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Cengiz HAKSÖZ

Ph.D. Candidate

*Department of Anthropology
University of Pittsburgh*

Ph.D. Candidate

*Department of Sociology
Middle East Technical University*

**ETHNIC CLEANSING OF
TURKS IN BULGARIA**

**(BULGARİSTAN'DAKİ TÜRLERE
KARŞI ETNİK TEMİZLİK)**

Author: Tomasz Kamusella

Title: Ethnic Cleansing During the Cold War: The Forgotten 1989
Expulsion of Turks from Communist Bulgaria

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The modern Balkans have not only been the playground of various nationalist movements, wars, uprisings, and massacres, but also different types of population movements, such as migrations, internal displacements, forced population exchanges, and mass population expulsions. During the five-hundred-year-long Ottoman

reign in Bulgaria, the country had a significant number of Muslim population. During the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877 -1878 and following the *de facto* independence in 1878 and *de jure* in 1909, a considerable portion of Bulgaria's Muslims either died because of wartime conditions such as hunger and diseases or were massacred or pushed away from their homelands. Tomasz Kamusella's book "Ethnic Cleansing During the Cold War: The Forgotten 1989 Expulsion of Turks from Communist Bulgaria" analyzes the last expulsion of Bulgaria's Turks in the twentieth century. The book consists of seven chapters together with an introduction and a conclusion.

Before starting his *introduction*, to give nuanced data, Kamusella provides the reader with maps, demographic statistics, and information about Bulgarian government figures during the state-socialist and post-socialist era. In the introduction, the author briefly compares the fate of Turks in Bulgaria with other similar post-imperial and post-World-War-II minorities. He introduces the emergence of the concept of "ethnic cleansing" in the world politics and social sciences with the reference to the disintegration of Yugoslavia. He has mainly two primary rationales writing this book. First of all, he aims to separate the forced assimilation campaign or "Revival Process" (*Vazroditelen Protzes* in Bulgarian) with the expulsion of the Turks from Bulgaria in 1989. Secondly, he claims the uniqueness of the 1989 expulsion and at the same time how it is belittled, forgotten and underrepresented not only in the body of literature in the world but also in Bulgaria and Turkey.

The first chapter on *forgetfulness and its perils* starts with analyzing how population exchanges once were legal instruments. He states that these practices which were even perceived as measures to prevent future conflicts have become illegal in the 1990s during the War in Yugoslavia. It was just after the expulsion of Bulgaria's Turks in 1989 that such measures were defined as "ethnic cleansing" and crimes against humanity. Kamusella also observes that the "un-newsworthiness" of the 1989 expulsion in the international public because it did not lead to a civil or international war as in the case of the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s. He criticizes the terminology which names the 1989 expulsion as "emigration," "mass flight," and "forced migration." Kamusella expresses his surprise for the fact that even in Turkey those events were seldom referred to as "ethnic cleansing."

In the second chapter titled *the State of research on the 1989 expulsion*, the author evaluates the body of research on the expulsion of Turks from

Bulgaria. Kamusella mentions pseudo-scientific propaganda books published by Bulgarian scholars under the directives of the totalitarian regime of the time. For him “Bulgarian intellectuals and scholars, by and large, have failed to acknowledge their role in the 1989 ethnic cleansing and the assimilatory campaign of the 1980s” (pp. 25-25). By borrowing the term first used by Julien Benda, he remarkably and bravely defines the situation as “*trahison des clercs*” (treason of intellectuals, in English). According to him, the responsibility of Bulgarian intellectuals and scholars cannot be ignored by arguing that they did not have any other chance but only to follow the directives of the oppressive regime. He also shows how the Kurdish issue in Turkey was played as a tactical card by the Bulgarian authorities, both socialist and post-socialist, to downplay the ethnic cleansing and forced assimilation campaign against the Turks in Bulgaria in the 1980s. He gives credit to Rumiana Uzonova’s book and her positive contribution to the cause. He points out the limited interest on the issue in Turkey, as well. “... [In Turkey,] no monographs have been published on the ethnic cleansing yet. Often, the tendency is to lump together the forced assimilation of the latter half of the 1980s together with the 1989 expulsion, without distinguishing between these two” (p. 30). He also acknowledges the fact that most of the Bulgarian publications on the issue are concentrated on releasing the archival documents without further analysis, and most of the Turkish publications were interested in life stories of the expellees. Not-well-known publishers also published both Bulgarian and Turkish books on the issue with a limited number of copies which prevent those texts from reaching a broader audience.

In the third chapter titled *the 1989 ethnic cleansing through the lens of the international press*, Kamusella surveys the non-Bulgarian and non-Turkish publications on the issue. He puts emphasis on propaganda war on TV screen and cinema between Turkey and Bulgaria in the production of cinematic content for supporting their causes about the forced assimilation campaign in the 1980s. In this chapter, he also summarizes the Turkish resistance organizations. The author does an excellent job in revealing some organizations which are unknown not only to the general audience but also to academicians. For instance, he gives information about the Independent Human Rights Society (NDZPCh) which was founded by Turkish members of the Bulgarian Communist Party; Democratic Human Rights League (DLZPChB) founded in Vratsa; and Leninist Communist Party of Turks in Bulgaria (TLKPB) founded by Avni Veliev. The chapter deals with the events and key moments that lead to ethnic cleansing of 3.5 percent of Bulgarian population.

Kamusella provides numbers of expellees by month in 1989 by using Bulgarian, Turkish and international sources. He pays particular attention to the totalitarian regime's official terminology of the expulsion as "Big Excursion" implying that expellees were just regular tourists using freedom of movement as a consequence of the liberalization policies in the state-socialist Bulgaria. The author also illustrates the reasons why some Turks returned to Bulgaria and later moved to Turkey again. He describes the conditions and labor shortages after the expulsion, property issues of returnees, and harassment of returnees by the Bulgarian authorities. He questions the "public amnesia" towards the ethnic cleansing of Turks in Bulgaria in the post-socialist period, as well.

