

**CROSSING BORDERS: CHANGING ROLES, CHANGING IDENTITIES
(TEMPORARY MIGRATION AS A FORM OF SOCIO-CULTURAL
EXCHANGE IN THE ENLARGED EU)**

Part one: Theoretical Frame and Main Research Questions.

1. Theoretical Frame

1.1. Approaches towards migration

The EU accession process is a part of the wider processes of globalization, which are reshaping the relationship between the national, the local, and the global, and which present a challenge for all borders. One of the major features of these processes is the increased mobility - it becomes a norm in all its forms, including enormous migration flows. In the past 25 years the number of migrants doubled. In 2000 more than 175 million people worldwide became migrants, of which 86 million people, including refugees were labor migrants.

The increased migration flows resulted in increase of literature on migration. But, as Claire Wallace remarks: "A frequent complaint about the migration literature is that it is lacking in theory. It is mainly descriptive in nature and this is seen as a drawback" (Wallace and Stola, 2001: 46). Most of the editions of the International Organization of Migration (IOM) describe the legal regulations in most countries from the viewpoint of protection of the rights of the migrant groups on the one hand, and on the other - they describe the migration flows. **The explanatory models include mostly economic factors, and of course, in the case of the refugees – political repression.** The main focus of the studies falls mostly on the **labour migration**. Claire Wallace presents in brief some of the most popular theories (in fact she evaluates them as quasi theories) in explaining migration flows: "According to classical economic theory, at the macro level differences in wages between sending and receiving countries are seen as the main factor which will explain migration, with the assumption that when these wages have equalized, migration will cease. At the micro level the neo classical idea of rational economic actors assumes that individuals will calculate the costs and benefits of migrating and will do so mainly in order to enhance their personal wealth. A similar style of theorizing applies also to demographic imbalances, arguing that places with high density of population and high birth rates will naturally expand into places with low population density or places with declining birth rates, according to a kind of hydraulic principle" (ibid: 47).

My impression is that these theories impose a certain economic and demographic reductionism, reducing everything to a mere economic survival and wealth enhancement, neglecting the whole complexity of factors, which determine the difficult choice to leave ones home place. It is this focus on the economic side of things, which by definition is calculative, that leads to the presumption, that one always makes ones choices rationally, i.e. to the rational choice theory. And the limitations of this theory have been demonstrated even by neo-institutional economists, such as Douglas North /North, 2001/.

In their attempts to overcome economic reductionism, sociologists are trying to introduce a more complex model, aimed at explaining the migration flows by taking into consideration both subjective migration motives and objective factors, causing it – **the model of “push and pull factors”** (Massey et al, 1998). It is true the picture gets complicated, but in the end the focus falls back on labour migration or on political refuge from the country, both of which are caused by factors external to people, which somehow automatically move them from one place to another. Even the studies of migration motives mechanically list and register different factors.

The other focus of the research on migration, as already mentioned, **is the study of refugees and immigrants from the viewpoint of violation of their rights**. This approach is contained in the more general approach, the **debate on citizenship**, which is gaining momentum - what happens to people's rights in a global world, how the contradiction between human rights which are supranational and the specific rights related to the nation state is resolved/ Baubock R. 1994; Cesarani D. and M. Fulbrook 1996). As a response to increasing mobility Baubock proposes the development of the concept of “transnational citizenship” (Baubock R. 1994), which is a good idea, but it is not clear how it is going to be put into practice. This approach, as opposed to the economic and sociological approaches, which claim to be unbiased and merely registering, is clearly marked by a humane normative pathos, and its problem is not in the excessive descriptiveness, but in the excessive prescriptiveness.

The third approach to **migration we find in postcolonial studies, which support the standpoint of an enlightened post-nationalism (E. Said, 1993) and investigates the vicissitudes of the cultural identity in a post-nationalist world**.

Postcolonial studies focus on the encounter of different cultures, which gives rise to new hybrid forms of cohabitation and identities. Apart from the analysis of this encounter within the specific colonial situation, the main subject of these studies are also the migration Diasporas, as bearers of cultural hybridity and as questioning the interrelation between national identity and nation-state, posing the problem of identity beyond territory. Ray Chow pays attention to the epistemological sense of the terms Diaspora and re-settlement/migration, as they create forms of knowledge, unbound to any specific territory, but go into circulation as forms of mediation (Chow R. 1993. 142). I would like to pay special attention here to Arjun Appadurai's book “Modernity at Large”. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization (1996) in which he argues that in the past few decades a general rupture in the tenor of inter-societal relations appeared due to two major and interconnected factors - media and migration- and their joint effect on the work of imagination (Appadurai, 1996: 2-3). Appadurai criticizes the classical approaches to migration, and by turning it into a part of a global trend, avoids its substantialization. The model, which he suggests is more flexible, dynamic, and more compliant with the idea of deterritorialization, and sets free different imaginary identifications, provoked by different -scapes /ethnoscapes/. The problem of identities, the self-perception of the immigrant communities within the context of assimilation by the foreign culture, is beginning to enjoy an ever greater popularity and is bound to the debates on minority rights and multiculturalism.

In the book “Migration Theory. Talking across Disciplines” (Brettell and Hollifield, 2000) a greater variety of approaches is presented, taking into account different disciplines (anthropology, demography, economic, history, law, political science, sociology) as well as different theories (rationalist, structuralist and/or functionalist, institutionalist, transnational and Eschews theory) explaining migration. The dominant theories in the field of sociology according to the editors are structuralist and/or

functionalist, in the field of anthropology – structuralist and transnational (Brettell and Hollifield, 2000: 3). The authors argue that there is a need of “bridging the canyons”, because they agree with Stephen Castles that the study of migration has to be strongly multidisciplinary in its theory and methodology (Brettell and Hollifield, 2000: 2). I agree, too, with this statement, so the approach I shall follow will combine anthropological and sociological questions keeping in mind the contemporary processes of globalization – it means transnational studies.

1.2. Migration and Mobility

I herewith outline in brief the existing approaches to the study of migration, in order to specify my views on the subject. On the whole, the above listed approaches view migration as a sustained wish to move from one place to another, in search of belonging to a new group, therefore they view immigrant communities, which have already settled down, or they focus on factors driving migrants from one country to another. **Migration is thought of as a specific type of mobility, which seeks a settled way of life, in a new, though imagined group belonging. It is an expression of some kind of static linear mobility, starting from one point and arriving at another, uprooting itself from one territory and culture and planting itself on another territory and culture. It always contains the strife to territorial “anchoring” and nostalgia of a previous belonging.**

From the viewpoint of Eastern Europe the situation looks different. After the first migrant waves at the beginning of the 90-ties of the previous century, who sought permanent refuge in the West, and especially after the Schengen list, in Bulgaria, as well as in Eastern Europe as a whole, the forms of movement, which are between mobility and migration became more popular – for example, the “suitcase vendors” crossing borders to and fro, the 3-month seasonal workers, who pretend to be tourists, the temporary labour migration, with one duration or another. **The interesting thing with temporary migration¹ is that it is permanently indecisive, temporary, because it seeks to be in two places at the same time, and it is not clear which appeal will prevail. It is torn between staying and belonging, it is twice deterritorialized – the place they stay at is incidental, a hotel; the place they belong has been abandoned.** There is a split between territory and the sense of belonging, break down of the nation-state to nation and state, as Appadurai would put it.

Of course this phenomenon is not new. It has its roots in the “gurbetchiistvo”(a Bulgarian word for people seeking /temporary/ employment outside the boundaries of their country) and the “gastarbeiters”. And it is in the comparison between the two, that the specifics of the new type of temporary migration are hidden. The “gurbetchiistvo” is not deterritorialized, it always presupposes return to ones real home, it does not contain imaginary belonging, because it (the belonging) is always one – the place from where one departs and to which later on returns. The journey is instrumental, the identity – local. It is a part of a natural cycle, it does not presuppose exchange of roles, it does not affiliate to the Others. The traditional “gurbetchiistvo” has nothing in common with the equal right rhetorics, although it probably relies on acts of humanity. Contemporary “gastarbeiters” usually end up in the industrially or already post-industrially developed western democracies, where the ideology on the rights of each individual is a norm, and the temptations of the consumer society and the western lifestyle are everywhere. As “gastarbeiters” they take up jobs that their hosts cannot or

¹ Of course there is research done on temporary migration, but my impression is that it is more focused on the return migration, then on the temporality, the constant move between different cultures – see Brettell C. in Brettell and Hollifield, 2000: 100.

do not want to take, i.e. they accommodate themselves to the roles they are offered. Thus they have to be like everybody else – the equal rights ideology, but at the same time they are guests – workers. They have to be a part of the cultural universalism of the West, but are different – both in status and in culture. This puts them in an ambivalent position. Besides, the work they do in most cases is not seasonal, it is not dependent on natural cycles. In this respect it requires a longer-term settlement, probably here is the difference between temporary migrants and gastarbeiters, if there is any – the well known gastarbeiters like Turks in Germany tend to live longer in the foreign country, they try to domesticate the Foreign or to put a border between “them” and “us”; temporary migrants I am investigating are (at the moment) returning and going back, but not following natural cycles. And then what I mentioned above happens – double deterritorialization, a possible loss of sense of belonging, or at least a schizophrenic feeling – one lives, where one does not belong, and belongs to a place one has deserted. This game of staying/sojourn and identity is very interesting to study, as well as the change in their social roles and the impact of that change upon the self and the group identifications.

Actually, the figure of the temporary migrant or the temporarily residing person becomes more and more universal. Beyond the specific example, it is the global society that gives rise to different forms of movement, with one duration or another, which cannot be described as migration or temporary migration, but as a longer stay – for example an expert, working in different countries, students, studying in different countries, etc. Therefore, I think, **it would be more appropriate to study migration in its dynamic aspect, as a peculiar mobility, which contains movement in itself and does not necessarily seek permanent settlement; as a cyclical, maybe spiral movement from one place to another, return and off again.** This is the type of mobility, which does not substantialize territory, places of departure and return; it is beyond all places, or perhaps it imagines some utopia of a place. Of course this is only a hypothesis, which needs to be tested. In any case, **I am interested in migration as part of mobility, and not as its peculiar form. Hence my next curiosity – if we regard the temporary migrant as a moving figure between different cultures, could s/he be considered a mediator between these cultures, what does s/he take from the new culture, and what does s/he keep from the old one? This in turn poses the problem of identity – what kind of identity would the constant transition from one place to another form?** The stable migrant Diaspora relieves its identity in an imaginary homeland, possibly institutionalizes its nostalgia, adjusting itself to an alien culture. What identity does the constant traveler have? And what happens to the places, if they lose their substance of a refuge, and become mere temporary stops – places of departures, arrivals, comebacks. If the places are toposes of stay, hotels, or deserted and empty den, “home hearth” without the warmth of a fire – what is the significance of a hearth without a fire? All of these questions pulsate in the phenomenon called “temporary mobility” and challenge my curiosity.

All these curiosities lead me to **the focus of the project: temporary migration as a form of socio-cultural exchange of different cultures and its impact upon everyday practices and everyday life when returning to the homeland. In other words, the main research problem concerns the influence of the cultural encounter with the Foreign upon the perception of the Own both as institutional culture and identity.** From that point of view **the object of the study includes Bulgarian short or long term migrants (gastarbeiters) in Western countries – members of the EU.**

Probably here is the place to give a more strict **definition for a migrant and temporary migrant**. The legal concept of a migrant defines him/her as a person who stays abroad more than a year. This definition is quite relative and the specifications of the objective of stay in visas clearly show that – there are work permits, student's visas, visas given to family reasons. I prefer to work with the following classification: settlers – those whose aim is to live permanently in another country; temporary migrants – gastarbeiters – who work abroad for a period more than one year and less than 3; seasonal migrants – who are going for a seasonal work which lasts usually less than six months. V. Mintchev (Mintchev et al, 2003) makes similar differentiation – he speaks about permanent, long term and short term migrants.²

More specifically, how could we define temporary migration – the first answer is that it does not presuppose permanent settling abroad, temporary migrants are going to work “there”, but are imagining their permanent residence “here”, they live in the split between the imagined place of belonging and the real place of work. The hypothesis is this split leads to a split between identity, understood as “we belonging” and role – performance of specific activities. In permanent migration they somehow go together, in temporary they do not.

