PATTERNS OF MIGRATION FROM MACEDONIA

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Abstract  This paper focuses on the diversity of migration pattern of the Macedonian and Albanian migrants from Skopje after the independence in 1991. Through a case study of Macedonian and Albanian migration during the transition period until today, it investigates possible differences of their migration patterns and explores whether these two ethnic migrant groups reproduce the patterns of division present within contemporary Macedonian society when abroad.

Keywords  Albanians; ethnicity; Macedonians; migration; segregation

In the last one hundred years, many population movements and intensive migration flows occurred on the territory of Macedonia. These have caused continuous demographic changes within the country that are effective still today. Migration flows were noted already during the period of the Ottoman rule. They continued in great proportions during the first half of the 20th century, in the period of the Macedonian struggle for freedom. Following the historic Ilinden Uprising (1903) and the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), the devastated Macedonian territory was divided among its neighbouring nations in 1913. The Serbian, Greek and Bulgarian suppressive policy of assimilation was an additional motive which increased the migration movements of the Macedonians. The phenomenon of pechalbarsto was the first remarkable form of labor migration of the ethnic Macedonians. Internal and external movements of people continued after World War II, when Macedonia gained independence within the Yugoslav Federation. The most important migration flows from Socialist Macedonia are: the migration to overseas countries; inter-republic migration; migration of Turkish and other Muslim population to Turkey; migration for temporary work in Western Europe. The latter is better known as the Gastarbeiter Phenomenon, which began in the 1960s and 1970s and continued in form of family reunions during the 1980s and the 1990s.

The last Macedonian migration flows have been caused by the difficult transition period, which has affected all post-communist societies. The period from the 1990s to the
present day represents a new episode in the history of Macedonian migration. Migration was most notable in the first years of transition and during the crisis in Kosovo in 1991 and the conflict in Macedonian in 2001. Due to the negative impact of the privatization process, unemployment increased consistently. Many Macedonians saw their possible salvation from the poor living standards in the more developed Western European or overseas countries. The visa regime and strict criteria of entrance by the economically more advantaged countries such as the EU could not prevent this new wave of migration. On the contrary, it forced people to cross borders illegally or to remain undocumented in the host countries.

Macedonia is not just a country characterized by a long history of migration. It is also a country, which remains deeply divided along ethnic lines. Paul Robert Magosci (1993) defines Macedonia as one of the most problematic and “complex ethno-linguistic areas left to the Ottoman Empire after the Treaty of Berlin in 1878” (p.87). In his *Historical Atlas of Central Europe*, Magosci (1993) considers that there were nine different ethnic groups living on this territory: Macedonian Slavs, Turks, Albanians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Serbs, Vlachs, Jews and Roma, making up almost two million people (p.87).

Today, Macedonia has a total population of 2,022,547 people and there are seven ethnic groups living in the Republic: Macedonians (64.18 percent), Albanians (25.17 percent), Turks (3.85 percent), Roma (2.66 percent), Serbs (1.78 percent), Bosniacs (0.84 percent) and Vlachs (0.48 percent) ("Census Data", 2002, pp.171-176).

All minorities, particularly the Albanians, contested the status of the minorities according to the Preamble of the Macedonian Constitution of 1991: ..."Macedonia is constituted as a national state of the Macedonian people in which complete civil equality and permanent citizenships guaranteed to the Macedonians alongside with Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, Roma and other nationalities living in the Republic of Macedonia…” (The Preamble as quoted in *Analysis of the Interethnic Relations*, 2009, p.147).

Internal ethnic instability marked the whole decade of the 1990s. The violent conflicts in the former Yugoslav republics transmitted insecurity and fear that Macedonia could experience the same and, eventually, it did in 2001. The situation appeased gradually
after the Ohrid Framework Agreement was signed and implemented. However, discrepancy and ethnic segregation in the society can be still observed.

This essay focuses on the migration patterns of the two major ethnic groups from Macedonia. More precisely, it investigates whether their migration patterns reflect the country’s present ethnic divisions and whether migration studies can shed new light on the roots of the divisions in Macedonian society.

For a deeper analysis of ethnic migration in the period after the independence of the republic, I conducted an empirical research in Macedonia between May and July 2009. My research is based on interviews and questionnaires. I collected primary data from two groups of migrants: ethnic Macedonians and Albanians from Skopje, independent of their country of migration. My sample involved 23 Macedonian and 21 Albanian migrants and their families. The two groups are chosen as major ethnic groups in Macedonia. In particular, with these interviews, I investigated:

- Differences and similarities of the motives of migration of ethnic Macedonians and Albanians;
- Patterns of segregation in regard to destination countries;
- Differences and similarities of individual ‘migration projects’ and their status experienced abroad;
- Interaction of Macedonian and Albanian migrants abroad;
- Conservation and practices of religion and traditions of the migrants and their relationship with the homeland.

