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**Intermarriages - Crossing political and social
borders**

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INTERMARIAGES - CROSSING POLITICAL AND SOCIAL BORDERS

Introduction

The social culture and social relationships among the members of a community, ethnic group or a nation represent a complex or system of mutual relations. This system is usually determined by traditional culture, religion and religious beliefs, economy, political system etc., and it usually shapes the social behavior. But the discrepancy between the “ideal” behavior and actual or “acceptable” behavior in one community, always exist.

Differences between the ideal and actual behavior occur as a result of many influences and changes in the social and economic life of the population and it is not black or white, since it usually interlaces many other personal aspects.

In this paper I will try to take migrations as one of the important elements that directly influence some of the socio - cultural changes of the male and female population in northern parts of Albania, and south west parts of Macedonia, viewed through the cases of intermarriages among female Albanians and male Macedonians and give some insight of their perception about their present situation and marriage.

Among the other factors for intermarrying that are about to be discussed within this paper, it is also important to emphasize the role that the religion has in these marriages, and how belonging to same religion, in this case - Christianity, influences and eases their decision to get married.

Attention will be also paid on how both traditions integrate traditional customs based on gender and sex, reflecting their tradition further on, and how the “newcomers” integrate in the new society.

Border crossings in this case doesn't mean only political but more social crossing, thus emphasizing conceptual over the material meaning.

Migration aspects

When we talk about migrations we can talk about its various aspects: motives, direction, number of migrant, gender, their age, duration of migrations and many more.

Even though there are differences in the approach and research methods used by different sciences, as geography, sociology, demography, economy, anthropology etc., more or less they all interlace, interact and complement each other in some point, thus enriching the knowledge about the people's reasons and habits to constantly move and seek for something "new and better".

Trough the past centuries and based on the historical data we had perceived many global migrations, intercontinental or transcontinental, usually initiated by the quest for better life conditions in general, and rarely from any other reasons. Anyhow, the quest that obviously never stops can be set in connection with so many time mentioned push - and pull factor of Ernest George Ravenstein and his Laws of Migration (1885) as complementary elements of the migrations, and it's "in favor" or "against" the migration, factors.

Many of the intense debates (Huntington, 2004: 7), that took place in the past decades, concerning migration almost inevitably included multiculturalism, diversity, assimilation, and finally the identity as an important but variable mark of the people in the contemporary community. That can be witnessed from the many undertaken activities of various institutions, organizations, associations etc.

But no matter what the reasons for migration or mobility of people are, nowadays we consider that the mobility of people is of an essential meaning to the global community, thus becoming supported or encouraged by many relevant organizations and institutions. For example the European Union through its agencies, takes and encourages mobility¹ as one of the key factors in the realization of many of its activities, programs and policies.

Influence of the political and economic changes on migrations after the collapse of communism in Albania

The collapse of the communist regime, at the beginning of 1990's, in many of the European countries, initiated changes and transitions that were not only political, but economic and social as well.

Dynamic transformations and disparities, in any aspects of life of population "caught" the people unprepared for the good and the bad things that were about to happen. Strong impact of these changes were about to be felt in many years to come.

Albania as a country entrapped into the total isolation and under constant political and economic pressure, has determined future development of the country with the opening of the borders, at the beginning of the 1990's.

The fall of the political borders, lead to great movement and migrations of people, inside and outside the country, thus causing far reaching demographical unbalances, that would become especially visible in the social life of the population.

Albania as a country with one of the most repressive communist regimes in Europe experienced great demographic changes and migration movements. Even in some of the official document and reports it is said that Albanian emigration during the 1990's

¹ http://europa.eu/index_en.htm

represented one of the most dramatic demographic phenomenon in Europe². This situation was a probable result of the low income, USD 2,570 (2005) GDP per capita as well as the fact that 25.4% of the total population in Albania lived on a verge of existence, and it was considered as the poorest population in Europe³.

