the party and I managed to organize all the cultural life in our village over a period of about ten years".

<sup>13</sup> For example, a respondent may tell us that life in his village is boring and that he would like to emigrate to America. However, more important, for a biographical analysis, is what he really did, and why.

<sup>14</sup> An example to illustrate this: In one of our interviews a woman living in a village expressed strong dislike of Turks, more than other people in this community. Later it turned out that she had a Roma mother, which is, in the established hierarchy of ethnic groups, even "lower" than being a Turk.

recognition, and tend to give answers which – as they believe – match what is socially acceptable and especially what fits the anticipated expectations of the interviewer (Taylor, Bogdan 1998: 101-103).

### **Sequential analysis**

A biographical narrative consists of a sequence of *biographical process structures*.<sup>15</sup> As we have seen, *biographical process structures* are variable.<sup>16</sup> (Schütze 1984: 88). When the dominating biographical process structure changes, the respondent accordingly will put other accents on the interpretation of his life history. Such changes are not necessarily experienced as dramatic or highly emotional. They may be just some “outer” changes, for example moving to a new apartment, getting into a new position in society, or a disturbance in everyday communication which lets the respondent feel unsure about his social skills and thus reduces his self-respect.

Changes in the interpretation of *process structures* may be brought to light through a type of text analysis, called *sequential analysis*. This means analyzing how the autobiographer himself arranges in his narrative the changes he experienced (Schütze 1982: 132; Popova 1994: 85).

A *sequential analysis* has three steps: 1) In the course of transcribing the interview we identify *text units* and classify them as either *narration*, *description* or *argumentation* (Rosenthal 1995: 240-241).

*Narration* is related to consecutive chains of factive or fictive events. They are linked to each other either by a timely or a causal logic. The respondent uses *narration* in order to actualize how things (actions and events) happened, with a beginning and an end, with a concrete time and place (Schütze 1987: 146 ff).

*Descriptions* are related to a repeated action, or to the unvarying state of things (circumstances). The main difference between descriptions and narratives is that descriptions are static. Any processual characteristics of the object of description are “frozen”. (Kallmeyer, Schütze 1977: 201)

*Argumentations* can be seen as theoretical constructs. Koleva (2007: 17) calls them *ideological meta-narratives*. They appear either as assessment of the respondent’s own or other peoples’ actions, or as a presentation of a respondent’s general ideological (in German: *weltanschauliche*) attitudes. *Argumentations* appear in interviews depending on the communicative setting (atmosphere) at the time of recording, since they reflect today’s point of view. (Schütze 1987: 149)

After having established the transition points of sequences (for example the change to another class of text units), we continue the analysis by searching for answers to questions such as: why does a given topic appear at a given place in the narrative? What determines its length? Why does the text appear in this form? To what thematic areas could a given sequence be assigned? What spheres or periods of life does the

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<sup>15</sup> See above, where this notion is introduced.

<sup>16</sup> Different events in your life may seem important to you today, and of minor importance tomorrow.

narrative deal with, and, reciprocally, what spheres and periods are excluded? What spheres or periods are mentioned only because the interviewer, later in the interview, asks additional questions? (Rosenthal 2005: 185).

The last and final step is interpreting the *biographical Gestalt* of the narrative. This is what we will do in what follows.

### **3. Biographical reconstruction and ethnic identity.**

The methodology outlined above is used in social sciences to better understand how an individual forms his or her identity, and how various factors influence this process. Such factors are gender, religion, language, migration, generation gaps, etc. Much emphasis is also laid on biographical analysis of *ethnic identity*. Ethnic identity is often seen as a key element for the creation of meaning in the life-world<sup>17</sup>, and thus for stabilizing the self-perception of the individual (Fotev 1994: 17-22). Interesting are not only such dimensions of ethnic identity which are related to the individual (for example an individual's affirmative or traumatic experience of ethnic identity), but also such dimensions of ethnic identity which make it function as collective capital. The latter are important because they bear the potential to bring about conflicts, particularly when people start to occupy new spaces in society, are included in or excluded from societal processes, legitimize their access to resources or impose on others restrictions to the access to resources.

In our study, we try to employ a non-substantialistic approach to *ethnic identity*. To that end in our biographical interviews we avoid the notion "ethnos", since "ethnos" implies an ontologically stable unit that directly includes its members who, by virtue of heritage, belong to a quasi ready-made cultural context. We prefer the notion of "ethnicity" which emphasises individual choice and the freedom of self-definition. It also gives the opportunity to interpret ethnic belonging outside of monolithic *master narratives*. For us, ethnic identity is not a mono-dimensional feature which is incorporated into the members of a community (Krāsteva 1998: 158; 2004: 31; Nedelčeva 2004: 47-61). Rather, we see ethnic identity as dependent of individual, mutative biographical constellations and their actual, meaningful re-interpretation in the present. In this perspective, it would be misleading to believe that individuals have an invariable self-conception. (Kohli 1982: 157-168).

The two narratives which we are going to analyse in this paper are to be seen as *prototypes* of life experience (Rosenthal 2005: 75). *Typicality* means that the "biographical case" represents one of potentially countless possible ways of relating oneself to the social environment. The *biographical case* is part of the social reality, even though it occurs, by definition, in this form only once (Popova 1994: 84; Rosenthal, Köttig et al. 2006: 36).

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<sup>17</sup> German *Lebenswelt*.

### **3.1. Some historico-political background: Turks in Bulgaria, and the assimilation campaign in the 1980s**

The respondents whose biographical narratives we present in this paper, belong to the group of Bulgarian Turks<sup>18</sup>. “Belonging” means that they define themselves as such. In the 1980s, Bulgarian Turks became the victims of an assimilation campaign, instigated by the communist regime under Todor Živkov, which did not proceed without various forms of violence, including the police and the military. The campaign set off a mass exodus into neighbouring Turkey. The background of this campaign (which seemed quite irrational even from the perspective of the communist regime) are not finally clarified. Today, the campaign and its effects are usually referred to as *vǎzrodítelen procés*.<sup>19</sup>

The choice of “Bulgarian Turks” as a reference group is based on the assumption that the *vǎzrodítelen procés* had powerful (and even violent) effects on the entire community, and thus marks a common *trajectory of suffering*. However, the reactions to this trajectory of suffering are not uniform. The two autobiographical interviews presented below show that the respondents use considerably different *biographical action schemes* and have different expectations of the future.<sup>20</sup>

Two of the most outstanding events during the *vǎzrodítelen procés* in the 1980s were a) the campaign to change the traditional Turko-Arabic names of the Bulgarian Turks to Bulgarian ones (particularly in December 1984 and January 1985), and b) the public protests in North Eastern Bulgaria in May 1989 which were followed by a mass emigration of nearly 360 000 to neighbouring Turkey.<sup>21</sup> Since then, scholars have collected a huge corpus of documents from archives and so on, and have tried to reconstruct the events and their political background. Detailed studies have been written about what effects the state policy of a “uniform socialist nation”<sup>22</sup> and the official historical discourse (which has been aiming to prove that the Turkish population in Bulgaria actually were “descendants of islamized Bulgarians”) had on ethnic markers such as language, names, attire and religion (Jalǎmov 2002; Gruev, Kal’onski 2008: 167-176).

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<sup>18</sup> According to the official census of 2001, „Bulgarian Turks“ are, by size, the second ethno-religious group in Bulgaria, counting 9,6 per cent of the overall population. As usual, the methodology of such census includes that the individual may take a free decision as for what is his ethnic belonging (if any).

<sup>19</sup> The term *vǎzrodítelen procés* is in common use in Bulgarian public life and academic writing, although it is historically problematic and carries ideological impetus. See: Baeva, Kalinova 2009: 5); Fotev 1994: 88-102; Jalǎmov 2002: 360; Dokumenti ot archiva na CK na BKP, 2003; Kalinova 2004: 52-64; Gruev, Kal’onski 2008: 131-176.

