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TRANSNATIONAL TIES AMONG MIGRANTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

The case of labour migrants (*pechalbari*) from the republic of Macedonia to Italy

For the people of the Balkan Peninsula migration is one of the central socio-cultural features. Movements have been both individual and massive, and caused by different motivations: religious, economic, political or related to regional conflicts. Historian Maria Todorova states that ‘most important in the social domain is the Ottoman legacy in the demographic sphere. This was a long-term development that proved impossible or very difficult to undo with immediate repercussions today. The demographic history of Ottoman Empire comprises problems pertaining to the geographic movement of the population (colonization, migrations); demographic processes (fertility, mortality, nuptiality, and so on); and other types of population movements (religious shifts, social mobility, and so on). (...) The fundamental consequence of the establishment of the Pax Ottomana in the Balkans was abolishment of state and feudal frontiers, which facilitated or enhanced population movements and the interpenetration of different groups within a vast territory.’ (Todorova 1997: 174).

One of the traditional models of migration, noted in historical sources since second half of 19th century, is seasonal male labour migration, referred to as *pechalba*, *gurbet* or – in Albanian – *kurbet*. It has been known throughout the entire Balkan Peninsula and also in the

whole Mediterranean area (cf. Hristov 2008; Todorova 1997). The traditional *pechalba* was at first seasonal and at second, male labour migration. *Pechalbari* worked above all as farmers, shepherds or craftsmen. They used to leave their family villages at the beginning of the spring-summer season, and returned after the harvesting period was over. Late autumn and winter were the time of the most important family celebrations – weddings, baptisms or circumcisions, and even symbolic funerals. Since there were numerous young men among *pechalbari*, migration was for them a kind of initiation. Not only did they return with the earned amount of money but also with new experiences gained through ‘being in the world.’ Then, when they have returned to their family homes, *pechalbari* had the opportunity to meet their future spouses. These mountainous regions were strictly endogamous, thus engagements and weddings were organised exclusively in home villages of the *pechalbari*. In this paper, I aim to demonstrate that most of the ‘traditional’ features of *pechalba* are also very important in the context of contemporary migration.

As Eckehard Pistrick points out, ‘this migration has been discussed extensively from statistical, economic and political viewpoints, while the self-conceptualisation of this legacy in local culture and in the local memory of the people has attracted considerably less attention’ (Pistrick 2008: 97). In other words, migration studies lack deep ethnographic research that would take into consideration local people’s opinions and feelings.

The objective of this paper is conducting an anthropological analysis, based especially on the extensive ethnographic fieldwork, using the notion of transnationalism within the context of *pechalba* from Macedonia to Italy. I focus on neighbourly and family ties that are kept by migrants and their closest that remained behind in their home villages. Questions that I will attempt to answer here are as follows: how transnational ties are kept within families and neighbourhoods; what is the impact of new technologies (TV, internet, mobile telecommunication) on these relationships; what are the changes in gender roles within the family and on the level of society, and what are changes in national identifications. Then, I would like to discuss the notion of transnationalism itself. I argue that it is not really applicable in the South-Eastern European context, therefore I would suggest to redefine it or propose a new term altogether.

Field and methods

The ethnographic basis of this paper constitutes data from my own fieldwork that has been carried out in the Republic of Macedonia since 2006. I conducted research in the Debar area as well as in some of the Reka region villages, while since 2009 I started to examine transnational pechalbari's relations in Struga, i.e. in the South-Western part of the Republic of Macedonia. I worked predominantly with Muslims but of different national identity.

The western part of Macedonia is inhabited above all by Albanians, following by Turks, Macedonian, Muslims and Roma people. National identity problems in this part of Macedonia as well as in the whole of the Balkans should be analysed in a separate essay, here I will only point to some questions that are important for my research and conclusions.

The largest nationality (community) in Macedonia are the Albanians (depending on censuses and sources – Macedonian or Albanians – it is for 20 up to 40%). The term 'community' in the previous sentence in parenthesis needs to be explained. In 2001, after an armed conflict between Macedonia and Albania, a Framework Agreement (*Ramkoven Dogovor*) was signed in Ohrid. The Albanians demanded to be considered as an equal group along with the Macedonians, and not as a 'minority,' because in some parts of the country they constitute the majority in fact. Thus, the term 'communities' was introduced to define all ethnic and national groups living in the Republic of Macedonia.

The fieldwork method I used is unstructured or semi-structured ethnographic conversations as well as observations and participant observations of my interlocutors' everyday lives. I spoke both with the local people as well as with the local officials and authorities like the imam, the municipality mayor or the primary school headmaster. In my interpretations of observed phenomena I follow Clifford Geertz (or – through him – Max Weber) understanding of culture, that is 'an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge

about and attitudes toward life' (Geertz 1973: 90). An anthropologist examines not facts but people's imaginations and opinions on them. Thus, my conclusions are based on my interlocutors' declarations that, as expected, very often differ from their practices. That is why, conducting observation and also living among the researched community is of utmost significance.

I prefer not to use the term 'informant' (although for stylistic reasons I use it occasionally) and 'interview' and I am more inclined to use 'interlocutor' and 'conversation' instead. In this way I would like to highlight the informal nature of most my interactions with the researched people and the close nature of the relations I was trying to establish with them. I perceive my fieldwork as cooperation with my interlocutors, therefore – to quote Sarah Pink – I try to work *with* not *on* them (Pink 2000: 102). It assumes that ethnography is not transparent (cf. Rabinov 1985: 3), thus the biography and positionality of the ethnographer determine her/his knowledge.