In a recent study of the Center for Research and Policy Making on the general profile of the Macedonian migrant, Daskalovski, Kostovska, Bimbilovski and Risteska (2007) confirm that the contemporary Macedonian migrant is generally either ethnic Albanian or Macedonian (pp. 32-35). This was an additional reason why I decided to concentrate on these two groups only. Skopje was chosen for reasons both of pragmatic feasibility and because it best reflects the ethnical structure of the Republic of Macedonia. Moreover, the capital Skopje was selected as a more multiethnic city of Macedonia than other cities or regions in
Macedonia, because Skopje does not follow particularly evident migration pattern. Finally, the level of education among ethnic groups from Skopje is more balanced due to the many education opportunities the capital offers.

The available statistics (Daskalovski et al., 2007) tell us that the majority (67.6 percent) of Macedonian migrants are aged between 19 and 29 years-old; three-quarter are single, 16.2 percent are married, 8.1 percent divorced; most migrants have only secondary education (59.5 percent) versus only 5.4 percent with university degree; the majority of Macedonian migrants have no significant working experience and up to 78.4 percent of them leave their home for the first time when they migrate abroad (p.33). Almost 60 percent of Macedonian migrants are males (Daskalovski et al., 2007), although the percentage of female migrants (40.5 percent) from Macedonia is the highest among the Balkan countries (Janevska, 2001). Janevska and Ivanovska (2007) argue that according to the censuses in 1994 and 2002 women in Macedonia have participated in both external and internal migration than men (pp. 211-234).

Numerous are the push-factors which have prompted the new migration flows of Macedonian citizens. In the above mentioned study of the Macedonian migrant’s profile, up to 35.1 percent of the migrants expressed that ethnic segregation was a reason to leave the country (Daskalovski et al., 2007, p.32). However, economic instability remains the main reason for departure: 56.8 percent identified poor living standards and unemployment as a reason for departing; almost 60 percent of them were unemployed prior to the departure, and among these 10.8 percent had already been unemployed for five to ten years (Daskalovski et al., 2007, p.32).

Ethnic Macedonians have somehow overcome the pattern of pechalba in the last two decades. Their migration is characterized by new challenges and follows the world developments and the waves of globalization. Since transition strongly affected the education system, many young Macedonians saw in the possibility of schooling abroad also as a way of escaping the Macedonian reality. For some individuals, the migration project was a pursuit of a specific university degree not available in the homeland, for others, education abroad was
seen as the only possibility of experiencing life in a foreign and more developed country. Schooling abroad was the reason for migration of 39.13 percent of the interviewed Macedonian migrants; three out of 23 Macedonians used a study visa i.e. enrolled to a University with the only objective to migrate. In the Yugoslav period, students had the possibility to apply for many student exchange programmes within the federation and abroad as well. In contrast, Macedonian students during the first years of transition had very limited possibilities to enjoy such programmes. As a non-EU member state, Macedonian students cannot yet benefit completely from the EU student exchange programs (Tempus, Erasmus, and Socrates). On the other hand, as part of a country with lower-middle income (Docquier & Marfouk, 2005, pp.171-176) Macedonian students have the possibility to apply for scholarships to many world-established universities in the wider world. Moreover, some scholarships are remunerative enough to cover expenses and permit even the saving of some money. A Macedonian female migrant who left Macedonia at the age of 16 remembers:

I have always wanted to study abroad. My parents did not have the possibility to finance me, so I needed a scholarship. The announcement for this scholarship was offering two possibilities: Italy and Norway. I chose Norway by chance or maybe because I felt Italy was too close to Macedonia. (E. Stojanovska, personal communication, June 14, 2009)

As far as Albanian migrants are concerned, this trend of migration for educational reasons is less pronounced and it only started to spread during the last few years. A male Albanian migrant in Italy considers that economic discrepancy among ethnic Albanians is large. In his opinion, only a few individuals have enriched themselves in contrast to a majority of Albanian families, who face low living standards and have difficulties of finding employment (B. Bejta, personal communication, June 5, 2009). According to the World Bank, 35 percent of the total labour force in Macedonia was unemployed in 2007 (www.worldbank.org.mk). The high unemployment rate in Macedonia contributed to an even higher level of migration caused by economic reasons. An Albanian male migrant, doing himself a research on migration in Italy, explained to me that, frequently, more than one
family member is forced to migrate in individual families. Once one member has settled down in the new country and has found a steady job, possibilities for other members to follow open up. Sometimes, if one migrant cannot prolong his stay abroad, perhaps for reasons of expiring documents, another family member would go to replace him. In that way, the job is not lost and remittances are guaranteed (L. Gashi, personal communication, May 5, 2009). This pattern of ‘replacement migration’ (Lazaridis, 2000, note 10, p. 75) was mostly characteristic for the 1990s when the difficult transition and hard economic conditions forced people to make sacrifices for the family welfare. After 2000, Macedonia faced a new form of transition and its population as well. Patterns of migration among the Albanian population changed considerably. Youth migration is now more accentuated and the trend of labour migration and sending remittances has gradually decreased (Bashkim Bakiu, personal communication, May 29, 2009). These differences described are reflected in the patterns of remittances of migrants sent to sustain families at home. 47.9 percent of ethnic Macedonian families receive remittances from a family member working or studying abroad; the percentage of Albanian families receiving remittance is higher and amounts to 72.8 percent (www.balkan-monitor.eu).

