LABOUR MIGRATIONS
OF THE ALBANIANS FROM
MACEDONIA –
SOME ASPECTS AND
PERSPECTIVES OF THEIR STUDYING

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In this study I would like to examine some aspects, trends and perspectives of the so-called labour migrations, i.e. the movement of individuals and groups looking for "gain", means of livelihood and better living and working conditions. This problem is a part of investigations of many researchers belonging to different scholarly disciplines. The proposed text presents an ethnologist's point of view on this matter. I will particularly turn my attention to Albanians from Republic of Macedonia that for various reasons (which will be discussed in the text) present to the scholar an interesting and still not well studied pattern of labour mobility. This in its turn will allow a series of specific research questions to be placed and considered, including ones with the terminological character, related to the growing corpus of texts that offer theoretical elaborations and generalization for the field of migration studies.

METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

Basis of this article is my field work in the Republic of Macedonia during 2008 and 2009[1]. Three field researches with duration between 10-15 days were carried out as well as 3 shorter trips in connection with my other scholarly obligations (a seminar, few conferences). In these cases I tried to add my impressions and considerations as well. Ethnographic interviews and observations are the main methods for gathering information. Some of these interviews are biographical – they describe personal experience or the experience of friends and relatives. 35 interviews were made, as well as many other informal conversations. In essence, this is a study of migrants and their relatives in Macedonia in their birth places and a study of their story about the migrant life.

In this connection, the following locations were visited: Skopje, Tetovo, Želino village, Struga, Radolishta village, Dologozhda village, Dobovyani village, Labunishte village, Debar, Yanche village, Broshtitsa village. Some of the interviewed people were Orthodox Macedonians, Macedonians-Muslims (torbeshi[2]) and Gorans. This allowed me to put migratory movements of Albanians from Macedonia for gain and livelihood in the context of a more general picture of labour mobility in the region.

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[1] The fieldwork is related to my dissertation on "Contemporary labour Migrations of the Albanians from Macedonia". A part of this fieldwork was carried out in connection with the bilateral research project "Dynamics of labour mobility on the Balkans", financed according to contract № БМ-4/ 2007 with Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria as a result of a joint project with the Ministry of Education and Science of the R. of Macedonia.

[2] The *torbeshi* are Macedonian population that has adopted Islam during the time of Ottoman domination on the Balkans. In historical perspective authors as Kanchov and Weigand determine them as Bulgarian-*Mohammedans*. Therefore, when citing these authors I use the terms they used, especially when speaking about the first decades of the 20th century. Today most of the torbeshi declare themselves as Macedonians and they affirm that they have kept "the purest Macedonian language". But in many cases at the last census in Republic of Macedonia some of them declared themselves as Albanians or Turks.

LABOUR MIGRATIONS AMONG ALBANIANS FROM MACEDONIA: HISTORICAL DYNAMICS

Migratory movements of people out of the birthplace with various duration to practice various activities with the aim of earning means for living are known in different parts of the Balkan Peninsula. On the Balkans the known traditional model of labour mobility dating from the second half of the 19th – the beginning of the 20th century has acquired the name *pechalbarstvo* or *gurbet* (Hristov 2008-A: 216). In the traditional Balkan cultures "gurbet" is a predominantly male occupation and has seasonal character: men leave their home places in spring and come back in autumn. They perform for remuneration different kinds of economic activities - agricultural (hired herdsmen for instance), as well as performing various craft jobs (masonry, pottery etc.) (Palairet 1987: 25-37). This kind of traditional labour mobility is connected with a number of specific features of the feast-ritual system and folklore in the birth places emitting workers. The most important family-kin feasts usually group in certain period of the year, mainly when seasonal workers return home; weddings are also performed in the period when those who departed "for gain" return; family and kinship structures transform, social roles and family-kinship relations change (Hristov 2008-A: 222-223).

Michael Palairet writes that on the Balkans during the 19th century there were 3 large regions with concentrations of pechalbar villages: Central Bulgaria around Stara planina and Sredna Gora; Rhodope, especially to the north of Komotini; the area extended from the western borderlands of Bulgaria and adjacent regions of Southeast Serbia to Kosovo, Macedonia and Pindus (Palairet 1987: 23). Actually, the mountain regions in the western part of contemporary Republic of Macedonia are among the places with the oldest traditions in terms of movement of groups of people, looking for livelihood and profit. Annually these places send out numerous waves of seasonal workers. At that time, 66% and 69% of the male population respectively in the *kaaza* of Tetovo and Debar was engaged in this type of living (Palairet 1987: 24).

