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WORDS MATTER: BETWEEN POLITICS AND OBJECTIVITY

Tomasz KAMUSELLA*

The Thirtieth Anniversary of the Forgotten 1989 Ethnic Cleansing¹

Three decades ago, in the summer of 1989, about 360,000 Turks (and Muslims) were expelled from communist Bulgaria to capitalist Turkey (Kamusella 2018a: 56-57). It was the largest and most intensive act of ethnic cleansing in Cold War Europe after the late 1940s, which saw the wrapping up of the Potsdam-agreed expulsions ('population transfers'²) of 'ethnic Germans' from central and eastern Europe to the Allies' occupation zones of the Third Reich (that later morphed into Austria, East Germany and West Germany). This 1989 ethnic cleansing pushed hundreds of thousands across the presumably impenetrable Iron Curtain, from the Warsaw Pact member state to the NATO member. Sofia's unilateral move amounted to a *casus belli*, which should have resulted in a third world war. The army of the People's Republic of Bulgaria would have stood no chance against the largest standing NATO army in Europe (Aydın-Düzgit and Tocci 2015: 117). Hence, the Soviet Union's Red Army would have needed to intervene in order to protect Bulgaria. In turn, this move would have necessitated involvement from the United States, thus ensuring that the conflict would have spiraled into a worldwide conflagration.

But *no* third world war occurred in 1989. This points to some secret negotiations between Moscow and Washington, which prevented treating such a unilateral breach of the NATO-Warsaw Pact military frontier as a *casus belli*. Researchers know nothing about these negotiations as the relevant documents still classified and sealed off in military archives in Russia and the

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² Under international law population transfer was a legal instrument of statecraft (that is, state building and maintenance) in the 20th century (Jackson Preece 1998: 819). However, its use was increasingly limited and gradually criminalized in the second half of the 20th century, and especially after the fall of communism (Chetail 2016; Jackson Preece 1998: 832, 935, 840). Beginning with the mid-1990s population transfer was relabeled as 'ethnic cleansing,' and is considered a crime against humanity (Geiß 2013; Jackson Preece 1998: 819).

United States.³ Because no global war broke out as a result of the 1989 ethnic cleansing, the study of this expulsion has been neglected. It fell under the proverbial radar of world public opinion, including scholars. Although the western press covered this 1989 ethnic cleansing extensively, all the reports were buried in the midst of the *Guardian*, the *Times*, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, or *Le Monde*. The story made it to the front pages only in Turkish and Yugoslav newspapers.

Numerous contemporary events deemed as ‘more momentous’ by the western press pushed the 1989 expulsion of Bulgaria’s Turks (and Muslims) out of the view of Europe’s public opinion. Such events included, for instance, the Round Table negotiations between the communist government and the anti-communist democratic opposition in Poland, followed, on 4 June 1989, by the first-ever (partially) free democratic elections in this country. This initial breach in the Soviet-style communist system shortly led to the fall of communism and the dissolution of the Soviet bloc. On the same day, the totalitarian regime of communist China bloodily suppressed the student pro-democracy demonstrations in the Tiananmen Square Massacre. A day earlier, on 3 June 1989, the Iranian leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, had passed away. These were the newsworthy stories which overshadowed the beginning of the expulsion of Turks (and Muslims) from communist Bulgaria. On 29 May 1989, the communist dictator of three decades and a half, Todor Zhivkov, delivered a televised speech that obliquely announced this ethnic cleansing (Zhivkov 1989). It was a reaction to the mass protests and hunger strikes staged by 60,000 Turks and Muslims in the last two weeks of May 1989 (Angleov 2015).⁴

³ Obviously, this proposition about the possibility of a third world war, and the prevention of its outbreak by some, as yet unknown, United States-Soviet secret negotiations, is just a working hypothesis. It still needs to be researched, and does not preclude another explanation of the largely pacific character of the 1989 ethnic cleansing, without any military confrontation between Bulgarian and Turkish forces. (I thank Konstanty Gebert for this important qualification.)

⁴ These May Protests of 1989 falsify the rife myth, repeated in numerous publications, that Bulgaria was the sole member of the Soviet bloc where no anti-communist mass demonstrations were ever observed. Furthermore, it is important to note that the sole mass dissident movement in communist Bulgaria was almost exclusively Turkish and Muslim from the ethnic perspective. Unfortunately, in today’s democratic Bulgaria, this ethnic character of the movement prevents remembering about its pivotal role in causing the fall of the communist system in this country. Elena Marushiakova and Veselin Popov propose that it may be inappropriate to label the May Protests of 1989 as ‘anti-communist,’ because the protesters wanted an end to anti-Turkish and anti-Muslim measures, *not* to overthrow the communist (socialist) system in Bulgaria. However, neither the Prague Spring of 1968, nor the Solidarity movement of 1980-1981 aimed at overthrowing the communist system, either. The protesters in Czechoslovakia and Poland

This ethnic cleansing lasted unabated until 22 August 1989, when Turkey closed the border with Bulgaria to expellees, namely, to ‘Bulgarian citizens without a Turkish visa’ (Kirişci 1996: 393). More Bulgarian Turks and Muslims followed shortly, supplied with now required Turkish visas in their passports, but even more began returning from Turkey (about 3,000 in July-August 1989, around 70,000 by late 1989, 130,000 by August 1990, and as many as around 200,000 by late 1991 [Kamusella 2018a: 61-62]). It was the first-ever case of a mass return of expellees recorded in modern European history (Angelov 2012). However, the administrative pro-expulsion pressure continued in communist Bulgaria until 29 December 1989, when the Communist Party of Bulgaria promised to return all human, civil and minority rights to the country’s Turks and Muslims (Lilov 1989). It took two long years to fulfill this promise in the face of mass protests staged by Bulgarian nationalist communists-turned-nationalists against this decision (cf Bakalova 2006: 238-239). In this way a ‘Yugoslav-style’ ethnic civil war or a breakup of the country was prevented a couple of years before the actual commencement of the wars of Yugoslav succession.