Let me briefly sketch the differences between temporary and seasonal migrants.

As opposed to the temporary migrant, who seeks employment abroad outside the cycles of nature and, in this sense, the length of his stay is not limited by them, but by his own will or the respective authorities, **the seasonal migrant** is limited to a certain period, depending on the seasonal activity. From this position, he really considers his stay abroad rather in an instrumental way - limited, therefore would hardly share the pressures of the temporary migrant. He/she is rather a “gurbetchiya”, than a gastarbeiter. Yet, it may turn out that seasonal migration, if causing a cultural shock, can change the institutional culture and influence the identification of a given person.

A question might arise, whether the so constructed figure of the temporary migrant does not remind of the G. Zimmel's and A. Schutz's figures of “The Foreigner”. I don't think so, because for them the figure of the foreigner is a metaphor of the abstract mediator, and it really is devoid of all territorial belonging. I am still interested in the actual live cultural encounter, the identity drama, if there is such, the exchange of cultural practices. It might turn out, though, that there is no exchange; that some travelers always travel with their own ghetto, like the nomad gypsies.

The specific focus of my interest determines the approaches I will use: temporary migration of Bulgarians to EU countries will be studied within the context of the research on mobility, taken both in its social and spatial aspects; within the context of cultural anthropology and the idea of the significance of cultural encounters and transfer of institutional cultures; as well as within the context of the postnational studies of Appadurai's type, viewing the issue of imagination of new and old identities and their stability.

Let me review in detail the theoretical hypotheses, related to the outline of these three problematic circles.

1. 3. Social and Spatial Mobility

In *Life in Fragments* (1996) Zygmunt Bauman makes a characterology of mobile persons – the pilgrim, the vagrant, the tourist, the player. Later on in his book

² Of course there are different typologies of migration – for more see Brettell C. in Brettell and Hollifield, 2000: 99.

I can not comment upon them now, I introduce this typology here for the objectives of my research.

Globalization (1999) he specifies the typology from the point of view of social inequalities. Bauman argues that the world is becoming divided into people who are increasingly living in time and for whom location is irrelevant because distances can be crossed instantaneously; and people doomed to be localized because their time is empty, nothing happens (Bauman 1999: 112-113). In other words, there are two main types: global cosmopolitan individuals, who are alike; and people doomed to their specific locality, whenever they go; and the cultural identities of those two types are diametrically opposite. Both groups are traveling, the first one living always in the center and collecting different experiences of different centers; the second one being always in the ghettos, excluded from the others and wherever it travels it carries like a snail its cultural shell. From human point of view this is the main question – **whether migration is a chance for possible upward social mobility, or it creates poor ghettos where immigrants are living in inhuman conditions and are losing their rights.**

Our question is in what way the social mobility relates to the spatial one, are the social/spatial divisions really so simple (I highly evaluate Bauman's beautiful metaphors of social inequality but the social analysis requires more complex picture), doesn't everybody start a journey with the hope that this movement will take him/her out of the ghetto and ascend them to a higher category? Doesn't spatial mobility implicitly contain the idea of ascending social mobility? And, of course, the opposite could happen. From that point of view **the self perception of the present status presupposes hope for the future, the imagining of the future probably becomes a part of the status itself. It is possible that the new global situation redefines the consistency of the existing social statuses and recombines in a different way prestige and lifestyle, income and education, one's own present status and future children's status.** In my opinion the typology of moving persons is much more complicated.

It is true, **people of high social standing**, occupying the top of the social hierarchy, whether we call them tourists/Bauman/, or cosmopolitan elite /Freedman/, it doesn't matter, are beyond spatial limitations. **Mobility itself - the ability to change places of residence without a problem, whether as tourists or on business - becomes an element of the social status, not just as a consequence to income, property, prestige, education, but together with them – as a lifestyle, as access to different places, as a mark of the status.**

At the bottom reside the totally immobile – as impossibility to move in space and in the social hierarchy. These are people, whose horizons have been narrowed down to immediate survival – in space and time. This is what poverty is all about – lack of future, impossibility for hope of any movement – up the social ladder, forward, or around the social space. The last definition of G. Spivak on subaltern relates namely to this impossibility of mobility, anchoring in one spot, which means vegetating and not living. This is also a definition of hopelessness, as hope is horizon, movement in time, which tears you away from the dead zone of numbness, stupor or repetition.

But between the top and the bottom, there is climbing, i.e. different mobility options – some replace one residence with another, namely because the change will ensure an opportunity to get away from the dead zone of hopelessness. Others climb the social ladders called career development or simply the curve of success, yet others wonder around at the expense of social declassification but to achieve personal satisfaction. Those who are settlers hope that the move shall improve an

element/elements of their status – at least their material situation. Temporary migrants are participants in a more complicated play of changing roles and changing identities.

There is one more peculiar, probably freer group – the group of the traveling and studying here and there students, who are beyond places, or rather in between them, in search of some settling and identity.

The research shall seek the peculiar relation between spatial and social mobility; the dimensions of the desired status, its eventual re-definition, what its role identifications are, whether there is conflict between old and new roles, or merely the role scope is expanding; whether there is a conflict between new roles and previous identities, between old roles and present identifications.

This leads us to the problem of identity/identities formation.

1.4. Stable or fluid identities?

The concept of identity is one of the most popular among the social sciences and humanities and as R. Brubaker and Fr. Cooper argue those sciences “have surrendered to the word “identity”” to a degree that it “tends to mean too much (when understood in a strong sense), too little (when understood in a weak sense) or nothing at all (because of its sheer ambiguity)”... (Brubaker R. : 28).

The first famous definition of identity as “a subjective sense of sameness and continuity” (Ericson 1996: 38) had lost its popularity and is substituted for a lot of talks about fluid, multiple, imagined, negotiated identities regarded mostly as collective phenomena. In the research on migration identity is usually conceptualized as ethnic (Appadurai 1996, Brubaker) or viewed as specific reimagined national identity, i.e. it is assumed to be a collective or a group phenomenon.

I will proceed from Ian Assmann’s definition of collective identities: “By collective or us-identity we will mean the self-perception that is developed by a group and with which its members identify. Collective identity is related to the identification of the participating individuals. It does not exist ‘as such’, but only insofar as definite individuals correlate with it. It is as strong or as weak as the extent to which it lives in the consciousness of the group’s members and to which it succeeds in motivating their thinking and action” (Assmann 2001: 131-32). Collective identity itself, however, becomes possible insofar as some form of “us” clashes with some form of “them,” provoking an image of “them” that may be either negative or positive. From those premises, following B. Anderson we may assume that modern identity (this does not apply to face-to-face relations) is always imagined insofar as the notion of some form of community must be kept alive in every individual, every individual must “regard him/herself as” - which for Anderson is equal to “imagines him/herself” as a community member. In this case, “communities ought to be distinguished not by their fallacy/truthfulness, but by the way in which they imagine themselves as communities” (Anderson 1998:22). Consequently, to understand identity we must understand *the ways* in which people think of themselves as community members.

But if we look at the contemporary society as a society in which mobility prevails, it would be faced with a challenge to identities precisely because of the different roles and groups with which people identify in this plural social world. Hence in a world that is seen as unstable and risky (U. Beck) and, at that, is changing dynamically, I am inclined to agree with Z. Bauman that “‘identity’ is a name given to the desired escape from this insecurity. Hence even though ‘identity’ is apparently a noun, it behaves as a verb... Although it is all too often hypostasized as an attribute of material entity,

identity has the ontological status of a project and postulate... in other words, identity is an indirect confirmation of the inadequacy or incompleteness of 'that which is'" (Bauman 2000: 110-111). If you are living in the comparatively closed and more difficult to change world of a rural community, you will reside in or cling on to your postulated identity, terrified of the surrounding differentness. If, however, you are caught in the whirlwind of a changing world, you will be forced to constitute new identities, moving from one to another. Where several different types of social relations are accrued, one has to simultaneously reside in the old identities – but it is impossible to reside in the "old" way, so the old identities are re-imagined; and at the same time new identities have to be "designed". As Bauman eloquently notes again, "...if the modern 'identity problem' was how to constitute identity and keep it solid and stable, the postmodern 'identity problem' is foremost how to avoid fixing it in one place and how to keep possibilities open. In the case of identity... the key word of Modernity was 'building'; the key word of Postmodernity is 'recycling'" (ibid.: 109-110). Here is my interpretation of this text : today there is a constant interplay of different identities, a surfacing of old identities that are reinterpreted and an imagining of new ones that seem to spin off from earlier their proto-forms; identities seem to be fusing with different convenient clothes for different concrete situations.

At the same time it is possible in a situation of cultural encounter with Otherness, if some form of "us" clashes with some form of "them," the old ethnic or national collective identities to become hardened and to produce probably newly recycled but strong group identities.

That is why the next theoretical hypothesis to be tested concerns the relation between temporary migration and flexibility of identities – whether migration forms multiple fractured identities (Bauman 1995) or it hardens the old ones.

Keeping in mind that hypothesis I had formulated the following research questions:

- Whether temporary migration hardens specific cultural stereotypes or breaks them, whether there is a change in the perception of the foreign culture in the direction of totally Alien or as Other understood as Different
- Whether temporary migration provokes reflection on "us" identity as ethnic, or national; whether widens identifications in the direction of "we, the Balkan people" (in the case of temporary migration to Greece); "we, from the South (in the case of going to Spain and Portugal); or "we, the Europeans" etc.; or it strengthens a specific "us identity" versus "Them".

What is at stake of that understanding of identity is the concept of culture and cultural encounter. Let us dwell more on that.

1.5. The Cultural Encounters between Different ("Western"/"Eastern") Institutional Cultures: Assimilation, Adjustment, Opposition or Hybridity?

In order to avoid the substantialization of the concept of culture A. Appadurai prefers to focus on the adjectival sense of culture (for similar reasons Z. Bauman preferred to treat "identity" as a verb, not as a noun...)."The most valuable feature of the concept of culture is the concept of difference, a contrastive rather than a substantive property of certain things", writes Appadurai (Appadurai 1996:12) Next, he suggests to "regard as cultural only those differences that either express, or set the groundwork for, the mobilization of group identities" (ibid.:13) In a way or another this notion relates culture with the idea of ethnicity. **But what happens in the process of temporary migration is the encounter between (cultural) differences and my interest is exactly in that process of mutual exchange or adjustment or impossibility to do**

that of different cultures, or more precisely of different institutional cultures.³ In my opinion Appadurai's understanding of culture is too vague, too abstract from one point of view, from other it implicitly holds on a concept of ethnicity as the dominant cultural category, but having in mind social differences this could not be the most important difference. So, I am in a search of definition of the concept of "culture", a concept to which, as probably R. Brubaker and Fr. Cooper would argue, the social sciences and humanities have surrendered too...I shall look for such a definition of culture which could be more useful in explaining the specific situation of the temporary migrant.