My fieldwork is – or rather is going to be – 'translocal' (Hannerz) or multi-sited (Marcus 1995). Research, 'mobile ethnography,' proposed by George E. Marcus 'takes unexpected trajectories in tracing a cultural formation across and within multiple sites of activity' (Marcus 1995: 96) and consists in following the people and their problems, the thing (among others: gifts, money, intellectual property), the metaphor (signs, symbols – 'this mode involves trying to trace the social correlates and groundings of association that are most clearly alive in language use and print or visual media' – Marcus 1995: 108), the conflict (most notably contested issues in the public sphere), the plot, story or allegory (interlocutors' narratives of everyday experience or memory), the life or biography (of individuals). Currently, I have done research only in Macedonia, but the project foresees fieldwork in Italy too.

In short, I spoke to two groups of people. At the beginning of my research, in the Debar and Reka areas, I had access almost exclusively to young, non-married men. Then, in the Struga region, I talked to, in principle, only with married women. It is caused above all by my status in the field. At the beginning I came there as a non-married woman, accompanied by students (predominantly female). Then, I got married and became pregnant and I conducted my latest fieldwork accompanied by my 10-month-old son.

Two issues were especially significant for gaining my anthropological knowledge: being a foreigner, or rather: being a Christian, and being a woman. While I was not declaring my religious affiliations, the interlocutors accepted a priori that if I am from Poland, I am a Christian. When I was researching Orthodox Christians, they highlighted my Catholicism, but for the Muslims I was just a 'Christian.' Therefore, I was perceived by my interlocutors like other Christians and like a Christian woman. It meant that, for instance, I did not need to keep Ramadan and was I even expected to drink coffee at Muslims' houses. And, of course, I was not expected to cover my head or to attend services in the mosque.

Christian women are perceived to be more liberal and open towards gender relations than Muslims. When I brought students (predominantly female) to Macedonia, we had numerous problems related to the fact that we are women. Not only did our male informants could not understand we were anthropologists and not tourists or prostitutes, but they also assumed we were more 'sexually accesible' (it is a term of Kirsten Hastrup, she mentioned her problems with fishermen in Iceland) than their Muslim women. Nevertheless, our behaviour was evaluated as if we were Muslims. Below I elaborate on the issue of gender division among the Muslims of Macedonia.

Fieldworks carried out by Macedonians are rarely carried out by a single person. Scholars work together with their co-workers and assistants, and living at homes of a single informant is not very common. When I was coming with students, we had mainly 'sexual problems' as indicated above. It was connected with perceiving us as 'alter' women, ergo Christians who are supposed to be sexually liberal. Such an assumption about our religious faith was supported by our nationality (Polish means Christian or Catholic), clothes, and – indeed – behaviour. Certainly, we did not cover our heads like most Muslim women do, but we tried to dress very modestly (despite the hot weather.) Then, we spent time in public, i.e. in the male sphere, talking to people and drinking coffee in bars. Automatically, we were classified as 'emancipated.'

It is worth mentioning that when I came to the field unaccompanied by students, married and with a 10-month-old baby, I was treated not as a foreign woman but I was included in the value system

of the society and my behaviour was evaluated in their categories. Therefore, although only implicitly, I was suspected of dissipation and not being good hostess, wife and mother. What does it mean? I was travelling alone (without the husband), thus I met strange men. Then, I came with a little son, therefore I was very irresponsible. However, every day I was receiving a lot of advice on the upbringing of my child, including breast feeding. Certainly, I had much easier access to the female part of society, but I did not have the opportunity to interview men. Moreover, in principle, my contacts were limited to one family and I was treated like my hostess's fifth daughter-in-law.

Macedonian migrations – example of pechalba / gurbet

Macedonia is one of the Balkan countries with a long history of migrations. The majority of labour migrants live in Australia, the USA, Canada and European countries: Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, among others.

My research focuses on the pechalba from the Western part of the Republic of Macedonia that is almost exclusively Muslim migration. I met only several Orthodox families whose men were in Slovenia (from this village Slovenia was a unique destination for Christians, while Muslims were also in Italy). In villages inhabited mostly or exclusively by Christians (like Jablanica municipality or Vevchani village in the Struga commune), different destinations are also common.

In Debar and Reka region in 1960's and 1970's the Christian inhabitants started to migrate to Macedonian cities (Skopje, Bitola), while Muslims remained in home villages and started to migrate abroad. When in 1968 Yugoslavia and Germany signed an agreement on *gastarbeiters* (guest workers), for numerous men from Macedonia, as well as Serbia and Bosnia it was an opportunity to live and work abroad legally. During the period of Yugoslavia, for poorer republics, migration within the federation was also practiced. For Macedonians the seasonal work destination was Slovenia.

The newest wave of migration is to Italy. Macedonians live and work above all in the northern part of this country – Venezia, Mestre, Treviso and also Rimini or Ravenna. In principle, all migrants stay and work in Italy legally.

Old-new patterns of migrations

In Western Macedonia one can observe at least two models of labour migration, i.e. of men or of entire families. In the first model, observed in the Struga municipality villages, *pechalbari* come back to Macedonia several times a year while, in the latter, typical for Reka, migrants stay abroad almost the whole year. They are back only once a year, for one month (August). Just like in the traditional model, the most important family feasts are organised at the time when the *pechalbari* are back. After all, both patterns, are named *pechalba* or *gurbet*, and thus refer to the traditional way of earning money that was both seasonal and male. While in Reka entire families go abroad, usually it is only men who work outside home, while women are responsible for keeping the house and bringing up children.

