

Gorani, with meaning Highlanders, are Islamic ethnic group, which inhabits the Gora region, located between Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia. Another autonym of this people is "Našinci" with literally meaning "our people". They are also known among the neighbouring Albanians with several exonyms, "Torbeshë" and "Poturë". They speak the Gora dialect, which is known by many Gorani as "Našinski". The Gora region comprises Dragaš municipality in Kosovo, Shishtavec municipality in Albania and the area around the Šar Mountains in Macedonia. They are adherents to Islam and have a rich and varied folk culture. They have been claimed by Bosniaks, Serbs, Bulgarians and recently Macedonians, but the general view is that they should be treated as a distinct minority group. Part of these people are already Albanised. By the last censuses at the end of 20th century in Yugoslavia they have declared themselves to be Muslims by nationality. In Republic of Macedonia their identity is also based mainly on their religion.

Etymology

The word Gora is a the traditional term for the region, it means "Mountains" or "Highlands". In the Gora dialect the "Mountain people" or "Highlanders" are known as Goranci (Cyrillic: Горанци), this is often transliterated into English simply as "Gorani" or "Gorans"

History

Gora is the region inhabited by the Gorani, and also that which peoples (including Gorani themselves) and many Albanians use to identify the native people (Gorani). The region, Gora, is mentioned in 1348 in the edict of Serbian Emperor Stefan Dušan, along with seven other Gorani-populated villages that were subsumed by the Monastery of Saint Archangel at Prizren at that time. The area called Gora was subsequently populated by Slavs during their migration in the 6th–7th centuries. Less than a century later the Bulgars invaded and subsequently settled in the area as well.

In 1455, Gora was conquered from the Serbian Despotate by the Ottoman Turks and became a part of the beylerbeylik of Rumelia, or specifically, the Sanjak of Prizren. The process of natural assimilation into Ottoman society henceforth began, mostly at the end of the 16th century. And following the trend of Balkan peoples, the conversion from bogumils through the process of Islamization was rapid, with dozens of mosques springing up across the Gora region (many have had to be rebuilt, a result of the Serb invasions of the late 19th century, which destroyed many of the area's mosques, and also the oppressive conditions in Albania during Hoxha's regime). The Gorani continue to maintain a religious hybridity of sorts — while steadfast Muslims, they observe a number of bogumils traditions and holidays, with observance of certain Saint's days and their acknowledging of the Bogomil.

Because of Gora's highly isolated location in and around Albania's mountainous northern region, the difficult terrain aided the Goran in resisting first the Slavic and later the Ottoman invasions. Migrations to escape the Ottoman invasion did occur, as they did in Albania in the 14th century, when many Albanians fled to Italy, Egypt, Syria and the Ukraine. These migrations were repeated several centuries thenceforth when many Goran, hemmed in by both Yugoslav and Albanian authoritarian regimes, fled the region. Many surfaced in America, where a significant diaspora has emerged (primarily in California). Migrations from Gora during the Ottoman era resulted in two significant waves: the first towards Prizren and Sirinić, and the other towards Tetovo. The latter populated the Macedonian settlements of Dolno, Palčište and Tearce. Their descendants still populate that part of the Republic of Macedonia. Gorani colonists have migrated and populated on the eastern side of the Šar Mountains the colonies of Urvič and Jelovjane.

In the First Balkan War in 1912 the Serbian Army seized Gora. A minor part of the Gorani population migrated to the Ottoman Empire as a result. In the 1916–1918 First World War the Gora was conquered by the Central Powers and assigned to the Bulgarian (until May 1916) and to the Austro-Hungarian (until October 1918) zone. After 1918 they were integrated into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The troubles during First World War, as well as the difficult period between 1919-20 were characterized by drought, causing famine and much poverty for the Gorans., This paradigm also incited migrations to Kosovo's larger city, Prizren and Tetovo in Republic of Macedonia. Disease and hunger in the post-communist era in Albania have caused a general downfall of the Gorani population, mostly due to in-migration out of villages for urban centers like Shkodra and Tirana.

By the decision of the League of Nations however, in 1925, the final border towards Albania was established. In it, over 15,000 Gorans remained in Albania's borders in their 9 villages: Borje, Zapod, Košarište, Novo Selo, Orgosta, Orešek, Pakiša, Crneljevo and Šištevac on demand of Fascist Italy, despite the local Gorani community's desire to remain together undivided.