**Family reunion** as part of migration patterns abroad is characteristic for both Macedonians and Albanians. Reunions can be husband-wife to single families (wife, husband and their children) or extended family types. Sometimes this category of migration can be a prolonged process for legal reasons. From what emerged in my research, there are no precise rules how much time it might last; each country has its own legislation. It also depends from many other individual factors: if the migrant already knew somebody in the destination country, if he had already visited the country before etc. A particular example, though not exceptional, is the case of the Aleksandar Vitanov’s family, who migrated to Melbourne, Australia (personal communication, May 30, 2009). Their migration project started almost 40 years ago when Aleksandar’s uncle decided to search for better life opportunities on the distant continent. 11 years ago his two-years-older brother followed his example, and he
became the new link and guarantee for the rest of the family. The next to migrate of the family was his mother, in 2007, and, finally, Aleksandar in 2008. As he explained to me:

I was the last to join the family. We all are in Melbourne now. Finally, Vitanov family left Skopje for good. It was our life project, to move out. Here it is great, we are more than satisfied. I am on the other side of the world and I can still not believe it. (personal communication, May 30, 2009).

A more individual reason, characteristic for both Macedonians and Albanians, who I interviewed (but probably a universal phenomenon for youth migration) is an adventurous spirit. It is a distinctive for the young and it does not know ethnic barriers. The attraction of the unknown, typical teenage rebellion during the period of puberty, a feeling of suffocation from the Skopje routines and a general desire to travel motivated many Macedonian and Albanian ‘Ulysseses’ to cross the borders. While this finding might not seem surprising for the urban ethnic Macedonian youth, who I have described as modern in comparison with the Albanian family cultures in this thesis, this result does suggest that also the Albanians are participating in global youth phenomena. My finding is supported by the research of the anthropologist Nick Mai (2004), who identified hedonism as a main motive of Albanian youth migration for neighbouring Albania.

Finally, political reasons did not emerge as factors of migration on either ethnic side from my research, although many interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with the Macedonian governments and parties since independence in 1991. However, political insecurity is the basis for further economic instability, and therefore an indirect instigator of migration from Macedonia. The failure to join NATO in 2008 as well as the slow development of Macedonia towards the EU, may cause additional discontent among the population and instigate future migration flows.

The choice of the destination country is based upon a greater variety of factors than discussed so far. Most of the migrants (37,8 percent) perceive their initial host country as only a temporary destination; they move usually from their first destination to a more permanent destination country, elsewhere; 18,9 percent of Macedonian migrants move to a country
where Macedonian citizens already live; 13,5 percent emigrate due to family reunion and only 10,8 percent select the host country randomly (Daskalovski et al., 2007, p.33). In regard to the familiarity with the local language as a motive, migrants from Macedonia tend to migrate rather prepared, i.e. with a basic or good level of knowledge of the host country’s language. Only 13,5 percent do not speak the language at all (Daskalovski et al., 2007, p.34).

An escape from unemployment and poor living standards in Macedonia is seen as best offered by the following, traditional destination countries: Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Austria and Holland in Western Europe, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland in Scandinavia; and USA, Canada and Australia overseas. Traditionally, Albanians and Macedonians have been divided in regard to the typical destination countries. In general, Macedonians are more prone to migrate to overseas countries, whilst Albanians are concentrated in Europe, especially in Germany and Switzerland. In the following I explore, based on my interviews, how this division has, or has not, been upheld in recent years.

**Germany and Switzerland**, in fact, have been the host countries of Yugoslav gastarbeiters, a migration flow which saw many Albanians participating. Many migrants already have some relatives in Germany or Switzerland who went there with the Yugoslav temporary work agreements and then settled permanently. In that way, some of the interviewed migrants to these countries have already had the opportunity to visit the country prior to the realization of their migration project. In fact, these visits have usually influenced their final decision to migrate to Germany or Switzerland. Perceived as particularly organized, Germany has always been seen as the country offering the better jobs and life conditions. B. Xhaferi has migrated to Western Europe in the early 1990s. Typically, he chose Germany because, as he says, ‘it is a more open, developed country with better job opportunities’ (personal communication, May 25, 2009).

Besides job opportunities, in the 1990s Germany provided camps for the refugees from the Balkans. Many Albanians from Macedonia saw the advantageous German asylum policy as a possibility to start a new life abroad. Among my interviewees, two migrants have used the fake asylum claim as an option to migrate abroad. All of them are of Albanian
ethnicity and they claimed to be Kosovo war refugees. As one of my interviewee told me, “besides offering a safe place to stay in the beginning, these camps provided help with the search for jobs etc” (A.Kadare, personal communication, June 17, 2009).