<sup>20</sup> As part of Microcon project No. 6, a team of the Sv.-Sv.-Kliment Ohridski-University in Sofia (Institute of History and Theory of Culture), led by Teodora Karamelska, Daniela Koleva and Christian Geiselmann recorded in 2008 and 2009 about 100 biographical interviews in those five *oblasti* in North East Bulgaria which have the highest percentages of Turkish population.

<sup>21</sup> Many of them returned after weeks or months, others remained in Turkey.

<sup>22</sup> This notion had been shaped at the Plenum of the CK of the BKP in January 1974 when a task was devised to “ideo-politically integrate those with Turkish descent” as well as to “make the Bulgarian Muslims aware of their nation, and to educate them as patriots” (cit. in Baeva, Kalinova 2009: 27).

We believe, as a hypothesis, that this historical context has heterogeneous effects on the way that people, through their biographical narratives, individually construct their ethnic identity. The two respondents whose narratives are introduced here form their social positions in two different ways. For both of them, the *vǎzroditelen procés* caused a loss of biographical orientation. For both of them, it provided an opportunity to re-think the question “who am I, and how did I become who I am”. However, they end up with entirely different results. As a consequence, we see a diversity of self-definition in those who are used to classifying themselves as “Bulgarian Turks”. This diversity of self-definitions, so far, has not been adequately taken into consideration by researchers, let alone the public.

Therefore, we will (1) first investigate how (and how much) the concept of a “uniform socialist nation” has shaped the dominating *institutional expectation pattern* and how the two respondents (seeing themselves as Turks) adapted themselves to this model. (2) Second, we will look at the assimilation campaign in 1984-1985, and the mass emigration to Turkey. We will interpret this as normative, institutional coercion which corroded (or even let implode) the self-perception of the respondents by depriving them of the feeling that they possess control over their life circumstance, using their mental, cognitive and social resources. As we will show, both respondents still experience the forced changing of their names as “horizons of meaning” with biographical relevance. This is clearly indicated by the fact that both of them use, for re-interpretation of their lives, a pattern of “before the *vǎzroditelnija proces*” and “after the *vǎzroditelnija proces*”. Quite remarkably, this pattern appears in all interviews we have recorded so far, although in the initial phase of the interviews we deliberately did not allude to the 1980s events. (3) Third, we will show that the interruption of reciprocity in the interaction with socially important partners (which are, in this case, the “Bulgarians”) as a consequence of the *vǎzroditelen procés* has its effect on the everyday relations between neighbours, and on their mutual stereotypes.

## **3.2. Narrative I**

### **3.2.1. About the respondent: Ismail Kadir<sup>23</sup>**

At the time of the interview, Ismail Kadir was 50 years old. He is married, with two children. He had worked for 30 years as a rural paramedic in his home village with a population of 4000. Currently he works as a paramedic in a vocational school in the nearby town, a position that he has been occupying for seven years now.

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<sup>23</sup> The two interviews were recorded by Teodora Karamelska and Vanja Elenkova. Both interviews lasted about 70 minutes. After the first part, a free biographical narrative, the interviewers had several questions concerning: the events of 1984/85 and 1989 as pivotal points for the interpretation of the biography; the „other“ ethnic group; current social roles; mobility; relationship between neighbours; informal networks of communication (language, food, attire, religion, holidays).

He starts the interview with describing his current duties as a school paramedic, and his relation with the students of the vocational school who are his patients. Due to layoffs in the health care system after 1989, Ismail Kadir became unemployed. His success in finding new employment after the economic crisis of the early 1990s, for him, is due to his solid medical training, the initiative for which came from his parents. For Ismail Kadir, the socialist time was a time of general welfare. “Democracy” (which is what came after socialism) brought about an erosion of the traditional order of life, a disaggregation of social structures, the collapse of agriculture (which had been the major source of income in this region), and emigration of the larger part of the people from his village to Turkey. After a short time in Turkey, Ismail Kadir and his family returned to Bulgaria. Decisive for his success in re-integrating himself in Bulgaria were, as he says, the support he received from one of his friends, a Bulgarian, as well as his own efforts. He describes the inter-ethnic relations with partners in everyday life (colleagues, friends, neighbours) as good-willed and tolerant; these relations are being sustained through mutual respect on a personal level, and through participating in common rituals (traditional holidays).

### 3.2.2. Selected sequences from Ismail Kadir’s interview<sup>24</sup>

- 1 [1/2] in the school I am responsible (1) chiefly for prophylaxis: well, (2) lectures, speaking about health issues [...] for example, this includes first hygiene, the habits of the students; **this is the most important thing**, then (1) when you go further (1) when you go deeper into the details, AIDS=drugs, serious infectious diseases, how to avoid coming down with a cold, and first aid in case of (2) accidents, hepatitis, particularly heavy infectious diseases... our work is interesting, we give them first aid [...] and that’s how our life goes on. ((laughs))
- 2 [2/12] and good that this position has been created (1) in the *technikum*<sup>25</sup>, the *technikum* we were **many** applicants for this one position, but I won the contest ((relieved))
- 3 [2/14] and they were retired, my parents, we are four children, I am the youngest, and I stayed at home when my parents already were retired, and my father took my documents from the Institute of Agriculture in ((name of the place)) to the Medical School in ((name of the place)), I **did not** know this (1) I was in the army then, two years I was an army

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#### <sup>24</sup> Legend:

- 1 [1/11] Serial number of the sequence. The figures in [square brackets] indicate the place in our transcripts.
- (4) Four seconds of silence
- no: Elongated pronunciation
- ((laughs)) Comment during transcription
- enough** Emphatic pronunciation
- (he says) Transcription unsure
- no=no Slurred pronunciation of two words
- //mhm// Interjection by the interviewer

The interviews were held in Bulgarian; they were translated into English by the authors of this study; we tried to render the sequences in an appropriate oral style to match the atmosphere. Therefore they are often far from being literal. The analysis of the interviews, of course, is based on the original Bulgarian text.

<sup>25</sup> Medical school, in this case.

musician, //hm// I played the trumpet in the military brass orchestra (1), and I did not know this, and then [...] and my father sent me a letter with a lot of excuse-mes, that he had transferred my documents and **out of necessity** [...] but why should I be angry ((louder)), and I am grateful for this that they cared for my education **that much**

4 [2/14] I was member of: (2) sporting teams, I was two times national champion of **floor exercises**, I was in the school orchestra, (2) I am a **musician**, I play the guitar and the trumpet, ((laughs)), yes: and I have brought up my **daughters** in the same way, I **myself** have taught them, didn't I, meaning, when you are on your own in life, you think about everything, and most you think when your stomach is empty, right, (2) best you think when your stomach is hungry

5 [3/18] we were frightened, we very **very** frightened ((emphatic))

every day I go to work hitch-hiking, because public transport is expensive, it is now 1,80 leva, 1.80 leva<sup>26</sup> and 1.80 leva, 3.60 leva, this are serious expenses ((laughs)), a **poor** region, a poor region, our wages are small, I had (2) cropland, right, 3.5 hectare, I sold them to support my children, I had a car, I sold it, too, I had a vineyard, I sold the vineyard too, but finally: the end justifies the means, they now have finished university [...] so that (2) more or less we are happy, no way **not to be happy**

6 [4/20] prior to 1989 there weren't such problems, for example, I would have been able **without any problems**, right, to support my daughters as students, without selling cropland, the vineyards, cars (1) and without such a lot of efforts, and without being worried about the future of my children, right, back then, back then nobody was hungry [...] Marxism-Leninism speaks of equal rights, doesn't it, okay, the upper ones lived well, the upper ones there is **no way** they wouldn't live well, but there was enough also for the ordinary people, there was enough also for the ordinary people, there was no unemployment ((getting louder)) (5) now we have unemployment, **especially** for the older ones like me, this is literally annihilating

7 [5/30] in the village, people get along with each other **very** well, get along with each other very well, there are no hassles, no hassles, in this democracy which had just started right then, well, at this time there was a lot of thievery, **a lot of** thievery, not to say, around our village there are forests, cutting, huge cutting (3) but the district major was afraid to go into the forest and to arrest them, but now they have been arrested, since political changes now made that things started becoming better

8 [5/32] and my wife laughed – Svetlanka, I call her Svetlanka, when the names were changed I was Ivo, and she Svetlanka, and still now we call each other Ivo and Svetlanka, and so they call me here, and I am not offended by this, I think it is not offending, it is a name, no but (3) this is a very (2) such a (2) bad reminder of (4) of the *vāzražđane*, of the renaissance<sup>27</sup> (1), to turn Turks into Bulgarians, do you understand ((becoming louder)),

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<sup>26</sup> 1 lev is about 0,5 euros. An average monthly wage would be between 200 and 600 leva, depending on the profession and the place.

