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POST-SOCIALIST REGIMES OF MOBILITY

Abstract: This paper, based on my ethnographic fieldwork in Macedonia and Italy (2008-2014), aims at showing two patterns of mobility observed after the collapse of Yugoslavia. They are both connected to contemporary political and economic situation in post-Yugoslav Macedonia, as well as refer to the situation back in Yugoslavia. The first one is labour migration of Macedonian-speaking Muslims from the western part of the country to northern Italy. The second kind of mobility is immigration of Catholic women from northern Albania to central Macedonia, in order to get married. In the context of these two kinds of mobility I will contemplate the concepts of regimes of mobility and post-socialism. I argue that in order to understand various movement of people, we cannot separate international from internal as well as spatial from social mobility.

Keywords: mobility, migration, post-socialism, Macedonia, Albania, Yugoslavia.

Migration research has a long tradition in social sciences, but there has been a rapid increase in it since the 1980s. After the collapse of communist/socialist regimes, citizens of Eastern Europe would not also travel freely to other countries as tourists, but also could work or study abroad. Some of those countries are already part of the European Union. Thus, what has been something new, started to be not only emigration countries, but also immigration countries. Still, in the Eastern European and the Balkan countries, standard of life and immigration policies are not as developed as it is in the West. It is especially visible nowadays, when we can observe actions and discussion connected to refugee movement from war-torn Syria. At the same time, one could see tourists traveling both from and to post-socialist countries, contract workers and high-skilled professionals.

Therefore, why in this text I stress the concept of mobility instead of migration? Mobility points at the similarities in the trajectories and practices of various people on the move – economic migrants, tourists, students, and contract workers. What is more, it can define not only international migration, but also rural-urban or urban-rural mobility. As I will argue later in this paper, in order to understand various "regimes of mobility" in Macedonia, we cannot separate immigration from emigration, and going abroad from moving from villages to towns.

Thomas Faist (2013) argues that a new paradigm in the social sciences has emerged, i.e. *mobility turn.* In his book *Sociology beyond societies*, John Urry (2000) writes that nowadays the interest should not be social relations and the interaction within different societies, but the global flow of people, ideas, things, and especially information. Analyzing the current situation in Egypt, he notes that social change is mediated (and made possible) by new media, such as the internet with social networking sites.

His thesis is that in today's world everything is fluid - ideas, identities, texts, pictures and metaphors. They flow and combine, creating different mixtures and hybrid forms (Urry 2000: 40- 41). The word flow is important here, thoroughly described by Alexander Stuart Rockefeller (2011) in the context of globalization research. Numerous scholars, e.g. Arjun Appadurai and Zygmunt Bauman, have also described such flows. As noted by Nina Glick Schiller and Noel S. Salazar in their inspiring article *Regimes of mobility across the Globe*, talking about flows takes agency away from the described people (2013: 4). By formulating the idea of the regimes of mobility, the authors want to prove that it is unaccounted to use the binary opposition of mobility and sedentarism (*stasis*). They show that movement and a sedentary way of life are intertwined and that mobility is not only territorial, but also social (i. e. crossing class boundaries). Interestingly, although people have always been on the move (i. e. mass migrations and relocation), being mobile is treated as an exception to the rule of living a sedentary life (Glick Schiller, Salazar 2013: 3). What is most important in using the concept of mobility is that it enables the researcher to analyze the relation between the privileged mobility of some (expats, tourists, international students) and the stigmatized mobility of others, who do not have the money or power (workers and refugees) (2013: 6). The other words, the concept of mobility can stress not only movement in the space, but also social mobility. For migrants, coming from lower social classes, mobility is treated as a chance to change status of themselves or their children.

The notion of the regimes of mobility allows for the mobility to be viewed not as a freeing choice, but also as a limitation. It is a reminder that immigrants can be used by institutions, that they are dependent on the economic situation, and vary in terms of their class, race, and gender. As Glick Schiller and Salazar argue: "It is the labour of those whose movements are declared illicit and subversive that makes possible the easy mobility of those who seem to live in a borderless world of wealth and power (2013: 6).