In the last decade, Germany became a favourite destination country for ethnic Macedonian students as well. Education in the German language was free until recently and after completing your studies, you gain the right to another annual visa, if you would want to find a job and stay in Germany. With regard to Switzerland, Zunun Zunumi (2008), PhD Professor at Faculty of Social Sciences (FON) in Skopje, noted that illegal migration to this country occur less than in other Western European countries. As he argues, this is due to the strict immigration laws, which the country has adopted (p.106). Among my interviewees, three out of 21 Albanians migrated to Switzerland in comparison to none of the 23 interviewed Macedonian migrants.

England, and more precisely its capital London, is a favourite destination for young Macedonians. The possibility to obtain easily a visa as a babysiter ting encouraged particularly many girls to choose this country. The link with this country is the English language, spoken by almost every young men and women in Macedonia. In regard to London, a Macedonian female migrant considers that its multiculturalism makes a migrant feel less foreign or a second class citizen. She adds: “work opportunities are not the same as in Germany, but physical and part time jobs are still easy to find” (A. Soleva, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

As mentioned previously in this work, overseas countries have been the traditional destination places of ethnic Macedonians since early 20th century. It is in these countries that Macedonian migrants have founded the first Macedonian Orthodox churches in the Diaspora, thematic clubs, newspapers and publications in the Macedonian language. USA and Australia are favorite destination countries particularly for young couples, for people willing to build a career and for students in search of specific studies that are not available at home. Many of the migrants, which I interviewed, talk about America with a special energy, as some of them still believe in the American dream. For example, the case of Krste Karagjozoski, an
ethnic Macedonian migrant, is quite particular, since he first had experienced the American atmosphere and working habits in the American military base in Skopje, where he has worked for several years before immigrating to the USA in 2005. He explained:

When the war ended they closed the military base and I could not cope in the Skopje day-to-day life anymore. I decided to reach my sister in New York. I applied at a university in order to get a student visa. I immediately found myself there. Now I am living and working in New York”. (personal communication, May 30, 2009).

Italy is the favourite destination country in quantitative respects, according to the latest statistics of 2008. Many reasons influence the choice of this Mediterranean country. Firstly, it is very close to Macedonia and easy to reach by many means of transport from boat to train, bus or plane. Secondly, as in other Mediterranean countries, border controls in the 1990s were relatively more flexible. For comparison, northern European countries had a strict immigration control since the 1970s. Finally, the ‘underground economy’ in Italy has stimulated illegal migration and, to a certain extent, the trafficking of women (Robinson, 2000, p.105). Other reasons could be the favourable climate and the particular cultural ties Italy had with all the Yugoslav republics. Italian language, cuisine and culture have always been ranked highly in the general opinion of Macedonians. A young married couple living in Rome, Italy told me:

We chose Italy for the job opportunities and the possibilities to continue our education. We had visited the country already and we knew the language. We simply like this country. It is close to Macedonia and close to our people’s mentality. It is a nice place to raise our children”. (I. Panov, personal communication, May 28, 2009).

Very important here is also the fact that migration to Italy does appear least ethnically biased of all countries discussed. In comparison to other countries, it is a relatively recent destination choice for migrants from Macedonia. The fact that it is a favourite destination for Albanians from Albania may influence the choice for Albanians from Macedonia as well. Moreover, it offers various job opportunities, although in the last years to a reduced extent.
Although in limited number, the welfare of the Scandinavian countries has attracted a considerable number of migrants from Macedonia in the last decades as well. Among them, Sweden is the preferred destination. However, perceptions of mentality and hard climate conditions still keep Macedonian migrants away from these Northern countries.

Asian and African countries are rather exotic destinations for Macedonian migrants. The only available data I have found about these two continents are from the 1994 census, when 210 Macedonian migrants were registered for Asia and 78 for Africa (www.iselenickistrani.gov.mk). Among all 44 interviewees, one young married couple migrated to South Africa.

If we should classify migration experiences as positive or negative we would make a mistake. The realization of migration projects and migration per se are complex in many ways: from the motives to the country of destination, from legal/illega l ways of migration to personal choices and chances. These and many other factors make such a classification an almost impossible task. Therefore, when we add the variable, ethnicity, we can hardly generalize, particularly given the restricted number of participants in my micro-study.

According to existing studies (Daskalovski et al., 2007), more than half of the migrants from Macedonia (54.1 percent) cross the borders of the host country illegally; many migrants enter the country with a touristic visa and 32.4 percent of them are visa so-called ‘overstayers’, who remain undocumented after the first entry (p.34). This latter migration strategy applies both to Macedonian and Albanian migrants. Most visa overstayers are female and they are less likely to be rejected than men, when applying for asylum; only 2.7 percent of the migrants from Macedonia have legal work permits (Daskalovski et al., 2007, p.34).