During the second half of 1989, other developments were deemed more worth featuring on the front pages of the western press than the ethnic cleansing in Bulgaria and its domestic and international ramifications. During the summer, tens of thousands of East German tourists, instead of returning home from the Black Sea beaches of Romania and Bulgaria, streamed to the grounds of the West German embassies in Budapest and Prague, from where they eventually were allowed to leave for West Germany. In October 1989, the Round Table talks in Hungary concluded in a compromise, thus opening the way for the democratization of this country. On 9 November 1989, the Berlin Wall fell, and was shortly followed by the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia. In December 1989, the bloody revolution toppled the communist dictator in Romania. These iconic events pushed out of world public opinion’s view the tragedy of the 1989 ethnic cleansing in Bulgaria, alongside the tribulations of the expellees in Turkey or of the returnees in still communist Bulgaria. Even the fall of communism in 1990 in autocratic Albania (including ships with Albanian refugees in Italy) gained more attention from the global mass media

desired a reform of the communist system, which would better take into account individual human needs (hence, the Czechoslovak slogan of ‘socialism with a human face’). However, the aforementioned events in Czechoslovakia and Poland are now commonly interpreted as ‘anti-communist.’ It is so on the account of the fact that their participants attempted to breach the main pillar of this system, namely, the communist party’s monopoly of politics and power. Hence, from this perspective and with today’s advantage of comparative hindsight, I believe, the May Protests of 1989 in Bulgaria can and should be qualified as ‘anti-communist.’

than the 1989 ethnic cleansing. However, it was this 1989 ethnic cleansing that triggered the collapse of communism in Bulgaria and decisively conditioned the postcommunist transition in this country (Kamusella 2018a: 3).

Following the end of communism in Bulgaria in 1990/1991, many returnees and Bulgarian citizens of all ethnic origins began leaving for Turkey in search of gainful employment due to the collapse of the economy during the period of systemic transition. Unemployment was rife and salaries were insufficient to cover basic living costs (Kasli and Parla 2009: 207). This free movement of people from Bulgaria to Turkey for work overlapped with the continuing return of expellees. As a result, in many observers' eyes, the difference between ethnic cleansing and work migration became blurred, and seemed to vindicate the zhivkovite communist propaganda, which until early 1990, mendaciously proposed that the 1989 ethnic cleansing was a case of 'mass tourism' (cf Stoilov 1989). The international mass media paid no attention to the aftermath of the 1989 ethnic cleansing, including this crucial distinction between work migration and expulsion, because the political and economic upheavals of the systemic transition from planned to market-oriented economy and from totalitarianism to democracy had already grabbed headlines. On top of that, the absorption of East Germany by West Germany ('German reunification'), the shocking breakups of the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, alongside the ethnic wars of Yugoslav succession and the First Iraq War (Gulf War) effectively overshadowed *any* developments in Bulgaria.

The Methodological Question of Dis/Continuity

Subsequently, no scholarly articles in any language, let alone a monograph, has been devoted to the 1989 ethnic cleansing of communist Bulgaria's Turks (and Muslims), until 2018, when the first-ever study on this subject was published (Kamusella 2018a). Meanwhile, literally tens of thousands articles and thousands of books have been devoted to the post-Yugoslav wars on account of numerous cases of ethnic cleansing and genocide committed in their course. However, Bulgarian scholars tend to propose that the 1989 ethnic cleansing in Bulgaria was already covered in detail (Round Table 2019) by Bulgarian researchers (eg Aliev 2001; Baeva and Kalinova 2009; Vasilev 2011; Zagorov 1993), including Roumen Avramov's most extensive and authoritative study (2016).

Indeed, in all these books the 1989 ethnic cleansing is touched upon to a greater or lesser extent, but only as the endpoint of the 1984-1989 forced assimilation campaign (usually referred in Bulgarian-language literature with the zhivkovite propaganda term Възродителен процес *Vuzroditelen protses* 'Revival Process'). Ergo, the aforementioned book by Kamusella (2018a) still

stands as the first and (for the time being) sole study devoted to the 1989 ethnic cleansing. Yet, Bulgarian scholars (Round Table 2019) propose that from the methodological standpoint of historiography, it is incorrect to research and analyze the 1989 ethnic cleansing as an event in its own right. They see it is an inalienable part of the aforementioned forced assimilation campaign, which lasted for half a decade in the latter 1980s. Some even want a further flattening of the story by retelling it exclusively in the *longue durée* context of the series of expulsions (or ‘emigrations’ agreed with Turkey) from Bulgaria to Turkey during the entire communist period.