Within the territory of the Ottoman Empire, the above mentioned regions were inhabited by population with different ethnic and/or religious belonging (Вайганд 1998; Кънчов 1900). Often Turks or Torbeshes determined themselves or were determined as Albanians or Albanians had Turkish self-consciousness. For instance Kanchov writes in his text: *"The whole Goren Debar is threatened by converting into arnaut. Bulgarian–muslim villages, bordering arnaut villages, are already bilingual. The torbeshes consider it honorable to present themselves as arnauts"* (Кънчов 1900: 90). The population have lived in a contact zone, where cultural adoptions were hardly an exception. The picture in ethnic and religious terms in this part of the peninsula is extremely variegated and dynamic both in the past and today (Кънчов 1900; Малкълм 2001: 265-266).

In historical sources the pechalbars from this region very often are noted as *arnauti* or came from "*Arnautluka*" (Arnaut region). However, these migrant flows from the Arnaut region absorbed population from different communities with various ethnic and religious belonging. As a sizable part of the population, Albanians also participated in these movements. Their presence is documented within the Ottoman Empire (Asia Minor, Thrace, Dobrudzha, Egypt) and out of its borders (Serbia, Wallachia, Moldova, Ukraine) (Вайганд 1998; Гюзелев 2004; Муслиу 2001).

In the Ottoman period the Albanian population from the mountain regions of contemporary Western Macedonia subsists mainly through sheep-breeding. During the winter, Albanian shepherds migrate with their herds to the Adriatic and Aegean coastal areas. Weigand notes in "Ethnography of Macedonia" that unlike the Aromanians, who would travel along with their children and household belongings, Albanian women and children remain north. Many *"ghegs"*[3] subsisted as stevedores along the coastal areas and the large cities, such as

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[3] River Shkumbi divides the Albanian population into two main groups, characterized by significant specifics in the language and culture - north of Shkumbi territories are populated with the so called *"ghegs",* and to the south live the *"tosks".* A bigger part of the Albanians in Republic of Macedonia belong to gegh group; around Struga there are some villages inhabited with Albanians from tosk group.

Thessalonica. During harvest, others go as seasonal workers in Thessalia, even Pelopones (Вайганд 1998: 57-58). Weigand notes the following for the *Tosks* from Macedonia: *"Tosks travel much abroad, same as Aromanis, in order to escape from the poor living conditions in their homeland. The destinations of their travels are Romania (long time ago), afterwards Asia Minor, Constantinople, especially Egypt, and in the last decades they prefer America. Owing to their intelligence and diligence, many of them have accumulated considerable wealth. Publishing a number of Albanian newspapers in Egypt and America proves that the number of Albanian settlers should be considerable, and also that the love towards nationality and mother language has not faded"* (Вайганд 1998: 58). Some older residents of Želino, near Tetovo, keep the memory of their grandfathers who have gone on gurbet to Wallachia. On the territory of modern Bulgaria there were also a significant number of Albanian populations. Today only one remains – in the village of Mandritsa, near Ivaylovgrad. After the Liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule, the other Albanian settlements were abandoned and their inhabitants settled in the lands of present-day Ukraine (for more details - see Гюзелев 2004).

Today, however, it is difficult to exactly determine the portion of Albanians who went to gurbet, or which community in this region predominated in this movement. In my opinion this question is not important, leastways in this text. It is important that throughout the ages a long-lasting tradition of labour mobility is created in the examined region, and it has become structural for the everyday life of the population (compare Карамихова 2003: 13). This movement flows without cessation years and decades with different intensity, various directions; in the course of time his characteristics change. The examined region has specific historical destiny. With the birth of the new countries on the Balkans at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, men working abroad for gain from the mountain parts of Western Macedonia orientated their routes more in the west and north towards Serbia then towards Bulgaria (Hristov 2008-A: 224-225). This is relevant also to Albanians staying out of Albania that was

created in 1912. After both the Balkan wars and the First World War these lands were included in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (from 1929 – Kingdom of Yugoslavia). Later as a result from peace treaties after Second World War, Vardar Macedonia was included in SFR Yugoslavia as one of the six republics. The gurbet amongst the Albanians from this region continues following established routes of the previous period and they settle widely within Yugoslavia (mostly in Slovenia and Croatia, but also in the other republics of SFRY); they work as confectioners, bakers, *boza*-makers (Јовановски 2002: 83).