Economy⁴	1990	2000	2003
GDP per capita	842	1116	1278
GDP growth rate (year on year)	- 9.6	7.8	4,7

Source: International Financial Statistics Yearbook; World Development Indicators

Low national income and the fact that level of economic growth during transition period was decreasing, raised the importance of remittances coming from the migrants. It was estimated that 68.6% from the migrants were sending remittances to their families. That consists about three times higher amount than the net direct investments, and nearly twice as much as the official development aid received by Albania⁵.

Migration of people was noticeable from the rural to the urban areas within the country, and from the southern and northern parts toward the central region and lowlands.

Great increase of population was noted in the capital city of Tirana, that from the number of 200 000 people in 1990's reached about 800 000 people in 2006 (Erka and Van Wissen, 2007: 88).

² Population and Housing Census 2001
³ The Republic of Albania Migration Profile, IOM International Organization for Migration, Republic of Slovenia, Ministry of the Interior, October 2007, p.22
⁴ USAID, Albania, An Economic Snapshot, Greater Access to Trade Expansion (GATE), December 2005, http://www.onlinedts.com/resources/Publications/12-06_AL1-EconomicSnapshot-Albania1.pdf accessed (18.10.2010)
⁵ The Republic of Albania Migration Profile, IOM International Organization for Migration, Republic of Slovenia, Ministry of the Interior, October 2007, p.16

Demographic changes in Albania doesn't only refer to the "inside the borders" or national migration, but as well to "across the borders" migration of the population, thus generating and influencing alterations in a broader sense.

According to the data from the 2001 census,⁶ number of migrants that left the country since the beginning of the transitional period in 1990's, was about 1.000,000 Albanians. Main destinations of the Albanian migrants were Greece, Italy, USA, UK and Canada⁷.

Especially cough by the migration movement, were relatively young people at the age between 20 - 29 years. While the internal migration level reaches 46% in favour of the male population younger than 30 years, the number of female population that would migrate within Albania was about 54%⁸.

On the other hand, majority of the relatively young male migrants that would live Albania goes in favour of the male population⁹.

Gender ratio of the population emigrating from Albania, according to the estimations, goes in favour of the male population with about 70 % (Erka and Van Wissen, 2007: 95), while the rest of the migrant population are female.

According to this data we can conclude that this great spatial movement brings demographical deterioration not only in the particular regions, but within the country in general, that entails and leads to dramatic social changes with far reaching consequences.

⁶ Labour Market Review of Albania, 2006; Çaro Erka and Van Wissen, L.J.G., Migration in the Albania of the post-1990s: triggered by post-communist transformations and facilitator of socio-demographic changes, South-East Europe Review 3/2007, p. 94

⁷ The Republic of Albania Migration Profile, IOM International Organization for Migration, Republic of Slovenia, Ministry of the Interior, October 2007, p.14

⁸ Migration in Albania, Population and housing census 2001, INSTAT

⁹ Migration in Albania, Population and housing census 2001, INSTAT, p. 34

Female - wedding Migration

Albania - Macedonia

As mentioned before, female migration contributes with a relatively small percentage to the number of total migration movement outside Albania, and it is usually a result of the family reunions, educations and rarely as a result of an individual decision and undertaken step.

Both regions, in Macedonia and Albania, caught by these migration waves are rural areas, sometimes smaller and not yet influenced by the globalization processes where the patriarchal connections are still strong and visible, so these relations have much to do with the way marriages are arranged.

Even though in various documents Macedonia is only mentioned as transit destination for the Albanian migrants for Greece or the rest of the European countries, at the beginning of the 1990's there was a notable number of female migrants to whom Macedonia became final destination.

First "wave" of these migrants was consisted of Muslim Albanian population that got married with the Muslim population leaving in Macedonia. But from the beginning of the 2000 there was a "shift" or "change" of population so Macedonia became a "wedding destination" for Christian Albanians¹⁰ from the northern parts of Albania.