In a nutshell, this methodological disagreement centers on what constitutes a historical fact and when it is appropriate to apply cesuras to the continuum of the human past for the sake of extracting such a fact for the purpose of description and analysis. To a degree, the procedure is always subjective as it is dependent on human choices. I propose, however, that the 1989 ethnic cleansing on many counts is a sufficiently distinctive and temporally self-contained event that can be easily and usefully studied in its own right. First of all, this ethnic cleansing has the undisputed clear-cut commencement date of 29 May 1989 and the equally well-defined (though more often debated) end date of 22 August 1989. Second, unlike in the case of the forced emigrations of Bulgarian Turks (1950-1951 and 1969-1978) negotiated with Turkey, the 1989 ethnic cleansing was Bulgaria’s unilateral imposition on Turkey. Third, the intensity of expulsion per unit of time during the 1989 ethnic cleansing was much higher in numerical terms than whatever was observed during the earlier forced emigrations from communist Bulgaria. The highest number of forced emigrants (expellees) per week amounted to 5,351 persons in December 1950 and 1,284 persons in 1978, while to the staggering 31,182 persons in July 1989 (Avramov 2016: 713-714). Fourth, the total number of expellees in 1989 was two and a half to three times higher than the total numbers of forced emigrants either in 1950-1951 (154,000), or in 1969-1978 (115,000) (Avramov 2016: 713). Last but not least, in the context of entire Cold War Europe in the period between 1949 and 1989, the 1989 expulsion was the *largest* and *most intensive* ever during this time.

Hence, the Bulgarian insistence on treating the 1989 ethnic cleansing only as the endpoint of the 1984-1989 forced assimilation campaign, or of the communist period’s forced emigrations, appears to be dubious on any methodological ground. I propose that the main motivation behind this insistence may be political in its character, namely, the intentional perpetuation of the observed neglect of any research, let alone the remembrance and commemoration, of this ethnic cleansing. The current national master narrative as taught in Bulgarian schools is steeped in the paramount myth of half a millennium of ‘Turkish yoke (slavery, occupation;

турско робство *tursko robstvo*),⁵ when, presumably, the Ottomans⁵ all the time repressed Orthodox Christianity, forced Bulgarians (that is, Slavophone Orthodox Christians) to convert to Islam, and killed anti-Ottoman rebels⁶ and their rural sympathizers (cf Lory 1997; Petrov 2018: 115-125).⁷ This myth

⁵ In the European stereotypical perception, the Ottomans were labelled as ‘Turks,’ though in reality the Ottomans were ethnolinguistically highly variegated, in the meaning of the population of the Ottoman Empire, the members of the millet of Islam, or this empire’s elite (cf Jezernik 2010). A similar stereotypical ethnonym of ‘Frank’ developed in the Ottoman Empire and across Muslim south Asia for referring to (Christian) Europeans, irrespective of their ethnolinguistic and confessional differentiation (cf Farang 2019; Frankokrasi 2019).

⁶ In Bulgarian school textbooks the period of Ottoman rule is teleologically presented as the time of never-ending national uprisings of the Bulgarians against the Islamic empire, ‘inescapably, leading to the founding of the ethnolinguistic and ethnoreligious in its character Bulgarian nation-state, with Russia’s ‘fraternal help’ (cf Fol 2008; Tsvetkov 1995: 2-3, 7, 12-15, 17). Yet, such rebellions could not be ‘national,’ since the concept of the nation was invented only in 18th-century western Europe, and implemented in the Bulgarian lands during the late 19th century. Second, such rebellions were short-lived and localized, typically triggered by irregularities in administration, perceived as injustice on the part of the concerned. Third, participation in these rebellions was not limited to Christians, wronged Muslim peasants often joined, too. Fourth, what is lauded as хайдучки дружини *khaidushki družini* ‘groups of hajduks’ (from Hungarian *hajduk* ‘brigands, mercenaries,’ singular *hajdú*, stems from *hajtó* ‘cattle drover,’ in turn from the Hungarian verb *hajt* ‘to drive [cattle];’ yielded the Turkish word *haydut* ‘bandit, brigand, thug, outlaw’) were none other than robbers and highwaymen, who stemmed from outlaws of a variety of ethnoreligious backgrounds (Adanir 1982). Fifth, in order to make unwilling peasants join an uprising, ringleaders often resorted to burning the former’s houses and to killing local Muslim officials. Because of the latter peasants joined, because they feared Ottoman reprisals conducted in line with the logic of collective responsibility (Larkin 2009: 62-63. Sixth, when the Russian involvement in the Balkans during the 19th century made anti-Semitism and pogroms of Jews into a permanent element of the then coalescing Bulgarian and other Slavic national movements (Rusin 2016).

⁷ Had the Ottomans really applied this type of repressions unceasingly for half a millennium in the Balkans, no Orthodox Christians (or even Slavophones) would have remained in the Bulgarian lands. For instance, during the Caucasian War (1817-1864), it took the Russian Empire only half a century to expel and eradicate the Muslim Circassians from Circassia (today’s Krasnodar Region) (cf Richmond 2013; Quiring 2013).

The Bulgarian myth of ‘Turkish yoke’ stems from the Russian slavist and ethnographer (of Rusyn origin), Iurii (Yuriy) Venelin’s, three-volume study *Drevniie i nyneshnioe bolgare v politicheskoi, narodopisnoi, istoricheskoi i religioznoi ikh otnošenii k rossiianam* (Bulgarians in Their Political, Ethnographic, Historical and Religious Relations to the Russians, 1829-1841). An abridged edition, titled, *Kriticheskie issledovaniia ob istorii bolgar* (Contributions to the History of the Bulgarians) came off the press in 1849, and subsequently was published in a Bulgarian translation (*Kritichesky izdyrianiia za Istoriia-ta blugaraska* [sic]) in 1853 in Semlin, Austrian Empire (today’s Zemun in Serbia) (Popok 2013: 118). This negative stereotype was internalized and propagated via a few popular Bulgarian-language novels published from the 1860s to the 1880s, the ‘crowning achievement’ in this regard being Ivan Vazov’s novel *Pod Igoto* (*Under the Yoke*). The author wrote it in Odessa, Russian Empire (today’s Odesa in Ukraine); this novel was published in 1889-1890, and the English-language

stands in sharp contrast to the recorded reality of Pax Ottomanica, which ensured peace, stability and economic prosperity – also in Rumelia (‘Roman lands,’ that is, the Balkans) – between the 16th century and the late 18th century, or at the time when Christian Europe was convulsed by a series of genocidal religious wars (cf Çiçek 2001; Fischer-Galati 1975; Kiel 2008: 347; Shaw 1975; Sugar 1977: 109, 275).⁸ Hence, it is hard to discuss Turks and Muslims as victims at the hands of ethnic Bulgarians, even if it was the latter, who overwhelmingly constituted the communist apparatus of repression.