My field research also shows that between the world wars and during the 1950s-1960s, gurbet was predominantly in the limits of Yugoslavia itself – main destination were Belgrade, Novi Sad, Zagreb, Pula, Ljubljana etc. These migrations followed the traditional gurbet patterns and very often had seasonal character. Confectionary and bakery were mentioned as the main occupations. However, my respondents also talked about construction and trade with fruit and vegetables. At the same time, the first half of the 20th century was a time when many Albanians migrate to more distant destinations such as USA or Australia; mostly they were men from the region of Prespa and Struga.

The established model of labour migrations shifted in the 1970s when, led by economic reasons, some Western European countries started to legally invite workers for different periods – first FR of Germany[4], followed by Austria, Switzerland and others. Thus, the Balkans became one of the sources of the so-called "*gasterbeiters*". Soon numerous Albanian migrants started to seek their livelihood in these countries. Many of them left illegally, without agreement, but simply following their relatives who departed earlier. Here I simply mark the process of "chain migration" and later I will return to it in the analysis of social networks.

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[4] In order to fill in the shortage of workforce in 1955, the Federal Republic entered upon an agreement for raise of workers from Italy. Agreements followed with Greece and Spain (1960), Turkey (1961), Morocco (1963), Portugal (1964), Tunisia (1965), and Yugoslavia (1968) (Oezcan 1994).

In search of earnings, the men left as gastarbeiters, while their women and families stayed in the native places; the women took care of the home, the children, and the old-aged. At first sight, only the destinations have changed. Migration is again temporary, but it is not seasonal as gastarbeiters stay abroad for a longer period of time – one, two or more years. The situation changes even more after 1973 when the German government stopped recruitment and other West-European governments followed it. Expectations that now many of the gastarbeiters would go home turned out. Some of them went back but the majority stayed on. As a result the process of "family reunion" gained speed more and more. Governments initially tried to prevent it but their efforts didn't meet with success. In the end family reunion was accepted as a human right. Foreign populations changed in structure. In the FRG, for instance, the number of foreign men declined slightly between 1974 and 1981, but the number of foreign women and children increased (Castles, Miller 2003: 80). In this way during the 1980s many Albanian migrants brought their families in the host country and settled there, their children went to local schools, etc.

Political and social changes after the break-up of Yugoslavia are the next turning point of the historical fate of this region. On the political map appeared an independent Republic of Macedonia, 25.17% of the population of which were Albanians (Попис 2002: 34). The migrations to Western Europe continued following the second model of labour migration, which I provisionally call "gastarbeiter model", although it is difficult to classify definitively. Certainly in parallel the seasonal movements within the framework of the former Yugoslavian space continue to exist – during the Socialist period Croatia and Slovenia were very popular for all Macedonians (here in the meaning of Macedonian citizenship) as the richest among the republics in the federation, and after the break-up of Yugoslavia these countries continue to attract many workers for seasonal work (Bielenin-Lenczowska 2009). This is confirmed also from my respondents:

„From former Yugoslavia – they mostly go to Croatia, along the coastline. They go and work in confectionaries... They have gone since Yugoslavian times. And now they continue going... Croatia is better not only

than Romania and Bulgaria, Croatia has the standard of living of England. Croatia postpones to enter the European Union, because at present in Croatia, the standard is much higher than in the European Union. That's why they have the status of Switzerland and England. There is a big difference. There is a lot of foreign investment. The monthly salary is between 500 and 2000 euro. The doctors who have completed a doctorate, masters and professors earn 5000 euros... They are so advanced that they know - if they join the Europe Union they will go worse ..."

This view is shared by my respondent from the village of Brodec. He has lived for 18 years in Croatia (in the summer of 2009 he was 24 years old), where his big brother has previously settled. They are working in a bakery. His opinion is firm: he wants to stay in Croatia; they have bought their own apartment there. He wishes to go to Germany, but only on a trip. Their work is not seasonal; they spend all year in the town of Pula, which refers back to the gastarbeiter model.