If we describe the situation of a temporary migrant we shall see that /s/he is a person who has to adapt to a new institutional milieu – with all its legal regulations, organizational requirements and informal rules and norms; coming from different institutional background with supposedly different legal regulations, organizational requirements and informal rules and norms. I am using here the concept of institution in its wider understanding as 'the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, the humanly-devised constraints that shape human interaction' (North 2000: 12). So we need a multidimensional picture of regulations and norms which could explain the complexity of possible adaptation or tensions when changing one institutional milieu for another.

Such more complex approach is applied by the New institutionalists, whose focus of interest is on the possibilities of institutional change. D. North accepts that institutions include two levels: the level of formal rules or organizational structure; and the level of informal constraints, which belong to the sphere of culture, let us call this level institutional culture.

Similar distinctions between the two levels of every institution could be found in Mary Douglas' (Douglas, 1988) and Claus Offe's (1996):

a/ The level of organizational structure which includes conventions or rules, establishing the structure or order. People are not deeply bound to them which demands a considerable control over their observance. In Klaus Offe's opinion this level is the instrumental one in which the *zweck-rational* strategy of the organization is embodied. At this level 'the authoritatively prescribed and enforced roles and rules, are assigned so as to achieve optimal outcomes'(Offe, 1996: 201-3).

b/ The level of institutional culture. This level includes value attitudes to the right course of action and behavior deeply rooted in the national cosmology, which attach to the action a feeling of mutuality and weight /followed by tradition and suggested to the new members/. In Offe's terms these include the social norms and values and only 'this non-contingent institutional framework of status rights ..creates the space for organizational decision making and purposive action'(p.203).

The definition of institutional culture as a tradition deeply-rooted and incarnated in institutions, implicitly holds the assumption that there is no contradiction between values and rules and roles, i.e. there is no contradiction between the two levels of institutions. The globalization processes and more concretely European enlargement problematize this consistency because of rapid changes of new institutional modes imposing on different cultural backgrounds from one side, from the other millions of

³ Cultural encounter is a key concept in the international comparative research "DIOSCURI" financed by 6th European Framework program, and lead by Prof. J.M. Kovacs and V. Zeltai, in which I am a participant. In the project draft one can find the following definition: 'Cultural encounters/exchanges are regarded as adjustment processes triggered off by culture gaps (shocks, frictions, surprises), which – if the partners manage to bridge them – lead to cultural compromises. Of course, the interruption of cultural exchange and the perpetuation of conflicts are not *ab ovo* excluded'(www.dioscuriproject.net)

people who are moving from one country to another are facing the challenge of adapting their institutional cultures to new institutional environments.

The role of personal cultural encounters is extremely important in the process of European enlargement and it is interesting to investigate the results of cultural encounters – whether they lead to assimilation from the foreign institutional culture, to adjustment, to opposition or they “produce” specific hybrid behavior.

If we consider the term ‘hybridity’ as used by the postcolonialism theorist Homi K. Bhabha, we will find that ‘hybridity’ developed in the colonial context because the colonial powers needed their subjects to take over their symbols and discourses of authority, in order to establish their rule. This *repetition* of domination relationships in the act of subjection, however, is different from its mere representation. Through repetition or through the estrangement created therein, it introduces a difference into the given social conditions, which does not leave either the colonial authority or the oppressed society untouched, but rather ‘hybridizes’ them and simultaneously temporalizes and destabilizes the existing power; estranges and transforms the symbols of authority into signs of difference (Bhabha, 1994: 102–122). So the hybrid in postcolonial discourse is understood as specific institutional mimicry, as pre-tention to be the same being different. Concerning personal cultural encounters I am dealing with, I prefer to use Jan Nederveen Pieterse understanding of hybridization, citing Rowe and Schelling: “the ways to which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices.” (Pieterse 2004: 64). In our case specific “old” institutional cultures are transferred to new social milieu which requires new norms and rules of behavior – what is happening?

This leads us to the following research questions:

- What is the perception, image of “our” institutional culture and of “theirs”; who are “they” and how they are described and evaluated (in social categories, in cultural, in ethnic, religious)
- Is there interaction or clash of different institutional cultures in the process of temporary migration;
- What is the influence of the homeland institutional culture in the new context and vice versa – the influence of the foreign institutional culture upon the “old” one, what is changing and what – not, what is the result of interaction;
- Is there any impact of the new probably hybrid institutional culture upon homeland’s institutional milieu after returning back, is there a new re-adaptation or is there a change of this milieu.
- To what extent the successful performance of the specific roles is more dependent on the basic values and norms of the institutional culture than on the concrete role prescriptions.

Before starting planned by me research I shall make a secondary analysis of the research done in Bulgaria on migration in order to specify the above formulated hypotheses and research questions.

2. State of research in Bulgaria

2.1. Brief overview of migration trends in Bulgaria – the reliable data problem.

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All the experts in the field state that there is no precise unified methodology for observing emigration trends. (Kalchev, 1999 and 2001; Guentcheva et al 2004, Balev 2004; Stanchev et al 2005)⁴

Here I shall give two examples, giving us totally different picture of emigration flows:

The NSI series of observations on border crossings pretended to have helped identify the number of emigrants from Bulgaria for the period 1989-1996. According to them, Bulgarian emigrants amounted to 654 000 people for these 8 years (Kalchev 2001, 128, 150-2).

Year	Total emigrants from Bulgaria (border information)
1989	218 000
1990	88 000
1991	45 000
1992	65 000
1993	54 000
1994	64 000
1995	54 000
1996	66 000

For the period 1992 – 1996 the total number of emigrants from Bulgaria as one can see according to the border information is 303 000.

Data from the national censuses conducted in 1992 and 2001 showed different figures for the migration flows. Between these two censuses, approximately 196 000 people emigrated from Bulgaria, while the number of persons who have returned or settled to Bulgaria was a total of 19 000. I. Kalchev acknowledged that it had been very difficult to count foreign citizens residing in Bulgaria for more than a year and that he believed their number was much bigger. The census figures were received through analysis of the information from 2.5% of all counted people as of 1 March 2001, done by NSI. **According to these statistics, net migration from Bulgaria is negative, amounting to roughly 177 000 people who had left the country in 1992-2001, or an average of 22 000 people leaving Bulgaria yearly** (ibidem, 175).

Year	Emigrants from Bulgaria (census data)	Immigrants to Bulgaria (census data)
1992-2001	196 000	19 000

The difference in the numbers given by the two sources – border information and national censuses - is quite shocking - according to the national censuses data the number of emigrants during the whole period 1992 – 2001 is smaller (196 000) than the number of emigrants in the period 1992 – 1996 (303 000) calculated on the basis of border police data.

Here is another quite curious example - the data from the State Agency for Bulgarians living abroad (SABA) - 2003:

⁴ Conclusions about the pluses and minuses of existing available sources could be found in Stanchev et al, 2005

Country	Number of Bulgarians, from <i>World Bulgaria</i>	Number of Bulgarians, from interview with SABA expert
USA	Between 80 000 and 150 000	Officially 55 000, unofficially 200 000; of them 80 000 post-1989 migrants
Canada	120 000-220 000 "old" emigrants	A total of 200 000, including 80 000 post-1989 migrants
Australia and New Zealand	5 000 people in Australia	5000 post-1989 migrants
Germany	30 000 - 35 000	300 000, of them 150 000 post-1989; at least 10% of the total are marginalized - live on social benefits and are of criminal behaviour
Greece	200 000 Bulgarian Christians who had preserved their national identity	Regular 50 000; irregular - 150 000
Spain	More than 3 000	10 000, some of them of criminal behaviour
Italy	Around 6 000	10 000, some of them of criminal behaviour
France	Between 8 000 – 10 000	10 000
Portugal	No data	10-12 000
Austria	Around 6 000	Regular 80 000; irregular - 20-30 000
Great Britain	Around 3 000 – 4 000	25 000
Czech Republic	Together with Slovakia - 7-8 000, with their families - over 20 000	30 000, of them 20 000 post-1989 migrants
Poland	No data	less than 10 000
Hungary	Around 5 000	under 10 000, because of the language barrier

No comment....

Here are data given by Krassen Stanchev and team (Stanchev et al, 2005) about residence permits in four countries, members of the EU⁵:

⁵ * Valid residence permits

** Work permits

*** Official census

**** Stock of Bulgarians – source [Migration Information Source](#)

**** Source: Germany Case Study , done by Dr. E. Markova

(0) Data as of 30/06/2004, source: [Annual Statistic Book for Foreigners in Spain 2003](#)

(1) Source: European Migration Center: http://www.emz-berlin.de/Statistik_2/es/es_02.htm

	Greece	Spain	Italy	Germany
2001	35 104***	11 761 (0)	7 500*	38 143 ****
2002		15 842 (1)	8 375*	42 419 ****
2003		28 319	7 399**	44 300 *****
2004			8 535*	

The research done by the IME clearly shows that more reliable data could be found looking at foreign information sources... If somebody is interested...

There are no serious data about labour migration, too. According to data from the Bulgarian Employment Agency bilateral agreements between Bulgaria, Germany, Swiss Confederation and Spain guaranteed jobs for 20 815 people in the period 1997-2003. According to the same source, at the moment there are 124 licensed private companies that can serve as mediators for employment of Bulgarians abroad. In 2003 people sent by these agencies number 800 and marine specialists sailing under foreign flag are 5 270. But when showing these data to the head of one of the leading private companies mediating employment abroad, he laughed and said that the numbers are much larger.

In the line of all speculative data about the number of Bulgarians working abroad, I, as a sociologist, would allow myself the following speculation: representative studies of BBSS Gallup and Alpha Research of March of this year show, that around 14 percent of the interviewees share, that a member of their family works abroad. If we accept that at the moment some 7.5 million Bulgarians live in Bulgaria, then 14 % of that figure would make 1 million and 50 thousand...

All this leads us to the conclusion that **there is an urgent need of elaborating a unified methodology for observing emigration trends and establishment of a regular and public database on emigration processes. There are no data about temporary migration, let alone the irregular one.** Keeping track of the number of irregular emigrants is a very difficult task that requires more efforts and coordination among different institutions, both Bulgarian and foreign ones. But the interesting sociological question is why the Bulgarian institutions are not interested in gathering reliable information about migration trends. Probably the answer lies in the fact that the lack of information on migrants working abroad gives them opportunity to report decrease in unemployment and increase in people's income...

In order to gather some data on the number of Bulgarians engaged in temporary work abroad, in August 2003 the team, working on an IOM project on migration trends, together with the IOM-Sofia branch, sent a short questionnaire to the mayors of all 263 municipalities in Bulgaria (Guentcheva et al, 2003). Although the data received are not the result of strict and exhaustive checks by municipal clerks, they are useful because give an approximate picture of the scope of temporary migration as perceived by municipal officials in Bulgaria. In my opinion, if the municipalities are required to gather such data on a regular basis, this could be a valuable source for the future information database.

The questions asked in the questionnaire were how many people exercised temporary work abroad (women or men), for what period of time, where, and for what type of work. The mayors were also asked to briefly evaluate the effect of migrant work abroad on their municipalities. Until September 2003, replies have arrived from 103 municipalities (4 of them with more than 50 000 inhabitants), with 8 of them saying

there was no available information. According to the approximate estimates of the mayors who have provided data, the number of migrants doing seasonal work is 73 989 people of a population of 1 173 052 people, or an average of 6.3%.