Although succumbing to mythologizing the past may result in a potent unifying national master narrative, this approach is not conducive to objective historiography. Furthermore, when myths are too much at odds with the actual (checkable) reality of the past, the tension may lead to social or political strife, and even to military conflict. How to detect a historical myth? It is a fact or a

translation came off the press in 1894 in London (Popek 2017: 263-265). For better or worse, Vazov’s novel remains the main point of reference for Bulgarian literature and culture, and also the symbolical foundation of the Bulgarian national master narrative. Until the turn of the 20th century, half of secondary school leavers and university graduates in Bulgaria received their education in Russia, which came together with the default anti-Ottoman and anti-Muslim (‘anti-Turkish’) attitude (Genchev 1988: 265-266). Furthermore, Russian and Russian-educated officers ran the Bulgarian army until 1887, when its language of command was finally changed from Russian to Bulgarian (Cholopanov and Georgiev 1981: 243; Vasil Delov 2019).

Interestingly, in the Bulgarian national master narrative, the myth of ‘Phanariot (Greek) yoke’ (фанариотско [гръцко] робство *fanariotsko [grutsko] robstvo*) was more potent than that of the ‘Turkish yoke’ until the Balkan Wars, in the wake of which Greeks left or were expelled from Bulgaria (Grigorov 1995: 15; Neuburger 2013: 25-26; Popek 2015b).

⁸ Obviously, the Ottoman Empire was not any paradise, either. Non-Muslims, despite enjoying ethnoreligious non-territorial autonomies (millets), were actually second-rank subjects of the sultan. For instance, the practice of *devşirme* ‘levy of boys’ (دوشیرمه, literally ‘lifting, collecting’ in Osmanlıca) from the Christian millets to the empire’s jannissary forces (یہنی چری *yeñi çeri* ‘new soldier’ in Osmanlıca) was often heartbreaking for parents and ended in tragedy for some of these boys, though a few made a high-flying career in the imperial administration. The Ottomans preferred officials recruited through *devşirme* to ‘old Muslims’ for the sake of limiting corruption and nepotism (Hain 2012). In the Russian Empire a similar practice of seizing Jewish boys and teenagers (‘cantonists’) for the army was practiced between 1827 and 1854, de facto leading to their subsequent Christianization and Russification (Tomaszewski 1993: 19). Western European empires also used such arbitrary and inhumane methods to seize indispensable workforce, as in the case of ‘impressment’ for forcing boys and young adults into service in the British navy. In the case of Irish-speaking Catholics press-ganged in this manner, it meant de facto conversion to Protestantism and a switch to speaking English only, which was similar to the compulsory change in language and religion, which *devşirme* boys experienced in their jannissary units (Brunsmann 2013). During the last two centuries, compulsory military service, as practiced in the majority of Europe’s nation-states, has often been an imposition from above on an unwilling population, entailing forced linguistic and/or religious assimilation of soldiers stemming from minorities. (I benefited from discussing this issue with Konstanty Gebert.)

phenomenon (alongside its ‘correct patriotic interpretation’), which is posed as a ‘historical truth.’ What is more, the myth of this kind tends to function as a constitutive (nodal) element in a national master narrative, and is evoked, when needed, for the sake of national mobilization. When a scholar aspires to verify the veracity of the myth with the use of documents and other evidence, her efforts are speedily thwarted by public opprobrium and arguments *ad hominem*, often generated with the employment of administrative measures at the disposal of a given nation-state (cf Baleva and Brunnbauer 2007; Popek 2015a; Vazenzkov 2009). A well-known ‘fact’ is a *myth*, when this purported ‘fact’ is not supported by evidence, while oftentimes is politically ‘sacralized’ by taught in school as the ‘national truth.’ It is so especially in cases when the administration of a nation-state is summarily deployed for preventing any dispassionate analysis of such a myth (‘fact’), and for turning public opinion against the researcher who may dare to commit an unheard of act of ‘national blasphemy,’ namely, by attempting to fact-check the myth (cf Topolski 1996: 203-204).

Although obviously not involved in the production of the Bulgarian national master narrative, Turkish scholars also have a problem with taking a proper note of the 1989 ethnic cleansing. Thus far, no Turkish-language history or analysis of this tragic event has been published. The few books devoted to this ethnic cleansing, which appeared in Turkey, are collections of expellees’ life stories that tend to be published in extremely low print runs (cf Boykoy 2015; Yılmaz 2013). The myopia was caused, first, by the long-lasting separation of national Turkish history from the non-national Ottoman past. In this schema, from Ankara’s perspective, the events in the political and social life of Bulgaria’s Turks and Muslims properly belong to the latter, *not* the former. Second, from the perspective of historical dis/continuities, the main point of reference for Turkish scholars is the concept of *muhacir*, that is, ‘migrant, refugee’ (cf Avagyan, Lokmagyozyan and Zarakolu 2013; Erdem 2018). This Turkish term of Arabic origin⁹ refers to Muslim populations displaced from the territories of the Ottoman Empire, seized between the 18th century and 1923 by the Christian empires of Austria and Russia, and by the Balkan