I researched only those who work either in Slovenia or in Italy. Certainly, there are also some other big waves of migration, like to Germany, Switzerland or Austria, but I did not research those deeply (see eg. Pichler, in print) as this destinations are not very common in the Debar, Reka or Struga regions. German-speaking countries are popular predominantly among Albanians and not Macedonian Muslims who were subjects of my fieldwork.

In Reka entire families migrate abroad, while in Struga – it is only men. It is especially related to a different model of earning money in Macedonia or rather even more so to the lack of agriculture in Reka. In the Struga region, women are responsible for cultivating plants and breeding cows and sheep. Therefore, is not very easy for women to go abroad with their husbands because mothers-in-law do not want to allow them to do so as this would meant they have work alone. Moreover, because *pechalba* is perceived to be temporary, their husbands are just ‘at work,’ while women stay at home.

Neighbourly and family ties

Family and neighbourly ties are kept predominantly through remittances sent by migrants to their close ones in the country of origin as well as thanks to the new technologies that enable keeping in

constant contact. Both migrants, non-migrants and return migrants live in two socio-cultural contexts: Macedonian and Italian (or Slovenian). Moreover, also in the receiving country, migrants create some kind of enclaves of neighbours or relatives.

Remittances sent by migrants to their relatives who remained in the country of origin are one of the most important income sources in the Reka region. It is not unique for Macedonia but very typical for a lot of places: ‘The economies of numerous developing countries are increasingly highly reliant upon them [migrants – K.B.-L.] as remittances reach amounts comparable to exports, development aid or tourism’ (Vertovec 2001: 575). Not only do migrants send money to their relatives, but they also purchase appliances. Transmigrants use new technologies in order to keep close contact with each other. ‘At the heart of nowadays’ transnational networks – highlights Vertovec – are new technologies that do not altogether create new social patterns but they certainly reinforce pre-existing ones’ (1999: 449). *Pechalbari* and their kinsmen in the country of their origin use mobile phones (latest models are one of the markers of prestige) and the Internet, listen to Italian music and watch Italian TV in Macedonia as well as Macedonian music and TV in Italy.

Migrants bring not only money and appliances but also ideas, values and social capital to their home country. Peggy Levitt defines them as ‘social remittances’ (2001: 54). ‘Migrants – writes Levitt – send or bring back the values and practices they have been exposed to and add these social remittances to the repertoire, both expanding and transforming it. Later migrants bring this enhanced tool kit with them, thereby stimulating ongoing iterative rounds of local-level global culture creation’ (Levitt 2001: 55). Remittances are transmitted when migrants return to live or to visit their communities of origin; when non-migrants visit those in the receiving country; or through exchanges of letters, videos, cassettes, e-mails and telephone calls (Levitt 2001: 63). In my opinion, it is worth adding that social remittances are two-sided: not only do migrants bring some foreign values to the country of origin but also they adapt them to these found in the host country. The models of life they use in the receiving country are combinations of their own values and various situations they face abroad.

Ideas on different lifestyle or dress code are transported to the country of origin through narratives of *pechalbari* as well as through

TV and the Internet. Nevertheless, they are not used in practice. In other words, there are no *pechalbari* women who sit in cafes in Macedonia or dress in a modern way. But on the other hand, they do not wear traditional clothes in Italy either – they dress modestly but do not wear veils.

While abroad migrants create communities of homeland neighbours and relatives. Those who are arriving to the receiving country can use the so-called *social networks*, i.e. ‘the sets of cross-border interpersonal ties connecting migrants, return migrants, and non-migrants through kinship, friendship, and attachment to share place of origin’ (Levitt 2001: 8). Thanks to that, most of the *pechalbari* live and work abroad legally, since they benefit from Family Reunification. In Italy they find accommodation and jobs through their close ones from country of origin. Nevertheless, this is also the reason for weak integration with the host society as they do not have any need to do so.

New gender roles

In a traditional Balkan family and society, strong division between male and female spheres took place and was expressed in different privileges and obligations. I do not intend to translate 19th century categories on the contemporary society or call it ‘traditional,’ but rather I would argue, that in spite of migration and various – say global – changes, some of these values and practices are still present, at least among Macedonian Muslims.

At this point I will make a short digression on the traditional Balkan family – *zadruga*. It was a kind of extended community, with some joint property and consisting of minimum two nuclear patriarchal (average *zadruga* had up to 20-30 members), patrilocal and patrilinear families¹. However, not relatedness was obligatory for recognition of *zadruga*, since membership by adoption was quite common, but ‘joint production by the division of labour’ (Hammel et al. 1982:

¹ There were some exceptions from this rule, as institution of *domazet*, i.e. man, daughter's husband who moved to his wife's place after marriage. Also widows could return to their fathers' houses.

5). Usually members of *zadruga* lived in one place, in one house or around one house, and the oldest man was the head of the household². However, as Milenko S. Filipović highlights, *zadruga* was ‘strictly democratic,’ as the ‘real power belonged to the assembly of adult male members. The head only carried out the decisions of the assembly’ (Hammel et al. 1982: 8). Another essential feature of *zadruga* was labour division. In a traditional agricultural society, men's work included caring for the livestock, planting and harvesting the crops. In turn, women were in charge of preparing food, looking after the children, sewing, weaving, embroidery etc., but also milking, making dairy products and helping with work in the field (cf. Hammel et al. 1982: 9).

Some traditional features of *zadruga* are still present in the community I researched. It refers especially to the superior position of men and gendered labour division. Moreover, there are some families that are living examples of *zadruga*. One of them is the family of my latest hosts. Fatma³ has four sons who are married and live with their spouses in one big house. She also has a daughter who is married in the same village and lives only a five minutes’ walk away from her mother's place. Fatma is the head of the family, because she is a widow. Just as in the traditional family, she is responsible for the family's estate, both money and land. Altogether, 17 people live in one household. But, indeed three for four sons are in *pechalba* – either in Slovenia, or in Italy. Their wives and children remained in Macedonia. Fatma does not want her daughters-in-law to migrate abroad, because she would have to stay and work in the field alone. And, certainly, in this way she has power as the head of the family, thus managing the money and property.

