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BETWEEN MACEDONIA AND SWITZERLAND:
ALBANIAN MIGRANTS’ TRANSLOCAL TRAJECTORIES
AND PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT:
The article examines transnational migrations of Albanians from the Republic of Macedonia to Swiss Confederation, seen in the light of ongoing processes of their exclusion and inclusion in different social contexts at the both ends of the migratory chain – the places of origin and destination. It focuses on the social and cultural challenges that individuals and groups face, as well as on everyday strategies of coping with live in-between different localities. The analysis, in the article, proceeds from the assumption that the migratory experience in a transnational space can be analysed by taking into account that it is constituted within historically and geographically specific localities of origin and migration, and it depends on social, cultural, economical, political and legal opportunities and constraints, and this at the both ends of the chain. In the light of this conceptualization, the strategies of managing with the live in-between are seen as everyday practices, relations and interactions within localized transnational (trans local) social spaces.

KEY WORDS:
Albanians, migration, trans locality, remittances, status-paradox.

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SAŽETAK:
U članku se istražuju transnacionalne migracije Albanaca iz Republike Makedonije u Švajcarsku i njihov uticaj na procese isključivanja i uključivanja migranata u različite društvene kontekte na oba kraja migratorskog lanca - mjesta porijekla i odredišta. Fokus je stavljen na društvene i kulturne izazove sa kojima se suočavaju pojedinci i grupe, kao i na svakodnevne strategije življenja između različitih destinacija. Analiza se zasniva na pretpostavci da se migraciono iskustvo u transnacionalnom prostoru može analizirati uzimajući u obzir da je konstituisan u istorijski i geografski specifičnim lokalitetima porijekla i migracija i da zavisi od socijalnih, kulturnih, ekonomskih, političkih i zakonskih mogućnosti i ograničenja na oba kraja migratorskog lanca. U svjetlu ove konceptualizacije i strategije upravljanja mogu se pratiti svakodnevni isazovi i međusobni odnosi unutar lokalizovanih transnacionalnih (translokalnih) društvenih prostora.

KEY WORDS:
Albanci; Migracije; Translokacija; Doznake; Paradoks status.
Introduction

Contemporary migration is a complex and multiple process and the movements of people often are not unidirectional – migrants could continually move back and forth between different places of origin and destination. All the more so as contemporary modes of communication and transport across the borders enabled them to work and live in different countries, keeping in touch with those left behind as never before (Foner, 1997; Morawska, 1999). Thus, many people are connected economically, socially, politically, and even emotionally to two or more societies at the same time and maintain relations with relatives and friends working or/and living in different countries and settlements (Glick Schiller, Basch, Blanc-Szanton, 1992, p. 1–2). This is what the researchers refer to as transnational migration and trans-migrants. It draws researcher’s attention and submits interesting questions concerning the specific trans-migrants’ life in-between.

The article examines the migrations of Albanians from the Republic of Macedonia to the Swiss Confederation1. The movements are seen in the light of ongoing processes of migrants’ exclusion and inclusion in different social contexts at both ends of the migratory chain. I focus on the social and cultural challenges that they face, as well as on everyday strategies of coping with such live in-between different localities. The main thesis is that Albanian migrants in Switzerland still remain highly interconnected through stable networks characterized by high ethnic homogeneity; simultaneously, they are strongly associated with their places of origin in Macedonia. Reasons for this are various and go beyond family and kin solidarity.

Theoretical notes

My analysis is framed by two theoretical frameworks that allow for a deeper understanding of migrants’ life worlds and their connections across time and space. First, I employ social networks theory in order to grasp the relations between migrants at receiving place, on one hand, and the ties between them, returnees and non-migrants, on another. All of them are engaged in multiple networks consisting of complex social and interpersonal relations based on kinship, friendship and community ties (Massey et al., 1987, p. 138). These networks – of information, assistance and

1 Further in the text I use only “Macedonia” and “Switzerland” for short.
obligations – allow us to understand why migratory movements are not necessarily limited in time, unidirectional or permanent (Boyd, 1989, p. 638–643).