⁹ *Muhacir* is the Turkish (Osmanlıca) phonemic adaptation of the Arabic term مهاجر *muhājir*, hence, in English it is also transliterated directly from Arabic as *muhajir*. In turn, this word is derived from the Arabic term هجرة *Hijra* ‘migration,’ which denotes the move of Muhammed and his followers from Mecca to Medina. The inhabitants of Medina who accepted them, became known as the أنصار *ansar* ‘supporters,’ for their hospitality to the *muhajirs*. Therefore, it has been a useful concept for Islamic polities whenever they want to justify the reception of Muslim refugees, like the case of Syrians in contemporary Turkey. (I thank Egemen Yılmaz for this insightful comment.)

nation-states. Later, this term was also applied to Muslims of various ethnicities expelled from Bulgaria, Greece,¹⁰ Romania, Serbia, or Yugoslavia to Turkey. However, in the ideologized process of the continuing Turkicization of the Turkish language (Lewis 1999), after World War II, the Arabo-Ottoman term *muhajir* was replaced with the Turkic neologism *göçmen* (Gökay 2013; Podręczny 2016: 11; Toğrol 1989).¹¹ This longue durée perspective that conflates temporal and spatial discontinuities between the Ottoman Empire and Turkey is also informed by important studies of western scholars (McCarthy 1995; Toumarkine 1995).

What is in the Name?

From this longue durée perspective, the 1989 ethnic cleansing appears to be a mere spike in the two-centuries-long continuum of ‘(forced) migrations’ of Muslims from the northern Black Sea littoral, the Caucasus and the Balkans in the wake of Christian (imperial or national) conquests. This Turkish historiographic interpretation of the events reinforces the Bulgarian approach, which proposes that the 1989 ethnic cleansing was none other than such a spike in the continuous (voluntary) migration of Turks (and Muslims) from Bulgaria to Turkey in the period from the Russian founding of this nation-state in 1878 to the fall of communism. In turn, western scholars also adopt this interpretation labelling this type of population movement as ‘emigration,’ while reserving the biblical term ‘exodus’ for the ‘spikes,’ as induced by warfare or the use of blatant coercion or force (cf Höpken 2014).

Hence, it should not be surprising that the most thorough reference on ethnic cleansing in Europe published thus far, *Lexikon der Vertreibungen: Deportation, Zwangsaussiedlung und ethnische Säuberung im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Lexicon of Expulsions: Deportations, Forced Expulsions and Ethnic Cleansing in 20th-Century Europe), refers to the 1989 ethnic cleansing as ‘an act of emigration’ (*Emigrationsakt*) and ‘mass flight’ (*Massenflucht*) (Brandes, Sundhaussen and Troebst 2010: 95–96, 666–667). The book’s

¹⁰ In the context of the 1923 ‘population exchange’ (that is, parallel expulsions) between Greece and Turkey (known in Turkish, as the *Türkiye-Yunanistan Nüfus Mübadelesi* ‘Population Exchange between Turkey and Greece’), the usual Turkish term for these expellees is *mübadil* ‘exchangee.’ Sometimes, by extension, this term is employed for referring to Turkish (and Muslim) expellees from other Balkan states, though in most cases these expulsions were unilateral, rather than reciprocal population exchanges (cf Özçelik 2007: 294). I thank Egemen Yilgür for bringing my attention to this term.

¹¹ In the context of Turkish ethnolinguistic nationalism, the Turkish term *soydaş* ‘ethnic kin, co-ethnics’ became popular in the late 20th century for referring to Turkish (and Muslim) expellees from the Balkans. This word stems from the Turkic word *soy* ‘kin, lineage’ and the nominal suffix *-daş* (cf Bulgaristan’da 2017). Egemen Yilgür kindly reminded me about this term.

authors refuse to recognize the tragic event as ethnic cleansing (*ethnische Säuberung*) or expulsion (*Vertreibung*), though they acknowledge that ‘some elements of expulsion’ (*Elemente der Vertreibung*) could be detected in it (Brandes, Sundhaussen and Troebst 2010: 95).

As a result, a self-reinforcing feedback has been created between Bulgarian, international and Turkish interpretations of the character of the 1989 ethnic cleansing. Because Bulgarian and Turkish scholars and commentators tend to refer to it as ‘(e)migration,’ their international counterparts – in good faith – tend to adopt this term, too. In turn, Bulgarian and Turkish scholars and commentators fall back on such an international opinion to ‘prove’ their point. Rarely does anyone try to break out of this solipsistic vicious circle in order to carry out a check-up by applying a definition of emigration or ethnic cleansing to the facts on the ground.

Hence, in Bulgaria the zhivkovite propaganda’s term Голямата екскурзия *Goliamata ekskurziia* (‘Big Excursion’) continues predominating as the preferred label for the 1989 ethnic cleansing (cf Apostolova 2008), while that of 1989 *Göçü* (‘1989 Migration’) in Turkey (cf Boykoy 2015). Bulgarian scholars, who wish to use the former term more critically, put it in between inverted commas as ‘*Goliamata ekskurziia*’ (cf Khristov 2016), while very few propose to speak of екзодус *ekzodus* (‘exodus’) (cf Avramov 2016: 261). However, often the supposedly required inverted commas are forgotten or omitted in the case of the former term, making it back into a zhivkovite euphemism, which is preferred by Bulgarian nationalists. On the other hand, the term ‘exodus’ comes with no discrete definition and confusing biblical references on top of that, which are not appropriate in the case of the overwhelmingly Muslim expellees.