Although the two types of movement (both the seasonal and the gastarbeiter model) are called with the term *pechalbarstvo/ gurbet* (in Albanian *kurbet*), my interlocutors differentiate them meaningfully. When they speak about the second type of moving, many themes emerge that are absent when they talk about traditional seasonal *gurbet*. I would like to focus exactly upon the migrants from the late 1960s ever since – temporary for a period of several years or settled in the respective country, upon the interactions among themselves and with their relatives that stay in the birthplace.

MIGRATION, KINSHIP, SOCIAL NETWORKS

The 1970s and the 1980s were the time when seeking work and livelihood away from birthplaces and in Western European countries increased. This became the main way of life for thousands of Albanians from Macedonia. Practically in the visited villages, there was not a single house without at least one or two family members on *gurbet*. This increase is influenced by many different factors, including politics. It is impossible to examine them in detail within the framework of this article. Nevertheless, it is necessary to mark shortly some of them.

According to the Constitution of 1963, the Albanian population (as well as the Hungarian in Vojvodina) has the status of *nationality*, unlike the other specific concept – *nation*. A *Nation* is the potential unit for a state formation and has the right of self-determination and even separation by forming a republic within the federation. A nationality on the other hand, is a part of a nation that has a state of its own. That is why nationalities can not have a federal entity in the form of republic (Малкълм 2001: 404). Albanians from Kosovo are organized in an autonomous region, but that is not the case of the Albanians from Macedonia. This adds a nuance to the examined group. Important is the fact that the Albanian language does not belong to the South Slavic group, which prevents the spread of the idea of Yugoslav identity among the Albanians. On the other hand, they benefit from all the mentioned rights as citizens of Yugoslavia, ensured by the Constitution.

However, we must have in mind some additional circumstances. Albanian population aroused considerable suspicion among the then-Yugoslav authorities. During the Second World War, Albanian collaboration troops (so-called *"Ballists"*) operated on the side of fascist Germany and Italy. Among the Macedonian population one can often hear the memories of Ballists and their atrocities. Along with that, the level of education among the Albanian population at that time was poor, because they had no education in their mother tongue prior to the Second World War. In the project of "New" Yugoslavia, of modernization and industrialization after the war, the Albanian population remained largely marginalized – in contrast to the intensive migrations of Orthodox Macedonians in the direction from villages to cities, the majority of Albanian inhabitants remained in their native villages.

As a result, the traditional rural values among the Macedonian population changed more or less, female employment increased, while the Albanian households remained strongly connected to their traditions and values; the women's work outside the household was almost absent (Pichler 2009: 217-218). The demographic growth of the Albanians was considerably higher, their villages enlarged. Often this is perceived

as a threat. In administration and state institutions, however, Albanian participation remains extremely low for a long time – on the one hand because of the mentioned suspicion, and on the other due to the small percentage of qualified (educated) staff. Factors are intertwined and it is difficult to evaluate unequivocally – each case is different. Many of my respondents said that they have been unable to find work and because of that they left to become guest workers.

On the other hand, the mentioned policy of worker recruitment in some Western European countries and the openness of Yugoslavian economy to this policy allowed many Albanians to look for a way out and run their own life strategies to improve their conditions of life: they choose to seek livelihood as gasterbaiters in Western Europe. The main destinations are Germany, Switzerland and Austria. My interlocutors talk about travelling to these countries as a tradition:

"This is in our blood already, you know. It is tradition. If it's repeated generation after generation, it becomes a tradition".

These migratory processes also cover the Macedonian population (see Стојановиќ-Лафазановска 2008). But while Macedonians have better opportunities for a state job – in administration, industry, etc., for Albanians working abroad very quickly becomes the main occupation. This has a strong influence upon family-kinship relations, social organization and relationships in the community.

Most of them leave with the idea to return to their home villages. Their main aim is to gain more money to help their families and to improve living conditions at home. In connection with the rapidly growing population, an important priority for many families is also the expansion of living space – they purchase land, build new houses, make better the overall infrastructure in the settlements.