<sup>27</sup> The word *vāzrodētelen procēs* which is broadly in use for those events, means, literally, “process of re-birth”. The word refers to the notion *vāzražđane*, which is “re-birth”, or “Renaissance”. However, *vāzražđane* does not mean “Renaissance” in the common European meaning (although the word was coined, of course, with reference to the European renaissance). Rather it is used in history books as a word for the time from late 18<sup>th</sup> to late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Bulgarian society emancipated itself gradually from Ottoman influence. The word *vāzrodētelen procēs* was created by the ideologues and strategists of the Bulgarian Communist Party in the 1980s as a euphemism for the violent attempts to assimilate the Bulgarian Turks to the official culture and ethnicity of the party-state. The word *vāzrodētelen procēs* itself is discriminatory, since the violent assimilation



this was a big mistake, do you understand, the mistake of the communists, but **anyway** I am a BSP-man<sup>28</sup> ((laughs))

- 9 [6/32] we were **ninety one** when we started university, we were seventeen when we finished university, and **five** got a diploma (2), I am one of those five
- 10 [6/34] I like the ideas people have, not the things people do, certain people (2) how many people died, I have friends in the Kărdžali region, they fled from Kărdžali at that time, they came to us, the police arrested them, they took them here from us, and later I heard that they have shot them, right, (2) this was a mistake, **but** I like those ideas in communism, those ideas which are applicable, but they have distorted the ideas of communism ((lowers his voice))
- 11 [6/36] I was in Turkey for eleven months in 1989, yes, exactly, we are three brothers and one sister, I am the pet of the family, the last one, at that time there were those suitcase things, only with suitcases they went, **they did not allow** more luggage (3) hurried around in Bulgaria, my brothers and my sister hurried around in Bulgaria, and I grazed the sheep (2) and they emigrated earlier than me, perhaps several weeks earlier, and finally, when I looked around in the village, there were left only the Roma, the Roma ((lowers his voice)) don't have relatives in Turkey [...] and so, when my brothers emigrated and I looked around, **there was nobody left** and I said Svetlanka, let's go, and I came and took the passports from here, and then on 4 July I was in Istanbul, I have an uncle in Istanbul, my whole family is in Turkey, of 260 people, of my complete family in Turkey only **I** came back in May (2), eleven months and 20 days I stayed, I was in Istanbul (2) that's not my cup of tea, Turkey isn't my cup of tea //a:// their mentality, the way they live, the way they behave towards a well-educated person [...] they do not like educated people, I hardly could stand it
- 12 [7/38] I had a boss, a doctor, he was an awful Muslim, right, went to the mosque five times a day, and didn't like me, because I was an atheist, I wasn't a believer, I did not make bows, that's called *namaz*, right, you pray five times a day (2) the Turks pray five times a day, I am not able to do this, so, although my grandfather was an imam, **but anyway**
- 13 [8/38] I went to Turkey with two trucks of luggage, I came back with seven bags, that was it ((laughs)) but **thank God** I had a house, I had rented it to a friend, Petjo is his name, Petăr Petrov Petrov, he was director of the local bank branch ((name of the bank)) (1) him I had left the house, when I came back, I had a greenhouse, tomatoes, right, he, the pal, sold the tomatoes, took the first five hundred leva, and when I came back he said, here you are, the first five hundred leva, to start again ((knocks on the table)), but there I got: money, then: one million ((Turkish lira)) was equal to seven thousand leva, I hid it in the bags, this money and (1) the luggage arrived, when we arrived with the luggage, those seven bags, right, the railway station was in ((name of the place)) and nobody had touched the bags, seven thousand leva, and I started as I was (1) completely from the beginning, again furniture, carpets, **things**, everything from the beginning, so we started... and on my own, I started to work, in the village, at that time the village doctors

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campaign can be understood as “re-birth” only if one denies a self-consistent cultural identity of the Turks living in Bulgaria. Moreover, it is rather cynical to call a violent assimilation campaign (in which even the army took part) a “process”, thus neglecting that there were people behind it who acted deliberately and purposefully. – Interestingly, Mr. Kadir does not use the word *văzráždane* which is well established for the period in question, but the foreign word *renesáns* (renaissance), which otherwise is used specifically for the European (mediaeval) Renaissance.

<sup>28</sup> BSP, Bulgarian Socialist Party, the successor of the Bulgarian Communist Party. BSP was the leading power in Bulgarian government when this interview was recorded.

were getting **good** wages [...] I established myself again and (2) with this initial speed which I had started with=I brought up my children, ((laughs)) we went through a lot of things, we went through a lot of things, but we survived

14 [8/42] **people envy me**, they envy me for my optimism, I am not a pessimist, I do not give up that quickly (2) they, my brothers, are still there, my mother died there (4) for several months they did not call me, because they are offended because I did not tell them that I was going to return

15 [9/43] Q: Over there, wow is their behaviour vis-à-vis the Bulgarian Turks?

A: **giaour** (2), **giaour**<sup>29</sup> (3) here (2) in Bulgaria we were Turks (2) they called us, (2\_p when we spoke Turkish, they did not accept us, right, but when we went there, there we were **giaours**, right, but my brothers **got used** to it, this is because they are not well-educated, my brothers, they got used to it, they are really nasty and sneaky, the local people in Turkey (2) everybody tries to frame you, **everybody tries to frame you**, for example I medically examined people there, right, I examined people, a doctor's fee I did not get, (2) they do not give one, but anyway I did not want a fee [...], I told you, didn't I, didn't I, when we went to ((name of the place)), I am blond, and my daughters are blond, and the doctor starts to talk to me in German ((laughs)), and I say "dur, dur"<sup>30</sup> and I say "dur, dur", well, I say, I am a Turk, and he says, nonsense, there are no blond Turks, with blue eyes, and my daughters are blond, they are red-headed (2), they could not get used to us, and I could not get used to them

16 [9/44] the doctor who was a Muslim started to give me Muslim books to read, **novels**=various, how to become a Muslim, right, (2) and sneered at me because I wasn't going to become a believer [...] he examined me if I had read, they started to press me to enrol my children in Quran courses, I forbade them to go there (2) and so somehow I couldn't get used to their mentality, their ways, and still now I cannot get used to it

17 [9/44] but when they came here and saw the liberty, they did not want to leave, here it is free, there you have **no space** for your own life, there you cannot live like you can here

18 [10/56-60] Q: When is the parish fair in your village?