Term "wedding migrants" (Стојановиќ-Лафазановска, 2008: 29) adopted and used by many authors that consider the intermarriage relations among indigenous individuals and migrants from different countries, is completely compatible with the

¹⁰ Милошеска, Е. "Жената мигрант и акултурациските процеси изразени преку обредноста на семејниот и календарскиот циклус - 2009 Прва меѓународна интердисциплинарна конференција: Балканскиот фолклор како интеркултурен код, Uniwersytet "Adam Mickiewicz"- Познан (Обжицко), Р.Полска, 11- 13 мај 2009

main idea and topic of this paper and it is going to be further used referring to the Albanian girls that got married to the Macedonian men.

Category of wedding migrants is already recognized by the Macedonian government, and it is stated that after 1992 a number of girls from Albania that gets married with their spouses from Macedonia constantly increases¹¹. The lack of certain data for this category of population, brings us to the conclusion that the above mentioned statement might be considered a bit voluntary, but if we take the statements of the female population already married in Macedonia, as well as the constant newspaper articles¹², TV reports and other researches¹³ addressing these topics, we can confirm that we are talking about significant number of marriages. According to the unofficial data in the last 7 -10 years, the number of marriages has probably reached about 2000 -3000.

This situation, in some rural areas, was a reflection of the so called “chain reactions”, where one female migrant starts to “attract” and sometimes even acts as an arbitrary, between her female relatives or girl friends, and local male population, in order for the new marriages to be concluded. As a result of this situation there is, an increased number of marriages. Interdependencies that occur in the process of creating this kind of social and family ties are compatible with the traditional life and culture of the population from both countries.

As already mentioned, increased male migration processes from Albania in the regions concerned, influenced the lack of “male power” or lack of “marriage

¹¹ Стратегија за интеграција на бегалци и странци во Република Македонија 2008-2015, Влада на република Македонија, Министерство за труд и социјална политика, Декември, 2008, стр. 9

¹² Rukaj, [Marjola](http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Regions-and-countries/Albania/), “Between Albania and Macedonia: Patriarchal loves”, 29 September 2010 accessed (18.10.2010) <http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Regions-and-countries/Albania/>; Цветаноски, Виктор, “Албански моми за Македонски ергени”, Глобус, бр. 43,12.02.2008; Зафирова Билјана, “Се поголем број мешани бракови во тетовско”, Вечер 05.09.2006

¹³ Милошеска, Е. “Жената мигрант и акултурациските процеси изразени преку обредноста на семејниот и календарскиот циклус - 2009 Прва меѓународна интердисциплинарна конференција: Балканскиот фолклор како интеркултурен код, Uniwersytet “Adam Mickiewicz”- Познан (Обжицко), Р.Полска,11- 13 мај 2009

candidates” for the remaining, but numerous female populations, thus leaving many young but unmarried women.

On the other side, the lack of economic opportunities and transition that also caught Macedonia with the breakage of Yugoslavia influenced gradual changes in every sphere of life of the population living in the rural areas. Few opportunities to find employment in the urban areas and to migrate from the villages, as well as the elements of the traditional culture where male member of the family i.e. the son, is usually the one that stays in the fathers’ house, influenced increased number of male unmarried population in the villages.

In contrary to the situation within the rural areas of Albania in many of the rural areas in Macedonia, number of male population is higher than the number of female population. This discrepancy was a result of the increased number of female population from the rural areas in Macedonia that left the villages and married in the urban areas or abroad. According to the general opinion¹⁴ in these areas, it is always “easier” for the female population to marry somewhere else, and it is expectable and understandable for them to leave their parents house.

Consequently to the above discussed situations, imbalance of sex ratio in both mentioned regions, i.e. rural northern Albania and rural parts of western Macedonia, influenced declining marriage rates in both of them.

Economic differences that exist between the Northern Albania and rural areas in Macedonia, which sometimes goes in favour of Macedonia, in these cases usually determine the final decision - whether or not to get married. But the decision reached means that, the cross-border mobility of the female population from Albania, becomes one-way or permanent migration. At this point we should not forget one,

¹⁴ Field research , 2010

merely conceptual thing that encourage the persons to undertake one sometimes unexpected step, common for almost every human being no matter of race, gender, religion etc, which is: the intention and desire of a person to have its own family and children¹⁵.