If we start from the previous conclusions of this work, i.e. that ethnic Albanians still migrate more for economic reasons than ethnic Macedonians, we can easily conclude that their migration experiences must be, consequently, more difficult. I found the tone of their voices while telling their story, particularly the reasons of migration, slightly sadder than my Macedonian interviewees. This impression was more accentuated in those cases where migration was the only available choice because of the difficult economic situation of the
family at home. Moreover, if the migration was illegal in the first place, people do not seem to like talking about it proudly. However, this is not a general rule. As mentioned above, labour migration among the Albanian population decreased as a motive in the last decade, at least in regard to the urban population. For example, the brother of B.Xhaferi who has migrated to Germany told me:

At the beginning it was very difficult; he had problems with the lodging. He was sleeping in a ‘Heim’, a sort of room with more people. However, he was accepted very well. He adapted soon to the new environment thanks to his communicative character. He is very brave and hard working. (personal communication, May 25, 2009).

In regard to labour migration, the following differences emerged from my research. On the one hand, Albanian migrants appear to have a more precisely defined migration project than the Macedonians. This is to work for some years and accumulate some capital to start a business in Macedonia upon the eventual return. In contrast, Macedonian labour migrants tend to build a career in the destination country. On the other hand, Macedonian labour migrants tend to migrate to countries where they already have relatives or acquaintances, whilst the Albanians (amongst my interviewees) in several cases have chosen the country according to the work possibilities offered there, rather than family ties. When it comes to the realization of their migration projects, with almost no hesitation the majority of my interviewees of either ethnicity claimed to have achieved more than they had originally anticipated.

Certain ethnically motivated inter-social barriers present in Macedonian society at home can also be found reflected abroad among the migrants themselves. However, the transnational experience makes some migrants more open-minded and reduces such constraints. In order to get an answer, I asked whether the migrants interacted only within their ethnic group, or beyond. Language emerged as a key motivating factor to make acquaintances in the first months of the migration experience, especially when migrants have a low level of knowledge of the host country’s language. Therefore, they prefer to share
apartments with migrants from the same country or a nationality closer to theirs. In such way, they can easily understand each other, they share the same problems and can support each other and therefore, they would feel more secure. So does this possibility of regional interaction among migrants abroad help unite Albanians and ethnic Macedonians in the same situation abroad?

The responses to my questionnaire suggest that ethnic Macedonians abroad tend to interact the most with migrants from neighbouring Bulgaria and Serbia. Besides the shared Orthodox religion, almost the same language and perceived mentality are the main connecting factors. Ethnic Albanians, who communicate with Albanians from Kosovo and Albania, follow the same pattern. However, sometimes, the numerous work engagements do not leave the migrant space for leisure time and friendship. This is particularly characteristic for labour migrants, whose preoccupation is to earn money and send it back home. There also exist cases of people avoiding their own ethnicity in order to better integrate into the host society, or for specific security purposes. This fits both some of my Macedonian and Albanian interlocutors. The brother of an Albanian migrant in Germany told me: “My brother avoids Albanian clubs. He says that Albanians cause often problems there and he simple does not want to be involved in them” (I. Fazliu. 12, personal communication, June 16, 2009).

The responses to my questionnaire suggest division and segregation appear more characteristic for the first years of the migration process. The more time passes, the better the migrants accommodate their lives in the new society and among its people. When new and different cultures enter into their lives, religion, identity, origin and ethnicity can acquire a secondary position.

A study of Hamit Xhaferi (2003), Professor of Albanian Literature at the Tetovo State University, on the factors influencing the preservation or the loss of the national identity of the migrants from Macedonia, suggests that younger migrants and those who have married in the host country with a native acclimatize better than others (p.88). According to my personal experience as student-migrant, students are already in an international environment, they learn the language faster, so the process of adaptation seems very natural for them. As
Xhaferi (2003) argues, those migrants with a native partner seem to accept easily traditions and have more possibilities to interact with native friends of the partner (pp.90-91). According to the personal observations of G. Gavrilovski, a Macedonian migrant living in New Jersey, USA, both Macedonian and Albanian second generations migrants have barely an idea of their homeland. Most of them do not speak the language nor have developed and idea of Macedonian/Albanian identity. They are aware of their country of origin, but feel part of the country they were born. The generational change in interethnic contact abroad is exemplified in the following statement of the same migrant:

Here in New Jersey, everybody hangs out with his own people. The Macedonians that have come here more recently have more conservative understandings. In contrast, second generation Albanians and Macedonians do associate. If a Macedonian girl dates and Albanian, for them it is normal, but for us it is still a taboo. (personal communication, May 28, 2009).

The word Diaspora comes from the Greek language and has the meaning of dispersion (Ibrahimi, 2004). According to Mustafa Ibrahimi, Professor from the South East European University (SEEU) in Tetovo, it refers to the distribution of a population in different territories outside the motherland, which is not compact enough to form a new entity (2004). In his study on The Linguistic and Socio-Psicological Problems of the Albanians in the Diaspora, Ibrahimi (2004) argues that the newly created community is mainly language-based and migrants keep links with the motherland, physically or idealistically, through their memories. Some Diasporas keep strong identity distinctions; others assimilate within the new society more quickly (p.60). The foundation of social cohesion for each Diaspora is the attempt to conserve the language, identity, religion and traditions, which define each particular ethnic group. Given this, it is not surprising that ethnic Macedonians and Albanians have constructed divided Diasporas and communities abroad and as such will be treated in my work.