The social networks connecting migrants with each other, as well as with network members in their home places play an important role in this case (Султанова 2003: 277-278). Migratory networks engage departed migrants, returned migrants and non-migrants in a set of complex social and interpersonal interrelations (Massey et al 1993)

through kinship, friendship, and feelings of affection towards the shared place of origin (Levitt 2001: 8). Once established, these social networks cause and support subsequent migrations – thus the well established "chain migration" is put to practice. In this sense, the presence of relatives or simply migrants from the same village/region, together with their migrant experience, provides the foundation for setting the migrant destination by the subsequent generations. The first Albanian migrants depart under bilateral arrangements, as it was mentioned above. But a very large percentage of the latter consists of their relatives and friends who leave, relying on their help and assistance. They live and work semi-legally or illegally in the respective countries. In practice all of my respondents give similar answer when I ask them how they left and why they chose their destination: "I have an older brother there", "I have an uncle in Zurich ..." etc. As a result, we observe the trend migrants to be concentrated in fixed cities of the country, sometimes in fixed neighbourhoods (Ташева 2004: 27).

In the course of time, the number of Albanian migrants increases. In the end of 1970s and 1980s, in the spots where they settled as gastarbeiters, the Albanians created their own ethnic communities and clubs, mosques, schools, where the social and cultural lives of the migrants developed. They had their own cafes, restaurants, food groceries, etc., read Albanian newspapers, listened to Albanian broadcasts etc (Џафери 2004: 89-90).

"I had friends there, many friends from these parts of Macedonia… We had our own clubs there, Albanian clubs. Mosques existed for the Muslims, and also there was a Christian church. A catholic church, as well. So everyone could visit these places of faith – depending on what faith he professed and appealed to. So, we had an Albanian mosque there, I was a member of this mosque. We supported it ourselves as members – we paid 20 marks per month back then for supporting the mosque and the club."

Family and relatives occupy a significant place in these social networks. Extended family structures continue to exist among the Albanians in Macedonia. Generally villages consist of several quarters *(mahallë)* where members of the same agnatic kin-group *(fis)* live

together (compare Pichler 2009: 221). The households are composed of two, three or more couples – it is common married sons to live under the same roof with their parents. The village endogamy is widespread – marriages are contracted in the frame of the village or women are exchanged with neighbour Albanian villages. The position of individual members within a household depends on their kin-relationship, their age and their gender. The head of the household (as a rule – the father) administers the whole property. Every male member has to contribute to the wellbeing of the household. This family-kin structure kept its features during the second half of the 20th century. Two or three members of the household leave as gastarbeiters. It is typical that this is male migration as a whole. For that, Albanian migrations differ from Macedonian migrations and from the general picture of labour migrations from SFR Yugoslavia at that time – a considerable percentage of the migrants are women. Approximately 31% of all labour migrants from Yugoslavia in 1971 were women (Baučič 1977: 220). These who stay in their birthplaces relied on their sons' funds:

"You think of your parents, because they rely on you. Because when you go abroad, you have family and you have to help them. And you constantly think of it – how are they, what are they doing…"

Family is an important element of migration experience; it could also be a factor for creating the necessity of departure in search of sustenance and gain. Precisely the family (nuclear or extensive) is the single structure where the help, the cash, the gifts (compare Glick Schiller, Furon 2001: 51-60) circulate. That is why, in order to save money, migrants restrain their consumption to a minimum. They shop from discount stores, avoid luxury and public houses; they spend money only for the most necessary. Often 7-10 workers sleep together in a small flat so as to divide the rent. They regularly send resources to their relatives for covering primary vital needs – food, medicines, clothing, and housing. In the typical case when the man leaves without his wife and children, they remain under care of his parents. The money is sent to the head of the household, not to the woman and the children. The eldest determines what the money to be spent on – that was explicitly noted by my respondents. Often saved money is used to

construct large new houses, sometimes to start their own business or to promote better, high quality education for children.