A: [...] the entire village meets on the square, [...] the village is predominantly Roma and Turkish, the mayor is even a Tatar, we also have Tatars in the village [...] rams get slaughtered on *koč-bajrjam* ((name of the holiday, kurban bayram)), this gets divided by seven, by the half, and these (2) pieces of mutton are given to the neighbours [...] they really enjoy this, for example I told you, didn't I, that we have seven Bulgarian families in the village, for example grandmother Dana each *bajrjam* gets a piece of mutton

19 [11/78] ((interruption by a student who comes for a medical examination)) mostly they quarrel for girls, oh, much they do ((laughs)) even most of them are Turks here, we have a lot of Turkish children here, they **learn** very well, even one of the class winners, when they give them awards, oh: one of the three of them is a Turk, isn't he, the one of them is a Turk, a child from a Turkish family, they learn very **very** well

20 [12/82-85] my daughters, their education was like they learned the things which were **shared**, you endure the **common** pain, so it is, this is a severe pain when you go deeply into this, go deeply into the things, but if you look at it a little bit more superficially, you can bear it,

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<sup>29</sup> Turkish, depreciative term for "unbelievers, infidels"

<sup>30</sup> Turkish „stop, stop“.

but if you go into the details (2) some people even have problems with their mental health as a consequence [...] to what end did they do this, a mistake of the party, assimilation (2) assimilation (3) this, I do not know, the people around Živkov<sup>31</sup> I cannot understand this (2) to assimilate one people to another ((lowers his voice)), well, we nearly had started to call each other, well, Todor, Tošo<sup>32</sup>, well, even before that, people were used to calling me Ivo, and later Bulgarian friends called me (1) called me Ivo, and we'd nearly gotten used to it... we had gotten used to assimilation, hadn't we, nearly, but then this started to become violent, you cannot achieve good things through violence<sup>33</sup>

- 21 [12/86] very bad, very bad, yes, well, the military watched us: armoured personnel carriers, encirclement... you could not go anywhere, for example (2) for several weeks there were soldiers in the forests around the village, you cannot go grazing the sheep, **go grazing the sheep you can't**, because they think you will escape from the village, in order to... they wanted to turn Turks into Bulgarians
- 22 [12/88-90] I just educated them: profoundly ((*po mážki*)), I sent them to various courses, at home they have a piano, they took piano lessons for five years, they do not like *čalga*<sup>34</sup>, they cannot stand it [...] especially we have some Roma neighbours, they play *čalga* on their tape recorder, get excited and so I have walk over and warn them, and, well, I am the village **doctor** here, and they listen to me, turn it down, when it is lower (2) they wouldn't hear it (2) I won't be at their service, then, when they need a doctor ((laughs)) [...] my father was good at history, and my daughters love history, especially in literature you cannot get the better of them **at all** ((emphatically))
- 23 [13/97-99] we have a church in our village, and a mosque... a **completely new** church, it even has been consecrated by the ((hesitating)) Metropolitane of Červen, **he** came, consecrated the church, the *hodža* and the priest were there together, they have their customs [rituals], the *hodžas* and the priests come together on Ramadan, the priests come to the *hodža*, and on Christian holidays the *hodža* visits the priest [...] they get along with each other **very well** those people, yes, **yes**, conflicts and confrontations don't exist
- 24 [14/109] I have books in Turkish language, by Nasım Hikmet, about (1) thirteen, fourteen **volumes**
- 25 [15/117] for example the Ataka<sup>35</sup> leader in ((name of the town)), I am a **very** good friend of his, of pal Nasko, he comes to visit me to be my guest, and when they see me in the village you are from Ataka too ((laughs)), okay, that's clear, right, and (2) I explain to them that we are friends, okay, if you have a friend like him that means you aren't a good man, and I say, do not think in that way, the village people, the village people, you cannot please them at all

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<sup>31</sup> Todor Živkov, leader of the Communist Party and head of the state until end of 1989.

<sup>32</sup> Typical Bulgarian names. Todor ist the full name, Tošo the corresponding pet name.

<sup>33</sup> He uses a Bulgarian proverb: „*Na síla xúbost ne stáva*“.

<sup>34</sup> A notorious kind of Bulgarian pop music, with Oriental and Roma elements, often with explicit sexual wording and performance. *Čalga* music typically is consumed by both ordinary people (typically with a non-academic or provincial background) and especially the post-socialist demimonde. Therefore it is vigorously detested by people who perceive themselves as well-educated and as honest citizens. For them, *čalga* is a synonym of “bad music for bad people”. The Bulgarian word *čalga* is actually a Turkish word for “music”.

<sup>35</sup> *Ataka* (“attack”) is a party in Bulgaria. It stands out by its xenophobic, anti-Roma and anti-Turkish rhetoric and its nationalist attitude.

26 [15/125] for example when I was the village doctor, they dispatched from Sofia a certain doctor Mihailov, he was **from Sofia** (3), he was kind of a boss, he was educated in that certain way, and we were a Turkish village, that was in about 1985, when they changed our names, this doctor Mihailov comes and meets me, blond as I am, aren't there any Bulgarians here, says he, only Turks, but you, are you a Turk? He had only watched "Under the yoke"<sup>36</sup> and he had some idea about the Turks that they are very nasty, nasty and are always armed with knives... later he understood that the Turks are very cordial people, my aunt Anife used to prepare *banica*<sup>37</sup> for him, and various soups, and then he got used to it and didn't want to return to Sofia ((laughs))

### 3.2.3. Ismail Kadir's biographical whole

In the biographical narrative of Ismail Kadir we find a strong orientation towards the *institutional expectation pattern* of a professional career and attempts to achieve a satisfactory social status. The decision to learn a medical vocation was not at all his own (his parents enrolled him in the vocational school without asking him), however, in retrospect, he fully approves of this decision. This is emphasised in each segment of the narrative. Transforming education into social capital (which guarantees inclusion into social areas which the respondent sees as desirable) is a key element of his value system. He uses this scheme not only for his own biography, but also for the biographies of other important partners of social interaction (his brothers, daughters, friends, colleagues, patients, and other people from the village). He repeatedly recalls both the (cognitive and mental) resources he had invested in education and the results he has achieved. This is the leading mechanism for selecting the elements from which he then constructs his *biographical Gestalt*. [See sequences 1, 2, 3, 5, 9.]

Another element of the *institutional expectation pattern* in his narrative is starting a family, and especially educating his daughters. This complies with the ideals of the classical socialist education model. Following this model is the only legitimate way to achieve a vocation, economic independency and a respected place in society. Hence we see that for Ismail Kadir success in fulfilling this expectation pattern is *biographically relevant*. [4, 22]

His efforts to adapt himself to the dominant socio-cultural context become visible to us when he refers to physical differences such as blond hair [10, 20] when he tells us about his decision his two daughters to have Bulgarian names (by the way names of famous sportswomen at that time) [no cit.] and when he tells how he steered their interests to subjects such as playing piano, sports, Bulgarian history and literature, learning Western languages, etc. [11]

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<sup>36</sup> Movie after the novel by Ivan Vasov, considered Bulgaria's most classical piece of literature, describing Bulgarian society in the late Ottoman period in 19th century. Much more than the book, the film emphasizes the image of "cruel Turks". Films of this type have helped create a very negative image of "the Turk" in Bulgarian society.

<sup>37</sup> Traditional Bulgarian pastry, usually filled with eggs and cheese.

### 3.2.4. Ethnicity as a topic in Kadir's narrative

In his interview, Ismail Kadir clearly delimits three basic phases of his life: 1) 30 years of work as a village paramedic prior to 1989, 2) the period of being unemployed and the struggle to survive in the early 1990s, and 3) the time after he started work in the school in the nearby city. In all of them, he strongly relativizes the importance of ethnicity for his *biographically relevant* actions. Ethnicity becomes a topic only at the periphery of his narrative, when, in a concrete situation, it may influence his self-esteem, or his assessment of the position of a partner of social interaction. An ethnic self-definition as “Turk” in a positive way appears in single situations, predominantly in the time after the *vāzroditelnija proces*, and in situations where it does not conflict his efforts to achieve social status. [10] One may see here a form of ethnic identity switching.<sup>38</sup> A similar “double identity” can be found in how he interprets the change of his name (see Ahmed 2003: 170). In the first sequences, this is presented as an event of minor importance: he describes this experience with understatement, and two times he emphasizes that he did not resist adopting a Bulgarian name. [8] Only in the second part of the interview (where we ask additional questions) does he present the change of names as coercion. [20] In these sequences, the assimilation campaign is re-interpreted as suffering, as far as it hindered a free self-definition and restricted the *biographical action schemes* of the Bulgarian Turks as a community.