In 1999 after the NATO bombing campaign on Yugoslavia, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) took over international administration of the Serbian province of Kosovo. Their own municipality was redrawn and Dragaš established, in which now Albanians are in majority. The Gora has received migrations of Albanians from Albania, and reports of killings and mistreatment of the Gorani by Albanian paramilitaries were subsequently recorded, though never verified. In 2007 the Kosovar provisional institutions opened a school in Gora to teach the Bosnian language, which sparked minor consternation amongst the Gorani population, added by the fact that the Principal declares as an Albanian. Many Gorans refuse to send their children to school for threats of assimilation and self-initially founded home schools for their young.

Language

The Gorani people speak a local dialect known as "Našinski" (Cyrillic: Нашински) or "Goranski" (Cyrillic: Горански). It's considered many to be an intermediary dialect between Macedonian and Serbian and is often called a Torlak dialect. While still remaining a Slavic based language there are numerous loan words in the language, the dialect has been greatly influenced by Turkisk, Arabic and Albanian.

According to the last 1991 Yugoslav census, 54.8% of the inhabitants of the Gora municipality said that they spoke the Gorani language. Some Goranian scholars define their language as Bulgarian, similar to the dialects spoken in Northwest Macedonia. Dokle, Nazif. Rečnik Goransko (Nashinski) - Albanski, Sofia 2007, Pečatnica Naukini akademiji "Prof. Marin Drinov", s. 5, 11, 19 (Nazif Dokle. Goranian (Nashinski) - Albanian Dictionary, Sofia 2007, Published by Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, p. 5, 11, 19)

Population

The Gorani population numbered some 16,000, in the Gora administrative division, according to the 1991 census. Gorani leaders today estimate that fewer than 10,000 are left in Gora, where large in-migrations to Albania's capital, Tirana, have occurred. Most Goran state that the unstable situation and the economic issue drives them to leave Kosovo. There's also some mention of threats and discrimination. The UN administration in Kosovo, UNMIK, has redrawn internal boundaries in the province in such a way that a Gorani-majority municipality no longer exists. The Gora was combined with the neighboring Albanian-

populated region of Opolje (some 35,000 people) into a new subdivision named Dragaš, which again has an Albanian majority.

Settlements

Below is a list of the traditional Gorani settlements in the Šar Mountains region. In parenthesis the Našinski names in Cyrillic.

Borje (Борје) » Brod (Брод)
Cernalevë (Црнолево) » Dikance (Диканце)
Donja Rapča (Доња Рапча) » Donji Krstac (Доњи Крстац)
Dragaš (Драгаш) » Globočica (Глобочица)
Gornja Rapča (Горња Рапча) » Gornji Krstac (Горњи Крстац)
Kosharisht (Кошариште) » Kukaljane (Кукаљане)
Leštane (Лештане) » Ljubovište (Љубовиште)
Mlike (Млике) » Novosej (Ново Село)
Orçikël (Очикле) » Orčiša (Орчуша)
Orgjost (Оргоста) » Orshekë (Оршек)
Pakisht (Пакиште) » Radeša (Радеша)
Restelica (Рестелица) » Shishtavec (Шиштејец)
Vranište (Враништа) » Zapod (Запод)
Zli Potok (Зли Поток)>> Ваčka (Бачка)

Gorani diaspora

The Gora is an underdeveloped region and for almost two centuries, its male inhabitants would go off to more distant regions in order to find work. Due to this, a true Gorani diaspora has come to life with many living in parts of Central Serbia (particularly Belgrade: 3,340), Vojvodina (606), the Republic of Macedonia (particularly the Western parts); Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, Greece and Turkey; and following escape from communist Albania and socialist Yugoslavia in the late-1940s, the United States (particularly New York and Los Angeles).

Culture and religion

Like many Balkan peoples prior to the invasion of the Romans and the forced conversions to Christianity, the existence of many pantheistic sects and worship of the sun god existed. Following the conversion to the Eastern Orthodox Christian faith, the Goran embraced Islam under the Ottoman Empire and remain today exclusive followers of the Islamic faith.

Traditional Goran folk music includes a two-beat dance called "kolo" ('circle'), which is a circle dance focused on the foot movements: it always starts on the right foot and moves in an anti-clockwise direction. Kolo is usually accompanied by instrumental music made often with a Zurla or Kaval and Tupan or Davul, kolos are less frequently accompanied by singing as they are in neighboring ethnic groups such as the Albanians and Serbians