In addition to this economic capital, within social networks also circulates some kind of social capital (in Bourdieu); with its help migrants decrease the threats and risks of migration, and facilitate access to the labour market, residence, information etc. Those that follow relatives and friends who already migrated, rely on information from them; they rely on help from older migrants in their early migrant life. One of my interlocutors - Imer (who spent nine years as a Gastarbeiter in Germany and Austria) said that he will send his two daughters to study in Austria after they complete their secondary education in Macedonia, relying on the assistance of his brother living there. Thus migration itself does not simply depend on the networks – it creates networks, and in this way conditions are provided for the migrations not to be unidirectional and limited in time or space (Boyd 1989). Therefore, we can talk about labour mobility, not simply about migration.

It is important in this examination to note some cultural aspects of labour mobility. The migrants bring with them the cultural traditions (language, religion, traditions, habits, behaviour) of their birthplace. As we already saw, the mosque and the Albanian club are part of migrant's life. A specific migrant sub-culture originates. Already it was noted that the time spent abroad is not several months but often several years. These places of social and cultural life easily preserve elements of the cultural model and identity carried from the native places on the Balkans.

However, migrants acquire new experience and adopt new cultural habits and patterns. Returning to his home place, the migrant brings a new view of the world, new values, new patterns of consumption, new technologies. For example – new modern houses with modern household equipment and techniques are being built. In some cases separate floors are built for every son: there are several rooms, own kitchen, bathroom. Very often, especially in the last two

decades, separate houses, but in one courtyard, are built for every son (Picture 1 and Picture 2).

Picture 1

Picture 2

The architectural view of gastarbeiter houses often gives the hint about the places where their owners have worked - in the village of Broshtitsa two houses are built quite near to each other in Alpine and

Mediterranean architecture style, "brought" respectively from Austria and Italy[5] (Picture 3 and Picture 4).

Picture 3

Picture 4

Along with that, the overall appearance of the settlements is improved. My respondents told me that there is a special fund in the village to which each household must pay a definite amount according to how many members of the family are on gurbet and according to their income. They are proud to say that when the state has almost forgotten about their villages, they urbanize their villages with the money from this fund – in this way at many places that I visited the streets have been asphalted; schools, bridges and fountains have been built; religious sites have been renovated. Whit this money, seriously ill people from the village are supported; the deceased "on gurbet" are brought to be buried in their home places.

It impresses also a grown self-confidence which is clear according to the words of one of my respondents:

"I have been throughout Europe. There is no capital in Europe where I have not been. I've been in America, in Asia; I have only not been in Africa.

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[5] Village of Broshtitsa is located at the Center Župa Municipality, near Debar. It is populated with Macedonian Muslims. Similar architecture examples can also be seen in many Albanian villages. This is a typical characteristic for the entire region. Because of that I include photos of Broshtitsa – here the visual example is very clear.

And I know how the world functions. There are people, though, who have not been out of Skopje. And they think differently, their habits are different, some things they just can not understand. They will understand, but 20 years from now, when it will be late for them and for the people around them. Only then will they gain this knowledge, but then they won't need it."

Prestige is also an important element in this aspect. Most migrants don't have a possibility to get a high position in the receiving society; they work as unskilled workers, often illegally. Because of this, they have a chance only in their home places to become socially prestigious and raise their status. When they contribute to the surviving and welfare of their relatives and friends, the migrants raise their social status in the home community. An expression of this prestige is building large houses or the manifestation of material prosperity (spending time in local cafes, driving rich cars with foreign registration number plates – from Austria, Switzerland, Germany etc. (Picture 5 and Picture 6), using and showing modern mobile phones or using foreign words and phrases) when they return in Macedonia (Bielenin-Lenczowska 2009).

Picture 5

Picture 6

The large houses with several floors in Albanian villages are an especially obvious mark. They are built in this way that they will be visible for the local community as well as very often for "the others" passing through the village. It is especially clear during last two decades. Expensive construction materials, great number of decorative architecture elements (columns, parapets, cornices) are used with the aim to demonstrate richness and wealth. This ostentation in many cases is the result of the wishes and concept for "modern way of living" (Pichler 2009: 231). Often these houses are empty because their owners work abroad (Picture 7).

In connection with the already mentioned status of the Albanian population in Macedonia, this demonstration of wealth has also one additional aspect. The crises in the late 1980s, followed by the collapse of Yugoslavia, turned out to be more severe for the Macedonian community. Unemployment in the country increased, and most employees and workers in administration, public services and industry are Macedonians. Due to the social networks that connect the migrants with their home places and relatives, this crisis affected less

the Albanian community. Because of that, demonstration of wealth is for many Albanians a significant mark of their community identity and a claim for a new place in society.