A significant factor connected with the status of men is prestige as defined by Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead in their theory of male prestige structures (1981). Namely, the social value of *pechalbar* refers to men, especially the young and single ones.

Ortner and Whitehead claim prestige is a sphere of relations or a set of structures that define or determine gender and sexuality systems

² After the death of the head, his sons were co-owners and co-workers of *zadruga*. Thus, there are two main kinds of *zadruga* – *ochinska* (paternal) and *bratska* (fraternal). In some cases, the head of a *zadruga* might be a woman.

³ All names of my interlocutors are changed.

in a society. Prestige structures are understood as ‘the set of prestige positions of levels that results from a particular line of social evaluation, the mechanisms by which groups arrive at given levels or positions, and the overall conditions of reproduction of the system of statuses’ (Ortner, Whitehead 1981: 13).

Being a *pechalbar* was traditionally interpreted as prestigious, since their work is associated with masculinity, i.e. with courage in coping with living away from their family, from their place of origin and without support from their relatives and neighbours. In folk songs called *pechalbarski pesni* the motifs of nostalgia for homeland and difficulties of living abroad are some of the most popular ones (see eg. Karovski 1979). It is also common literary thread. In Albania, as Eckehard Pistrick claims, migrants were even considered to be heroes who were helping the village and were bringing new values and ideas while respecting old traditions and customs (Pistrick 2008: 101). Current migrants from Macedonia to Italy can gain their high position in a home society through several factors – both material and non-material.

Macedonia, which is the country of their origin, is perceived as a place of reference. Since Macedonians in Italy are relatively poor and not able to reach a high position in the host society, they have the opportunity to improve their status only back in Macedonia. As Peggy Levitt writes with reference to migrants from Miraflores in Dominican Republic to United States, ‘the money, training and labour power they harness across borders allow them to achieve economic gains they would not be able to achieve otherwise. Transnational practices also enable migrants to recoup their sense of purpose and self-worth. Though they may feel isolated and unwelcome as immigrants, they are still treated as respected and valued members of their sending communities’ (Levitt 1994: 20).

All important feasts of family life – such as weddings and circumcisions – are organised in the home country. In the researched villages August is the month of returns of *pechalbari*, both from Italy and Slovenia. This is when the weddings and meetings of young people take place as traditional endogamy demands marriages within one village or its proximate surrounding. Furthermore, wedding organised in the sending country should be performed in the traditional way (the most significant are considered to be the outfit and the music played by local Gypsies – *How could one find e.g. musicians in Italy? Yet the-*

re are no such musicians who know and play such music (Pieszczyk 2008: 24). Certainly, it is probably some kind of rationalisation of this practice, as Gypsy musicians could also be found in Italy, but the most important factor of the wedding refers to its actors. All relatives and neighbours should be invited and all elements of the ceremony are observed and commented by the local community. Wedding is definitely one of both material and non-material determinants of prestige, since it is an opportunity to show one's wealth and social position. Thus, organising such events is possible (and rational!) only in Macedonia, since only the local people can comment on their customs and only for them the material aspects of weddings can be observed and valued.

The other signs of prestige are building rich houses and showing one's wealth while back in Macedonia – i.e. spending time in local cafés, driving rich cars with Italian number plates, showing new models of mobile phones. Investing in houses in the country of origin is mentioned by numerous researchers (Bringa 1995; Levitt 2001, Čapo Žmegač 2003). Even if migrants live abroad for many years, they do not purchase properties in the host country. Houses are built not only in order to come back to their homeland, but also to elevate their position in the receiving country and to stir up envy: *If one builds a nice house, his neighbour or brother wants to build a nicer and bigger one. They want to show off* (Pieszczyk 2009: 123). Building is often financed by mortgages taken out in Italy and entire families take part in the process. This issue is very typical for migrant societies and demand more extended and comparative studies. Probably it is also connected with the need to have a home, and for many migrants ‘home’ is referred only as their place of origin. When it comes to non-material markers of *pechalbari*'s prestige, using Italian words and phrases in public sphere is especially significant.

Another ‘traditional’ feature that is still present in both migrant and non-migrant societies is gendered labour division. Women are responsible for keeping houses and bringing up children while men are in charge of providing for their families. The division into the public and private spheres proposed by feminist scholars is very well applicable here. Therefore, roughly speaking, public places are for men, while private for women. It means that women and especially girls were hardly seen in public places, like cafés and bars. Most of them do not work at a salaried job, i.e. do not work outside home. Girls are not

allowed to go out without permission or unaccompanied by a male member of their family. Therefore, cafés and bars are filled by men, while women meet with their relatives and neighbours only in houses or courtyards.