- Momchilgrad (45%), Kurdzhali region
- Rila (25%), Kiustendil region
- Kotel (20%), Sliven region
- Dupnitsa (9-18%), Kiustendil region
- Satovcha (15.3%), Blagoevgrad region
- Tvurditsa (11-14%), Sliven region
- Suedinenie (13.4%), Plovdiv region
- Stamboliiski (13%), Plovdiv region
- Tutrakan (12.1%), Silistra region
- Dzhebel (10.3%), Kurdzhali region

In 28 municipalities the migrants are predominantly female, while in the rest men represent more than 50% of the migrants. Work is done primarily in Greece, Spain and Italy, but also in Portugal, Germany, Israel, Holland, Cyprus, Turkey and Belgium. There are also temporary migrants to Austria, the Czech Republic, the USA, Sweden, Libya, Poland, France, Russia, the UK, as well as (rarely) Canada, Ireland, Serbia and Denmark. Work is predominantly seasonal, for a period less than 12 months, and migrants work in construction, agriculture, domestic care (for babies, elderly and sick people), housekeeping, hotels and restaurants, and the textile industry. Fewer of the migrants work as drivers, medical personnel, car technicians, or are students.

Migration is also ethnically specific, meaning that in some municipalities the emigrants come entirely from the Turkish ethnic group in Bulgaria, whereas in others they are ethnic Bulgarians. In still other municipalities, Roma emigration prevails. The fact that migration from Bulgaria has a regionally as well as ethnically specific and gender profile is confirmed by the more recent research of Institute for Market Economy, financed by the OSI – Sofia, in which specific case studies are done – on Greece, Spain, Italy and Germany, and those studies show that in every country the situation is different. This research, as well as the investigations on potential migrants, confirm the thesis that Bulgarians work in low qualified labour segments.

As there is no reliable information on Bulgarian migrants working abroad, neither specific research on Bulgarian diaspora, all the conclusions made are on the basis of research on potential emigration.

2.2. Profiles of potential migrants. Which factors matter?

If one looks at the research done on potential emigration (1992, 1996, 2001, 2003) s/he is able to detect a tendency showing that temporary (either short term or long term) migration dominates upon the permanent one. The preferred destinations are Greece, Spain, Italy, Germany and The Netherlands and the main motive is related to finding a job or one that is better paid.

Here are the factors for potential migration summarized on the basis of analysis done by V. Mintchev et al, on research on potential migration, done by NSI and Alpha Research agency with one and the same methodology, carried out respectively in 2001 – 2003 (Mintchev, V. et al, 2003). The analysis uses the distinction among 3 groups of potential migrants – those who want to stay permanently abroad, called “settlers”; those who want to stay more than one year but plan to return – “long term migrants”, and those who want to stay and work abroad less than one year – “short term migrants”. The analysis is quite sophisticated and precise and I deeply recommend it.

	Settlers	Long term migrants	Short term migrants
Factors	Age - young	Gender – more male	Gender – more male
	Marriage status – single	Marriage status – single	Age – all the age groups including those above 50
	Ethnicity: settlers attitudes among Turks are diminishing, just the opposite among Roma	Ethnicity: long term emigration attitudes among Roma are diminishing, just the opposite among Turks	Ethnicity: short term emigration attitudes among Roma are increasing/4.1 % in 2001, 14.6 % in 2003/
	Stay abroad – it increases attitudes toward emigration	Stay abroad – it increases attitudes toward emigration	Stay abroad – it increases attitudes toward emigration

This research, as others (Guentcheva et al, 2003. Gachter, 2002, Stanchev et al 2005) confirms the multidimensionality of emigration phenomenon and the difficulties of making easy conclusions. The profile of migrants as well the destination of migration is geographically determined and depends on already created networks. So in some Bulgarian municipalities female emigration prevails, while in others migrants are predominantly male. (Guentcheva et al 2003). In Greece female emigration prevails, in Spain and Germany – male (Stanchev et al, 2005). Migration is also ethnically specific, meaning that in some municipalities the emigrants come entirely from the Turkish ethnic group in Bulgaria, whereas in others they are ethnic Bulgarians. In still other municipalities, Roma emigration prevails. The destinations are also ethnically specific. The Bulgarian long term and short term emigrants work mostly in agriculture, construction building, domestic care, housekeeping, hotels and restaurants, and the textile industry.

Summarising all the research done on potential migrants I can formulate the following *myths about Bulgarian emigration:*

- **Brain drain - not true.** Most of the emigrants are with secondary education /their percentage vary between 60 и 70 /, with primary one are about 15 %; 15 % are with tertiary education. Nearly all of the emigrants are involved in low qualified activities – agricultural, construction, house keeping, restaurant services, domestic care. So, **instead of brain drain we can speak of brain waste** – most of the Bulgarian emigrants are engaged in work requiring lower qualification then their own;
- **The unemployment is the main reason for the emigration – not true.** Employed and higher income (meaning 3 minimal salaries per month...) individuals have higher emigration attitudes (Mintchev et al 2003);
- **The average emigrant is a young male Orthodox, or young male Muslim – there is not such an animal like “average” emigrant, neither he is YOMO or YOMM.** The profile of emigrants depends on different factors, they have different ethnic and religious profile, male as a whole dominate, but in Greece the female emigrants are majority. A lot of people aged 50 and more are short term emigrants;
- Emigrants are either overqualified or very poor – not true. **The emigrants do not suit the everyday images of social status, they challenge the consistency of**

social statuses: changing job prestige for money; security for risk enterprise; predictability in not predictable environment for unpredictable life in a predictable social milieu.

It is supposed that most of temporary Bulgarian emigrants are irregular, but nobody could claim whether this is true or not. Nobody can say how many of them work in shadow economy, too. Stanchev argues that most of them have work permits, but a lot of them have no social or health insurance, some of them are deprived of any social rights.

When looking on investigations, related to questions I am interested in – the impact of temporary migration upon culture of the migrants, upon their future life and social mobility, or in what way it influences their identifications, I could not found any serious research. The impact is measured predominantly by the amount of remittances, coming in the country through bank transfers.⁶

There is a conclusion concerning positive impact of emigration, related to the growing size of remittances. According to data provided by the Bulgarian National Bank, the amount of remittances is growing every year and has even surpassed the amount of direct foreign investments in the Bulgarian economy (Kapital 2003, 9-12). The National Bank keeps yearly statistics about the inflow of money sent by the Bulgarian emigrants abroad, which, as it assumes, falls under the rubric "current private transfers". These data are collected from the Bulgarian banks, which are obliged to report on a monthly basis the size of transfers from abroad to Bulgaria. "In the last years, current private transfers comprising primarily transfers from emigrants and Bulgarians working abroad to their families in Bulgaria substantially rose both as an absolute sum and as a percentage of the GDP", says an analysis of the Bulgarian National Bank on the balance of payments for January-November 2002. While in 1998 the amount of current private transfers was 177.3 million USD, in 2001 it already reached 402.1 million USD. While in the former year current private transfers constituted 1.4% of GDP, in the latter they were already 2.5% of GDP. For the period January-November 2002, current transfers from Bulgarians living abroad amounted to 449.6 million USD, surpassing the amount of direct foreign investments by 20.9 million USD and making 2.9% of GDP and surpassing by far the financial help coming from the EC pre-accession funds, which for January-November 2002 amounted to 100.8 million USD. A great deal of remittances are transferred through the non-banking systems of Western Union and MoneyGram, which have numerous offices throughout Bulgaria, which means that the real sum coming to Bulgaria is larger.

The size of remittances and their share of main macro-indicators

	Remittances (euro mln.)	As a percent of			
		Exports	Imports	GDP	FDI
1998	170.2	3.18	3.20	1.48	35.61
1999	233.3	4.30	3.81	1.92	30.75
2000	305.9	4.01	3.66	2.24	27.82
2001	472.5	5.83	5.01	3.11	52.94

⁶ Remittances are generally defined as that portion of a migrant's earnings sent from the migration destination to the place of origin. Although remittances can be sent in kind, the term usually refers to monetary transfers only. In most of the literature, the term is further limited to refer to migrant worker remittances, that is, to cash transfers transmitted by migrant workers to their families and communities back home.

2002	531.7	6.22	5.45	3.22	55.90
2003	613	6.48	5.50	3.48	49.64

But compared to other countries, like Romania for instance, the size of remittances is not so high.

Romania:

	Remittances in mln. Euro	As a percentage of			
		Export	Import	GDP	FDI
1998	726	9.81%	7.47%	1.94%	39.62%
1999	680	8.52%	7.42%	2.03%	67.88%
2000	1067	9.47%	8.12%	2.65%	90.96%
2001	1301	10.23%	8.11%	2.90%	92.66%
2002	1588	10.82%	9.11%	3.28%	113.02%
2003	1704	10.91%	8.71%	3.38%	93.06%

The two tables are taken from Stanchev et al, 2005

But, I repeat, the impact of temporary migration is still measured only by the size of remittances. There are no serious anthropological and sociological investigations upon their cultural impact. In two of the books (Guentcheva et al, 2003; Stanchev et al, 2005) a question is posed that probably there could be a positive impact concerning relation between the cultural lessons learned from temporary work abroad and a new organization of work and life, leading to the development of entrepreneurial behaviour; as well as impact upon consumer practices, but that is all. There is no serious research in the field I am interested in.

Part two: The Research.

1. Description of the scope of research.

And so, after everything said so far and after the secondary analysis on research (un)done on Bulgarian emigrants, my anthropological attitudes strengthened and I decided to do a qualitative study – in-depth interviews with temporary migrants from the following locations:

- *Momchilgrad and Doupnitsa*, because of the large percentage of workers abroad. The research in these two towns was carried out in December, 2005, with the idea that some of the emigrants might had come back for Christmas, alas, it did not happen. But people were interviewed, who have been abroad and come back to their home towns. I have 9 interviews from Doupnitsa and 7 from Momchilgrad.

- *Kalofers* – a small de-industrialized town, with a lot of people working abroad. I have a summer house there, so I could say that I had mad participatory observation there, being a witness of desolation of the town. Nine interviews have been taken in April, 2006 – mainly with people who have returned from abroad, one through a letter, and three with people working abroad who had, at the time returned for Easter.

- I had made 11 interviews with Bulgarian migrants to *Italy* – five men and six women – 7 lived in *Milan*, 3 in *Sondrio* and 1 in *Livigno* (*Sondrio* is a small town near *Milan*, and *Livigno* is a resort in the Alps, near the Swiss border). The *Milan* destination was prompted to me when I did the interviews in *Doupnitsa*, as many people from *Doupnitsa* go to work there. So I walked around the “Bulgarian” spots in *Milan* – it turned out that the Bulgarians gather for a chat and to share information at one of the *MacDonald’s*, five minutes away from the *La Scala*. The place where they “sell” jobs (the word is precise – to fix somebody up with a job costs from 50 to 200 Euro. Almost all interviewees commented on this fact, although they all said they helped newcomers wholeheartedly), is called the “trash”!, but they refused to tell me where it was, or to take me there. The Bulgarians meet also in the park before the Central Railway Station in *Milan*, where the Bulgarian buses arrive. I visited a “Bulgarian house” – a building, in which half of the inhabitants were Bulgarian, located near the Turkish-Arab quarter in *Milan*. The “dispersion” of female work force took me to *Sondrio*, where Bulgarian women took care of elderly women. The interviews were done between July 5 and 11, 2006.

- The analysis also includes interviews I had taken in *Hague* in 2003 on the so-called Bulgarian street, with illegal Bulgarian immigrants living there – 6 interviews altogether.⁷

So the total number of the interviews used in the analysis is 42. I would like here to thank everybody, with whom I have spoken, for his/her sincere response.

The data, no matter how relative, confirm my hypothesis on the leading role of the temporary migration and on the need to follow up on its eventual action as cultural mediator. The fact that most of the Bulgarians departing to work abroad take up less qualified jobs as compared to their previous status, confirmed my curiosity with regard to the special nature of mobility and the occurrence of possible role and identity conflicts – do they have identity crisis, how do they handle it, why do they undertake that step, what does it mean – reconsideration of status or escape from it, or hope? This is why most of my interviewees are people with relatively high status in *Bulgaria*, who do low qualification work abroad.