What has been also pointed out is that the word "migrant" itself is evaluative - it concerns mostly disadvantaged people from poorer countries and is connected with transnational mobility. The word "migrant", and especially "immigrant" is often criminalized, so we can easily find in public discourse collocations such as "illegal / clandestine immigrants" or "illegal cross-borders". The latter expression has been used in public media in Hungary now. Thus, as Thomas Faist (2013) writes, on the one hand we have open borders, more possibility to travel (eg. cheap flights, exchange programs, international volunteering, transnational companies, etc.), and on the other – immigration control that is a part of welfare states.

Based on my ethnographic fieldwork in Macedonia and Italy (2008-2014)[1], I would like to show now two patterns of mobility observed after the collapse of Yugoslavia. They are both connected to contemporary political and economic situation in post-Yugoslav Macedonia. The first one is labour migration from the western part of the country to northern Italy. I will focus on a small group of Macedonian-speaking Muslims who have migrated to Emilia-Romagna in Italy. The second kind of mobility is immigration of Catholic women from northern Albania to central Macedonia, in order to get married. At

the beginning, however, I will also discuss the concept "post-socialism" and its usefulness in the research of mobility in former Yugoslavia.

Post-socialist or post-Yugoslav

The notion of post-socialism in social sciences is very broad, perhaps too broad. It means the period after the collapse of state socialism in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans. At the same time it defines the present time and indicates a significant impact of the earlier period. Katherine Verdery (1996) defines socialism as a one-party system of government with a centralized economy. Thus, post-socialism is marked by privatization of means of production and the introduction of a multi-party system. Some authors put together all the countries from the USSR to Yugoslavia, and in scholarship some kind of Soviet-orientation is prevalent.

Although the narrow definition of socialism (a one-party system and the lack of private property) can be applied to any Eastern bloc country, the standard of living (by which I mean the economic status, but also the scale of oppression and unequal access to goods) of citizens in many countries was incomparable.

Peter Skalník rightly says that while in Western scholarship the former system is called 'socialism' or real socialism, Eastern European scholars used the terms 'communism' and 'post-communism' (Skalník 2002: 194). In addition, Ilká Thiessen (2007: 11-12) says that in general Eastern Europe as a concept has been constructed by the West, resulting amongst other things in the creation of the concept of post-socialism.

Yugoslavia was much more open to the West than other socialist and communist countries, there was no real or symbolic wall. Access to goods, services, and knowledge was for the people of Yugoslavia incomparably higher than in the Soviet Union and its satellites. Therefore, after the collapse of the country people yearned and still yearn for the size and importance of that state. This is particularly evident in small, economically and politically unstable countries like Macedonia. Until 2009, that is until the abolition of the visa regime for Macedonians, one could freely travel only to Bulgaria, Serbia and Albania. The common slogan "Europe without borders" was true more in Yugoslav times than after the collapse of the federation. What is more, while the modernization project for the socialist countries assumed to follow the path of development of Western Europe, the transformation in the former Yugoslavia (again I refer to Macedonia) is seen as a recession. 'Modern', 'European' and 'Western' was former Yugoslavia, while 'backward', 'poor' and 'Balkan' is post-1991 Macedonia (Thiessen 2007: 11-12).

In the 1960s and 1970s two factors shaped contemporary and later mobility in Yugoslavia: industrialisation and bilateral agreements guest workers with Western European countries, especially Germany. The first factor caused rural-urban migration, while the second – international (mostly male) mobility. After the collapse of Yugoslavia both internal and international migration in Macedonia increased, due to high unemployment, corruption and ethnic tensions in the country.