One of the terms that define male and female relations, rights and obligations really well is *shetanje*. This is also one of the key terms crucial for understanding the position of *pechalbari* in the local society. Tone Bringa who analysed a synonymic term of *hodanje* explains it differently depending on an actor or rather on their gender. If a woman *hoda* (in Macedonian *sheta*) implies „she does not work” as an expression *puno hoda* (goes about a lot) is perceived opposite to *vole raditi* (likes working). Moreover, a woman who *puno hoda* probably knows more about what is going on in the village, i.e. spreads gossips. A girl, who *hoda*, is considered to be not honourable. A married man, in turn, is condemned for *hodanje* as he should be a responsible provider for his family and should not spend his time and money in cafés. A young man, however, is expected to *hodanje*, because he must seek potential marriage partner, thus he goes to coffee-bars, dances, fairs, meets friends, and dates girls (Bringa 1995: 89-90). Thus, Macedonian bachelors are also expected to *shetanje*, as they can present themselves to girls – potential spouses. But for the girls themselves *shetanje* is strongly forbidden, so in fact they present themselves to girls' parents or match-makers. The only official possibility for meeting young people is taking part in weddings or other festivities. Certainly, there are some unofficial, secret ways for meeting and dating. The most important role is played by the girls' brothers and cousins... and technologies – Internet and mobile phones. Małgorzata Czyżewska notes, that there is some kind of unofficial market of girls' telephone numbers and information on their ‘sexual freedom.’ However, while ‘free’ girls are desirable for dating and *shetanje*, they are absolutely not good marriage candidates (Czyżewska 2009: 60).

Moreover, we have to remember, that parents or rather: the father has the last word concerning the candidates for marriage and has the power not to allow it, especially when a religious difference takes place. Traditional *pechalba* was characterised by endogamy. Not only were the weddings organised during the time of returns of *pechalbari*, but also they were occasions for meeting future spouses. In the Reka as well as Struga region endogamy is still valid. Partners should come

from the same or at least the neighbouring village. Even if both of them live in *pechalba*, they officially arrange and contract the marriage in their family village. The second factor, and a more important one, is the religion. Ethnically mixed marriages are not concerned as intermarriages, while religious, on the contrary, are seen as such. However, the latter occurs very rarely.

A specific myth of living in Italy is constructed and reproduced among young *pechalbari*. During their stay in Macedonia, they have a lot of time and money (earned abroad) for *shetanje*, but meeting with girls is limited only to these from other localities or it takes place unofficially, secretly. Thus, they create narratives based on *shetanje*, that in Italy they have the possibility to meet openly with girls and spend a lot of free time in discos and bars. It is connected with perceiving Italian (see above for the notion on perception of Christians) girls are more open for sexual relations. While Macedonian women do not walk around and do not work outside home, Italians are perceived to be more open and independent from their husbands. *Italian women do not want to do housework. They go to work, meet other men and go around [si shetaet]. They do not ask husbands if they can go out, do what they want.* It is morally evaluated: *They are not good hostesses* or – said with irony – *Men have to listen to women over there!*

Young men from Macedonia describe life in Italy as constant walking, going to discos and dating girls. They would compare their (Macedonian, Muslim) women with these in Italy (not only ethnic Italians) as follows: *You can find some our people [from Macedonia] in the street. There, you can go together for a coffee, to a pub, to a disco, no problem. (...) [Girls from Italy] dress in a modern way. Here women cannot wear clothes like that: only long skirts, long-sleeved blouses. You can see nothing.* While men prefer such lifestyle, they do not want their close women (sisters, daughters, wives) to behave and dress like this.

In fact, however, Macedonian migrants do not have enough money for spending it in discos as well as do not have enough time for doing so. Moreover, their fathers strictly control them and do not allow them to go out. Also, as it was depicted in the description of a traditional family, fathers keep all money earned by their sons. Although most non-migrants know what life in *pechalba* is like, such myth of

dating numerous girls, *shetanje* and big money, is reproduced in Macedonia. Young migrants in Italy, an that is strongly connected with prestige, used to change (unofficially) their real names while making new friendship in Italy. They have Muslim names like Ibrahim, Amir, Izmet etc., but present themselves as Marco, Leo or Olivier. Their explanation reveals very practical motivations – their own names are too difficult to be pronounced by Italians, so they use ‘simpler’ names that are popular in Italy. However, they do not claim they are Italians, but e.g. Croats. Thus, after a longer conversation, they admit another and probably more important reason for such practice – they do not want to be considered as Muslims and associated with other Muslim minorities in Italy, especially with the Albanians. Therefore, by both narratives on „free” living in Italy and the practice of changing names, young Macedonian Muslims express their desires and values as well as create their personal identities.

Identity changes

In my research I focused predominantly on Macedonian Muslims. National or ethnic affiliation of this group demands a deeper study (see more on this: Bielenin-Lenczowska 2008). Here I will point to only selected issues connected with their identity shifts and various national declarations. It allows to show significant fluidity of category of identity that is constructed, reconstructed and deconstructed depending on socio-cultural and political context.

Macedonian Muslims, also referred to as Macedonian-speaking Muslims, Isamicised Muslims or – most popular – Torbeshi – are people whose mother tongue is Macedonian, while confession – Islam. The name Torbeshi is used to describe all Macedonians confessing Islam in the Republic of Macedonia but this ethnonym originally referred only to those from the areas of Debar and Reka, and from the North West part of Macedonia. Because of its etymology, the term Torbeshi is quite often perceived as pejorative. There are several theories about the origin of this term, but the most popular etymology is connected with religious identity and describes the Torbeshi as those ‘who sold themselves for a sack of cheese’ (or, in another version, flour): they are said to have sold their Christian faith to the Turks.

The Torbeshi themselves are unanimous in self-identification. In part they declare their affiliation to the Macedonian nation, in part they consider themselves as an autonomous ethnic group, while some derive their origin from the Ottoman Turks. Language as well as many traditional elements of culture and e.g. visiting of Orthodox holy places associates Torbeshi with Macedonian majority while religion links them with Turks and Albanians.