I am starting the analysis of the interviews with the issues of the status.

2. Paradoxes of the Status. Stultifying of the Role, Self-Assertion of the Self.

A large number of the interviewees have higher education, and a prestigious social standing in *Bulgaria*: I came across two ex-Mayors, who at the time of departure had relatively good jobs, yet one of them had gone to *Ireland*, where he washes dishes, and the other to *Spain*, where he is a construction worker. A secretary at one of the municipalities has worked for a year as a waitress and supplier in *Greece*, a teacher, an engineer, a hospital nurse care of elderly ladies in *Spain* and *Italy*, a teacher worked as chambermaid in the *Netherlands*, small bankrupt businessmen work in green houses and in construction as builders, etc. All interviewees, with two exceptions (a dentist, who has worked as such in *Turkey* and has returned and an owner of a small firm in *Italy*, who had managed to establish it there) have had a social status “here”, in *Bulgaria*, which can be determined as relatively high, and have worked / still work/ in low qualified jobs and unpopular jobs “there” - in the respective country. Most of them

⁷ At the moment I am finishing a qualitative study - in-depth interviews with Bulgarian students, who had been on the so called students’ brigades in the *USA* for five months. Unfortunately in this text I could not manage to make the comparison between this students’ mobility, which is also temporary, and the *gastarbeiters’* one.

have gone when they were not so young – over 40. At first, it seemed to me as voluntary disqualification and declassification.

That is, of course, if we accept a classical sociological definition of a status, bound to education, prestige, and income, which are considered interrelated by the Western sociologists.⁸

Furthermore, a large part of the migrants at first live in inhuman conditions, especially the men. The women who are employed as baby or “granny” sitters, or as chambermaids have a room of their own somewhere, but, of course they are perceived as servants.

A man from Doupnitsa, 52, ex-military, went to Milano and returned. December, 2005:

*“There was this factory – they called it the Boboshevo factory – there were God knows how many people from Boboshevo alone. And you see **them** come out of such derelict basements and all, like hamsters...that’s where they live, well...This is just in the beginning, only at first. Until you start work...until...Almost everyone has been down that road. A factory that’s been abandoned, no lighting, no water. We get up at 5 in the morning and disappear. **You** jump over the fence. At night **we** get back at 11 pm, when everybody watches television or have gone to bed...”*

Notice the usage of “they come out as” and then “...we get up and disappear” – as if to escape from the traumatic memory of the life in the factory...The man is aware of being there himself and at the same time this remembrance is reified, objectivated – “they are living in such conditions”.

The initial shock is huge.

A teacher from Momchilgrad, 50, Bulgarian Moslem, she was a chambermaid in Holland, describes how she started on the joints, which she found in the hotel. December 2005.

“And maybe I was experiencing a rough patch in my life, not that my life here is very easy. The life of a gastarbeiter is very hard abroad. Your psyche is stripped, especially if you are someone who used to live up to certain standards in your own country, you had a name, social standing. At one time you go there and you are nobody, and it is hard, and I felt really good when I had a joint.”

In all of the interview the worry of the woman from the previous quote is present, in some place visible, in some not, in the form of a tale on the departed “they”, a part of whom were you: you had a name and a social standing in your country, you leave and you become a nobody.

Why is this happening, what does it mean? The first and the easiest answer is, that gastarbeiters exchange prestige against money – the status inconsistency /G. Lenski/ has become deformed – the prestige of highly qualified professions, such as the teaching, the state or municipal official cannot compensate the low payment. And in a society, where after a long equalization, money becomes an extremely significant factor, it turns into the mean benchmark for status. “If you don’t have money, you are nobody” is the frequently repeated leitmotif.

And yet, we are not talking about extremely poor people, but people who had lived well under the Bulgarian conditions. Let’s look at the interviews to find out why they had left.

⁸ For communist Bulgaria the inconsistency of status is typical, which is due to the ideological construction of the social hierarchy. But this is another subject I have covered in a different place.

P.P., working in Spain as of 2000, 53, a teacher, divorced, one child – a 25 years old girl. The interview was done by letter; the address was given by her mother with whom I talked a lot on April 25, 2006 in Kalofer.

“My daughter finished high school, we had to pay the fee at the university – she was accepted in the paid form of training. We used to live in a hired apartment in Plovdiv, life became more and more expensive – how could I go by on a teacher’s salary? Besides, to be a teacher nowadays is a torture, not a joy... I was lonely anyway, I had no close friends, no lover, my daughter started her own life, so I felt quite bad, middle age crisis probably... A woman told me that she knew people working in Spain who could arrange me to work as a cleaner and a cook in a private house. I love cleaning, when I am nervous I am doing this all the time, so I decided to try. It was a great adventure for me, I had never traveled abroad.... Thanks God, the family I had to work in, was quite friendly. They were two old sisters, widows, with no children, very rich and I had to care for them and for the whole house. Actually the first year I had only 6 free hours per week. I learned the Spanish kitchen, the French one. It was very tiresome, of course, and the loneliness was terrible, but I started learning Spanish, wrote a lot of letters to my mother and daughter – I missed them terribly. I tried to forget the whole my previous life. It was not humiliating for me to become a housekeeper, because the two sisters were good to me, respected me. But it was a totally different world”

Now she supports her daughter, who studies in Germany and is happy that she would receive good education and “praise the Lord, she may do well in life”.

Ex-Mayor, working as a dishwasher in Ireland, 53, April 2006 /came back at Easter/, Kalofer

“Well, what can I tell you, why I left...I went to see my son, who was working there, and after that I told myself – why not prove that I’m still young, that I can handle it, I’m tough. And here I am, I lost weight and physically I feel really good. Took 10 years off my back...And I also needed the money, to support my daughter in Germany, she studies there. And what can I tell you, everything got messed up here anyway – people started arguing, got alienated, left. Only worries... You are nobody there and this allows you to be yourself...”

His son has left due to completely different reasons:

St. D. 26, working as a bartender in Kork, Ireland, April 23rd, Kalofer

He was 3-rd year student at Economic University in Varna when he went for 5 months students brigade in England. He did not return after it, because there he got acquainted with a boy, working as a barman in Kork, who told him that in the pub he is working there is a need of personnel. So he just went there and started as a boy for everything, now he is working as a barman and he is proud of that: “I am the most important person in the bar – making all the cocktails.” The reason for being there is not poverty, or any lack of money. “I wanted to travel, to see the world, for that we had not enough money. It was a kind of adventure. You know, living in a small town like Kalofer is very boring and one has no perspectives here...I adapted quite well in Ireland, I know the language and the Irish people are just like us. I feel well there and I have friends and fun. But I do not plan to live and work there for ever. After saving some money – you know a small sum there is quite large here – I shall come back, of course, I do want to continue my education and to graduate economics and to start a business here, meaning not in Kalofer, but in Varna, on the seaside – a good cocktail bar, probably a hotel. These are my plans for now, but if I marry in Ireland, who knows....”

A man from Kurdjali, 42, works in Hague, June 14, 2003

“I had a small business, but 4 years ago I bankrupted. I had taken a credit from a bank and I could not return it. I was desperate and did not know what to do. The situation was terrible, I had 2 children, my wife was unemployed, my sister is divorced, my parents are retired with small pensions. So I had no choice then to look for a work abroad... I have been working everything. You see that stop over there. Every morning a bus is passing and is taking the illegal workers, delivering them wherever there is a need of work. So I started in that way. We got about 20 Euro per day, we lived 10 persons in a room and I could save about 200 Euro per month. This was at the beginning...” (the continuation of the story see below)

A woman, engineer, 55 years of age, looks after an elderly woman in Sondrio, July 8, 2006

“Look, I have worked many years at Energoproect”, I was even Head of a Department. And in the beginning of the 90-ties they laid off the designers. The younger ones will be OK, they speak at least two languages, but I – where should I go? I started designing privately, I was cheated a few times – they did not pay me, we even started a private company – maintenance of electrical appliances, but the rent ruined us. And so it went on for seven years without a permanent job – all the odd jobs I have done during that period – I was a cleaner, orderly in a hospital...And for what – you just fill in gaps in the budget...And so I decided to come here. I am being respected here and I make money. It’s true, I am lonely, but I manage. One has to forget one’s past and live in the present. There’s no future.”

Here is another version, of another woman – a nurse, also 55 years of age, and also looking after an elderly lady in Sondrio, July 8, 2006:

*“I had a very good job in Sofia, well paid, I was appreciated. But I got divorced three years ago, and we have just one apartment. And instead of arguing and fighting, **I said to myself – why don’t I start all over again.** I’ll go abroad, save some money, buy myself an apartment, save up for my old age. And that’s what I did. And I don’t regret it – in two years I’ll buy myself an apartment, I will work for another two or three years and have fun afterwards... I became more well-balanced here, more confident, independent. I used to be very pretty, I’m still OK. Life goes on, and I believe there are good things in store for me”*

What do I find in the interviews? In most of them /with the exception of the youngest/ - dissatisfaction with the status in Bulgaria, because of its devaluation, and disappointment with the situation in the country as a whole. To my question to our immigrants in the Hague and in Milan whether they intend to return to Bulgaria, most of them answered yes, if **Bulgaria becomes a normal country** – this means that it should have such legal basis, which would guarantee stability, safety, equality before the law, no chaos. There is a devaluation of the place, not the birthplace, but the state – Bulgaria is not what it used to be: “Bulgaria is not Bulgaria...What state could it be? We are one wagon of people, but occupy the first place by crime, lying, imitation, everything. There’s nothing left. Nothing’s left of this crappy country”- the 48 year man from Doupnitsa was rambling on.

In that situation going to a foreign country, moving away from the devaluated place becomes an element of status. **The living abroad itself, regardless of one’s role there, is a part of a more prestigious status, in the same way as if you come from a town is more prestigious, than if you come from a village. The transition period has enhanced the periphery complex of Bulgaria, and globalization has made the West not only a prestigious destination, but a Center that holds, and the**

movement towards the Center is a part of the status in itself. Spatial mobility becomes a part of the vertical mobility, especially when the social hierarchies have messed up. As the sociological surveys show that in Bulgaria there is no legitimate success model, hence no legitimate vertical mobility, the spatial mobility is regarded as a form of accepted vertical mobility. The movement from village – town – capital – abroad, regardless whether to a town, village or ghetto abroad, regardless of the role performed there, is perceived as a prestigious vertical mobility. When you return, it is as if you return from the capital to your village, when your status obliges you to rename your home a villa... The temporary migrants, returning from Italy to Doupnitza are called “the Italians”; most of them build new houses as signs of prestige; and this resembles so much the socialist “habit” of building a villa in your birthplace as a sign that you started from “here” but had climbed up the social ladder and now you can go for a rest at the foot of the ladder...

This interrelation between spatial and social mobility is very typical but in a different way of the young people, without the drama of denying Bulgaria – they simply run away from the boredom, stagnation, the lack of perspectives. *“One day I woke up and said to myself – why don’t I go to Italy...Packed a bag and left” (a 25 year old man, Milan); “Well, some time ago, my friends and I decided, just like that, got on the bus and there we were in Milan. We didn’t know anybody at that. Some friends from Doupnitsa had told us about it ” /a man, 27 years old, Milan/ “A girl friend of mine wrote me – why don’t you come visit me in Italy, and I decided... ”/a woman, 36, Livigno/. It was astounding for me, how quickly, as by accident the decisions for the departure had been taken – all of a sudden s/he tells her/his self – hey, why don’t I hit the road, like a Jack Kerouac hero...*

Or may be life in many places becomes an element of the status, of the specific lifestyle. It looks like that this will be the conclusion of the analysis of the interviews with students returning from brigades in the USA.