Regarding the ethnic Macedonian Diaspora, after World War II migration to overseas countries was observed as being of lower intensity than before (Avirovic, 2010, p. 28). In the
1950s, the preoccupation of the **Macedonian Diaspora** was Macedonian national patriotism. The Macedonian Orthodox Church abroad was also developed. The first Macedonian church outside the borders of Macedonia, “St. George”, was built in 1959 in Melbourne. This coincided with the tendency of Macedonian emigration towards Australia, which had its peak between 1960 and 1975 and it is prior the proclamation of the autocephalous Macedonian Orthodox Church in 1967 in Ohrid (two hundred years after the abolishment of the Ohrid archbishopric in 1767). The Macedonian historian Katardziev (1986) notes that, in 1986, there existed more than 30 Macedonian churches abroad and several monasteries (pp.182-185). Today there are almost 200 Macedonian churches around the world and there exist many cultural associations, which are mostly concentrated in the overseas countries. In Europe, the Macedonian Diaspora has established churches in Germany and associations in the Netherlands.

From the post-war period originate also the first Macedonian overseas publications in both Macedonian and English languages. The newspapers “Makedonska Iskra” (Macedonian Spark, 1946-1957); “Ilindenski vesnik” (Ilinden Newspaper, 1975-1980); “Makedonski pechalbari” (Macedonian Labour Migrants, 1974) are some examples of the Macedonian press in Australia, Canada and USA. Subject of interest of the Macedonian press abroad is definitely the Macedonian Diaspora and from the titles alone the deep emotional link with the name and tradition of the motherland can be noted (Katardziev, 1986).

In addition to stemming from the necessity to safeguard a language, identity, religion and traditions, these facts suggest that the development of the Macedonian Diaspora is also in correlation with the preservation of traditions as part of nationalist political interests that are institutionalized abroad. As Katardziev (1986, p.190) explains, “The history of the Macedonian emigration abroad is very closely connected with the Macedonian liberation struggle”. Similar as the **Albanian Diaspora** played an important role for the wider Albanian nation-state building process (Malcom, 2002, p.72). Malcom (2002), Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, points out the importance of the Pan-Albanian Federation of America ‘Vatra’, whose activities, such as publications, influenced the raising of the Albanian
consciousness in the early 20th century (p.70). According to the Albanian author from Kosovo, Emin Kabashi (2003), the foundation of the first Albanian colonies in both Europe and USA during the first decades of the 19th century, had influence in the development of the Albanian national awareness (p.141). According to Mustafa Ibrahimi (2004), the Albanian people distinguish a historical and a new Diaspora (p.61). The historical Diaspora is a consequence of the migrations of ethnic Albanian populations during the last seven to eight centuries (Ibrahimi, 2004, p.60). One of the oldest communities abroad of the ethnic Albanian population are the Arbëresh in Southern Italy and the Diaspora founded by the Arvanites in Greece (Ibrahimi, 2004, p.61). A large part of the Albanian population, which settled in Turkey after World War II, originates from Macedonia. It is estimated that 400,000 Albanians have moved from Yugoslavia to Turkey during the period from 1953 to 1966 (Z. Neziri as quoted in Ibrahimi, 2004, p. 61). Other historical Albanian Diasporas are present in Croatia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and many Arab countries. The new Albanian Diaspora is spread in Western Europe, USA and Australia and includes migration flows of ethnic Albanians from the 20th and 21st century (Ibrahimi, 2004, p.62).

Given such examples, the existence of a nationalist Diaspora politics in both the Macedonian and the Albanian Diasporas is observable. However, my intention in this section is not to make a comparison between the respective Diasporas, but to investigate whether ethnic Albanian and Macedonian migrants from Macedonia participate in the activities of the respective ethnic Diaspora, particularly or not. In this context, I would mention that the activities of the Macedonian Diaspora today are not exclusively mono-ethnic anymore. In fact, among the recent activities of the Macedonian Diaspora Coordination Body, such as publications of textbooks in the Macedonian language for the children living in the Diaspora and organizations of sports tournaments with participants from several countries of the Macedonian Diaspora, there are future projects which include the publication of a textbook in the Albanian language for the ethnic Albanian migrants from Macedonia as well.

The Clubs and the cultural organizations of the Macedonian Diaspora, as well as the publications in the native language and religious sanctuaries are ways of keeping traditions
and religion alive. As described further above, entire colonies of ethnic Macedonians or Albanians developed abroad. Many times, migrants were relatives or coming from the same region. In such communities, it is easier and more efficient to communicate, celebrate holidays and preserve a nationally or ethnically distinct identity (Xhaferi, 2003, p.89). In his study on identity preservation of migrants from Macedonia, Xhaferi (2003) suggests that a full cultural assimilation with the host culture is more characteristic for second-generation migrants, especially for children who sometimes may even feel ashamed if their parents speak the native language (p.88). As mentioned above, migrants with a spouse from the host country tend to socially assimilate the most. Their children usually do not have a good knowledge of Macedonian or Albanian, or they do not speak the language at all (Xhaferi, 2003, pp.90-91). The same pattern was noted among my interviewees, regardless of their ethnicity. For example, the brother of an Albanian migrant to Germany told me:

My brother usually comes to Skopje for a 10 days vacation, but leaves within 5 days. When he went to Germany, he was very young. He is married to a German woman, so his friends are all Germans. He has become a ‘Shvaba’ himself, says Ilir for his brother. (personal communication, June 16, 2009).