However, depending on the political context, they are regarded either as Turks or as Albanians. Moreover, they start to declare themselves to be Turks or Albanians while they do not speak either of these languages. In one municipality of the Debar region, I met people who consider themselves to be ‘Turkish who forgot their mother tongue.’ They declare themselves to be descendants of the Ottoman Turks who lived outside homeland through centuries, did not have the possibility of keeping their mother tongue and transfer it to the next generations. In other part of Western Macedonia, between others in Struga, a lot of Macedonian Muslims consider themselves to be Albanians. „They only write 'Albanian' in censuses” (samo se pishuvat Albanci) - claim my interlocutors from the neighbouring village.

Sometimes they declare themselves to be just Muslims (referring this way to a category of „Muslims” as a nationality – introduced in 1960. by J. Broz Tito). Moreover, some of the Torbeshi consider themselves to be a separate ethnic group. In spring of 2006 a Party for European Future (PEI – Partija za evropska idnina) was established. Admittedly, its leader, Fijat Canovski, also a Macedonian Muslim, did not officially propagate Torbeshi as a target group, but it is considerably visible that the party's activities focus on the areas of Western and Northern Macedonia, i.e. regions when predominantly inhabited by Torbeshi. Canovski himself regards Macedonian Muslims as an ethnic or cultural community (cf. Risteski 2009).

These new national shifts are connected with Torbeshi's living and being marginalized in ethnic Turkish or Albanian surrounding. Also, every group wants to incorporate the Torbeshi in order to increase the number of Macedonians, Albanians or Turks living in the Republic of Macedonia. We need to have in mind that Macedonia is a multi-ethnic society where the majority group – Macedonians – constitute in fact ca. 50% of state population, and the largest minority group,

Albanians, is ca. 30%. Scholars as well as Macedonian politicians talk about Torbeshi politicisation in Macedonia, i.e. Albanicisation or Turkicisation and their new declaration relate to Islamic or rather Turkish and Albanian political propaganda.

Under the Ottoman Empire, religion was the only important factor defining identity. The *millet* system segregated the population into Muslims and non-Muslims: all Muslims were considered „Turks” and all Orthodox Christians „Greeks” (certainly, we cannot relate those names to the modern notion of nationality). During the time of socialist Macedonia they were first treated as ethnic Turks, then (in the 1950s and 1960s) they were encouraged to adopt Macedonian national identity. However, only in the late 1970s more serious and coordinated attempt to integrate Muslims in Macedonian majority was undertaken and an organization of Macedonian Muslims was established with the support of Macedonian branch of Yugoslav League of Communists who wanted to diminish the influence of the Albanians in Western Macedonia.

Nowadays, Islam in Macedonia is predominantly associated with Albanians. Both the Torbeshi and the Turks complain that they have been assimilated by the Albanian majority via the Albanian language being used in worship at mosques, by Albanian hojas and by representatives in Islamic organizations, etc. Moreover, there is an extremely pejorative attitude towards Albanians linked especially with the Macedonian-Albanian armed conflict of 2001. Aneta Svetieva, a Macedonian anthropologist, writes that the Albanicisation of the Torbeshi started before the Balkan Wars and First World War and connects the process to the Bulgarian and Serbian propaganda. Then, during the occupation of Western Macedonia by Italy (in fact – by Albania) during World War II, methods such as education in Albanian language, the use of non-verbal ethnic symbols as the indispensable white hat (*keche*) for men or the change of names and surnames to Albanian ones were introduced. The Macedonian state did not take any action to change these names back to Macedonian. Svetieva considers it the sign of vitality of an old formula „An Albanian equals a Muslim and vice versa” and the absence of negative attitude regarding Torbeshi's ethnic background.

In the Macedonian political and academic discourse regarding Torbeshi, this group is considered to be Macedonians who converted to Islam under the Ottoman Empire. When the state established an organization under the name of „The Culture and Science Centre of Macedonian Muslims”, its official line was: ‘Torbesh are local people, i.e. Macedonians; but the Ottomans converted them forcefully.’ Of course, Torbeshi themselves do not agree with this statement, and regard the organisation’s chairman, Nijazi Limanoski, as a traitor. In Macedonian official discourse, the opinion about forced Islamicisation is widespread – after all, in numerous academic publications about Torbeshi the term Islamicised Macedonians is used. Very similar situation concerns Pomaks, whose name is explained as related to „pain, torture” (bulg. *mǎka*). Ulf Brunnbauer who analysed narrations about the origins of Pomaks, writes that ‘to be able to declare that the Pomaks were Bulgarians and to cope with the fact that they believed in Allah – the god of the former oppressors! – a history of forced Islamisation was invented’ (Brunnbauer 1999: 41). The above-mentioned ethnologist and a Macedonian Muslim, Nijazi Limanoski, in his writings, understood ‘Macedonianess’ through language, customs, origin and folklore common to all Macedonians. Islam is, in his opinion, an additional feature and had not deeply changed the social and spiritual life of the Macedonian Muslims. Islamisation and isolation of Torbeshi from the rest of the Macedonian nation is described as the beginning of a heroic path and one full of sacrifices for the Muslim population of Slavic origin on the territory of Macedonia, the end of which will be the recognition of the ‘Macedonianess’ of this population by the rest of the Macedonian nation. Nowadays, only a part of Macedonian Muslims agree with Limanoski. Rather, they do not want to diminish the role of Islam in their collective identity.

Faith is probably the most important for my interlocutors, ethnicity is not of utmost significance. Certainly, also pechalba has a strong impact on migrants' identity. Abroad they declare themselves to be Macedonians as they are Macedonian citizens. As said above, young pechalbari used to change (unofficially) their names in Italy when making new friendships there in order not to admit they are Muslims. Moreover, migrants have multiple identification related to their life abroad – Steven Vertovec writes about the „awareness of de-centred attachments, of being simultaneously 'home away from home',

'here and there' or, for instance, British and something else" (Vertovec 1999: 450). My interlocutors are at the same time Muslims and Albanians / Turks / Macedonians, Macedonian citizens, and – because of living abroad – 'Italians' or 'Germans' (*pechalbari* are called in Macedonia *Italijanci* or *Germanci*, i.e. Italians or Germans, but they do not identify themselves this way).