Picture 7

In this context I will note the grand weddings. It is typical not only for the Albanian community, but also for other migrants from this region, that weddings are concentrated during the summer, in the period between July and August. At that time the villages are buzzing with life, every day there are two, three, or sometimes even more weddings. During this time most migrants have their annual holidays and return to their home villages. Even at present, mixed marriages with Austrian or German women are an exception (there are such cases mainly during the last few years). As I noted, often the bride is from the same village as the groom. This is another significant mark of shared community identity and maintenance of close ties between migrants and their home places. Wedding ceremonies usually include a noisy procession through the village with expensive cars, loud Albanian music, horns and flying Albanian flags, so as to stress the wealth of the migrants and especially their identity. For all these people who are far from home most of the year, the wedding rituals are an important moment that refers to

descent, ethnic unity and community consciousness (Pichler 2009: 230).

As I mentioned above, usually the migrants' initial aim is to spend a certain period of time in the host country and earn enough money with which to seek a new beginning for themselves and their families in the birthplace. Like the traditional gurbet model, money is earned "there" to be spent "here", at home (Hristov 2008-B: 142). Often my interlocutors mention that they have took the road of the gastarbeiter with the idea not simply to secure their vital existence but also to start their own small business in the home place:

"I said to myself – fine, I need a good gain. I haven't spent much; I kept the money a lot. I didn't spend it on anything. And now, this is ours, it is private [a hotel built with earned money]. *I had such an intention – to start a business here. And my wish came true…"*

However, very often it turns out that achieving the desired objective is not that easy for various reasons; return is constantly being postponed or even disallowed at some point. It becomes easier when wives join their husbands after some time, or better yet, if they migrate together. That way a great number of those who have left as *gasterbeiters* have permanently turned into emigrants and settled at the new place, raised their children there, and some of them even have grandchildren born in the host country. Those children study there and have better jobs than their parents had. My interlocutors talk about their assimilation:

"While I was in Austria I got to know people that had gone there in 1968. So, I met them. At first they were alone until 1980. Then, in 1980, they took their wives with them, you see. And when I saw their grandchildren, they were speaking to each other in German. They don't speak their mother tongue. In school, they study in German, in the play-schools German again. And when the child comes back home in the evening the father is very tired; he has no time to talk to his child. He goes to bed and you turn on the TV – German again. There they perform assimilation… For them it's important to raise their birth rate because it's low. They give people citizenship – Austrian, German – anything. And they know that in 30-40 years humans become totally different. You spend all your time among Germans and

Austrians and you're assimilating, and you're bit by bit losing your mother tongue. After the second or the third generation it stops there, you are assimilated. "

These cases – emigrants, who have lost connections with the birthplace, completely changed their identity – will remain outside the sphere of my interest since I am interested in the connections and relationships between migrants, between host and sending communities. In today's global world, however, it is difficult to talk about complete and pure assimilation. In the second half of the 20th century migrations and people's displacement reached unknown scale both quantitatively and spatially. What makes a difference now is the level of development of media and communications, especially internet communication, as well as cheaper and faster transport (see Apadurai 1996). These new conditions change the characteristics of the relations between migrants and non-migrants and thus allow the formation of multiple identities among migrants (Vertovec, Koen 1999). The dissociation of territory, nation and culture as ideologically conflated within the notion of a nation-state becomes evident (Гелнър 1999), and puts on the agenda discussions about the concepts of homogeneous national identity and national culture that are taken for granted. Migration has prompted the creation of multiple social and cultural spaces within the single geographic space of the nation-state. With the continuous stream of migrants across borders, nation-state territories have been transformed into complex social spaces, sometimes divided into several parallel societies defined along ethnic and cultural lines (Чапо Жмегач 2008: 444).

In this regard, researchers talk about transnationalism and transnational migrants. Actually, from the early 1990s the paradigm of transnationalism replaces the classic concept of analysis of postmigration phenomena, which used to view them under the scope of assimilation and integration (Glick-Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1992; Vertovec, Koen 1999; Portes, Guarnizo and Haller 2002). Transnationalism is seen as a process in which migrants create and support multidimensional social relations that bond destination societies with the ones of origin. Transnational relations between

migrants and non-migrants exist despite the presence of geographical, cultural and political frontiers. Nina Glick-Schiller even replaces the term e/i-migrant with transmigrant, seeking to emphasize the new features of these people compared to the classical concept of migrants.