In the early 1990s, the 1989 ethnic cleansing was still known in Turkey under the more appropriate term of *büyük göç* (‘Big Migration’) (cf. Konukman 1990), or that of the 1989 *Bulgaristan zorunlu göç* (‘1989 Forced Migration from Bulgaria’) (cf 1989 *Bulgaristan* 2012; Sofya’dan 1989). Seldom is this expulsion ever referred to as *etnik temizlik* (‘ethnic cleansing’) (cf *Dokuzuncu* 2005: 242–243], or *koy(ul)ma* (‘expulsion’) (cf *Tarihte* 2004: 144) in Turkish-language literature. The Turkish reluctance to use a straightforward term for referring to the 1989 ethnic cleansing is caused by Ankara’s unwillingness to bring any international attention to Turkey’s ongoing ethnic cleansing of Kurds, which flared up into a full-scale civil war during 1984-1999 (cf Gunes and Zeydanlioğlu 2014). As a result, the Turkish government was also careful not to criticize the Zhivkov regime too vociferously when the 1989 ethnic cleansing was in full swing. They knew that Bulgaria was ready to point to Ankara’s ongoing ethnic cleansing of Kurds, first, for shaming Turkey, and second, in order to show world public opinion that Sofia’s treatment of

Bulgarian Turks was more lenient (or ‘civilized’) (cf Bedreddin 1992; Bulgaria: Kurds 1985). And it appears that to this day Sofia is ready to employ this ‘argument’ for silencing any of Ankara’s criticisms of Bulgaria’s mistreatment of the country’s Turks and Muslims (cf Balabanov 1998; Petrov 1994).

A Way Forward

The first step toward an improved comprehension of the past is a rejection of sacralized historical myths, seen as ‘undisputed and unanalyzable truths.’ Second, continuities and discontinuities applied for probing into the past should be nuanced for the sake of improved comprehension of analyzed events, and must not be treated as an unmodifiable given. For instance, the Turkish penchant for the *longue durée* view of the emigration of Muslims from the Ottoman Empire’s shrinking borderlands conquered by Christian powers from the 18th century through the turn of the 20th century could be enriched with a reflection on the colonial techniques of ethnic cleansing and genocide as developed and deployed by the Russian Empire alongside the Black Sea’s northern and western shores, and in the Caucasus (Sherry 2007). Then such a change in methodology would make it possible to assess Russian actions in the Caucasus in 1864 as the Circassian Genocide (Richmond 2013), or analyze the 1877-1878 Russian conquest of Bulgaria in terms of ethnic cleansing and genocide (cf Donaldson 1877). However, this methodological leap in thinking about the past would require scaling the political obstacle in the form of Ankara’s insistence on *not* recognizing the 1915 Ottoman deportation of Armenians and Assyrians (cf Akçam 2004).¹² From the *longue durée* perspective, the Ottomans learned this murderous technique of politicized ‘population management’ from imperial Russia.

On the other hand, through the lens of Bulgarian history, the period of 1877/1878-1989 can be defined as a ‘national revolution,’ or the period of the construction of the Bulgarian nation-state through the unceasing policy of ethnoreligious and ethnolinguistic homogenization (‘purification,’ or de-Turkicization and de-Islamization). In this ideological framework Muslims, Jews and non-Bulgarian-speakers were defined as ‘un-Bulgarian aliens’ who had to be assimilated or expelled in order to produce ‘pure’ (that is, through and through Orthodox and Slavophone) Bulgaria (cf Kamusella 2018a: 140).

¹² The 1915 genocide of Armenians and Assyrians appears to shame today’s Turkey, as long as no clear distinction is maintained between the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey. The latter was founded in 1923, so the Turkish nation-state cannot be seen as guilty of this genocide, which was perpetrated by the Ottoman administration. Obviously, this does preclude personal responsibility in the case of Ottoman officials who then became civil servants in Turkey (cf Fortna 2016).

The Ottoman tradition of the millet system (or non-territorial autonomies for ethnoreligious communities) and Bulgaria's international obligations, alongside the tradition of interethnic and interconfessional *komşuluk* ('[good] neighborliness,' known as комшулук *komshuluk* in Bulgarian),¹³ mitigated this divisive policy of 'purification' until Bulgaria's 1908 declaration of independence from the Ottoman Empire. Until that time Muslims and Turks in Bulgaria were largely left to their devices, while their emigration to the Ottoman Empire was mostly voluntary, though frequently triggered by the dramatically changing economic situation (mainly due to the seizure and redistribution of large Muslim owners' land among Bulgarian peasants [Popek 2018: 133-134]). The point break is 1912-1914, or the period of the Balkan Wars. During this conflict and afterward, that is, until 1989, migrations of Turks and Muslims from Bulgaria and their assimilation became invariably forced in their character, with moments of intensification, which are easily recognizable as acts of ethnic cleansing (Popek 2016: 64-65).

Finally, in 2012, the democratic and liberal deputies gained the sufficient majority in the Bulgarian Parliament for adopting the momentous *Declaration Condemning the Attempted Forced Assimilation of Bulgarian Muslims* (Deklaratsiia 2012). This *Declaration* unequivocally recognizes the 1989 expulsion of Bulgaria's Turks (and Muslims) as етническо прочистване *etnichesko prochistvane* 'ethnic cleansing'¹⁴ (see the English translation of

¹³ The term *komşuluk* may also denote 'neighborhood,' and stems from Turkic *komşu* 'neighbor,' which, among others, yielded *komshi* 'neighbor' in Albanian, or комшија *komšija* 'neighbor' in Macedonian.