Transnationalism – terminological problems⁴

Migrants from the Republic of Macedonia to Italy can be called „transnational” or – as I would propose – trans-state. Until the 1990s most migration research had focused on immigrants and their adaptation (integration, assimilation) in the host country. Then, a notion of transnationalism was introduced to social sciences. According to Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina, Szanton Blanc, transnationalism is defined as a ‘processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement’ (Basch et al. 1994: 6). Although this concept was charged with „tempocentrism” as such trans-border multiple ties are recorded even before a period of nationalism and before establishing national borders (Božić 2004: 189), now it is impossible to research migration without using it. Below I will discuss the term of transnationalism itself and suggest some redefinitions in order to better understand migrants' connections with receiving and host countries.

As said before, Macedonia is a place of reference for migrants. Both *pechalbari* and those who remained behind live in two socio-cultural contexts – Macedonian and Italian. The receiving country is a place for earning money, while the country of origin – for spending it. It means, Italy, although *pechalbari* live there almost the whole year, is not perceived as a place for *living*. There is an important term in Macedonian language describing it: *uzhivanje*. It means „using” or „us-

⁴ I started this discussion on 5th InASEA conference „Migration to, from and in South-eastern Europe” in Ankara (21-24.05.2009), where I presented a paper “Different models of labour migration in contemporary Macedonia – or what does *pečalba* mean now?” I am very grateful to Jasna Capo Zmegac, Petko Hristov and Robert Pichler for their inspiring suggestions.

age” literally but contextually – „using a life”, „enjoying”. In order to understand the value of *uzhivanje*, I need to mention the case of migration to Germany, although nowadays it is not a very popular destination. However, these labour migrants who worked in Germany as „gastarbeiters” returned some years ago to Macedonia for retirement. As they worked there very hard for even thirty or forty years and did not visit the country of origin and their families for a long period of time, now they cannot adjust themselves to the Macedonian reality. That is why they cannot stand idleness as well as wastefulness: *He cannot sit – in vain, not in vain, he must work. They are like this. All Germanci are like this (...) till the death, he does not stop working!* (Koperkiewicz 2009: 92). From the point of view of my interlocutors, they do some stupid jobs, like cleaning streets and they do not spend time (in fact: money) in cafés with other men. Thus they are perceived as those who cannot live or cannot use a life (*uzhivanje*) and are actually considered to be madmen (*budala*). Not only hard-work but also the ability to spend money and sociability are perceived as positive.

The most remarkable theoretical issue I would like to address here is the notion of transnationalism itself. This term, according to the researchers of the Balkans may be misleading as it derives from the Anglo-American concept of nation-state. Thus, *nation* and *state* as well as *nationality* and *citizenship* are used as synonyms (Pichler, in print).

In her study on Croatian migrants in Munich, a Croat anthropologist Jasna Čapo Žmegač submits a term (*inter-state*) *translocality*⁵, that, in her opinion, is more accurate, since it preserves the notion of locality that is crucial for trans-border actors as well as avoids ambiguity of the term „transnationalism”. The word ‘national’ can refer both to „nation-state” and to an ethno-national community not limited by state borders (Čapo Žmegač 2003: 119). She points out four modes of translocality: living in Munich while performing trans-border activity oriented toward Bosna (investment in Bosna, sending remittances and visiting relatives for the most important feasts), multi-local family life (mother was separated from her children), constant transmigration (among other models, one woman who had moved to Munich three

⁵ A term 'translocality' is also used by Arjun Appadurai, who claim that locality is socially constructed, and that translocality is one of the localities (1995).

times and had been back in Bosna twice) and living in Bosna while performing trans-border activity oriented towards Germany (re-migrants who made efforts for permanent residence in Germany and right for pension and health insurance there; they were living in Bosnia while regularly visiting Germany in order to take pension and, possibly, visit a doctor).

In turn, Robert Pichler, in his research on Albanian migrants from Macedonia to German-speaking countries, suggests the term *transterritorial*, as *translocal* seems for him to be too confined to understand the relationship the migrants have with their home(land). A Croatian sociologist, Saša Božić writes that the term of transnationalism is ambiguous and unclear as it is not related to a notion from which it is derived – nationalism (Božić 2004: 188). Thus it is necessary to limit the meaning of transnationalism to creation of new social formations and focus on visible and measurable transformation of nation-state (Božić 2004: 199).

Undoubtedly *pechalbari* – those „traditional” as well as the current ones – have lived in two contexts: the country/region/village of origin and the host society, thus the word „trans” is significant. However, I would turn over an element of „nationalism”. While „national” in the English language refers both to the state and nation – and this way to the notion of a nation-state – we can highlight either „national” or „state” dimension. In other languages, among others in Slavic, this association is not such obvious. Migrants from Macedonia are of different ethnic origin and in fact represent national minorities (communities) – Albanians or Turks. Macedonian Muslims are regarded as either Macedonians or Turks or Albanians, or as a distinct national group „Macedonian Muslims”/Torbeshi or simply as „Muslims”. Thus, the country of origin is perceived by them above all through the prism of a territory and citizenship, and not through ethnicity or nationality. So, we probably could talk about „trans-state” migration. Moreover, in the receiving country *pechalbari* have ties rather with other migrants from Macedonia or even from the Reka or Struga region and not with Albanians or Turks from other countries. Robert Pichler notes, however, that the ethnic loyalty of Albanians from Macedonia (he has conducted fieldwork in a village of Veleshta, in south-western Macedonia) is not limited to Albanians in Macedonia, but also includes these from Kosovo and Albania. ‘Thus – writes Pichler – to