The second framework is the transnational migration paradigm\(^2\). According to it, contemporary international migration should be placed in the specific transnational context, mentioned shortly above. Transnationalism has been defined as ‘the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement [...] An essential element of transnationalism is the multiplicity of involvements that trans-migrants sustain in both home and host societies’ (Glick-Schiller, Basch, Blanc-Szanton, 1995, p. 48). Moving back and forth between different countries they ‘develop their social spaces of everyday life, their work trajectories and biographical projects’ in configurations of ‘special practices, symbols and artefacts’ across space (Pries, 2001, p. 21).

Transnational practices, however, do not take place in an imaginary “third space” between the states, and trans-migrants are not deterritorialized people. According to Janine Dahinden (2010, p. 51) transnational formations result from a combination of mobility, on one hand, and locality in the sending or/and receiving country, on other. Locality means to be rooted – socially, economically or politically – in the host place and/or in the place of origin, and to develop and/or sustain a set of social relations at specific localities. Migrants come from specific place (village, town or city) where they were socialized in local families and were attached to local community. After migration they move to other place and in most cases join and develop networks namely with people working and/or living at the same place and in local context. Furthermore, through their everyday practices, relations and interactions trans-migrants link together their localities of origin and destination.

This conceptualization does not reject but expands the concept of transnationalism, bringing to the attention local context and situatedness of mobile, as well as immobile people (Greiner, Sakdapolrak, 2013, p. 374). The specific context in which transnational actions take place in fact is “trans-local” (i.e. local-to-local). Thus, the migratory experience in a specific transnational space can be analyzed by taking into account that it is constituted within historically and geographically specific localities of origin and migration, and it depends on social, cultural, econ-
nomical, political and legal opportunities and constraints, and this at both ends of the chain (Guarnizo, Smith, 1998, p. 13, Dahinden, 2010, p. 52).

The everyday strategies of managing with the live in-between various localities are in close connection to this conceptualization: they can be described as everyday practices, relations and interactions based on kinship, friendship and ethnic affirmation within localized transnational (trans-local) social spaces.

Methodology

The paper draws on ethnographical primary data, collected from 2008 to 2010 within the contexts of working on my doctoral dissertation under the title “Contemporary labour migrations of Albanians from Macedonia”. Four field research sessions of 10–15 days each were carried out in selected Albanian villages, situated in the western part of the Republic of Macedonia (in the regions of Skopje, Tetovo and Struga). The research benefited from several shorter occasional trips to some of the studied locations (due to other scientific obligations). A set of 35 interviews was conducted, but in this article I use information only from the interviews (13) with Albanians who have worked or are still working in Switzerland.

Most of the interviews I conducted were a combination of semi-structured and biographical (life history) narratives. The life-history approach is very valuable in studying processes, social changes and everyday life, especially in cases when the archives are incomplete or missing (Thompson, 1978). Life histories allow us to observe the changes in the cultural and social experience of the individuals, their points of view and daily cultural practices, and the meanings people invest in their actions (Roberts, 2002, p. 21). This approach takes into consideration the fact that life histories are subjective, but finds them valuable as they reveal the respondents’ opinions, dispositions and attitudes (Lieblick, Tuval-Maschiach, Zilber, 1998). Simultaneously, the respondents’ “versions” are placed among information from other secondary sources and scientific interpretations. Data from the State Statistical Office and the Emigration Agency of the Republic of Macedonia, and Swiss Federal Statistical Office as well, are also included in my analysis. These data, however, are incomplete and often incomparable and must be used carefully and in combination with all other sources.
Migrations of Albanians from Macedonia to Switzerland: Historical Dynamics

The beginning of Albanian migrations from Macedonia to Switzerland is connected to the policies of the Yugoslav authorities toward international migration in the late 1960s. These policies have their economic and political grounds. Migration outside the federation became one of the pillars of the Yugoslav type of socialism. Simultaneously, giving opportunities for work abroad was seen as one of the possible ways to overcome the economic gap between the richer and the poorer regions of Yugoslavia. Since Kosovo, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina remained the most economically underdeveloped areas in Yugoslavia, the government directed this new, more open migration policy especially to these regions (Dimova, 2007, p. 2–3). At the same time, Western Europe was still enjoying its post-war economic boom and migrant labour was very much in demand. The Yugoslav government signed official agreements with a number of the Western European countries which started to accept primarily unskilled workers mostly from the underdeveloped regions of Yugoslavia (Ivanović, 2012, p. 31–70). A sizable part of them were Albanians from the Western Macedonia and Kosovo region. In the next decades, migration movements were constantly increasing and became a mass phenomenon. They reached to unknown level in comparison to the previous times. In actual facts, all villages populated with Albanians had already sent young men as temporary workers abroad.