It is more complicated with the elderly. Apart from the devaluation of the place, meaning the state, the whole existing social hierarchy has vanished. The transition period has caused a typical anomic crisis – previous statuses have devaluated /both literally and symbolically/: *“And what can I tell you, everything got messed up here anyway – people started arguing, got alienated, left. Only worries”, “Besides, to be a teacher nowadays is a torture, not a joy...”, “I got bankrupt and had no choice”. The usual normal world has gotten messed, the same has happened to the social hierarchies, so what is the meaning of the social status, the social role? Then the spatial mobility has become the solution to the crisis of status. We are witnessing the escape from the shadow of the previous already non-existent status /the Mayor, the military, the bankrupt, the engineer/ or the present devaluated one / the teacher, the librarian/. **Going abroad reminds of rushing into the desert in search of yourself:** “One does not go into the desert to find ones identity, but to lose it, to lose ones individuality, to become anonymous. But the desert is a space, where one step makes way for the next one, which deletes it, and the horizon means hope for a future, which begins to speak.” /E. Jabey cited in Bauman 2000: 113).*

The apparent role conflict between the old, prestigious, requiring high qualification role and the new, low qualified, non-prestigious one is resolved through an escape from the social identification of any of the two roles and re-discovery of the self as a person, strength, will, free choice – “I can handle it, I’m tough (I’m still good at it)”.

In all of the interviews there is a clear distinction between the story of the beginning of the journey abroad – “it was very tough”, this is also the story of a certain humiliation, loss of self, “you are simply nobody” and the end, the present – **from the position of the “now” people talk dispassionately, they have overcome the beginning, the**

trauma has subsided or has been suppressed, because they have endured, gotten back on their feet and have started their life anew: “ *This was at the beginning. Then a Dutch employer liked me and I started working for him permanently and he paid me more. I got myself back on track, I returned my debt, my wife came to me, now she is working too, then my sister came, then we took the children, now they are studying in the Hague...* ” - **a man from Kurdjali, 42, works in Hague, June 14, 2003** (see above the beginning). “*When I came here, I found a mattress someone has thrown out, took a blanket from the church and slept on the pavement for two months. With my first salary I bought a second hand car and slept in it. After that I bought a trailer. After that I slept in a shed. And after that I rented a place. I have done everything. Least of all I have worked under my specialty – a turner. Now I own my own home and my own legal company – since the New Year I have sent over 30 long vehicles loaded with cars to Bulgaria. If you persist and don’t give up, you are bound to succeed. Now I work what I’ve always wanted – I’ve been interested in cars since I was little*” (**a man, 38 years old, Milan, July 6, 2006**).

Or, as I had already said, they tell themselves “I’m still good at it, I am still capable”, “I took 10 years off my back”.

Or returning to their birth places, they have already relaxed and have reclaimed their previous status, because “they have tried both end of the stick”, they have handled them and can now dispassionately make the comparison between “there” and “here”, evaluating pluses and minuses of being “here” and “there”. They had had the freedom of choice and when the choice is to return this gives to the previous status a new aura of value.

Or after the return they decide to radically change their lives:

H.H, secretary at the Kalofer Municipality, 55, 25 April 2006: “*In Greece I learned to be active, to be ingenious, in order to survive. Also to be strict and responsible, no delays, no explanations – if you have to do something, you have to do it. I understood that I had to take control of my life, to be more enterprising, up and about. So, when I returned from Greece I was a different person.*”

In all the cases the compulsion to go to another country at the end is perceived as a victory of one’s free will to overcome all the troubles, of finding yours strength irrespective of roles requirements and prestige. It looks like if the moral of the journey is “Forget the roles, prove yourself!”

This feeling is enhanced by the fact that the roles are reversed – almost all interviewees work something different from what they had worked at home, and often abroad they change their jobs several times “all the odd jobs that I have taken” was a frequent leitmotif in the interviews, especially of the male migrants. Although we are talking of not quite qualified activities, they still require specific skills, which are acquired quickly, though, and they are considered a challenge – see, I handle this as well... One of the women in Milan said, with a mixture of pride and self pity, “I have cleaned toilets as well, I have been waist deep in shit...” We are witnessing something like **life long learning by doing. In this process roles do not matter so much, as the capacity to acquire them; the focus falls on the potential of the personality, and not on the realization; the present is important, not the past.** Thus the personality may handle eventual nostalgia- the center of your life is here and now and depends on you and you alone... “*It is only here, that you can prove yourself, by not being bound with family ties, friendships. In Bulgaria someone will help you, a couple of calls here and there. Here, you are alone, you learn to be independent, and you count on yourself. In Bulgaria this does not happen – you are at home*” (**man, 38 years of age, Milan**).

The research confirms Ulrich Beck’s and Anthony Giddens thesis that individualization and globalization are two sides of one and the same process. “Individualization means, first, the disembedding and, second, the re-embedding of industrial ways of life by new

ones, in which the individuals must produce, stage and cobble together their biographies themselves” (Beck 1995:13)

The social identity is replaced by proving oneself capable - rediscovery of the self, starting one's life anew. A new personal identity is acquired, for which we cannot use Ericson's definition „identity as a subjective sense of sameness and continuity” (Ericson 1996: 38). **It is rather that identity is determined by the ability to overcome discontinuity, to start anew - identity as a subjective sense of overcoming discontinuity, of possibility for being different.** Now I could fully agree with Z. Bauman that identity has the ontological status of a project indeed and it is an indirect confirmation of the inadequacy or incompleteness of ‘that which is’” (Bauman 2000: 110-111). If this sense of discontinuity and starting anew could be called identity at all...

Anyway, we can ask ourselves, this strengthening of the personal self perception and confidence, or if we call it identity, in scurrying to and fro between “here” and “there”, between my past self and my new one; does it leave any room, does it produce, does it relate to any group identities?

3. The vanishing group identities

As I had written above in the research on migration identity is usually conceptualized as ethnic (Appadurai 1996, Brubaker) or viewed as specific reimagined national identity, i.e. it is assumed to be a collective or a group phenomenon. Let us check that hypothesis on the basis of analysis of the interviews. The other question to be discussed here concerns the strength of possible “us” and “them oppositions”.

Let me start with the question whether my respondents have a feeling that they belong **to a national “imagined community”** (B. Anderson).

From the above quotes, the hidden bitterness from the situation in the home country emerges – in Bulgaria something has gone wrong, you don't see the point, “*money is just enough to fill in the gaps in the budget*”, “*how long will it take you to buy a fridge, oven and a TV set in Bulgaria with these salaries*”/a woman, 30 years old, Milan/. The feeling is one of “abandonment” – by the state, by the homeland; and it does not matter whether you are living in Bulgaria, or abroad. It is even better to go abroad, because there you can have a better life.

The exasperation is sometimes frightening.

Doupnitsa, a man, 48 years of age, December 2005

“- What are you doing in this crappy country, get up and go! Pack your bags and hit the road, you are a young guy, you should go abroad somewhere, settle down, study, learn a language well, so that you can earn your living. Here, in Bulgaria it isn't Bulgaria”.

Doupnitsa, 19 years of age, December 2006

“I won't wait for these 16 years, I won't go abroad either, but I will improve my situation at the expense of the state, the system, the neighbour, etc., do you get me? Everybody wants to screw up everybody, so I will do the same. I don't give a damn about the country. If I can, I'll eliminate Bulgaria. I won't leave Bulgaria, but if I can, I'll delete it, you see? If I can improve my situation at the expense of Bulgaria, I would do it, because all the big shots have done it at the expense of the ordinary people, so if we get a chance, we shouldn't miss it. You get better at the expense of the state, that's it.”

What national identity could we talk about in these interviews, what “imagined community”...

The Bulgarians, interviewed by me abroad, were not as extreme in their evaluations as the above quoted people from Doupnitsa, but I did not feel any sentiment as to the

homeland, or any painful nostalgia. To my question “Do you miss Bulgaria? What do you miss most from your home country?” only three people answered with “yes,” they missed it, specifying all three of them: “I miss the Balkan”, further specifying:

„The green of the Balkan, the trees, no, the flowers, the trees and the air of Kalofer. I dream of coming back to Bulgaria when I retire, of sitting in my garden, planting flowers, looking at the Balkan”/a woman, 53 years of age, Spain, April 2006/;

“...I miss the Balkan mountain, Kalofer, the brandy, the clean air. Naturally, I am in Ireland only temporary, so that I can make my wife yearn for me...” /a man, 53 years old, from Kalofer, working in Ireland, April 2006/;

“...I miss the Balkan, the lakes, and going fishing... Not that the mountains here are not good and I don't go fishing – there are magnificent views. Yet I have no intention of staying here, I'm homesick, not that it's hard...My brother could barely hold it for two years, nostalgia got the better of him and he went back. May we be well and in good health, we'll work for another three years, and then we are going back. I will start something else, I have even figured it out, business with some Swiss guys... I want my kids to grow up in Bulgaria” / a man, 38 years old, lives in Milan, comes from Doupnitsa, and has his own company in Italy, July 2006/.

The rest of the responses I can divide into three types:

They miss the food:

– “...I miss the Bulgarian food, the bread” / a man, 34 years old, Milan/, “I miss the white cheese, the yellow cheeses, the pickled gherkins, the pickles cabbage, the home made brandy” / a man, 38 years old, lives in Milan/; “I miss the white cheese, what else could I miss in Bulgaria...” / a woman, 28 years old, Sondrio/; “I miss the brandy” / a man, 53 years old, from Kalofer, lives in Ireland/.

They miss their kids, family, friends – typical response from women:

“Well, I miss my kids very much, but I know they are OK and they are managing / a description follows of their professions and successes/, but it's seems to me I miss my friends, with whom I drink my coffee more” / a woman, 55, Sondrio/

“I miss my kids terribly, my family, my friends” / a woman, 55, Sondrio/

“I miss my kids very much...But you know, I'm doing it for them...” /a woman, 40 years old, from Petrich, lives in Milan/.

And the third type of responses accompanied by sincere astonishment or uttered with dark determination – **I miss nothing:**

“No, I'm not homesick and I don't miss anything in Bulgaria. I went back a couple of years ago, I lived there for a while and immediately decided to come back here /Milan/. It's not easy for me here, but it feels good.” / woman, 50 years old, from Blagoevgrad, lives in Milan, has the looks of a Roma woman/.

“Don't be ridiculous, what should I miss... I will never go back to Bulgaria. My biggest dream is to marry an Italian woman, she may be an elderly woman, too, - she'll die, right? But she'll be rich. Money is the most important thing.”- this thing about the old woman is told with enthusiasm by a young man, who continued with two more stories about marriage to grannies / a man, 25 years of age, from Doupnitsa, at the Moment in Milan/.

So I wasn't left with the impression that they had any national, “imagined community”, all of them are alone, with their own memories and dreams – memories of places, foods, friends, dreams about the future, in which Bulgaria is simply missing. The homeland is at best reduced to gastronomical specifics, a whiff of nature – of a lake, of green, fresh air, or is even further reduced to the concrete birthplace, the family and friends. The only interview, which revolved around the subject of how significant it is to be Bulgarian and that we, too, have given something to the world, was with a worn out woman from Petrich, in her forties, living in Milan, who said: “I am proud to be Bulgarian. I am proud of the yoghurt – bacterium bulgaricus is known worldwide, the

only one. That's what we are famous for." The Roma woman sitting next to her was watching her with affectionate condescension...