Religion and tradition are important values of preserving home identities when abroad. In most countries, both Macedonians and Albanians have the possibility to visit churches or mosques. When such possibility is not given, for example, Macedonians go to Orthodox Serbian, Russian or equivalent churches. However, working duties and dynamic life does not leave much space for religious rituals. From what resulted in my research, only most important festivities and religious holidays are celebrated: Orthodox Christmas and Easter for Macedonians and Ramadan Bayram for Albanians. Usually, migrants celebrate through a dinner at home, as a reason to gather with friends. It is also a possibility to show to foreigners some traditions from Macedonia, to share customs and culture. In many cases, migrants celebrate the religious holidays of the host countries. The same applies to traditions.

In the past, the existence of pre-existing ethnic and kin-connections abroad has previously much determined the choice of destination. In contrast, the migrants involved in
my case study confirmed that they do not participate much anymore in the cultural and religious manifestation organized by the respective Diaspora. This suggests that Macedonian migration today has been transformed into a more individual mission, in which migrants tend to accomplish their projects and integrate better into the new society rather than aiming to preserve the traditions of their particular ethnic group.

The relationship migrants have with the homeland varies from case to case. Family is the most important tie between migrants and homeland. 32.4 percent of all migrants from Macedonia send remittances: female migrants send less remittances, or less frequently, than their male counterparts do (Daskalovski et al., 2007); one third or 33 percent consider remittances very important for their families at home (p.34). As mentioned above, remittances are more characteristic for the Albanians population, although this phenomenon has decreased during the last decade.

When asked about their homeland, a majority of migrants interviewed assumed a nostalgic tone of their voices. For most interviewed Albanian migrants, Macedonia represents their home without any doubt. Only those migrants, who have left the country before the Yugoslav dissolution, or during the early 1990s, see their host country as the new home exclusively, because their homeland, Yugoslavia, has disappeared. The host country is the new home also for those who have founded their new families abroad. The brother of a female Albanian migrant to Germany explained to me that home should be considered the place where your family lives. In the case of his sister, as home is regarded where her husband and her children are. Most of the Macedonian migrants consider their country of origin as their home. However, some of them have rapidly acclimatized to the new circumstances and the experiences offered by the new country makes them feel already at home as well. After a moment of hesitation, Krste Karadjozoski, a Macedonian originating from Skopje, told me: “New York is now my home. Even when I was this summer in Skopje, I did not felt completely at home. But, on the way back when I saw New York from the plane, I felt relieved: here is my heart, here is my home” (personal communication, May 30, 2009).
Although, many of the migrants interviewed are content with their new lives, the possibility of returning to Macedonia was not excluded. Most migrants feel nostalgic and miss many things from Macedonia. Albanian migrants, in general, tend to miss their family, friends and Macedonia’s relatively quiet life. Ethnic Macedonian migrants seem to be even more nostalgic than Albanian migrants in this sense are. They miss the Macedonian cuisine, the sun and climate, the city of Ohrid and Macedonian nature. Here again they refer to the social life as known at home. Societies that are more anonymous, cosmopolitan cities and hard work do not leave much space for a wealth of social interactions. Many times migrants complained in my interviews that “here abroad there is no life at all”. In this sense, they also refer to a particular form of freedom. In Macedonia, people are not yet slaves of their work, life is more relaxed and even without high earnings, people can often spend weekends in the nearby mountain or at the Ohrid Lake. Macedonian fresh fruits and vegetables are also highly ranked among the things migrants miss, together with homemade lunches and grandmother’s pie.

Besides all this “irreplaceable” things, the migrants were aware of the difficult economic situation in Macedonia. They are somehow sorry to have betrayed their own country; they follow the news and events in Macedonia as technology today allows simultaneous access to online newspaper or TV news abroad similar as in Macedonia. Older migrants of my sample tended to be more nostalgic, whilst the younger migrants miss less the homeland. However, the majority of them also complained about the conditions in Macedonia: the hard living condition, high level of unemployment, low salaries, corruption, inoperative laws, limited possibilities of prosperity, working carriers etc. As a young successful Macedonian migrant in France stated: “Although I miss our tomato and paprika from the market, other things here make me satisfied and, in the end, they are more important’ (V.Cvetkovski, personal communication, May 29, 2009).