Despite the fact that in some cases traditional relations or traditional culture in general, is considered as a merely conventional thing, which is usually not so compatible with the “modern way of life”, when it comes to marriage, individuals, especially male, seek for a “traditional wives”. This is almost without any exceptions stereotype of a woman that will take care of the household and children, thus securing successful marriage.

Matchmaking

Based mostly on the tradition, family formation should be realized at a certain age. That depends of the local traditions and of course of the gender of a person. In this case appropriate age to get married for a girl from the regions concerned in Albania, is between 14 -18 years or rarely 20. If the girl is not married at this age it is considered “old” and it is usually very hard to get married once, ones passes this age.

I was 18 and my mother said to me: We will marry you. You are old now. What are you going to do now? - They are used to marry their girls at 14. My sister was 14 and they married her¹⁶.

Appropriate age for a marriage of male candidates in the considered rural areas in Macedonia is between 20 -25 years, but as a result of changing conditions

¹⁵ Nedoluzhko Lesia and Agadjanian Victor, “Marriage, childbearing and migration in Kyrgyzstan: Exploring interdependencies, Max Planck Institute for Demographic changes - working paper, January 2009. <http://www.demogr.mpg.de/papers/working/wp-2009-003.pdf>, accessed 12.10.2010

¹⁶ AEM K1-2009 Interview made by Miloseska Eli, 07.04.2009 in Prilep.

and decreased number of female population, this average limit is higher. So, usually the candidates will have more than 30 - 35 years and sometimes even more than 40 years. But the marriages are usually concluded regardless of the age¹⁷ of a marriage candidates and their age difference, which can be between 7 -10 years and sometimes even larger than that.

Without any exceptions, marriages among the spouses are arranged through some acquaintance or a “matchmaker”¹⁸. This sort of arranged marriages are wide known in the traditional cultures¹⁹ of many nationalities and ethnic communities but today in contemporary conditions these activities are realized through a large number of marriage agencies²⁰ throughout the world. All of these agencies chose and match the candidates in order to gain material benefit.

But as matchmakers in these cases of arranged marriages in Macedonia, appear individuals that arrange marriages between the Macedonian “grooms” and Albanian “brides”, charging a sum of 500 - 1000 Euros. This sum is charged to the “groom” as soon as both candidates agree to a marriage.

In many cases the family of the girls does not receive any money, so we can not say that the marriage is concluded in order for the family to benefit, as in many other

¹⁷ Field Research 2010

¹⁸ Field research 2010; Милошеска, Е. Жената мигрант и акултурациските процеси изразени преку обредноста на семејниот и календарскиот циклус, First international interdisciplinary conference: Balkan folklore as an intercultural code, Uniwersytet “Adam Mickiewicz”- Познан (Обжицко), Poland, 11- 13 мај

¹⁹. Стојановиќ-Лафазановска, Л. *Миграција и хабитус. Македонската емиграција во Германија*, Скопје 2008, стр. 29

²⁰ Lisa Anne Simons, Marriage, Migration and Markets: International matchmaking and international feminism, A Dissertation Presented to The Faculty of the Graduate School of International Studies University of Denver, June 2001, p. 47-50; Bruce Andrew, “Making the Family - Marriage within and across Borders, IOM regional Representative, South East Asia, [http://www.metropolis2009.org/Presentations/Marriage%20A Bruce marriage across%20borders.pdf](http://www.metropolis2009.org/Presentations/Marriage%20A%20Bruce%20marriage%20across%20borders.pdf) accessed 15.10.2010

countries²¹. But again, sometimes where the matchmaker is a member of the family they charge the sum for the family.

.....my brother said; if you pay 1000 Euros I will let her go. Here, some girl that has just married here, in a village near by (Godivle), her cousin said; if you give money you can take her...²²

Because of the large number of married girls in Macedonia, some of them undertake the role of a matchmaker for a cousin or a friend, and in those cases they do not charge at all, or the amount is much lower 300 -500 Euros.

Complete process of intermarriages can be considered as a set that consists of several phases.