Paradoxically, the most clearly expressed love to Bulgaria as Bulgaria came from a Bulgarian citizen of Turkish origin:

Momchilgrad, a photographer, a Turk, 55, December 2005

"Personally I love my country (Bulgaria) very much. I have two brothers and two sisters in neighbouring Turkey. I am all alone in Bulgaria. I came back from Switzerland and didn't move anywhere after that. I love my town, I love my work, I love my country. I have many more Bulgarian friends, than Turkish. For 17 years I have been working along the coast and mostly with Bulgarians. My adolescent years passed in Sofia – Bulgarians, Armenians, I had all kinds of friends. Along the coast I had Czechs, Polacks, East Germans. I keep in touch to this day with some of them. I am an internationalist. I love all nations, as long as they are hygienic. By the way I am a religious person, a believer. I practice the Moslem religion."

Momchilgrad, a dentist, a Turk, around 50, December 2005

*"The Bulgarian Turk feels Bulgaria more as a homeland than the Bulgarians, because the Bulgarian according to me is a nihilist. Here's an example: when they show the weather forecast in the news, he says "it will be snowing over the country", and in Turkey they say "over our fatherland". And what is the difference between Bulgaria and Turkey? While in Turkey 10 % literates rule, here it is just the opposite – 90% are literate and 10 % illiterates rule, i.e. the difference is in the elite. It is very important who will be in front of the cart, more precisely who will pull the cart. Who will give the direction. **It is not possible for a nation not to have an ideal. The national ideal of the Bulgarian is to become a foreigner.**"*

Probably **the lack of clearly expressed national identity** is due to the fact, that there is no big Bulgarian Diaspora – neither in Milan, nor in the Hague, although there are "Bulgarian" places, where people gather and meet, and even a Bulgarian street in the Hague. There is no clearly expressed "living within a group", there is no ghetotization, people are scattered here and there. Women looking after elderly Italian and Spanish women are practically living in Italian and Spanish families. This puts them in a completely different situation from the workers in the factories, on construction sites and in the green houses. At the same time, everybody in Milan was watching Bulgarian television, listening to "chalga"(pop-folk music) and Bulgarian popular music, communicating with Bulgarians most of all – as if in some quiet sadness with their previous way of life. **The ethnic lives in the language**, although everybody I talked to in Italy managed very well in Italian, the Bulgarian language remained in their private space, while the "working" language was Italian. **The ethnic also lives in the music, to which they listen, in the Bulgarian cooking, in their friendships.** There is some **network connection to Bulgarians** – friends, relatives, who help their close ones join them, but this is not happening along the line of national fellowship and compassion, but along the following line: we are close, let's help the guy. **This is some kind of traditional familiarity of a closeness, pre-modern in a sense, because it is focused on face to face relationship and this has nothing in common with the contemporary identifications with imagined communities – be they nations or classes.** There is this countrymen fellowship, that of relatives and friends – beyond the grand identities, in the semi-private spaces of the search for human closeness, provoked by some born in times of childhood in observable space borders, identifications.

But **the constant perseverance to be independent, to cope alone, to survive, to help yourself, mentioned in the previous paragraph, definitely dominated over any group identities.** Even **the sense of family has been shaken**, because the family itself has scattered – in most cases the relatives are in Bulgaria, but there are a number of cases, where for instance one son has gone to Cyprus, the other one to Spain, the

husband has stayed behind in Bulgaria and the wife is working in Italy; another example - the wife is working in Spain, the daughter – in Germany, the Grandma – in Bulgaria, etc., etc. You can never take all your relatives with you – even the family, with which I spoke in Milan, and which included a husband and wife, a child and the brother of the wife, had left their elder child in Doupnitsa, because he could never adapt to the Italian school and had cried all day long. “So, who is looking after that child in Doupnitsa?”, I asked. “His Grandmother”, replied the mother with resignation. Back in Bulgaria, under another project, I came upon heart-breaking tragedies of children, whose parents work abroad, social workers spoke to me about the “dead mothers’ syndrome” in children, whose mothers work abroad, and they simply stopped eating. In other cases children started “calling” their parents through aggressive behaviour – theft, brawling. I became witness to the helpless tears of a social worker, who had tried to bring back and persuade a mother to take care of her son - “an extremely capable and decent child, but he gets in fights and steals, because he wants to turn the attention on himself” – no luck, then she tried to persuade the Child Pedagogical Services not to send him to a Labour Corrective School – no luck there either. “Now he is in the Labour Corrective School, he’s already been raped. He is finished now.”

So the immigrants – at least the Bulgarians I spoke with, are, on the whole, **alone in their struggle to survive, to become self assertive, and they urge those around them – those, close by or somewhere in the world – to cope alone, if they can – good, if not...** It is true, virtual family communities are being constructed – telephones, the Internet, letters and postcards, which maintain the sentiment of the family, even exalt it, namely because the everyday clashes are missing, but this is the odd family, in which everybody has his own line of career – “*My husband also misses me and wants to join me here. But if he comes it’s going to become very complicated*” /**a woman, 36 years old, Livigno/.**

Of course, there is the “us” talk, and it is precisely the “us, the Bulgarians” as opposed to the Italians, the Spaniards, the Dutch, but it is not so much “us” as “imagined community” and “them” as “the Others”, but rather to comment some qualities of “them” and “us”.

“The Italians are more of politicians – sleek, sweet-talk you, and then stab you in the back.../pause/ On the other hand, we are the same” /**40 old woman from Petrich, in Milan, July 2006/.**

“The Italians are warmer people, I don’t feel a great distance between us, and they treat me well. For them the image of the mother, the Madonna is sacred.”/**55 year old woman, Sondrio, July 2006/.**

“The Spaniards are full of temperament, warm. The family, in which I work, is treating me with great respect. They make such gestures, that I wonder how I’m going to repay them” /**53 year old woman, Spain, April 2006/.**

“Oh, the Irish are great, very, very decent folks” / **53 year old man, Ireland, April 2006/.**

“We Bulgarians are more capable, we can handle anything, you just tell a Bulgarian what to do – he gets used to it, learns how and does it. The Italian is a limited man – he has studied something, and that’s it, that’s where he stops. I am not a specialist, he says. Me neither, as if I had something to do with computers back in Bulgaria – no- but I learnt. My brother, when he came here and went into construction – he had never held a trowel before. In half a year, he became Chief – because he can think” /**38 year old man, Milan, July 2006/.**

“We are more intelligent. An Italian cannot work with machines, cannot change a light bulb... In Bulgaria there is this sloppiness... You see, it is the state that is our problem, not us. In Bulgaria too if you are given 8 Euro per hour, you’ll be like a windmill” /**34 year old male, Milan, July 2006/.**

Two are the obvious things that emerge from the interviews – **that there is no hard and emotional “us” position to construct “our identity” with regard to “them”**. Just because the Bulgarians want to be like “them”, or at least to work “there”, there is certain mimicry, not maintaining “our” ethnic specifics. And secondly, **the evaluation happens through what I called above institutional culture, it is an evaluation of behavioural differences**. Numbers of interviews reflect upon the discovery that “we are as we are in Bulgaria, and completely different abroad”. This discovery at the end of the day leads to the conclusion that the reason for that relates to the differences in the normative regulations and organization of the work in Bulgaria and in the other countries. And it is here, that the significance of cultural encounters is expressed – namely because people / I have no claims of making general statements, it is clear that I am talking about my respondents/ are not hooked on their ethnic and national identity, but constantly facing the alien culture, which has its specific institutional context, are open to the “best practices” and clearly perceive the fact that the stay abroad changes them, for the better, on the whole.

4. The cultural encounters

The stay abroad leaves deep imprints, no matter what we are talking about, the comparison constantly emerges – “they do that there that way, we here do it differently. Or in the attempt to forget the trauma from the experience, the following always comes up: “but |I learnt everything life hadn’t taught me up to that moment. Now I am a different person.”

Apart from the demarcation line between “us” and “them” already mentioned above, the stories often jump from descriptions of “their” to descriptions of “our” social worlds. But unlike the assessment of the qualities of Spaniards, Italians, Dutch, etc., which vary, and sometimes are not so flattering, the evaluation of “their” world is, by rule, positive, and the contrast with “our” world is enormous.

“Their” world and “our” world. Light and darkness, order and chaos.

Doupnitsa, ex-military, 52, spent 1 year and 3 months in Italy, December 2005

How can it be...when I saw in Italy kids this big – climbs his bike and always puts his helmet on. And we here don’t put our helmets on when we get on the motorbikes, when you get in a car – no belt, nothing. We just have to get it in our kids’ heads the thing that has to stay there, that we have to put the belts, we have to do many things. They don’t have a conscience. I was really impressed in Italy, which is not very advanced, you see that [points a finger around the square], everything is in garlands, everything is spotless. And look here - dead. No lamps, no lighting, no one is thinking about it. They had to put up a Christmas tree. I was lucky in Italy, spent all those months there, I went there for 3 months, came back for 10 days and left again...but I am delighted, impressed. To say nothing of Austria, Belgium, the other even more advanced countries...France, they are...I don’t know how it is...but I believe, they are much more advanced. That’s it...when you look at these tiles there, it’s as if they are polished. While here, at home, everything is imitation – we do it for appearance sake.

When you look at the grass – everything is mowed, it’s as if you are walking on a carpet. Look! (He points at some overgrown patches before the municipality), you can’t see that anywhere. And their village is 100 times better than ours. I don’t want to promote their stuff, see, I’m against that... But we are talking reality here, the trees, everything is trimmed. In spring you see the vines are cut, and when that greenery starts creeping – beautiful! And the people use all kinds of technology, he climbs up like that guy who changes the bulbs, and cuts and trims. They have a machine that they

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put the sticks and twigs in, like that, the carpenters staff, and it mills them and turns them into sawdust, bran, doesn't stay in one place at all. Here, look, can this be a square – dark everywhere! There, the bulbs are like these, but higher and not in every other lamp, but everywhere. They don't economize. And here – gloomy.”

It is amazing how a man, who has lived like a “hamster in a derelict factory”, who has worked constantly, sees the world only where it is bright and beautiful, and the “homeland”, to which he has returned as darkness. This is beyond own experience, this is a look at the world around us, beyond us – and one of the worlds is/looks bright, orderly and the other one - chaotic, gloomy, lazy, dark.

Momchilgrad, a lady librarian, who worked in the Netherlands, December 2005

“And when I went to Holland, what do I see – communism is already built.

I spent 1 year and 2 months in Holland and have asked myself this – a country with no resources by nature, apart from marshlands, some birds, eggs and flowers, nothing else - how come it has such a powerful economy? People live so peacefully. Even as gastarbeiders we had mobile phones. There are good and humane people there, who were not brought up by communists, so they lend you a helping hand and not because you are asking for their help, they try to direct you without breaking their laws, they never want to break their laws... The typical Dutch is a very diligent person. They are unique ecologists there. I have seen a construction site, but in order to do it, some tree is in the way, and they won't cut it as we would do, or burn it. They dig with miniature excavators, uproot, pack and in a while you will see it moved some other place. The tree is blooming; it hasn't felt any stress from the fact that it's been moved. They care a great deal about their country; they care about everything they have and try to protect it at all costs, but all the immigrants that they have in their country will somewhat mess their economy.”

But for the Bulgarians in Milan, ‘here’ is Milan – *“here I learnt a lot, while in Bulgaria...”* / **38 years old male, Milan**; *“...here I allow myself to wear shorts, mini skirts, I cannot do that in Bulgaria”* / **30 years old woman, Milan**/. Notice how “here” and “there” move – with the man, who returned to Doupnitsa, apart from the distance in space, “there” is also charged with the symbolic distance of the completely different world. With the woman from Momchilgrad, the division is between “us” and “them”, but there is no “there” and “here – she speaks of “Holland” and “Bulgaria”; while for the Bulgarians living in Italy, Milan is already “here”, but Bulgaria has not yet become “there”, they talk about “Bulgaria”.