Thus, in the late 1960s Switzerland became one of the main destinations, along with FRG and Austria, for workers coming from Macedonia. In fact, initially Switzerland was less attractive labour destination than Germany. This statement is supported by statistical data (see the next paragraph for more details), as well as by my respondents:

*The first [migrants] left in 1967-68 through the employment office. Then they went to Germany, the first went in 1967-68. Six-seven years later Switzerland and Austria opened their labour markets, but the first workers went to Germany* (♂, born in 1965).

Until the mid 1980s, Albanian migrants in Switzerland were exclusively young men, while their women and children remained in the native villages. They came
from rural and poor regions, working mainly unskilled jobs. They often lived in barracks with other foreign workers, because their objective was to earn money in order to financially provide for their families in Macedonia and to return after a few years to the native village (cf. Dahinden, 2010, p. 63; von Aarburg, 2002, p. 271).

Initially, Albanian migrants, entering legally Switzerland, had received a seasonal permit. This permit was with duration of 9 months (max.) per year and was renewable and provided the worker to get another job contract. The holder had to return to the home country for the remaining months of the year and he was not allowed to bring family members to Switzerland (Gross, 2006a, p. 6). Workers with uninterrupted seasonal permits for 10 years could obtain annual residence permit (permit B). The all kinds of permit were under annual quotas but the conversions were not a subject of the quota rules (Gross, 2006b, p. 17). The Permit B was awarded to foreign workers with work contracts of one year or more. It was automatically renewable with a work contract but an authorization had to be sought to change employers or cantons. This permit allowed the family reunion under certain conditions – the worker had to prove that he had the financial possibility to secure himself and his family. After 10 years, the permit could be converted into establishment permit (Permit C), which was valid indefinitely with no constraint on mobility.

At this structural condition, in the end of 1970s and in the beginning of 1980s Switzerland became more preferable destination than Germany or Austria for many Albanians coming from Macedonia. At that time, the 10-year period of those arrived first expired and they could get the annual residence permit. Furthermore, the waiting period for conversion was reduced to five years. Thus, a process of family reunion took place gradually and became possible by the transformation of the residence status. After mid 1980s more and more Albanian men started bringing their women and children to Switzerland:

*I went to Switzerland in 1980. The wages in Macedonia were very low. And I left with a friend of mine who had already worked there for 2 years. My family remained in Macedonia. I was allowed to work for nine months – from 15 March to 15 December. And for three months I had to come back home. In this way we lived separated for six years. However, then we obtained the rights to bring our families. In 1985, I*
got the permit which allowed me to stay around a year in Switzerland and to bring my family there. I brought them in 1986 (♂, born in 1954).

If earlier migration was perceived not as a regular inflow but as an exceptional phenomenon in a booming economy of Switzerland, the term “guest work(er)” signalized its temporary limitation during the 1980s and there were increasing evidences that migration became a constant phenomenon, then most of workers would stay in Switzerland. During 1960s-1970s, the public perception almost completely ignored immigration as the migrants were predominately single males and thus not visible in the public space or in schools. Furthermore, they were residing in the outskirts on construction sites and in barracks. Afterwards with the change of migration structure and character from single males to family migration, migrants moved from the outskirts to inner city areas (von Aarburg, 2002, p. 271) and became more visible, provoking the public attention. These tendencies continued and intensify during 1990s.

Simultaneously, starting from the mid 1980s, the political and economic situation in former Yugoslavia in general, and specifically in the areas populated with numerous Albanians such as Kosovo and Macedonia, worsened drastically. After Tito’s death in 1980, the Albanian population began to lose gradually the previously given rights. This tendency continued, and became even worse, after Slobodan Milosevic’s political rise in the late 1980s. In Macedonia, particularly, during the second half of 1980s, there were several campaigns directed towards the restriction of rights for Albanians: there were statements that many Albanian wedding songs were nationalistic by nature, and they were banned. Also, authorities discarded as nationalistic some commonly used names – such as Alban, Albana, Fljamur (Albanian flag), Ljiriduam (I want freedom). There were also efforts to limit the height of the courtyard walls by an administrative decree. In 1987-1988, much of the traditional constructions, such walls around Albanian houses in Tetovo and Gostivar areas, were demolished (Rousolek, 2001; Poulton, 1995, p. 127–128).