consider oneself Albanian in Austria or in Switzerland is to understand oneself as belonging to the ethno-cultural nation that encompasses persons with different citizenships living in different states which might be far away from the imagined ethnic territory’ (Pichler, in print). However, according to my data, the ethnic dimension is not very important, while state or regional, on the other hand, is very crucial. One of the reason for this is probably a large diversity of national identification by Macedonian Muslims, but also their strong connection to the place of origin. As said above, Macedonia is perceived as a place for living, so the most important social events are connected with it: meeting new spouses, weddings, circumcisions, money investment and raising to prestigious position.

Conclusions

Labour migration is one of the most important factors in the economic and social life of Macedonian Muslims. We can observe two patterns of such migration: when entire families go abroad and live there almost the whole year, and when only men live and work abroad, coming back to Macedonia several times a year. However, both models are called *pechalba* or *gurbet* and refer in this way to the traditional way of earning money that has been known in the Balkans since 19th century. As I argued, in spite of all changes, this migration is still perceived as to be seasonal and is predominantly male. Certainly, *pechalba* has a strong impact not only on the economic life but also on gender relations and some identity changes among Torbeshi. One of the most important factors in this relation is prestige and that refers mainly to men. Markers of prestige can be both material (like investing money and showing one's wealth back in the country of origin) and non-material (like usage of Italian expressions in Macedonia).

Macedonian Muslims constitute quite a specific group of Muslims, whose mother tongue is Macedonian. Thus, they are associated predominantly with the largest Muslim community in Macedonia – Albanians, and to a lesser extent with Turks. They themselves declare to be either Macedonians, or Turkish, or Albanians or just Muslims. In the Macedonian official discourse they are considered to be subjects of

strong politicisation, since every group want to incorporate them in order to increase their own community numbers in statistics.

I argued that migrants and their close ones that remain in Macedonia live in two socio-cultural contexts as they keep in constant contact. Not only do migrants visit their country of origin regularly, but also use new technologies for fast and frequent communication. Remittances – both in the form of money and ideas or values (social remittances) are transmitted among pechalbari and their relatives and neighbours. Migrants perceive their migration as temporary and Macedonia is their place of reference, so they organise the most important family feasts (circumcisions and weddings) only in the country of origin and meeting of young couples take place there too. After all, pechalbar villages are still endogamous.

Migrants who live in the contexts of both home and host countries are named in literature as „trans-national.” I argue, that this term is not really applicable in the context of my research. Torbeshi, but also other pechalbari from Western Macedonia, e.g. Albanians or Turks, are national minorities (communities) and their place of reference is not their „nation-state” - Macedonia, but just „state” - Macedonia or even the region or the village they come from. They make and keep relations not only with the representatives of their nationality (after all, their national affiliation is very diverse!), but rather of a shared place of origin.

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Summary: The aim of this paper is an anthropological analysis, based on the ethnographic fieldwork, of transnationalism within the context of labour migration (pechalba) from Macedonia to Italy. Two patterns of such migration can be observed: when entire families go abroad and live there almost the whole year, and when only men live and work abroad, coming back to Macedonia several times a year. However, both models are called *pechalba* or *gurbet* and refer in this way to the traditional way of earning money that has been known in the Balkans since 19th century.

Migrants and their close ones that remain in Macedonia live in two socio-cultural contexts as they keep in constant contact. Not only do migrants visit their country of origin regularly, but also use new technologies for fast and frequent communication. Remittances – both in the form of money and ideas or values (social remittances) are transmitted among pechalbari and their relatives and neighbours. Such values are connected above all with gender relations. Migrants perceive their migration as temporary and Macedonia is their place of reference, so they organise the most important family feasts only in the country of origin and meeting of young couples take place there too. In Macedonia they invest and spend money, and build houses that are very important markers of pechalbari's prestige.

Research group constitutes Macedonian Muslims, so called 'Torbeshi'. It is a group of Muslims whose mother tongue is Macedonian. They themselves declare to be either Macedonians, or Turkish, or Albanians, or just Muslims. In the Macedonian official discourse they are considered to be subjects of strong politicisation, since every group wants to incorporate them in order to increase their own community numbers in statistics. Thus, depending on the political context, they are regarded either as Turks or as Albanians, or as Macedonians.

Pechalba has a strong impact on migrants' identity, too. Abroad they declare themselves to be Macedonians as they are Macedonian citizens. In turn, young pechalbari used to change (unofficially) their names in Italy when making new friendships there in order not to admit they are Muslims. Moreover, migrants have multiple identification related to their life abroad, thus are at the same time Muslims and Albanians / Turks / Macedonians, Macedonian citizens and e.g. 'Italians'.

Migrants from Macedonia to Italy can be called transmigrants. I argue, however, the notion of transnationalism is not very applicable to Balkan context as it derives from the Anglo-American concept of nation-state, and *nation* and *state* are used as synonyms. I would propose a term 'trans-state'. Migrants from Macedonia are of different ethnic origin and in fact represent national minorities (communities) – Albanians or Turks. Macedonian Muslims are regarded as either Macedonians or Turks or Albanians, or as a distinct national group 'Macedonian Muslims'/'Torbeshi' or simply as 'Muslims'. Thus, the country of origin is perceived by them above all through the prism of a territory and citizenship, and not through ethnicity or nationality.