¹⁴ Implicitly (by stating that it adheres 'to the highest achievements of European and world thought, [and to] international law in the sphere of human rights and minority rights' [Deklaratsiia 2012]), this *Declaration* espouses the internationally adopted definition of ethnic cleansing, as derived from the 1994 UN opinion, namely, "Based on the many reports describing the policy and practices conducted in the former Yugoslavia, 'ethnic cleansing' has been carried out by means of murder, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, extra-judicial executions, rape and sexual assaults, confinement of civilian population in ghetto areas, forcible removal, displacement and deportation of civilian population, deliberate military attacks or threats of attacks on civilians and civilian areas, and wanton destruction of property. Those practices constitute crimes against humanity and can be assimilated to specific war crimes. Furthermore, such acts could also fall within the meaning of the Genocide Convention" (Letter 1994: 33). Furthermore, the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court among various 'crimes against humanity' (Article 5.1.a), in Article 7, among others, defines the two following crimes against humanity, which fulfill the aforementioned definition of ethnic cleansing, namely, "'Deportation or forcible transfer of population,' mean[ing] forced displacement of the persons concerned by expulsion or other coercive acts from the area in which they are lawfully present, without grounds permitted under international law" and "'Persecution,' against any identifiable group or collectivity on political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender [...], or other grounds that are universally recognized as

this *Declaration* below). Curiously, this highly significant document is relatively unknown in Bulgaria, and almost completely unknown outside the country, including Turkey. The first full English translation of the *Declaration* was made available only in 2019 (*Declaration* in Kamusella 2019). Not that this document is without any problems, for instance, the use of the sobriquet ‘Bulgarian Muslims’ in order to avoid mentioning the ethnonym ‘Turks.’ This usage, which verges on the denial of identity, appears to perpetuate the zhivkiovite tradition of claiming that after 1985 there were no minorities left in communist Bulgaria, so the country’s Turks had to be referred to as ‘Bulgarian Muslims’ (cf Laber 1987). This unfortunate collocation continues to be employed in today’s Bulgaria for dubbing (and at times, for suppressing) Pomaks (Slavophone Muslims) (Mincheva 2005). I infer that the use of this term in the *Declaration* is a result of a compromise with nationalists in the ranks of Bulgarian democrats.

But whatever the shortcomings of this document may be, the *Declaration* can successfully function as a foundation for long overdue and much needed Bulgarian-Turkish reconciliation, meaning between Bulgaria and its Turkish minority, and between Sofia and Ankara. Jan Józef Lipski, a precursor and one of the foremost figures of the post-1989 German-Polish reconciliation, wisely noticed that ‘[w]e must tell all to each other [that is, the Poles to the Germans and vice versa...]. Without this the burden of the past will not let us enter a common future’ (*Musimy powiedzieć sobie wszystko [...] Bez tego ciężar przeszłości nie pozwoli nam wejść we wspólną przyszłość*) (Lipski 1996 [1985]: 89-90). Hopefully, this truth will not be lost on Bulgarian and Turkish elites, including historians, especially those who are responsible for school curricula and education.

Unfortunately, Turkish scholars appear not to know the *Declaration* and they obediently toe the line of Turkey’s political sensibilities, preferring *not* to speak of ‘ethnic cleansing’ in the case of the 1989 expulsion.¹⁵ Their Bulgarian

impermissible under international law, [...] mean[ing] the intentional and severe deprivation of fundamental rights contrary to international law by reason of the identity of the group or collectivity” (Rome 1998).

¹⁵ Perhaps, a new opening in Turkish scholarship on the subject of the 1989 ethnic cleansing may be offered by İbrahim Kamil’s monumental eight-volume collection of primary sources *Bulgaristan Türkleri ve göçler. Bulgaristan Komünist Partisi gizli belgeleri (1944-1989)* [Bulgarian Turks and Migrations: Secret Documents of the Communist Party of Bulgaria [1944-1989]], which was published in 2018. Significantly, four volumes – that is, half of this work – are devoted to the latter half of the 1980s alone. And out of these four volume, the three last ones focus on the planning and the carrying out of the 1989 ethnic cleansing. These proportions seem to vindicate the 2012 Declaration’s decision to label the anti-Turkish and anti-Muslim policies pursued during the last five years of communism in communist Bulgaria, as ‘forced

counterparts, almost invariably label this tragedy with the zhivkovite term ‘*Goliamata ekskurziia*,’ mostly placed in between inverted commas. In this manner, quite curiously, Bulgarian researchers and intellectuals question the word and spirit of the *Declaration*. As an explanation, they maintain that they employ this now historical term for the sake of avoiding anachronism. But when pushed further about this issue, Bulgarian scholars go to lengths to emphasize that this usage is *not* any adoption or endorsement of zhivkovite propaganda. They claim that they use this term in a critical and objective manner, the required distancing latter supposedly ensured by the tenuous device of inverted commas (Round Table 2019).

For the sake of comparing the coining and usage of terms employed for labeling emotionally and politically sensitive historical events, I propose to analyze how relevant terminology has developed for referring to the Jewish Holocaust. The German-language neologism *Endlösung* (‘Final Solution’) was the Nationalist Socialist (Nazi) coinage of the Third Reich’s administration for the policy of exterminating Jews (and Roma) as a people. Beginning at the turn of the 1950s, the Greek neologism Holocaust (Ολοκαύτωμα *Olokáftoma*, ‘sacrificial offering [to gods] by burning’) became popular across the English-speaking world. Earlier, this English-language neologism had been applied for referring to the 1895 massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. The biblical term *Shoah* (שואה ‘calamity, disaster, catastrophe’ in Hebrew) appeared in the English-language press in the context of the genocide of Jews already in the early 1940s. Jews prefer this term to the non-Jewish name ‘Holocaust,’ especially after the latter came to be used for referring to genocides of other peoples, for instance, the Roma (Names of the Holocaust 2019).