Situation did not improve after disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991 and formation of the independent Republic of Macedonia. The 1990s were a period of deep political, economic and social change and accumulation of even higher ethnic tensions which led to armed conflict between Macedonians and Albanians in 2001. In
this complicated situation desires for migration abroad grew. However, with a shift in immigration policies in Switzerland, and particularly, with the implementation of the ‘three-circles’ model in 1991, the recruitment of workers from countries succeeded former Yugoslavia was no longer possible: Albanian migrant from Macedonia were now categorized as members of the third circle and had no rights to obtain a work permit (Dahinden, 2010, p. 64).

The established culture of migration played a crucial role during the 1990s and 2000s, so that migrations continued with high intensity, despite the restrictions. The strong endogamous tradition among Albanians played an important role as marriage became a way of overcoming these restrictions. Hence, the family reunion and family formation became the main source of the new Albanian migration from Macedonia during these post-socialist decades. As a consequence, there was a steady increase in the Albanian population from Macedonia (and also Kosovo) in Switzerland through such chain of migrations.

At the same time, politically motivated migration started. Thousands of Albanian asylum seekers arrived. In fact the asylum seeking became an important strategy for many Albanians to circumvented the policy of ‘three-circles’ and to migrate to Switzerland. Many of them had relatives among the Albanian migrants in the country that came during the previous periods. Claimants for refugee status were able to work under some conditions regulated by the canton (Gross, 2006b, p. 32). Some of my respondents also spoke of this:

*I went to Switzerland in 1992. I was there registered as an asylum seeker and I worked as porter and facade maker. I left because of poverty. Then here in Macedonia there wasn’t work for young people and I decided to leave. I had many relatives there. I had an uncle who had lived in Switzerland since 1968. My oldest brother have lived there since 1984, and the other one since 1991 (♂, born in 1954).*

**Numbers**

It is difficult to speak on the number of Albanians from Macedonia in Switzerland during the years. The cause is in fragmentation of the available statistical data. Until 1991, the Albanians from Macedonia travelled with Yugoslav passports and in
Switzerland they were counted as Yugoslav citizens. After that they became Macedonian citizens. Because of increased number of ethnic Albanians during the 1990s, the Swiss census data began to count in a separate category of Albanian-speaking population. However, it included Albanians who came from several Balkan states. The Macedonian data from the conducted censuses in 1994 and 2002 are contradictory. Nevertheless, the available data indicate significant tendencies. According to the data summarized by Macedonian researcher Verica Janeska, between 1971 and 1994, the number of Macedonian citizens emigrated from Macedonia to Switzerland constantly increased (Fig. 1). The data of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office, for the period 1994 – 2012, support this tendency (Fig. 2). The statements of my interlocutors, whose family members (women and children) became numerous during the 1990s, correspond to the statistics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employed in Switzerland</th>
<th>Members of families</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>857 5 476 12 193</td>
<td>809 11 582</td>
<td>6 285 23 775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87 % 51 % 13 % 49 %</td>
<td>100 % 100 %</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Fig. 1. Data summarized by V. Janeska (2001, p. 214)

3 The census results from 2002 still are the last official; the census from 2011 was suspended.
Concerning the share of Albanians in 1994 Census, they were 68 % of all Macedonian citizens residing in Switzerland (Fig. 3). The Swiss data for 1998, which were cited by V. Janeska, show even bigger Albanian share – 80 % (Janeska, 2001, p. 201). The Census from 2002 counted only these Macedonian citizens residing abroad up to one year. Data by ethnic affiliation are available and they show that in Switzerland Albanians were 83 % of all population coming from Macedonia.