First the “groom” to be, engages in the process of matchmaking, and after the bride is chosen, together with the matchmaker alone or with one friend or a family member, he visits and introduces himself to the parents and the future bride in her home in Albania.

After the first meeting, the father, brother or some other close male relative of the girl comes to Macedonia to meet the grooms’ family, see his house and his property and “estimate”, weather or not, he is going to be able to take care of the bride and future family. Than, they will go back to Albania and in few days they would give their answer which is usually affirmative.

Next step for the groom is to go and take the bride from her home. For that occasion, together with his closest family, the groom brings some gold, ring, earrings, necklace and some clothes for the bride and after the small celebration at her home the bride is taken to Macedonia. The main event - wedding, is organized in

²¹ Bruce Andrew, “Making the Family - Marriage within and across Borders”, IOM regional Representative, South East Asia,

²² AEM K1-2009 Interviews made by Miloseska Eli 03.03.2009 in the village of Krivogastani

Macedonia, under local tradition and customs which are without any argument undertaken by the bride as a perfectly normal thing.

Despite the fact that the “buying” of a bride is in general, not acceptable, anyhow most of the community members in either of the countries consider it as a perfectly adequate in the social frames of those local communities. In some cases even the brides, doesn't seems to be “touched” by these act of “buying” that involved the members of both families.

According to the statements of the involved individuals and local population, most of these marriages are considered as successful ones, and all of the members, both in the nuclear and the wider family, are looking to these marriages with an approval.

First time that my father came here (in Macedonia) he didn't thing very well of it. The next time when he came, he saw the place, the people and he started to praise: “As my Christina leaves nice, no one else does”!²³

Almost all of the new nuclear families have children in the first year of marriage and in the next years at least one more.

These processes give hope to the local villagers, because this way many of the almost completely depopulated villages will prolong their existence and maybe they will even be completely revitalized. Reason for this conclusion is the increased number of children that is considered as a pillar for future existence of the community.

Religion as a factor for intermarriage

²³ АЕМ К1-2009 Милошеска Ели, 03.03.2009 г. во с. Кривогаштани. Информатор: Христина Џока Гоцеска, родена 1986 г. во с. Кафтат, Р. Албанија, омажена во с. Кривогаштани.

Importance of the religion in the forming of intermarriage relations is probably the most salient and it plays significant role in the decision for marriage and it is going to be discussed further on.

Intermarrying among the member of different ethnic, racial, social or religious groups is usually hard decision to make. Among all the above mentioned reasons, religion is probably the one that provokes most discussions.

If we observe religious tolerance, and religious diversity, in many of the contemporary communities, and the attitude of the people towards these questions, we can conclude that it appears as a completely “other thing” when they are connected to Inter-religious marriages (Gołębiowska 2009: 371-391; Lucassen and Laarman 2009)²⁴.

Approval of inter-religious marriages usually represents more declarative than real statement of the people, which gives more or less dominant position to one - usually own, or the other - usually counterpart's, religion. Religion seen in context of the migrants, as something that is “imported” together with them, seems to become troublesome when it is put in context between the migrants and “indigenous” population. In correlation to the religion and inter-religious conflicts there are hypothesis that this conflicts actually represent intercultural conflicts and that they must be approached as such (Parker 2010:318)²⁵.

Religion is almost always seen as interweaved with the local cultures so it bears the marks of the local community, as a creator of the local culture. According to that, it can be elaborated that religion is usually a dynamic category, changing trough the

²⁴ Gołębiowska Ewa, ” Ethnic and Religious Tolerance in Poland”, East European Politics and Societies, Volume 23 Number 3, 2009, p. 371-391; Lucassen Leo and Laarman Charlotte, “ Immigration, intermarriage and the changing face of Europe in the post war period”, The History of the Family”, vol.14, 2009

²⁵ Gumucio Cristián, “Interculturality, Conflicts and Religion: Theoretical Perspectives” Social Compass 55(3), Downloaded from scp.sagepub.com at National & Univ Library on October 22, 2010, p.318

time, interlacing and intercepting with local traditions (Parker 2010:328)²⁶ that have resemblances to the “main” religion, so it is hard to talk about “pure” religions in a real sense of the word.