Case 1. Contemporary pechalbari from Western Macedonia

Traditionally, so-called *pechalba* or *gurbet* was the male seasonal labour migration within the territory of the Ottoman Empire. Later, this term was also applied to mobility after the fall of uprisings against the Ottomans as well as to overseas migration. *Pechalbari* worked above all as farmers, shepherds or craftsmen. They used to leave their home villages after St. George's Day (6th May), perceived as the beginning of the spring-summer season, and return after St. Demetrius's Day (8th November), the end of the harvesting season. Late autumn and winter were the time of the most important family celebrations – weddings, baptisms or circumcisions, and even symbolic funerals.

After WW2, when Macedonia became a part of Yugoslavia, men, especially in the western part of the country, emigrated to Germany as Gastarbeiters. It was virtually only male migration, albeit from other Yugoslav countries women migrated, too. Then, because of urbanisation and industrialisation, intense migration from the countryside to cities started as well. After the breakup of Yugoslavia, the situation changed considerably.

In the post-socialist Republic of Macedonia, struggling with economic and political problems, whole families started to migrate, and one of the main directions of such mobility became northern Italy (cf. Bielenin-Lenczowska 2015). Nevertheless, it has still been to some extent only male migration. Men have worked predominantly as construction workers, while women would stay at home. Most of these women, especially Muslims, did not participate in public life, not only because of their ignorance of the Italian language, but mostly due to the cultural construction of gender relations known from their country or region of origin.

The experience of migration is always gendered, i.e. possibilities and vulnerability to discrimination vary depending on gender of the people, but also on their age, class, race etc. (cf. Salazar Parreñas 2005). This is also the case for Macedonian-speaking Muslims in Italy. In their native villages women are not allowed to travel alone or to work outside their home (sometimes they can work as teachers, cleaning ladies or nurses). Thus, many of them do not speak sufficient Italian, and their integration with non-Macedonian-speaking people is visibly poor.

The migrants brought along with them their everyday customs, and their daily lifestyle reflects their belonging both to Macedonia and Italy. It refers to gender relations between husbands and wives, the position of a woman in the family and the society, but also to their everyday activities: visiting neighbours to chat and drink coffee (Turkish, brought from Macedonia and prepared in a traditional way in a pot or *gjezva*), and watching Macedonian films or, more frequently, recordings from weddings or after-circumcisions parties. Food, religious practice, dress-code or private space of houses show their strong attachment to Macedonian socio-cultural landscape (or rather to the one characteristic for Muslims from Reka region in Macedonia), but also depict an influence from the local, that is Italian, or as it is rather said 'European' culture.

Villages of origin in Macedonia are perceived by migrants as places of reference. Twice a year, for up to one month in August and about two weeks around the New Year, the migrants travel to Macedonia. This is their time for visiting families, building or renovating houses and organize weddings. It is still considered that weddings and circumcisions should be organised in Macedonia in a traditional way, it means with Gypsy music,

traditional food and costumes. Additionally, villages are still endogamous. Even young *pechalbari* living almost the whole year in Italy know that they should find a Muslim wife/husband, preferably from Macedonia, and they *return* for the wedding to the country of origin of their parents. Lavish weddings are for migrants also a visible marker of prestige as most wedding rituals take place in the houses' courtyards and public spaces of the village.

My interlocutors, although they often call their mobility *pechalba* or *gurbet,* observe a qualitative difference in the new pattern of migration, define their mobility as *iseluvanje* or *iseleništvo* (emigration), and call themselves *iselenici* (emigrants). It should be noted that they are the first generation of migrants, and the second one, that is their children, is significantly different. They attend Italian schools and make international friendships, and their relationships with the country of origin are significantly weaker.

Case 2. Wives from Albania

Poreche is a mountainous area located in central Macedonia, with Makedonski Brod as the administrative centre. It is there that in the years 1932-33 a Polish sociologist and social anthropologist Józef Obrębski conducted his ethnographic research. He lived in the village of Volche which is today almost completely deserted (with only four people living there permanently), and is accessible only in an off-road vehicle.