**Migration Networks, Transnational Practices and Localities**

In result of intensive migratory movement during the last three decades migration has not been just a man’s territory, as it was in the initial guest-worker period. Family reunion and family formation or ‘family migration’ as many of my interlocutors label it, has existed parallel to the migrations of single men. Thereby, different types of migrants (also in the sense of gender and age) living or only temporary working in Switzerland, has been found to be interconnected economically and emotionally through kinship and friendship, as well as they have been strongly linked with relatives and local communities from Macedonia. This reality has been reflected by way of an important economic and financial support, but also through political mobilization (Iseni 2013, p. 230–231).
Work and life in Switzerland

The employment of Albanian migrants varied, but all note that these are activities that local workers do not want to do and that they mainly do the donkey work. Most of them are employed in the construction business (bricklayers, plasterers, painters, joiners, etc.), horticulture, forestry, restaurant business (waiters, confectioners, bakers, pizza chefs, etc.). Sometimes the job is not permanent, it does not provide regular income and the worker is paid only for the days they actually worked. On many occasions they have to change the workplace repeatedly within a few months, sometimes even weeks, before they manage to find a suitable job. Furthermore, these are often job positions in very different fields. The lack of understanding of the language, the different behaviour, manners and values of the people from the host society and the clash of different stereotypes and prejudices in the relations and communication are additional factor which often creates troubles and crisis situations.

Most of the people I talked to said that they went abroad alone, but they also add that a brother or uncle, or a friend from childhood, had already started working at the same place. In many cases, newcomers stay for shorter or longer period of time, namely at the dwelling of their relatives or friends and with their assistance they make acquaintances with other Albanian migrants. Building up such social ties is important and is a cause for migrants’ concentration in certain regions and towns. There are cafes, temples or migration organizations where they gather and communicate. All of these aspects help them preserve elements of their local culture by organizing Albanian folklore evenings, culinary collections and more.

Data suggest that, on the level of everyday life and daily interaction, Albanian migrants developed a strong local orientation in Switzerland. The most Albanian migrants are concentrated in definite cantons and towns in the country (mainly in German speaking parts). The social networks display a strong ethnic homogeneity. Although my respondents said that they have Swiss or Italian friends, later in the course of the interview it was made clear that such interaction are only within the workplace. Such people are important exclusively for the dimension of instrumental support, but speaking of general advice about professional or family affairs, economical and emotional support they rely on other Albanians. Commonly, Al-
Banhans turn to other Albanians (relatives or friends) to find job or an apartment. Leisure is also spent with other Albanians (cf. Dahinden, 2009, p. 255). Living on the margins of the host country most of the Albanians lead a parallel social life to its mainstream populations (Iseni, 2013, p. 231).

Even in Switzerland, the social networks, connections and relationships are in the most cases established among the local migrants. They are crucial for dealing with the situations of the new environment. Studies on the role of the networks in migration processes often discuss their role for reduction of the trip costs. The price, however, should not be understood simply as financial value. These relations are transformed into a kind of social capital which enables the workers to cope with risks and challenges more easily: to find housing and work and to deal with overall adaptation at the host place.

However, social networks cross the space involving the migrants’ relatives and friends remained at places of origin. And, the importance of these trans-local ties goes beyond the facilitation of the arrival and adaptation of new migrants. The point of reference for the most Albanian migrants, especially these of the first generation, is their place of origin where their relatives lived and relied on their economic support. Ideally, when an Albanian went abroad to work, he did not go ‘for himself’, but to improve the living conditions of his entire family (Reineck, 1991, p. 143). Therefore, the worries about the parents, wife and children left behind constantly accompanying the daily life of the migrants. In that sense, relationships and maintaining intensive relations with the closest people and the relatives at native places turn out to be crucial. The economic support from the migrants is often an important factor in the reduction of poverty and the improvement of living standards.

Remitting, building, investing in the villages of origin

Precise data on the means that Albanian migrants use to remit to their relatives, however, are lacking. The channels of sending money in most cases are informal, the key ones being self-delivery and via friends and relatives. Only 22% of the migrants, responding to a recent survey, sent money through formal banking channels (Mughal, Cipusheva, Abazi, 2009, p. 64–70).
However, statistical data are indicative for some tendencies. The table 5 presents the amount of migrant remittances: it is visible that during the last 15 years the total remittances to Macedonia raised, even during the years following 2008 economical crises.

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<td>77</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National bank of the Republic of Macedonia</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>64.2</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>69.8</td>
<td>130.3</td>
<td>146.3</td>
<td>155.3</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>216.9</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>237.9</td>
<td>240.6</td>
<td>250.7</td>
<td>234.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5.** Remittances in Macedonia (in millions, dollars).