Transmigrants construct and alter their inclusion in more than one community (Glick Schiller, Basch 1995: 48). They remain connected with the native land through their actions and thoughts. That is why when my respondents speak of assimilation they would very often say words that contradict to the previously stated. Their relatives who are settled with their families in Germany or Switzerland keep sending money and gifts within the family-kinship circle in the native place and keep helping whenever necessary. Many of the migrants from first generation return after 30 years spent abroad, buy, or build houses to spend their last days where they were born. Their wish to come back that couldn't be carried out for a long time because of economical and/or political circumstances comes true after their retirement. Their children and grandchildren keep living and working in the respective country.

The case of two Albanian brothers is particularly indicative. Imer, whom I mentioned above, worked for 9 years in Germany and has built a small hotel in Skopje. His older brother migrated to Austria in the beginning of the 1980s, but later on took his wife with him, established a family, and even raised grandchildren. Now he's retired, but keeps maintaining very close relations with his younger brother and actively participates in processing and maintaining the hotel. He spends 15 days every month in Skopje, taking care of the hotel, while Imer does that the other 15 days. During that time Imer's brother is in Turkey on other business.

Along with that, the constant influx of new migrants toward the areas already inhabited with Albanians 2nd and 3rd generation has a two-way effect. Often clubs and fellowships in the respective countries try to ease the newcomers by helping with settling and finding jobs. Very often people born in Germany, Austria and Switzerland return to Republic of Macedonia only to find a wife from the home village or

any of the nearby villages. In frequent cases, women are also looking for partners in the homeland. In recent years this phenomenon has purely practical motives – in the circumstances of reduced demand for workers in these countries, and practically terminated issuance of work permits, marriage becomes one of the few legal ways to obtain the necessary documents. It is important that the new Albanians bring along specific local Albanian culture and customs. The result is an interest even among 3rd generation migrants towards the cultural heritage of the home places, where their ancestors came from and where more and more new people are coming from in search of livelihood. They show interest in dances, songs, customs, traditional food or ethnic clothing, and folklore ensembles are being found. Restaurants serving national (Albanian) food are being opened. The number of people feeling a deep inner and emotional connection with the homeland is not small. They participate in the political life of the country, in different civil initiatives for development on local as well as on national level – this is what Nina Glick-Schiller and George Fouron call "nationalism from away" (Glick-Schiller, Fouron 2001: 4).

But as it was mentioned, Albanians from Republic of Macedonia are one peculiar case. As migrants from Macedonia they have different ethnic origin. All of them adopt the country of descent as a territory and citizenship, but not as nationality. In this sense, as other researchers of Albanian labour migrants notice (Bielenin-Lenczowska 2009; Pichler 2009: 214-216), is it relevant to speak for trans-***national*** (italics is mine) migrants and relations as far as this notion refers to Anglo-American concept of the nation-state? When my interlocutors speak about Motherland they don't think of Republic of Macedonia. The Motherland for them is: the homeland, the home street, the family and friends. Moreover, during the last few years, the processes flowing in the Albanian community bring forth the idea about ethno-cultural unity of all Albanians – from Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia. Thus Albanian migrants are a part of the same ethno-cultural community which is dispersed among different areas and countries. Because of that it is suggested to replace the term transnational to **trans-state**

(Bielenin-Lenczowska 2009) or **trans-territorial** (Pichler 2009: 214-216). In a similar case, Mila Maeva proposed the concept of **trans-etatic**, on the occasion of the mobility of the Bulgarian Turks who migrated to Republic of Turkey (Маева 2004).

The question remains open, and future researches will specify terminological problems in terms of this concept, as well as in connection with other obscurities, only identified in the text. Forthcoming more detailed studies will allow a more thorough description of the labour migration of the Albanian population from Macedonia. This will be a good precondition for developing a more relevant theoretical frame correcting a number of Western theoretical paradigms which are used as a tool for analysis of the vastly different realities of the Balkan "labour mobility" phenomenon.

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