Until 2004, Samokov was the administrative centre of that area, and in the times of Yugoslavia the country's strategic weapons factory was located there. It was ironically named 'Suvenir', for camouflage. In its heyday the plant employed more than 200 people. A housing estate (*naselba*) was built for the staff in Samokov, and a kindergarten was opened as well as a nursery and a hotel. New residents of the *naselba* were mostly young couples from surrounding villages. These villages are now deserted not only due to this migration, but also due to the fact that in the '60s and '70s mobility had begun to fast-growing cities, and this process continued after the collapse of Yugoslavia. In 2004, 'Suvenir' was closed down.

Permanent inhabitants of the Poreche villages are largely old people and forty- to fifty-year-old bachelors. Some of the elderly do not in fact live in the villages all year round as they spend the autumns and winters with their relatives in town. Those who live in the country have their own, mostly small farms, and supplement their incomes by picking herbs and mushrooms, or logging in the forest.

There are relatively many old bachelors there, often several in one village. They are referred to as *samci,* or loners. It should be stressed right away, however, that the lives of many of them are remote from the fixed stereotype of a bachelor as a helpless, untidy man, often abusing alcohol. In the village of Zvechan, where I came across the largest proportion of unmarried men, they coped very well – they ran their own, often large farms, cooked meals, baked bread, and made preserves for the winter. When asked why they did not have wives, they responded: *And which girl would now want to live in the country, with goats, and without a decent bathroom and a kitchen?* Generally, it is the men's own decision to remain in the country, on a farm, living a very modest but calm and quiet life. Besides, the older ones say that they do not feel lonely and that they have someone to work for, their siblings and the siblings' children. One of my interlocutors makes

very tasty goat cheese, most of which he gives away to his siblings. He also shares with them vegetables he grows and herbs he picks in the local woods.

Younger interlocutors, on the other hand, would make plans. A bachelor in his thirties said: *I'll build a house down below* [on the road to Samokov, in the area called Stara Vodenica] and then *I'll find myself a wife*. When asked where he would find a wife when all the girls had either left or were already married, he replied right away, *I'll bring one from Albania*. It would probably not be difficult, as two of his brothers already have Albanian wives.

A characteristic phenomenon associated with the depopulation of Poreche is the bringing of Albanian women to the village, who then marry local bachelors. These women originate mostly from large families with many daughters. In their own country they cannot find a husband because many young men have been emigrating to Western Europe, especially just after the collapse of the communist regime in Albania in the early 1990s. With the depopulation of Poreche, there are not enough brides for the local bachelors. The bachelors are not mobile because they want to live and work in the countryside. They bring therefore wives from Albania where in turn women cannot find husbands as men there are mobile and go abroad in search of work. All this is possible in the current era of globalisation when people move both within their countries and beyond, and their motivations for mobility stem from supra-local economic and political factors (migration from the countryside to cities undergoing rapid industrialisation in the socialist times, and, after the collapse of socialism and communism, to Western Europe) as well as from social factors (migration in order to get married).

Bringing women from Albania for them to get married in Macedonia is not a new phenomenon, nor is it limited only to the region of the Poreche (cf. Lučeska 2011). The import of women from Albania is often referred to as "buying wives". This is an oversimplification, even though it highlights several issues: firstly, the process of importing women into Macedonia involves transferring money and goods to the family of the bride and to a third party (the matchmaker); and secondly, it deprives the women of the power to decide, or indeed of any causative role. Concluding arranged marriages in contemporary Macedonia should therefore be analysed in the context of the traditional customs connected with the process of marriage and the social roles within a patriarchal and patrilocal extended family.

Arranged marriages are a well-known phenomenon in Poreche and many people, especially the elderly, view them positively. The general opinion about arranged marriages of Albanian women to Macedonians is also positive. It is believed that an important role is played there by the matchmaker, that is the one who gets the two young people to meet. It is his or her responsibility to find out about the potential partners' family situation, their financial standing, their reputation in the community, and, finally, to bring them together. The reward for these efforts may come up to 1,000 euros, to be paid by the groom. The final decision, of course, is made by the parents and the couple themselves.