In the English-language literature, all the three terms were employed in an equal measure until the late 1960s. Subsequently, ‘Holocaust’ became the preferred term, while the frequency of the use of ‘Shoah’ took over ‘Final Solution’ at the turn of the 21st century. Nowadays, the term ‘Holocaust’ is employed in English-language publications over seven times more frequently than the two other terms (Final Solution, Holocaust, Shoah 2019). In German-language literature, the term *Endlösung* dominated until the late 1970s. Nowadays, the term ‘Holocaust’ is employed four times more frequently in German-language publications than *Endlösung* (Holocaust, *Endlösung* 2019). It is high time that in Bulgaria and Turkey a discussion would be devoted to the clear-cut recognition of the 1989 ethnic cleansing and to the question with

assimilation,’ and the 1989 expulsion as ‘ethnic cleansing.’ (I thank Elena Marushiakova and Veselin Popov for bringing this collection to my attention.)

what name(s) it should be referred to. Without this step, research on the 1989 ethnic cleansing will continue to be hindered and questioned. Significantly, any discussion or research must involve victims of the 1989 ethnic cleansing, so they could voice what their memories, expectations and wishes may be. These victims should become the main subject of this discourse and they should be entrusted with leading the discourse.

Only in the mid-1960s, thirty years after the war, with the Frankfurt Trials, did West Germany begin coming to terms with the fact that the majority of wartime Germany's elite were directly or indirectly involved in the preparation and execution of the Holocaust (Pendas 2010). This breakthrough occurred thanks to the lone courageous and principled Attorney General of the *Land* of Hessen, Fritz Bauer (1903-1968). He was a Jew and opposed the Allies' and West Germany's complacency, or the 'pragmatic' approach that entailed forgetting about the past for the sake of opposing successfully the Soviet bloc in the course of the Cold War. Bauer brought as many as possible war criminals to the dock from the territory of his jurisdiction. Most of his counterparts in the other *Länder* of Germany remained inactive in this regard. At present, with the privilege of hindsight, we can say that Bauer singlehandedly saved Germany's honor (Steinke 2013).

Now, three decades after the 1989 ethnic cleansing, Bulgaria still awaits a Fritz Bauer of its own, who would save the country's honor by fulfilling the *Declaration's* heartfelt appeal, "*We call upon the Bulgarian Justice and the Attorney General of the Republic of Bulgaria that they ensure completion of the case against the perpetrators of the so-called 'Revival Process'*" (Deklaratsiia 2012). Thus far, not a single perpetrator of the 1989 ethnic cleansing has been brought to justice. At the same time, the victims and their descendants, both in Bulgaria and Turkey, must suffer the indignity of the burgeoning personality cult of the ethnic cleanser Todor Zhivkov, who is incongruously celebrated with the flag of the European Union unfurled at his monument in Pravets (Kamusella 2018b). Even worse, Bulgaria's incumbent Prime Minister, Boiko Borisov, praises this ethnic cleanser as a 'great Bulgarian leader' (Borisov 2011; Karaabova 2010). Borisov is the sole EU leader who publicly extols an ethnic cleanser. Unfortunately, this example encourages nationalists and populists, who nowadays rework the Bulgarian national myth of the 'five centuries of Turkish yoke' as the петвековният геноцид *petvekovniiat genotsid* 'five centuries of the {Bulgarian} genocide {as perpetrated by Turks}' (Bozhkov 2013). It is a shame, to say the least, that myths should take over common sense.

April 2019

The Bulgarian Parliament's momentous 2012 Declaration is relatively unknown in Bulgaria itself and utterly unknown abroad. There is no full translation of the Declaration into any foreign language. Hence, to ameliorate this gaping omission, I translated this important document into English. The Declaration adds importantly to Europe's liberal tradition of freedoms and human rights.

The Declaration Condemning the Attempted Forced Assimilation of Bulgarian Muslims

We, the Deputies of the 41st [Bulgarian] National Assembly

- referring to the highest achievements of European and world thought, [and to] international law in the sphere of human rights and minority rights;

- referring to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms;

- expressing our deepest regret that since the beginning of the democratic changes, for 20 years, the Bulgarian justice system has failed to punish the perpetrators of the attempted **forced assimilation** of Bulgarian Muslims, including the so-called 'Revival Process;'

- expressing our firm conviction that no statute of limitation can be applied to such crimes,

WE DECLARE THAT:

1. We condemn vociferously the assimilation policy of the [Bulgarian] totalitarian communist regime against the Muslim minority in the Republic of Bulgaria, including the so-called 'Revival Process.'

2. We declare the expulsion of more than 360.000 Bulgarian citizens of Turkish origin [from Bulgaria to Turkey] in 1989 constitutes a form of **ethnic cleansing** committed by the [Bulgarian] totalitarian regime.

3. We call upon the Bulgarian Justice and the Attorney General of the Republic of Bulgaria that they ensure completion of the case against the perpetrators of the so-called 'Revival Process.' Efforts to terminate this case with the use of the statute of limitations means shifting the blame [for this atrocity] onto the Bulgarian people, away from the actual perpetrators.

This Declaration was adopted by the 41st National Assembly on 11 January 2012 and is stamped with the official seal of the National Assembly.

Bulgarian Parliament, Sofia, 11 January 2012

(Deklaratsiia 2012)

NB: I put in bold the terms 'forced assimilation' and 'ethnic cleansing.'

Translated from the Bulgarian by Tomasz Kamusella

NB: The English translation may be freely reproduced, subject to citing its source and the translator's name

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