In the fourth chapter titled *the ethnic cleansing's aftermath and the regime change*, Kamusella analyzes how the expulsion of 350.000 Turks from Bulgaria in 1989 led to the collapse of the state-socialist regime in Bulgaria. He summarizes the events and demonstrations, as well as backlashes by those who were against reinstating cultural and political rights of the Turkish and other Muslim minorities. Kamusella states that post-socialists still challenged minority rights in Bulgaria, a reality that can be seen from the fact that the Turkish minority representatives were not part of the official democratization process, such as the round-table talks between January and May 1990. He ironically calls it as the "original sin," which has led to "semi-inclusion" of Turks and Muslims in the post-socialist period. Kamusella also emphasizes the fact that Bulgaria's transition to democracy was still led by former "second wave" communists, who benefited from transition both economically and politically. He also gives some unpopular examples on the violence and hostility against the Turks in the early post-socialist era, such the bombing of the local office of Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) in Shumen and declaration of "Razgrad Republic" by the nationalists in the province of Razgra, where the Turkish minority constitutes the majority. Another issue that he focuses on is the education of the Turkish minority in their mother tongue. He rightfully presents the obstacles on the minority language education. Interference of legislative bodies and judiciary bodies in minority politics, such as nullification of 1992 Census results in Yakoruda, Gotse Delchev by the Bulgarian Parliament on the grounds that non-Turks stated themselves as Turks, and invalidating the local election in Kardzhali by the district court which led the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) candidate to become the mayor. He criticizes that the history textbooks do not take into account the forced assimilation campaign in 1984-1985 and expulsion of the Turks in 1989 by stating

that it leads the new generation to believe that such events have never happened.

In the fifth chapter titled *the official coming terms with the 1989 ethnic cleansing*, Kamusella discusses the exclusion of Turks and their sufferings from official commemorations of the state-socialist and totalitarian regime in post-1989 era. Thus, he mentions how the Turkish community found alternative commemoration ways, such as commemorative fountains. As a positive note, although it does not include a straightforward apology to the Turks in Bulgaria, he praises the adoption of “the Declaration Condemning the Attempted Forced Assimilation of Bulgarian Muslims” by the Bulgarian Parliament in January 2012. He criticizes the slogan-like “Bulgarian ethnic model” which was praised until 2012 by MRF and other parties. According to Kamusella, this model is just an “empty phrase” and “ensures collective amnesia and passively prevents any reconciliation from taking place” (p.116 and p.119).

In the sixth chapter titled *between language and millet*, the author states that the national myths, such as “five-hundred-years of Ottoman yoke” are among the major obstacles in reconciliation in post-socialist Bulgaria. In this chapter, Kamusella explains the Ottoman millet as a concept that influenced not only the Balkan and Bulgarian socio-political lives during the Ottoman Empire but also in the post-Ottoman era, including the state-socialist period. The author provides compelling examples of how the state-socialist totalitarian regime employed various nationalist policies.

In the seventh chapter titled *the question of responsibility*, Kamusella questions how not a single person, including the prominent totalitarian leader Todor Zhivkov, were sentenced either because of assimilation campaign in the 1980s or for the ethnic cleansing of the Turks in 1989. He states that there is a *de facto* ethnic hierarchy in social and spatial spheres in Bulgaria. In such exclusionary socio-political milieu, the Turkish minority and MRF have no other choice but to make compromises and follow a formula of “live and let live.” (p.146). He gives examples on the ways in which MRF is walking in the edges of being constantly accused of being “anti-Bulgarian.” He also argues that there are “personality assassination” attempts by biased publications accusing MRF as part of the Bulgarian Secret Service (DS) of the time. Kamusella, questions how only in Bulgaria the former totalitarian leader Zhivkov could enjoy such respect and was elevated to a cult-like

persona, not during the socialism but interestingly during the post-socialist period.

In the *concluding* chapter, Kamusella wrap-ups his idea and rationale of writing this book. He questions how and why the ethnic tensions in Bulgaria during the 1980s did not escalate to civil war as it did in the former Yugoslavian republics and Kosovo. He argues that to achieve long-lasting societal peace both forced assimilation campaign and expulsion of the Turks should be officially and publicly commemorated through museums, monuments, and events.

One of the most exciting parts of the book is the *postscript*. There, the reader learns how Kamusella's path crossed with the fate of the Turks in Bulgaria. First his father, then all his family had visited Bulgaria. Their only visit to Bulgaria interestingly coincides with the forced assimilation campaign, and his father was unable to find his ethnic-Turkish friends in the Bulgarian town of Dimitrovgrad.

Kamusella's book is a valuable contribution to the literature on ethnic-Turks in Bulgaria, as well as the Balkans in general. Unlike other academic books and journal articles, he is courageous in going against the official Bulgarian historiography, even towards protracted myths such as the Batak massacre. He is one of the few who acknowledges the responsibilities of the whole Bulgarian society for at least passively letting the forced assimilation campaign and expulsion of the Turks to happen. The organization of the book sometimes gets confusing. At times the author loses his focus by diverting the subject to elsewhere. Although this provides extra information to the reader, it also makes it hard to follow even for a reader knowledgeable on Bulgaria and the Balkans. Probably to escape criticism of being "anti-Bulgarian," he often finds himself making comparisons with Turkey. Also though some of his claims are relevant, he cannot save himself to fall into irrelevant discussions and examples in that repertoire of analogies. On the whole, this book is an excellent contribution to the history of the Turks in Bulgaria.