In the case of the people involved in the intermarriage processes between the Albanian and Macedonian population, religion also plays a great role and it is crucial only in context of the inter-religious marriages of two individuals belonging to completely different religions as for example Islam and Christianity, which they oppose without any doubt:

“Oh, no. That can not happen”²⁷

When we talk about Catholic and Orthodox Christians, religion is not seen as an obstacle for marriage and even though there are differences they are very soon adopted by the migrants, as something, according to them and according to the members of the “incoming” society, perfectly normal and understandable thing to be done:

“I am following only your local customs; there (in Albania) my mother is following their local custom”.

But in any case for the main Christian holydays as Christmas, and Ester, the wife is preparing some of the traditional food that she used to prepare in Albania, and their husbands don't mind that. However, still the main accent is set on the local traditional celebration of the main Christian Orthodox holydays.

Other traditional customs connected to the wedding, childbirths, burial customs etc., are adapted and practiced by the wife very soon.

²⁶ Parker Gumucio Cristián, “Interculturality, Conflicts and Religion: Theoretical Perspectives” Social Compass 55(3), Downloaded from scp.sagepub.com at National & Univ Library on October 22, 2010, p.328

²⁷ Field research 2010

According to this situation we can conclude that the barrier or the border for intermarriage is set only in cases of a completely unknown and completely “opposite” religions, while in the other cases the differences are less important.

Acceptance of these local traditions is the first step in the process of acculturation of the migrant, where the integration into the community starts from the first and smallest “cell” - the family, and then it continues toward the others, neighbourhood, village and society.

Nevertheless it is questionable whether or not this process ever stops. Process of acculturation and a complete integration usually lasts longer than it is expected, and the terms of first, second and even third generations of migrants, mean that the process of integration lasts longer than a lifetime.

Language

Language taken as a basic mean for communication represents another category in the process of migration, acculturation and integration, which is also very important, not only to the migrants themselves, but to the family or a recipient and wider host community.

With the migration process, the migrant, leaves not only the religious and cultural community but as well the language community. If we considered that, the language can act as a symbol of belonging or foreignness, and put it into correlation to the will and the motives²⁸ of the migrants to integrate into the new society, we could see the resemblance to the elaborated theme of the intermarriages of the Albanian and Macedonian population.

²⁸ Hartmut Esser, “Migration, Language and Integration” AKI Research Review 4, December 2006

On the question, how fast they learned the Macedonian language the answers were approximately between 3 - 7 months. But of course the knowledge of the language after these 3-7 months is more on the level of understanding, some months more on reading, while even after 5 - 6 years of leaving in Macedonian, there can be still noticed sufficient lack of writing skills.

The knowledge of the language in these cases should be considered more as a subjective conclusion given by the migrants themselves, and that the knowledge is far from the grammatical knowledge of the language, which without additional education becomes questionable if it is ever going to be achieved.

When the language is set in connection to the children, bilingualism is perfectly normal and acceptable, even wishful thing. But on the other hand even the mothers prefer that their children should first learn Macedonian and then to teach them, speak Albanian.

Even though there are many factors to be discussed in context of the language, migrations and bilingualism in context of intermarrying between Albanian and Macedonian spouses at this point, within this paper we can observe the language as a factor for acculturation and integration both by the migrants as well as the host community.

Conclusion

Intermarriages taken as a study cases within this paper were discussed through several important components as economic, social cultural and religious background of the persons involved in the process of the “wedding migration” that was going on in the past decade in some of the rural areas in Macedonia, thus showing similarities and differences with the likewise situations all over the world.

The motives in almost all of the above mentioned cases as well as the motives of many other cases discussed and analyzed in the quoted papers, according to my opinion, are almost always taken as a step or border crossing from one reality to the other, from “bad” to “better”, or even from “better” to “best”.

But again the question remains open: Does that undertaken step meet their expectations or that quest and border crossing for “better” ever ends?, as well as our efforts to find the answers and maybe discover patterns of similarities and differences in this humans action.

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