From the interviews quoted in the previous paragraph, it is obvious, that when the interviewees speak of “us” and “them”, that is not an expression of a complex – “we” in some cases cope better and are smarter than “them”. But Bulgaria, as an institutional regulation and “their world”, “abroad”, are total opposites, very different, and here the complex is quite obvious, the exasperation with the Bulgarian state explodes.

A question arises – **if these two worlds are so different, is the transfer of best practices possible, of a new type of institutional culture, or would our environment crash any innovation?**

There are two types of responses: A person changes there, but once back here, everything goes on as before; and the second type is – yes, one is changing.

Here are some examples on **the first type of responses**:

Doupnitsa, 52 old man, worked in Italy, December 2005

“People work hard, but they get money. And here, I got back and started work in a place, and they laugh at me and say “wait a sec, this is not Italy”. And says I, “Look, you’ve got to work. You can’t go on like this: you go for a coffee, then for beer... And as to myself, I worked for a while, and saw that they were laughing at me, and I started like that, just sitting pretty, as they did, you see... they just go there...just like that, we just don’t know how to work. And the one, who wants to work, and when they are not paying right, you lose your incentive, that’s that...Not that we are not hardworking, the Bulgarians, but if you don’t have an incentive to work, that’s the end. ”

A woman from Momchilgrad, who had worked in the Netherlands, December 2005 .

“For example, I have never allowed myself to travel without a ticket in Holland, because the ticket costs 2 Euro, and the fine – 70. In Bulgaria the ticket costs 0.70 leva, and the fine 2 leva, why shouldn’t I travel without a ticket... It is from these trifle things that one can draw ones conclusions”

In the second case, the influence goes in several directions.

The first and the most obvious is **the change of consumer practices**, raising of the standard of living.

Doupnitsa , 25 year old woman, December 2005

“When they come back, a small part of them set up some business. For example, I know a guy... so, he made this shop for heaters, but he was first there, in America for five years – he built himself a very nice house and...that’s it. And the bigger part buys apartments here.”

Momchilgrad, a housewife, December 2005

“When he comes back, his standard is different. He buys a car, he shows himself. You can see he’s bought a new car, because he’s back from abroad. He buys himself a house. They are very expensive here.”

In the next case the change happens on a deeper level, in the mentality, in the experience of the self, in the self-perception.

Momchilgard, a dentist, a Turk, December 2005

“The change is expressed in the fact, that in one way or another, he takes from the mentality of the place where he’s been. He wants what he does to be beautiful, clean, pleasant, etc., he changes his mentality, he changes his way of thinking. At least these people continue to be industrious. But the huge change will come not from the fact of the EU accession, but from the fact that many people of ours will go there to work. In the past years, the prosperity of 70 % has come from the capital of the so called gastarbeiters. It’s been calculated how much money comes in from foreign investment in the Republic of Bulgaria, and how much of the money of these immigrants come into the country. And it turns out that the latter is much more, and that’s clean money. For example in a province like Kurdjali, we may say that many people live, get by, thanks to money coming in from there. Every month people send in money to their parents.”

Remember the already cited interview of the secretary of Kalofer Municipality, 55 years old.

“In Greece I learned to be active, to be ingenious, in order to survive... I understood that I had to take control of my life, to be more enterprising, up and about.

After her return to Kalofer, she, together with other two persons, registered the first and the only NGO in town, dealing with alternative tourism. From its start until present it had developed and applied a lot of projects and had helped a lot of people to start hotel business.

Kalofer, 35 years old man, wh has been with his wife twice in Greece for seasonal work – picking oranges. 28-th of April 2006

“Anyway, in spite of all the troubles, work in Greece was a good start for our business; I could not have managed to open it with these salaries here. And what I learned from our work there was that the best thing in the world is to be your own master first, then to work for other masters – be they the state or employers”.

Here are some responses to the question: did your stay abroad change you: *“Yes, I became more independent.”*(a man, 36, Milan); *“I became more well-balanced here, more confident, independent”* (a woman, 55, Sondrio; *“I became more free, I shook off the dependency on the public opinion”* / 30 year old female, Milan; *“I became more independent, started coping with everything”* (man, 38, Milan).

The cultural transfer relates most of all to the experience of the self, strengthens ones confidence in one’s own Self, the conviction that you can handle any roles, once faced with the need to forget the old ones, learn new ones, then return to the old ones again, but in a new way. In this process of a life long learning by doing, the roles lose their prescriptive power, they are susceptible to the personal willpower. The research confirms Ulrich Beck’s conclusion that “the individualized individuals,... are no longer the “role players” of simple, classical industrial society, as assumed by functionalism. Individuals are constructed through a complex discursive interplay which is much more open ended than the functionalist model would assume.” (Beck, 1995: 16). Indeed, one remains under the impression that the most important lesson is **the ability to switch quickly from one type of institutional culture to another, from one role to another – in other words to make your personality both adaptable and resilient. This makes stable identities and roles senseless**, but the famous metaphor of the whole world as a scene – still relevant. The respondents in my case do have roles, but they are not so important, the important thing is to perform them well. **The “talent” of the actor is important, to play a lot and quickly changing roles, to be in constant life long learning by doing, proving his/her identity by the capacity of constant flexibility. Again the importance of the Self appears, in a way de-socialised – without specific roles and identities, protean; but from the other side –re-socialised from the point of view of successful management of the differences.**

What is most appreciated from the Bulgarian culture is a result of precisely that criticized, hated social situation in Bulgaria – the ability to survive in any situation, the patience, the capability, which you were taught by circumstances.

If I have to answer the question whether the cultural encounters between those different institutional cultures lead to assimilation, adjustment, opposition or hybridity; it is clear that we don’t find neither assimilation, nor opposition. I can define the result of the cultural encounters as a specific flexible adjustment, but very contextualized, cultivating sensitivity to social milieu and its institutional culture which leads to switching over to its specific requirements. This switching over is possible because of the cultivated trans-cultural sensitivity. It is not a hybrid in the sense of difference or mimicry. It is a process of mediating between the two cultures carrying the tension between the old institutional culture and the new one, between the newly acquired and the suppressed old one. The hybrid is a structure – not quite stable indeed; the process of personal cultural encounters cannot be expressed in terms like hybrids or hybridization. This switching over requires a constant process of remembering and forgetting – trying to forget the own in a foreign environment and to remember and imply the new foreign knowledge in the own country. This makes the person different – more reflexive, even if s/he does not reflect upon that, and more innovative. I had cited Ulrich Beck twice – for my surprise I re-discovered the concept of “reflexive

modernization” from the point of view of this research – Beck’s approach turns to be relevant not as a result of the dominance of welfare state, as he argues, but because of the globalization processes.

So while the European enlargement produces institutional hybrids, combining new normative regulations with old institutional cultures and it isn’t clear how this institutional conflict will be resolved: whether the western model will assimilate the postcommunism habituses, whether they will adjust, or whether the “colonized” will “colonize” the “colonizer”⁹; the personal encounters with a new culture will have greater impact when returning home, because of the change of the institutional culture – ones own but through it that of the “home” institutions.

So there is a cultural transfer through cultural encounters. In the Kalofer case for instance, the town slowly becoming deserted, those who breathe life into it are those, who have returned from abroad – the man, who started two businesses, the secretary, mentioned before, who established an NGO. At the same time, though, the “settlers” have preserved their old institutional culture. The problem is not with those people moving about, just the opposite, it is in the resilience and resistance of the embedded in Bulgarian institutions procedures and practices. And yet, **the change, apart from the legal regulations enforced from above, will most probably happen through this type of horizontal integration** – through the change of the people, returning to their country, trying to change the institutional environment. Namely because they have become more free, more active, more self-confident, they have shaken off that formed by communism infantilism, which required somebody – the boss, the party, the state - to take charge of everybody.

5. What is glocalization? Changing places, keeping localities: people and photos.

The local towns that I visited get depopulated. Kalofer has turned into a ghost place – one lit house out of five, and in it - a lonesome old woman watches a soap opera.

The Doupnitsa people also feel as if they habituate a cemetery:

22 years old, Doupnitsa, December 2005: *There is everything, just the people are missing! Everyone is in Italy and the Italians are beginning to come back...this month things are stirring...Otherwise everyone is in Italy, and here - completely dead, ‘cos there’s nothing, nothing’s moving...here all Doupnitsa is... in Italy.*

19 years old, Doupnitsa, December 2005: *but of course, it’s got depopulated... Half of the people are in Italy, the other half in the cemetery, that’s it. Old and young, everybody’s there.*

The houses are empty, but the walls are covered with photos – not of deceased relatives, but of the living family, scattered around the world, pictured in Granada, Seville, Munster, Milan. The global world through the lives of the beloved people is watching old women from the walls, and is touching up their sentiments through the dramas of the soap opera strangers on the TV. Appadurai would probably enjoy that, because he would assume that this would stir up let’s say the glocal imagined. Whether this is true, I don’t know. But the empty house resounds with the many voices of different places, the depopulated town is inhabited by many live virtual images. At the next funeral of the next old woman from Kalofer I overheard the following conversation between two women in mourning: “Did your granddaughter get Sprach diploma? ”, “Mine is in Delaware, she studies at an American school, Ganca’s granddaughter is in Munster. Where were yours?”, “Ah, one granddaughter is in Bonn,

⁹ These institutional hybrids appear in a lot of Bulgarian papers, done in the frame of the already cited comparative project DIOSCURI; in my paper developed for DIOSCURI I argue that the Bulgarian implementation of SAPARD program is such a hybrid.

the grandson in Cork, and my son is there. It's a good thing my daughter-in-law is here to keep an eye on me..." The place Kalofer is staring at all these places around the world, it is related to them, it is dying with eyes staring at a place somewhere in Germany, somewhere in Ireland, somewhere in Spain, somewhere in the States...at the background of some Columbian, Italian or American soap opera...

On the other hand, somewhere in Seville, Munster, Delaware, Milan the conversation goes around bean soup with "kaloferche". The pictures of the home, the garden in spring, the mother left behind in the small town, of the daughter in Germany, embellish the walls.

"Do you know what I miss most in Spain? The green of the Balkan, the trees, no, the flowers, the trees and the air of Kalofer. I dream of coming back to Bulgaria when I retire, of sitting in my garden, planting flowers, looking at the Balkan, without worrying that I will not be able to pay my electricity bill...I want to die here /"here" is Kalofer, the letter is from Spain/."

"And in Milan, there is a Doupnitsa colony and somebody in Milan asked if Doupnitsa was the capital of Bulgaria. There are thousands of Bulgarians there – in Milan. And they are from Doupnitsa."

The world has entered the provincial town, and the people have left it. The people have scattered around the big world with the small town in their hearts. Somewhere, between the big world and the small town, the nation-state has vanished.

6. Tentative Conclusions as an End?

The story of temporary migration as seen from Bulgaria is a story of disappearance – of devaluated roles, of vanishing group identities, of deserted places. What is left, are the people themselves – with their personal strives and fears, feeling of self confidence and humiliation, self assertion and muddling through; with their affiliations and aversions, with their hopes and nostalgias. The other concept, which is still alive, is that of "cultural encounter" – the stories are about "them" and "us", "here" and "there" – what is left are the people, moving along the places, comparing them, constantly adjusting themselves, being there and dreaming of somewhere else. It looks as though we are witnessing the crash of all normative concepts, prescriptive models of behavior and belonging, and rehabilitation of individual Self as the only important topos. To cite Ulrich Beck again: the individual becomes "an actor, designer, juggler and stage director of his or her own biography, identity, social networks, commitments and convictions."(Beck, 1995:14).

Temporary migrants are so flexible, that the only Center that could hold them is they, themselves. In other words, their protean existence could be held by the reinvention of their "real" autonomous Self.

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