Sources:


Other recent survey shows that, between 2008 and 2012, the percentage of households in Macedonia that rely on economic remittances sent by their working abroad members increased, in average, from 16 % to 21 %. Furthermore, the results indicate that during 2012 the share of Albanian households receiving remittances by relatives who work abroad are more than Macedonian, respectively 42 % compared to 14 %. (Petreski, Jovanović, 2013, p. 31–32). I collected qualitative materials similarly to the presented statistical data which confirm the thesis that the remittances sent by Albanian migrants are a key factor of providing economical and social welfare to their relatives in the villages in Macedonia they originate from.
As for uses of remittances, the majority of my Albanian respondents confirmed that they spent first and foremost to meet essential needs locally—food, medicines, clothing, different taxes and fees. However, the most visible are the funds invested in the reconstruction or construction of houses, as well as in their furnishing. When entering an Albanian village one might be impressed by the number and the size of the houses created by such remittances, with varied planning and architectural features. Most of these houses were built in the last 20–30 years and differ significantly from their more ‘traditional’ counterparts built earlier. Many are still under construction.

In addition to these expenditures, some remitted funds are invested in production activities. The majority migrants want to invest their savings in small businesses in their native place, aiming to provide a regular income for their families. Such examples from my fieldwork are several owners of small cafés, grocery stores, small family hotels and transport companies. Some of these initiatives are sustainable due to periodical money transfers by the owner’s brothers who continues to work in Switzerland. In the last decade or so, remittance-funded successful business activities become increasingly visible, gradually changing the business environment in areas inhabited by Albanians. Here is how an employee (♂, born in 1975) of the local administration in the Municipality of Teartse explained the changing attitudes brought by financial remittances:

Table 6. Households receiving remittances from relatives working abroad.

![Chart showing remittances by Albanians and Macedonians from 2008 to 2012.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Albanians</th>
<th>Macedonians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here is how an employee (♂, born in 1975) of the local administration in the Municipality of Teartse explained the changing attitudes brought by financial remittances:
Till now we have mainly invested in houses. Big houses have been built. But people have already started to think otherwise, they know that you can build a house, but you must maintain it. Each year at least 1000 Euros are needed [for this]. And now, we can say that since 2005, the time I have been working here [in the municipality], ten good businesses have been started. And all of them are investments with capital gained abroad.

Besides individual remittances, the villages of origin are transformed by an injection of collective funds in public infrastructure and services (for more on such kind remittances see Goldring, 2004). Respondents in all researched villages explained the existence of a special fund to which each village household must pay a certain contribution, depending on that how many of their members work abroad and on their income (Markov, 2015). The money has been invested in asphalting streets, building bridges and fountains, renovating schools and religious sites or supporting vulnerable households such as those seriously ill or hit by some disaster. For instance, the rebuilding of a burnt house is assisted by finances from the fund.

If there is some need, for instance, which cannot be met independently here, they forward money. For instance, if there is a family that suffered something, they get together; they have there a special fund to send (♂, born in 1962).

Aid is provided also for the transportation of those who died abroad to their native places. Up to this day, although numerous Albanians from the studied places, live with their families abroad, only in extremely rare cases they are buried there. The fund helps the families that do not have enough money to transport the deceased to Macedonia, so that the burial ritual could be performed in the village of origin.

If he is working abroad, no matter whether in Austria, Switzerland or America, when he dies everyone wants to be buried in his native place. And if his family cannot afford to transport him from America or from Switzerland, people will collect as much money as needed, and they will bring him back (♂, born in 1937).

The Status-Paradox of Migration
An important cause for continuing financial support and expenditures of migrants’ means in their places of origin is connected to issues of social status and prestige. Nieswand (2011) points out the paradox of specific status that can emerge in the context of contemporary mass migration. Most migrants are employed as unskilled workers, often illegally, in host societies and are thus unable to gain a high position there. On the other hand, the economic inequalities between the receiving and the sending country create incentives for migrants to transfer resources earned in richer countries to poorer countries in order to increase their purchasing power. I studied the similar case. Regardless to their often low social position abroad, Albanian migrants have a chance to become socially prestigious in their village or town of origin and thereby to raise their status there. The fact that they manage to help the family at home also enables them to cope with inferior positions, various forms of discrimination and loss of social status in the workplace. Therefore, in general, a migrant’s success depends not so much on their status abroad, but on the remittances sent to the areas of origin. For that reason the results of migration must be made visible to the community and there are even some acts of ostentation aiming to demonstrate well-being and raised positions.