Therefore, there are different aspects of freedom associated with migration. A.Pavlovska has left Macedonia at the age of 19 in 2001. She has completed her studies in Germany; then she has migrated to the USA and now she works in Brussels, while
considering where to pursue her PhD studies. In regard to the situation in Macedonia, she considers it negative due to many aspects: from low living standards and salaries to corruption and inoperative bureaucracy. In addition to all these reasons, she thinks Macedonian society is still close-minded and ethnically divided:

I do not want people to look at me oddly just because I am married to a Muslim man. This is another reason why I would not come back to my country. There is a Bosnian proverb, which says ‘the full lives where he was born, the smart-where he likes it (personal communication, June 20, 2009).

**Conclusions**

The ethnic division within the Macedonian society can be noted on various levels. Besides the political and economic, the social division affects mostly people’s everyday life. All ethnicities work together, share common spaces, and interact among themselves; there is respect of religious holidays and each other’s tradition and culture, but yet division is somehow still present. As one of my interviewees said ‘the Macedonian society is interesting and difficult to define: there are no concrete divisions, but there is either no cohesion’ (L.Gashi, personal communication, May 29, 2009). Furthermore, he notes how strange is the fact that we are all living in the same society but we do not have a common place to go out. There is no Albanian music in a Macedonian bar and vice versa. In the past years, ethnic Macedonians started to be more open and interested in Albanian culture. Many young Macedonians study Albanian, especially after it became second official language in many municipalities including Skopje. Understanding each other brings people closer and the knowledge of the Albanian language has lately become required in the labor market.

Given all these explanations and considering the fact that the history of Macedonian migration has been marked by the importance of ethnicity, we cannot expect to have a uniformed pattern of migration from Macedonia. The only link of these two groups with different language, culture, history, tradition and religion is their shared homeland. Once far from Macedonia, these differences tend to become more emphasized, even though also individual ways of bridging divides that are still unusual at home could also be identified.
There is still no general understanding of the concept of Macedonian citizens independent of ethnic divides. Macedonia is the common homeland, but the people are divided among Macedonians versus Albanians from Macedonia, Orthodox versus Muslim. Different ethnicity also leads migrants to choose one or the other Diaspora. Among my interviewees, none of the migrants declared to attend cultural and religious events organized by another Diaspora, but their own. However, the majority of them do not participate in those events at all. Consequently, new migrants experience rather cosmopolitanism than patriotism.

In sum, migration can help overcoming ethnic barriers present in the homeland, but the idea of divisions remains somehow still present in Macedonian people’s minds, as far as my research suggests. At the end, it is difficult to draw a general conclusion, because individual cases can always, theoretically, represent one or the other extreme, depending on various external factors. Since the Republic of Macedonia is the connecting link the migrants I interviewed have in common, it is here where a potential lies that the division could further diminish. As a male Albanian migrant in Italy said: “My friends here are of all ethnicities from Macedonia and ex Yugoslavia. No matter how much enemies we are at home, here even the enemy becomes your friend. Most probably we feel nostalgic for the same thing” (L.Elezi, personal communication, May 30, 2009).

In conclusion, my explorations of migration motive, impact at home, choices of destination, experiences abroad and links amongst each other and to the home country, resulted not as differentiated as it was expected. Although differences in the respective patterns of migration of Albanian and Macedonia migrants still exist on various levels, such as motives of migration-only partially and destination countries-to a lesser extent than previous migration periods, this research displayed findings that the two ethnic groups tend to have more commonalities than differences in their respective patterns of migration. In fact, the general trend of the previous migration periods, migration of ethnic Macedonians to overseas countries and ethnic Albanians to Western Europe was only partially confirmed by my investigation. My own calculation show that 26,09 percent of the interviewed Macedonian migrants migrated to overseas countries in comparison to 14,29 percent of the interviewed
Albanian migrants. In regard to Europe, 73,91 percent of the Macedonian versus 85,71 percent of the Albanian migrants chose one of its countries. In particular, my research showed that Italy emerged as common destination country with respectively 28,57 percent of Albanians and 26,09 percent Macedonians migrating there.

Finally, an important feature that emerged in my research is the low participation of female Macedonia Albanians in the external migration. Namely, only 19,05 percent of my Albanian interviewees were female in comparison with 39,13 percent of female Macedonian migrants. However, this finding was not emphasized in my case study, due to the fact that the analysis of gender, as a migration aspect, was disregarded in my research.
Reference


(according to the territorial organization of the Republic of Macedonia, 2004), Skopje.


i *Pechalbarstvo* is a derivate word from *pechalba* which means ‘affliction’, ‘sorrow’ whilst today its use has been extended into the common language in the literary sense of ‘earning money abroad’.

ii All names but those given with complete name and surname have been changed upon request of the interviewees.

iii The term ‘replacement migration’ is used to explain the patterns of migration of the Filipino female working migrants in Greece by Gabriella Lazaridis.

iv A list of all Macedonian churches and organization was provided by the United Macedonian Diaspora. For more information visit [www.umdiaspora.org](http://www.umdiaspora.org)

v ‘Shvaba’ is a pejorative denomination for Germans in the Balkans. It corresponds to the English ‘boche’ or ‘jerry’.