The process of Albanian women moving to Macedonia follows a similar pattern. First, the suitor goes to Albania with a matchmaker to find a suitable candidate, or to visit the house of a girl already known to them or recommended by someone. Then there is an exchange of information about the potential spouses and their families – what they do, what they own. If the girl's family like the candidate and of course if she does, too, a preliminary agreement takes place to go ahead with the marriage. The bachelor buys his fu-

ture wife jewelry – a watch, a necklace, and a ring. He may also buy gifts for the relatives of the bride. The man also leaves money for the bride to obtain a passport and cover her travel costs to Macedonia (about 100 euros). During the first visit, the families arrange to meet again, this time in Macedonia. It is the girl's father or a brother who may come, but never the bride herself – after all, she is not a wife yet, so it would not be appropriate for her to stay overnight at her fiancé's house. There is also another, more practical reason: women usually do not have passports, whereas men do, since many of them have lived and worked abroad. In Macedonia, the visitors get acquainted with the man's family and neighbours, and his property and possessions are inspected, as well as the place where the woman is about to live. During the man's next visit to Albania the wedding takes place, which is about a month after the bride's family visit to Macedonia and the final approval of the marriage. The wedding lasts one day, but no documents are signed, and there is no church ceremony. Right after the wedding, the transfer of the bride to the groom's house takes place. Then, the newlyweds depart and the woman takes care of all the formalities connected with her stay in Macedonia – her registration at the register office and so legalisation of her stay, and sometimes of the organisation of a wedding ceremony in the Orthodox church. After three years, the woman may decide to apply for the Macedonian citizenship. Following all this, everyday life begins for her in the new place, next to a man she hardly knows, while she learns the local language and customs.

Concluding remarks

The collapse of Yugoslavia created opportunities as well as constraints for mobility of people coming to Macedonia and leaving it. In Western Macedonia, despite visa regimes and difficulties related to documented stay and work, migration has intensified. Macedonian-speaking Muslims, as well as Albanians and Turks, have developed strong networks in Europe, thus they could easily move from place to place. Such 'culture of migration' is the case for Orthodox Macedonians too, however not to this extent. What is more, Western Macedonia is more ethnically and religiously diverse than the rest of the country.

In Albania, in turn, during communism the mobility was strongly limited, and leaving the country (legally) was practically impossible. Therefore, after the collapse of the regime, huge waves of emigrants left for Italy, Greece and other Southern and Western European countries. Most of these people were young, single men. Thus, in numerous villages and towns, young women stayed in majority, and they had hardly any possibility to find a husband. In this context wedding migration started from Albania to Macedonia and Serbia.

Macedonia and the whole Balkan Peninsula have a long tradition of internal and international mobility. Both should be treated together since they influence and condition each other. In other words, migration to Italy takes place, among others, because during the Yugoslav industrialization and urbanization, from the rural western Macedonia to the cities went mainly Orthodox. The Muslims then benefited from agreements with Germany and began to go abroad. At the same time, residents of Poreche began to move to the cities of Macedonia (abroad too, but less) and the villages started to depopulate, and it was mostly women and girls who emigrated to urban areas. After the fall of communism

in Albania, among labour migrants to Western and Southern Europe were mostly young single men. Then, young single women could start coming to Macedonia to get married.

We cannot also forget about social mobility that is (almost) always related to spatial mobility. In these two case studies I described, social mobility is an integral part of movement in the space. Both pechalbari and "Albanian wives" desire to improve their material and social status, they invest into education of themselves or their children and they reflect on traditional vs. modern[2] ways of life or gender divisions.

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2   The concepts of what is modern and what is not modern (referred to as traditional or backward) are related to the conceptualization of the idea of "we-ness" and the "otherness" as well as of "Europe" and "the Balkans" (cf. Bielenin-Lenczowska 2015).