The above mentioned large houses in Albanian villages are an obvious mark demonstrating well-being and enhanced social prestige. They are, indeed, visible for the local community. My male interlocutor (born in 1955) said:

*There is a contest – to build a larger house than others. There are such people, lot of them. For instance, if he has an old house, he will demolish it and build a new one. And it should be larger than the neighbour’s house. In order to demonstrate himself, he would even build a swimming pool.*

Another visible expression of prestige and improved social position is the manifestation of well-being to the native village when migrants return during the summer. For several weeks the villages are buzzing with people and expensive cars with foreign registration plates numbers – from Switzerland, but also from Germany, Austria, USA etc. The cafés, pubs and restaurants are overcrowded during the
entire day. Every returnee from abroad is expected to treat relatives and friends, showing the amount of his earnings. Young people show off the latest mobile phone models or walk along the main street of the village wearing designer clothes. When it comes to non-material markers of migrant’s prestige, using German, Italian or English words and phrases in the public sphere is especially significant. In this respect my findings correspond to Hemming’s (2009) study on migration status paradox and display of wealth from young Albanian male migrants during their visits to their hometown in northern Albania. Such a situation is not unique to the Albanian context, however, as shown by Nieswand’s (2011) research among Ghanaians and Bielenin-Lenczowska’s (2010) among Muslim Macedonians in the Struga region.

Also, the grand weddings can be noted. It is typical not only for the Albanian community, but also for other migrants from western Macedonia such as Torbeshes and Turks, whose weddings are organized between July and August, the period in which most migrants have their annual holidays and return to their villages of origin. Every day there are two, three, sometimes more weddings. The bride is often from the same village as the groom. Even after several decades of emigration, mixed marriages with Swiss or Italian or German spouses are an exception. The wedding is luxurious and lavish ceremony. All relatives and friends are invited – those living permanently in the village, as well as migrants arriving from various countries around the world. Nowadays, the number of guests usually reaches a few hundred. A noisy procession with expensive cars, loud Albanian music, blaring horns and Albanian flags passes through the village, so as to stress the wealth of the migrants and especially their identity. Evening festivities continue in the groom’s home, but during recent years this part of the ceremony has begun to shift to local restaurant halls. According to my respondents, such weddings can cost between 5000 and 10,000 Euros. The number of guests, the luxury cars in the procession, and the expensive gifts are important symbols of well-being and social positioning of the household.

*The man brings many pieces of gold jewellery for the bride – necklaces, rings, bracelets. He also wants to demonstrate in this way how strong he is, how big is the family.* (♂, born in 1964).

The expressions of well-being and economic power easily translate into prestige and social status within the local village community. Organizing such events
is possible and rational only in the place of origin, since only the local people can comment on their customs and only for them the material and social aspects of weddings can be observed and valued (Bielenin-Lenczowska, 2010, p. 520).

There is something else we need to consider when it comes to a longer stay abroad. The migrants see and endeavour to adapt to the quality of life and consumption patterns in Switzerland, that are very different from those in the places of origin. That is why, in my opinion, the construction of large and modern furnished houses and the act of supporting various improvements in the village have one more meaning – they attempt to improve the living conditions in Swiss way (or how they perceive it).