From his present perspective, emigrating to Turkey was an involuntary act, initiated through relatives pressing for it, and driven by general disorientation in the summer of 1989. In Kadir's interpretation, the episodic impulse to leave the country is not presented as a consequence of threats against his ethnic identity. The short sojourn in neighbouring Turkey which followed is presented as sort of a *timelessness* (or *time off*). In this period he tried to alter his situation by preserving the structures of everyday life which he had brought with him from his Bulgarian context. [11]

In terms of social recognition, what he experienced in Turkey strongly contradicted what he had been expecting to find. This is one of the factors that let him, together with his family, return to Bulgaria. The transition to the new environment with its socio-cultural peculiarities is abrupt, it is not related to his biography, it is not planned in advance, and it is not successful. Therefore the respondent now sees the time in Turkey as a time of disintegration. Seen from today, in the framework of a holistic recapitulation of life, the period in Turkey is modelled as part of a biographical process which finds its climax in the successful re-integration in Bulgaria. Re-integration is documented at the one hand through markers of success with predominantly symbolic meaning (the respect of his colleagues, the help he receives from his Bulgarian friend and neighbour, the daughters who studied at the university),

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<sup>38</sup> See for comparison: Stojanka Manolčeva: „Identity-Switching auf der Suche nach dem Selbst. Zum Zusammenhang von Biographie und ethnischer Identität am Beispiel der türkischen Minderheit in Bulgarien“, unpublished study, University of Magdeburg.

and on the other hand through elements of material success such as the re-established household. [13]

There is a second line of argumentation supporting the decision to return to Bulgaria. We find it in those parts of the narrative, where the respondent remembers how the local population in Turkey was not ready to appreciate the higher education level of the Bulgarian emigrants. Moreover, he has a negative approach to their ritual religiosity. This form of religiosity is alien to him. It does not correspond to his own value system which had been formed in a secular, socialist environment. [16, 12, 15] This coincides with the depreciative attitude to the less educated members of his family (the brothers who remained in Turkey) and to the Roma in his village, whereas he has a positive attitude towards the Alevi, who, for him, are culturally gifted people. [Not cited]

The attitude towards Islam – which is one of the markers of ethnic identity of the Bulgarian Turks – becomes visible in the second part of the interview where the respondent describes how traditional holidays are celebrated. Ismail Kadir interprets them in the context of collective belonging to the community, beyond any ethnic or religious specificity. In order to support his position and to neutralize any possible reproach that he did not know Muslim tradition well enough, Ismail Kadir relies on the authority of his well-educated grandfather, who had been a student at a Muslim higher education institution in Istanbul up to 1908, and then became appointed Imam in North East Bulgaria. [12]

Another marker of ethnicity, the Turkish language, is presented as being obstructive to developing the desired *biographical action schemes* not only of Ismail Kadir but also of important partners in his social interaction. He disregards the deficits students from Turkish families have at using the official Bulgarian language. [19] On the other hand, in the narrative much attention is paid to Bulgarian language. For Ismail Kadir, Bulgarian language is one of the means to achieve ethnic intersubjectivity (Fotev 1994: 193). The Turkish language is important only when it is the object of legitimizing discourses in the Bulgarian environment, as it is the case, for example, with the poems of the leftist Turkish poet and playwright Nazim Hikmet. [24]

There is another fact which may be interpreted as indicative for the relatively weak influence which “ethnicity” has on the biographical self-perception of Ismail Kadir. Although after 1989 the Bulgarian Turks received certain minority rights, Ismail Kadir continues to hold in high esteem the time before the end of socialism. [6] When a respondent, shaping his or her *biographical Gestalt*, tends to stick to the traditional order, we can conclude that the energy and life time which he had invested in this period, has made them sources of meaning – sources which the present cannot provide. The positive attitude to socialist times is explained by opportunities to achieve a sustainable economic status (including education and employment) which afterwards were lost or at least would need considerable effort to re-negotiate and achieve them again.

### 3.3. Narrative II

#### 3.3.1. About the respondent: Mehmed Ersin

At the time of the interview, Mehmed Ersin is a man of 61. He is married, and he has two daughters. He works as a builder. He has spent most of his life in the village of S. He starts his narrative with a description of the prosperity which he had achieved as a result of his efforts at work. Important for him is also that he and his team, as volunteers, had contributed considerably to enhancing the infrastructure of their village. In his narrative, this is immediately linked to the description of how representatives of the communist regime tried to force upon him their patterns of assimilation. Without paying too much attention to the chronology of events, he constructs his own biographical time order around various incidents during the *vǎzroditelen procés* when he got arrested and was forced to change his name, and later, when he was de facto expelled via Austria to Turkey.

His sojourn in Turkey, from the second half of 1989 until the beginning of 1990, is presented under the leitmotiv of successful adaptation to the new environment, and the readiness of the locals in Turkey to support the Bulgarian emigrants.

After sequences where Ersin tells us about his unintended return to Bulgaria and his re-integration there, he takes up again the topic of repressions through the communist *Dǎrǎžavna sigurnost* (State Security) against him and his family.

#### 3.3.2. Selected sequences from Mehmed Ersin's narrative

30 [1/2-4] I am born here, there were absolutely no problems between Turks and Bulgarians (3) I think there is no problem, in my work I am always together with Bulgarians... I am a builder, I have built the kindergarten, I have built the hospital, I was a brigadier, there was no problem at all, if there are two Bulgarians together somewhere, the third one is a Turk, and I am with them, too

31 [1/4-10] well, as for the *vǎzroditelen procés* (2) you would not forget something like this, okay, this is hard, this is quite hard=because this is being handed down from generation to generation, the *vǎzroditelnija proces*=I am the first one in S. ((name of the village)) who went to Austria ... I used to work in Tǎrgovište, and my wife came and said, there was a guy named T.T., he came from the *Dǎrǎžavna sigurnost*, and my wife said N.N. ((name of an officer)) has issued a passport for you, you have to go to Austria ... at eight o'clock you have to appear before him in R. (1) I went to him, he says, okay, here is your passport, you have to leave your village, you have to leave Bulgaria, what, because you are, you are a... well, I was a **stirrer** he said, I had been agitating against changing the names he said, I said, if you deport me, well, deport me, but I want to go with at least one more family, I never will go **alone**,<sup>39</sup> one more family=and then (2) I took my cousin, we are cousins, and our wives are daughters of the same family, and (3) and in the train in

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<sup>39</sup> Speaking of "I" he anyway means "me and my family".

Romania they confiscated all the money I had, they left us 200 leva per person, the rest they confiscated //mhm// ... we could not take anything with us, I took as many new clothes as I could, everything else I left in the house as it was (1), I threw the keys right into the garden ((louder)).

32 [2/20-22] I had no visa, I know what is a visa, in the passport, a stamp like for a prisoner, it was quite like an imprisonment Austria ...

Q: Who bought your ticket?

... they know how to do this... everything is prepared, without asking me do I agree or do I not agree ((hits the table)), I took the tickets, passed the customs, they controlled **absolutely** everything, everything (3)... and then we boarded the train, through Romania, we arrived in Vienna, there some guys from the Turkish embassy met us, diplomats, quartered us in a Mosque, there were also several others from other districts ((in Bulgaria)), more obstreperous ones //aham//, so we were about 150 people, Turks from Bulgaria, **Turks**, however with Bulgarian names

33 [2/30-34] indeed, they changed my name, indeed, my story is a long one, well, when I start telling this all ((laughs)) (4) I have to start from the beginning, I tell you (3), now it has changed, in the mountains, not here, one evening=they came at 3 o'clock in the night, they mobilized me, the army, and together with another boy, he was the boyfriend of my sister (1) and they gathered us here in Ruse in the school, I forget its name, somewhere in the centre, you do not know that... from our village were only the two of us, and from all ((louder)) villages in the Ruse region ((hits the table)), five busses full... when, the year 80-and-something... 85, I am talking about the mass ((mobilization)) (1) at that time when they mobilized me I had my Turkish name, before people started talking that they were about to change our names, they take those who see it most clearly, they know, the *dāržavna sigurnost*<sup>40</sup> came here two times a week and they knew everything about everybody, and then at three o'clock in the night they came and mobilized me, together with this other boy, and they herded us together in the school in ((name of the place)) (1), something like 150 people we were, and from there to ((name of the town)), in the mountains, in the Pirin mountains, right at the peak there were some barracks, and there we stayed 45 days, I even have pictures from there... they do not say nothing, yes, you climb ((the truck)) and off you go, well, I even forgot how many hours we rode there, thirteen hours, they drove us around in ((name of the town)) so that we shouldn't understand where they were going to bring us, (3) but there were some boys, five of them, they knew that region... they stuffed us into a, what, what was it, barracks, and there they started instructing us, you will take this way, if you leave it, we will shoot you without warning, you go to the toilet, without straying away, (2) in the same week they started to change, one by one, our names //mhm//, (2) my name was Milčo Pirinski, because of the mountains, the mountains ((laughs)), Milčo Pirinski I took this name, they even said "no, no" but I said, I want it to be Pirinski, so that I know where I have changed my **name**, right, because of the mountains... their aim was that it must not be a Turkish name... we were frightened (1) especially when we were on the way, they did not say where we were to go (4), the bus could have an accident and overturn, as it had happened in Serbia, how they kill them, I don't know, everything seemed possible, we were very frightened, very frightened

34 [3/40-44] I had heard about that, that they were going to change the names, because they initially started in the Silistra region, there they started to change the names, I went there in order to check if this is true... I just was curious whether this was true, because I have friends,

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<sup>40</sup> Socialist totalitarian secret service



relatives ((hits the table)), on the telephone (2) ((they said)) they change the names, what shall we do, ((and I said)) I don't know, what can you do, nothing ((speaks feebly now)), (2) the village, they mobilize the village, they surround the village with tanks, soldiers, where could you go... at once ten men each... they read out the lists, Asen<sup>41</sup>, Asen, Asen, Asen, but we could not do anything, you, do you know that there were lads who were ready to attack them, to do some stupid things like that (2), but there were also other lads who said don't do this, because they may shoot all of us because of two or three guys who attack them, so, there were such guys too, ready to die... to die, but not without killing some of them

35 [4/48] here, after about two weeks they started to change people's names... I first told my wife about the fear, as I now tell you, about the fear, the transport, there we already understood that it was because of the names, but the transport, the time in the barracks, we were very frightened (1) we did not sleep, we got no bread, we had nothing, okay, 45 days of stress, that was not one day, that wasn't twenty four hours, that was **45** days..  
//hmh//

that was how I was mobilized, as a stirrer, as one of the more active ones, this was the reason why they took me

36 [4/56] ... okay, a first and a third name you may take on<sup>42</sup>, but as a father's name what could you do... their aim was to give names, usual ones or unusual... now, my sister, I have two sisters and one brother, they have completely different names, we are four children with completely different names, **as if** we weren't sisters and brothers

they perhaps knew that deep in my heart I wanted to emigrate to Turkey, I said, I cannot live here, it was not possible to live here, the guy who came... *dāržavna sigurnost*, **every** week he came, every week he summoned me (2), because to you I am speaking openly, and to him I spoke **openly**, I was not frightened, there was no problem, I said, living here is not possible anymore, there are tensions, people may get killed, as you say, 40 years they called me Mehmed, and now... because it was obligatory to call each other with the other name, obligatory... and you couldn't live in Bulgaria any longer (1) and he ((took notes of what I had told him... today something I said, tomorrow something, next week something else, and this piled up and he understood that I did not want to live here, and he prepared a passport

37 [5/58] I was in Austria for one week ((excited)), one week, we slept there in a Mosque or two, we slept there in the Mosque (1) until there were enough people to fill a plane, and then they took us by plane directly to Turkey, and there they distributed us, those who had relatives went to their relatives, those who hadn't, the state told them where to go... I had a brother there, (2) a doctor, he had studied in Bulgaria, in 1977 he fled and came via Germany to Turkey. I went to my brother, he was in Ankara, the capital city, I went to him... he had no problem, the doctors over there earn money

38 [5/60] and there they fed us already three months (2) three months, free rooms, free meals, and for those who wanted to work they found work, they chased away **even** their own people, and put us in their place, the people from Bulgaria, yes... and at once, it was September already, the children had to go to school, they paid for the accommodation, they gave work and accommodation to everyone, as you say, in order to clear the school, and then

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<sup>41</sup> Asen (pronounce like a-ssén) is a typical Bulgarian name.

<sup>42</sup> Bulgarian names – as usual in Slavonic countries – consist of a name, a fathers name and a family name, for example: Ivan Petrov Georgiev where Petrov is the father's name, the father being actually Petăr.

however there were rumors that people started to return (5) I stayed there nine months, I got a lot of money there, I worked as a builder again, I did not want to return **at all**, but the children... I have two daughters, one has a boyfriend here, the boyfriend stayed here, I want to go back, and her mother, (1) well, you know about mothers and their attitude to children, and just then they had finished school, in Ruse, they had their school leaving ball, and they **couldn't** go to university

39 [5/62-66] I stayed there nine months, I spoke even to the mayor ((of our village)), I say, how is it, he says, if you want to come back, come back, there is no problem, everything is okay here already... those who came back, they deported them again, but in Bulgaria, in villages, not in the towns, in the villages. There was a second deportation.

I look at my house, completely empty, absolutely: nothing was there anymore, the clothes I had, the things I had ((hits the table)), everything was stolen //mhm// the dowry of the children, I have two daughters, I had everything, as you say, everything, 30 years I had worked (2) **empty**, nothing was there anymore, only the bed stood there, because it is heavy and there was no way to take it, only this had been left, everything else was gone, the stoves, the TV set, the radio, the sewing-machine... everything. I say to the mayor, mayor, couldn't you post a guard there, Mehmed, he says, they came already on the third day, on the **third** day... I say, tell me who it was, he didn't tell me, and until today I do not know **who** it was, that's how the times were, the times

Q: And what did you do then?

everything from the beginning //mhm//, in Turkey, here from the beginning... there I had a lot of money, my wage was one million because I got piece-work pay, there three people at 300 000, and I got one million, I do not know **at all** what it means to be poor (3), and we came back, I started working here, I set up a construction brigade again

40 [6/69] some years went by, and I started to trace this guy of the *dāržavna sigurnost* ((says his name)), I understood where his apartment is (6) he opened the door, an unshaved guy, **on purpose**, you know, those agents, what kind of folk they are, do you want to come in, please come in, I say, you see, we meet each other **again**, you cannot do me any harm, he says, you are a friend, ((I said)) why do you think that we are friends, ((he said)) because you are the first one whom I let go to Turkey, you wanted to go to Turkey, didn't you, I could have sent you to Belene<sup>43</sup>, I could, but actually I have saved you from many things... and I am very upset, but on the other hand I am good-hearted, and I thought, okay, perhaps this is true, so we drank coffee and said good-bye, I did not do him any harm, my idea was to see his reaction when he sees me, and he got yellowish, yellowish ((puzzled)), I felt that he did not feel good, he shivered //mhm//, yes, they afterwards had laid them off, didn't they, cut the jobs, and he became an ordinary man

41 [7/79-81] my daughters are very okay, everything is okay in my family, won't have problems ((laughs))

42 [7/83] I even thought that this communism would never fall, (2) there might be **war**, there might come an earthquake, but I did not believe that communism could fall, and not only me, I tell you (2) one **hundred per cent** of the people, whom ever you ask ((said that there was)) no way that communism could collapse, this was the situation, how to tell you ((laughs))

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<sup>43</sup> A camp on of the Danube islands. Belene was notorious as a detainment camp during socialism. It is still used as a prison today.

43 [7/85] my father was also a farmer, and he also was a builder like me, my mother died when she was 54 years old, I did my military service the fourth month when she died; my father died when he was 77, quite young, okay, middle aged (5) we made his grave, but not only his, also the complete Turkish graveyard, **all** the tombstones were smeared with colour, even smeared with plaster, those which had bas-relief inscriptions, and when they had high relief inscriptions, they were smashed with hammers... that's the policy of the Soviet Union, it is **not** Bulgarian policy, I thought (5) Bulgaria doesn't have the power to solve this problem, the **scholars** know where it came from, but that's what we, the ordinary people, think, because Soviet Union had many republics, and they wanted to see how the world would react ((to such a policy of forced ethnic assimilation))

44 [7/85] Bulgaria has lost **a lot** because of those names, the respect of the Bulgarians, of the Turks, I tell you how things should be, I tell you, from this perspective, from the perspective of how they treat the Bulgarians, the Turks (4) **this** sympathy, this love **has gone**, okay (2), and a dividing line emerged, it is not very deep, but it exists=it has happened ((deploring))

45 [7/87-89] things are completely different now (2) now we are NATO members, and Turkey also is a NATO member... before they changed our names it was like we were brothers, brothers we were, here I am born, every evening I go out with different people, and how many years I was construction brigadier, we built the hospital with voluntary work, the kindergarten (2) the entire village went through my hands, I say, there was no problem before they changed the names, if two Bulgarians met each other, the third one was a Turk, or the other way round, two Turks, one Bulgarian you need to have at the table, the first one stands a round, the second one stands a round, conversation about common topics, we talk about our work

Q: And now?

now there is a difference. Okay, we still sit together in the pub, for example I have Bulgarian friends, are they guilty of this, so that I could not sit down with him and talk to him, but there is something, okay, I say, a little, but it exists

46 [8/93] I even feel better than a Bulgarian, I feel better than many Bulgarians (4) I am happy, yes, I love my village, that's it, yes, and it is not only me, we do **not** have such powerful tensions between us, we don't have, hundred per cent, I guarantee (2) it is ((stutters)), in ten people you will find one, either illiterate or a drunkard, it is them who talk things like that, otherwise, the ordinary man, the educated man won't talk such things (1) to offend you or to hurt you

47 [8/104-106] we, the Muslims, have to holidays, *koč bajrjam* and *šeker bajrjam*, or even if there were five holidays, we would celebrate the five of them (3) now, the Bulgarians don't celebrate our holidays, but we, the Turks, celebrate also the Bulgarian holidays ((satisfied))

Q: And what do you think about the Bulgarians?

(2) how to tell you... I won't speak about discipline, I will talk about **culture**, the Turks are more civilized or more decent, I will tell you why, because our bible ((the Quran)) is stronger and we are strong believers in our bible, the Quran as it is called, in our bible it is written that you mustn't steal, you mustn't lie... our fathers always tell us that you mustn't steal, that you mustn't speak in a certain way to a man who is your senior, you mustn't swear, (4) **religion** is for me first of all something about educating people, if you

believe in your religion, you will be much more civilized, a certain *Baj* Dimităr<sup>44</sup> said, we have a lot of learned people in Bulgaria, but wise people we do not have

Q: And what happened to your cousin's family?

they came back, too, after they had understood that there was no problem, and they came back... it is difficult to get used to it, three times a day you hear the Muezzin calling, it is difficult (2) we are used to a **completely** different life

48 [9/112] they took us as Turks, but they called us Bulgarian Turks, they called us, that is the truth, when someone comes from Turkey, we call him a Turk from Turkey... that's international language ((laughs)), otherwise, as I told you, we did not have problems, they even collected money, they gave us **money** for bread, for clothes, they helped a lot (2) **religion** is very important for the education of people, to be a believer, to be able to advance, as it is said, you may believe even in a tree, but you must be a believer, you must fear something, because if you do not fear anything, before you do something ((bad)) you will think twice about it, fear is at the first place, (2) ask me, I can talk to you until tomorrow ((laughs)), these are things which I have experienced, I don't make it up

49 [9/114] after the operation in Sofia sister Danče<sup>45</sup> came every evening, and the whole village holds her in high regard, she never refused to treat anyone, she did not refuse to give injections even during the night (1) she is a well-mannered person, if we all were that well-mannered and caring Bulgaria would become twice as good a country

50 [10/122] she ((his wife)) waited for me ((to make an advance)), and I was such a beautiful lad, a sly fox, wow ((laughs)), instead of me taking her hand, she took my hand and presto we were married, unexpectedly as you would say, but we have been together for 38 years now, she gave birth to my two children, brought them up, and we were okay, (3) I did not know what poverty is, my vocation... wherever I go I can earn money... so far I am happy with my life, I am happy, as my father said, each generation has to pass through one evil, my father lived during the war in 1944, when the Germans passed and took the cattle, (6) then out of a sudden the big flood in 1947, we had seven or eight victims here (2), and for me – the change of the names.

51 [11/128] Q: Would it be possible for you to check your *dържавна сигурност* files now?

I know the three of them ((means the agents who spied him)), one of them I beat up heavily, he lost a tooth

A: And what people are they, are they Bulgarians?

They are all Turks, agents, they got money, and they wrote their reports, (7) I was used to visiting him and we spoke about politics, like we are talking at the moment, but he switched on a tape recorder and put me up ((to speak about certain topics))

**now, listen, I'll tell you** I am fine with this, *dържавна сигурност*, a state must have such agencies, they take care of law and order in the state, okay, but they shouldn't pin something on the little Joe [the ordinary man] (3) it is okay that there are such agencies but they should keep an eye on who is a thief, or who is a spy, those people, but "let's change their names and let's check who speaks Turkish", hey, that's the wrong thing...

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<sup>44</sup> Bulgarian *baj* (Turkish bey) = traditional polite form to address a senior

<sup>45</sup> Pet form of a Bulgarian female name; sister Danče is the medical nurse in the village.

**there must be** agencies like this, but torturing ordinary workers ((upset)) (4) this is all in the past now

### 3.3.3. Mehmed Ersin's *biographical whole*

In the biographical *Gestalt* of Mehmed Ersin, his vocation as a builder takes the most important place. Ethnicity is represented basically by two topics: disregard for his self-conception through restricting his civic rights (detention and de facto expulsion) and the use of Turkish language in everyday communication. Markers of ethnicity have a positive connotation as mechanisms to pass on cultural codes (important for the respondent's self-conception) to the next generation. In Mehmed Ersin's narrative, ethnicity is much more than a general feeling of passive belonging to a community: it is present as collective experience of asymmetry and ethnic tensions during the time of the *vāzrodítelen procès*. The single sequences are delimited one from each other through evaluation and argumentation of the gap between the ethnic groups "before" and "after" (the story of the arrest, the forced change of names, the deportation to Austria, the subsequent sojourn in Turkey, and the returning to the home village). [31,33, etc.]

In the first part of the interview, the past prior to 1989 is presented as a time full of fear, when Ersin felt himself being excluded from society, and banned from controlling the patterns of biographical relevance. Ersin experiences the assimilation campaign as a form of suffering, disorientation and violently being pushed out of the structures of everyday life which had been familiar to him. The change of names for him is clearly a coercive act which he, however, does not endure passively, but rather resist using a variety of means: He gives up his and his family's social status (including sources of income) and leaves for Turkey. He takes an ironical and contemptuous attitude towards his Bulgarian name. And he uses the forces of collective memory in order to maintain the memory of what had happened to him. How traumatic these experiences were for Mehmed Ersin becomes clear particularly through the fissures in time in his narrative, and the (sometimes confusing) way how he interweaves separate traumatic situations into a single story. (See for example how the extradition to Austria and the emigration to Turkey are entangled. [36-39])<sup>46</sup>

Ersin's return to Bulgaria is for him part of his *trajectory of suffering*. When he emigrated, he was expecting to get fully integrated into the new socio-cultural environment in Turkey, and indeed he entered the world of work in Turkey successfully. [38] Therefore, returning to Bulgaria appears to him as a constraint to chances of development. Returning to Bulgaria is not what he desires. It is the result of his family urging him to return. For Ersin himself it means starting again right from the beginning in order to achieve an appropriate economic status. His partners of social interaction in Turkey (colleagues, relatives, friends) are described as acting in solidarity with him. Through them, Ersin gets access to spaces in society that are meaningful for him. Their specific Muslim religiosity (understood not that much in its

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<sup>46</sup> See also Rosenthal 1995 and 2003.

dimension of rituality and practice, but rather in its dimension of a moral imperative) is seen as a *conditio sine qua non* to keep alive a sustainable order of everyday life in Turkey. [37, 38, 47, 48]

The communist regime is re-actualized in Mehmed Ersin's narrative in two ways: first, it appears as a powerful restriction to social mobility and the freedom of ethnic self-definition. [31-36] On the other hand, the period prior to 1989 is experienced as a well functioning system of rules, which – notwithstanding the restrictive policy towards ethnic identity – sustains a reliable social order – which is missing in the present. [30, 42, 45, 51] Mehmed Ersin's trust into the socialist state and its established social order adds to his ethnic self-conception some aspects of an identity as citizen. The same differentiation is visible also in his interactions with Bulgarian partners. We see this in the sequences telling about the *vāzroditelen proces* [31-36] where dominating emotions are frustration, distance and distrust, whereas in other sequences we find respect and high appreciation of those Bulgarians which whom Mehmed Ersin interacts (see, for example, the relation to the medical nurse in the village [49]).

#### **4. The two narratives compared**

A comparison between the two biographical narratives reveals both similarities and differences in the *biographical process structures*. In both narratives we find a disparity between how the respondents interpret their life history, respectively how they use *biographical action schemes*, and the given societal conditions (which have, as such, normative power).

As for the similarities: In both biographic trajectories, the ethnic self-conceptualization is shaped by the experience of suffering during the assimilation campaign called *vāzroditelen proces*. The respondents feel helpless, disoriented, and experience a lack of resources which would enable them to counterbalance the events.

Differences appear when it comes to setting up *biographical action schemes* (which are, by way of definition, biographically relevant). Ismail Kadir's solution for dealing with the repressive state policy against Bulgarian Turks (including the changing of their names), is taking an opportunistic attitude by internalising the dominating culture. Mehmed Ersin, in contrast, answers the pressure by actively advocating civic rights and opposing the attempts of forced assimilation.

Ismail Kadir sees his adaptive attitude towards the dominating culture as a legitimate way to achieve social status. He strives to minimize possible negative effects of ethnic markers such as name, language, religiosity, and physical difference by dissociating himself from the inherited ethnic tradition of his family. Only in isolated sequences does he mention positive aspects of Turkish ethnic identity.

Quite in contrast, Mehmed Ersin's traumatic experience of the assimilation campaign results in a consequent biographic line of resistance. Ethnic markers (particularly the moral side of religiosity) become milestones of a value system to

support Ersin's present positions and opinions. Both the assimilation campaign (the *vāzroditelén proces*) and the successful re-integration in Bulgaria which followed contribute to Mehmed Ersin's self-conceptualisation as an ethnic Turk growing stronger.

In both biographical representations the respondents assess their communication with their partners of social interaction (relatives, neighbours, colleagues, friends). Kadir's and Ersin's approaches to the Turks in Turkey are again quite contrasting. Kadir sees them in a predominantly negative way, Ersin in a predominantly positive way.

In respect to Bulgarians, however, things are more complicated. Ismail Kadir develops a coherent positive attitude towards "the Bulgarians". For him they are representatives of a valued culture (even in cases when they are members of nationalistic associations [25]). Mehmed Ersin, in contrast, finds Bulgarians *as a group* rather negative (especially in the context of interethnic relations), but he chooses positive words when talking about active citizenship and civic responsibility, or about certain individuals with whom he had face-to-face contact. This corroborates the thesis of Petăr-Emil Mitev about the *double approach* to the "ethnic other". This *double approach* includes being tolerant towards ethnically different persons as long as they are seen as individuals (example: the medical nurse in Ersin's village [49]) but distance towards ethnically different persons when they are conceived as a community (Mitev 2005).

Both respondents use elements of their memory to construct their ethnic identity from today's position. Therefore experience, memory and narration do not always correspond one to each other. The analysis of the biographic narratives shows that ethnicity should be understood not that much as an invariant, but rather as a construction which is being dynamically re-arranged during people's lifetime. Such re-arrangement may occur either partly, in relation to a certain situation, or entirely. In some situations ethnicity can be used as the leading element of the respondent's self-definition. In other contexts, the individual may find other ways of defining himself more appropriate. Factors that influence this process are individual biographic experience, social conditions, and the interpretation of biographic experience in the course of the narration.

## **5. Outlook**

As part of this MICROCON project, we have recorded about 110 interviews in Bulgaria, 20 in Macedonia, and 10 in Turkey. Based on this corpus we are going to analyse if and how differences in the biographical mechanisms of ethnic identity generate different types of social behaviour in the case of (micro-) conflict. One approach is assessing the social distance (in terms of economic factors, language, and civic rights) which results from remembering past conflicts such as the 1980s assimilation campaign. This will give us insight into the heterogeneity of inter-ethnic

conflicts in a society in transition such as Bulgaria (see Horowitz 1985: 95-141, Horowitz 1993: 18-39). Heterogeneity means that the roots of conflicts between ethnic groups are manifold. There is a variety of causes and preconditions, such as different access to resources in the past and the present, differences in how individuals form their social identity (for example in an adaptive or conflictive way), erosion of belonging to a given group in the past, and, last but not least, differences in how individuals have experienced a given period of time, in our case: the time of the *vǎzroditelen procés* in the 1980s.

Whatever its causes may be, the heterogeneity of inter-ethnic conflicts in Bulgaria must be seen in the context of a continuing crisis in which Bulgarian society has found itself since 1989. Due to the crisis, people tend to adopt ethnocentric attitudes. This is visible especially in people of higher social position (members of the elite), partly because they are more likely to be given access to the necessary fora in the public and the media. We find this tendency, however, also in our sample of autobiographic interviews. There is a growing tendency to refer to ethnic categorizations, especially amongst the more educated.

When “Bulgarian Bulgarians” and “Bulgarian Turks” start to either emphasize or reduce the ethnic element in their identity, this cannot be seen as a mere result of old, tenacious stereotypes or antipathies towards the other group. Rather, it should be seen as related to the chance of the individual to get access to social resources (such as education, economic wealth, respect, political power). When inequality cannot be overcome by means of individual social capital, individuals start referring to an (ethnic) group that seems to be helpful for achieving the goal. This, then, fosters loyalty to the group, and they tend to support initiatives in the name of the group even when the initiative is not in line with the individual’s biographically relevant action schemes and value system.



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