**Ethnicity and Identities in Motion**

Recent researches show that the first generation of immigrants often remains more dependent on relationships with persons of the same ethnic background, while the second generation has fewer reference people of the same ethnicity. Often, children of the first generation of Albanian migrants have better education and work positions than their parents and keep interpersonal relation with people of other ethnicity. However, the ethnic mobilization remains very strong even among the second generation in the studied case. Continuing with big intensity, ethnic and political tensions in Macedonia are important factors for prolongation of ethnic consolidation and empathy, as well as for maintenance of close ties with the areas of origin. Therefore, until the end of the 1990s, many of Albanian migrants saw their stay at Switzerland as temporary and lived with the general idea to go back. This reality was reflected through the commented important economic and financial support, but also through political mobilization. In this respect, contributing to the survival and welfare of relatives, and participating in different community fests, rituals and activities migrants continually reaffirm that they are still and will stay ‘Albanians’. This participation, especially in the context of ethnic tensions between Albanians and Macedonians, is an important marker of their community identity. Nowadays, solidarity with the community is often seen as a sort of political statement (Pichler, 2009, p. 228). For the Albanians from the Republic of Macedonia it is important to declare clearly their Albanian identity, regardless to the fact that they work and live mostly abroad or they stay at home village. The demonstration and ostentation of wealth, the use of Albanian national symbols (Albanian flag for
instance) in architecture and rituals are designed to demonstrate strong feelings of Albanian identity and ethnic solidarity. Thus, the remittances and strong social networks between Albanian migrants and their places of origin have additional meaning – to declare new positions and claims for increased role of the Albanian population in the Macedonian state.

Undoubtedly the socio-political tensions in Kosovo, as well as in Macedonia, have influenced the evolution of Albanian immigration in Switzerland. Many of Albanian political activists received refuge status in Switzerland, but also in other Western European countries such as Germany and Belgium, and North America and Australia as well. As quoted Bashkim Iseni (2013, p. 232–233) shows in his study, this enabled them to establish themselves in these countries and to follow their political aims from there. Under the leadership of political figures, and following the development of events in Kosovo and Macedonia, the majority of Albanians in Switzerland became highly politicized. Their political activities irritated politicians in their areas of origin.

The active political mobilization among the Albanian diaspora in Switzerland in the 1990s is commented in the public discourse, as well as in some research studies. This was reflected in a number of ways: an active political and public life was developed; various Albanian formations were established in order to support political activists in Kosovo and Macedonia. Albanian diaspora is strongly engaged in political lobbying in Western countries in order to influence public opinion there, through arrangement of meetings with political leaders from Kosovo and Macedonia. Different publications in the media, organizing public demonstrations, petitions and other various campaigns were also important (Iseni, 2013, p. 233).

In this context, speaking of collective remittances and funds sent to help their places of origin, my respondents only hinted that some of these funds have been used for political purposes. A widely discussed (especially in the media) issue is funding of Albanian paramilitary formations provided by the Albanian emigrant circles from Switzerland, in times of armed conflicts in Kosovo and Macedonia during 1998–2001. Such evidence is also adduced by Antonina Zhelyazkova:

“We are three brothers, but only I was a warrior, the other two were involved in financing and purchasing arms. Every family decides according to its possibilities – more warriors or more tax and voluntary
donations. All take part. We ask about the revolutionary tax: What is the taxation for the freedom and is it collected from all – for instance is it collected from the Turks, Bosnians and Roma? Commandante G.: The freedom tax is 3% of the revenues and is obligatory for all Albanians regardless to their incomes. It is collected only from Albanians across the world” (Zhelyazkova, 2001).

My interlocutors did not mention directly, even once, about the existence of such financing, but several times I indirectly came across such evidence like note they make “this is not for war” when speak about the collective funds. Such practice, by itself, is a form of collective remittances, having political dimensions and fitting in what Nina Glick-Schiller and George Fouron call “long-distance nationalism”(Glick Schiller, Fouron, 2001, p. 4). This provides further explanation of the strong relations and intense trans-local practices strongly connecting Albanian migrants in Switzerland with their places of origin in Macedonia.

**Conclusion**

A continuous transnational mobility between the host Swiss society and places of origin in Macedonia is a typical feature of Albanian migrants. They are locally anchored in Switzerland, where they work and live. Recently, they raised and educated their children there. This locality is an important resource for building up their transnational project. Although, during the last two decades, the share of a short-term temporary migration have been reduced instead of a more long-lasting one, the majority of Albanians continue to be strongly emotional and economically engaged with their places of origin in Macedonia. A combination of various factors affect this specific trans-locality – Albanian norms and culture; conditions and migration policies of Switzerland; socio-economic and political situation in Macedonia, etc.

What future directions will migration among Albanians from the Republic of Macedonia take? What changes will occur in the overall migration patterns in the upcoming years? These questions leave the topic open for future research, especially if we consider the aspirations of Macedonia for the EU accession, on one hand, and the recently passed referendum on international migration in Switzerland, on another.

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4 This theme is delicate and requires careful additional research work.
REFERENCES:


