

A

nthropology of continuity
and change

Macedonian Poreče 80 years
after Józef Obrębski's research



Institut Sławistyki PAN

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ULTURA

na Pograniczach



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and change

KULTURA NA POGRANICZACH

nr 11

(BORDERLAND CULTURES no. 11)

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Anthropology of continuity and change

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This work has been carried out within the grant “Macedonian Poreče 80 years after Józef Obrębski’s research. An anthropological study of continuity and change” (no. 2011/01/D/HS3/03583), awarded by the National Science Centre and implemented at the Faculty of History, University of Warsaw.

Praca została wykonana w ramach grantu „Macedońskie Porecze w 80 lat po badaniach Józefa Obrębskiego. Antropologiczne studium ciągłości i zmiany” nr 2011/01/D/HS3/03583 finansowanego ze środków Narodowego Centrum Nauki i realizowanego na Wydziale Historycznym Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.

Cover, halftitle and title page design / Projekt okładki i stron tytułowych
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Volume 11 of the series *Kultura na Pograniczach* (Borderland Cultures)

ISBN: 978-83-64031-29-8
ISSN: 2450-565X (Kultura na Pograniczach)

Published by:
Sławistyczny Ośrodek Wydawniczy
Instytutu Sławistyki PAN
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Foreword

This book is a result of fieldwork undertaken for the project “Macedonian Poreče 80 years after Józef Obrębski’s research. An anthropological study of continuity and change” in the years 2012–2013. Our aim was to create a contemporary monograph on Poreče through critical analysis of collected field material, by posing the same or similar questions as Obrębski did 80 years ago. The research focused primarily on subjects explored by Obrębski, for instance family, yearly rituals, religion, magic, or the position of women in the rural society. Secondly we investigated new topics like the political, economic, and social changes related to the collapse of Yugoslavia and the painful transition process in Macedonia.

Acknowledgements

This book was written and printed thanks to the financial support of the National Science Centre in Poland (grant no. 2011/01/D/HS3/03583).

We would like to express our gratitude to students of the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Warsaw, students and employees of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje – Ljupčo Risteski, Meri Todorovska, Donka Risteska, Vele Zmejkoski, as well as to scholars from the Institute of Old Slavonic Studies in Prilep: namely to Tanas Vražinovski and Vladimir Karadžoski. We also thank Barbora Machová, who did not participate in our project but was nevertheless eager to share with us her knowledge of Bitovo, where she lived during her PhD research.

Cordial thanks go to Olimpia Dragouni for the translation of articles published in this book, as she was faced with the challenging task of dealing with texts written in Polish, Macedonian, and English and to Joanna Mroczkowska for the proof-reading of this book.

Finally, the book would have never appeared if it was not for our Interlocutors, and all the people we met “in the field”, who told us their stories, provided us with a place to sleep, delicious food and strong coffee, and who sometimes made us drunk with of their home-made *rakija*.

Karolina Bielenin-Lenczowska
Anna Engelking

JÓZEF OBRĘBSKI'S POREČE: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC REVISIT

"What are you writing and writing all the time?"
words of a man named Trpe from the village of Trebovle
to Józef Obrębski, 1932
[Obrębski 2005a: 29–30]

Whatever Josif found, he took a photo of it
[Interview, Karanfila, 2013, Trebovle]

*He was interested in everything,
it was linked to his profession.
He was entirely devoted.*
[Veselinovski 2002: 227]

*The tale of the past is always a projection
of the present collective will
of human community into the future*
[Obrębski 2007: 97]

A foreign ethnographer internalized. Józef Obrębski in Poreče, 1932–1933

Poreče, surrounded by mountain chains and massifs of Suva Gora, Jakupica, Dautica, and Dobra Voda, is hidden in a deep highland valley crisscrossed with streambeds and deep gorges of rivers and streams. The corrugated basin presents a scenic view of mountains, hills and uplands. Covered by forests it opens time and again into vast pastures. Here and there, limited

by the forest or a mountain ridge, surrounded by a mosaic of arable lands, the Poreče villages appear: a dozen huts, several dozen at most, clustered and surrounded or separated by patches of small fruit and vegetable gardens, and even smaller apiaries. These several villages scattered around the valleys, ridges, and slopes of the cirque, this is Poreče – a land where there are no cities, cut off from [...] any rail track, spreading across a vast space of western Macedonia. A day of [tiresome] travel separates the villages of Poreče from the closest Turkish small town [Gostivar]. [...] Bigger towns: Tetovo, Skopje, Prilep, can be reached within two days by a caravan carrying merchandise over a narrow mountain trail which is impassable even for a wagon. Hence, regardless of the [political] changes and the civilizational progress, the Poreče village lives according to its own, distinct, old life, just as the ancestors used to lead it a hundred or two hundred years ago [OC, boxes 50–51].

This is how Józef Obrębski described Poreče 80 years ago. He spent over six months there: from mid-August 1932 until the end of March 1933. Who was he, what was he looking for, and why did he arrive at this particular place?

Józef Obrębski (1905–1967) was an ethnologist and a slavist educated at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland and an assistant of Kazimierz Moszyński (who at that time was regarded as the greatest authority on the ethnography of Slavs). Obrębski came to Poreče from London as a PhD student of Bronisław Malinowski and a stipendist of the Rockefeller Foundation.¹ The competence and the abilities of this young, 27-year-old researcher were highly assessed. Bronisław Malinowski expressed his opinion about Obrębski by stating: “There is no doubt at all that he is one of the most capable young men in ethnology. He is a good worker, original, clear-minded, and efficient. He certainly also has a spark of genius” [LSE, letter to the Rockefeller Foundation, 22.10.1933].

In Macedonia, Obrębski searched for “his own Trobriands” – an ethnically homogenous community, possible to isolate both in geographic and cultural-social dimensions. After months of research in western Macedonia, he decided to stay in the villages of Poreče which, as he described in a letter to Malinowski, “suited him the most because of its archaism” [LSE, letter, 4.11.1932]. In his later work he wrote that Poreče is inhabited by: “a compact local, rural-pastoral, homogenous population. The influx of foreign element [...] does not matter” [OC, boxes 50–51], and that this region is characterized by minimal social mobility: “until recently Poreče did not know emigration” [OC, boxes 50–51], and also by the lack – or weakness – of the educational system: “The education was also able to influence only to a small extent the levelling of traditional culture” [OC, boxes 50–51]. In this location, isolated from civilization,

¹ For general biographical information on Józef Obrębski see: Engelking 2003; 2007.

Obrębski saw a “reserve of primitive, archaic South-Slavic folk culture, marvellously preserved” [Obrębski 2005: 25]. He thus concluded that, according to the theoretical assumptions of both of his teachers, this is: “the country of special and undeniable value for ethnological research” [Obrębski 2005: 25; cf. Lubaś 2011: 37–39].²

Obrębski was interested in rural communities which managed to escape the disintegrating influence of modernity. He wanted to research them using the functionalist approach of Malinowski, aiming at a synthesis of:

[...] these invisible facts, which are comprised of cultural basis and values of the members of the researched society, manifest themselves in activity and actions realized in the communal life and organized around certain fundamental goals and tasks into various social institutions of the group [Obrębski 2004: 62].

The big patriarchal family and its function in the rural community became the subject of Obrębski’s research, and he focused especially on the role of women in the traditional society. He studied and documented ceremonial, religious, and everyday life, mythology, folk medicine, and magic rituals. He managed to gather rich materials³ that were unique even at the time of their collection and are thus all the more valuable today, since no other anthropologist led ethnological field research in Poreče until the very beginning of the 21st century.⁴

Obrębski settled in the village of Volče, in the house of Kiro and Kolo Krajčevski, and their mother Stefkojca.

² It needs to be understood that complete isolation of even remote and hard to reach regions (in terms of communication) in the 20th century Europe is a myth. Obrębski was fully aware of this fact; he took into consideration the level of isolation of Poreče in comparison to other regions. His fieldwork materials document for instance that the inhabitants of the villages would not only visit the nearby towns, but they also migrated further out when looking for jobs, that young men served in the army, that the village was sometimes visited by gendarmes and public administration envoys, and also that the church system was in function, etc.

³ The scientific legacy of Józef Obrębski is available in the “Obrebski Collection”, Special Collections and Archives, W.E.B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts, USA; <http://scua.library.umass.edu/umarmot/obrebski-jozef/>. The material referring to Macedonia encompasses around 1500 pages of Obrębski’s manuscripts and typescripts in Polish, Macedonian, and English written both directly during the field research (notes and short descriptions) and later, during the office stage of work (monographs and articles prepared for publishing, many of them in several versions). Large sections of the manuscripts are barely legible and it is no longer possible to recreate the logical sequence of the material according to the author’s intention.

⁴ The subject of research conducted by Obrębski in Poreče, contextualized in reference to his scientific biography and history of anthropology, has been elaborated in numerous works, among them: Engelking 2002; 2006a; 2006b; Halpern 2002; 2003; Risteski 2011; Vražinovski 2003; 2006.

He would later write to Kazimierz Moszyński:

Nearly six months I spent as a member of *zadruga*, catching and observing from a close distance what was unobserved until now: the intimate life of a South Slavic family. [...] apart from a lot of valuable information, I got the most important thing: a good knowledge of this complex of relationships which a patriarchal (big) family represents [IEiAK U], letter, 4.04.1933].

It was not always easy for him to access the life of the community; the process of breaking the barrier of mistrust frustrated him immensely.

First weeks, even first months of work led me to despair, until I gained control of the situation. [...] the Macedonian field is extremely difficult for the ethnographer [IEiAK U], letter, 4.04.1933].

This situation was especially difficult for the researcher who wanted to know and understand these aspects of culture, which were kept hidden from foreigners, and such was the case of Obrębski, who was among other things interested in the practice and the system of local magic.

Overcoming this “extreme difficulty” in the Macedonian field⁵ was made possible thanks to Obrębski’s methodological approach. Obrębski laconically described the ethnographic method he practiced inspired by Malinowski as “objective observation and direct experience” [Obrębski 1934: VI]. He had no doubt that:

the image which anybody would want to create on the basis of relations anchored in questionnaire-type inquiry and uncontrolled by observation would be wrong and false to the highest extent [Obrębski 2005: 49–50].

We can assume that he was aware of the fact that the ethnographer needs to build an understanding of the culture through the means of – as we call it today – the anthropology of experience [see: Hastrup 1995; Turner, Bruner 1986]. Summing up his research on magic and witchcraft, he confessed that:

Especially active participation in the life of the village, which was the main arena of my work, enabled me to discover an entire local system of witchcraft and to penetrate it closely: not only theoretically, but also through practical participation in several witch affairs [OC, boxes 50–51].

During nearly eight months that he spent in Poreče (according to him this period was too short to conduct functionalist research), Obrębski managed to establish very good relations with the inhabitants of Volče and the surrounding villages. This was apparently made possible not only due to the use of the method, but also thanks to his personal charm. He

⁵ For details on the difficulties of gaining the trust of Poreče inhabitants that Obrębski faced, and how he overcame them see: Engelking 2006a.

was a man of high emotional intelligence, who connected with people with ease. He liked the highlanders of Poreče, and they liked him in return. Moreover, the people of Poreče started to see him not as a foreigner, but perceived him through the filter of their own neighbour and affinity categories. He became “internalized”. Obrębski provides information about the time when he lived in the village of Trebovle at the house of one of his most important interlocutors, the unmarried homestead owner (*bečar*) Trpe. This was the most characteristic testimony on the position of the ethnographer in the local community:

One day, while thinking about how to solve the issue of introducing female help into his household, he came up with an idea to make me his *domazet*.⁶ I was to marry his niece Elviza, who often helped him by cooking or fixing his clothes, and thus I would provide his household not only with a woman, but also with male workforce. “What are you writing, and writing all the time?” – he expostulated – “Be a man, do some work: plow, sow. And if you really need to write, write in the municipality. Be a writer, maybe even a village head” [Obrębski 2005a: 29–30].

After the fieldwork was finished, Obrębski wrote to Moszyński about his future research plans related to Macedonia:

The results [...] will take the form of a book about Macedonian female witch doctors [...]. It will be an important contribution to the knowledge on the socio-cultural structure of patriarchal society. [Collected data include] a substantial collection of photographs. I am full of enthusiasm, and in London I shall immediately start working on the subject. However, it lacks one crucial aspect. There are no observations and photographs of periods which are important for the medicine and magic, such as Gjurgjovden and Ivanden.⁷ *Nota bene*, I would like to return to Poreče in order to study these periods. This time for studies on religion, it is a subject which seems to me especially interesting [IEiAK UJ, letter, 4.04.1933].

Work on documentation and memory. Józef Obrębski's Poreče from the 1930s until the early 21st century

Obrębski never managed to return to Poreče, although, according to some sources, he wanted to do so until the end of his life. Moreover, WWII and his subsequent migration to the United States made it impossible for him to finish and publish the results of his field research. He managed to

⁶ *Domazet* – a son-in-law who does not have his own household, “married” into the house of his in-laws.

⁷ Translator's note: the periods refer to the St. George's and St. John's Day.

publish only two articles: *Black magic in Macedonia* [Obrębski 1934] and *Religious system of the Macedonian people* [Obrębski 1936]. The typescript of the monograph *The Giaours of Macedonia. The description of magic and religion of Macedonian shepherds vis-a-vis the communal life of their village* was destroyed during the Warsaw Uprising. Luckily, some working versions of large fragments of the monograph were salvaged, as were some parts of other studies and elaborations summing up the field experience from Poreče, and its anthropological interpretation. The full Polish edition of Obrębski's research results is currently being prepared for publishing,⁸ while a Macedonian translation of large parts of this corpus has been edited by Tanas Vražinovski [Obremski 2001a; 2001b; 2002]. After Obrębski's death, his article written in English: *Ritual and Social Structure in a Macedonian Village* appeared as prepared by Barbara Halpern [Obremski 1969]. Since then it has been re-edited, translated, and reprinted several times.⁹ There are also Polish first printed editions of fragments of the archival collection, studies: *The witchcraft of Macedonian Poreče* and *The scandal in the village*¹⁰ [Obrębski 2005a; 2005b]. The research group whose activity and research output are presented in this book had access to both the printed and archival legacy of Obrębski.

The photographs taken by Obrębski in the Macedonian Poreče were also an extremely important source. The collection of 550 glass negatives¹¹ survived WWII: the occupation, and the Warsaw Uprising. They were buried in metal boxes, in a garden of the Warsaw Mokotów district. 200 of these reproductions have contributed to forming a Macedonian-English album edited in Skopje: *Macedonian Poreče 1932–1933* [Obremski 2003b], which, besides the photographs, also included selected fragments of Obrębski's texts, and articles written by the editors of that book. The photographic documentation collected by the researcher is not only priceless for ethnography – as well as beautiful – but also constitutes an important factor of constructing the memory of Obrębski in Poreče, and the modern narrative of the people of the region about their own identity. We shall return to this issue later on.

After Obrębski passed away, his wife Tamara, following his wishes, visited Volče on two occasions. The visits took place in 1969 and 1971,

⁸ The monograph *Macedonia* of Józef Obrębski will appear as the second volume of the series *Ethno-Sociology Studies*, published by the Oficyna Naukowa publishing house, edited by Anna Engelking.

⁹ See the Macedonian *Opštstvenata struktura vo makedonskoto selo* [Obremski 2003a] and the Polish translation: *Struktura społeczna i rytuał we wsi macedońskiej* [Obrębski 2005c].

¹⁰ Macedonian translation: *Skandal vo seloto* [Obremski 2006].

¹¹ The collection is available at <http://scua.library.umass.edu/galleries/obrebski.htm>.

and were the first intentional returns to Poreče following the footsteps of Obrębski: sentimental journeys, but not devoid of research aspects. Tamara Obrębska, as a sociologist and participant of post-war field research led by her husband in Jamaica, was well prepared for the fieldwork. She wrote from Volče to Józef's sister, Antonina Obrębska-Jabłońska:

The travel surpassed my expectations. As *Josifica* I was welcomed as "one of their own" by the families that Józio befriended, and during these couple of weeks which I spent in the village, I gathered data and over 200 photographs – which will enable me to publish an article or a short book on the subject of "Social change in a Macedonian village". Apart from that, I have the enormous collection of material which Józio documented in his notes, and the theoretical orientation formulated by him in several published articles [AR, letter, 7.10.1969].¹²

Tamara Obrębska concentrated the efforts on protecting and publishing her husband's legacy. However, she did not manage to prepare the announced publication as she died in 1974. Before her death, she contacted Joel M. Halpern, a professor of Anthropology from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, who had previously researched Serbian and Macedonian countryside. He took care of Obrębski's legacy and finalized the publication of several of his works [i.e. Obrebski 1977; Obrebski 1976; Halpern 2003].

Josifica who studied Macedonian language, visited Volče as well as other places in Macedonia 40 years after her husband. She wanted so much to finalize *Josif's* work, and to publish the material he gathered. She felt the need to fulfil his will and testament. She constantly looked through his notes and looked for people whose names were noted in them: "Where is Kolo? Where is this one? Where is that one?" [...] If one of them was already dead, she would contact his family, wife, children. There was no house that she would not enter and photograph [Veselinovski 2002: 229].

There is no doubt that Tamara Obrębska, who managed to contact some still living interlocutors of *Josif*, and two subsequent generations of Poreče's inhabitants, contributed to the revival and preservation of the memory of Józef Obrębski in the region. She was also the provider of the first testimony to the mythization of remembrance: "In this village Józio is a half-legendary figure – a kind of a 'younger' hero, like prince Marko" [AR, letter to A. Obrębska-Jabłońska, 18.08.1969].

The memory of *Josif* has been alive in Poreče until now, surprising as it might seem. It is actualized by a monument erected in 2002, which

¹² Notes and photographs from Macedonia made by Tamara Obrębska are placed in the "Obrebski Collection" (box 30) in the archives of University of Massachusetts Amherst.

stands next to the church in the central square of Samokov,¹³ the biggest town of Upper Poreče. The statue, made of white marble, constitutes probably the only monument in the world devoted to an anthropologist (even Bronisław Malinowski does not have one). It was funded by Ariton Veselinovski¹⁴ from Volče, a relative and neighbour of Kolo and Kiro, in whose *zadruga* Obrębski used to live. Furthermore, the main street of the town bears the name *ulica Jozef Obrembski*.¹⁵

Ariton Veselinovski did not know *Josif* personally; he was born several years after Obrębski left Macedonia. He was, however, a friend of Tamara Obrębska, and accompanied her on trips to Poreče where they followed in the footsteps of her husband. He was the one who wrote the abovementioned remembrance of *Josif*, and the first testimony of the local memory of Poreče about “their own anthropologist”. Among other things, he wrote that:

Obrębski was known in the village as *Josif* and was really liked by people. It is interesting that he was liked by both men and women. Such signs of acceptance and hospitality on the side of women were rare back then. He was, all in all, a foreigner, a come-byer. This means that he possessed exceptional qualities. [...] [H]e was constantly in motion. He would walk to 10–15 villages of Upper Poreče [...]. He was always in the right place at the right time. He participated in all the rituals. [...] When somebody died, *Josif* was also here, among his own people so to say, since he lived with them in the same village. When people went to the mill, he went with them. When there was a need to lever a rock, he was also there. When people started to break this rock apart with hammers, he would also grab a hammer and join the work. Somebody was chopping wood, he did the same. He literally wanted to see and try everything. He was interested in everything, it was connected to his profession. He was completely devoted to it. [...] He was alone, distanced from his cohabitants, only [at night] when he went to bed, but it is said that [even] then, when everybody laid down and was asleep, *Josif* would turn on his lamp and start writing. Sometimes he would work until dawn. He selected and systematized the notes which he made during the day, during the rituals and other events [Veselinovski 2002: 227–228].

¹³ Until 2005 Samokov was the center of the municipality. Nowadays, the municipal administrative centre of Poreče is located nearly 40 kilometres away in Makedonski Brod (former Brod), just where it was in Obrębski's times.

¹⁴ The initiative to build and finance a monument came from Ariton Veselinovski. The erection of the monument took place in cooperation with the Institute for Old Slavonic Culture in Prilep and Mermeren Kombinat (marble factory) in Prilep which donated a block of snow white marble for this work. The bust of Obrębski was sculpted based on a photograph by Atanas Atanasoski: a sculptor employed at the Institute.

¹⁵ The initiative to name the street after Józef Obrębski came from professor Tanas Vražinovski, the head of the Institute for Old Slavonic Culture in Prilep.

The revival of research interest in Poreče among the ethnographers, folklorists, and anthropologists (mainly Polish and Macedonian) began in the early 21st century, and is connected with access to the legacy of Obrębski and the process of its publication. According to Tanas Vražinovski, thanks to the publication of Obrębski's works in Macedonia:

Poreče, in many aspects, became one of better researched regions of the country [...] [as Obrębski was] [probably] the most important foreign [...] researcher on folk culture of Macedonians [Vražinovski 2003: 61, 53].

Regular conferences have been held in the "Biser" ("Pearl") hotel in Samokov for over a decade, with the aim of presenting anthropological, folklorist, and cultural research inspired by the issues taken up by Obrębski, or connected thematically or geographically to his work.¹⁶ Also, the very figure and work of Józef Obrębski are the focus of attention for researchers who meet there [cf. most of the publications in: Vražinovski 2002, also: Bielenin-Lenczowska 2013; Pandev 2013].

A large research project that aimed to document the traditional culture of contemporary Poreče was carried out between 2000–2002 at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje. Students and employees of the Institute went to Poreče on short (several day long) stays and conducted interviews relating to various subjects, i.e. demonology, annual and family rites, folk medicine, customary law, or traditional vs. modern agriculture. The materials summing up this research, which were presented in many BA and MA theses, were deposited at the Institute's archives, nowadays largely digitalized. Publications summarizing the project are available on its internet website,¹⁷ and also partly in the volume *70 years from the research of Jozef Obrebski in Macedonia* [Vražinovski 2002], which summarizes the aforementioned Samokov conferences.

However, the question of the memory of *Josif* in present day Poreče has never until now been a subject of research. The character of the present remembrance of "their own anthropologist" by the people of Poreče, as well as of other issues he worked upon, were the subject of our research interest while restudying the same locations in Poreče 80 years later. If one should refer to the proposal of Michael Burawoy's reflexive ethnography and types of focused revisits proposed by him, it is possible to apply to our research the definition of ethnographic revisit which he coined:

¹⁶ Three collective volumes (monographs) summarizing these meetings have already been published, i.e. Vražinovski 2002; Vražinovski, Karadžoski, Jovanovska-Rizoska 2006; Lucheska, Dimoski 2013.

¹⁷ http://www.iea.pmf.ukim.edu.mk/PORECHE/index_mak.htm

An “ethnographic revisit” occurs when an ethnographer undertakes participant observation; that is, studying others in their space and time, with a view to comparing his or her site with the same one studied at an earlier point in time, whether by him or herself, or by someone else [Burawoy 2003: 646].

Ethnographic revisit. Poreče 2012–2013 in the perspective of change and continuity

When Obrębski conducted his research, Poreče and Macedonia were part of Yugoslav South Serbia (*Južna Srbija*). After WWII, the region, still within the borders of Yugoslavia, became part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Macedonia, and after 1991 it became an administrative unit of an independent country: the Republic of Macedonia. Present day Poreče, observed and experienced by our research team in 2012–2013, was subject to deep civilizational, social, and cultural changes which occurred throughout the last 80 years. Regardless of their scale and dynamics, this territory is not easily accessed even today.

There is still no direct road that would lead to Skopje, the capital city only 80 km away, as the crow flies. In order to get there, one has to take a 4-hour long journey over 180 kilometres of road that winds around high and steep mountains. Most of the villages of Poreče can, however, be accessed by car (although some of them only by an off-road vehicle), and Samokov, being the centre of Upper Poreče, has a direct road link with Makedonski Brod. The latter is in turn well connected with all of the bigger towns of Macedonia. The region is therefore no longer as isolated in terms of communication as it was earlier. The roads, although varying in quality, fulfil their function. In and around villages, donkeys are still used for local transport and communication (for example animals carry oak branches for the winter feed for goats, just as they did in the old times), though many inhabitants of Poreče own a car. There are also private minibuses (*kombe*) travelling between individual settlements, which transport people to their workplaces in the town (i.e. in the granite stone pits in Bitola), or back home for the weekend. A road is also being built which is supposed to cut through the mountains and connect the region with Skopje. It is not the first engineering interference witnessed by Poreče since WWII. Firstly, around a decade ago, one of the villages researched by Obrębski, Zdunje, had been flooded by an artificial lake following the construction of an electric dam. Secondly, a part of the neighbouring village of Breznica was relocated to a higher location. Its inhabitants provide picturesque descriptions of how the church of Breznica was moved “stone by stone”.

An especially radical change, and its effects on the cultural and natural landscape can be observed in the demographic structure of Poreče. This change is a consequence of political, social, and economic transformations that had occurred in Macedonia in the past 20 years, and had been strictly related to global processes. The present-day demography leads to alterations in economic strategies (i.e. retreat of traditional pastoral life) and everyday life in Poreče.

After WWII, as a result of the socialist policy of industrialization and urbanization in Yugoslavia, Poreče began to depopulate. Factories and districts built in the nearby towns lured the youth, who were attracted by a vision of an easier, urban life. Brvenica, a village close to Tetovo, in the north-western part of the country, was one of the centres drawing migrants from the countryside. Here in the 1960s a textile factory Tedex was built, providing employment for many villagers from Poreče. These days migrants visit their home villages, where they still own houses, only during the summer or during some of the more significant holidays.

Samokov also had its factory, which in its heyday hired up to 200 people – this was the weapons factory “Suvenir”. It was closed in 2005 but reopened recently, after privatization. In the tales of people from Poreče, “Suvenir” seemed to have been a place that hired everybody, or at least a member of nearly every family. The collapse of the factory is therefore perceived as a blow directed at the inhabitants of the region by the politicians. They feel deserted and marginalized by the state which provides them with no support: neither institutional, nor financial [cf. Chajęcka in this volume]. In the Yugoslav times, the workers of “Suvenir” were granted a housing estate (*naselba*), built especially for them, complete with a kindergarten, school, and a hotel. The factory, according to the socialist idea of “etatization of time” [cf. Verdery 1996] also organized the free time of the workers [cf. Zmejkoski in this volume].

To a large extent, the socialist changes have contributed to the change of demographical structure of the Poreče villages: many young people left the mountain regions and moved to the *naselba*. Those who remained in the villages were older people and a considerable number of unmarried single men. These old bachelors (*samci*) took care of homesteads which they inherited from their parents and, out of necessity, assumed the work traditionally considered as female: cleaning, cooking, baking bread, or preparing fruit and vegetable preserves. Around a decade ago, in order to stop the depopulation of the villages, people began to invite Catholic women from northern Albania to Poreče. This has been arranged through matchmakers, who are paid around several hundred to a thousand euros respectively, and match local bachelors with women who marry them

and settle in the villages of Poreče. In 2013, there were three Albanian women in the nearby village of Kosovo; seven – in the larger village of Brest; and eight in Samokov (the majority in Stara Vodenica part), which is the largest village. There were *Albanski snai* (Albanian daughters-in-law) in other villages of Upper Poreče as well, and during our two year research we noticed a constant increase in numbers [cf. Bielenin-Lenczowska 2015a]. The sociological and cultural changes brought about by the reorganization of marriage rules broke the laws of ethnic endogamy and introduced non-Orthodox Christian, foreign-speaking women, and subsequently, children from mixed-marriages.

Permanent and temporal labour migration is yet another issue, of a scale incomparable to what was observed in the times of Obrębski, which strongly influences the demography and economy of the region. People of Poreče move to other ex-Yugoslavian countries, and even farther, mainly to Italy and Germany. The migration abroad was significant back in the 1960s, when Yugoslavia signed the agreement on *gastarbeiters* with the states of Western Europe, but it intensified after 1991, when Macedonia became an independent country struggling with political and economic instability [cf. Chepreganov 2010; Bielenin-Lenczowska 2015b]. On the other hand, an ethnographer who comes here following the footsteps of *Josif* will notice a continuation of age-old patterns of seasonal earning: for this purpose people exploit forests, manufacture resin and turpentine – which in the past they used to sell in the nearby towns, and now they export abroad in exchange not for denars but for euro.

Many examples of the continuity of cultural and economic patterns are visible in the landscape and the everyday, and ritual life of Poreče villages, just as Obrębski described it: peppers and tobacco hanging on strings are drying in the sun, and it is easy to find handmade beehives, or gourds grown for culling water in the house gardens, or goats being herded by a common shepherd. The villages are divided into the same neighbourhoods (*maala*) as they were 80 years ago, and one can hear the same myths about the founding of the village and the church, or the same tales about the mythical reasons for the prohibition of marriage between people coming from villages of Brest and Botuše. Also, the institution of village godfather (the village *kum*), the master of ceremony during the celebration of *Vodici* (Epiphany, 19 January) remained unchanged. The celebration is organized every year in the same way: in the church and on the graveyard, this time not under the open sky but in the new *trpezarijas* (where village *slavas* are also celebrated), built with the financial effort of the entire community. *Vodici*, and *slavas* – holidays of the patrons of villages and churches, but also of particular families [cf. Zarzycka in this volume] – are occasions for the deserted villages to spring back to life, as they are revisited by

the numerous emigrants who return from the towns to their home place in order to celebrate together.

The elaborate wedding and funeral ritual, analyzed so carefully by Obrębski, is a testimony to the continuity of familial-ancestral foundations of the community. We had the opportunity to observe and document the key components and contents of both these rites. We were also able to see the everlasting love for the collective dance *oro*, and hear the traditional music of *gajdadžii*.¹⁸ We participated in the yearly celebrations of the 19th of August: the Feast of Transfiguration (*Preobraženije*) organized collectively by members of three villages: Brest, Kosovo and Trebovle atop the mountain Fojnik, a celebration also photographed by Obrębski in 1932. We recorded songs sung during the Feast, asking Mother Mary (the *Gospoda*) for Her blessing for the crops, songs which were also noted down by Obrębski. Just like him, we talked to women who got married through the institution of running away from home, and who are known here as *begalki*. In the same way as he did, we tried to establish good relations with women practicing folk medicine, divination, and magic: the *bajački* [cf. Statkiewicz in this volume]. Similarly, our attention was also drawn to the prophetic role which the local culture ascribes to dreams.

We even managed to ask about some ethnographic details missed by Obrębski. The function of a certain detail related to the celebration of *Vodici* can serve as an example. Obrębski noted:

Now all the househusbands approach the old godfather [*kum*] who stands in the door of the church atrium [...] and each of them receives a part of a hemp string, which is being gradually unwound and cut off, and which ties up the *bosilok* bunch to the cross [...]. When everybody has been given a piece of the string, the old godfather gives the cross to the new one. In my notes however, there is no information about what happens to the parts of the string which have been previously shared among the householders, and what is their subsequent purpose and use [Obrębski 2001b: 243].

The villagers from Brest told us about the purpose of the *Vodici* string: the red string received from the priest is used to tie up bunched basil, to which old coins are being attached. Such a bouquet (*kitka*) serves as a small aspergillum, which is later used to bless houses and house animals [photograph no. 8].

How is the memory of contemporary Porečans about “their anthropologist” positioned within this dynamic configuration of change and cultural continuity?

¹⁸ People playing the *gajda*, a bagpipe known in the Balkans and Southeast Europe.

Josif – dobar čoek. Józef Obrębski in Poreče, 2012–2013

The generation of Józef Obrębski's interlocutors has already passed away. The oldest interlocutors of our research team were born in 1920, and were still small children when Obrębski conducted his fieldwork. However, we have not encountered anyone who had met him in person. We therefore dealt with "communicative memory": formed through oral transmission from parents and grandparents, and knowledge retrieved secondarily through the means of ethnographic works, media, and school. This memory has its own rules, well described by the researchers of remembrance issues [see e.g. Assmann 2008; Halbwachs 1992; Climo, Cattell 2002; Nora 1989]. It distorts and interprets facts from the perspective of present day needs and values. It is a subject to mythologization. It is constructed and ideologized by external factors.

The most deserted Poreče village, Obrębski's "headquarters" Volče, is these days also the least accessible one, as it is located in the highest mountains. During his research there were 30 homesteads here, and around 170 villagers. These days only four elderly people still live in two houses there. Among them is Angja, the daughter-in-law of Cvetkojca, who was a top specialist in folk medicine and magic and one of the main interlocutors of *Josif*. This village, just like the others, becomes more densely inhabited between May and October, when people of Volče – who spend the winter in towns – return for the summer.

The local memory of Obrębski is easily evoked: it almost lies on the surface. The first reaction to foreigners in the village – those coming from abroad – is to associate them with Obrębski and lead them to one of the ruined huts with the words: "*Josif* lived here". We were not the first to come here following his footsteps: over the last two decades, Volče was visited by participants of several conferences in Samokov, as well as by Macedonian anthropologists, and an American "Obrębskilogist", Joel M. Halpern. All of them have documented their research and stay by filming and recording conversations with the inhabitants.

Contemporary narrations on *Josif*, which the people of Volče share, are neither complex nor rich in detail, and their content is rather poorer than that provided by Ariton Veselinovski in his commemoration. The rarely mentioned facts serve as the material of the tale, and are shaped in accordance with the local narrative patterns. The ethnographer learns that *Josif* lived here with Kolo and Kiro for two years, here he ate and drank, and noted everything. Kolo and Kiro were his peers and got along well with him. When *Josif* came here, it was obvious that he was a city man –

he was different from the locals.¹⁹ He had his own money and paid for everything. When he ate and drank, he paid for the food, and he paid for the transport as well. People spoke well of him. He lived here for the entire winter, taking photographs, which he would later send from Poland. People say that he used to send many photographs (this last detail may rather refer to Tamara Obrębska's photographs, as she presumably sent them 45 years ago from the USA). These 80 years separating the present from these events is shortened in the narratives of the interlocutors, and becomes simplified as they do not place *Josif's* stay in Poreče in an objectified historical timeframe.

Józef Obrębski left Poreče at the end of March 1933. He did not publish any articles in Yugoslavia, and therefore no scientific paper in a comprehensible language could reach the people of Poreče – not until the early 2000s, when the works of Obrębski were published in Macedonian [Obrębski 2001a; 2001b; 2002], together with an album of his photographs [Obrębski 2003b]. It is highly improbable that the two Polish articles from the 1930s [Obrębski 1934; 1936] could have reached this region earlier, even if only so that the villagers could see photographs included in one of these texts. In 1978 Joel M. Halpern showed the inhabitants of Volče an English publication [Obrębski 1977] which also included photographs, this was commented on by the locals.²⁰ However, unlike the visits of Tamara, which were mentioned by several interlocutors, Halpern did not remain in the collective memory we registered.

When listening to the people who have read or even looked through Macedonian publications of Obrębski, or on Obrębski, we have no doubt that these interlocutors accommodate the information taken from books into local narratives, for example: that *Josif* was most interested in rituals and magic, and that he described how he met the local *babi* (old women): Stefkojca, Cvetkojca, or Desojca. In these tales, on occasion, the person of Obrębski is fused with other figures of his interlocutors or persons known from books published after 2000, as well as from publications available online. The message loses the historical truth: it becomes mythicized. In several villages interlocutors claimed that it was their village that hosted Obrębski. Somebody was sure that Obrębski married a Macedonian girl. According to widespread opinion, he lived here for over a year, he was a teacher, who took many photographs, and for this reason a monument of him was erected in Samokov.

The attitude of the interlocutors is especially noteworthy as they tend to perceive individuals and interpersonal relations through

¹⁹ The notes of Obrębski suggest that he was being called a man from the city, a city-dweller.

²⁰ <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mufs001-xn-i0502>.

the perspective of locally dominating family patterns: we were asked several times whether we are *Josif's* family. It was also striking that in nearly every conversation there was a reference to him through an everyday cliché of *dobar čoek* (good man) which generally served as sign of approval. It is the most frequent stereotypical positive label of a man; this is how one speaks here of a husband, a neighbour, a relative, or an acquaintance.

Just as any oral folk narrative, constructed from motifs repeated in the family and at home, heard and read, the narrative about *Josif* is subjected to specific mechanisms. The narrative, transmitted in local linguistic formulations, also articulates the local reality, conceptual categories, and value system. It does not comply with the reality of 1932–1933, as that is not the narrative's goal. Instead, it seemingly aims at providing a tale about the Porečans. The story of the foreign researcher, who lived among the people of Poreče in order to write everything down and take photographs of everything, strengthens the sense of their own value.

There is no doubt that nowadays, the central position of this narrative connected to *Josif* is marked by the album published in 2003 under the title *Poreče 1932–1933* [Obremski 2003b]. This publication serves primarily as a family album for the inhabitants of nearby villages and as a tale about group self-affirmation. This album is kept in many houses, and when asked about Obremski, people often take it out and present the pictures of people they used to know: their aunts, uncles, relatives or neighbours, or even their mother, as was the case with Karanfila from Trebovlje, who was born after WWII in the *zadruga* of Volče, where *Josif* used to live. Her husband Rade's mother, who was also from Volče, was photographed while preparing warp yarn for weaving. Rade remembers his mother's tales about how *Josif* used to take these photographs. He evokes the information about Obremski which is to be found in the album, and emphasizes that during the war, "he had all his photographs buried in the ground" [Interview, man, born 1947, 2012, Trebovlje]. This fact, strengthening the positive overtone of self-narrative, affects the imagination of the local people.

The group activity of looking through the photographs in the album actualizes the knowledge and memories about the events and activities captured: about the practice of healing and love magic, about making amulets and their functions, about the celebration of *Vodici* and village *slava*, about wedding and funerary rituals, and the customs of commemorating the dead. These photographs focus the ethnographic conversation. Its collective hero is the intergenerational, non-anonymous familial community that functions, just as it did 80 years ago, with strong neighbourly ties, which are the basis of local sense of identity and dignity. The photographer-teacher

Josif Obrembski is woven into this tale. He returned to Poreče thanks to this album. He returned there as a mythical figure bearing content currently awaited by the people of this region.

Interlocutors who have read both the works of Obrębski and works about Obrębski, repeat and reformulate (over)interpretations of some Macedonian authors [see e.g. Vražinovski 2006; Vražinovski in this volume], incorporating the Polish anthropologist into the Macedonian nation building discourse which claims that Obrębski emphasized the existence of Macedonian nation and language, and also supported efforts to establish a separate Macedonian state.²¹

Locals tell us that with several years of research Obrębski proved that Macedonians are a separate nation, with their own traditions and set of customs, distinct from Polish one. And for this reason they erected the monument of Obrębski.

Knowledge transmitted at school becomes an inherent part of the narrative paradigm about Obrębski, which was mediated through text and iconic media implanted after 2000. In Samokov primary school teachers impart the knowledge about Obrębski to their students. Our younger interlocutors, at present high-school or university students, remember learning about the Polish anthropologist at school. However, as we were told, there were no separate lessons devoted to Obrębski: "He was not covered in the school curriculum, because the services he rendered were not to the whole of Macedonia" [Interview, woman, born 1998, 2012, Bitovo]. Students learned about the Polish scholar during history classes, when they visited commemoration sites in Samokov. During these excursions they learned that Obrebski was a Polish ethnographer who studied Poreče. He was compared to Marko Cepenkov, a folklorist and poet from Prilep at the turn of the 19th and 20th century.²² The memory of Obrębski is invoked mainly on the anniversary of his death (every 28th of December), when the school delegation lays flowers by his statue.

A local teenage girl told us that as a primary school student in the sixth grade she attended a seminar in Samokov organised to honour the 105th anniversary of Józef Obrębski's birth (in 2010). After the seminar the students were asked by their teacher to conduct an ethnographic survey among older family members. This survey covered both age-old customs in Samokov in general as well as the memory and knowledge about

²¹ This discourse is reproduced by Macedonian researchers and media; for instance in the program of the television channel: Kanal 5 (26.04.2015, 3.38 pm. local time, http://kanal5.com.mk/vesti_detail.asp?ID=67672), broadcast on the occasion of the 35th anniversary of the Institute for Old Slavonic Culture in Prilep.

²² Cepenkov identified himself as a Bulgarian. In the Macedonian academia he is considered a Macedonian folklorist and writer, whereas in Bulgaria he is labelled a Bulgarian.

Obrębski. This task was not obligatory but some of the children – including our interlocutor – chose to participate.

Both these modes of remembrance and narrating about Obrębski in Poreče (modes which are not always clearly separated) seem to be constitutive for the construction of collective identity. Familial, kinship and neighbourly narrative, operating with mythicised factuality upholds ties within the community and serves for self-affirmation of the local community. The objective of the “new memory” about Obrębski, constructed as a nation-building narrative about “their own anthropologist”, legitimises the imagined community of Porečans as the Macedonian nation.

And what was Józef Obrębski’s objective and mission? It was anthropology.

Translated from Polish by Olimpia Dragouni

Archives

- AR – Family archive of Antonina Obrębska-Jabłońska, currently owned by Anna Engelking, Warsaw.
- IEiAK UJ – Archive of Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Jagiellonian University, Kraków.
- LSE – Archive of London School of Economics and Political Science, London.
- OC – Obrębski Collection, Special Collections and Archives, W.E.B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts, Amherst MA.

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HOW DID JÓZEF OBRĘBSKI EXPERIENCE POREČE?¹

The foreword to Józef Obrębski's book on the folk culture of Poreče began with a remark:

The subject of this book is, among others, ethnographic description of the magic and religious system or, simply put, religion of a small and less known – both in history and ethnology – Balkan people who inhabit a mountain region of Poreče, a land that lies on a mountain massif of south-western Macedonia, in the western part of the Balkan Peninsula, in Yugoslavia. The land and its people are not well known in historical and ethnological terms. Tossed to the brink of the European civilization, they found themselves in the territory and national space of the South-Slavic community only several decades ago; in recent years they have still been leading their lives according to the models handed down to them by their parents and grandparents. Poreče people, with all of their archaic folk culture and traditional way of life, found themselves on the margins of contemporary history, away from the currents of profuse changes and historical events of contemporaneity, foreign and indifferent to the events in the big centers of civilization where the fate of the present is being formed [Obrembski 2001b: 25].

Before Obrębski came to Poreče, there were several Serbian researchers who showed interest in the region: these were Jovan Cvijić and Petar S. Jovanović. When finishing his research on the Balkans in the period of 1878–1915, Cvijić stopped in Poreče. Later on, in 1926, Jovanović also carried out field research, and published his results in 1935. Thus he provided us with additional information about Poreče. He claimed that Poreče was inhabited relatively early – quoting some local tales, he stated:

According to a folk tale, Poreče was inhabited early by the *Jelimsko*,² or the “Greek”, population due to the fact that there is an old settlement

¹ This paper is an edited version of a text published in an earlier book [Vražinovski, Karadžoski, Jovanovska-Rizoska 2006: 27–45].

² *Jelim* from *Ellin*, i.e. Hellene – translator's note.

in Tomino-Selo called “Grkoi Kučišta”; in Upper Krušje there are similar traces – the village of “Grkoec”, while in the Graždanik near Lokcica there are traces of a town which is said to be *jelimski*. Aside from that, people of Poreče call many old walls “Latin”, for example the Monastery of Modrište, church in Taževo, the tower between Kovač and Benče is called in Benče “Latin”, and in Kovač *tirjansko*, the cemetery in Veligoici in Zagrad is also called “Latin” [Jovanović 1935: 262].

Jovanović uses folk tales to illustrate his theory that Poreče was inhabited early. For example, near the village of Krapa, there is a Roman gravestone where jewellery dating back to the times of Justinian II was found. In Orev there are traces of an old settlement with large Roman bricks while old silver Constantine coins were found in Tomino Selo and elsewhere. In the Monastery of Modrište there are Greek inscriptions around the frescoes, just as there are in the old church of Sv. Nikola in Crešnevo, and the church of Sv. Ilija in Taževo, etc. [Jovanović 1935: 262].

The aim of the present research is to discover Poreče, its folk tradition and culture, from the times of the research done by Obrębski – a period he described as one when “archaic folk culture and traditional way of life” were still apparent. Of course, parallels with contemporaneity regarding the folk culture in Poreče will be accentuated as much as possible. One should emphasize herein that the folk culture in Poreče was subjected to substantial changes as a result of civilizational changes of the population of the region, and also as a result of migrations from the region and the desertion of Poreče villages in the second half of the 20th century.

Józef Obrębski gives a detailed description of the Poreče region: its borders with other regions, mountains, rivers etc. Poreče lies in the very heart of Macedonia, it is located in the valleys of the rivers Treska and Mala and, looking from the mountain chains, between these two rivers. It is surrounded by high mountains which form a definite and clear natural border. From the north it borders the mountain massif of Jakupica, Karadžica, and Suva Planina, from the east the mountain chain of Dautica and Kurtov Kamen. From the south it borders with Crna Reka and Mount Buševa. Poreče stretches from the villages Latovo and Rusjani in the north to Zdunje and Volče in the south-west, and encompasses 55 villages.

The people of Poreče divide their region into two parts: Upper and Lower Poreče. Upper Poreče is surrounded by the mouth of the Mala river (except for villages Inče, Mogilec, and Kalugjerica) and all the villages north of the Mala river (Mala Reka). Lower Poreče covers the rest of the region. According to local people, villages in the lower flow of the Treska river

belong to Upper Poreče, settlements in the upper flow to Lower Poreče, and Poreče itself lies in the middle part of the river.

Poreče villages are not big. There are ten huts at most, spread around open, sometimes steep slopes, or on the flat mountain plateau. Villages are comprised of *maalos*, or neighbourhoods, and their distinction is based in the genealogical division of the inhabitants of the village. The villagers derive from a common mythical ancestor, one of the founders of the village. According to tradition they derive from the only child, or one of several sons of the first grand-grandfather of the entire village group [Obrębski 2002: 37].

When Obrębski was in Poreče the means of transportation were very poorly developed. There was only one road to some of the eastern and southern villages, this road was the only way to connect Poreče with the basins of Prilep and Kičevo. All of the other paths were simple, steep mountain trails traversable on horseback, although during snowy winters these paths would become difficult to pass even on foot. When new roads were built, Poreče became connected with Kičevo in the south, via the Makedonski Brod, with Prilep in the east, and with several other villages also through the Makedonski Brod. The most recent roads connect the communal centre Samokov with more villages. In the time of Obrębski there was no urban centre in Poreče. There is one today, namely: the Makedonski Brod. After the construction of the Kozjak dam the picture of Poreče will face changes in regards to tourism, and the untouched beauty and purity of nature will not remain unaffected.

Economically Poreče was always an underdeveloped region. This was evident in the poor state of agriculture, and in the industry. The agricultural production was very weak, and people would mostly grow oats, rice, *urov* (*Vicia sativa*), potatoes, and barley. Most of the plants would be grown for animal feed instead of for sale or individual consumption. The agricultural techniques were also very primitive [Jovanović 1935: 283]. Only sheepherding was developed, thanks to the abundance of mountain meadows. Obrębski noted, referring to the living conditions of the local people:

With crossing of the mountain border, the peripheral zone, where no farmer or shepherd reaches, the romantic image of travel will be challenged. Instead of the expected poetry of primitivism, wilderness, and man lost in the beautiful nature of the mountains, with every deeper step one will face the prose of ordinary pastoral passage. Soon, every piece of land, every part of this territory bears the trace of human activity. [...] The inside of this basin has none of virginity of the nature. Instead, every step provides new proof of the exploitation of any resources that this poor country can provide with its few scattered riches. [...] It is a passage of a wasted nature, its romantic character worn off, with no regards to the hardly accessible

terrain, left to the destroying forces of human activity: typical shepherd [Obremski 2001b: 34].

Aside from shepherding, there was another type of production which took some time away from the everyday activities of the local population – preparing charcoal which the people of Poreče would then sell at the neighbouring markets. The third kind of production was collecting resin and obtaining turpentine, which was later also sold at the markets. These activities led to continuous exploitation and degradation of beech and pine forests. In regards to this Jovanović noted:

In the pine forests the production of resin is very widespread (Taževo, Breznica, Trebovlje). The trunks of the trees are cut and resin is collected, and after distillation, colophonium and turpentine (*"neft"*) are produced. Beech is also processed and made into charcoal. The exploitation of the forests is irrational. The forest is being used without a plan and any thought of reforestation. In the last years it has been reduced by the state. Because of the high importance of shepherding and forestry, large part of the rural area is a communal meadow. Only the pine forest, which is used for resin, is divided into parts attributed to owners [Jovanović 1935: 284].

Notes of Jovanović and Obrębski are mutually complementing on the subject of economic activity.

It is clear that Obrębski was expecting to find archaic and beautiful nature in Poreče, where the flora is romantic and rich, the high mountain peaks overshadow the human being, forming a kind of oasis for the primordality of life and pristine nature. In his depiction, Poreče was a place left to its fate, to its traditional folk life, where customs and rites reign, transmitted from previous generations, preserved and practiced by Obrębski's contemporaries. His romantic image and expected poetry of primitivism, wilderness, and man lost in the beautiful mountain nature is touched by human activity.

Jovanović wrote about the life in Poreče:

People of Poreče live a harsh, modest and monotonous life. The centre of life is "work", hard work, which gives small income. There is no time for entertainment – time is precious. This life taught people to be happy with anything. They are forced to bring food supplies from far away, from markets. The most common food is simple bread and bell peppers, rarely a warm meal (beans). Of dairy products: buttermilk and white salted cheese. Houses are primitive, people sleep on the ground, on bedding made of straw or goat skin. Disheware are mainly made of wood or clay. Only in the southern part, or Lower Poreče, is life somewhat better [Jovanović 1935: 298].

These days some of the villages look similar, especially in Upper Poreče. Some are still cut off from the world. They are not connected by an asphalt

road with the municipality, and in times of rain or snow, no car or wagon can reach them. This is the situation in Volče or Benče.

Because of this Poreče posed a great challenge for a scientist. It is understandable that Obrębski was so interested in the region, conforming to the paradigm of his times about the scientific interest of ethnologist in regions like this, that is, interest in primordiality and the so called “primitive nations”.

Even if Obrębski was disenchanted by not being able to see nature untouched by human hand, he could not be disappointed by the rich folk culture of the people of this region. The folk culture and tradition were preserved and functioned in the rural community through ages in unchanged form, having an important role in the social life. With this concept in mind, Obrębski made his contact with the life in the culture of the Slavic world and concluded:

The levelling of traditional culture which nowadays happens in the vast territories of Slavic world in every part of the cultural life of the villagers, left only several territories untouched by this process. One of such lands, where collapse of folk culture is only in its initial stage and where thanks to this, it can be researched in its traditional archaic form is Macedonia [Obrębski 2001b: 9–10].

There are materials collected by Obrębski in Poreče which confirm this, as well as materials collected by us during several years of research in this area, even if nowadays, the preservation of traditional culture, suffered from negative changes.

There were many reasons for preserving the original forms of folk culture in Poreče. Aneta Svetieva enumerates two of them, which stay in concordance with Obrębski’s thoughts. She notes:

Ethnographic region of Poreče is a specific ethnological entity in Macedonia due to its “modus of isolation” as a result of natural and geographic characteristics of the region [...]. This modus is logically linked with the category of “time” as a way of confirmation of the “modus of continuity”, as the old changes of socio-political systems were oriented towards keeping the continuity of particular forms of folk culture [Svetieva 2002: 269].

Two questions need to be asked in the context of research on Poreče: what do we owe to Józef Obrębski’s research on Macedonia, and secondly, what were the reasons for his choice of Poreče. The latter is not a typical question and has its prehistory. His interest in Macedonia and the Balkans in general was developed in the 1920s, and influenced by professor Kazimierz Moszyński, Obrębski’s mentor, who carried out his own research in the Balkans, and young Obrębski accompanied him several times as his student.

It can also be assumed that Obrębski was familiar with the literature on the region which appeared at that time, for instance, with the works of Jovan Cvijić. This question however is difficult to answer as we lack information on this matter.

At the time of Obrębski's research, numerous folk beliefs were preserved by Macedonians, especially in Poreče. We can find proof of this in Obrębski's first publication on Macedonia, an article: *Black magic in Macedonia* [Obrębski 1934]. In the introduction Obrębski writes:

Over 150 years have passed since the last trials of witches happened in Europe. The scandals of the Inquisition became forgotten. The social changes erased the ancient superstitions of magic. It seems that in this part of Europe, our objective observation and indirect experience will never leave [Obrębski 1934: VI].

But it is not so. Magic did not disappear entirely from Europe. In some parts of former Yugoslavia, in the mountains and valleys of Macedonia, it is still alive much like in the past, undestroyed by the Inquisition and unchanged by civilization. Among the people in Poreče, one of the most archaic parts of Serbian Macedonia, magic has its special system, developed in the local social community. In his work *Ritual and social structure in a Macedonian village*, Obrębski wrote: "Here I had the unique possibility to research the traditional rural society which still is not changed by contemporarity" [Obrębski 1972: 201].

Obrębski's choice of Poreče for the research becomes clear when we take into account his character and curiosity about the past which was an intellectual challenge for him. Joel M. Halpern assessed Obrębski stating:

[...] there is no doubt that the youth of the researcher brought him to the isolation of mountain villages of Macedonian Poreče, which became an intellectual challenge for him. The communities did not form a separate group of tribal character, but instead they expressed a cultural entity which could become an object of beautiful research in the field of social anthropology.

These were rural communities which would back then form an independent national state which appeared after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire as an aftermath of Balkan Wars and the WWI. It is understandable that Obrębski was conscious of these historical facts, but because of the method he used, he did not pay too much attention to them [Halpern 2003: 63].

There is no better explanation for the choice of terrain of a researcher who wants to fulfill his scientific interests. Obrębski had a unique opportunity in Poreče to examine the traditional rural society, which was unaffected by contemporary changes. His Macedonian fieldwork had an enormous impact on him as a researcher and scientist, which is proved by his works contributing to the study of Macedonian folk culture.

Fieldwork of Józef Obrębski in Poreče

Main information about the work of Józef Obrębski in Poreče is to be found in his letter to Kazimierz Moszyński. During the first days of his stay in Poreče, the local environment was not too favourable. Villagers treated him as a foreigner and distrusted him. Here, the opposition own-alien is relevant; in the aforementioned letter he wrote to his professor:

It was even more difficult because Macedonian terrain is an especially difficult field for an ethnographer. It comes from the people who insist to keep you in the function of their guest, reducing the contact to a conversation or a story performed out of hospitality, and do not admit to any originality, which according to them would be against the ideas, customs and beliefs of the foreigner. Those were men. And women in turn hide all their knowledge away from the foreigner in fear that it might be used against them. So you need to fight for any information, and every fact needs to be uncovered from hiding. First weeks and even first months brought me to despair as I have not managed to control the situation [Obrębski 2001a: 101].

Indeed, such situation lasted until November and *Martinoji* celebrations, when Poreče welcomed him with an open heart and began sharing with him their most intimate experiences. Referring to such attitude towards foreigners, Ariton Veselinovski noted in his memoirs:

Obrębski was known in the village as *Josif* and was really liked. It is interesting that both men and women accepted him. It was very rare back then for the women to approach somebody with such hospitality and openness. All in all, he was *jabandžija*, arrival from abroad. This means that he possessed important values as a human being, and thus he was friends with everybody [Veselinovski 2002: 227].

Józef Obrębski became the favourite person of Poreče people. This can be confirmed by some memories of older village inhabitants who used to host him, like Boško Stefanoski or Božo Veselinovski from Volče, or by some of the younger ones with whom Obrębski became close because of the stories they heard from the elders of the village, like the aforementioned Ariton Veselinovski:

He still lives in the memory of the people, especially in Upper Poreče, where he spent most of his time during research. He was constantly in motion. He would walk to 10–15 villages of Upper Poreče: Kosovo, Brest, Trebovlje, Zdunje, Gorno Botuše, Dolno Botuše, Rasteš, Zagrad, Bitovo, Volče. He was always at the right place at the right time. He participated in all the rituals on all occasions, whether it was a holiday, or *svršuvačka*, or engagement, or a marriage, baptism, birth, he was always there. [...] Sometimes they would also ask for help. When somebody died, *Josif* was also here, among his own people so to say, since he lived with them in the same village. When people went to the mill, he went with them. When there was a need to lever a rock,

he was also there. When people started to strike the rock with the hammers, he would also grab a hammer and join the work. Somebody was chopping wood, he did the same. He literally wanted to see and try everything. He was interested in everything [Veselinovski 2002: 227–228].

This was also clear from the letter by Tamara Obrębska, wife of the researcher, to his sister, Antonina Jabłońska-Obrębska. In 1968 Tamara was Ariton Veselinovski's guest in Gostivar:

Today a year passes since we have sent Józef with you and Stefan. He lives in the memory of many people in Volče. I took a photo of the blue kettle and a decanter that Józef gave to the wife of one of his friends from Volče. They told me: "in one – tea, in the other – *rakija*", and thus they talked for an entire night. "*Josif* was like a brother to my husband, they slept and hunted together. Whenever I look at the kettle I think of him. My mother sent pig fat for *Josif*. He is like our brother, you are our sister". *Josif* is a half-legendary figure in the village – such a "young hero like Marko Krale" [Obremski 2002: 113].

Obrębski, like any true researcher who loved his work, had to "go native" and become to some extent a local person, a Poreče peasant, in order to gain trust. Ariton Veselinovski noted that: "people used to trust him a lot since he was educated, so there was no secret kept from him, nothing to be hidden". This was the core of his success to be included in the community of the villagers from Volče and other places, and key to the success in gathering material and his research work in general. He embraced their way of life. He used to eat with them the way they did, in the family circle. He also used to wear clothes characteristic to the region. He became a member of the *zadruga* where he lived. One needs to love the people one studies, if staying with them for a longer time is required. It seems that it was Obrębski's nature, as even Bronisław Malinowski described him in this manner in his letter to Kazimierz Nitsch: "Talented, nice, intelligent – he is generally liked and popular" [letter of 10.06.1931, quoted in: Engelking 2002: 58].

Obrębski based his research on interviews and observations of the entire village life. In the beginning he faced difficulties as people did not want to talk, especially about magic. When he asked questions, he would hear a reply "How do you even know what this is?" He felt resignation but his persistence broke the barrier and, as he noted:

even the latest research, especially the active observation with participation in village life, which was the main arena of my activity, enabled me to penetrate and uncover from a close distance the entire local system of magic: not only theoretically, but also practically, as I have participated in some witch affairs [Obremski 2001b: 41].

Petre Georgievski claims that this strategy followed the Chicago school in sociology which recommends to research:

1. People in their natural environment where they live and gather;
2. The researcher should bond with people;
3. The social environment should be understood in order to perform generalizations and theorizations about the beliefs of individual members of the group in the rural community [Georgievski 2002: 167].

Georgievski concludes that with his approach, Obrębski was a precursor of ethno-methodology, which as a term was used for the first time in 1959, and was being developed in the 1960s and 1970s as a method of research and analysis [Georgievski 2002: 167]. According to this method, the void should be filled, using the methods of social sciences and... common sense. It is important to learn the commonsense reality of everyday life, to learn about these things that “everybody knows” through interviews recorded like in everyday life, with all the details. The presupposition of Georgievski about Obrębski being a precursor of ethno-methodology is based on his observations on how Obrębski collected his material, took detailed notes, and analyzed the conversations, for example in relation to *Koleda* or *svršuvačka* [Georgievski 2002: 167–172]. Indeed, this was the approach to the research on the folk culture of Poreče.

The fieldwork material of Obrębski is authentic and original, collected with patience and commitment. In a letter to his professor Kazimierz Moszyński, after finishing the work in Macedonia and going to London, Obrębski wrote:

Nearly six months I spent as a member of *zadruga*, catching and observing from a close distance, what has not been observed until now: the intimate life of a South Slavic family. Apart from confirming several hypotheses in regards to reality, I gained the truth of real thinking and interpretation of the materials, which will constitute the base for the book: the collection, descriptions of works whose authors are not academics, or even worse, specialists in one theory who cannot discover or look at the facts [Obrębski 2002: 103].

Obrębski's interest in collecting data was shown in several of his works. According to his letter to Moszyński, he initially intended to focus on gathering material on kinship. He wrote:

Unfortunately, I made a mistake by choosing this territory. I am talking about the perception of the kinship in the type of culture which is presented for example in western Bulgaria in the descriptions of Marinov. Meaning a culture which is characteristic for the Balkans. Poreče is a mountain terrain, *šop* area, and here, with all the variety of basic identities, there is a basic difference: the ritual aspect of family life is reduced to the minimum. Publications up to now concentrate on the plains. And instead of doing synthesis and filling up the holes in knowledge, I faced the necessity to gather material on the sub-type of the culture I was interested in. And that discourages me a bit. Even more so as the first contact was very difficult [Obrębski 2002: 102].

Nevertheless, this discouragement did not stop him from gathering further material on the issue of kinship. Fieldwork material on kinship reflect the thinking of his informants on the notions of kin and *pobratimstvo* (sworn brotherhood). It is also the first time that such materials appear in Macedonia.

According to Porečans kin is related to blood, which means that the members of the same kin share the same blood. *Pobratimstvo* is not connected to blood but is rather a result of personal choice, of one's own will. A special role is assigned to the relationship with the mother and with women in general, then to the relations between father and son, and uncle as the closest member of the family.

Collecting materials about kin, Józef Obrębski reached a conclusion that this complex was well preserved and known by the Poreče people. Thanks to the research on the kin system of South Slavic people, we can observe that at this time Obrębski became one of the best and most qualified specialists in this field, ahead of some South Slavic authors, in both the factographical and theoretical background.

Józef Obrębski focused on collecting material on folk religion of Macedonians, especially on the ways in which religion affects group consciousness, and also on the integration of traditional rural community. Through the analysis of relations between rites, actions, and social structure of a group he managed to research the social structure of religion.

One of his interests during fieldwork were particular segments of Macedonian folk mythology. The main aim was to analyze their sociological contextualization. In the previously quoted letter, he wrote:

This work is not fieldwork, but a general-Balkan theoretical work, and is not finished yet. I analyzed and prepared these myths for analysis: 1. On killing the elders, 2. Myth of settling the area, 3. Marko Krале and heroes, 4. Myth about blood mixing, 5. On selling the woman out of the village, 6. About a man in puerperal period. Theoretical thesis is that those myths are understood in a wrong way as an old tradition and dead culture (myth 1, 4, 5, 6) or as documents which relate to the origin of the village (myth 2), or finally, as a testimony for national or state consciousness of Macedonian villagers (myth 3). These myths function in the current reality as a moral norm in the complexity of social relations, characteristic for Balkan culture. So all work should be divided into two volumes: critical-polemical, where the present mistakes in ethnography should be addressed; and constructive, where every myth would be shown in its real social context. This means an analysis through the prism of life. The myth of killing the elders and the dynamics of kinship as the law and praxis of family reciprocity. The myth of love with mixed blood is an analysis of the law and choice of marital partner. The myth of sold wife analyzes the relations between wife and husband in the family. The myth of settling the village analyzes the system of ruling the land, with special reference to the issue of conflicts over borders. The myth of

the man is related to the structure of the family with its constant patriarchal function with bilateral organization. And finally, the myth of Krale Marko is an especially Macedonian one. Apotheosis of a social ideal of a cunning Macedonian [Obrębski 2002: 102–103].

With this in mind Obrębski recorded more folklorist material: songs and beliefs about demonic creatures: *zmej, lamija, narečnica, samovila*, vampire, *čuma*; songs and tales of religious nature: about God and saints; songs and tales about Marko Krale, which serve as the source for the myth of Marko; tales of founding settlements, which serve for the myth of settlement; as well as tales about the killing of the elders.

In his fieldwork Obrębski reserved a special place for the collection of material on magic and anti-magic. It is very surprising how determined he was to research this, especially the formulas told during the practice of magic. Every researcher knows well how difficult it is to find such material. They are exceptional, and with their publication the modest basis of Macedonian beliefs in magic and its practice has been enriched. In these publications [e.g. Obrębski 2005] we can find interesting information about the bearers of magic who, according to the Poreče people, are the work of the devil. Interestingly, the people who perform magic are always women: the women come from the devil, and so it is the women who do magic. The men never practice magic, only the women. Magicians are sent by the devil. In his notes Obrębski lists the names of women-witches, for instance: Stamejca, Milenkojca, as well as objects which are used for magic.

Obrębski used to arrange the material referring to magic into groups: magic for milk, magic for blessing, magic against infertility and impotence, love magic, and medicine magic. An especially important place is reserved for the protective magic: how to protect against magic, how to detect magic, how to undo a cast spell, with specific information given about the process. There is also interesting information connected to *gatanje*, bone divination, curses, prophecies based on dreams, etc.

The scholar devoted much of his effort to gathering information on folk health magic:

The work is difficult because of the distrust and secrecy of the Macedonian women, but our cooperation is developing. As a result I shall publish a book on Macedonian *bajački*, and if the situation allows, I will publish it in English [Obrębski 2002: 103].

Magic in Poreče villages was popular and widespread but it was practiced in secret and the informants could not and were not prepared to pass their knowledge to him. They would avoid the subject of his interest because they considered it insulting. Only after some time, when they were more familiar with him, did he manage to penetrate and discover

the local system of magic. It enabled him to gather enormous fieldwork material on magic, which had disappeared by our time.

Józef Obrębski noted all the calendar celebrations and rites connected with them. He recorded the main information on every holiday separately; for example, the day when it happens, what rites are performed, magical practices, what verbal formulas, and other.

He also took down many notes on the economy of Poreče that involved magic practices and *bajanje*, like for instance the spring work (sowing), harvest (harvesting: *žetenje*, the first sheaf: *brada*, *vršidba*). Then there are materials about bad weather phenomena, such as hail and storm and happenings connected to them, transmitted in songs and beliefs.

In the field materials of Obrębski there are also some (though modest) accounts of the wedding complex of ceremonials, with all the beliefs and rites connected to them; for example, soul in the perception of Porečans, depiction of death, commemorations for the dead, lamenting, memorials, etc.

Folk medicine was also richly presented, with direct folk terminology on illnesses. In a letter to Kazimierz Moszyński, Obrębski wrote about his interest in folk medicine:

If there is anything I regret, it is the fact that there I did not contribute enough time to kinship, but unfortunately I was focused on a different ethnographic passion: medicine and magic. It was the most difficult subject because the inaccessibility in Macedonia. But I have a feeling that there is no description of the system of medicine and magic of Southern Slavs. The work which was at the beginning designed to fail because of the mistrust and distance of the Macedonian women, has developed very interestingly [Obremski 2002: 103].

Pictures are characteristic for Obrębski fieldwork. He would draw whenever he could, so there are drawings showing the borders of villages; *maala*; various objects which were used during magical practice, like *bajanje*; agrarian tools; diagrams of family genealogies; and other. This also means that he was a serious researcher. With this type of data his collecting activity gained more authenticity and originality.

* * *

Józef Obrębski as an ethnologist devoted himself not only to collecting ethnographic observations, but was also focused on collecting folk material, songs, tales, and sayings. Some of them are indeed unique, which means that they are unprecedented in the present collection of published folklorist

material, or in our contemporaneity. For this reason they have special importance. The collected songs represent several genres: mythological, religious, heroic (some are connected to heroic acts of Marko Krале), love songs, and ritual songs (connected to various rituals sang during the holidays, like for example during *Božikj, Vodici*), etc. Some of them are of local character. Folk prose is also presented by Obrębski in the form of tales and sayings. He collected various genres: legends, magical, religious and realistic tales. Some of them are connected to the figure of Krале Marko. The songs, tales, and sayings have many archaic elements which are rarely seen in contemporary recordings of folk prose.

With the publishing of the songs, tales, and stories, the foundation of Macedonian literature has been built with new works from a region in Macedonia which has not been a subject of folklorist publications. The value lies not in the number of works themselves, but their uniqueness.

The weak side of Obrębski's research is the lack of information about informants. It is seldom that he even mentions their names, like: Kole, Igne, Dojčin, Nikola, and when referring to women, he gives the name of their husbands: Stefkojca, Cvetkojca, Desojca, Velejca, Todorica, Veljanica, Milošica, or Gjinojca. He only gave very modest information about Stefkojca, who was apparently his best informant: "one of them is my best one, one of the most helpful informants about the old times [...]".

However, we tried to find out the names and surnames of Obrębski's interlocutors, and here our thanks go to Ariton Veselinovski from Volče, confirmed by other people from the village: Boško Stefanovski and Dragutin Angjelkoski. According to them, the real name of Stefkojca was Meglena Krajčevska (husbands' surname); Cvetkojca – Menka Srbinoska; Desojca – Nerandža Angjelkoska; Velejca – Pauna Božinovska; Veljanica Angjelkovska; Milošica Angjelkoska. Kole and Igne's surname was Krajčeski, Dojčin Blažeski, Nikola was from Zagrad (burnt alive in front of his wife and daughter by Bulgarian troops during the occupation of Macedonia in WWII). All the songs were sung by Sekula Boškoski.

Another essential issue was the fact that Obrębski took his notes and talked to people in Macedonian, which means he knew the language very well. The ease of understanding the researched community was one of Obrębski's strongest assets [Nowakowski 1982: 9]. His fieldwork involved a process of collecting the most detailed and most diverse elements of folk culture and their systematization.

Based on the field material and the methodological approach to their collection, one can conclude that Józef Obrębski was a real and talented field researcher who knew how to apply field data in further analysis. The fieldwork encompasses more segments of folk culture, including information on the life of people. He also managed to advance

the research and did not limit himself to systematization and analysis of the material, which were often collected by non-academics with no preparation.

The modest body of correspondence that we can access shows that Obrębski had intended to continue his fieldwork in Poreče and Macedonia. He wrote to Kazimierz Moszyński:

There is also a question strictly related to my future plans and projects. In a broader perspective of several years I would like to commit myself to fieldwork. I will write to you about this question in more detail afterwards. I would like to connect this plea strictly to Your academic plans and interests. Because of that, I would like to go back to Poreče, but this depends on whether you, Professor, believe that it is necessary to do the research in some other territory or not, and if receiving a Yugoslav stipend was easier than some other academic subvention for research [Obrembski 2002: 104].

After WWII, Obrębski once again showed his will to go back to Macedonia. In 1966, professor Božidar Vidoeski, who originated from Poreče, learned from professor Antonina Jabłońska and professor Zdzisław Stieber that Obrębski planned new research in Macedonia; however, as it turned out later, death had prevented him from returning there. Professor Vidoeski wrote to Obrębski:

I learnt from professor Obrębska-Jabłońska and professor Stieber that you want to stay in Yugoslavia (in Macedonia) for academic reasons. I would be enchanted if I could meet you in person. I learnt about your research in Macedonia from prof. Jabłońska's letter. I hope it is possible for you to give me more details on the planned research to be done, with highest respect [Obrembski 2001a: 9].

Finally, Obrębski provided important and truly valuable research and theories as he was an external observer and field researcher. Lech Mróz stated:

His works are relevant and of practical use today, and they tell a lot to contemporary researchers on inter-ethnic and intercultural relations [Mruz³ 2002: 132].

Just as Georgievski stated, the lack in approaching Obrębski and his fieldwork is a deficiency among contemporary sociologists, and we would also say among ethnologists and folklorists in Macedonia. Learning about his work can be an inspiration for academic work in these disciplines, especially among the younger generation [Georgievski 2002: 174].

³ In keeping with the transliteration system adopted in the present volume, the Polish name Lech Mróz has been rendered as Leh Mruz in the bibliographic entry for prof. Mróz's Macedonian-language article.

Fieldwork experience that came from Obrębski's research in Macedonia had influenced his later work in Jamaica where he also conducted individual interviews. Anna Kutrzeba-Pojnarowa stated that:

[...] because of the research on old cultures in the Balkans, and the interest in the issue of cultural differences, but also with a hope to discover characteristics of rural reality, Obrębski planned to perform field research upon his return to Poland after 1934 [Kutrzeba-Pojnarowa 1972: 217].

On the subject of relevance of materials provided by Obrębski, prof. Antonina Jabłońska wrote in one of her letters to his wife, Tamara:

The students and academics at the Amherst University need to learn Macedonian if they want to use the Józio's materials. The photographs are perhaps not as important, not as the texts, which have to be published in such a raw state as they are. This would be of benefit not only for the Amherst students [OC, letter, 27.07.1973, box 5].

With this in mind I pose a question: what is the importance of Obrębski's Macedonian material for the scholarship? The answer should be provided by our scholars!

Translated from Macedonian by Olimpia Dragouni

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PART I.

ECONOMIC STRATEGIES,
SOCIAL CHANGES

NARRATIVE AND ECONOMIC STRATEGIES OF COPING WITH UNEMPLOYMENT IN MACEDONIAN POREČE

Introduction

The article is based on materials gathered during three research trips to Macedonia in 2012 and 2013. I describe the strategies used by inhabitants of several Poreče villages to cope with long-term unemployment and the ensuing economic hardship and insecurity. Influenced by fieldwork experiences and theoretical inspirations [Kędziorek 1996], I have divided these strategies into narrative and economic ones. By doing so, I intended to show both the communicational and practical dimensions of being in the world of my respondents. What may initially seem like an obstacle on the researcher's path to information, i.e. recurring complaints present in every conversation (about the hopelessness of the state, lack of perspectives, etc.) is in itself an extremely important form of communication.

Before I proceed to characterize the abovementioned strategies, I shall briefly describe the place where my research had been conducted; I will sketch the historical-geographic context which is – I presume – meaningful for the interpretation of the respondents' statements, desires, and self-assessments of their current situation. Finally, I shall characterize the people I have met.

The fieldwork I have participated in was in a way, a continuation of Józef Obrębski's research from the 1930s and I attempted to undertake a subject somewhat similar to his. Namely, I focused on the economic situation of the inhabitants of the region, even though, due to different theoretic inspirations and demographic changes in the Poreče itself (village Volče where the Polish ethnologist¹ spent much of his time is practically

¹ While writing about Obrębski, I call him an ethnologist, although I do acknowledge that, both in the means of his method and theoretic inspirations, his research was

deserted today), I placed the accents differently. The proposed approach enables me – at least partially – to include the undertaken subject into the circle of anthropological reflections on post-socialism [Gille 2010; Hann, Humphrey, Verdery 2002; Verdery 1996]. It also allows considerations regarding memory, i.e. the phenomenon of “yugonostalgia” [Debeljak 2002; Ugrešić 2002; Velikonja 2008]. Instead of referring the material to particular explanatory models, I focus on presenting hopes and problems of the inhabitants, strategies used to cope with the problems, and I show some possible interpretative paths.

* * *

Poreče is located in the northern part of Macedonia and over the entire middle watershed of the River Treska. It is surrounded by tall and steep mountain chains with the highest peaks reaching 2000 m. The mountains are both the natural borders of the region, and hard to pass obstacles separating the region from the rest of the country. Access is made even harder by the fact that there are very few roads linking Poreče with nearby cities, which is also caused by specific geographic conditions. This poor road infrastructure is often mentioned by the disappointed inhabitants of Poreče, who emphasize the number of kilometres to nearby cities as the crow flies, and then compare it to the actual distance they have to travel to reach them. Skopje is an excellent example; the capital is located around 80 km from the place of my fieldwork. However, reaching it takes 3–4 hours since one has to go around the mountain chains which surround the city.

Another problem are public transport connections. Only the lines linking the region with Skopje and Makedonski Brod (the administration centre of the region, the municipality) are direct ones. Also, the ticket price is relatively expensive for the people from Poreče.² This does not mean however that they do not commute at all. On the contrary, towns surrounding the region: Kičevo, Gostivar, Prilep, Tetovo, and Skopje are important trade, work, and education centres. Their proximity gives hope for a better economic life, which in turn causes internal migration which is very characteristic for the region.

on the border of two disciplines: sociology and ethnology. Obrębski referred to himself as an ethnosociologist.

² Often while riding a minibus (*kombe*) to Makedonski Brod I overheard conversations of local people who complained about the high prices of tickets.

The region is divided into two parts: Lower and Upper Poreče. At the very heart of the former, lies Makedonski Brod, which is the centre of the region according to the administrative division from 2004. The life of Upper Poreče is focused around Samokov, its social and cultural centre.³ Due to its large size, Poreče is one of the most important ethnographic regions in Macedonia. However, looking at the population density, it is among the last places in the country. This is especially puzzling considering the fact that there are approximately fifty villages on its territory.⁴

Upper Poreče, which is the main area of my research, has over 20 settlements scattered on mountain slopes and in the valleys;⁵ the biggest one is the aforementioned Samokov. This village shows the transitional character of the region in an excellent manner and reflects the changes which occur there, manifesting in things like built but unfinished houses, collapsing buildings, and an out-of-order gas station.⁶ In Samokov there is also a primary school, several private shops, and a small tea factory. A bar operated until recently.⁷ However, the thing that is most specific for Samokov, and what its inhabitants most often mention and associate with their home place, is the weapon factory “Suvenir” which opened in the 1980s.

At its peak it used to hire over 200 people. It was closed in 2004 and the workers were sent home with 100 euro in monthly allowance, paid until their retirement age or until they found new employment. The factory was recently reopened (it was bought by a Czech investor) but this fact does not improve the quality of life of the inhabitants of Samokov as it hires only ca. 70 people (mainly from Makedonski Brod).⁸ Most of the former workers, many of whom were experienced and worked in the field for many years, were not granted a workplace in the reopened “Suvenir”. This also applies to those who – just as one of my respondents – were ready to change their qualifications and accept a post below the one they held previously.

The recurring motif of the factory, reappearing in conversations and shaped around the comparison between the old times and the new, should not be surprising. “Suvenir” was something more than just the main source

³ In the period of 1996–2004, Upper Poreče was part of the Samokov Municipality. By the territorial division of the Republic of Macedonia in August 2004, the Samokov Municipality was disestablished and its territory attached to the Makedonski Brod Municipality.

⁴ For more information on the region, see <http://www.mbrod.gov.mk>.

⁵ Upper Poreče encompasses villages such as: Zrkle, Zvečan, Tomino Selo, Sušica, Lupšte, Kovač, Benče, Inče, Mogilec, Gorno Botušje i Dolno Botušje, Bitovo, Zagrad, Rasteš, Brest, Kosovo, Trebovlje, Zdunje, and Ramne.

⁶ Just after my last stay in Poreče one of the shops was moved to the former gas station, which in my opinion shows the dynamics and the scale of the changes that Samokov and the settlements lying in the range of its economic and cultural impact are undergoing.

⁷ It was closed by the end of my last stay in Samokov (end of August 2013).

⁸ This number was given to me in August 2013 by one of my interlocutors.

of income for the inhabitants – it was also essential for the development of the region in economic and cultural terms [Zmejkoski, this volume]. In order to facilitate access of workers to their place of work a new asphalt road was built, joining Makedonski Brod with Samokov and Rasteš. Lower and Upper Poreče were thus connected, and access to bigger and more distant cities became easier. Apartment blocks were also built for the workers: two in Samokov and one in Makedonski Brod – some of the inhabitants lived there for free. The factory had an additional impact on urbanization: there was a new settlement built near Samokov. The factory bought private land where its workers could build their houses. Work in “Suvenir” was also an integrating factor for people inhabiting remote villages of Poreče. It resulted in long term friendships, marriages, population growth, and it limited ongoing depopulation.⁹ While the factory was still operating there was also a kindergarten in Samokov, as it was often the case that both parents worked in “Suvenir”. There was also a football team. Aside from guaranteeing a workplace and economic stability, the factory supported cultural life by funding many cultural events not only for workers but also for all the inhabitants of Poreče. There were concerts, theatrical plays, art exhibitions, etc. Everything was being financed by “Suvenir” [Zmejkoski in this volume]. It has to be emphasized that – to a certain extent – even today the owners of the factory have ambitions to animate the cultural life and integrate the workers, as can be proven by a football match organized to celebrate the anniversary of Ilinden Uprising,¹⁰ the factory team also played in this match.

* * *

My interlocutors are mainly middle-aged (40–55) although I tried – as much as I could – to contact also older and younger generations whose life experiences would form a research background. Among them are both men and women. Most come from several villages around Samokov, located at a distance reachable by foot under good weather conditions. The majority used to work in “Suvenir”, so they have experienced fixed contract work and had to (and also still have to) face the new reality – lack

⁹ In the 1970s many inhabitants of Poreče left the region and moved to Macedonian towns (Skopje, Gostivar, Tetovo) and abroad in search of better paid jobs, i.e. to Germany.

¹⁰ The uprising against the Ottoman Empire was organized by the Internal Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organization (VMORO). It started on the 2nd of August 1903, on the day of Eastern Orthodox holiday of St. Elijah (Mac. *Ilinden*), thus: the *Ilinden* Uprising. This was one of the most important events in Macedonian history.

of employment guaranteeing social security and a monthly income. This ensues the need to acquire money through alternative ways – by using various ecologic niches, like for instance picking wild fruit.

Their possibilities are on the one hand limited by geographic conditions in which they live. On the other hand, it is exactly thanks to these conditions that they can survive and remain autarchic. This applies to both the people who live in Poreče permanently for the whole year, and to the visitants – people who live in town but are able to gather food to be preserved for the winter and improve their home budget thanks to the temporal migration to the countryside.

Of enormous importance is the fact that most of these people are of rural origin, therefore they have skills to perform many activities on their own (bake bread, grow vegetables, or herd animals). It is also noteworthy that very often my respondents have high school education. During my research, I have also spoken with several people who had almost obtained a university degree: they had one, two exams left to pass in order to graduate but the collapse of Yugoslavia, the brink of the war, or establishment of their own family and the need to sustain it, were the final obstacles in completing their education.

I write about the education of my respondents mainly because it was a subject which they themselves frequently mentioned. Education had both symbolic and practical value. On the one hand it was an important element of self-description (for some, their taught profession was an element of self-identification, they would emphasise their qualifications). On the other, it was a factor which gave hope for improving the economic situation and supporting the family etc. Very often these hopes would fail.

It was through speaking about schools and courses which they graduated, that people of Poreče would frequently show their disenchantment. They were also underlining fears concerning the future of their children. They agreed that for their children, even a higher education diploma is no guarantee of a decent life in Macedonia. The older generation could not accept the long-term unemployment and low wages. Their income could not provide for all their needs and was often inadequate to their qualifications. This inadequacy was a sign of injustice and state malfunction.

During the interviews people were often referring to their present state of affairs, their problems, and needs by commenting on the current economic and political situation of the country. Some of the issues, i.e. their children's education, or the job market hardships, were compared to the Polish case. Respondents were assuming that in the times of global economic crisis the situation in Poland and in Macedonia must be similar. They asked questions about life in Poland, the unemployment rate, minimal

wage, post-graduation job perspectives in the learnt profession.¹¹ The past was mentioned solely as a point of reference (although an important one) for the present. Memories of the people of Poreče – especially concerning life in former Yugoslavia, and assessment of the previous political system – were focused on values of stability, certainty of employment, freedom, and economic security.

The research was conducted mainly in the summertime (with one springtime stay) and therefore I could not witness the everyday life during the winter. When the snow falls and makes it difficult to move anywhere, only a few people stay in the village, and all the rest goes to the nearby town. In that season, according to the respondents, who emphasise the emptiness which surrounds them then, people watch television and are bored. This applies mainly to the villages surrounding Samokov, which are seasonally completely deserted, or have only a few people staying. The seasonal migration from the village to the town or city can be explained by a certain characteristic of Poreče, i.e. that this region serves as a kind of “larder” or “summer kitchen” for the cityfolk. Most of the people (especially pensioners) return to the family settlements in spring and leave again when the summer ends.

The spring-summer stay becomes an occasion to harvest the crops from the fields for food, or to gather it in the woods, to prepare preserves and collect food-supplies, which people then take to the city. This type of “double settlement”: having a house or plot of land in the village away from the place of residence, has no positive influence on the economic status of the owners.

Narrative strategies in Poreče region

During my field research I often witnessed a phenomenon intuitively described by one of the Polish researchers in his analysis of the material from the villages of Lower Biebrza, as the “peasant complaining”¹² [Kędziorek 1996]. The term was used to denote a manifestation of peasant mood, a way of expression which would show the life-attitude of the villagers. As Piotr Kędziorek writes, peasant mood is usually bad, and expresses itself in the complaint [Kędziorek 1996: 123].

¹¹ One day my neighbour (a man in his 30s with an extremely practical life philosophy who is trying to live off random jobs, often going abroad to work), after having learned the area of my studies and the perspectives of being hired in my profession on a position with decent payment, asked me openly and sternly why I chose this career path, adding, that he would like to understand me as he finds my choice at least not sensible.

¹² I am referring to this term with some reserve considering the pejorative quality of the term – at least in Polish linguistic context.

In the beginning I perceived these complaints as irritating and distracting from issues which I (back then) considered interesting. With time however, I decided to treat these voices as a yet another strategy of coping with reality, equally important to the economic one. I started considering the complaint as a way of experiencing the reality, an attempt to tame and understand it. Finally, I perceived it as a specific narrative which informs me about the inhabitants of Poreče and problems important to them.

I consider the narrative to be something more than a mere tale, assuming (after most of contemporary narrativists) that narrative is a certain self-awareness structure, having its own clean cut end and beginning, enabling the described events to take shape as a definite, structured, and thus, logical entity [Rosner 2006]. Therefore, I treated the complaint not as a manifestation of my interlocutors' current mood, but rather as a way of explaining and naming what happens around them – a certain finishing point of their actions.

State-owned and private: past and present

The subject that was most frequently mentioned was the lack of employment in Poreče. According to the inhabitants, the unemployment caused not only the need to leave the region (and the ensuing constant depopulation), but also the need to take any available job, even such below one's qualifications, or simply unrelated to the previous post. For example, one of my interlocutors used to work in "Suvenir" as a pyrotechnician. After the factory was dismantled, he became a teacher, simultaneously working part-time as a builder.

The interlocutors used to emphasize that there was a difference between working in a private and a state-owned enterprise. They preferred the latter because it included social security solutions and they were paid every month with money adequate to the work they have done, which allowed them to sustain their families at a decent level. It was also important that the state-owned enterprises guaranteed off-work holidays, weekends, etc., and the work schedule was strictly fixed so people could plan and use their free time. Today all this has changed. Work – even if it exists – does not guarantee any security. Such insecurity of employment is in turn preventing people from making other plans:

When "Suvenir" was still there, we used to go there... We were all employed. All of us, both [husband and wife]. Now, when they closed it... Mushrooms, moss. That is life [...] Each month we used to get paid. We were free on holidays, and on Saturdays and Sundays. Now I work on holidays, and Saturdays, Sundays. It used to be better [Interview].

Yugonostalgia often mentioned by researchers on post-socialism herein becomes nostalgia for stability. The past seems better because back then the interlocutors did not have to worry whether the money would last until the 1st of the month. They felt appreciated and respected.

Remarks about leisure time, memories of summer vacation trips or consumption goods they could afford, refer to a certain living standard which is nowadays beyond their reach [Thiessen 2007]. One can therefore assume that the people of Poreče refer to those elements of their past which they currently miss the most: fixed employment contract that would allow them to pay all the bills and (which was emphasized especially often) a wage that would grant them a sense of security. This in turn would allow thinking about their own, and their children's future with ease of mind. Interlocutors underlined the bad economic situation of the country (low wages, high unemployment) as well as the global crisis. I often felt that this particular word: "crisis", appearing in nearly every conversation, became a key-word for explaining mechanisms which run the world. It was probably a borrowing from the media discourse treating the crisis as a universal explanation for the bad local economy.

At the same time, with some exceptions, the people of Poreče would not blame the government or particular politicians for the bad economy, but they would rather indicate some abstract institutions or processes (the aforementioned crisis, privatization, or the state as such). I acknowledge however, that the tendency to refer only to general concepts and phenomena could have been caused by unwillingness to openly manifest one's political views in front of a stranger.

People who have children of school age or studying at a university often mentioned the fear about the offspring's future. They stressed the difficult job market situation, especially for young people and expressed doubt that good (i.e. higher) education guarantees employment. They were making references to their own youth, to the times, when even only after high school one could easily find a job. "Once, in our times, if you had a high school [diploma], it meant something" – they used to say.

Simultaneously, most of the youth from Samokov and surroundings declared the willingness to study, or was already studying at academic level. In turn their parents would often mention the cost of education and stress that in the times of their own youth, the situation was completely different (i.e. education was free of charge).

Another issue appearing in the conversations is the nostalgia for social life that people used to have. According to locals it changed with arrival of new times. Interlocutors claimed that nowadays people are permanently busy, unable to focus, and have no room for carefree joy or a moment of reflection:

Before, we used to organize parties on our own. Alone – one woman from Poreče told me. When there was a holiday, or something similar, everybody was there to meet. There was music [...] we would set the table. Somebody would bring drinks, someone else meat, salad. Whatever they had... And we used to hang out together. A lot. Or the 8th of March, or during the state holidays: Yugoslavian as long as we were in Yugoslavia. And then, in those times, they were respected a lot. Now it no longer happens. Now there are new events in the history, that's why. Now nothing. Now we no longer hang out, or anything, we neither hang out, nor anything [Interview].

Such observations can be caused by the fact that people simply miss the times and carefreeness of their youth. This motive was beautifully depicted by Dan Lungu in his novel *I am an Old Communist Hag!* [Lungu 2009].

My interlocutors complained about inconveniences caused by the lack of water and roads leading to their region and particular villages. The lack of permanent water access is the biggest problem for Zrkle, Ramne, and Brest – especially in the summer when the draughts come and the spring dries out. As a consequence, water is available only for two hours in the afternoon (in Zrkle it happens every second day). The issue is often mentioned, and I could observe myself how some inhabitants walk around with full or empty water containers.

During my last stay in Poreče there was in turn much talk about problems caused by heavy rains and hale during the spring. They caused bad crops, both in terms of quantity and quality, and negatively influenced family budgets. The beekeepers were also mentioning the need for additional feed for the bees, which were left without their natural food because of the weather conditions.

State, power, connections

Life in Poreče seems to be happening aside, or apart from the main politics and the economy of the state. That however does not mean that the region is outside the bounds of law. Rather the power structures are transmitted here from the state, onto the local level, especially regarding the fact of membership in the ruling party structures (VMRO–DPMNE¹³) among the local people. The leading party (since 2006) forms an activity framework for particular individuals who are in turn important for the socio-economic life of the region. According to my interlocutors, it is

¹³ Vnatrešna Makedonska Revolucionerna Organizacija-Demokratska Partija za Makedonsko Nacionalno Edinstvo (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity).

VMRO-DPMNE party that decides whether, or for whom it is possible to find work, and helps in this process. As the people of Poreče say – everything happens through connections (*preku vrski*).

The phenomenon is not new – at most it just grew stronger in the last years [Thiessen 2007]. One of the women told me about her first attempts at finding a job just after her high school graduation at the beginning of the 1990s. She emphasized that this process was very difficult since she did not know anybody who would help her with finding a job in the factory, which back then was the closest and most desirable workplace. As the youngest daughter, she had to stay by her parents to help them with the household, with the animals, and plant growing. For the same reason her husband was also looking for a long time for employment. Initially they both made a living by selling milk and home-grown vegetables in nearby villages. Also, the help from their parents was not to be underappreciated. Only after some time did her husband manage to befriend somebody who helped him to find a job at a gas station.

A similar situation was described by another interlocutor, who found her job in “Suvenir” through her husband, already employed there.

Another woman claimed that personal connections help not only when searching for a job, but also when applying for social care benefits. According to her, if you have connections or friends (*vrski ili prijateli*) you will get income support with no effort, even if you are rich, thus taking the money away from those who really need it (as she noticed, it is a very modest sum anyhow, one which does not help much):

There is social help. If you are alone, you receive 1000 dinars. Two and a half for two people... 40 euro [...] but if you own any land, they give you nothing. 40 euro is [enough] only for breakfasts. Just that. But that's how it is in poor countries. Here, the standard is low. The wages are low [Interview].

The importance of personal connections applies not only to Poreče – in the opinion of my interlocutors it is rather a problem of the entire country, best apparent in these few sentences:

Your country is big, not so small, family-like [like here]... here all the people know each other. You have a friend in every city. And then he finds himself in some institution, he will be in power, you will call him and you'll find the job. This is horrible here [Interview].

The inhabitants of Poreče often emphasized that the ruling party influences various spheres of life and even brings suffering to their children. One of the women told me a story of her daughter – a good student with high grades, who was winning school and sport competitions, but who was not granted a stipend because her family “supports”

the wrong party. In this situation the scholarship was transferred to somebody else.

It is noteworthy that people of Poreče often know who votes for whom during the elections. This is possible – among other things – because of the small number of inhabitants of particular villages. Also, the candidates are finding supporters by promising to “arrange” certain matters after the elections [Lubaš 2011]. When I came for research in May 2013, just after the local elections, my landlady was certain that she knew who did not vote for her husband (he lost the election with a shortage of several votes). In this situation the worst thing for her was the knowledge that his own family did not support him.

The distrust towards the state as a superior structure is apparent in Poreče. The same attitude applies towards local representatives of the state, and most people try to manage on their own, without asking for institutional help.

Economic strategies in Poreče

I shall now describe particular ways of coping with the lack of permanent employment. In this case the strategies are not limited to narratives of reality, which has been verbalized in order to be tamed and understood, but encompass certain actions. I hope however to show both the communicative and the practical aspect of being in the world of the Poreče inhabitants.

At the beginning I would like to once again emphasize the dependency of the people of Poreče on the geography of the region. The surrounding mountains limit the economic possibilities as they prevent production on a larger scale. This in turn leads to specializations of particular villages in particular areas, depending on the altitude at which the village is located.

As I was told by one of my interlocutors, inhabitants of villages Kovač, Benče, Zvečan, and Lupšte specialize in picking chestnuts. In Ramne and Brest (especially in the latter) people work in construction and building. In Rasteš and Zagrad animal herding has been developed, and additionally many people are engaged in gathering forest berries as well as growing peppers, tomatoes, potatoes, beans, etc. in house gardens and on small fields. Beekeeping is also widespread here, and honey from Poreče is appreciated in the entire country. In Zrkle people pick nuts and chestnuts, and grow vegetables.

Even in this schematic division it is apparent that nature (such as thick forests covering the mountains) is not only an obstacle, but

also supports subsistence. Whatever can be found in the mountains: chestnuts, nuts, herbs, moss; is an important source of income and thus a supplement to the limited social care that the state offers (pension or unemployment benefits), and to what people produce in their homesteads. By paraphrasing Tomasz Rakowski one would say these are the modest means of survival for locals, in a situation where, “under regression and unemployment”, a man is forced to retreat to “the old, ‘tried out’ formulas” [Rakowski 2009: 110–111].

Activities undertaken by the people of Poreče in order to improve their family budget are not new solutions, and the situation is not caused or forced by negative external conditions alone. I often heard that self-grown vegetables or fruits were a desirable addition to the monthly income earned in the “Suvenir” factory. Having such “backing” – as some interlocutors claimed – one could “live really well”.

These activities also represent a return to skills that had been learnt in youth; abilities acquired from parents and grandparents. This return often results in coming back to the family village and living in a house inherited from the parents. Hence, it involves physical displacement to a location where living costs are somewhat lower and “survival” is easier.

One of my interlocutors, who owned an apartment in Skopje, returned to his mother and brother; another, together with his wife, left a house in Samokov and went back to his home village. I also met a married couple who settled in the village of one of the spouses because neither was able to find employment in the place where they previously lived. Interestingly enough, despite the relocation they did not decide to sell their first house. When asked about the reasons for this decision, they said they treat the house as a potential “backup” (in case they decided to return to the city, or if they or their children managed to find a job there). It is important to remember that having two houses (in Samokov, Makedonski Brod, or some other big town, and in the family village) does not reflect, as I already mentioned, one’s higher economic status, as it would in the case of a Polish person.

House gardens, small fields, animal herding

Most of the people from Samokov and nearby villages have small fields or house gardens where they grow plants: corn, peppers, tomatoes, cabbage, beans, cucumbers, onions, and (less frequently) potatoes. They also grow fruit trees (mainly plums and apples) and keep animals (cows, donkeys, pigs, hens, horses). In this way, the inhabitants try to assure an “existen-

tial minimum" for themselves, and also attain self-sustainment. Thanks to this, they do not have to buy many essential products, and they make certain preserves and foodstuffs on their own: *ajvar*, juices, syrups, jams, *rakija*, ketchup, *domašen začín* (a kind of homemade food spice made of dried vegetables), cheeses, and sausages. From their homestead production they have milk, eggs, meat (mainly chicken and pork). They go to the shops only to buy products which they cannot produce on their own: coffee, carbonated drinks, beer, cigarettes, flour, sweets (bars, chips, chocolate), bananas, oranges, etc., or when they do not have their own vegetables and fruits yet. For this reason the shops in the region are not very well stocked, not to mention the fact that not every village has its own shop. Most of the shops are in Samokov (five), but in some villages like Ramne, Lupšte, Zrkle, there are none. Economic self-sustainability is therefore a necessity, especially for the older people, for whom walking over an hour (while also carrying grocery bags) on a road which is not adapted for pedestrians can be particularly tiring, and in the winter it becomes practically impossible.

When I visited Lupšte I could observe that owners of a shop in Samokov come there and bring juices, carbonated drinks, and other products that cannot be produced locally. It turned out that this "shop-on-wheels" comes here twice a week and the villagers are informed about the time of arrival in advance. However, this activity is not a widespread phenomenon. The "shop" visits only this particular village because one of its owners comes from here. Therefore, this shop might be perceived as a way to help the people in this given village. Inhabitants of other villages, where there are no shops, (like Ramne) order wares from their neighbours or friends from Samokov, who later deliver the products themselves. It is noteworthy that the prices in all the shops are similar, so the owners do not compete.

Shops from Samokov have a wider range of wares, as one of my interlocutors emphasized: "If something is not to be found 'at Goki', it won't be found anywhere". The situation is worse in Brest and Bitovo (a peripheral settlement) where people live on whatever they can grow themselves, and the shop is rather a place for social meetings, drinking beer and talking about current issues. Most of the households produce food for their homestead's consumption (including feeding the animals) as well as for the family members who live in towns (mainly children). To quote Tomasz Rakowski, the inhabitants build:

economical and thus, even ontological self-efficiency. Entire ecology of survival manifests itself in the internal autarchy of poor households [...] in the conditions of unemployment and village poverty, people live from the post-industrial or agrarian pension of their parents, and use their household resources [Rakowski 2009: 112].

I encountered this strategy many times during my fieldwork. I met married couples living on a pension or social benefits of one of the spouse's, and also unemployed bachelors contributing to their parents' pension with their own unemployment benefits.

Manual work therefore became a necessity: it was an unavoidable addition for the home budget and a source of savings. If circumstances allowed (i.e. if the crops were good), some people would sell the surplus of fruit and vegetables. The buyers were usually regular clients from bigger towns like Prilep or Makedonski Brod, although, several times, I have heard people from various villages asking each other for beans or cabbage. Therefore, a household serves as "the source of nutritional consumption and minimalization of social risk" [Kocik 2001: 64].

The people I encountered rarely visited nearby markets. They explained that they had no time for this since they needed to save it for other, more important housework, or that the entire trip simply is not worth it. One of the women I met even said that she would spend more on transport than she could possibly earn. At best, she would be left with some money to buy herself dinner for that day. A practical approach to the house economy is visible here – the ability to perform accurate calculations of gains and losses, and mostly well motivated assessment of the situation and consideration of the profit. I find this to be crucial since unemployed people (most of my interlocutors were jobless) are usually perceived as passive and helpless. Their "immobility" is perceived as an extreme form of passiveness. Other than that however, just as Rakowski noticed, such perceived unemployment, "despite any external assessment of the situation [...] is no [...] passiveness. It is [rather] a permanent relation with the world, about which, despite everything, we care" [Rakowski 2009: 110]. The unemployed, as Rakowski convinces us, "are not passive subjects, as they do not live in a cultural void, but they change their situation" [Rakowski 2009: 110].

The ability to adapt aptly to external conditions can be observed in the simplest home activities. The unemployed bake the bread themselves, saying it is both for the sake of money-saving, and because of the quality of the product:

- Home-made one is better than the bought one. The bread is good, if you make it at home...
- And is the home-made food cheaper?
- Cheaper and more tasty. You make it as you wish [Interview].

Home-made bread is better than the bough one. I have one neighbour here. She comes from Germany in the summer and she calls me to bake her bread, always. So I bake it. As my duty. Home-made is very different than a bought one [Interview].

It is noteworthy that these activities are not limited to women. Although one can often hear that women bake bread and men make *rakija*, in practice these activities are being done by both sexes. It often happens that men – as bachelors – are forced to take over household activities traditionally considered as feminine. One of the villages can serve as a perfect example: it is located around 4–5 kilometres away from Samokov and inhabited almost entirely by men. Most of them are forced to deal both with activities recognized as a men’s job, but also those which are traditionally female.

The locals pay great attention to the quality of food (as is clear from the aforementioned quote) and especially to the food’s “cleanliness” or “purity”. I have often heard that their vegetables and fruits are not “sprayed” but “clean” and “natural” (*sve prirodno, sve čisto*). According to the locals the situation is different in the towns, where one can buy only plants grown in a greenhouse, with the use chemicals, which are unhealthy and not tasty. Some of the interlocutors stated that peppers sold in the shops have water injected in them so they are heavier, and as so the customers are being deceived on every occasion. Eating what you grow on your own is a guarantee of a long and healthy life.

Picking herbs, chestnuts, mushrooms and moss

An almost equally frequent way of sustenance, though mainly focused on money making, is based on using the forest resources: picking chestnuts, mushrooms, all kinds of herbs and moss. These specific “ecologic professions”, as they are called by Tomasz Rakowski after Justyna Laskowska-Otwinowska [2002: 228–229], form an important source of income from spring until late autumn. Around April or May the villagers are already starting to walk around the mountain meadows in search of various herbs: *planinski čaj* (*Sideritis scardica*), *majčina dušička* (*Thymus pulegioides*), *uvin čaj* (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*), *ruski čaj* (*Thea sinensis*) and other aromatic forest plants, which is not particularly difficult as there are many of them growing at this time.

Each of these has a certain medicinal purpose well known to the gatherers: *uvin čaj* for example helps with urinal tract problems. The gatherers can easily enumerate illnesses which certain plants can relieve, how to prepare a tea from these plants, and how often to drink it. It is worth saying that this type of activity is undertaken also by men – it is not typically female. An interlocutor whom I most often contacted told me that collecting and selling herbs (as well as juniper berries, which he used to prepare various tinctures/alcohols) was one of his main sources

of income. Later he also began to pick mushrooms and moss. However, despite this fact, he did not know what were the best places to collect these plants, or what were the best prices to sell them, as I discovered while witnessing his conversation with his neighbours. It is noteworthy that the gatherers inform each other about possible sale points and the best prices offered for a certain type of herb. Those are often simply bought by a small private company based in Samokov for 40 dinars per kilogram, which is less than one euro (for comparison: during my stay in Poreče a loaf of bread cost 25 dinars and 1 litre of the cheapest milk – 47 dinars). Aside from mushrooms or healing herbs people also pick raspberries, mulberries, and blackberries – those are however turned into preserves: syrups, *slatko* (a type of thick jam used as a coffee snack), in preparation for the winter.

Picking mushrooms is considered particularly profitable – especially one particular sort – the common morel. One kilogram of dried morel can be sold for 20 euro, an amount that my interlocutors considered to be a relatively large sum of money. Sometimes the sum of 25 or 30 euro was mentioned. Fresh mushrooms are sold for 2–3 euro per kilogram. At the same time, some of the people from Poreče would stress the uncertainty of this activity. It has a seasonal character; it is dependent on the climate and weather, and also on luck, which can sometimes lead one to find 5 kg on one occasion but nothing on another.

In autumn people collect chestnuts which are later sold to a factory Dra-Go, located four kilometres outside of Kičevo. The factory produces sweet and spicy products in which chestnut is the main ingredient. The company is considered by some locals to be a kind of a “last chance”. As one of my interlocutors said during my first research stay (that is: when the factory opened), if only it was built closer, it could become a chance for activating the region, just as “Suvenir” was before it. The man even suggested that this was the initial plan. The idea was justified because of the closeness and the chestnut plentitude in the region. It has to be mentioned that the chestnut is a particular symbol, and a pride of Poreče. This attitude is manifested in the form of *Kostenijada* – a festival of chestnuts which takes place at the end of November in Makedonski Brod. The inhabitants of Samokov and nearby villages consider the festival to be an event distinguishing their region from other lands.

Chestnuts (roasted, cooked, raw) are also being sold in the market, most frequently in Prilep. However, the quantities are smaller than those sold to the factory and the payments are also different. As one man told me, a person can earn up to 2 thousand euro for two tons of chestnuts, and for this money one can survive for a long time in Poreče.

Working abroad

Many inhabitants of Poreče also work abroad (mainly in construction), mostly in the EU member states. People from Poreče usually look for jobs in Slovenia, Germany, and Italy. The biggest problem for them is the time-limit of the stay abroad – they can stay in EU countries for up to three months at a time, which they mention with a certain dose of bitterness. A Bulgarian passport is a very desirable item among them because of this, and the question of acquiring one was often brought up in the conversations [Neofotistos 2009; Risteski 2014].¹⁴ My interlocutors often mentioned ways of obtaining this passport, emphasizing the need to acquire a certain amount of money in advance – a sum which was usually considerably high for them. For this reason not everybody could afford this “luxury”. The interlocutors also underlined the lengthy duration of the procedure itself. However, it is worth noting that the passport is herein treated solely as one of various possibilities available while seeking employment, and has nothing to do with any national affiliation. Attempts to obtain the passport are therefore related to potential economic possibilities – as citizens of Bulgaria (an EU member state), people from Poreče could stay within the EU for more than three months and move freely in search of work. One could therefore say that, in a way, the passport opens a door to the West.

Another means of improving one’s everyday existence is the phenomenon of village-to-town migration which is widespread in Poreče. The inhabitants of Samokov and nearby settlements usually move to bigger urban centres in Macedonia in order to find employment: to Skopje, Tetovo, Prilep, or Gostivar. This however does not mean that they completely break their ties with the family land. Many of them treat Poreče as a kind of a pantry: a source of cheap fruit and vegetables, and thus, of additional savings.

¹⁴ This phenomenon (typical for the entire Macedonia, not only Poreče) is a source of many controversies and discussions among both Macedonians and Bulgarians. These controversies are linked to the already complicated relations between both countries (deeply enrooted in history and linked, among others, to the issue of Macedonian identity). It is thought that there are between 60 and 120 thousands of Macedonians using Bulgarian passports (the data are inaccurate because Macedonian authorities do not keep official statistics on the matter). A large part of Macedonians received Bulgarian citizenship before Bulgaria accessed the European Union in 2007. Back then, Bulgaria was eager to grant passports, treating Macedonians as part of the Bulgarian nation (this is still practiced, according to some Macedonian politicians and citizens). Currently, obtaining a Bulgarian passport is a little more difficult because the Bulgarian authorities move towards tightening the procedures of issuing passports; however according to press releases, these limitations do not apply to Macedonians yet. The willingness to obtain such a passport usually has a pragmatic background, and is caused by the wish to escape the Macedonian “visa ghetto” in search for a better paid job in the EU member states. My aim here is only to stress the problem, which in itself is too complex and intertwined with the political context to further develop in this article [Blaževska 2014; Marusic 2014].

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In the villages where I did my research one could to a certain extent observe the phenomenon of “mutual employment” [Rakowski 2009: 111]. This was not paid work however; it was rather a specific exchange of help based on the rule of reciprocity. One of my interlocutors used to help pick plums for his friend from another village, and she would in return do the same for him. Another was helping his neighbours with corn crops. Yet another was telling me that each year he helps his colleague from Zvečan in collecting chestnuts. It also happens that as payment for the help, a person simply receives part of the fruits or vegetables he helped to collect. However, the interlocutors were not eager to talk about such practice and did not want to describe the details. I also received a lot of mutually exclusive information, or information that was not in accordance with my own observations. For example, I would often hear about the lack of help, or about the lack of willingness to help the people, but the person would at the same time run to his neighbour to help him with work on the field. This was perhaps caused by the fact that I did not spend a lot of time in this place, so I was naturally unable to observe many aspects of everyday life of the people of Poreče or to recognize some nonverbal (that is, unspoken, remaining outside of the declarative realm) mechanisms ruling their interpersonal relations. That is exactly how one of my interlocutors commented when I talked with him about the inconsistencies I had observed: “You have to spend more time here in order to see how it works”. If I were to synthesize some rules about how this mutual help system works (despite of apparent differences between the declarative narratives and the actual social practice, and rather scarce data), I would say that help was usually limited to neighbourly and friendly relations. If you know somebody and have closer ties, you go and help them. The condition that had to be fulfilled was reciprocity: readiness to “work back”, for example on a neighbour’s field.

Concluding remarks

One of the biggest problems for the inhabitants of Samokov and nearby settlements is the lack of permanent employment. This subject would reappear in the narratives even if I did not provoke it. Many of my interlocutors, both men and women, had to take any available job, even low paid, in order to survive. It was often a job below their qualifications that corresponded neither to their education, nor to their work experience accumulated over years of professional activity – a job that would not

meet their hopes or expectations, a job that would only cause bitterness and frustration in them. Despite all that, many of them were ready to undertake it. They were forced by the difficult economic situation – the need to feed themselves and their families, buy medicine for their sick parents, pay for the education of the children, etc. During my research, the people would often tell me about their fears; they emphasized that their every day is marked by uncertainty. Usually this became a pretext to compare the “old” with “the new”: communism with capitalism, ex-Yugoslavia with present-day Macedonia.

Many of the local people were very critical of the changes that appeared in their country after the fall of socialism and the attainment of independence. They were pointing out the fast growth of unemployment (including among the young people), closure of state-owned businesses, and the devaluation of education. Even those who had employment could not be certain if that would remain so. People complained about the lack of basic social security solutions, about low wages, or lack of free time. This led to a certain idealization of the past. Yugoslavia was associated not with an oppressive political system as such, but rather with a sense of security and social stabilization, and with a higher living standard. This phenomenon, known in literature as “yugonostalgia”, is however not sufficient to explain their critical approach to current reality.

One of the issues most frequently mentioned was the conviction of people from Poreče about the lack of state’s interest in their region. At the same time, it was really rare that they would blame the government for the situation – they avoided doing so openly. More frequently they would search for reasons in abstract phenomena – system transformation, privatization, or often mentioned crisis. When asked about politics they would only state that ascription to the party (meaning: membership in the ruling party) helps with many things: finding a job, or a good school for the children. They were underlining how important it is to have personal connections when looking for employment.

Conviction that a good job could only be acquired through party membership or certain (usually also “party”) connections is not at odds with the feeling that people of Poreče expressed – that of remaining outside the main course of politics and economy, and therefore with a certain lack of existence of the state in Poreče region. By this I mean the lack of institutional help for the region, and also lack of focus on its problems in the media discourse, or in the speeches of politicians of the most important parties. For this reason the people from Samokov and its surroundings think that they are left alone when faced with a crisis (which affects them personally). An attempt at arranging something

by “pulling strings” and connections is one of the possible ways of coping with the reality.

I also show that the unemployment of people interviewed by me should not be linked with hopelessness, passiveness, marasmus or inability to find oneself in the reality. I attempted to prove that – no matter the external assessment – they are extremely active. They try to improve their economic situation by using the means they have and they remain open to various possibilities, including going abroad or “arranging” a Bulgarian passport. “Here – as Rakowski writes – this second, complementary face of rural culture of survival reveals itself – face of not passiveness or hopelessness as such, but rather of a specific activity – using anything that is possible from the surrounding space” [Rakowski 2009: 108]. One of my interlocutors summarized it in a laconic sentence: “Gather whatever nature gave you”.

By dividing their existence in the world into communicative and practical spheres linked to an activity, performance of particular actions, I wanted to show two types of taming reality used by the inhabitants of Poreč; the reality, in which they found themselves after losing fixed (and considered as good) jobs, the reality of long-term unemployment, and global crisis. Thus, I treated the complaint [Kędziorek 1996], which was an element of most of the interviews, not as a “supplement” devoid of meaning, but rather as yet another strategy of coping with problems that carries information on how my interlocutors position themselves in the surrounding world, their problems, particular assessments, prognoses for the future, etc. Whatever was discursive and remaining in sphere of declarations, I therefore treated as complementary to the everyday activities leading to affirmation of the existential minimum.

Translated from Polish by Olimpia Dragouni

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Barbora Machová

LIFE AND ECONOMIC STRATEGIES OF SMALL COMMUNITIES IN POREČE FROM THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT

Specific historical, social as well as climatic conditions in the Republic of Macedonia, among other factors, led to the development of particular strategies employed by the population. Based on a case study, this paper presents the life and economic strategies of small communities in the mountain area of Poreče in western Macedonia from the second half of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century. Life strategies are sets of practices and long-term plans developed, defined and implemented under certain conditions in order to achieve specific objectives, and can be observed in the behaviour of both individuals and households.

From an economic point of view, a household is a market unit of consumption and production [Brčák, Sekerka 2010]. Household members use their common resources, contribute to material (financial) production and consume it together [Schmink 1984: 89]. From an ethnological point of view, a household (and family) is a unit that ensures the continuity of tradition [Slavkovský 2008]. In social and cultural anthropology, a household is a structural unit of society and the smallest social system which can be analyzed [cf. Eriksen 2001]. Households are mostly defined by coresidence or family affiliations [Miková 1991: 604]. However, coresidence is not always necessary. Migrant workers who live separately from their families are also considered to be part of the household. On the other hand, households consisting of non-related persons are very rare in the Balkans [Todorova 2010: 280–281].

Life and economic strategies can be observed based on the economic activities of household members, but also through research of the social and cultural aspects of behaviour and motivations. Today, social science research focuses more on value systems [Miková 1991: 604]. According to this approach, the value system of a given community is the driving force of specific strategies. Potential strategies of individuals and households are also affected not

only by actual values but also by other factors, such as current labour market conditions, land and capital ownership, government interventions [Linhart, Vodáková 1996: 1233–1234] or global economic development, e.g. the financial crisis in 2009. Differences in regional strategies are also based on climate conditions and distance from economic centres. As household composition and labour market conditions constantly develop, relevant strategies also have to be modified. Changes in the strategies of specific households can be observed, for instance, when unexpected major expenses arise (e.g. due to illness of a household member), or in times of financial distress caused by external factors (economic crisis, changes in the labour market, new laws or regulations). Such situations lead to the reinforcement of strategies that provide cash income. Household members try to use all available resources and job opportunities. Work migration fits well in the scheme. Diverse economic activities are especially important for poor households which do not have enough reserve funds originating from a stable income. Women and children, and sometimes seniors as well, play a key role in the intensification of the work effort. While men focus on cash income, women usually play multiple roles. They take care of most of the unpaid domestic work, external social networks, access to public goods and services, and they also provide a secondary, irregular income [Schmink 1984: 91].

The life and economic strategies adapted in the region of Poreče in the second half of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century and their specific social dimensions can be illustrated by a case study carried out in Bitovo.¹ The mountain village of Bitovo shows all the typical trends of Macedonian periphery regions and the entire Balkan region from the 1950s until today, such as a high rate of depopulation, development of self-sustainability, forest food gathering (foraging) for income, or a high concentration of single men due to the traditional patrilocality of Macedonian society, in which women are much more mobile than men (they marry and move outside of their birthplace). Naturally, the growing transnational economy (which is part of the globalization process) shows its specific importance for the local community through the adaptation of global products to each locality or culture, as it is called glocalization [Eriksen 2005: 27]. Local communities cannot be studied without taking into consideration the global or transnational flow of goods, people, finances or ideas, in particular *scapes* [Appadurai 1997: 178–200]. Almost all communities in the present world are connected and interdependent. The current task of ethnographers must be to study how global reality is

¹ The study is based on the field research carried out by the author of this paper through interviews with locals and expatriates and with the use of participant observation during her short stays in the village (ranging from 10 to 30 days) from 2011 to 2014 [see e.g. Machová 2013].

reflected at the local level and to find the connection between the daily life of ordinary people and the global world [Appadurai 1997: 178–200].

Poreče is a rural and peripheral region, and an historical and geographical region of Macedonia. It lies in the basin of the river Treska (the river Golema) in a valley surrounded by tall mountains. There are a total of 51 settlements, consisting of 50 villages and one small town called Makedonski Brod. The core area of Poreče is identical to the administrative and municipal area (*opština*) of Makedonski Brod.²

Poreče has been an independent administrative unit since the 19th century [Kănčov 1900: 257–258]. This fact definitely played a role in the formation of a regional identity, but the main factor was the geography and morphology of the region as the administrative borders were defined based on natural boundaries. This *opština* belongs to the least developed *opštinas* in Macedonia. Minimal economic development and a high rate of depopulation are typical for these regions. Poreče is one of the least populated regions of Macedonia. In the early 2000s, the population density was 13 people per km² [Svetieva 2004], in 2014 there were only 8 people per km², and the drop in population continued.³

Locals used to distinguish between Upper Poreče in the north and Lower Poreče in the south (*Gorno, Dolno Poreče*). The areas were given their names based on the character of their landscape – Lower Poreče is situated in a lower area with fewer hills than Upper Poreče. The south side of the region is more open and the connection with other regions is much better; the road to Kičevo valley provides the easiest access. In the past, another difference between the two areas was in their main source of livelihood. The herding of sheep and goats was the predominant occupation in the hillier and rather isolated region of Upper Poreče, whereas in Lower Poreče work migration, or *gurbet*, to countries like Serbia, Bulgaria

² *Opština* (municipality) is the smallest administrative unit of the Republic of Macedonia with *gradonačalnik* (mayor) as its chief executive officer. It usually consists of several settlements and its size is mainly defined by population, not by the area or number of settlements. During the second half of the 20th century the administrative organization of Poreče was changing. In the years 1945–1955 there was Brod district (Brodsko okolija) with several *opštinas*, in 1955–1996 there was only one *opština* Makedonski Brod, in 1996–2004 two *opštinas* Samokov and Makedonski Brod.

Villages of Plasnica, Preglovo, Lisičani and Dvorci, which nowadays belong to the *opština* of Plasnica, had been, in different times, added to different administrative organisational entities called *opštini*. Those villages are often included in the region of Poreče by researchers [e.g. Risteski 1982: 11]. Plasnica is geographically but not culturally linked to the region, and it also has a different regional identity. It is inhabited by Muslims who speak Macedonian and they define themselves against the inhabitants of Poreče by their Turkish or undefined sense of national identity. Also, people of Poreče do not refer to people of Plasnica as “we” but as “they”.

³ Website of the *opština* of Makedonski Brod http://www.mbrod.gov.mk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1221&Itemid=645.

or Romania served as the major source of income [Risteski 1982: 18]. In the past, the semi-enclosed basin was both the original and final destination of migration. People from the lowlands would come to hide away from soldiers and bandits [Jovanović 1935: 273–277]. Self-sustainable crop and fruit farming was widespread throughout the region [Obrembski 2001: 42]. Villagers used to sell their products at markets (*pazar*) in Gostivar, Prilep and Kičevo, which were the closest towns. These economic strategies are very similar to the strategies used in other mountain regions of the Balkans [Brunbauer 1999; Brunnbauer 2004; Muka 2004]. Marina talks about their trips to markets in the 1960s and 1970s.

We used to go to *pazar* in Gostivar, which was the closest town – about five to seven hours away by foot, on Tuesdays; to Kičevo, which was about 7 hours away, on Thursdays and to Prilep on Saturdays. Trips to the market in Prilep would take two or three days. My father would leave Botuše at midnight and on the first day he would get as far as Ropotovo where there used to be a coaching inn. He would stay overnight and get to Prilep in the morning where he would spend the whole day in the market. He would then spend the following night in Ropotovo again. He was also selling products on the way – he would exchange a kilo of cherries or apples and he would get some grains. He used to walk around villages and exchange products. My father used to bring back wild garlic that he found on the way, and during Lent or for Christmas he would stop by the river Treska and catch some fish. He often brought candies or cherries back home from the market. He also financially supported my brother who studied in Gostivar and had to pay the rent there [Interview, Marina, woman, born 1947, 19.01.2013, Bitovo].⁴

During the second half of the 20th century, Macedonian society faced dramatic political, economic and social changes. The early period of socialist Yugoslavia saw the establishment of a centrally planned economy. The modernization of agriculture, accompanied by collectivization and planned industrialization of the formerly agrarian country were factors that influenced the traditional life strategies of the people of Poreče. Massive urbanization started at the beginning of the 1970s and Poreče was quickly becoming depopulated.⁵ From the early 1980s partial but important economic reforms towards liberalisation and market economy had been implemented in Yugoslavia and some other socialist countries (Poland, Hungary). There was a certain amount of private property here, in comparison to some other socialist economies where the state was the owner of all property and means of production. The year 1991 brought about a period of political, economic and social transformation following the declaration of independence of the Republic of Macedonia. The disin-

⁴ All names used in the text are pseudonyms.

⁵ In the period from 1971 to 1991 the village of Bitovo lost two thirds of its population.

tegration of Yugoslavia and the newly established market-based economy caused an economic crisis during the 1990s. Many people lost their jobs, especially in factories, as the state organized industry lost markets in other Yugoslav republics [Rychlík, Kouba 2003: 258; Thiessen 2002: 9]. Poreče was not greatly affected by privatization, since most of the land in the region (especially fields, and partially also pastures and forests) was in the possession of private owners during the socialist era. There had been only small cooperatives (called *zadrugas*⁶) founded in this mountainous and unfruitful region.⁷ The depopulation of the region continued in the post-socialist period; people were leaving their villages for cities and abroad to find better living conditions. However, some of those who had lost their jobs in the cities were forced to return to self-sustaining farming in the country.

These days, people in Poreče make their living by gathering mushrooms, herbs, lichens or berries, and through animal husbandry or the sale of edible chestnuts. Some people work in forestry and timbering, cutting trees or transporting the wood, some work in services (shops). Some people choose transnational migration; they work mostly in Slovenia, Italy or Germany for example as bricklayers.⁸ Many locals, especially in bigger villages, are on unemployment benefits (which are relatively low) and relatives living in towns or abroad support them. Child or maternity benefits also represent a source of income.⁹ There is a primary school, police and medical doctors in Samokov and Makedonski Brod.

Most people in Poreče are Orthodox Christian Macedonians and there is also a small percentage of Catholic Albanians (new migrants – women). The Muslim community is represented by only a few people, who speak either Macedonian or Turkish. The predominance of Christianity also affects the economy of the region. In Macedonia, the life and economic strategies of Christian and Muslim migrant workers largely differ. The main difference lies in the fact that Muslims (mostly Albanians and Macedonian Muslims) seem to have a stronger sense of community and deeper connections with their extended families, and also to their place of origin. Most of their foreign income is invested in their place of birth – they build luxury homes where they only

⁶ The term *zadruga* (literary translated as “community”) is usually used for description of an extended family, but since the socialist Yugoslavia it has also been used for cooperatives or unions.

⁷ In the period of 1945–1952 there were 26 *zadrugas* founded in Brodska okolija (Region of Makedonski Brod), but they covered only 1 percent of the lands [Arhiv, Odbor Makedonski Brod, 271, 297].

⁸ Excerpt from an interview with the deputy mayor of Makedonski Brod *opština*, for Samokov, 4.07.2012, Samokov. There were 20,498 Macedonians living in Slovenia in 2011 but if the temporary migrant workers are also included, the number would double [Bielenin-Lenczowska 2015: 104].

⁹ The maternity benefit in the amount of 8,048 denars (134 euros) a month is paid only for the third child, until the child is 10 years old [for more information, see Zakon 2010].

stay for one month out of the year.¹⁰ Nowadays, the number of transnational families is higher among Muslims. On the other hand, Christian families often leave the villages entirely. This is the reason why the process of depopulation in Christian villages is much faster than in Muslim ones. According to a Macedonian historian Violeta Ačkoska the situation probably originates from the period of socialism when Orthodox Christian Macedonians would very often migrate to towns in the process of modernization and urbanization, whereas Muslims, who were a minority, stayed in the countryside and made a living in agriculture, tobacco farming [Ačkoska 2011: 463], or sought work abroad in Germany, Slovenia, Italy, or Austria. To a certain extent, this was caused by their lower education, which worsened their situation on the labour market [Maeva 2010: 188, 189]. Over time, the tendency has gradually been changing and nowadays some Muslims also choose permanent emigration.

Case of Bitovo

The village of Bitovo is located in the northwest part of Poreče (Upper Poreče). With its social, demographic and climate conditions, it is a typical representation not only of this area, but also of many other periphery regions both in Macedonia and the entire Balkan region. It lies at an altitude of 1,200 metres above sea level.

Bitovo today

In 2011, there were a total of 42 permanent residents living in 16 households in Bitovo, 21 of whom were of working age.¹¹ The population is fully Orthodox and all residents speak Macedonian, apart from one Catholic Albanian woman who married into the village in 2007. There is an Orthodox church, a chapel and a small shop in the village.

At the time of this research, the majority of male residents worked in forestry (felling, skidding with horses, logging truck transportation). Two men worked for Macedonian Forests, a public enterprise, and six men ran their own business or worked for a private company which has a concession for cutting trees in Mavrovo national park (west of Poreče). Three men worked in livestock farming (sheep and goats). Forestry

¹⁰ A field research in the village of Plasnica, inhabited by Macedonian speaking Muslims with Turkish ethnicity, in 2011, 2013 and 2014.

¹¹ Under the given conditions, working age cannot be defined by the commencement and termination of employment. Children and elderly (or pensioners, i.e. men who collect pensions) form an important part of local economy. They contribute to the self-sustaining agricultural production significantly – they take care of the cattle, irrigate crops, etc. For the purpose of the study, working age is limited to 65 years of age.

work took place in or outside the region, and depending on the nature of the work, some men used to commute to work. They would usually have a place rented in the place of work and they would come back to Bitovo irregularly – once in a couple of weeks or once a month.

Men's work would generate household cash income. Local men (mostly those born in 1965 or later) were very flexible when looking for a job. This can be illustrated by the fact that several Bitovo men who used to work in forestry tried to get a job in a factory in the administrative village of Samokov, and they also applied for Bulgarian passports, which would make their access to the European job market much easier.¹²

In addition to their work outside the village, men would work on the farm when at home. They would feed the cattle and horses, take care of the hay, or plough the field.

If there were also women in the household (which was the case in 11 out of 16 households in Bitovo), then these women would work exclusively in self-sustaining farming. They would take care of cows, goats, horses, donkeys, hens, and small fields where they grew beans, potatoes, corn, peppers, pumpkins and other vegetables (garlic, onion, cucumbers, tomatoes, cabbage). Men's work in the farm would be rather irregular and women would bear the main responsibility. It is women who also had to carry out the daily tasks. Women would, with the help of children and older household members, be involved in the informal and non-monetary economy. Although their work could generate some income, it would mostly be on an irregular basis. They would mostly sell milk or yoghurt to households that had no cattle. In the past it was uncommon for women to work outside their homes. The traditional model is fairly typical for Balkan families, but over time and with continuing modernization this model is changing and these days, for example, women who live in towns often have jobs.

One of the important sources of sporadic income for Bitovo households was selling mushrooms and herbs (and also some lichen and juniper berries) that people would pick in the area around the village or in the surrounding mountains. From May to October, depending on weather conditions, both men and women would leave their houses early in the morning and go to the mountains to collect mushrooms, either on their own or in groups

¹² Bulgaria issues passports to Macedonians as a part of its current power politics used by the Bulgarian government against Macedonian national identity. Bulgaria grants citizenship to individuals who prove or claim that they are of Bulgarian origin, or who identify themselves with Bulgarians. Macedonians widely use this opportunity mainly because of economic advantages it brings them – travel and job opportunities in the European Union. Between 2001 and 2013, 51,391 Macedonians were granted Bulgarian citizenship [Risteski 2014; Makedoncite 2014].

(family-based).¹³ The harvest time for juniper berries is from August to October, and lichen is harvested from January until March. There was a man who would come to the village and he would buy the harvest and resell it for more money to distributors, who would then sell it abroad. Mushrooms are mostly exported to Italy and France; lichen and juniper berries are exported to France and are used in perfume and in pharmaceutical industry; herbs are sold to the local tea factory (local Skopje branch). This factory would also buy, pack and distribute lichen. Lichen and juniper berries are not as profitable as mushrooms (which bring a one-time income) because they have to be harvested every day in huge amounts in order to eventually pay off for the hard work.¹⁴ The work is physically very demanding. Permanent residents of Bitovo were not so much involved in harvesting juniper berries or lichen because they were too busy with livestock, field and domestic work. On the other hand, this was the dominant strategy for those residents of Poreče who had no cattle or who did not work in self-sustainable farming (e.g. people who used to work in the “Suvenir” factory in Samokov and who lost their jobs in 2004 when the factory was closed). This strategy was also adapted by some of the people who moved to town but did not find their income (or pension) sufficient. During the summer, Bitovo would mostly be inhabited by the elderly, but also by a few young people who would do some seasonal work there. These people return from towns to their place of origin. For example, there was a young man who worked as a taxi driver in Gostivar during the winter. In the summer, he and his wife used to stay in Bitovo with his parents and his brother, who are permanent residents, and pick mushrooms and juniper berries to sell. They would then sell the harvest directly in Gostivar for a better price than that from a reseller. During the economic crisis that followed Macedonian independence in 1991, and also

¹³ This strategy is very common throughout Macedonia (my own research in 2011 in Kriva Palanka and in 2012 in Bitola). The most common species are *Boletus Edulis* (*vrgan*), chanterelle (*lisičarka*), parasol mushroom (*sončarka*), Caesar’s mushroom (*jajčarka*) and oyster mushroom (*bukovka*). Prices vary depending on quality. In 2011, it was 450 denari per kilogram (60 denari = 1 euro) for first class mushrooms and 100 denari per kg for second class mushrooms. Second class mushrooms would be mostly dried and then sold for 1,550–2,550 denari per kilogram (depending on quality). In 2012, dried mushrooms were sold for as little as 1,500 denari per kilogram. In 2014, when June harvest yielded a large mushroom crop, first class mushrooms were sold for 1,000–1,200 denari per kilogram of dried mushrooms. The lowest quality, or *industrija*, was sold for as little as 300 denari per kilogram. In other regions people harvested and sold blueberries (research from 2013 in the foothills of Solunska Glava).

According to official information, the average salary in the Republic of Macedonia was 342 euros in 2011. Unofficial sources on the other hand placed this figure at 200 euros per month [Prosečna mesečna plata 2011].

¹⁴ Juniper berries were sold for 60 denari per kilogram in 2011. In 2013, juniper berries were sold for 70 denari per kilogram. Good gatherers were able to harvest around 50 to 75 kilograms (3 sacks), which means that they would be able to make up to 5,250 denari (90 euros) a day.

during the recession that hit in 2009, harvesting represented an important source of income for many households in Macedonia. It might seem paradoxical that people who left the countryside for better job opportunities in towns during socialism are now coming back and exploring economic activities there, rather than in towns where jobs are scarce.

Pensions were another source of income for Bitovo residents. Men who used to work and whose employers paid social contributions for them can receive a pension. Women, who worked in domestic farming all of their lives, were not eligible for pension. There is a possibility of a so called agriculture pension (*zemjodelska pensija*) in Macedonia, but the women from Bitovo do not receive this pension. They decided not to apply for it because of a lot of administrative arrangements. In 2011, there were three men over the age of 60 who received a pension from Germany, where they worked in factories, construction sites or slaughterhouses in the 1970s.¹⁵

Table 1 shows the population distribution of particular households in Bitovo in 2011. Single-member households and two-member households were predominant. Nine households had at least one member of working age, and seven households consisted solely of people over 65. Children under 18 lived in four households.

Five out of 16 households were male-only households and two of them were female-only.

Table 1.

Households in Bitovo by household members (2011)	Total number of households	Gender distribution			Age distribution		
		Males	Females	Males and females	0–18 years of age	19–64 years of age	over 65 years of age
	16						
1 member	5	4	1			2	3
2 members	5	1	1	3		1	4
3 members	2			2	1	2	1
4 members	2			2	1	2	
5 members	0						
6 members	1			1	1	1	1
7 members	1			1	1	1	

Note: numbers in the table represent the number of households.

¹⁵ After having worked for 5 years, they received a pension of 80 euros a month, which is a substantial amount of money in Macedonia. See note 13.

Most of the single-member households and two-member households in Bitovo consisted of elderly people. Back in 2001, research revealed a high number of this kind of households in Poreče [Crvenkovska 2002].¹⁶ It is highly probable that the number of elderly households grew even bigger with the growing depopulation of the Macedonian mountain and rural areas.

An important phenomenon connected with household structure is the lack of young women. The lack of young women in the entire region (as well as in other, mainly peripheral regions of Macedonia) is a current problem that impacts the economic sustainability of some households. In Bitovo, as well as in other Macedonian villages with much better infrastructure, the demographic imbalance is caused by the fact that women were more mobile during the continuing migration of Orthodox Macedonians for work in towns. In a patrilocal society such as this one, sons are tied to the family land and they are obliged to take care of their parents. This mostly concerns and affects the youngest sons. Marriage with a younger Catholic woman from Albania has become a common strategy in Macedonia in the last couple of years. There were a large number of single women over 25 in the rural areas of Albania because men would emigrate for work or because they preferred younger women. The future spouses learned about each other through their social networks – Albanian women who married into the Poreče region would recommend their friends or family members. Such marriages were an acceptable solution for both spouses as it also allowed them to start a family. However, a man had to have economic security, i.e. his own house and land, and money to provide for his wife, so that she could enjoy the same or better living standards than with her parents in Albania. Mirko, one of the local shepherds, who turned 40 in 2011, had to deal with a similar situation. He was pondering whether he should sell his sheep and move to Gostivar, where his family owned a flat. He was not able to take care of the sheep with just the help of his aging parents and he needed a wife that would help him with the work. However, hard work and village life are not that appealing to Macedonian girls. Every girl hopes to get married and move to a town where she would live in a flat and work in the service industry, which would be the best-case scenario. Girl's parents, although living in a village themselves (or maybe because of that), would have similar hopes. According to sociological research, Macedonian society considers life in rural areas and agricultural work to be the least prestigious occupation [Taševa 1998: 161].¹⁷

¹⁶ Ines Crvenkovska, a Macedonian ethnologist, defines elderly's households as those where all the members are over 60.

¹⁷ Only a small portion of land in Macedonia is owned by agricultural collectives – most land is private but the owners tend to migrate to towns (or abroad) for work, i.e. to

Values and attitudes

Most of the young generation has the tendency to leave the village and move to towns in search for jobs. They (especially the women) are not expected to stay in the village. The youngest sons were expected to take care of their ageing parents and the farm. The current young generation feels that there is no future for them in the village and they expect to live better lives in towns or abroad. Their positive attitude towards living in towns and working in the service industry is based mostly on the experience of their relatives, older brothers or sisters, or friends. They are in touch with them via mobile phones or internet every day. They expect life in a town to be easier and much more comfortable, since there is no daily hard physical labour required, unlike in the village where they would have to take care of the livestock and work in the fields. As mentioned above, several young men from Bitovo who used to work in forestry tried to find jobs in a factory in the administrative village, and they also applied for Bulgarian passports. They were unsatisfied with their current occupation because it was hard and badly paid. That is why they were open to seeking new sources of livelihood; they were ready to move to find work, and even to move abroad. The willingness to commute to work or to move is one of the most important features of both individual and household economic strategies in Macedonia.

The older generation praised socialist Yugoslavia and nostalgically looked back on Josip Broz Tito and life under socialism with its established rules. They would mostly emphasize the security and permanent work in state enterprises. On the other hand, the period following the break-up of Yugoslavia was chaotic. There was a high level of crime and people had problems with finding and keeping jobs. It seemed inevitable that the young generation would leave the village and would be provided with all the necessary support. They were convinced that their only hope for a better life was to leave the countryside. Both the villagers and people from towns think that those who work in agriculture are of a lower social status than those who live in towns and work, for example, in industry. People employed in the service industry or those who own their own business (e.g. shop assistants, hair dressers) have a higher social status. The tendency to consider agriculture as less prestigious originates from the period of socialism when industrialization was prioritized over agriculture, which was highly neglected [Swain 2008: 32; Taševa 1998: 161]. During the economic crisis in the 1990s, following the break-up of

change the source of livelihood – information based on a sociological research carried out between 1995 and 1997 [see Taševa 1998: 161].

Yugoslavia, self-sustainable farming and gathering of mushrooms and berries proved to be one of the survival strategies in uncertain times [see e.g. Benovska-Săbkova 2001]. However, these activities and country people still have a lower status.¹⁸

The idealized image that some villagers have about living in a town is shaken by the opinion of a young mother of two who was born in Bitovo in 1980 and who left for Tetovo together with her husband immediately after their wedding. In 2013 she told me:

Living in the village is better. You make 6,000 or 7,000 denari [100 euros] in a factory in Tetovo. You have to be in the factory every day. You do not have time to grow anything for yourself, and living in the town is more expensive. Those who live here and have a salary (e.g. from a state enterprise such as Macedonian Forests) are doing better – they make around 12,000 denari [200 euros], which is very good. And they can grow their own food. [Interview, Lubica, woman, born 1980 in Bitovo, 17.08.2013, Bitovo]

Economic strategies of Bitovo residents in the second half of the 20th century

Let us go back in time and look at Bitovo 60 years ago. In 1946 there were 360 residents. This was the peak of Bitovo's demographic growth.¹⁹ As the number of residents in 2011 (42) shows, for the past 60 years most of them chose migration, i.e. leaving their place of origin and seeking other opportunities elsewhere as their life and economic strategy.

Demographic trends in Bitovo in the past 70 years correspond with trends observed in the whole Balkan region, i.e. migration from rural areas, especially from mountain and periphery areas. Yet, the urbanization process of Bitovo was different than in other places in the region – migration

¹⁸ Due to the recent mass urbanization, a strong connection to villages and regions of origin can be felt among inhabitants of Macedonian towns. Macedonians say that "everybody has his/her village [*sekoj ima selo*]". Today's young generation that was born in the city is still closely connected to the countryside – they regularly come to visit their relatives or take care of the house, but they consider working in agriculture to be inferior and would feel ashamed if they had to perform their duties in front of their peers. "It is especially shameful to work in the field [*Osobeno e sramno da rabotiš na pole*]". "My parents used to say: Study, my children, so that you don't have to work [*Učete deca da ne rabotite*]" [Interview, Katerina, woman, born 1984, 18.02.2014, Brno].

¹⁹ According to Census 2002 [Popis na naselenieto 2002], data from other censuses for numerous settlements in Macedonia, including Bitovo, can be obtained from Macedonia's States Statistical Office at: http://makstat.stat.gov.mk/PXWeb/pxweb/en/MakStat/MakStat__Popisi__PopisNaNaselenie__PopisiNaseleniMesta/Popisi_nm_1948_2002__NasPoVoZrPol_ang.px/?rxid=46ee0f64-2992-4b45-a2d9-cb4e5f7ec5ef

was lower than in other villages (a drop in population from 100 percent in 1946 to 11.7 percent in 2011). For example, in the neighbouring village of Rasteš, which used to be an administrative village with two churches (in fact, it used to be the centre of the *opština* in the 1950s), there were around 600 inhabitants in 1946 and only 20 permanent residents in 2011 (a drop in population from 100 percent to 3.3 percent).

There were several waves of migration from Bitovo. The main motivation was to attain better living standards, which meant getting some land or paid work that would generate a regular income. Based on the dominant source of livelihood, two of the waves of permanent migration can be called agricultural (to Vojvodina or *Prilepsko Pole* – Prilep Field), and the other two can be called industrial (to Germany or other towns).

The first families left Bitovo for Vojvodina (Banat) after World War II, and there they settled on land that was previously occupied by the deported Germans. The settlements were part of the agrarian reform realised by the new socialist state of Yugoslavia, which wanted to populate Vojvodina with its loyal citizens. Based on this policy, it was mostly the WWII combatants who were given preference in obtaining the land [Ačkoska 2011: 343–351]. At the time, there was most likely population pressure in Bitovo. The barren mountain soil and limited amount of pasture could no longer feed everybody. The poorest families left Bitovo hoping to gain some land and they settled down mostly in the small town of Kačarevo (18 families) and the village of Jabuka (2 families) in the Pančevo District, where they grew corn and crops.²⁰ In total, 1,678 families (10,352 people) from Macedonia settled in Vojvodina between 1945 and 1948, out of which 1,143 families settled in the Pančevo District [Ačkoska 2011: 349]. These families engaged in intensive farming. The government gave them a share of basic tools (ploughs, sowing and threshing machines), livestock (cows, horses, pigs and sheep) and some food and fuel with which to start [Ačkoska 1997: 315].

People used to laugh at those who were leaving, saying they would be thrown in the Danube over there. But the settlers were given land in Banat and they began to grow corn. Afterwards, in the 1950s and 1960s, people from Poreče would travel to Vojvodina to harvest corn. There were big collective farms and mass production was also developing in Yugoslavia. They knew that people had good lives over there. They were rich, their harvest was good, they kept pigs, and the soil was very fertile, unlike here in the mountains. Locals started to think that they should have left as well. But the colonists did not lose contact with them – the first generation of

²⁰ Interview, Dragan, man, born 1951, 23.08.2013, Bitovo; 30.08.2013, Brvenica. According to the 2002 census, 1,467 out of 7,624 inhabitants of Kačarevo and 2,054 out of 6,312 inhabitants of Jabuka were Macedonians [Popis stanovništva 2003].

expatriates would regularly go back to Bitovo – they would bring sweets and would also choose future wives for their sons there. Local girls were happy when they could marry into Banat; they always welcomed the opportunity to leave the poor mountain region [Interview, Dragan, man, born 1951, 23.08.2013, Bitovo].

At the time of tobacco industry development, people from Bitovo also largely inhabited the Macedonian lowlands. Tobacco is still the most important industrial crop in Macedonia. Tobacco cultivation is a source of livelihood in many regions and tobacco exports constitute an important segment of the country's GDP [Stojmilov 2005: 156]. This cultivation requires substantial workforce. It cannot be fully mechanized like other sectors of agriculture. Therefore, there was a large demand for workers in areas where tobacco was intensively cultivated. Tobacco is grown throughout Macedonia but mainly in Prilepsko Pole, the plain of Pelagonia in the vicinity of Prilep, where the tobacco industry is centred.²¹

One of the Bitovo expatriates, Tome Zdraveski, was born in Bitovo in 1960 as the youngest of five children. He had four older sisters. His parents were self-sustainable farmers, and like other locals, they cultivated grains and tobacco in the mountains around Bitovo. When he was 16, his parents decided to buy a field in Sekirci, located in the lowlands close to Prilep, in order to continue tobacco cultivation but in a more intensive and mechanized way. They bought a plough and sowing machines. More and more families were leaving Bitovo for Sekirci and its neighbouring villages.

Most of the people who decided to leave Bitovo during this wave were poor and as such, did not have enough land or workforce. Those who had large herds of sheep and sufficient workforce stayed in the village. They left the village later with the industrial wave of migration, or they stayed in Bitovo if they took up work in forestry. In the 1960s, it was still common to have three, and sometimes (temporarily) four generations of joint families [cf. Kaser 2012] consisting of more than 20 members. This meant that parents lived together with their sons, daughters-in-law and grandchildren (sometimes also with the wives of grandchildren).²² The joint families used to be formed on the basis of demographic and economic conditions; they were characterized by family relations and coresidence, and also by shared

²¹ 50 per cent of the total Macedonian tobacco production comes from Pelagonia, 30 per cent from the vicinity of Prilep [Stojmilov 2005: 159].

²² "When I married to Bitovo in 1969, we lived in Borje; there was *zajednica* – three brothers, Metodija, Mikalje and Dragan, together with their wives and children. Zore, my husband, was Metodija's son. My mother-in-law was nice but Mikalje gave me a hard time (husband's uncle)" [Interview, Nada, woman, born 1949, 7.07.2014, Bitovo].

property and family budget [Todorova 2006: 129].²³ The division of labour was essential because families would raise cattle, engage in self-sustainable farming, grow fruit and sell produce in town markets far from the village in Gostivar, Kičevo or Prilep. The Austrian historian Michael Mitterauer states that this family model was common mainly in mountain areas where monetary economics was of little importance. These areas were primarily connected with sheep herding, which was the most common way of life [Kaser 2012: 96]. At the time of modernization, joint families began to fall apart – brothers and their families would become more independent and they would often move to towns.

With the industrial flow of migration, many residents of Bitovo left for nearby cities and developing industrial centres, mainly to Gostivar and Tetovo in the Polog valley, or to the capital city of Skopje. Industrial development of towns was planned extensively during socialism. Simultaneously, intensive agriculture was growing in the vicinity of large towns located in fertile lowlands. A number of people left rural areas and found work in factories, such as in the textile industry in Tetovo. Working in a town very often meant permanent relocation, which was caused mainly by difficult access to a person's place of origin, underdeveloped infrastructure and low density of industrial centres.

Collectivization of agriculture cannot be regarded as one of the reasons why so many people decided to leave the mountain regions and self-sustainable farming and become waged workers. Mountain areas were hardly affected by the process of collectivization that started in Yugoslavia in 1948.²⁴ There were more than 800 agricultural cooperatives in Macedonia in 1949, but they were officially abolished in 1953 and a new law was passed that limited the area of a private land to a maximum of 10 hectares [Veljanoski 2002]. On the contrary, some families were afraid to go to the lowlands because of collectivization, even though the process was stopped in 1953. Families that decided to stay in Bitovo would invest in land in their village and family members would work on the land together.

²³ According to some researchers, *zadruga* (a new term for South Slavic joint or extended families) was only a phase in the life of nuclear families – extended families would develop from nuclear families and would divide up into nuclear families again [Todorova 2006: 129–131].

Karl Kaser and Michael Mitterauer use the term *joint family* [Kaser 2012], Macedonian translation of Józef Obrębski's work uses the term *zadružno semejstvo*, *golemo semejstvo* – the oldest generation consisting of one couple, *golemo semejstvo vtorostepenno* – the oldest or middle generation consisting of brothers [Obrębski 2002: 34, 45]. My interlocutors use the words *zajednica* (community) or *kabile* (clan).

²⁴ Violeta Ačkoska, a Macedonian historian, considers collectivization one of the reasons for urbanization [Ačkoska 2011: 463].

Those who left Bitovo or other areas of Poreče for Tetovo would probably settle close to each other in the suburban area of Brvenica. In accordance with the migration network theory [cf. Uherek, Drbohlav 2007], they settled down in areas where they had already known somebody. Usually, a man came to live with his relatives or friends who had already been living in Brvenica, and he then found a job in one of the factories. He would rent a place with his relatives first and his wife would stay in the village and take care of the farming with the help of his parents and their children, and later on she would also find a job in the factory. They would then buy a plot of land and build a house with the help of their relatives and friends from Bitovo and surrounding villages (to whom they would often be related through the mother). A portion of the savings would be invested in gardens and fields – it was still equally important to grow one’s own vegetables, grains and corn to feed pigs, not only to provide the family with food (it was not common to pay for food), but also because it was a strong element of their identity. Growing their own food would bring more independence, pride and respect (“look how nice my peppers are”). A large number of women from Poreče would also do seasonal work in agriculture in Brvenica. The Tetovo region was an important agricultural centre during socialism [Stipetić 1982: 197]. While the older generation is still very closely attached to the land, the younger generation does not share their parents’ and grandparents’ priorities, whether they are children who grew up in the lowlands near a town or children from mountain villages. The first family came to Brvenica from Bitovo in 1958 and there has been an influx of families from the whole region of Poreče ever since. In 2013, there were 16 families of Bitovo origin (patrilinear origin, i.e. men were originally from Bitovo).²⁵ More than half of almost 3,000 Brvenica residents (some sources claim the number to be as high as 90 percent) were expatriates from Poreče (from Brest, Volče, Rasteš, Ramne, and other villages) and their descendants; the rest were either originally from other mountain areas of Macedonia, for example from Galičnik, or Serbs who settled in the area after WWI [Popis na naselenieto 2002].

Migration to the Polog valley also sped up due to seasonal migration abroad – villagers would rather invest the money they earned abroad to buy land in the lowlands than in the village of their origin in the mountain region of Poreče. In the late 1960s, people from Bitovo would often leave for Germany. At first, it was almost exclusively a temporary migration of men. Germany opened the labour market for Yugoslavs in 1968

²⁵ Interview, Slave, man, born 1943, 30.08.2013, Brvenica.

[Bielenin-Lenczowska 2015: 101]. In 1971, 8.6 percent of the economically active population of the Republic of Macedonia worked abroad. During that period and until the end of the 1970s, the majority of *Gastarbeiters* would be from rural areas [Cheprengarov 2010: 222; Janeska 2013: 3–4]. The government organized work migration to Germany. It was not the villagers themselves who decided what city to go to or for whom to work. Companies would have specific demands for the workforce from Yugoslavia. Thus, many villagers worked in construction, steel factories or the food industry all over the Federal Republic of Germany (men from Bitovo worked in Regensburg, München, Dortmund, Karlsruhe).

Igor describes his own experience with work in Germany:

I first left for Germany in 1971, when I was still single. I came back later and got married to Darinka. The work migration to Germany started in 1969 and it was done through the labour office in Makedonski Brod. But the first two people who left Bitovo went to France, only then it became a massive issue. The demand for *Gastarbeiters* fell after 1974 and work migration was allowed only with a permit [*so garancija*]. Germans were taking their revenge for war. It was then that I left for the second time, after the wedding. There were German commissions that would pick us. They were in Kičevo. A German company would send their order, for example, that they needed 20 people to work in a factory, or 50 bricklayers, and we would apply for the positions based on our field. German doctors, with the help of a translator, would check if our hearts, lungs and teeth were all right. Then you would get the visa and they would choose a company for you to work for. They would be waiting for you in Germany right at the train station and they would want to see your documents. There were 15 of us coming from Poreče, and each of us would work for a different company. The 1970s and 1980s were the best years for us. Wages in Yugoslavia were as high as in Germany. And then in the 1990s everything fell apart [Interview, Igor, man, born 1950, 19.08.2013].

Most of the temporary workers eventually returned to Macedonia. One of the reasons was the reduced demand for workers. Also, Germany closed its market for new *Gastarbeiters* in 1973 due to the economic crisis [Maeva 2010: 188]. After their return to Macedonia, most migrants from mountain regions would buy land and plots in the lowlands. In the case of people of Bitovo and surrounding villages, it was mostly land and plots in the Polog valley in western Macedonia, in Gostivar (Ciglana neighbourhood), or in the village of Brvenica near Tetovo. As such, they did not invest in their place of origin, i.e. in the mountain areas that were considered poor and underdeveloped, but they tried to give their children a new and better life.

Some men settled down in Germany and their wives eventually came to live with them. Some single men from Poreče settled in Germany and found their wives there, who would very often be of Serbian, Macedonian

or of other Yugoslavian origin. These expatriates are still in contact with their native village or with the native village of their parents (mainly fathers, in accordance with the patrilinear system).²⁶

Strategies of those who stayed

However, in spite of what has been said earlier, people would leave Bitovo later and less often compared to other villages in Poreče. People from surrounding villages would focus more on work outside the region and left within similar waves of migration as people from Bitovo, only faster and in greater numbers.

There are several factors influencing this, but the main one was the labour market success of Bitovo men since the 1970s. They found jobs in forestry, the state enterprises *Kopačka* in Kičevo or *Makedonski šumi* (Macedonian Forests) in Makedonski Brod, and, as mentioned above, they also worked in Germany for a couple of years as seasonal workers, which provided them with a decent income. Not all of the families whose members had worked in Germany moved from the village of Bitovo to the Polog valley. Some of them stayed in Bitovo, mainly those who had large farms. Traditionally, the local economic strategy was self-sustainable farming with a periodical sale of surpluses. Until the 1970s, crop and livestock farming were the main source of livelihood and the necessary financial income was provided mostly by the sale of products in city markets. Sheep, calves, dairy products, beans, apples, walnuts or sweet chestnuts were the main commodities. Along with the modernization of Yugoslav society, state-controlled industrialization, deagrarization,²⁷ as well as development of the health and education system and other services, the old economic strategies were progressively changing. Traditional values and economic priorities transformed. The present economic situation created a need for cash and additional earnings. However, job opportunities in the field of agriculture outside of Poreče in the form of seasonal work were limited due to the mechanization and collectivization of agriculture – from 1948 to 1953 [Veljanoski 2002]. Yugoslav state policy had direct influence on certain aspects of Bitovo's

²⁶ One of the migrants from Bitovo (he left when he was 18, in 1985) is, for instance, an admin of Bitovo Facebook page. As of 22nd December 2015, the page had 701 subscribers. Apparently, most (though not all) of them were probably migrants from Bitovo or their children: <https://www.facebook.com/Bitovo-116335275062202/likes>.

²⁷ The term deagrarization is commonly understood as a phase of modernization comprising the transition from an agrarian to industrial society [Minnich 1989: 97; Ačkoska 2011: 467].

local economy, such as the prohibition of goat breeding, in 1947.²⁸ In spite of the changes in how money was earned, self-sustainable farming, which provided most of the products needed for the diet of villagers, still played an important role compared to the source of monetary income. After many village families had left, first for Banat, then for *Prilepsko Pole* (Prilepsko Field), and later for Germany and the Polog valley and towns in Macedonia, the lack of land caused by overpopulation in post-war Bitovo was no longer an issue. Families who stayed invested a part of their resources in arable lands and pastures. This enabled satisfactory self-sustainable farming and, when combined with a paid job, secured quite a high standard of living compared to the situation before or immediately after WWII. Also, those who lacked the courage or the resources to leave, or those who were unable to find employment in towns would stay in the village.

Riste explains changes in the strategies during his economically active life:

Here in Bitovo people mainly grew grain (rye, barley, wheat). They ploughed, sowed, reaped and threshed. There were five mills down on the Bitovo river. Every family had fifty, sixty, one hundred or only twenty sheep, as well as some cattle. When they had a lot of milk, they made *urda* [curds], *sirenje* [cheese], *mas* [butter] and *mačenica* [buttermilk] in *butin* [churn]. If they had surpluses, they went to the *pazar* to sell them. If not, they kept it for themselves. Everybody had to keep reserves for winter. We were poor. The only money we got was from selling the surpluses or working as seasonal wage labourers [*argat*]. I worked as a cowman [*momok*] before marriage. Since we started going to work in the 1970s, the growing of grain decreased. I got a job first in Kopačka, a public enterprise, and then in Makedonski šumi. At first there were five or six people from Bitovo working with me there. I was a woodcutter [*sekač*], I worked with a chainsaw. It lasted for thirty years. We worked all winter. It was cold, there was a lot of snow, but we had to work. We worked in groups of four; there were three groups from here, which means 12 people in total. It is different today. There are no jobs now. It used to be a state enterprise in the past. Nowadays, everything is private [Interview, Riste, man, born 1937, 18–19.01.2013, Bitovo].

The absence of the men in the households, caused by seasonal work migration or daily working hours, required more effort from the women and other household members, such as the children and the husband's parents. As far back as the 1970s, formerly extended families fell apart. They had functioned as economic units, which enabled a balanced

²⁸ During the period when goat-herding was prohibited, which lasted for more than forty years (until 1989), the number of goats reduced from 516,800 in 1947 to 47,000 in 1949, which is more than 90 percent [see: Country report 2003: 19].

distribution of labour. Some of the family members worked outside the village and others took care of the sheep, cattle, fields and crops, or the household. During the process of transformation of these old patriarchal structures, it became more and more difficult for the women to manage with all the unpaid work on the farm alone, with only the help from older household members and children. Riste describes the women's position in the local economy:

It was very hard for women. They had to bake bread, milk the cattle, make yogurt, then they had to take their children and go to the field to reap grains. Men used to help, but when they were at work, like I was, women did everything themselves. They went to the market [*pazar*] and men had to go to work [Interview, Riste, man, born 1937, 18–19.01.2013, Bitovo].

In place of a conclusion

Unfortunately, there is not enough space in this paper to analyze the economic behaviour of every single household in Bitovo. Yet, this analysis would show some particular strategies and how local communities in Bitovo were affected by external factors, such as global changes or particular government interventions. Let us demonstrate one example in place of a conclusion. In 2014, a new law was passed, according to which anyone with only a basic education falls into the category of a lower job class. This change also affected the life of Kire and his family. Instead of 15,000 denari (250 euros) that he used to earn in the Macedonian Forests company before 2014, he now makes only 6,000 (100 euros). Kire, who was born in 1965, has to support three children (two other daughters are already married) and his wife. All household members, had to intensify their income-generating efforts, apart from the youngest 10-year-old boy. In July it was haymaking that would allow them to sell the hay in winter or to save money for the hay they would have otherwise had to buy for their cattle. Mushrooms were another source of income. Kire, his wife and their daughters would pick them every day while doing their usual farm errands around the village. However, they could not focus solely on gathering, as other families did, because they had their farm – a cow with two calves, a horse, and several vegetable gardens – which secured a crucial part of their everyday diet.

The case of Bitovo in Poreče region shows some contemporary social phenomena that to some degree apply also to hundreds, or even thousands of other villages in many regions around the whole Balkan Peninsula with regard to their development during the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century.

Archive

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SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF POREČE VILLAGES – A CHANGING TRADITION?

Upper Poreče is one of the most beautiful mountain parts of Macedonia, with clean, unspoiled nature, picturesque villages and settlements, and welcoming people. Here lie the villages of Volče, Zagrad, Rasteš, Bitovo, Botuše, Zvečan, Kosovo, Brest, Ramne, Samokov, Kovač, Gorno and Dolno Zrkle, Lupšte, Inče, Kovče, Taževo, Blizansko, Mogilec and Kalugjerec. They are located in the north-western part of Macedonia, on the left bank of river Treska. The villages are scattered on mountains Dobra Voda, Suva Gora, Dautica and Karadžica. A village of Volče is the closest one to Gostivar and Tetovo, where most of the people from the aforementioned settlements have migrated. According to the last territorial division into municipalities, these villages are ascribed to Makedonski Brod (since 2004), whereas earlier they were a part of the Samokov municipality (1996–2004).

Józef Obrębski considered the region of Poreče as one of the few lands not affected by the process of levelling of traditional culture. The specific character of this ethnographic region is caused by the state of isolation from bigger cities and towns which is as a result of the landscape's natural features and limitations of communication with bigger urban centres in the proximity.

The state of isolation fixes the slow tempo of socio-political changes, which in turn serves for the preservation and prevalence of particular forms of folk culture [Svetieva 2002: 269]. On the other hand, the fast technological development of IT systems and socio-political changes, despite slower pace, had to and did influence Upper Poreče.

For this reason, one cannot say that the region remained totally immune to the transformation. The directions, in which these occurred, have left their impact on the way of life and the social structure: from the smallest and most basic cell of society – the family, through the village as social community, to the regional level.

Social structure of Poreče villages from the times of Obrębski until the transition period

The work of Obrębski is an important contribution to the research on socio-cultural structure of Macedonian patriarchal society, and especially a family [Vražinovski 2002: 21]. The typical or traditional extended family in the region comprised of three generations: the oldest one, represented by the head of the family and his wife, the middle: unmarried daughters and sons with their wives, and the youngest one – grandchildren of the househusband and the housewife, i.e. children of their sons and daughters-in-law.

The constitution of the big family is always a combination of two types of family relationship: patrilineality and marriage [Obrembski 2001: 45]. The traditional, patriarchal family would determine the rules and the social position of the family members accentuating the role of the husband in all the aspects of life. The rendition of data provided by Obrębski shows a substantial division between male and female roles within the family, with the obvious inferiority of the latter. The inferiority of women is present in the entire social organization and can be analysed from the perspective of behavioural acts [Taševa 2002: 49]. Patrilineality is therefore a fundamental rule forming the organization of a big family system, playing a dominant role in the family life [Obrembski 2001: 50]. However, some anthropologists do not agree with this black and white picture. For example Aneta Svetieva [2002] writes that, besides the “ideal model” of traditional patriarchal culture, there is a “real model” where women use certain mechanisms of female subculture in order to gain significant latent rights. Although the world is burdened with the limiting consequences of patrilineal system (as men hold the privileged position), when it comes to the religious social responsibility, the authority is transmitted by women. Thus religion becomes a sphere where gender roles are at balance; it is equal in rights and includes everybody [Obrembski 2002: 59].

Marija Taševa [2002] shows that Obrębski wanted to research enclaves of primitive social organization in Europe, focusing on those aspects of culture which were inherent to such type of social organization. Looking from this perspective we will use the knowledge of social sciences as a point of reference remembering though that Obrębski focused only on two basic institutions out of five: religion and family. He noted the system of control within the family, and the framework of the traditional system of control in the community, like for example the village or family *kum*. However, this was not reflected in institutions or individuals, through which the state establishes its control in the local community. The last

institution, education, which is the most important factor of social mobility, and in this context, of the development of traditional culture, is not mentioned at all by Obrębski [Taševa 2002: 53].

In this context the class-based division of the village proposed by Obrębski [Obrembski 2002: 10–11] into the rich, the middle class, and the poor should be looked at, just as the division of families according to their economic tradition.

1. First group of rich families – *zengii* (from Turkish “rich”) were big families comprised of ten or more people, their main occupation was raising livestock.
2. Medium income families comprised of low number families, potentially rich, for whom the increase of the number of members of family was the condition for a bigger economic growth.
3. The poor incomplete families, without husbands or wives, families which had “more mouths to feed” than they had workers.

This division shows the apparent correlation between the size and wealth of the family. What is more, Obrębski shows us interrelations between these groups, and, through that, the economic stratification of the village, and the system of communal control. This set war over power in the village between rich and medium-income villagers: wide possibilities to control the area, demarcate boundaries, divide rights and obligations – poor villagers did not participate in it [Obrembski 2002: 14].

On the basis of data available in the literature and based on the fieldwork of Aneta Svetieva [2002: 270], I can conclude that the villages in Poreče were organized as self-governing village municipalities, not only on the level of the village, but also on the level of ethnographic region. The leading village function was *kmet* / mayor who was the head of the village and executed power. This function used to be assigned to a dignified person respected by the community. *Kmets* were chosen among distinguished, affluent people who held a special status and were feared and respected in the place where they lived¹. The village would choose so-called “councilors” (respectable elders) as helpers of the village chief, as well as a herald, a field keeper, a woodsman, and other auxiliary rural serfs [Svetieva 2002: 270]. The village would delegate two advisors to represent or defend the rights of the village in the municipality council [Obrembski 2002: 14]. It is clear that, in accordance to the traditional patriarchal rule and the low social position of the women as one of the main elements of this culture, women never participated in the ruling system, nor did they choose representatives.

¹ Individual fieldwork notes, 14.08.2013, Samokov.

The sequence of social changes that occurred after the research of Obrębski in Poreče lead to the modifications in the traditional relations in the village, and in social structure. At the same time, (observing) tradition is a factor which sustains the feeling of group belonging. People therefore hold onto traditions to avoid the sense of being lost. This sense of security is accomplished because tradition ties the individual to the past generations, to ethnic and religious identity. If identity is an ascription to tradition, it is clear that by defining the individuals as members of a group, one insists on supporting tradition.

In my opinion, vitality is one of the most characteristic features of tradition. Traditions exist because they have significant meaning for groups, and rarely disappear suddenly. Mostly one can speak about changing tradition, and its natural evolutions. What seems to be the end, is in fact an adaptation of new elements. Changes are gradual and lead the traditional practice in a new, different direction, which does not mean disrespecting the custom. Tradition is a dynamic category, and changes constantly to remain relevant; it adapts and evolves with the group.

Substantial changes were introduced with socialism and the state system of the Socialist Federation Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ²). Socialism directly influenced the traditional kinship relations; Vlado Puljuz [1994] claims that the state was especially generous in its family policy, but at the same time it penetrated this basic social unit with its influence. It can be said that “the spiritual quality of the family” was reduced due to the excessive socialization on the part of the government [Puljuz 1994: 85].

Irrelevant of the tempo, the changes in family structure and relations occurred in Poreče. Here one should remember the size-wealth correlation and the change of property and production system (especially in terms of collectivization and the creation of cooperatives). The new system gradually led to dismantlement of big families and promotion of other forms of kinship organization (namely the nuclear family). This area, characterized by passivity,³ suffered also due to changes in demography.

My interlocutors indicated three periods of extensive migrations in the socialist times. The first one happened right after the end of World War II and the establishment of socialist state. People migrated to colonize the Jabuka and Pančevo villages in what back then was the Socialist Autonomous Province of Vojvodina in the Socialist Republic of Serbia. The second big migration took place in the 1960s, when in the villages of Tetovo land-parcels were given for free. This trend was always present, especially among the young population, since the living conditions in Poreče are not even

² Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija.

³ The term passivity refers here to the underdevelopment of the region and thus to the economic aspect.

close to fulfilling the needs of the youth. The destinations would primarily be bigger towns in the region: for example Gostivar, Tetovo, Skopje, Prilep, Kičevo, and also abroad, to other Balkan countries, to Southern and Western Europe, and other continents. With unchanged intensity, this process lasted until the early 1980s, that is until the establishment of the “Suvenir” factory which played an important role in the development of the region, and counteracted the constant depopulation [Zmejkoski in this volume]. The last bigger group of migrations was related to the opening of “Suvenir”, but this time it happened within the region of Upper Poreče. Younger family members who worked in the factory began to move to Samokov.

In line with the socialist ideology, the factory found a way to solve the issue of housing for its workers. At first, there were two blocks built in Samokov, and apartments allocated to the workers. Later, in order to expand this trend, the factory bought private land and gave it to the workers in order to facilitate building houses. This wave of migrations ended the extended family, or maybe contributed to the largest extent to the process of their decomposition.

Another typical feature of socialist ideology is the development of women’s rights and improvement of their status in the family and in the community. Women entered the workforce, abortion was freely accessible, and free kindergartens were opened. In the Poreče region these changes could be felt when “Suvenir” was built, and many women were employed in it. Yet, importantly, the employment of women did not affect labour division in the family, and the women would still be responsible for taking care of children and homes. New rights and old responsibilities were not stabilized, and at that time the women had even more obligations [Puljuz 1994: 85].

In the socialist times, just as it is now, the basic social unit of the authorities was *mesna zaednica* (literally “local community”, at the same time, this is the name of a local council). The council of *mesna zaednica* consisted of its leader (*pretsedatel*) and chosen members (*členovi na odbor, odbornici*). Just as it is now, in the past its members were chosen for four years. The local councils played a substantial role in the villages. They were responsible for communal, propriety-related, and legal issues, as well as solving quarrels among neighbours (in the 1970s there were local councils, called mediatory, or peace councils, which would solve problems among neighbours).

There were also numerous initiative committees responsible for solving more serious problems of the village. These committees would initiate projects realized with the resources of the municipality or through self-contributions. That was how the electrification of Poreče (through private contributions), was accomplished. The inhabitants of the villages

were able to contribute in various ways, not only through financial support. For instance, they had to “voluntarily” participate in the work: if the majority agreed to do something, all members of the community were obligated to participate in the realization.⁴

The cooperation of *mesna zaednica* with Makedonski Brod Municipality was based on the so called delegate system). Delegates would be sent from the villages, depending on the size of the village, one representative for one bigger village or for 2–3 smaller ones. There were seven representatives sent from Ramne and another two villages. In a secret election, one delegate was chosen out of these people to be a representative of all the villages in the council of the Makedonski Brod Municipality. His mandate was valid for four years. He represented only the interests of these villages which sent the group. Every day he would participate in the works of the municipal council, and thus he was able to insist on solving problems of villages which he represented. Hence he was more efficient in solving the problems. At least once a year, he was obliged to summarize what he did in an announcement reported to the local communities.

These changes had extensive impact on the two basic institutions of social structure: family and political bodies on the level of village and region. Global social changes are reflected in the sphere of family interrelations, which in turn lead to socio-demographic transformations characteristic for contemporary Poreče [Matilov 2002: 259].

Socio-political characteristics of Macedonia in the period of transition

The last decade the of 20th century brought important socio-political changes in the world. The most dramatic turmoil was the collapse of socialism which happened by the way of Eastern-European revolutions from 1989 to 1991 [Heywood 2007: 99]. In the block of Eastern European socialist/communist countries, the process of transformation from the socialist system to liberal democracy began, which in turn caused changes in all segments of social life. And in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, as a separate part of the SFRJ, there have been significant changes on social and political level [Trpeski 2013: 69]. The single party system was transformed into parliamentary democracy, which in turn meant forming more political parties which divided into two blocs: leftist parties with socialist ideology and rightist national parties.

⁴ Fieldnotes, 14.08.2013, Samokov.

The change in Macedonian society cannot be categorized unequivocally as a transition from socialism to liberal democracy, as there is a wide range of categories which are of economic, political and cultural character [Trpeski 2013: 69] that have to be taken into consideration.

Geopolitical changes after 1989 lead to the disappearance of four European countries. One of those (East Germany) integrated with another (West Germany), while another three (USSR, SFRJ, Czechoslovakia) disintegrated into smaller states [Ribić 2007: 217]. As a result of the fall of the SFRJ, the Republic of Macedonia emerged. With this change, Macedonian society, was faced with a new task to keep its sovereignty and build institutions of an independent country, apart from the transformation of social organization from socialism to liberal democracy.

The road to independence of the Republic of Macedonia was direct: Macedonia separated from the SFRJ through a national referendum which took place on the 8th of September 1991, when the majority of voters chose independence [cf. Thiessen 2007]. After the collapse of the SFRJ, Macedonia stepped out of it as one of the poorest republics, without healthy social structures which were necessary to build secure institutions, aptly responding to modernity and new social changes [Trpeski 2013: 61]. Apart from the issues related to the independence and transformation, Macedonia, in this important period, faced many other, historically unprecedented, problems like: the conflict over the name with Greece; Bulgaria's lack of recognition of Macedonian nationality and language; international sanctions placed on the "remains" of SFRJ, which also did not recognize Macedonian Orthodox Church as a separate entity; self-enclosure of Albania; and problems with wider international recognition [Trpeski 2013: 61–62].

Macedonia, facing all the aforementioned obstacles, managed to remain a sovereign state, building liberal democracy as its social system. However, certain elements of socialist system still exist in the Macedonian society and have influence on human lives and conditions [Trpeski 2013: 70].

Macedonia is different from other former republics, and post communist states, as a state which preserved many of its social laws. Even in the process of changing the economy to a market economy, and its political system into democracy through a course of reforms, it distanced itself from socialism more than some other Eastern-European countries [Thiessen 2007: 25]. And finally, it can be concluded that Macedonia is based both on the remnants of the previous system, as well as on the elements of the new system, so that it functions "stuck" at the intersection of both these systems, which, in my view, is the definition of transition [cf. Trpeski 2013: 70].

Social structure of Poreče villages in the period of transition

Isolation, characteristic of the Poreče region, could not shield it against influences of the socio-economic changes called transition. Transition and all of its dynamics has entered all spheres of human life. Both political and economic changes have had their influence on the community of the Poreče villages.

The processes of economic and political changes are highly correlated with the processes of differentiation of family groups and are directly reflected by changes in the sphere of family interrelations. Modern family in the Poreče region finds itself in a specific state, torn between processes of re-traditionalization and modernization [Matilov 2002: 256]. Socio-political changes (especially changes of the economic system of centrally planned economy into a market one), like the changes from a single party to a pluralistic system, with its constant dynamics, had great influence on all aspects of the family life: on existing family interrelations and the system of norms and values. Those influences require certain adjustments to the new situation. In this context, the contemporary family represents a real, communal unit, in which traditional and modern tendencies coexist [Matilov 2002: 259].

One of the biggest problems, with unfavourable demographic repercussions for the Poreče region, is its depopulation. Apart from intensive and uncontrolled migrations (mentioned earlier), these processes were especially intensive in the young section of the population. Another demographic problem is the low birth rate. Because of the emigration and low reproduction rates, demographic processes of continuous aging of the population are noticeable. In addition to these problems, there is a higher number of "old bachelors", that is men older than 30 years of age who still have not married and did not form a family. Based on the data collected during my ethnographic fieldwork in the region, I need to emphasize that the biggest number of village settlements are left without the young generation, or with a rather symbolic number of juniors, or even are totally deserted. Because of the decreasing numbers of young people in the region there are only two primary schools, one in the Brest village, where lessons are held for classes 1–5, and in Samokov, where there are all classes, i.e. 1 to 9, and the students from Brest finish their school by joining the higher classes in Samokov.⁵

The process of aging of the population resulted in a model of life where more and more households are kept by elderly people. The term "elderly

⁵ In 2015 a school for classes 1–3 was also opened in the village of Kosovo.

household” was used by Ines Crvenkovska in reference to an autonomic family structure in which people older than 60 years live under one roof. In her work, she classifies “elderly households” in Poreče region into several types:

1. Elderly household which is a type of a simple family household where two members of the family live together, produce, and consume, with a subtype in which both husband and wife are older than 60;
2. Elderly single household encompassing one man, who lives alone;
3. Elderly single household encompassing one woman, who lives alone;
4. Elderly household of type of “unstructured” household of brothers, sisters, or brother with sister, or brothers with sisters, etc.
5. Elderly household encompassing an extended family, with several members, where the main family nucleus – husband and wife live with a brother, a sister, etc. [Crvenkovska 2002: 433].

During my fieldwork I have observed all above mentioned types of elderly households and these types function in virtually all villages of the region of Poreče. Apart from this, as a distinct subtype of small family households I would extricate elderly households of returning migrants – pensioners. These families, most frequently consist of a married couple who moved out of the region and come back for retirement. For the first few years returning migrants declare, that they had come back only for the summer period; however, as the time passes, they stay in the village throughout the entire year. The biggest part of these elderly households survives thanks to pensions; herding animals is therefore only a small portion of their income. Families of rural background, which grow plants for personal use, can be found, but most frequently they buy their food-stuffs. In most of the villages there are local shops, and wherever there is none, the basic, previously ordered products are being brought once a week by car.

Apart from Samokov and Brest one can rarely meet younger families in this region. The reasons for this fact include: the inability to economically improve one’s situation and to find a job, insufficient infrastructure, unpaved roads, lack of shops, lack of medical care, and closed schools. Where such families do actually exist, they are most frequently independent or extended, with at most three generations living together, especially a married couple with children and parents of one of them, usually of the husband. This serves as proof that patrilinearity is still characteristic for the Porečan family. In this context, the fact that a large number of these “younger families” are a result of marriages between local bachelors and women from Albania is especially important.

One more characteristic feature of the present day families is the disappearance of the biggest type of multigenerational extended families.

Basic cause for their disappearance can be found in the continuing migration processes which are encouraged by the older generation. In the past, parents would oppose the relocation of their children; now, based on my fieldwork observations, we can say that there is substantial support for the young people from their parents, to enable them to find better living conditions outside the region. The most notable from many such examples was one of a parent who supports his children in leaving. When his children and their friends met at his place and were discussing their dilemmas about the future, the father opened the fridge and, showing them the empty shelves, told them that this would be their future if they stayed, and that they should leave home and look for their fortunes abroad.⁶ I am myself a mother and as such I could not be indifferent to the tears of another woman – a mother – who cried because of her children's difficult situation. Although they benefited from free education, they were forced to live in a boarding school away from their home not only during the school year but also in July when the school year finished, as they were held back for the summer because of bad grades. Their mother could not hide the disappointment with the fact that she cannot guarantee a better life for her children.⁷ And again, poor economic situation, lack of bigger economic resources, the non-existence of markets where one could sell produced goods, and many other economic reasons prevent young people from settling in the region, worsen the demographic situation, and increase the number of elderly households in comparison to young families.

The change in the political system from a single party to a pluralistic one did not introduce changes in the institutional makeup at the level of a single village, nor at the regional level, but in the way of functioning of these institutions. *Mesna zaednica* becomes the main, smallest organizational unit. According to the Law on local self-government (*Zakon za lokalna samouprava*, cf. Zakon 2014), local communities represent local sovereignty. The council is chosen by *mesna zaednica* in a way specified by the statute of the municipality. Aside from selecting the council, *mesna zaednicas* are responsible for evaluating open questions, agreeing on standpoints, and preparing motions of immediate importance for the life and work of the inhabitants of this area. The council gathers every four years and a president is chosen from its members.

Every village in the region has a separate *mesna zaednica*, which is represented by a selected member, and three to seven members take part in the committee of *mesna zaednica*. Samokov is an exemption here,

⁶ Fieldnotes, 07. 2012, Samokov.

⁷ Fieldnotes, 16.07.2012, Brest.

because there are two *mesna zaednicas*: “Suvenir” and Kovač. The division of *mesna zaednicas* in Samokov does not apply only to land, but is also visible in the way buildings are constructed. In “*Mesna Zaednica Suvenir*”, built by the workers of the factory, modern houses are planned and built in several rows with nice gardens in front of each house. In “*Mesna Zaednica Kovač*” the older, traditional type of buildings prevails, with *čardaci* (traditional verandas) and traditional objects in the courtyards. In Samokov, only the centre is different, with police and former municipality buildings, living houses, some well-stocked shops, a small cafeteria, a hotel with a swimming pool, a beautiful park near to the church, and a monument of Obrębski.⁸ The organs of *mesna zaednica* are being chosen once every four years and this choice is connected to the local elections. After that they prepare elections for *mesna zaednica* to choose the representative and members of council. As the institutional division remains the same, the meaning of *mesna zaednica* has changed. The competencies of *mesna zaednicas* remain the same, in practice they make no important high-level decisions, but most frequently their work is limited to giving permits for cutting fruit bearing trees:

The election happens but I’m telling you, maybe they respected him more but now it is not like that. As if he did not exist. Now, we younger ones, we only care to prepare pleas for the mayor, that’s it. *Mesna zaednica* is avoiding this function, not as previously. Before it was [...], I would say, *mesna zaednica* [...] you call her and they would solve conflicts and all the problems. But not now. This thing has died out. This and... Definitely *mesna zaednica* is not being respected in the villages. Not only here, but in general, everywhere. It is not like it used to be [Interview, N.N., born in Brest].

Reasons for this situation and *modus operandi* of local communities are identical, as data collected during my fieldwork show. One of the reasons is the low number of inhabitants who actually stayed in the villages. Also, some of them do not want to hold the aforementioned functions since they are voluntary and non-paid. Some people who are capable of fulfilling this function know that by holding functions in *mesna zaednica*, one could get involved in some conflicts with neighbours. So they avoid them: “A wise man does not tangle with the village matters”.⁹ Even those who decide to get involved do so in the hopes of staying close to the local power structures, and thus to “arrange something for themselves”. That is why many people do not get involved in the work of local communities.¹⁰ However, the situation is not clear-cut. The region is burdened with many

⁸ Fieldnotes, 07.2012, Samokov.

⁹ Fieldnotes, 11.08.2013, Rasteš.

¹⁰ Fieldnotes, 14.08.2013, Samokov.

infrastructural problems: bad roads, problems with water supply, street lightning, etc. During our field research, we were presented with many ways of solving these problems by the representatives of some local communities. In the framework of local self-governance, pleas and petitions about the local needs can be made by the citizens. One of the bigger problems of the region is the lack of medical care, and especially the lack of a pharmacy. In the entire region there is only one doctor who visits specific villages on set days. The locals have an even bigger problem with the distance to the closest pharmacy, and for this reason the local communities are writing petitions to open a pharmacy in Samokov:

See, I am the most active example, I used to organize [...] announcements from all the local communities we took to the Ministry of Health so that they open a pharmacy for us, down in Samokov. We have no pharmacy. From here to [Makedonski] Brod it is 40–50 km. To go there, you need 120–140 denars only for the trip, and money to buy the medicine. You have to go to Brod even to buy *kafetin* [popular pain relief medicine] [Interview, Mitko, man, born in Ramne].

People from Lupšte could take pride of an asphalted road. In Trebovle, the Local Community together with the church council tried to renew the tradition of Vodici in the newly built space for celebrating this holiday. Financial means were always the biggest problem but some people from local communities showed initiative to establish a separate fund with which smaller problems could be solved:

That means that even a local community, in order to prosper needs to have a fund for money. So we're going to keep trying, and nobody... Look, for example we have given a proposal, each house to gather 100 denars, these councils which are in these houses or whatever... There is always some need, need for this, need for that, and we are left without people, they don't accept it [Interview, N.N., born in Brest].

According to the territorial division of the Republic of Macedonia, these villages belong to the municipality of Makedonski Brod. In the period of 1996–2004, the region of Upper Poreče was assigned to the newly formed Samokov Municipality, which existed for only eight years, and which constitutes two mandates. In the Samokov Municipality only the mayor and other two people were hired: an official for building and urbanism and a secretary. The municipal council was made up of 13 members elected in local elections. Financing came from the budget of the Republic of Macedonia, the Municipality did not have its own means. Financial resources that were granted covered only the wages of employees and current expenses of the Municipality. There was also a Fund for public utilities, but there was no public utilities enterprise. This fund would receive money from the Ministry of Transport. The Municipality had prepared projects for all

of the open questions and pleas, but receiving money for their realization was an enormous problem. As local people reported, the mayor also had to use his personal party connections in order to get necessary funds. Additional funds could be expected only in case of a budget rebalance, when another richer municipality did not spend all of its money and the surplus was transferred to the poorest ones. Obtaining money from foreign sources was even more difficult, because the number of inhabitants of the region is very small, and because of extensive analytical documentation which should be prepared.¹¹ One should underline, however, that the offices of the Municipality were always open for the inhabitants of the region and they were always waiting to answer their pleas as best as they could.

After the dissolution of the municipality of Samokov, the municipality in charge – Makedonski Brod, opened an office for the municipality in Samokov with an aim to be closer to the inhabitants of the region. This office is a centre which usually performs communal services, and most frequently people come there to ask about a job. They also ask for water supply, roads, and complete infrastructure.¹² Among the responsibilities of the office and of the representative of the Makedonski Brod municipality are communication and mediation between local communities, the inhabitants and the administrative centre. Most often local communities and inhabitants do not use this office and carry their pleas directly to the municipality.

Makedonski Brod Municipality is small, undeveloped, and poor. Current administration is always open to cooperation, but their economic means are limited. However, it was a better solution for Upper Poreče to be a distinct unit. According to local practice places close to the administrative centre are serviced more quickly. And so, there is no village in Lower Poreče without an asphalted road.¹³ Regardless of the previous claim for Upper Poreče to have its own municipality because of the laws on the self-financing of municipalities, there is no possibility for the survival of a separate municipality in the Upper Poreče region due to impossibility of financing it, especially after the closure of the largest economic entity, the “Suvenir” factory.

Partisanship and political polarization were yet another causes for the poor functioning of local communities and bad cooperation with the municipality – a motif that constantly appeared in all of the conversations. As it was mentioned earlier, in Macedonia, together with introduction of political pluralism, two large political blocks appeared. The extent of this division was so strong that it was surprising even for me, though I live permanently 60 kilometres from this region and I am familiar with its social and political context. The topic of political division

¹¹ Fieldnotes, 14.08.2013, Samokov.

¹² Fieldnotes, 07.2012, Samokov.

¹³ Fieldnotes, 14.08.2013, Samokov.

was always avoided during the interviews, especially if the voice recorder was on. Despite this, the political polarization could be felt in every informal conversation and in every aspect of life. I found evidence of this process during the first days of the research. We were sitting with friends in a small restaurant in Samokov and discussing the subject of the recent revamp of the city centre in Skopje. After my comment that I like some particular part of it, I heard a remark from the next table: "She's from SDSM".¹⁴ Based on my short comment, which was simply an expression of my personal taste, a politically flavoured conclusion was made. Though indirectly, there were always mentions of many specific problems of the community which were not solved because this particular part of the country was inhabited by people from the opposite political line. These problems were looked at as something "typical" and "normal" for every governing party. A conclusion presents itself here that partisanship in all segments of life is perceived as a normal aspect of reality.

Conclusions

Through his work Józef Obrębski enriched the Macedonian academia with a priceless body of material about many segments of folk-life. This material, properly systematized and analyzed, becomes a signpost for many a future research. In Obrębski's works, special attention is paid to the social structure of the villages in Poreče. The extended analysis which he provides about the family as an institution represents a starting point for comparative research of changes that happen overtime, mainly caused by socio-political processes of the last eighty years.

Families, analyzed by Obrębski in terms of both their size and economic stratification, witness changes of socio-political organization. He connects the size of the family with its affluence, in the sense that big families are rich families. Socialism with its ideology of majority state ownership pushed towards the shrinking of big families and towards foundation of independent families. The constant unfavourable demographic factors in the Poreče region: emigration, and low birth rate, led to the prevalence of the so-called elderly households.

As for political institutions, and the organization of governance on the level of the villages, as well as the region as a part of the social structure, information provided by Obrębski was not as exhaustive (as in the descriptions of families), but it does constitute a starting point for an analysis of

¹⁴ Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija (Social Democratic Union of Macedonia).

the changes that had occurred. In his description of rural power structures, Obrębski wrote about the village chief as an image of honesty and a man of dignity, respected by all the people in the village, whose word is listened to and valued. During the socialist times, *mesna zaednica* as the lowest level of government held some competences, and its functions were defined in accordance with the socialist ideology. Cooperation with social structures of power was performed through the so called representational system and created the impression of staying “close to the people”. Today the local communities, even if they have the same competences, do not function. The municipality is open for cooperation with the community from the region, and even the mayor himself is always ready to meet and listen to the local people, but the municipality is one of the poorest in the country, and therefore it is difficult to answer all the pleas. Trying to assess the degree of dependence of village power structures and local communities on political changes that happened, the first claim would be that the village power was always organized according to the rule of self-governance. This was the case when Obrębski conducted his research, then later during the socialist times, and finally in “the times of pluralism”, when local life was organised by *mesna zaednica* which in the Law for local self-governance are regarded as a means of local self-rule, founded by the municipality. And aside from the manner in which the village power structure and local communities are formed, there is always a question of their links to the ruling structures, namely the political parties. Though it is a subject to be examined on its own, I will try to summarize several specific claims about it. Firstly, even at the level of choosing *kmets*, it was important that these people are dignified and respected in the region; at the same time they were usually also respected by the local power structures. In the times of socialism it was not only the representatives of local communities, but also the delegates from the villages, who became members of the party. Today, the fact that directly after municipality elections the Municipality prepares elections for the councils of *mesna zaednicas* shows that a certain link between these two forms of power exists. Maybe local power structures have no influence on the process of elections, but the fact that the result of local elections is already known means that the locals themselves want to choose representatives close to the ruling party, as through their party connections they could improve the life in the village.

To conclude, emigration, large number of old bachelors, and low birth rate were the biggest negative processes which had detrimental effects to the demographic structure of the population. The question of whether such a demographic structure is the result of a bad economy of the biggest urban centres, or if it is quite the opposite, and the economic situation of the region is worsening through emigration and shrinking of families

(according to Obreḡski the big families in Poreče are wealthy) – is a bit of a chicken and the egg dilemma.

Translated from Macedonian by Olimpia Dragouni

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SOCIAL INFLUENCE OF THE SAMOKOV “SUVENIR” FACTORY ON EVERYDAY LIFE

Introduction

The aim of this text¹ is to show how a factory, which main aim was to produce light infantry munitions for the war industry, in fact “specialized” in securing the economic existence of its workers, and thus became the main framework for a broader region influencing local inhabitants’ ways of life. The term “broader region” refers to Poreče, an ethnographic entity also known as Porečie or Porečje, located in the western part of the Republic of Macedonia along the river Treska and on both sides of its valley [Risteski 1982: 9]. From the north it borders with Suva Gora, from the east with the mountains Karadžica and Dautica, from the south with Bušova Planina, and from the west with the gouge of Kičevo. Within these borders Poreče encompasses the area² of 888.97 km² with 51 settlements in Upper and Lower Poreče: mainly non-urbanized settlements grouped according to ethnic-based delimitations. Upper Poreče stretches along the flow of rivers Treska and Mala Reka, and – according to the new administrative division in 2004 – is identified through Makedonski Brod as its administrative-cultural centre. Because of the size of this area Poreče is one of the biggest ethnographic areas of Macedonia, but the density of population is the lowest with 8,03 inhabitants/km².

¹ This text is a shortened and revised version of my BA dissertation defended at the Institute for Ethnology and Anthropology at the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje in 2014 under the tutorship of professor Ljupčo S. Risteski.

² Official website of Makedonski Brod municipality: http://www.mbrod.gov.mk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1221&Itemid=645&lang=mk

This demographic situation has several reasons, i.e. geographical characteristics of the region, such as the isolation from Skopje and bad communication with other urban centres of the country. With time Poreče became one of the least economically developed areas of Macedonia, which caused constant changes in the demographic structure – namely depopulation. The trend has always been present, especially among the younger generations, as living conditions in Poreče are not even close to fulfilling the needs of youth. The waves of migrations are aimed at bigger towns in the region i.e. Gostivar, Tetovo, Skopje, Prilep, Kičevo, and also abroad: to other European countries, and to other continents.

With unchanged intensity this process lasted until the early 1980s, that is, until the establishment of the “Suvenir” factory, which played an important role in the development of the region, “taming” the constant depopulation. Moreover, the factory became one of the key factors contributing to the transformation of cultural life and entertainment patterns. In its golden period (since its opening in early 1980s when the Socialist Republic of Macedonia was a part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, until the mid-1990s when the Republic of Macedonia became an independent country), development was apparent in the entire region. The text will mainly focus on this particular period and the town of Samokov shall be treated as a point of reference. The choice is based on my assumption that in this particular period Samokov played a central role and the factory had the strongest influence on the reality.

Theoretical and methodological aspects of the research

The timeframe for the research encompasses two socio-political systems and two different state organizations, which can be perceived as two separate entities with a short transitional time span. The first period refers to the regime of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ³), and the second to the independent Republic of Macedonia which became a parliamentary democracy in 1991. Such an approach needs a more precise chronological elucidation and analysis of the system’s occurrence, ideology and activity [see: Heywood 2003: 109–110].

The difficulty in analyzing socialism lies in its various understandings. Most frequently socialism was perceived as an economic model connected with the idea of collectivization and planned economy. It was also seen as means to obtain access to economic and political power by the working

³ Socijalistička federativna republika Jugoslavija.

class. One thing is certain: socialism derives from the working class and acts in its favour as a political belief, or ideology characterized by theories and values of community, cooperation, uniformization, social class and collective property [Heywood 2003: 112]. In the very heart of this social system lies a mutual relation of these fundamental values, and treatment of the individuals as social beings who solve the societal and economic problems of the community, and cooperate within the community with no hierarchical division of common property.

The SFRJ was functioning in this framework of socialism, and collective vision and activity (of six federal states: Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, and two provinces: Vojvodina and Kosovo), until its collapse, which began at the end of 1980s and finalised at the beginning of 1990s. After the fall of Yugoslavia, its former member states were labelled as "postsocialist", or "states in transition" (into other political systems, like for instance Macedonia, which became parliamentary democracy).

Ralf Dahrendorf described the post-1989 transformations in a very precise way and proposed a "recipe" for this process: 6 months are needed to change the political system, 6 years to change the economical regime, and 60 years to change the common mentality [Dahrendorf 1990], which, in my opinion, accurately reflected the situation of new states, including the Republic of Macedonia. The term postsocialism, according to Sharan Chari and Katherine Verdery, refers to what happens after the change of the system: privatization and fragmentation of the political single-party monopoly, to the way in which these changes apply to life experiences of people who used to be a part of socialist state, and to the way this shapes their future [Chari, Verdery 2009: 11, 12]. Considering all this, Macedonia can surely be called a postsocialist state.

The hereby analysis is based on ethnographic research conducted in early 2013. The data was collected through informal conversations, fieldwork notes, document analysis, and finally, interviews which formed the main corpus of data, and were conducted with the former employees of the "Suvenir" factory living in Samokov. Before and during the field research I lived in Samokov, and I participated in everyday life there. I also possessed earlier inside knowledge, which shall be used for the analysis. In order to prove the relevance of this knowledge, I needed to carry out research which I understood as a course of several steps. I began with informal conversations, and then interviews with some previously designed questions. I already knew many respondents, so initiating contact and cooperation was easier and conducted in a relaxed atmosphere. My interlocutors were 50–60 year old ex-workers of "Suvenir", who felt somewhat distinguished by the interviews as it gave them a unique

opportunity to express their way of thinking. They were answering questions with pleasure, not hiding positive emotions brought back by memories of the beautiful period in their life:

This... this cannot be described with words, it was like one organism, the heart which is essential, and if it stops, the whole organism stops, that is what "Suvenir" was for Samokov and for the workers. Not only workers, but also the families, everybody... for the entire Poreče [Interview, man, born 1957 in Rasteš, 2013, Samokov].

An important part of the research was based on the analysis of the factory's documentation. As the documents have never been transferred to the National Archive of the Republic of Macedonia, I had to gain access to the Archive of "Suvenir". Because of the specifics of the factory production, and its current status – it is a private company now – the process was spread over time, but I finally managed to access the important data, and was even granted the right to take photographs. Although the archive was in a total chaos, I managed to take more than 400 photographs of some of the documents.

During my work I noticed that most of the documents were classified as "top secret" and "army secret". The army secret refers to army data, plans and preparations of the army, the means of arming and war equipment, army objects and installations, and all the other information which pertains to the activity of the army, which if revealed, can cause harm to the army. Every data which is an army secret, depending on its meaning, is classified according to three degrees: "top secret", "secret" and "internal". The documents which include top secret material have in the upper right corner the sign: "army secret" and under it "top secret" [Služben vesnik 1992].

Taking into consideration the period when these documents were written, in a former political system, with the factory working for the Yugoslav National Army (JNA⁴) and then for the army of the Republic of Macedonia (ARM⁵) it is clear why they were classified. Transformation of socio-political context subdues many phenomena to relativization. With time, documentation of the fallen factory lost its initial meaning and became only a pile of tossed around papers, however, I personally think, it should never have been left in such a condition.

Frequently anthropologists are concerned about the ethical questions connected to the possible implications of their work [cf. Neuman 2009]. The ethical questions of public responsibility require the process of data collection (including documentation and interviews), to be done

⁴ Jugoslovenska narodna armija.

⁵ Armijata na Republika Makedonija.

and interpreted properly, correctly and responsibly contextualized, and only then published. Also, the results should be accessible after the publication.

The "Suvenir" factory in Samokov

The "Suvenir" factory was built in the 1980s as the only industrial object in Poreče aiming at employing large part of the region's young population. The village Samokov was chosen as the most adequate location due to its geostrategic position. The factory was expected to stop the regressive demographic tendencies of Poreče by improving the local economy. After its opening, "Suvenir" indeed had a big impact on the demography, urbanization and socio-cultural life.

The idea behind "Suvenir"

Samokov is the centre of Upper Poreče, and it acquired this status because the only communication line linking Upper Poreče with the rest of the world crosses the town. For this reason the administrative units were located here, and so the town became a centre for local people from surrounding villages:

Well, Samokov... yes, it was a cultural, this, administrative centre mainly, and because all the surrounding villages had their local office here, and there was a primary eight-class school and other services where people would arrange the papers, Samokov is considered the centre of Poreče, that is, of these twenty five-six villages around it [Interview, man, born 1958 in Ramne, 2013, Samokov].

For a long time Samokov did not provide any support, and employment could be found in only several local institutions: "there was a police station, clinic, a forestry service division, a school" [Interview, man, born 1958 in Ramne, 2013, Samokov]. All these places could provide work only for several people. The number of people and households is the main driving force behind the development of this geographical area [Talevski, Temjanovski 2004: 66]. We can assume that in the 1960s and 1970s the situation in Samokov was different, as young people continued their education in bigger towns of Macedonia, and large numbers of them would decide to leave Poreče, so the area depopulated:

There was, there was..., there always was and will be. In that time there was a big migration, in 1968, the 1970s, with people going to Germany, where people went for *pečalba*, a big portion of young people and those

still able to work went to nearby towns... Gostivar, Tetovo, many to Prilep and Kičevo but most to Gostivar, Tetovo and Skopje [Interview, man, born 1958 in Ramne, 2013, Samokov].

In order to avoid the threat of depopulation, an idea was developed to open a factory in Samokov in hope to stop the trend. The Department of National Defence (ONO⁶) in Makedonski Brod-Samokov, and general Todor Atanasovski, the commandant of the Territorial Unit for Defence (TEO⁷) of Macedonia, were interested in the life of local people. Atanasovski, aware of the poverty and harshness of local life, talked with the commandant of ONO in Samokov, Strezov Trpčeski:

We are poor, we go for *pečalba* [labour migration]... and we go because we have nothing, nothing, [no] apples, fruit. [...] I told him everything, we cannot unfortunately boast about anything. Look, more than three hundred years and we have no road, no electricity, and I told him that we depend on a poor municipality, and that is why the children, after they learn, they stay in the city, ask for work there [Interview with general Todor Atanasovski, 2013, Samokov].

In that conversation general Todor Atanasovski proposed to build a factory supplying the army industry in Samokov: "He told us: 'we have a plan to make an object here, it is a pretty place, good to build a small object'. And that was his initiative" [Interview with general Todor Atanasovski, 2013, Samokov]. But there were no local funds, so the money had to be received from the Yugoslav Council Secretariat for National Defence (SSNO⁸).

Eventually, the initiative succeeded and most of the funds for the construction were assigned by the SSNO:

If they [the SSNO] assign money, because other than that we have no means, if they will, and they will, we want to have such an object in Macedonia, for our needs. And thus, [SN] gave us money, the construction began, and they were building and building it according to the plan of one of the companies from Ohrid... what was its name? A, yes, *Trudbenik* [Worker]! And the factory was built [Interview with general Todor Atanasovski, 2013, Samokov].

The choice of location

In one interview, a retired general and former commander of TEO in Macedonia said:

⁶ Otketot za narodna odbrana.

⁷ Teritorijalnata edinica za odbrana.

⁸ Sojuzniot sekretarijat za narodna odbrana.

My entire contribution is that the factory was built specifically in Samokov. I took a 1:1,000 000 map and looked at it to establish where it is best to build. I said to myself: Skopje is here, Jasen⁹ is here, village Zdunje here, and Brod is there, and thus I saw the factory should be placed precisely in Samokov [Čaloski 2008: 48].

In regards to the location, it has to be remembered, that the plans had to be considered in wider frames of the SFRJ. First it had to be decided, in which federation entity it should be built. Macedonia and Montenegro went into tight competition:

You know... back then in Yugoslavia, there were several locations competing through the Council Secretariat for National Defence. Montenegro and Macedonia were mentioned as a place for construction [Interview, man, born 1958 in Ramne, 2013, Samokov].

When the SSNO decided it should be in Macedonia, the question of location within Macedonia appeared. There were two possibilities in Poreče: Lokvica and Samokov, but the first one, according to general Todor Atanasovski, "was too remote, and also easier to bomb, and Samokov is a place a little bit hidden because of the terrain" [Interview, man, born 1958 in Ramne, 2013, Samokov].

Finally, the decision was made collectively by the Secretariat of the Republic for Industry and Commerce, which formed a committee where members of the SSNO (Belgrade), Secretariat of the Republic for National Defence (RSNO,¹⁰ Skopje), Headquarters of the Republic for Territorial Defence (RŠTO,¹¹ Skopje), Secretariat of the Republic for Industry¹² and the Representative for Defence were to investigate the surroundings of Samokov, Municipality Makedonski Brod. This investigation was to be accomplished according to the Safety Procedures regarding the handling of explosives and dangerous materials. The location called "Janeo" near the village of Kovče was finally chosen for the location of construction, and, during a plenary meeting with the aforementioned members, the committee of the Municipality of Makedonski Brod decided to support the commission.¹³ This closed the issue of the location choice.

⁹ A Macedonian nature reserve. Formed in 1958 at the beginning only on Mount Karadžica, in 1960 it was expanded to Suva Gora, finally it encompassed the entire canyon of the river Treska. In the times of the SFRJ and the JNA jurisdiction, it was "classified" – closed because of its strategic position, and after the collapse of Yugoslavia it was under the jurisdiction of the ARM. It has recently become "un-classified" – available to the public.

¹⁰ Republičkiot sekretarijat za narodna odbrana.

¹¹ Republičkiot štab za teritorijalna odbrana.

¹² Republičkiot sekretarijat za industrija.

¹³ Decision on the choice of location for constructing the "Suvenir" factory, Archive of "Suvenir".

The construction of “Suvenir” and its plants

Since the SFRJ was increasing its defence capacities, it created conditions for producing army equipment for the times of peace and war. Thus, between 1975 and 1980, the SSNO planned to build a factory of infantry munitions in the Socialist Republic (SR¹⁴) of Macedonia. The “Suvenir” complex comprised 5 divisions:

- Suvenir-1 Plant for production of infantry munitions caliber 7,62 mm;
- Suvenir-2 Plant for Handheld Shaped Charge Grenade BRK M-79, with possibility of production of other similar types;
- Suvenir-3 Plant for civilian program (It was linked with the plant “Suvenir-2”);
- Suvenir-4 Plant for pyrotechnics;
- Suvenir-5 Plant for maintenance of infantry weaponry.¹⁵

According to the plan, the construction process of these entities began in 1979 with the erection of the plant Suvenir-1, and other plants were built in the subsequent years: “[Constructions began] around 1979, were finished by 1981, and in the next years they were building other parts, adding various plants” [Interview, man, born 1958 in Ramne, 2013, Samokov]. The construction was finally finished in 1990 with the completion of Suvenir-5, and the factory became a techno-economic entity ready for economic sustainability.

These new circumstances influenced the education and qualifications of people. Initially a large number of the workers had no qualifications, as there had never been similar industrial instalments in the region, which primarily depended on agriculture and animal herding. Hence, the education acquired by people was not compatible with the needs of the factory; people needed to be trained for work “with the machines”.

At first the trainings were executed in external centres of war industry supplies in the member states of the SFRJ. Individuals were being sent to upgrade their qualifications as pyrotechnicians, or operators of the munitions, and later, they would train the rest of the workers. With time, the conditions allowed for the opening of a special technical school in Makedonski Brod preparing the workforce to work in the factory. Many of the students were receiving stipends and continuing education at academic level. The personnel were therefore prepared to form the core of the factory, but also, of the administration. Apart from that, most of the workers were additionally trained during courses in professional development.

¹⁴ Socijastička Republika Makedonija.

¹⁵ Announcement on the completion of construction of “Suvenir”, Archive of “Suvenir”.

The influence of "Suvenir" on everyday life of people in Samokov

The regressive changes and influences which lasted for many years and affected the region until 1980s resulted in its depopulation and worsening the economy – the idea of opening a factory brought some hopes. Immediate proximity of the factory made it possible for the inhabitants of Samokov and the nearby villages to experience the changes. With the beginnings of Suvenir's functioning, ideas of Samokov people were in the process of transformation and projection of economic stability:

In this period, when the factory began to be built, I was studying in Prilep at the Faculty of Economy, and I was... how to say it... happy that such an object was constructed, such a relevant to the economy object started being built in our region, and I was convinced that after graduation I will go there too, and find a job there, and other people who used to live in the area, also had such hopes, because, it is the land where you were born, if you can also work there, it is very touching... and it was interesting, a delight for all young people who lived here in these times [Interview, man, born 1958 in Ramne, 2013, Samokov].

In this period the youth in productive age would often decide to live in Samokov, and many of those who have studied and worked away, in bigger urban centres, would think of going back, in hopes for great future in Samokov:

I am one of those who left before "Suvenir". My first job was after the army service, in Kosovo, I worked with a company from Skopje in Kosovo, where we earned really well at that time. I am one of those, I had bought a parcel, and sold it to buy a house in Samokov, to return there and work in "Suvenir" [Interview, man, born 1958 in Ramne, 2013, Samokov].

Positive changes brought by the work in "Suvenir" cannot be limited to the issue of depopulation in the region, as they had more substantial and complex implications for all the spheres of life. These transformations were also reflected by other processes through the urbanization of the area, improvement of the socio-economical situation, and through the cultural life in Samokov.

Influence through depopulation

In the 1930s the Polish ethnographer Józef Obrębski stated:

Lower Poreče which lies in the parts of southern valleys of this region, due to better communication means is less isolated from the world, and only a few individuals left it for *gurbet*. Upper Porečans according to themselves,

have the stereotype of a migrant [*gurbetčii*] and are shepherds, unlike the Lower Porečans [Obremski 2001: 42].

This note by Obrębski shows how drastic were the demographic changes in the region regarding the migration patterns.

The change coincided with a rapid transformation of rural life which in 1960s resulted in mass migrations to the cities (people of productive age), but also, the constant depopulation by the state. These transformations applied specifically to the economically weak regions, such as Poreče, where living conditions were harsh, villages underdeveloped and the geography unfavourable. This change was, however, possible also due to economic reasons: accelerated economic development of the cities and improvement of living conditions in the urban centres.

Migrations were paralleled with the following process of deagrarization of rural population. People leave agriculture and quit herding animals as main forms of their economy, as they subdue to industrialization. Between 1948 and 1994, Poreče with its two centres: Samokov and Makedonski Brod, and the villages gravitating towards them, witnessed intense changes in terms of population statistics. The absolute number of inhabitants diminished (according to the 1961 census), while the population of Makedonski Brod constantly grew. The situation in Samokov, as the centre of Upper Poreče, was slightly different, because the numbers fluctuated between 1948 and 1981, and then they continuously grew until 1994.

This continuous growth of population in the two centres of Poreče, especially in the period 1981–1994, occurred in the context of deagrarization and industrialization of the region. It also coincides with the period when the factory started: “‘Suvenir’ was the main economic and production centre which hired people” [Interview, man, born 1958 in Ramne, 2013, Samokov]. Other than that, by providing employment and improving the economic situation, it limited migrations:

Well it can be said the migrations [...] with the start of functioning of “Suvenir”, with the start of taking workers, it can be said that they stopped, and since then people stopped leaving, and now, after it has been closed, after several years of waiting, there is no work, and people started to do whatever they can, the young, the old, [...] we, the oldest people have nowhere to go, we had built our houses and here we sit and suffer, on bread, and the youth leaves the place. And it has to be like this. [...] Because there is nobody here to protect us and take care of this land [Interview, man, born 1957 in Rasteš, 2013, Samokov].

New circumstances and the demand for educated workers in the factory had impact on the worldview of young people. These who already began working and living outside their birth place, decided to return to Samokov:

Look here, even before it was built [...] Samokov and this entire land were becoming deserted, and when the factory was built, young people came

back, I also came back, from Skopje. I used to work in Skopje, and then I was in the field in Bitola, and I came back to “Suvenir” from Bitola. And many others who left this place came back because of the factory... the houses... and that’s how it was until 2005 [Interview, man, born 1958 in Ramne, 2013, Samokov].

Another respondent claimed that:

Apart from the fact that people were hired here, [...] there were villagers from here and Makedonski Brod, and because there was not enough educated “cadres”, usually the qualified workers who had moved away, began coming back to work, so there were around 60–70 people who came back from let’s say Skopje and other towns and found their work place in “Suvenir” [Interview, man, born 1957 in Rasteš, 2013, Samokov].

The negative aspect of this story is that the factory not only did not manage to stop the depopulation of the villages, but at their expense, it supported the expansion of urban centres: Samokov and in particular Makedonski Brod.

Influence on urbanization

Urbanization is a process of urban population growth and transforming rural settlements into urban ones, as well as promotion of urban way of life in the rural areas [e.g. Mangin 1970; Dujzings 2013]. Historically, the idea of urbanization was connected to specialization, industrialization and economic development. Although there is some disagreement concerning the form of this connection, there is a general consensus within the Academia that the fundamental characteristics of urbanization pertain to the structural changes and transition from agricultural to non-agricultural forms of employment.

To put it differently, urbanization is a territorial answer to the structural changes in economy [Sharma 2003: 375]. In this context, when the factory opened, the rural settlement of Samokov began its growth and restructuring into an urbanized centre with all accompanying infrastructural elements specific to the urban way of life. Thus, the urbanization of the region was caused by the factory and also enabled its work.

As there was no internal or external infrastructure, it had to be built to make work, life and stay in Samokov possible at all. External infrastructure was financed by the SR of Macedonia and the SSNO and it included an asphalt road connecting Makedonski Brod with Samokov and Rasteš:

[...] afterwards, in 1985 I think, an asphalt road was built, but until then one had to follow the same old road to Samokov, in 1985–1986 they built the road Makedonski Brod-Samokov-Rasteš and “Suvenir” had its big influence in that [Interview, man, born 1957 in Rasteš, 2013, Samokov].

Also, power lines and a power transformer to provide electricity to Samokov were built, just as was the post office and telecommunication network, television network and the water supply: “in the times of ‘Suvenir’ the water utility was built, first one in Samokov” [Interview, man, born 1957 in Rasteš, 2013, Samokov]. It needs to be mentioned that the construction of all these objects was possible through non-repayable funds, and the “interested” institutions (including the Electrical Company of Macedonia and the Macedonian Post) took part in this process.¹⁶

The internal infrastructure and housing facilities for highly qualified workers of “Suvenir” were financed with non-repayable funds from the budget of the SR of Macedonia and by the SSNO – “the National Bank of Yugoslavia – Army Fund”.¹⁷ The funds served to build two blocks of flats in Samokov with twelve apartments and a ground floor for business area, one block of flats (with ten apartments) in Makedonski Brod, and to assign two apartments in Skopje to some of the factory workers.

There also was another object built in Samokov, with 18 twin-bed rooms, used as a hotel for the guests. Additionally, there was a plan to build a settlement of free-standing houses.

Because of this, expropriation of private land was carried out, and around 70 workers financed the construction of their own houses:

[...] the factory bought the land around “Suvenir” and it divided it in the municipality of Makedonski Brod between the workers, so everybody from surrounding villages who worked there, formed, as to say it in contemporary language, an elite settlement with all the elements of suburban housing with water, electricity, water supply and sewage system, phones, streets [...] and the construction was financed by the workers themselves, from their salaries [Interview, man, born 1958 in Ramne, 2013, Samokov].

“Suvenir” also helped to modernize the health facilities in Samokov¹⁸ and opened a kindergarten for workers’ children:

It helped by building, expanding and supplying the clinic in Samokov, and opened a dentist office next to the clinic, with special equipment, and a kindergarten was opened too [Interview, man, born 1958 in Ramne, 2013, Samokov].

Even the cultural-historical monuments or churches were constructed and renovated with the money from “Suvenir”, for instance the church Sv. Ilija in Samokov which was built in 1996. Although some

¹⁶ Announcement on the completion of “Suvenir” construction, 8.09.1998, p. 8, Archive of “Suvenir”.

¹⁷ Decision of the Council of RO Suvenir, 5.12.1986, Archive of “Suvenir”.

¹⁸ Decision of the Council of RO Suvenir, 17.05.1985, Archive of “Suvenir”.

facilities foreseen to be included in the urban plan, like the gas station or a market, were never built, it can be said that the influence of "Suvenir" on the urbanization of Samokov was enormous, and the construction of an entire infrastructure substantially eased the life of workers.

Influence on socio-cultural life

"Suvenir" is an example of a socialist workplace which not only provided people with employment, but also organized housing and leisure time [on the concept of "etatization of time" see Verdery 1996].

According to the assertion of gender equality, women also were employed in the factory, and "Suvenir", as it was said, financed kindergartens and schools for the children. When the factory had opened, it also formed a space which enabled people from remote and poorly communicated settlements of Poreče to meet each other. This possibility resulted in permanent friendships, and with marriages between partners from a variety of villages: "because when we started working there [...], we had not set up our families yet but there were some marriages that took place [later]" [Interview, man, born 1958 in Samokov, 2013, Samokov].¹⁹

As people were getting married and establishing families, a need for a kindergarten arose, because in most of the families both parents worked in "Suvenir". Therefore, the factory came forward with an initiative to adapt an already existing facility into a pre-school for 30 children. It worked as a part of "7-mi Septemvri" (the 7th of September) structure in Makedonski Brod:

It is open only because of the needs of the "Suvenir" workers. Those, as we said, were the generations of the 1950 to 1962, 1963 which were marrying back then to have children, working for "Suvenir". It is normal that every young married couple doesn't want to leave the children to be raised by grandparents, plus some [grandparents] couldn't do that, so according to this logic, a kindergarten was opened for the children to take the kids there, so the children don't have to go here and there to stay with grandmothers, grandfathers, from one village to another [Interview, man, born 1958 in Samokov, 2013, Samokov].

Also the technical high school in Makedonski Brod is equipped entirely by "Suvenir" which financed even a laboratory so that the students become qualified specialists and later work for the factory. Because there was a need for qualified personnel, committees formed by "Suvenir" would

¹⁹ Analysis of the socio-economic level in the region Mala Reka, 6.01.1991, p. 14, Archive of "Suvenir".

gather information on the progress and successes of the students.²⁰ The ranking would later serve for redistribution of academic stipends²¹ to selected young people and some of the workers.

“Suvenir” worked as a supporter and organizer of many cultural events, trips and celebrations, benefiting not only the workers, but all inhabitants of Samokov, Makedonski Brod, and the surroundings. The “Suvenir” hotel served as a cultural community centre for Samokov. It was a place where cultural or art events such as concerts, theatre plays, film screenings (and so on) would happen, it was also an activity ground of cultural and art societies. All this was financed and technically supported by “Suvenir”.

Yet another element which contributed to the rich cultural and entertainment life in Samokov was the football club “Suvenir”: “the workers came up with the idea, and the factory became the main sponsor for the football club” [Interview, man, born 1959 in Latovo, 2013, Samokov]. Another interlocutor said:

We have no football field – we will make it for you, we have no asphalt – we will make it for you, we have no nets – we will buy them for you, we have no football equipment – we will buy it for you, we want to have a team – form it, and we will pay for it... [Interview, man, born 1958 in Samokov, 2013, Samokov].

Because there were no appropriate conditions in Samokov, first games were played in Makedonski Brod stadium, and later, a separate stadium was built in Samokov. The club was winning at municipal level, and during one season it even managed to enter the second league. However, in 1995 the club was closed because of the factory’s financial problems. Apart from its relatively short life, people remember the football club as a source of wonderful joy and recreation, and also, as an affirmation of the factory and the town of Samokov activities:

For us it was a recreation... We had a stadium built especially for us... It was great fun to come and see good football, spend a couple of hours on Sunday, and during the week there were also matches, so soon, the entire population even from outside Samokov, from neighbouring villages, would come to watch the game. And also it was an affirmation of the place itself, of the factory, because the club was called like the factory... football club “Suvenir” only by visiting other towns in the republic, [did it], in the entire country, there was an affirmation of the region which was a bit forgotten by the state [Interview, man, born 1959 in Ramne, 2013, Samokov].

²⁰ The list of students of UCSO “Velko Vlahovikj” from Makedonski Brod who because of their excellent results could sign up for the VTF (Vojnotehnički Fakultet), Army Faculty of Technical Studies in Zagreb for the academic year 1988/1989, 21.01.1987, Archive of “Suvenir”.

²¹ Decision on the scholarship sum, 7.03.1988, p. 1-3, Archive of “Suvenir”.

Conclusions

The idea of building a factory on the Macedonian territory benefited all, but in a more specific dimension, the construction of "Suvenir" in Samokov started a new era, a new way of life for the entire generation which could remain in the homeland. There were several possible locations for "Suvenir" to be built. In the end, Poreče, in proximity to Samokov, was chosen as the best location because of geostrategic reasons, so important for the SFRJ and the socio-political system of that time.

The factory influenced many particular aspects of everyday life in Samokov and generally in Poreče, mainly through demographic changes, socio-cultural life and urbanization. Most of my interlocutors said that when "Suvenir" opened it tamed the migration, but this claim stays in contradiction to the census documents which clearly show that the factory did not entirely manage to stop the region's depopulation. This in turn is consistent with the assumptions of the deagrarization of the region.

Deagrarization formed a new way of life for local people, and inspired growth of two Porečan centres: Samokov and Makedonski Brod, at the expense of the depopulation of nearby villages. Nevertheless, the factory's impact on the region was enormous. The most important advantage of Suvenir's existence was the fact that the factory provided all required elements and conditions for urbanization. Samokov changed from a rural into an urban settlement, and all infrastructural elements needed to lead the urban life were provided by the factory which wanted to assure proper living conditions for its workforce. "Suvenir" sponsored several blocks of flats in Samokov and Makedonski Brod, a hotel in Samokov, sport areas, church and other facilities, and a new settlement for individual housing was designed and realized with the sole help of the factory.

On the socio-cultural level, the factory connected people from Poreče, who thus would become each other's friends, spouses etc. Also, facing lack of other financing, "Suvenir" constantly seemed to be the main supporter of cultural and sporting events through financial help and other actions. Contributions to education were also important, since "Suvenir" helped to equip and train the workforce. This was also possible due to the existence of a technical school in Makedonski Brod, granting university scholarships.

Finally, it can be said that "Suvenir" left a mark on the development of the Poreče region and with it memories which cannot be erased. These memories are devoted to the good times of people who have spent here the years of their working life.

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PART II.

**MAGIC, RITUAL
AND SOCIAL CONTROL**

Emilia Polak

GOSSIP IN THE CONTEXT OF MATRIMONIAL STRATEGIES IN POREČE, MACEDONIA

Through the analysis of stories about people from Poreče I am trying to present the meaning of gossip in the context of matrimonial strategy. I treat gossip as a text, and study its social context and influence on the matrimonial strategies of local communities. I attempt to show the use of gossip by the local people to enforce correct moral standards of individuals living in informal relationships. I also discuss how people try to avoid the rules determining how much time one should spend with his/her partner, or with whom one can meet.

Analysis of the fieldwork findings leads me to the conclusion that social practices of Poreče people are based on a “game of appearances”, and that the declared values are not upheld in practice. There is a difference between the younger and the older generation along the lines of values connected on one hand to the culture of liberal consumerism and on the other the dying patriarchal culture. Young people feel the tension between the two systems and not being able to choose only one of them, they function simultaneously in both worlds.

A few words about Poreče

Poreče is a mountainous region situated in central Macedonia. Due to its geographic makeup it is still to some extent isolated from external influences. It encompasses a single municipality of Makedonski Brod, consisting of 52 villages. The villages are very sparsely populated; at a given time most of them are permanently inhabited by about 10 people. Population density in Poreče is about 8 people per km².¹ Local people describe this region as

¹ http://www.mbrod.gov.mk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1221&Itemid=645&lang=mk.

a “clean” region in terms of ethnicity and religion. According to the census of 2002, there were 7,141 people in the municipality of Makedonski Brod and 97% of them declared themselves as Macedonians [Popis 2002: 35].

Economic and political transformation in Macedonia was difficult, especially for the residents of small towns. In Yugoslav times, a state armoury called “Suvenir” operated near Samokov, the most populated town after Makedonski Brod. In its heyday it employed more than 200 people. After the factory collapsed, people had to make do under new conditions. The place of work which not only provided them with income but also organized free time [Zmejkoski in this volume] ceased to exist. Not everyone could find a place for themselves in an increasingly privatized labour market. Part of the society equated state authority under socialism with *patria potestas*; it was strict but it did not allow its “children” to be hurt, and thus provided a feeling of security [Hann, Humphrey, Verdery 2002]. Nowadays, the opportunities for earning money have worsened and consequently people need to seek new ways to deal with economic problems (for example: by collecting and selling crops or forest products).

Situation in contemporary Macedonia can be understood and defined within discursively opposite constructions of “Europe” and “the Balkans” [cf. Todorova 2009]. Europe is considered to be the modern, open-minded, and tolerant part of the world, with good economy and highly educated people. Other socialist countries, as well as Yugoslavs themselves, considered Yugoslavia to be a “European” country. This was connected to the fact that countries which belonged to the Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia were in a better economic situation and allowed freedom of travel, in contrast to other socialist or communist countries. Macedonia was part of this larger structure [Kaneff 2002], that is, Yugoslavia. Yugonostalgia is now visible in this region; it is a longing for the previous system, as well as a discursive way of dealing with economic and cultural changes. Interestingly, this nostalgia for Yugoslavia affects not only the elderly but also young people, those born after the collapse of the federal republic. Even young people tend to complain about the current financial situation, comparing present life with the times of Yugoslavia, of which they only heard from the generation of their parents and grandparents.

Research methods

I conducted my fieldwork in 2012 and 2013, mainly in Samokov and surrounding villages: Bitovo, Brest, Dolno Zrkle and Belica. I spent a total of about 9 weeks there. I took part in the daily life of the local community and talked with people in the Macedonian language. In the field I also

made friends with Macedonians who then made suggestions with whom I should meet and talk, and accompanied me during most of the interviews.² It helped me to build trust between my interlocutors and me; I was accepted and treated more like a local person than a foreign student.

As all of the interviews were recorded and quotes which I used have been published with permission of my friends, I am aware of the sensitivity of the subject and the ethical implications of the methodology. In order to protect the privacy of my interlocutors I have changed their names and tried to provide information about each person in such a way that they could not be identified.

The aim of this paper is to show how gossip is used in regards to love and how it affects relationships. I was not interested in whether rumours which I heard are true or not, but rather to what or whom they relate. The subject of gossip is hidden from the outsiders. People from Poreče carefully choose persons with whom they want to share specific information, in order to use them for their own purposes afterwards. Moral standards, to which the members of the community should adapt, are set during daily meetings, which on the surface look exactly like ordinary neighbourly visits. When something outside the norm happens in the society, it is the rumour that demonstrates dissatisfaction. Gossip also serves as a way of regulating matrimonial strategies pertaining to who can date, and in what circumstances: a social game not revealed or admitted eagerly in the community.

People from Poreče know what should not be told to the strangers; these are the issues which refer only to them, and should only be known by the people involved. This cultural strategy stems out of “cultural intimacy” [Herzfeld 1997], it binds society and provides rules of social life. Despite the passing of time, the sensitivity to unwanted topics of conversation, and the willingness to hide them from strangers is still relevant. People from outside the local group, even if liked, will never be completely incorporated into the enigmatic sphere of gossip [Gluckman 1963].

Matrimonial strategy by Obrębski

Józef Obrębski did not write about matrimonial strategies *per se*; he was rather referring to them only through incidental observations. He focused his attention more on the social position of both sexes, their rights and obligations in marriage, showing precisely how the system of patriarchal domination in family and social life are balanced through the dominant

² Maja Cvetkoska, Elena Micevska, Viktor Veljanoski and Vele Zmejkoski were of great help to my project, and I wish to thank them for everything they have done for me.

position of women in the ritual sphere. Obrębski wrote that thanks to this the community becomes united on a symbolic level [Engelking 2005]. He also wrote about gossip in reference to the escape ritual [Obrębski 2005], narrating a story of one girl who ran away from her family (after which she is called *begalka*) to get married to an unknown man. Through the whole process of escape, the search for the girl, and finally, her marriage, we learn which rules were applied to relationships and marriages in 1930s. The choice of a spouse was the responsibility of parents, who usually looked for social and material status of a candidate in addition to age. Therefore, if a widower wanted to marry again, he could only choose among widows, “spinsters”, or women who cannot marry suitable bachelors due to their scandalous reputation. When a girl did not agree to marry a man chosen by her parents, she could decide to escape from the family home.

The ritual of escape had specific rules; the woman who runs away should leave her shoes on the doorstep of her family house and go to her boyfriend’s family barefoot. Otherwise, the prosperity of her household will move to the house of the husband-to-be [Obrębski 2005]. This was not a frequent occurrence and when it did happen, the village commented that it was a matter of witchcraft. When a girl runs away, the parents of the bride do not receive her dowry, which is a norm during negotiations with matchmakers [Bielenin-Lenczowska 2013].

Almost all marriages were arranged with the help of matchmakers, who negotiated the sum of a dowry, arranged the wedding details between families, etc. For their work they received a contracted amount of money. Matchmakers competed with each other to obtain the greatest advantages; they were often spreading slander about other candidates to their “client”, in order to make their own offer seem more attractive to the parents of the nubile. In present-day Macedonia matchmakers still perform their work, especially in contracting international marriages, as I will elaborate below.

Cases analyzed by Obrębski are still – to some extent – relevant in the 21st century. Until recently, women had a significantly lower social status, however in the last decades, changes occurred: women were able to become independent, acquire higher education, and move from villages to cities, or even abroad.

Analytical categories

I decided to describe matrimonial strategies in Poreče with particular attention to the gossip as a mechanism of social control. By matrimonial strategies I mean all efforts and activities that aim to create an intimate relationship with another person. These actions are conscious and may

have various causes. Some people are guided by emotions – they decide to be in a relationship because of love, but there are also those who are looking only for economic gain, or to obtain help in the household. In this article I describe partnerships, friendships, and ideas of young people on what a perfect relationship should look like, as heard during my fieldwork.

What role does gossip play in matrimonial strategies? How to define gossip? According to the Dictionary of the Polish Language [Szymczak 1979] gossip is unproven or false information passed from mouth to mouth, usually harming someone else's image; gossip does not explain a situation, only judges it. The strength of gossip is its distinctive feature and it is difficult to predict whether its effect will make local communities stronger or destroy relationships. The only thing that can be said with certainty is that gossip has an impact on almost all areas of life. It exists among people who have something in common – for example: they share a common history, place of residence or work [Rapport, Overing 2000].

In social knowledge, the line between gossip and ordinary conversation is blurred. Gossipers do realize when they start to talk in that specific way; rumour is obvious to them, similarly to an ordinary conversation which is a natural flow of information [Kwiatkowska 2001]. In my opinion, gossip is a social judgment of human behaviour, made known to the close circle of friends. Most often it includes incorrect or speculative information, undermining someone's authority. Gossip can also be regarded as linguistic recreation caused by the lack of other activities. In addition, one has to take into account the positive aspect of gossip: talking about other people in a flattering style, stressing their positive traits. I believe that the reasons for gossip are twofold: the desire to obtain benefits for oneself, even if it means the destruction of another's reputation; and an intentional or unconscious action which arises accidentally during everyday conversations.

According to the *Routledge encyclopedia of social and cultural anthropology* [Barnard, Spencer 2010], gossip is the key to understand the daily life of the local community. It strengthens the unity and morality of the group. Gossip is a hallmark, privilege, and even duty [Rapport 2010]. Gossip still has impact on the everyday world. Anthropological analysis shows that gossip always has a purpose.

Max Gluckman wrote that it is a culturally controlled game with an important function in maintaining social relations [Gluckman 1963]. Gossip resembles a vicious circle – it can express the aims and values approved by the community, but at the same time, gossip makes it difficult to fulfil these goals, because it defines proper behaviour so strictly and narrowly. Gossip is a mechanism of social control – it sets the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and expresses the requirements

for the members of the community [Aštalkovska 2009]. Robert Paine [1967] believes that gossip is an individual matter, which increases or decreases the social status of the individual. In my opinion, it is possible to combine the two definitions: gossip is an individual action, but it also has an impact on the entire social group. People with higher social status have more opportunities to regulate the rules of a local group as they have authority. In the book *Village voices* [1997], Perle Møhl describes gossip as story-telling about others. For her, it is essential to get to know the individual way of thinking without assessing whether the information is true or not. Confidential conversations show what you **really** think. Michael Herzfeld [2000] writes that gossip is a space where one can manifest, dispute, and change traditional values. Gossip can serve both means: maintaining traditional values, and expressing a desire to modernize certain aspects of life.

The fear of being the subject of gossip is linked to the notion of “reputation”. It is the opinion other people hold about someone. Møhl noticed that the fear of being a victim of backbiting creates self-discipline and results in behaviour which does not go beyond the canon of values set by the local community [Møhl 1997]. Gossiping can operate in two ways: increase one’s respect by talking in a glorifying manner; or decrease it through negative information. Kenneth H. Craik [2008] believes that reputation is a dispersed phenomenon which can be found in the beliefs and claims of an infinite number of others.

Gossip in Poreče

“If you do not know what has happened in your house, ask your neighbours. They know more about you than you do” – according to a popular humorous saying in Poreče.

Neighbours are watching what is happening in their area and they are eagerly commenting on it, sometimes adding extra, unproven information. One topic can be discussed for a time, until something new happens in the village; for example an unwanted pregnancy or a relationship between a man and a woman from two feuding families.

In Poreče, most of my interlocutors used the word *ozboruvanje* for rumour. Literally translated, it means to talk about, but it denotes slander. *Ozboruva* is a term for the person who denigrates, though I have not heard it very often. My interlocutors often used generalities: “a lot of people here say” or “it is said that...”. The act of gossiping was something “normal” for the community, it was not held in contempt, however the term for a gossiping person is considered offensive.

The people of Poreče understand gossiping in various ways. Tamara comes from another town, located about 70 km from Samokov. In 1988 she started to work in “Suvenir”, where she met her husband. Six months later they got married and built a house in the workers district (*naselba*) in Samokov. Tamara believes that people from this region are uneducated and close-minded, and they are not sufficiently close to God, so their main activity is gossiping. Aleksandar, a 21-year-old youth from Samokov, also defines people who gossip as backwards (*zaostanati, nemoderni*). When he was talking with his friend Ubavka about negative behaviours of their mates, they said that these people were accustomed to the world, did not travel, did not have higher education, and did not learn personal culture from home. Aleksandar appreciated the father of his friend who did not pay attention to the “nonsense” which people in Samokov said. He said: “Her dad is much better. A European man, a true European man”. If someone’s behaviour is worthy of emulation and above average, my interlocutors talk about it being “European” [Thiessen 2007]. Europe is associated with such values as: a high level of education, good economic situation, freedom to travel, civilization, high technologies, etc. In the opinion of my Macedonian friends, Balkans are the inverse of Europe. It is said that in the past the Balkans countries, especially Yugoslavia, had power, and were known in the world. My respondents with sadness told me that in the old times Macedonia had better living standards than Poland (my home country), while at present it is worse. Some of them think that fragmentation of the Yugoslavian state was a mistake which resulted in weak economy. They see incredibly huge differences between Macedonian people and for example, the Polish. The Macedonians I talked to do not call themselves Europeans – they are Balkan. My interlocutors assume that in Poland there are no problems with employment, health insurance, education, etc. Regarding every aspect of life they think of themselves in worse terms than of people from outside the Balkans.

Even young people think that in the Yugoslav times life was better. 20-year-old Ubavka emphasized the sense of community in those days:

You know, maybe before it wasn’t like that, but now with the economy, because there is no money, because everything is private [...]. Earlier, in the times of Yugoslavia, there was brotherhood and unity, people loved each other, they were brothers to someone who was not their brother. Since Macedonia is a separate, independent country, and when it started with the economy, there is no work... [sighs] it’s very strange [Interview, Ubavka, woman, 20 years old].

Ubavka and Aleksandar told me that when the “Suvenir” factory functioned people simply did not have time to gossip. They were too busy working and building their homes in the new workers district. They visited each

other more often but there was no gossiping, they would talk mostly about what has happened at work; they did not care who is seeing the neighbour's daughter. Yugoslav time is idealized and perceived as a time when finding employment was not a problem and people were friendlier towards each other. In my opinion, their way of dealing with economy problems and living conditions is a sentimental return to the old days.

People also gossip in order to obtain benefits, for example when a man gives negative misinformation about the partner of some girl in the hopes to make her change her mind and choose him instead. Behaviour like this is very popular, because in Poreče there is preponderance of men, and young women move away to big cities for education and in hopes of finding a husband. For this reason men of the region strive to find a partner, so they would not remain alone in their old age.

All of the interlocutors know the weight of gossip but they respond to it in various ways. Some people participate in this process, others agree to such a state of things, not rebelling against the rules. Only a small part of the population expressed opinions that they do not care what the neighbours say and do not live according to the rules established by the community, like Tamara. During my stay in Samokov, I have rarely seen her going out to meet with anyone, even the nearest neighbours. She was always busy with housework. I wish to point out that it is almost a norm that when someone goes down the street you need to greet them, ask how they are and invite them for coffee. Tamara did not do it. She said that she does not like to waste time. If she needs something from the neighbours, she goes there only for that purpose, and does not talk about issues which do not interest her. As soon as she feels overwhelmed by the situation around her, the constant pressure to gossip, she changes her surroundings. Tamara feels that in Samokov she has no friends, that she cannot trust anyone. She said:

For them, for the people from here, it's forbidden to tell the truth, if you are truthful, this is the worst thing you can do. [...] As long as you give them something, it is good, and if you once say that you cannot do something, or that you need help from them, then you become their worst enemy [Interview, Tamara, woman, Samokov].

Those who behave within the standards set by the community perceive opposing it as tilting against windmills – a senseless fight and impossible to win. Hristijan, 26 years old, believes that no matter what you do, people will backbite you. Ubavka explains her submission by her loyalty to the family. She claims that her parents did nothing wrong to her, so she cannot bring shame on them. This difference of attitudes is not strict of course; there are certain aberrations, but they are not radically different.

Relationships and gossip

The process of forming a new man-woman relationship in Poreče does not seem to be unique for the region. Boys and girls meet through their friends or at a disco, and after a longer or shorter period of time they become couples, friends, or lose contact with each other. There are not many places where they can date in Poreče. They spend most of the time together at school. There are primary schools in the largest villages, but for secondary education they have to go to Makedonski Brod, and for tertiary education to Skopje, Bitola, or Štip. If someone chooses to look for work instead of pursuing higher education, they also seek it in the larger towns of Macedonia. As a result, the relationships are very often put to a test by the separation. A couple usually meets once or twice a month. They must settle for contact by phone or online.

Due to socio-cultural changes and lifestyle changes, (like the decision to study in larger cities in Macedonia, take a job abroad, and the desire to achieve economic stability at a younger age) the time when people decide to get married has also shifted. In the 1980s and 1990s, young women would marry when they were 20 years old, after a short time in a relationship. For example Tamara got married when she was 20, six months after first meeting her future husband. All my interlocutors told me that in present time the best age to get married is between 25 and 27. Ana from the nearby village commented on this:

[...] school is in the first place [...], to explore a little bit of the world, I mean that I want to have my life. In the first place there is education, then work, finding a job and becoming independent from parents. [...] Then it is time to marry, to give birth, take care of them, and time for dying [Interview, Ana, woman].

Gossip organizes the sphere of love in everyday life: it determines how dates should look like, how much time you should spend with your partner and whom you can meet. It may also be the reason for a breakdown of a relationship, when the local community is dissatisfied with it. That is why the young try to hide whom they date from other villagers, but only in face to face interactions. What is a norm in real life is almost the opposite of the virtual world. From Facebook I learned that two of my friends have been in a relationship for several years. It is popular to share photos on the social networking site, commenting on the activity of the partner by using emoticons with kisses or hearts. One of the reasons for public declarations of feelings on Facebook is the possibility to select one's own friends there, and the fact that the portal offers a way to block the visibility of posts to unknown people. Everyone can make

a decision on who will know about the relationship. Secondly, users are typically young people, so couples can officially announce that they are together to other potential suitors. The age of users is also important for keeping secrets from older family members who would not be happy with the choices of their children, grandchildren, nephews, etc.

When I visited a soccer tournament in Makedonski Brod in August 2013, I had the opportunity to observe a very interesting situation. Had I not known that my Macedonian friend is there with her boyfriend, I would never have guessed that they are a couple. They carefully hid this fact from others. When they were in a public place they did not even stand close to each other. When we went out together from the stadium to go to the shop and the street crossing was without streetlight, they held hands. They did not want anyone to see them. Truly, even very distant neighbours know who is in a relationship with whom. However, both the couple and the community support each other in keeping the relationship a secret. The condition is that the young couple should create the appearance that they are not a couple.

Marko, 20 years old, was already in the three relationships, but told his parents only about his first girlfriend. He broke up with her because of rumours. He heard that she dated someone else. They were not from the same village so he could not be with her all of the time. He asked two colleagues to follow his girlfriend and inform him of any suspicious situations. He got to know that she was meeting with another boy and even though he knew that they were only friends, he ended the relationship. There was too much gossip. Since then he has changed his approach to love; he does not take relationships seriously, and says he is too young for stability. According to him the proper age to get married is 27–28, which means starting to date seriously at the age of 25–26. He does not see his future in Samokov because there are no career prospects. Although he wants to stay in Macedonia, he will probably move to a bigger city. When I talked to him on Facebook about the reasons why he does not want to live permanently in Samokov, he told me:

I don't like the way people who live here think about relationships, I know they will be gossiping, etc. I don't want a girlfriend from Samokov, definitely. People in Samokov have nothing else to do aside from backbiting relationships [Interview, Marko, man, 20 years old].

Marko was convinced that if he had been in a relationship with a girl from his town, people would have immediately started commenting on why they were meeting. Reasoning for example that their families did not have good relations with each other; people would have started to question whether the girl is good, faithful, or trustworthy. Sooner or later, these rumours would become the reason for arguments within

the relationship. Marko told me that he knows of a few such cases, but he did not want to reveal names.

Couples cannot visit each other in their homes. Youth explains that by the fear of being a subject of gossip. Ubavka has been in a relationship with Hristijan for 5 years and has never been a guest in his house, nor he in hers. She explained it to me this way:

And what if we break up next week or month? People will talk. They will gossip about me that I bring him home before the wedding, and now we're not together [...] Parents didn't do anything wrong to me, I can't bring shame on them [Interview, Ubavka, woman, 20 years old].

Ubavka adapts to the social norms; she does not want to destroy her and her parents' good name. An interesting observation was made by Tamara, Ubavka's mother. She believes that because her daughter did not want her boyfriend to visit her at home, she was probably not sure of her choice. However, there are not many people who would agree with this interpretation. The majority of the young are afraid to meet their partner at their home in fear of losing their reputation.

Young people told me that friendship is more important than love, claiming that contrary to the latter, friendship is eternal. There is no need to be afraid that in a month, even if there is an argument, a friend will just go away. Therefore, the local community allows friends of both sexes to visit each other in their homes. People see nothing wrong with that, as long as it is certain that there is no romantic connection. Usually they are sure only when the friend has a stable partner or when friends are at the same time each others relatives.

There is also a strong objection in Poreče to premarital cohabitation. The only exception, I heard about from Marko, was a couple who moved to Skopje to study where – to make it cheaper – they would rent an apartment with separate beds together (according to the official version). This situation is similar to one described by Ryszard Tomicki in the work on the sexual life of Polish highlanders, which was perceived by him as a social game [Tomicki 1997], and to research of Ewelina Majuk who wrote about double standards in the lives of the inhabitants of Centar Župa municipality in western Macedonia [Majuk 2009]. Adults know that their children do not follow the rules of abstaining from sex until the wedding night, and unofficially they consent to it. Therefore, the rule is not so much to postpone sex until after the wedding, but to conform to the game of appearances, i.e. keep their sexual initiation secret and not allow a pregnancy to happen. Eva, one of my interviewees, a 25-year-old woman who has been in a relationship for 10 years, told me that her partner and she are planning a wedding, but in 2–3 years – once they establish a better financial position for themselves. When I came back

after half a year, they were married and in January 2014 they posted a picture of their newborn daughter on Facebook. The woman had a good reputation in the village, but when the society connected the dots, people began backbiting her. She broke the law, by getting pregnant first and only then getting married. Her partner decided to organize a wedding as soon as possible. He did not want negative rumours spread about them. Ubavka wrote to me on Facebook that people still gossiped about her:

They say that they were married because Eva became pregnant, if she was not, they would still be together as boyfriend and girlfriend [Interview, Ubavka, woman, 20 years old].

It was not important that the couple planned to get married anyway. However, for the community their story was the perfect subject for gossip over a cup of coffee.

A well-known 200–300-year-old local story is another example of the impact which rumours have on matrimonial strategy (although it is difficult to assess now whether the story is true). The legend states that it all started at the wedding of a young man from the village of Botušje with a girl coming from Brest. The wedding guests were invited from almost all the villages, even though people from these villages did not like each other. A huge row erupted at the wedding and many people were injured and several were killed. After this event, representatives from both villages met and decided that the villages will be to each other as a *kum*, i.e. they will be like godfathers to each other, so that people from Botušje will not be able to enter into marriage with people from Brest. This has been in effect to this day, even if it is unproven information that is being transmitted to future generations.

Old bachelors and “buying a wife” from Albania

Aging communities are a serious problem in Poreče. Population growth rate in the region is low and not many young people choose to live there permanently. Most of them look for employment in other towns or abroad, and return there only for weekends or holidays. This especially applies to women, who want to live in a city, get higher education, find well-paid jobs, make a career, and find a husband who does not come from a village. The men I talked to very often emphasized that women do not want to live like their mothers or grandmothers did: cooking for their husbands, working on the land, etc., which is their reason to leave.

The respect unmarried people have in the community depends on their gender. Men are considered to be independent and can choose a life

of a bachelor, while unmarried women are perceived “useless”. A lot of old bachelors (*ergeni*) live in Poreče, sometimes several in one village. It is said that they are *samci*, or loners. When a man is over 40 years old and alone, talk begins about him being unmarried, but not in a negative way. When I asked Eva why there are so many single men in this area, she replied:

Firstly it is their choice, their personal choice. For example, my uncle [...] is 39 years old [...], and my dad and mom also wanted, as it is done now, to bring him a wife from Albania, and he said that he didn't want to marry, he decided this, and he just does not want to [change it] [Interview, Eva, woman, 25 years old].

It also happens that men are working too hard and have no time to meet a suitable young woman, and get to know her well enough to arrange a wedding. Some of them are very attached to their fathers' land – they do not want to sell it and prefer to stay in Poreče and cultivate it. Society talks about them in a positive way; that they are resourceful and carry out the tasks assigned by this community to both women and men.

It is hard to find “old maids” in Poreče. In Samokov there are two, there is one in Brest and another in Benče. A woman becomes an “old maid” when she is unmarried and over 40 years of age. Women are more mobile, and travel to the cities to find husbands. Of those who are unmarried, it is said that they are handicapped in some way, that no one wanted them. It can be a mental or a physical impairment, e.g. limping on one leg. This observation was also made by Józef Obrębski during his research on Poreče [Obrębski n.d. a]. While the “old bachelors” can coexist with the community without fear of any kind of ostracism, this is not the case for old maids. Due to the power of gossip women are under strong pressure to get married.

It is also interesting what are the local perceptions about Macedonian-Albanian marriages, which are quite popular in the region. On the one hand, women from Albania are described as “our” women. One of the main reasons why society treats them in this way is the religion of Albanian women, as they are also Christians.³ There is no distance in personal contact with them. On the other hand, when people talked about transnational families, I have sensed a strong reservation towards it. Local people think that a man pays an Albanian family for their daughter – he buys her as a material thing, which is especially harmful for women. In fact, the man pays firstly for the work of the go-between acting as an intermediary between the Macedonian bachelor and the Albanian family (i.e. the matchmaker or *strojnik*), secondly for the gifts presented

³ They are in fact Catholics and Macedonians from Poreče are Orthodox Christians.

to the Albanian family and the wife-to-be, and thirdly for the woman's passport. The question of whether there is true love in mixed marriages is a subject of neighbours' disbelief. Public opinion regards these families with suspicion and looks down on them. As one woman told me:

Local men pay for the whole wedding there. [...] The matchmaker is a friend of the bachelor or it's one woman from Albania who came here and has a sister there and she says: give me, for example, 200 euros, I'll bring her to you as a wife. So again it is for money. [...] So there is no love, nothing, it's just to have children, not to be alone [Interview, woman].

When Macedonian-Albanian relationships appear in conversations, it is as a deviation from the norm of the local community, a compromise which Macedonian bachelors are forced to make because of the lack of single women in Macedonia. At the same time, by "backbiting" – gossiping about them, local communities get accustomed to the presence of Albanian women and begin to treat them as "theirs".

Conclusions

The topic of gossip and its impact on matrimonial strategies is still to some degree perceived as a not a very serious research problem, hence there are not too many researchers who deal with this issue. Some of them, such as functionalists Gluckman and Paine, did not focus on the information exchanged between the members of the community; they only performed an analysis of the consequences of gossiping. In my opinion, both the content of gossip, and the analysis of context are important. The question of authenticity of the gossip is not important for the community – through gossip they can enforce their concept of the social norm.

This phenomenon is interesting for an anthropologist as it constitutes a way of social communication, practiced every day. Gossip is also a form of linguistic recreation; it often occurs when people have nothing to do with their free time, and thus backbiting can be treated as a form of entertainment. There is no single, particular social group that engages in gossip about relationships. Moreover, there are three main attitudes towards it: 1) complicity; 2) silent rebellion without expressing opposition; 3) indifference. In public discourse, gossip is strongly feminized but – based on my research – I can say that it is practiced in equal measure by both sexes.

By learning about the major gossip topics covered by the local community, I learned which relationships are approved, and which are assessed negatively. Of course, no information is told officially or openly – you need

to listen carefully and reach your own conclusions. Based on my experience in the field, I know that a researcher who would come for a short period of time, without knowing the language, nor having friends there, and conducted only official interviews and observations, could not write about gossip as a mechanism of social control. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I did not notice the existence of that problem. An outsider can say that people from Poreče are incredibly hospitable and friendly. I am not going to deny this statement; gossiping does not negate the cheerful personality of the people. However, when I established friendships with a few people from the community, I learnt the importance of gossip in the daily life.

Gossip is a mechanism which can both cause conflicts and solve them: it shows the social problems, and expresses the need for a change. Gossip is a reaction to the derogation from the societal standards. Rumour affects behaviour of both partners in a relationship. Fearing for their reputation, people try to adapt to the general public. This especially applies to local women (men have greater freedom in the studied community). It is not a problem of high importance when a girl from another region stays overnight at her boyfriend's home in Poreče, but it is unacceptable that a girl from Poreče be received at her partner's home. The community wants to preserve at least the appearance that the future bride remains a virgin for the wedding. Perhaps this is a remnant of a patriarchal world: a model which does not fit the present.

People from Poreče, especially the generation of grandparents and parents, are not sure if modern rules which exist in the West are also good for them. They try to keep the safe rules from the previous system, which according to them ensures societal order. When a worrying incident occurs, local people react quite sharply by "backbiting". Rumours spread very quickly, even among different villages. That is why young people often hide their relationships in order to avoid becoming subjects of gossip. Most of my interlocutors assume that it is better to live in harmony with others, reducing the risk of being "backbitten". Being respected by the community depends on their reputation, as do their prospects of finding a proper wife or husband. Thus, gossip may determine their entire future. Issues I elaborated on are not the only examples of rumours being treated as a mechanism of social control. However, due to my previous interest in marriage-related research, I have focused mainly on the impact of gossip on matrimonial strategies. I learnt how single people are perceived depending on their gender, what is the social status of Albanian women married to men from Poreče; how are love and friendship valued; and finally, how does the gossip regulate behaviour between romantic partners.

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THE HYBRID STATUS OF *VODICI*: A STUDY OF CONTINUITY

In his works, recounting his several month long stay in Macedonian Poreče, Józef Obrębski emphasized the importance of the *Vodici* ritual and custom complex [Obrębski 2002]. *Vodici* is one of the most popular holidays in Macedonia (especially in the Western part of the country), and it is known under official church names as: Epiphany or the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan river. The prosperity of the entire village depends on this ritual, which for Obrębski marks the culmination of the ceremonial year. He highlighted the collective character expressed in the form of the cult, and the ritual's social influence awaited by the researched group. The prosperity in the soon to begin new year is to be brought through proper way of celebration and encompasses the entire community from particular settlements of Poreče.

This rite stands in the whole of the yearly ceremonial cycle as the climax of all ritual activities. Never omitted or neglected, it is considered essential to the prosperity and successful life of the village [Obrębski 1977: 8;¹ Obrębski 1972; 2005d; 2006].

Obrębski focused on both the ethnographic description of the ritual sequence, as well as the specificity of the celebration of the Christ's baptism in the river Jordan (namely, what makes it exceptional among other celebrations of the calendar cycle). He interprets this concurrence as assigning and performing ceremonial roles:

The allocation of ritual roles is neither haphazard nor does it depend upon the personality characteristics of the individual. It is related to the community's social structure and its status system. In spite of the seemingly amorphous and diffused nature of religious behavior, there is a definite

¹ This work is also known as *Social structure and ritual in a Macedonian village* [Obrębski 2006].

meshing of ritual roles with the social structure. One of the effects of the structural alignment of ritual roles is the emergence of various structurally determined, sacerdotal groupings, differently and differentially engaged in the performance of ritual activities. These ritual activities not only give expression to the religious sentiments of the performers and to the values shared in common by the members of the village group, but they also articulate with the structural configuration of the village community: the community as such, its lineage system, the age and sex structure, the kinship system, the family and the household [Obrebski 1977: 4–5].

He ascribes the difference to the androcentric orientation. This interpretation stands in opposition with the noted and described [Engelking 2006: 91] rule of balancing the dominance of men in family and social life (which is inherent to patriarchy) and the “dominant role of women in the sacral sphere, which transforms the community, on the symbolical level, into a unity” [Engelking 2005: 18]. *Vodici* is, in Obrębski’s ethnographic narrative, the only celebration “the performance of which is a solely male duty” [Obrębski 2005d: 77]. “One ritual for which the responsibility rests exclusively with the village men is a water consecration ceremony corresponding to Epiphany” [Obrebski 1977: 8]. Thus, the celebration of the Baptism of Christ transgresses the boundaries of the homestead, and it gains a global dimension within the boundaries of the toponym, related to the male law of inheritance:

Only the male agnatic descendants of the founders of the village have indisputable rights to residence in the community, to patrimony, to the utilization (under the customary land tenure system) of the village’s resources [Obrebski 1977: 6].

[A]ll households unite in the possession of a tangible symbol of the benevolent mystical powers. With the lineage system as its basis, the ritual stresses the responsibility of the village men for the unity, continuity and welfare of the group. At the same time it gives expression to an all-inclusive sense of community, embracing descendants of the ancestral pair, their wives and families and including even those who have passed away. Through the office of the village *kum*, a spiritual kinship, which is the highest and the most sacred form of kinship, is established at a ritual level between all members of the group, irrespective of their lineage. The lineage system elevates the men. Yet symbolic, spiritual kinship, officiated through this system makes for a unity bridging cleavages which, at a profane level, are maintained in the community through patrilineality [Obrebski 1977: 10–11].

Obrębski recognized and underlined the uniqueness of this aspect of *Vodici*, however, it is not the subject of further investigations. My analysis, undertaken 80 years after the experiences of Józef Obrębski, a PhD student of Bronisław Malinowski, begins exactly here, at the point where “the underappreciated sociologist” [Nowakowski 1992] stopped

his inquiry.² I link this unusual male control of the ceremonial role with the ritual's foundation myth: biblical and liturgical prototype of the celebration in which the main function was performed by John the Baptist [cf. for example Obrebski 1977]. The village *kum* becomes his representation [Connerton 1989] and guarantees the proper course of the ritual and thus, realization of its goals in the yearly commemorative ceremony.

The concurrence of my and Józef Obrębski's research is based on two pillars. The first is of course the common point of interest, that is, *Vodici*.³ The second is the hybrid character of the celebration ritual, which Obrębski understood as a mix of ritual and ludic elements within the framework of religion of the examined "religious community" [i.e. Obrebski 1977]. This character is visible in his research material on the level of coexistence of the abovementioned pillars and the sacral as well as ludic function:

The function of communal feasts is connected to the creation of actual consumption, common euphoria, atmosphere of unity, good will (God among us. With God. One who thinks badly, will face the bad, and others) [Obrebski 2002: 28].

Ethnographic, folklorist, witnessed, and created sources used in my research on *Vodici* are filtered through the conceptual apparatus, tools and findings regarding the commemorative ceremony theories in which the rhetoric of performance play a special role. I enrich the understanding of previously indicated hybridity by linking the religious (ritual) character with the performative one – a form which is pleasing both to the faithful and the spectators [see Jurkowski 2011: 15]. Therefore, I step away from the considerations which are popular in folklorist studies, and which aim is mostly to indicate pre- and post-Christian elements of the ceremony. I also focus on the question which is presently important to my interlocutors, i.e. to the participants of *Vodici*. According to them the following issues are indisputable: 1. Belonging to the Christian Orthodox ecclesiastic/religious community;⁴ 2. Proper celebration of *Vodici* confirms their status as Christians and forms

² Here I make a reference to Anton Blok. If we denote some element of cultural phenomenon as devoid of sense, we decide to "stop the inquiry in the moment where it should be started" [Blok 2001: 113; cf. Tokarska-Bakir 2008: 53].

³ There is a difference as to the territorial scope of our research. I do not limit my fieldwork to the territory of Poreče (as Obrębski did), as I study *Vodici* on the present territory of the Republic of Macedonia.

⁴ "The 'religious community' is an analytic abstraction from the total culture pattern. It consists of interrelated systems of ritual activities and corresponding beliefs, attitudes and sentiments shared by villagers" [Obrebski 1977: 20].

an element of religious practice essential for being “a good Christian”. On the other hand, this issue is problematic: are the particular elements of the ritual-customary complex of the celebration of a sacral, or rather of a festive character? Respondents identify the sacral character with tradition, and value it positively, while the entertaining character is associated with the new, the acquired, and the non-traditional, and it is assigned negative value. People never doubt, however, that the celebration of this ceremonial has an entertaining role, they simply notice that the form of entertainment has changed. In the past it used to be performed through common singing of ritual songs and dancing *oro*, while nowadays, although *oro* remained, the songs are rather *obični* (ordinary), *selski* (village) [Interview, woman, born 1943, 2012, Dolno Zrkle, researcher: Joanna Rękas] instead of *vodičarski*. These new forms of the ritual do not change its ontological status, but, according to my interlocutors, they are of lower value than the “traditional” ones, and are treated as a logical aftermath of deterritorialization and the influence of pop culture.

– Do you go from house to house later? Or not?

I: No, not now. Now we do not, but in the old times, we did. For five years it happens only for *božikum* [God’s *kum*], for *lažikum* [fake *kum*],⁵ and that’s it. Only in those houses in which there are, let’s say, by Marko there are six. Only by his cross.⁶ [...]

– And now the old *kum*, where will he go? What will he do, what does he celebrate?

I: He celebrates. Now they don’t celebrate here anymore. Here he only offers the kettles, and he takes them. And it is being handed over [Interview, woman, wife to Father Marko, an Orthodox priest, 2013, Brest, researchers: Vladimir Karadžoski, Eli Lučeska, Joanna Rękas].

– Is he being given some special food or not?

I: No. Only now they are allowed to be free. Without ties. And they are being left now. You mentioned the young ones. There are young ones who want to continue that. There are some who want to bring some of their own [opinions] that this should be like that, that should be different, and according to him, it should be like this. [...]

– But he is respected. Maybe there are some small changes from time to time, but he is respected.

⁵ *Božikum*: This term is used for the actual *kum*, instead of *lažikum* which means last year’s *kum* (who was called *božikum* during last *Vodici*).

⁶ Villages are territorially divided into crosses, and if there are three crosses, there are three *kums*. A cross defines a space, and it is connected to a kin. Thus, marriages within one cross are prohibited.

I: Somehow naively they will accept and join, but they change within a year. And before two, three years they decided not to carry the kettle, this *božikum* with the kettle, but instead, to [focus on] all the houses, with the cross, by the evening. They tried to explain it somehow, so the people would not be unhappy. I think the tradition is being disrupted [Interview, three men, 2013, Brest, researchers: Vladimir Karadžoski, Eli Lučeska, Joanna Rękas].

– And tell me, is saint John being mentioned in the songs?

I: Yes, he is [...].

– And the male *Vodici*, and the female, or?

I: Yes. Saint John. Before they used to sing, I just forgot how. Women used to go to the church for the female *Vodici*, and the *božikumica*, they were singing: if you're sleeping, wake up, if you're drinking, merry, your house is a mess, and they would say the riddles. And they would bathe the housewife. But now it is being forgotten, they do not sing like that. But that's how it is [Interview, woman, born 1943, 2012, Dolno Zrkle].

Priest: I want to tell you something. I know it is not the whole sum, but last year it was 500 denars, this year it will be 800 denars. [pew...] [laughter] If you want, of course it not... [berating, laughter, loud voices...] I also have children... And my children want to eat... [Interview, video recording, 17/18.01.2013, Roždestvo na Presveta Bogorodica Monastery, researchers: Vladimir Karadžoski, Eli Lučeska, Joanna Rękas].

However, if one would look at the inhabitants of Poreče/Volče as at “primitive people” enclosed in time and space, and perceived their practices as the testimony of past ages, then:

The local system of folk religion is without any doubts of a similar character to the one which for the past decades or ages was characteristic to the peoples of other Slavic lands [Obremski 2001b: 10].

The attractiveness of Poreče for ethnologists lies not in the richness and lavishness of local cultural forms, but in the fact that due to long-lasting isolation from influences and external contacts, the culture of Poreče is free from uncoordinated intrusions of foreign and unharmonized contaminations which are a result of influences of various cultural environments and historical epochs [Obremski 2005a: 26].

Obremski saw Porečians as people who performed rituals, but who had not yet achieved the level of Western performative arts. This difference, however, “does not prove superiority” [Schechner 2006: 81]. Regardless of whether we talk about rituals noted nearly a century ago, in a place which was different from the “natural environment” of the researcher in terms of civilization, every performance is both effective (and thus, bound to the *sacrum*), as well as entertaining. “That is,

each event proposes something to get done and each event gives pleasure to those who participate in it or observe it" [Schechner 2006: 76]. In the hybrid status of *Vodici*, according to Józef Obrębski, the main emphasis is placed on assigning it causative meaning – relating to the notion of agency (just as with other yearly celebrations), thus dominating the recreational one, and he writes the entertainment into purposeful activity.

The relation between efficacy, which is characteristic for ritual performance, and entertainment, which is inherent to the theatre, can be analyzed in accordance to the well-known model of Richard Schechner, who juxtaposes efficacy with entertainment as such:⁷

EFFICACY/RITUAL	←————→	ENTERTAINMENT/PERFORMING ARTS
Results		For fun
Link to transcendent Other(s)		Focus on the here and now
Timeless time – the eternal present		Historical time and/or now
Performer possessed, in trance		Performer self-aware, in control
Virtuosity downplayed		Virtuosity highly valued
Traditional scripts/behaviors		New and traditional scripts/behaviors
Transformation of self possible		Transformation of self unlikely
Audience participates		Audience observers
Audience believes		Audience appreciates, evaluates
Criticism discouraged		Criticism flourishes
Collective creativity		Individual creativity

Scheme 1. Ritual and theatre play. Source: Schechner 2006: 80.

The decision to call the celebration or its part a ritual or theatre [see: Kolankiewicz 1999: 31–98] depends mainly on their context and function. Where? Who? In what circumstances? What for? – these are the main questions posed by the researcher who performs a judgment which gives or takes away sacral or entertaining functions from the complex of activities. This complex of activities has a goal:

Every ritual includes elements of a spectacle. For as long as the element of sacrum prevails in it, we remain in the world of religious performance. When the entertainment wins, there is a chance for the emergence of theatre, which can now form a new quality [Jurkowski 2011: 15].

⁷ "Schechner's scheme clearly illuminates some of the differences between ritual and drama in his efficacy/entertainment model [...]. In this scheme, the two models are not viewed as discrete opposites but are conceptualized on a continuum. Schechner's contention is that all performative phenomena have varying intensities of either mode and during any historical moment, one modality is emphasized more than the other, without canceling the other out" [Ashley, Holloman 1982: 68].

If the ritual's goal is to:

effect change, then the other qualities under the heading "efficacy" [in scheme 1] will also be present, and the performance is a ritual. But if the performance's purpose is mostly to give pleasure, to show off, to be beautiful, or to pass the time, then the performance is an entertainment [Schechner 2006: 80].

The weakness of Schechner's diagram, which prevents me from using it without criticism, is the question concerning the valuing judgments made by the researcher. Who decides if the aim of the performance is efficacy or entertainment? The observing researcher or the member of celebration? There are also another important questions. Why the researcher cares about the answer at all? Why the ritual should be valued more highly than the theatre play [see: Jurkowski 2009: 19]?

Józef Obrębski did not oppose *sacrum* with the ludic, but – what contributes to the above quoted diagram – he considered them to be (to quote Schechner) "poles of a continuum [...]. Performance originates in the creative tensions of the binary efficacy-entertainment" [Schechner 2006: 79–80]. This is also the reason why in my analysis of the ritual-customary complex of *Vodici*, 80 years after the author of the first Polish systematics of spells [Engelking 2012], I follow his understanding of the hybridity of the celebrations. Simultaneously, as I want to minimize the one-sidedness of determining the ritual's goal, I decided to incorporate the *Vodici* performance, and the behaviour complexes of ritual and/or theatrical character, understood as a text ("single collective text"; "symbolic collective text" [Connerton 1989: 28]), into the concept of commemorating ceremonies [Connerton 1989; see also Halbwachs 1992; Assmann 2011; Le Goff 1992]. Thus, the research perspective can be set at the level of the ceremonial subject. That means that the participant of the ceremony, who conditions its continuity and shape, is in the centre of my interest. It is a decision close to the working method of the Józef Obrębski, "discoverer of Polish Trobriands" [Kutrzeba-Pojnarowa 1979: 72], who in the "research and description [of the groups explored] took into consideration people's subjective point of view" [Engelking 2005: 10]. Therefore I turn my attention away from the roots of the differences in the current forms of ritual-customary complex, and I do not conclude on the genological question of the verbal texts. I look at the participant of the ceremony as a follower of a religion (Christianity/Orthodoxy), religion understood as an objective fact [Sztompka 2012: 368]. According to the assertions of the theory of collective memory of religious groups, for its believers, the ceremony is a commemoration of a certain period, or event from the life of Christ, a recreation of an event that had happened at a specific historical time.

Let us shift attention away from origins or the profound meaning of myths. Instead of looking beyond these traditions to general events – the migrations and fusions of peoples, of which they are perhaps the echo – let us consider them as they appear in the eyes of the believers. All of them offer us a depiction of the life, activities, and figure of divine or sacred entities. Whether in terms of human, animal, or other traits, in every case the imagination lends them a sensible form of existence. These entities exist in or have appeared at certain places, at certain eras. They were manifested on earth. [...] If we survey the different components of the Christian cult, we realize that each one of them is essentially the commemoration of a period or an event of the life of Christ [Halbwachs 1992: 87–88].

The participant takes over the role of a *performer* [Bauman 1975: 305] and thus he gains control over the representation of the particular event from the past, and through this act over the creation of social and religious future reality, i.e. the transgression into the new status or ensuring the safety of the current status. Thus, the *performer* (*kum* in the case of *Vodici*) recreates the past event and the social boundaries (ethical, religious, sexual, etc.) currently relevant to the group, through the actions representing the event.

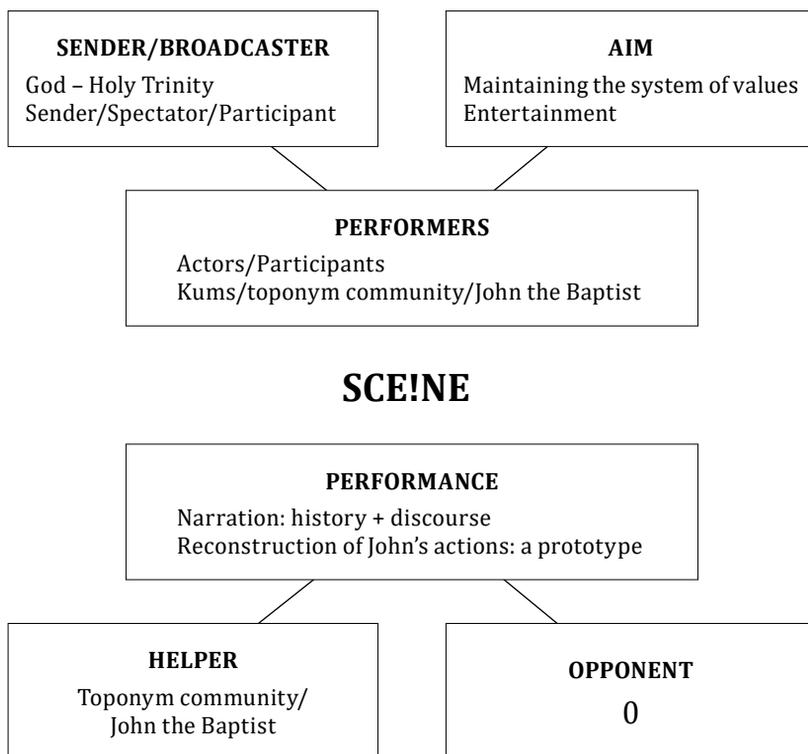
Commemorative ceremonies are distinguishable from all other rituals by the fact that they explicitly refer to prototypical persons and events, whether these are understood to have a historical or a mythological existence; and by virtue of that fact rites of this sort possess a further characteristic and one that is distinctively their own. We may describe this feature as that of ritual *re-enactment*, and it is a quality of cardinal importance in the shaping of communal memory [Connerton 1989: 61].

However, I want to underline that I do not have in mind any real event observed by people and transferred to the church tradition. The memory which works through reconstruction does not preserve the past as such. Jan Assman [2011: 27] writes that the collective memory of the apostles can be limited to *logia*, i.e. tales, sayings or sentences. The biographical elaboration of these memories did not come until later after expectations of the imminent Apocalypse have faded. Only then the remembered *logia* were built into biographies of the apostles, and thus into time and space.

In the case of Epiphany it is the Baptism of Christ in the river Jordan and the manifestation of the Holy Trinity. I reconstruct the text of this linear “happening” based on biblical and liturgical message and I subordinate its form to the ritual phases which the subject of an ever changing status undergoes [van Gennep 1960].⁸ The original text is commemorated in the form of celebration, as a complex of sequenced rituals. The way

⁸ Detailed description in: Renkas 2013b: 180–183.

in which the representation happens, in the villages where I have conducted participant observation, i.e. Bituše, Rostuše, Manastirec, Brest, Ehloec and Kičevo, shows a template emerged on the basis of the scheme of narrative by Algirdas Julien (based on the narrative schemes by Vladimir Propp).⁹



Scheme 2: *Vodici* performance (based on schemes of plot, ritual, and prototype).

The scheme of Greimas refers to the founding myths and the scheme of the form or to remembrance, i.e. the commemoration. This is how I single out texts of ritual subjects. They are understood as narratives differentiated according to the heroes changing status. Among the two main heroes of the founding text, only John the Baptist can be called a ritual subject (according to the mechanism of the passing ritual). His passing, that is, the fact that he changed status, is of importance to the change of

⁹ Works of Elena Novik [Nowik 1993] and Henryk Jurkowski [1998] served as inspiration. The scheme of the plot and the ritual and the prototype is found in Renkas 2013b and Rėkas forthcoming.

status of entire humanity, on the other hand Jesus – Human/God – did not need a Baptism, and he accepted in only to make the salvation of human kind possible. In the text of an enacted cult, John is replaced by the *kum* – a performer, and recreation of divine actions is possible thanks to the careful application of what the Christ told John. In the ceremony commemorating this task, which *kum* should fulfil, the actions of John the Baptist are re-enacted, thus, making it possible for entire community to receive the gifts of the baptized nature. The narrative schemes of the subjects changing their status: 1. show that the rituals preserve the memory differently than objects, because they refer to the past not *implicite* but *explicite* [Assmann 2011]; 2. indicate the identity of the performers/users, and thus affirm and reenact the places of belonging to various categories and social groups, 3. enable the recreation, making the founding situation a present one, as we said quoting Paul Connerton, or Dmitrii Likhachev [2014], entering the open present time.

As a result, *Vodici* produces a ritual-customary complex which is primarily established on the level of remembering and recreating the prototype text, and secondly, on the level of remembering and recreating of boundaries (i.e. social) important for the participants of the ritual. In a thus presented scheme, the productive place (i.e. the role of *performer*) has been granted to the *kum* and his activity of recreating the deeds of John, whereas the rest of participants take the position of helpers.

According to these determinations, establishment of the goal shall be accomplished from the perspective of the evoked figure and its relation with the spectator (i.e. status of the performer in the eyes of the spectator). Therefore we are dealing here with the rhetoric of the spectator [Connerton 1989], which is distinguished within the rhetoric of performance. The rhetoric of the spectator here is specifically evoked in reference to the ways of performance of the audience, and its influence on the actors/participants and their roles. Both ritual-customary complex holidays/dramas, just as the actor and the spectator (who according to the above mentioned scheme, can be understood as co-participants) are defined as texts. Actor/participant is a reader of the drama/celebration, while the spectator/participant is a reader the actor [see: Sinko 1988: 31–35].

The actor in the theatre and the performer of cultural spectacles (excluding the ritual ones) perform activities which would never be done if it was not for the spectators. The ritual performer usually is not so spectator-dependent. He is rather dependent on another performer or participant [Steiner 2003: 304].

The goal-oriented actions are fixed on the line: actor/performer/participant – spectator/audience, and the last category is related to

the demand of the audience to observe a given event but not to participate in it “theatrical situation [...] reduced to minimum [...] is reduced to a situation where A represents B and C observes it” [Bentley 1964: 4; cf: Steiner 2003: 310]. According to the narrative-ritual scheme and its *Vodici* realization, the only passive participant is God/supernatural being-broadcaster. *Vodici* does not re-enact (represent) His actions, but it re-enacts John’s actions. Still, it is God who “makes” John do certain things (in the biblical narrative) so He is the one who “orders” the yearly spectacle. At the same time, it is not Him, but John who rewards the good performance and punishes the bad (according to the semantic layer of the oral folklore about *Vodici*). Thus, the appellative *Vodici* ritual songs in the blessing function are directed to John the Baptist as he is the guarantee of their fulfilment.¹⁰ This is also how the following saying noted by Obrębski could be analyzed: “God can endure much, but the saints are very impatient” (*Gospod može mnogu da prosti, ama svetcite se mnogu nestrplivi*) [Obrembski 2001b: 56]¹¹ as well as his notes on the saints in the religious system of Poreče [Obrembski 2001b: 11–15]. “The saints are usually perceived as rigorous, guarding the ritual, merciless, and as such, punishing people for all their mistakes” (*Svetcite obično se smetaat za golemi rigori, koi stojat na stražata na ritualot i so seta bezobzirnost vo toj odnos gi kaznuvaat lugjeto za site greški*) [Obrembski 2001b: 12]. If we look at a figure of God as that of a spectator, *Vodici* becomes a theatre play, where actors play their role in the drama re-enacting behaviours which He designed in a specific historical moment (He created an event marked by specific qualities), they act before Him, before the Grand Spectator [see: Steiner 2003: 313]. His dissatisfaction would be shown by particular saints – also participants of the show, “his fellows in cosmogony and contemporary leaders” (*negovite drugari od kosmogonskite aktivnosti i negovite sovremeni predvodnici*) [Obrembski 2001b: 11]. Through buying into grace of saints one can gain the approval of God.

The spectator sees the theatrical character understood as a text [Sinko 1988: 31], and the actor, who has a specific vision of the spectator, plays the role which stays in accordance with the spectator’s expectations. The re-enacted history is made by the giver of the text and done by the spectator [Sinko 1988: 9–10]. “Performer in the world of shows becomes a theatrical actor every time when his actions bring him closer to the mimetic re-enactment of something bigger than he is” [Steiner 2003: 304]. The role of the performer can be analyzed as

¹⁰ For detailed analysis see: Rękas forthcoming.

¹¹ Of course, a different situation can be observed, for example during the Easter processions (Roman Catholic Church), which recreate the actions of Christ. Also, the importance of the presence is different and goes beyond the scope of this work.

a controlled representation, i.e. the founding hero controls the change of actors (the place of John the Baptist is taken by the *kum*): not theatrical but ritual. The S/spectator does not change but his role in the show does. Not only does he influence by his presence and demand, but he participates in it. The spectator-participant i.e. the engaged spectator, appears when the analysis (shown in the aforementioned scheme) based on religious dimension of the celebration is put in motion. Then the seemingly (!) passive member of theatrical audience becomes a participant of these “events” of recreating history as a part of narrative projected by the Spectator and programmed to repetitiveness. Even then He is the beginning and the condition of the repetition. “When something happens, the members of the event do not even know that it happens so that a scene can be repeated. This is the reason, perhaps the only one” [Kolankiewicz 1999: 98].

Taking over the role of *kum* begins with a classical separation phase of the rite of passage. Depending on the village, the passing over of *kumstvo* and giving an oath of the new *kums* to “arrange a new *kumstvo* relationship” (*go zemat novoto kumstvo*) take place on the first or second day of *Vodici*, or even on the 31st of January. Thus every year a new person and his closest ones become not the commemoration of Saint John, but his living presence on Earth. Every year, in every settlement that celebrates *Vodici*, Saint John is present, not only as a memory of the Baptist.

A thick tree has grown, / a thick tree has grown in front of the church: / with the peak, / the peak - up to the sky, / branches - down to the ground. / What is on top, / it is Saint John's, / and the branches, / are the villagers' [Ristovski 1970: song 2].

The moment of verbalizing the agreement excludes the *kums* from the status they have been granted, and it relegates new obligations. In their case this phase of exclusion is long and it corresponds with the importance of the assignment. The rhetorics of spoken word and performed gesture put responsibility for the entire rural community on the *kum* (and on his family). At the same time, in the re-enactment of the liturgical dialogue, there is a change of actors. John assigns *kum* to take his place, but he does not leave him by himself. Formally, the old and new *kums* participate in taking over the “*kumship*”, but the verbal ritual indicates a different personal code. It is John who personally passes over his role to the *kum*. “The old *kum*” who gives away his “*kumship*” to the new *kum* is John, and thus replaces him in the ritual scheme.

With good you come, Saint John. / With good I found you, ey, new *kum*. / Don't be scared, rejoice. / I am Saint John, I bring food [Interview, woman, born 1950, 2012, Bituše, researchers: Eli Lučeska, Joanna Rękas].

In regards to the textual layer of this song, there is no doubt as to the meaning of the conversation of the new *kum* with John the Baptist who comforts him like in the prototype where Jesus Christ and people were comforting John the Baptist. Recalling the character of the dialogue between Jesus Christ and John the Baptist, the repetition of the conversation “transmitted” through liturgical texts (change in the first and fourth verse of John to Jesus) is striking. In this dialogue Christ convinces John not to be afraid, as he (Jesus) brings salvation to entire world (macro perspective)/village (micro perspective). The *kum*, who replaced John in the ritual scheme (i.e. John did perform the action now repeated by *kum*), talks with John through the words of the song, just as John used to talk with Jesus Christ.

However, despite the replacement of actors in the entire ritual-customary complex of *Vodici*, *kum* is not left alone with his community which he is supposed to support and for whom he should guarantee happy passage to another year of life. The verbal rituals remind him about the Baptist’s care over him. At the same time they emphasize their exchange of roles, namely, the substitution. *Kum* is a physical replacement of Saint John, here and now, but he uses John’s support understood as blessings which the human nature acquired through the baptism given by John to Christ.

I bring food, white wheat. / White wheat, pail of *rakija*. / Pail of *rakija*, two pails of wine. / Two pails of wine, a heifer [Interview, woman, born 1950, 2012, Bituše, researchers: Eli Lučeska, Joanna Rękas].

Kum should serve his social or territorial group just like John served the humanity. Through his tasks, John became the most important prophet, and *kum* gains the respect of the people based on the fact of accepting *kumstvo*, and then, on the financial contribution he made, how well he prepared the ritual, what kind of a host he was.

Thus the agregal fulfilment of the promise given by Christ (in the liturgical narrative) to John. The effort undertaken by John, which made him the most important prophet not only repeats itself but also is realized in the amount of *kum*’s work and in the geography of actions he performs. Both the road which he passes (home – church – home on the 17th and 18th of January during the Big Water Consecration; and when he walks from home to home in the entire village, or to the cross on the 18th, 19th and 20th of January), as well as the wealth of the table where his guests are sat are representations of the Baptist’s activity and belonging.

Run, Ruža, let us run, / the wind blows – snow will snow! / Hold on, bridge, don’t swing, / *božikum* will pass, / after *božikum* – *lažikum*, / after *lažikum* – the villagers, / after the villagers – the women of the village, / after them – little children [Ristovski 1970: song 4];

Jana was serving saint John, / Jana was awaiting three tables of guests.
/ At the first table there were two young women, / at the second table,
only young men, / at the third table, all married young ones [Matijašević-
Pokupec 2000: 169];

Eat, drink, be merry. / This is saint John's party. / Saint John himself carries
and offers the food [Interview, woman, born 1950, 2012, Bituše, research-
ers: Eli Lučeska, Joanna Rękas].

These verbal rituals are acts of creation and their ontological status is directly dependent on the function of the celebration. Similarly, the relations between the actors in the staging of the commemorating ceremony are caused by the “way in which the moral rule is realized as fate dependent on higher instance” [Ajdačić 2004: 32]. But *kum* is a mediator between people and God only if he “substitutes” Saint John – the son of Zachariah and Elisabeth well enough. *Kum* who blesses (with words, gestures and holy water) every member of the community thus repeats the action of the prototype, attaining the same effect (although on micro level) as the hero-founder, i.e. John the Baptist. Of course we talk here about so called sacramental performativity, “by virtue of which the celebrant [...] is held to be restoring to them [words and gestures] their primary performativity” [Connerton 1989: 68]. The benefactor of the gift is always John the Baptist, whose founding activity is always commemorated during the rituals:

Today, Saint John is old, / Today he wakes up early / Old Saint John passed
through the street, / in his hands he carries a frozen kettle pot, / frozen
kettle, silver cow / and on the cow, a bunch of basil [Ristovski 1970: song 1].

In this context, *kum* cannot be characterized as a man who has the power to mediate between people and the supernatural [see: Ajdačić 2004: 29]. Each year, he represents, in his agreement to receive the *kumstvo*, the fiat of John the Baptist in once verbalized history. John's fiat is possible because of the biblical narrative and the historically prior fiat of Mary [Luke 1,38]. Her *fiat*, that is. Her agreement, enables the process of incorporation of God, just like the agreement of John the Baptist – enables human salvation. It is an “acting word” [Malinowski 2013], which influences the activity of the human “at the moment when, by virtue of the enunciation of the sentence, the corresponding act takes place” [Connerton 1989: 58]. The character of this relation can be compared to the joint agreement of Mother of God and John the Baptist on the God's word. The God's word precedes human reaction but also presupposes it, and triggers it, and it makes sense as long as there is an answer to it in the form of human word or act. Every year within the space of each village, a new *kum* (metaphorically) re-enacts this fiat by repeating it when he accepts the *kumstvo*. Therefore, he does not mediate

but he incorporates. The giver of gifts which can be received on micro level due to the *kum* is John – but *kum* is not an intermediary here:

Oh, host damjanin *dos, dos* / if you're sleeping, wake up, *dos*. / If you're drinking, merry *dos, dos* / merry guests have come to you, *dos*. / Merry news they brought you *dos, dos* / Merry songs they have sang for you, *dos*. / So you live long, *dos, dos* / so Saint John gives you, *dos* [Lučeska 2010].

The influence of John is not possible without the will and effort of the people who constitute the territorial/social unit. The “potential” which is brought by the figure considered sacred can be used only due to the subordination of one's own, i.e. human, will, to the God's will, which is implied by the group [Rekas 2009: 261–263]. The group's rituality, encompasses yearly celebrating of founding ceremonials, i.e. the most important “moments” of Christ's life.

Lucid symbolic function of the actions of untying and tying of the belt of the *kum*, which is the central position for the appellative narrative of the quoted songs, bears an explication element built on the rule that “similar causes similar”. These are namely two verbal rituals, which directly co-create and comment the ritual situation:

Take down the belt, old *kum*, / Untie yourself, rejoice. / Tie your belt, new *kum*. Tie it, rejoice. / In a year, merrier, / Merrier, bigger, / So we wait with the entire village, / With the entire village, with all the kin, / With all the kin and family [Obrembski 2001a: 129].

Untie the belt, old *božikum*, / tie it, new *božikum!* / So that the wine, grain is born / wine, grain, honey and milk! [Ristovski 1970: song 6];

Untie the old *kum*, old *kum*, / tie up the new *kum*, new *kum*, / so that unties the blessed field, / so it bears me, so it bears me, bears me, / so I have wine and grain, wine and grain, / wine and grain, honey and milk, honey and milk [Ristovski 1970: song 8];

Untie yourself, old *kum*, / Tie up new *kum*. / Untie yourself for the blessing, / Tie up for the blessing. / Untie yourself, old *kum*, / Tie up, new *kum*, / The old blessing has untied, / The new blessing has tied up. / So you can meet up another year / With everybody in this house [Interview, 2013, Manastirec, researchers: Vladimir Karadžoski, Eli Lučeska, Joanna Rekas].

The old *kum* takes off his belt and puts it on the new *kum*. Therefore he is excluded from his ritual status now and the status of the new *kum* is confirmed. This is the last stage of ritual-customary complex of the celebration. But this last moment is also the first one: “the holiday does not end, new best men were given their tasks, there is no break, there is no end, the village is not left without the spiritual patronage of the best man. The holiday continues” [Renkas 2013a: 148]. John can leave because his replacement stays:

God bless you with health, Saint John. / The night sends you, the morning awaits you. / In the morning this strong village awaits you. / Strong village, strong and merry [Interview, woman, born 1950, researchers: Eli Lučeska, Joanna Rękas].

The *kums* who visit and bless the families through verbal rituals also re-enact the internal group social borders. These borders are not typical for particular toponyms but rather characterize the *Vodici* independent of the place of their realization. The acts of protection and creation preserve the content differentiating the participants of the celebration according to their status in the life cycle of the individual. When the message is received, i.e. when persons verbalizing the oral text addressed to a particular person come into contact, there are social events commemorated and actualized as a choice and combination of elements which form the internal narrative of the verbalized ritual. Recreation of sexual boundaries and within them the divisions is established: child – far from being married, maid/bachelor – close to being married; young married couples – far from death, elderly people – approaching death. Through answering questions about sex, marital status, children or age, and, therefore, through a personalized extratextual narrative, the verbal ritual transmits the memory about internal social divisions.¹² A key factor here is the interdependence between the actualization of information done through medial reception and as a constructed narrative, and a faithful reception of “broadcaster’s intentions” [Erlil 2009: 219].

According to the aforementioned attempts of analysis of actions which are performed by the *kum*, one can treat them as mimetic enactment (theatre) and epiphanic recreation (ritual). At the same time, the proposed scheme uses yet another type of an evoked figure, namely the pure “being yourself” [Steiner 2003: 305] and initiation. The performer loses some elements of his own identity and gains elements of a new one, with new rights and obligations that ensue [see: van Gennep 1960]. Participant/actor is “entirely changed” in the performance [Steiner 2003: 299]. This conclusion is perfectly illustrated by the words spoken by *kums* who leave their ritual status:

Good morning, Saint John. Let this holiday last for many years. In a year we are more joyful, more merry and more numerous. Saint John, as you looked after me this entire year, please look after everybody in this village. Give them health, happiness and money. If I have done you any wrong, please forgive me, give me a new *kum*.

¹² The analysis of *Vodici* verbal rituals that led to this conclusions is available in: Rękas forthcoming.

Good morning, Saint John. Let the village be merry, merrier in a year, let the houses open. Saint John, give health, happiness, and prosperity. Saint John, we spent a year together. If I faulted you, forgive me. Saint John, thank you for watching over me, and helping me. Saint John, look after and help the new *kum* in the same way. And now, saint John, give me the new *kum*.

Good morning, Saint John. Let our village be merry, happier in a year, and even more numerous. Saint John, give me health, give me love, peace and blessing. Saint John, the last year was a year to be remembered in my life. I thank you from my heart. Just like you looked after me, you gave me health, success, peace, I wish the same to the new *kum*. And now, Saint John, give me the new *kum* [Interview, 2014, Ehloec, researcher: Joanna Rękas].

Thus the continuity of hybrid status of *Vodici* analyzed in the goal-oriented (and thus spectator- and actor-oriented) optics of performance rhetoric encompasses in the framework of the commemorating ceremony the following statuses: theatre (mimetic reenactment), ritual (epiphanic incarnation) and initiation, i.e. the transformation of the performer and his pure “being self”. All three types of performance co-create the same event. Their coexistence functions as a homogenic uniformity and although it includes three contradictory elements, it does not exclude the possibility of their change and communication. On the contrary, this coexistence becomes a qualifier of the performance. Each type of performance co-forming *Vodici* does not function as a parallel world for the rest. In this complex and syncretic entity, there is no separation or mix.

Due to repetitiveness (prior participation), knowing the rules of verbal forms, dress, proper use of objects etc., the founding tale produced by the Spectator is told to him every year. The variantization (space-time, depending on the socio-cultural and historical context) encompasses elements of the discourse, i.e. “means and ways through which history is presented to the spectators” [Sinko 1988: 9]. Variantization in which also other spectators participate (participants observing enacted roles and judging the result, or researchers – as the actors try to play their roles in front of them “most accurately and according to the tradition” – [Sinko 1988: 9]) includes these elements of the role which have no influence on the construction of the narrative scheme of the tale. Of course, the variantization within the rhetorics of the spectator can be seen on two levels: macro (differences), i.e. shape of the form of the cult depending on the religious and historical conditions and micro (variantization) of the ritual-customary complex within one *kumstvo* (or one *Vodici* cross) and/or one toponym.

At the same time, the act of (un)conscious participants (actors) in the divine theatre [see aforementioned quote from Kolankiewicz 1999: 98] plays a role ascribed to the ritual in the performative rhetoric which is expressed by the influence of particular representation

(material retrieved through participant observation) on the participant and the audience. It is therefore not the social function of the performative act, like creation and recreation of religious, ethnic, inter-social boundaries (i.e. the memory about social and family relations). The main questions in the rhetoric of the actor/participant are: what is happening to the society in the moment of recreation/representation? What boundaries are recreated? What is a subject of affirmation? The ability to recreate the social boundaries [Bourdieu 1991; Cohen 2001; Lubaś 2011] and to transmit and realize meanings that are important for culture [Assmann 2011] are these characteristics of rituals which a researcher of calendar rituality and life cycle of the individual discovers independently from the initial questions and assumptions. The two types of relations: ritual – social border, rite – repository of collective memory, differentiate the demarcation orientation determined by founding memory (also known as remembered past) [Assmann 2011]. It means that the type of recreated social “correlations between persons who belong to specific categories of groups” [Lubaś 2011: 136], as well as their efficacy in the spatial production of locality [Appadurai 1996: 178] (that is, confirming and strengthening the status of the community) are a result of individual qualities of the group, such as its social structure, religious, ethnic affiliation, the necessity (or its lack) of an immediate confrontation with groups perceived as different and/or opposite. Different, in terms of religion and society, foundation events cause the rites to refer back to different past and indicate various identity of its users [Assmann 2011]. For this reason the *Vodici* rhetoric of actor/participant encompass ways of influencing the spectator (another participant, John the Baptist, God) which are realized within internal borders (the status in social organization; recreation of the borders of internal social structure), and inter-societal borders (recreation of religious and ethnic boundaries).

The actor – reader of the drama understood as a text – apart from the well told story and the proper influence on the *katharsis*, simply wants to be a good actor.

When instead of being focused on the figure of Hamlet, we focus on the actor, we stop treating the figure as a text which has some meaning: we just mean that it is “written” by the actor [Sinko 1988: 73].

I have observed this kind of approach to the figure of *kum* during the *Vodici* celebration in Bituše, when *kums* competed for the biggest number of *kumstarki* to come to their homes (to transfer *kumstvo* to the new *kum*: *za da kveaat kumstvo na novite kumovi*) and the participants/audience would comment on what new the *kum* brought to the part he plays, or which actions performed by him are well done, or how the way

in which an action was performed would influence the win. The audience would also talk about the play of the *kums* from a couple of years ago. In the rhetoric of one's own person the *kum*/actor creates a picture of one self: 1. his religious group; 2. his ethnic group;¹³ 3. one self/one's own family, but also that of the 4. spectator. The institution of *kum* does not only constitute a religious function, but also enables him to communicate history (a story of his family and community, entire village). One man becomes a story, through the *kum* the entire group which he represents is "told". The creative and protective functions of all verbal rituals addressed to particular people which shape is not dependent on the role of the person in the ritual-customary complex, but on the place in the social group organization, is confirmed by the final direct forms of blessings.

– Is Saint John the Baptist mentioned during the *Vodici*?

I: Yes, yes, of course, how could he not?

– In the conversations, or in the songs?

I: In the songs, these that are going to be danced for midday meal, they call it here, "to the help of Saint John". Yes, to the help. Not "good morning", or "good afternoon". "To the help of Saint John". He is being mentioned, yes. And the guests are coming, friends if you have some, will come if they want. They go, so you invite them so they see how is it. Whoever is interested... And it is nice, how could it not be... [Interview, woman, born in Topolnica, researcher Joanna Rękas].

In a year merrier, / Merrier and bigger, / So we wait with the entire village / With the entire village, with all the kins, / With all the kin and all the families [Obremski 2001a: 129].

Oh, my dear granddaughter, what is our sister doing. / Now the grandma was washing up, to come for *Vodici*. / To come for *Vodici*, for *Vodici*, as a guest. / To whom we will give this song, the gift is to be to the fate. / So you meet up next year with everybody in this house [Interview, 2013, Manastirec, researchers: Vladimir Karadžoski, Eli Lučeska, Joanna Rękas].

So that you have a kind daughter, so you have a kind son. / So that your daughter meets up, *ajde* [let's], so we intermarry. / To whom we will give this song, the gift is to be to the fate. / So that you meet up next year with all the others in this house [Interview, 2013, Manastirec, researchers: Vladimir Karadžoski, Eli Lučeska, Joanna Rękas].

So that you meet up the next year, / so you meet up many next ones! [Veličkovska 2006: 119].

¹³ And more broadly it should refer to his ethnographic, territorial or regional group. In his works Obremski consequently used the term "ethnic group" which he did not identify with the nation, i.e. Engelking 2005; Obremski 2005b; 2005c.

So that you meet up the next year, yoy, / with everybody in the house, yoy,
/ with all the village meetings, yoy! [Ristovski 1970: song 22].

The final forms of blessings, frequently separated from verbal rituals and brought to the sole form of blessing include elements of “calling the good wishes” [Ajdačić 2004: 29] and explain the function of narrative scenes which they precede:

Let our house be strong and merry;

Let the wine and grain be born / wine and grain, honey and milk;

Wherever there is a woman, the first year is taken. So that children are born, children like bears [Interview, woman, born 1950, researchers: Eli Lučeska, Joanna Rękas].

As many drops, as many gifts and blessings, / where it is plowed / let there be born, / let there be born. / Just are those that are done, / let them be born [Interview, woman, b. 1943, Dolno Zrkle; researcher: Joanna Rękas].

If the point of reference for the analysis of the hybrid status of *Vodici* would be the scene on which the ritual/theatre play are enacted, then the place of the person in the ritual-customary complex of the celebration is further on, and on the first plan there is affirmation of intergroup borders (toponymic, religious, ethnical, depending on the actual need of the group [Engelking 2005: 21; Obrębski 2005b; 2005c: 91–95]). The scene is not the house of *kum* or especially built *kukja za Vodici* (house for *Vodici*), but the space of toponym (village/city): in 1933 inhabited by the participants of *Vodici* (everyday space physically equated with the ritual action space), and in 2011–2014, full of people only during *Vodici*. The deterritorialization [Cohen 2001; Bourdieu 2001; Appadurai 1996] seems to result in stronger affirmation of the separating functions of the scene in *Vodici* rituals. It is one of these topics in the narrative of Obrębski about *Vodici* where he stops his inquiry only signaling the problem [Obrębski 2002]. 80 years after his research this inquiry seems to be the most important due to expropriation of the inhabitants from their natural socio- and biosystem [Miodyński 2008: 259].

As I have already mentioned, Józef Obrębski tended to underline the uniqueness of *Vodici* juxtaposed against the rest of the celebrations of the calendar and life cycle of the individual, based on its male orientation:

A salient feature of the village’s ritual activities is the predominant part played in their performance by women. Although in the Epiphany ritual, the paramount rite of the yearly cycle, men are the main actors, in all other ritual activities women dominate the scene. In some of them they are the sole and exclusive performers in principle or in fact [Obrębski 1977: 5].

Obrebski was puzzled by the fact that in the other ritual actions it were women who performed the leading role, which stood in opposition with their social role. The celebrations the Christ's Baptism are, in his narration, the only celebrations which stay in accordance with patrilineality. The main attention is brought to the relation between the social roles and the ritual roles, as well as to the *explicite* dominance of ritual female roles over the male ones takes place, where the ritual-customary complex of Epiphany with recreating the spatial borders of the toponym. Obrebski does not make this connection despite his conclusions about the description of *Vodici* and its ritual role:

Only the male agnatic descendants of the founders of the village have indisputable rights to residence in the community, to patrimony, to the utilization (under the customary land tenure system) of the village's resources and also, according to their family status, to participation in making decisions of public concern through the intermediary of the village council. In the workings of this patrilineal system, a sharp differentiation is made between the status of men, natives of the village, and that of women, the strangers [Obrebski 1977: 6].

In the situation where there is no immediate threat of losing identity of the toponym, i.e. its expropriation, the question of recreating territorial boundaries through actions that create the festivities was not emphasized by Obrebski. Similarly today, during the participant observation in quite densely populated Manastirec or Brest, this question does not come to the fore. However in Bituše, which has a status of a dying village, it is different. The unchanging topography of the village connected to its fixed geography of ritual actions, becomes a repository of memory about creating the "local subjects, actors" [Appadurai 1996: 179], who recreate in the rite all that is important for the community:

No collective memory can exist without reference to a socially specific spatial framework. That is to say, our images of social spaces, because of their relative stability, give us the illusion of not changing and of rediscovering the past in the present [Connerton 1989: 37].

The main characteristic of the scene in the conditions of deterritorialization is socialization. This tendency was shown as follows: closed safe space – non-safe space (church, monastery, sometimes in the same village, but without belonging to the same *cross/kumstvo*); the point in the open space which gives the sense of certainty, the return to closed space. Under expropriation the scene becomes more complicated: 1. Ensuring safety of the village and then leaving it, but the *kums* "stay" – they become prepared in the city, 2. The objects, place, and actions have only ritual function, they lose the ordinary function because of the lack of socialization.

Apart from territorial separation observed in Bituše, the ritual actions which form the celebrations of *Vodici* recreate ethnic/ethnographic boundaries. In the work *Remembrance of the borders, the demarcating productivity of Vodici in the Mijak villages of Bituše and Ehloec* [Rękas forthcoming; Polish title: *Pamięć o granicach. Demarkacyjna produktywność Wodzic w mijackich wsiach Bituše i Ehloec*], I have tried to show how Mijaks consecrate the difference between people who fulfil the duty of becoming subjects to the ritual (of *Vodici*) and people “who are not allowed to do so” [Lubaś 2011: 135]. *Vodici* became thus a *slametan* of Clifford Geertz: a ritual based on territorial divisions, immune to urban change of the rural model (which was “abandoned” by the performers): “*slametan* remains unchanged, blind to the major lines of social and cultural demarcation in urban life”, ignoring the newly constructed “patterns of social integration among opposed groups” [Geertz 1973: 168]. Both villages revive during the summer, when people from Skopje, Kičevo come back to their parents’ houses. They are most numerous for the Epiphany celebrations, when nearly all houses are full. Then, the *kum*, a performer, as the most important person of the ritual, influencing its shape and success, through his ritual acts transmits the memory of borders which have no spatial reference (confirmation) and which have become blurred in the city. There, when it comes to relations at school or work, assuming the role of the city dweller, and not that of a member of ethnic/religious group, is welcomed. As Thomas Hylland Eriksen notices, fluid and negotiable ethnic framework depends on the situation [Eriksen 2002]. The remembrance of the borders is in case of the *Vodici* ritual transmitted in “geography of action”¹⁴ undertaken by *kum* (according to the above analysis). Nevertheless, it applies mainly to the end of the status exclusion phase the entire liminal period and beginnings of the aggregation phase.¹⁵

The above presented proposal of analyzing the continuity of hybrid status of *Vodici* (1933–2014) does not claim to be an exhaustive, or fully objective analysis. It is rather only an attempt of such an inquiry. Analysis of ritual complexes of festivities, which according to the rhetorics of the calendar are placed in the category of commemoration, requires from the researcher to listen to the “arguments” of many sides, sometimes contradictory. That is why I want to emphasize that the proposed results of the analysis, are only an attempt. All in all, “the text as a whole, and as a singular whole, may be compared to an object, which may be viewed from several sides, but never from all sides at once” [Ricoeur 1976: 77].

Translated from Polish by Olimpia Dragouni

¹⁴ I use the term of geography of practical actions after Tim Edensor [2002: 93].

¹⁵ For detailed description with division to ritual stages see: Renkas 2013: 183–189.

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Robert Statkiewicz

ONE PRACTICE, SEVERAL METHODS: FORTUNE-TELLING WITH COFFEE GROUNDS IN POREČE, MACEDONIA – PAST AND PRESENT

Introduction

80 years ago Józef Obrębski observed, analyzed, and described magical practices in Poreče. In my research, I was interested in the present day state. I examine what has changed in terms of practice and narratives: my interest stems not only from my status of a student, but also from the personal perspective of a person who has always been fascinated by magic and even attempted to learn palm reading as well as other esoteric practices. For this reason I chose the topics of fortune-telling using coffee grounds and traditional healing through words called *baenje*.

I learned this word from *baba* Riza,¹ who taught me coffee divination (tasseomancy) and told me a lot about *baenje* as she herself is considered a *bajačka* – a person, who knows the formulas of *baenje* and heals people using this method. I spent a lot of time with Riza and we became close friends. Many of my interviews with her seemed to be general conversations or lessons, where Riza was my “professor” and I was her student. Riza’s biography constituted an important part of my BA thesis, which included her thoughts and views on some of the aspects of *baenje*. Of course, I also interviewed other people who – like Riza – are connected with the world of magic, healing, and divination. I met *bajačka* Mitana and *čičko*² Miloš, who was a fortune-teller³ able to perform tasseomancy. Thanks to that,

¹ In Macedonia it is common to use the forms *baba* (grandma) and *dedo* (grandpa) when referring to elders.

² It is possible to use the forms *čičko* and *tetka* (literally “uncle” and “aunt”) for middle-aged people in Macedonia.

³ In Macedonian, *gledač* means literally: the one, who sees, hence: a seer.

I could notice the differences and similarities in their individual styles, and also the discontinuities between two Poreče cultures: that of the 1930s, and of present day.

In this article I will attempt to describe and analyze coffee divination which I believe to be an important and interesting part of Poreče's culture. This is mainly due to popularity of this practice in everyday life – many people in this region come to Riza just to hear her predictions. It is also significant because tasseomancy is subject to change and is being influenced by some of the new trends observed in present day Macedonia.

Fortune-telling in Obrębski's work

Tasseomancy is generally absent from Obrębski's articles. He rarely mentioned anything about coffee,⁴ which is an extremely popular drink these days. Moreover coffee was most probably present in Poreče at the time of Obrębski's field research, and coffee divination is at least 100 years old. I learnt this from Riza, who is now almost 80 years old.

Obrębski presents some information about fortune-tellers but presently their profession underwent changes. In Obrębski's writings I found claims that the main role of divination was to recognize the reasons behind misfortunes, illnesses, and plagues. My observations differ from this. I noted differences in the choice of potential fortune-teller, in learning the process and the interpretation of the signs. In *The Religion of Macedonian Giaours* Obrębski wrote:

In order to become a fortune-teller, one must perform a specific social function. This duty is acquired by birth: apart from learning divination techniques (fortune-telling by water, bones etc.), passed from mentors and teachers, one does necessarily need to have the gift of clairvoyance. [...] Clairvoyant predictions can also be made based on dreams which allow contact with another world: with saints and spirits of the dead, and make it possible to thus retrieve information and advice on a variety of the world's problems [Obrębski n.d. c: 25–26].

In the same article Obrębski noted that people treat fortune-tellers like half-saints. I never witnessed such an attitude or treatment, whereas the motifs of dream realms and contacting with the deceased are more typical for *baenje*⁵ [Radenković 1996: 218–223]. Of particular importance

⁴ “The ritual compensation of this feast modesty [is] placed [in] the middle of tablecloth, coffee cup filled with [seeds of] all raised plants in farm” [Obrębski n.d. a: 14].

⁵ I do not aim to say that Obrębski was wrong nor want to argue with his claims. I perceive these differences more as a sign of change between past and nowadays Poreče.

however is Obrębski's claim that both women and men can perform fortune-telling, which also seems to be pertinent today. However, tasseomancy itself is absent in Obrębski's works (maybe it was considered by him simply as one of the many ways of fortune-telling), while in present day it seems to be the most important method of fortune-telling still practiced in the Poreęe region.

Contemporary fortune-telling in Poreęe

Here I would like to present the biographies and practices of two of the (probably) best known coffee ground readers in Poreęe – *bajačka baba* Riza and the clairvoyant *ęięko* Miloš. I will attempt to analyze their techniques of fortune-telling. I will also explain why I refer to Riza as *bajačka* and not a fortune-teller, and in the same manner why Miloš is a fortune-teller and not *bajač*. The Macedonian word *bajka* literally denotes the activity of *baenje* but also means prediction. This is important as I did not perceive the fortune-telling element to be a part of *baenje* before the research. In his works about *baenje* Obrębski never mentioned prophecies, however because of the meaning of *bajka*, and the Old Slavonic word *baja* which means: 1. doctor, folk healer; 2. fortune-teller, magician; I argue that the term *bajačka* can be defined not only as healing through words, but also as fortune-telling [cf. Bielenin 2003].

In the field however, divination is not considered a traditional occupation of *bajačka*, who could not uphold their folk-healer status should they engage in fortune-telling. Local people do not recognize a person with clairvoyant abilities as a folk healer but as a fortune-teller. Divination is only one of the elements which can be involved in *baenje*. There is a distinction between the institutions of the fortune-teller and the folk healer, but if a person can perform both actions (like Riza), (s)he is always called *bajač(ka)*.

Baba Riza

Riza says she is 79 years old, but she probably does not really remember or know her age (once she told my friend that she is 84 years old). Riza believes that celebrating birthdays is only for young people.

She lives in Dolno Zrkle, a small village located close to Samokov, though still one of the biggest ones in Poreęe and the closest to the main road. Other than that, Dolno Zrkle is a quiet, almost depopulated village.

In order to reach Riza's, house one has to pass a small stream with no real bridge – there were only a few unstable planks propped against a big pipe (as I later learned a concrete bridge was being built there). After crossing the stream one still needs to walk a few-minutes up the hill where Riza's house is located. If you follow this mountain path, you will pass an old farm and some fields where vegetables (probably beans) are grown.

Riza's house has two floors, but only the first floor is open to everyone. The second is only for Riza and the members of her family who come there for the holidays or sometimes for a few days in order to help her out. On the ground floor there is a special guest room which looks like a typical room in a local rural house in Poreče's – a bit obscure, and with no hardwood floor, only packed dirt (earthen floor). Inside there is a fridge, an oven, a sink, an old sofa, and a little wooden hand-made coffee table where a lot of coffee was spilt.

Every time I was in Poreče, I visited her almost daily. She would greet me hunched over, wearing a sweater-like jacket and a headscarf with a floral pattern typical for women of her age. After happy words of greeting, she would lead me with her slow, wobbly walk of an elderly woman to the guestroom, where I could hear her stories and observe her everyday activities.

She would always smile and even though her life was a harsh one (she comes from a rich family but her father chose a poor husband for her, whom she did not even love), she was optimistic and always poured me coffee. She would swear quietly if she spilt some of it, just like the youth from Samokov. When she smiled with her big, gap-toothed grin, her eyes would shine brightly. Usually in a good mood ("good for everyone", as she often said), she would reminisce about past times and comment on the present. Sometimes she smoked an occasional cigarette. However, whenever she talked about *baenje*, her voice and expression became serious.

I have noticed that she was well known by many people in Poreče, even those from faraway villages. One time a friend of mine heard: "You didn't come to Poreče if you didn't come to Riza's" [field notes, 08.2013]. When the coffee cooled down a bit and was ready to drink, I would usually begin to listen to the stories of my friend – Riza.

Riza learned all that she knows from her father. That is quite unusual because in the tradition of Poreče magical rites are the realm of women and they can be done only by them [Risteski 2004: 107–108]. The same applies to *baenje*, where a male folk healer – *bajač*, is a rarity.

Hodžas⁶ are doing that [*baenje*, magic stuff], but among us Macedonians, I think, there is no man [to do that], or [maybe] if he had a dream – there is no

⁶ Hodža is a Muslim cleric or teacher.

other possibility [for him to do so] [Interview, Mitana, woman, 70 years old, Gorno Zrkle].

No, father told me everything. He read from a book, in a dream he had a book and read, in a dream he had it, and so it was, and so it was. In a dream, when he was reading, he did this to his memory! He was 90, and I told him "why don't you tell me?" [...] He was reading and told me everything. "That [should be done] this way, and that another way. You must learn everything by heart" [Interview, Riza, woman, 79 years old, Dolno Zrkle].

In the memories of villagers from Ramne (Riza's home place) her father Veljan was a great healer who specialized in healing headaches, for which he used a rock. He would take one and with it touch the suffering person's head. He would whisper his secret formula⁷ and then throw the rock on the ground. He would repeat the ritual two more times.

Interestingly enough, Riza herself does not use this method. She knows other ways of healing headaches and uses them. But who taught her those methods? And more importantly – who taught her the tasseomancy? I learnt that Riza had two teachers – not only her father but also her grandmother. I do not know her name, nor if she was Riza's maternal or paternal grandmother. Nevertheless, the method of fortune-telling by coffee grounds used by Riza is very old – probably over 100 years,⁸ and has been passed down from generation to generation within the family.

The age of this method is important because Obręski, in his early works, did not even mention coffee-based prophecies and he rarely mentioned coffee itself even though it has long been a popular drink in the Balkans. He was probably not interested in this particular divination technique.

Riza's view on the institution of *bajačka* is truly interesting. She became a folk healer when she was 22 years old and a wife to a poor farmer, which stands in contradiction to the tradition of Poreče region.

⁷ In *baenje*, a secret magical formula is whispered. This is a defensive strategy preventing others from overhearing the individual language of the healer and stealing it, thus making the words unusable for the original sorcerer.

⁸ I estimated this by adding Riza's age and her grandmother's age when Riza was born. There are more accurate information about the consumption of coffee in this regions. Božidar Jezernik wrote in his book that coffee arrived in the Balkans in 1526 [Jezernik 2011: 115]. It was highly popular in the Muslim culture but there is no clear information as to when this drink became popular in the Balkan-Christian culture. We could find only sparse information related to this issue. In the 17th century, there was a lot of cafés (*kafani*) in Macedonia – in Ohrid, Bitola and Radovi. Coffee was popular among all the mountain communities throughout the Balkans (like in Poreče) in the end of the 19th century – it was drunk by everyone, even by poor people from small, mountain villages [Jezernik 2011: 116]. Jezernik mentions Rebecca West, an English publicist, who claimed, that in the middle of the 20th century, there was at least one café in every Macedonian village. She also maintained that there were "a lot of" cafés in Skopje [Jezernik 2011: 130–131].

Obrębski states that *baenje* could be done only by women older than 50 who can no longer become pregnant [Obrębski 2005: 82].⁹ Riza however treats *baenje* like any other job. I realized this when I was talking with other *bajačka* from Gorno Zrkle – Mitana, a teacher in the local school married to the former school principal. She told me about all restrictions – when she can and cannot do *baenje*.¹⁰ She also explained that she should never demand any kind of compensation from people – if they want to give her something, they can, but never as an official “payment”:

They ask me “what is the price?” I tell them “I have no tariff”. If they want – they pay, but they can’t put it in my hand. When they are leaving – if they want – they drop the money on the ground. That’s how it looks. If you want – you give something, if not – you don’t. Someone brings you coffee, someone buys packets of sweets, and someone else leaves the money for me. [...]. It is necessary to do that, doing it in a true, good and honest way. If you are doing that for money, that means that you don’t help others, but you help only yourself with this money [Interview, Mitana, woman, 70 years old, Gorno Zrkle].

Riza’s only restriction about *baenje* is not to work on Sundays – however on occasion she breaks this rule, if someone is in need or comes to her from far away.

On Sundays I’m resting, but I heard from my... my son... He was ill. [...] and once I had a dream, there were women in it. Here. I was dreaming, and she told me in my dream “if you are working on Sunday, you will never have a child!” And I haven’t worked on Sunday for 40 years [Interview, Riza, woman, 79 years old, Dolno Zrkle].

This is probably also determined by her faith in God.

More importantly, Riza has her own “price list” for *baenje* and *taseomancy*. The payment does not resemble a purchase at the market, nor does it resemble a visit to a medium – it rather appears like second economy [Verdery 1996: 27–28], where people give her cigarettes, homemade *rakija*, or meat of a hunted boar in exchange for her services.

- And what do the people give you for fortune-telling? Money or food...?
- For fortune-telling? Cigarettes and coffee! [Interview, Riza, woman, 79 years old, Dolno Zrkle].

⁹ Obrębski writes there about “true folk healers” (*prava basnarica*). No one ever used this term in reference to Riza, but she plays a similar role for people from Poreče. The fact is, that every woman can do *baenje* but only for her own family and home needs. Riza used her healing techniques in her twenties also for people who did not belong to her family.

¹⁰ She cannot perform it on Sundays and Mondays, or when there is a full moon, or a holy day. What is more healing warty skin can only be done on Wednesdays and Saturdays. She can perform the ritual only before 12 p.m. because after this time “the power is running”.

Tomorrow you'll also leave money on the rock¹¹ [Interview, Riza, woman, 79 years old, Dolno Zrkle].

Another important fact is how Riza perceives the issue of her legacy. She wants to pass it on like her father did:

I want to do it like my father did. A moment before my death, I don't know – a month, a day, an hour – I'll take a person standing closest to me, I'll grab his/her shirt, and tell him/her everything that I know, just like my father did [field notes, 08.2013].

Čičko Miloš

Miloš is about 60 years old, he knows tasseomancy and a variety of healing methods but is probably not as famous in Poreče as Riza. When I first visited him, he welcomed me with hospitality, just like most of the people in the region. During our conversation I revealed my interest in esoteric matters and demonstrated a basic knowledge of fortune telling using coffee. Miloš seems to have been fascinated by the magical world from the earliest years of his life. He was probably under the influence of his mother who had the ability to undo spells. She passed part of her knowledge to her son, but unfortunately did not pass the special formula of breaking the spell on to him before she died.

I have no idea what should be done. She was 89 years old. I said "Mom, tell me" and she said: "no", and later: "maybe yes, maybe no" and she died, and did not tell me! She learned everything from one old woman¹² from Modrište when she was a little girl [Interview, Miloš, man, ca. 60 years old, Belica].

Miloš did not know the words known by his mother, but the magical practices he knew did not lose the power after revealing its formula

¹¹ This sentence is connected to one of the rituals of *baenje* performed by Riza on me. In the rite I had to sit on a rock in the forest and Riza was using salt and a knife to cast the evil spirits out of me and to guarantee love, health, and luck instead. It was a clear demand to leave money. Although it may seem like a gift that Mitana was talking about, this is not a voluntarily gift. I encountered this situation and a few others which were a clear order to pay. Once Riza, in really bad mood, told my colleagues from the research group, that they should pay 2 euro for coffee fortune-telling. That could have been seen as reasonable because of her mood and fact that a lot of people had visited her earlier and had not brought anything in the form of gift. Also, during my first travel in 2012, I and my friend from Skopje (at that time she was part of the research group) were told about "Riza's tariff". She herself told us about prices for a few of her rites [field notes, 2012].

¹² The word used was *baba*, i.e. this woman could have been either an elder or the actual grandmother of Miloš's mother.

like “real *baenje*” should.¹³ Therefore, his practices can be performed by anyone, although there are other limitations and additional conditions of the ritual or the appropriate time to perform it. Miloš is renowned for the fact that he can tell the fortune. However, he does not regard his activities as *baenje*: “No! I don’t heal with words! Only my mother did that. She could undo spells” [Interview, Miloš, man, ca. 60 years old, Belica]. The way Miloš perceives passing the knowledge about *baenje* and fortune-telling to others is important – he believes that the most important prerequisite is the interest and the will to learn. Prophetic dreams or duty to teach the youngest child are not important to him: “If you are interested in this – you’ll learn. But if you aren’t interested – you won’t learn” [Interview, Miloš, man, ca. 60 years old, Belica].

Fortune-telling with coffee grounds

Being aware of the differences, I will try to compare the methods of *čičko* Miloš with those of *baba* Riza in regards to tasseomancy.

In both Riza’s and Miloš’s method, after drinking the coffee you should turn your cup upside down. After a few moments, the fortune-teller takes this cup and starts to read figures which (s)he sees in the cup. With the help of the symbols (s)he interprets the character, past, present, and future of the person. When (s)he ends reading and explaining what is seen in the cup, the person who drank the coffee has to put (usually) an index finger into the cup and leave a print on the bottom. At the same time this person should wish for something in his/her mind. Afterwards, judging from the symbol left by the finger, the fortune-teller will assess whether the wish is going to be fulfilled.

Riza and the bi-coloured method

Riza, as I mentioned, learnt tasseomancy from her grandmother. Based on this fact, I think that her method is older than that of Miloš, or at least “more traditional”. The whole process takes place in the small guestroom at a small table. Riza is primarily known for her divination from coffee and many people visit her for this reason. She did not seem to be bothered by the fact that she had to repeat divinations for the same person for several days in a row (this was my case). However, it should be noted

¹³ Miloš knows formulas of “not-true *baenje*” for healing rash and warty skin.

that my case was probably not very typical because of how much time we spent together. I noticed that she possesses numerous coffee cups in order to always have enough for all the visitors.

Many people come here. Yes, they have beautiful wishes. Boys, girls – everyone comes to me from Preska, Tetovo, one girl came here to me with Vlatko. Vlatko is back for holidays. People come. Many come here. Youngsters and elders. From Zrkle and other mountain villages. Yes, yes. Someone will come. It's good, that you see other people in your house. If there is no one, it is bad [Interview, Riza, woman, 79 years old, Dolno Zrkle].

When asked, Riza tells the symbols and explains their meanings to interested people, and because of this people who come to her more frequently could also learn to interpret some of the symbols themselves. However, Riza passes only the knowledge about these symbols which, she believes, are true, i.e. sheep, horses etc.

Coffee cups have a traditional shape, similar to a hemisphere. A small saucer is given with each cup. The divination process begins with the first gulps of coffee taken by the visitor, which actually does not differ from any normal coffee-drinking visit of friends or neighbours. So in this case, just like during regular visits, it is good practice to bring some sweets. People also give Riza cigarettes or small amounts of money but I had the luck not to be obliged to pay, especially as it seems that Riza not only accepts but even requests gifts in exchange for the prophecy.

When the drink is finished, the cup with coffee leftovers must be gently shaken. Then the cup is reversed, placed on the saucer and left there for some time, specified by Riza. When she has made the decision to look into the cup, she takes it and starts reading figures from coffee leftovers. Then both she and her guest become quiet and focused, concentrating on *bajačka's* words and occasionally reacting to them with happiness, laughter, or a disconsolate yell.

I called this method bi-coloured because Riza distinguishes only two colours – the blackness of the coffee grounds and the whiteness of the cup. One figure could come in two colour variations. Then the meanings of these figures are opposite.

We can divide symbols into two groups:

- a) Figures referring to nature, like a mountain, a chicken, a snake. Their colour is often unimportant to the interpretation. An exception can be made for the symbol of a star, which has a black and white variant, probably as it is strictly connected to fortune of the person asking for prophecy. A white star means a bright, successful future. The black signifies a shady-looking individual.
- b) Figures referring to culture, i.e. a cross, a person, a house, a letter. In this case the colour is important, for example in order to describe

someone's hair colour, the character of the person or of the figure. According to this, a white cross means birth or a new episode in one's life, but a black one is the omen of death.

A single figure is not analyzed deeply, as it often means a single word (for example a horse symbolizes speed, a sheep – love). A deep interpretation is done for many symbols grouped in one place, especially when two figures from the abovementioned groups are interconnected e.g. a chicken on a branch, five people on a path, a person on a mountain.

We can also observe the opposition of the old and the young but I have encountered it only once, in the group a) figures referring to the nature. A young chicken means good news but its mature form does not; a hen stands for bad news and a rooster is a symbol of emigration, of moving out of the village.

Whatever remains on the saucer is also important; Riza takes a look and interprets it when the sign is either obvious, clear, and as such very important, or is an omen of happiness (for instance, when a relatively large amount of grains falls onto the saucer it symbolizes wealth).

Coffee foam is rarely analyzed. Only once did I observe this type of interpretation, when Riza described the meaning of this omen to me. On the surface there was a big heart-shaped sign (although to me it looked like lungs) which means life filled with love. And once again it seems that only clear signs are being interpreted in this way.

Miloš and the tri-coloured method

Miloš learned to read the symbols by observing how other people read them. He tried to do the same, always asking the person he was doing it for whether they thought his interpretation was right or not. His method is probably a combination of techniques used by other fortune-tellers.

I will tell you. Wait. Robert, even I don't know. I'll tell you what people were saying. I'll tell, but... [laughter] But I don't know what. We'll see! [Interview, Miloš, man, ca. 60 years old, Belica].

I called this method tri-coloured as the figures appear in three colours: black – when grounds of coffee form an obvious shape; white – when coffee grounds form a thin contour around the whiteness of the cup; and red – when space within the contour is filled with light-brown coloured liquid.

Miloš does not expect payment in exchange for coffee divination but the custom is to bring him something to eat or a small gift. This man does not perform fortune-telling in a special room. He uses his living room, and the dining table, which faces a big collection of animal horns and fangs.

Miloš can perform divination from all types of cups but he prefers the cone-shaped ones – with a long, thin base, broadening at the top. For him, the saucer is not important. He puts the overturned cup on a napkin and afterwards takes the cup in his hand without even looking at the shapes on the napkin.

As I have previously mentioned, the fortune-teller distinguishes three colours and I believe that each figure has its three colour variants. Colour could greatly influence the meaning of the figure, which is clear in the following case of the horse symbol: “White horse – bad luck, but red one – luck! Black horse – money” [Interview, Miloš, man, ca. 60 years old, Belica].

Apart from the figures listed above, Miloš can read the auspicious day, or the name of the saint who is our guardian. In general, the whole process of Miloš’s fortune-telling seems to be closely related to religion, in this case to Orthodox Christianity. This is not limited to reading the names of saints and angels (i.e. one’s patrons). Miloš also orders one to make a sign of the cross on top of the cup with one’s hand before the cup of coffee is turned over. It bears similarity to ritual making of the cross sign over unbaked bread, to ensure that it would be good and tasty. The same gesture over a cup might be understood as asking God for a merciful fate.

As I have shown above there are big differences between the two tasseomancy methods. Intuition of the person performing the divination is essential, just as his/her knowledge. The knowledge provides the seer with some means of “control” – only then one can properly read the shapes that emerge in the cup. It also helps in making a choice which symbols are important for the person that came for a prophecy.

The meaning of prophecies by Porečans

Everyday life in Poreče, its natural beauty and the warmth of its people notwithstanding, is rather harsh. After the collapse of Yugoslavia the economy worsened and the region became depopulated. When the main employer – the “Suvenir” factory – shut down, people found themselves in a new, challenging situation. The former employer had not only provided money but also organized cultural events, yet all this was dismantled. In my opinion, coffee-based fortune-telling could serve as one of the solutions to this problem.

Firstly, the entire process of tasseomancy is based on regular, friendly coffee drinking in a café or at a friend’s house, which is a popular way of spending time in the Poreče region. Drinking coffee should be accompanied by conversation and jokes, which itself for many people has a kind

of a therapeutic effect and forms an alternative way of dealing with everyday problems [Kurcińska 2012: 36].

Secondly, the prophecy provides hope for a better life. It is also a quick way of obtaining information about our problems and about ways of solving these impediments. According to my observations, generally, most people remember only the most interesting and optimistic moments of divination. I once met the wife of a village baker who was forced to sell his bakery. She told me that one year earlier Riza foretold her a wealthy life, and immediately afterward the bakery started to make a great profit.

A strong, traditional conviction about the connection between magic and religion [Obrębski n.d. a: 15–22], and the weak authority of official representatives of the church (*pop*¹⁴) are apparent in most of the villages. Priests perform only the major rites and are sometimes not summoned even for the funerals. This shows how weakly they are connected with the local community. One priest usually takes care of several villages and he can be dismissed and replaced at any moment by the local community¹⁵ [Obrębski n.d. a: 21]. Therefore, fortune-tellers provide a quick and easy means of contact with the sacrum for the people in Poreče.

Apart from the function of helping people to cope with their problems, divinations become efficient carriers of gossip and information. As a result of coffee/divination meetings, Riza is a person who hears news and gossip, and then passes them along.

Fortune-telling from coffee “spilt” over the Internet

It is vital to acknowledge modern cultural influences in the field of magical and esoteric practices in Macedonia which could – to a certain extent – help to understand all of the abovementioned cases. Migrations from Skopje to Poreče and back are especially relevant in this respect.

One can observe that the rationalization of prophecies and more generally of the esoteric sphere is often connected to the technological discourse. As a result, a “magical axis” emerges, one where we can place more or less true and reliable practices. Astrology or numerology would be recognized as more effective and “more true” because of their connection with science – in contrast to traditional magic and healing, which is considered less reliable.

¹⁴ The term *pop* is a commonly accepted way of referring to the Christian Orthodox priest in Macedonia.

¹⁵ Even nowadays there is only one priest for the whole region of Poreče.

A friend of mine came to Riza, who told her that someone is going to do something bad to her children, house and husband. Riza said it, and my friend felt distressed and became ill. I told her: "You are not going there. She asks you, and she tells you, and she's lying!" And when she stopped visiting Riza, she became healthy again. I can tell you that. I didn't believe. But a lot of people did... [Interview, woman, Samokov].

Regional practices are less interesting for Macedonians than those from the outside. Lately we can observe a growing influence of media on the perception of magical practices, which can be associated with Western Europe, and therefore probably also recognized as more modern [Thiessen 2007].

Maybe you believe in bioenergy? I believe, in things like that, I do. Yes? I was once at a bioenergy therapist, after eight years have passed since me and my husband began trying to have a baby, and someone told me, there is one woman who works with bioenergy and she can help me [Interview, woman, Samokov].

Strong faith in bioenergy could somehow be connected to *baba Vanga*. She is a Bulgarian clairvoyant and visionary who legitimized this kind of treatment, especially as she was additionally propped up by Ljudmila Živkova, a former minister of culture of Bulgaria, daughter of the former Bulgarian dictator Todor Živkov, and privately a fan of the esoteric. Although Vanga is described as "the great Bulgarian pythia", she was born in a Macedonian village. Many Macedonian pilgrimages are made to the Orthodox church which she herself visits in Ripuite, Bulgaria [cf. Valtchinova 2007]. I am not certain about this connection but it seems highly probable.

There is also a very popular belief that everything known by fortune-tellers and *bajačka* can be found in books.

- And what has she told you?
- A lot. About the meaning of the figures [about tasseomancy]
- You can find this in books as well! [Interview woman, Samokov].

I had an opportunity to witness this when my friend gave me a 1995 edition of a course book in fortune-telling with coffee [*Gledanje na kafe* by Ilija Boškov-Krajnički] found at one of the Skopje markets. This is a great example of the influence that rationalization and globalization has on the magic sphere: the book not only includes meanings of symbols such as a pyramid, a camera, or a whale, but it also clarifies why coffee fortune-telling works. The authors believe that everything has its scientific justification (i.e. the technological discourse). According to them, coffee grounds combine with DNA in human saliva and as a result the arranged figures can clearly pinpoint the character of the person. Moreover, this fact signalizes one's "fate inscribed in the genes" [Boškov-Krajnički 1995: 20].

Processes like the one described above aim to bring the “secret knowledge” out of irrationality, which is associated with them, and into the realm of science and rationality in order to authenticate them [Grębecka 2006: 180, 194]. Simultaneously, they disconnect the primal link of magic and religion and reconstruct it through the discourse of science and technology. In a similar way Richard Webster, the author of *Palm reading for beginners* [Webster 2000], notices with pride the interest in palm reading in the field of science and even an attempt to use chiromancy at a crime scene.

Since tasseomancy has begun to be regarded as entertainment, many people think that it can be performed by anyone. When friends meet for a coffee they spice up their meeting by fortune-telling with coffee grounds. One day my Macedonian language teacher told us how her friends could spend hours drinking coffee and smoking an entire pack of cigarettes, interpreting and discovering the meanings of figures in the cups of their fellows.

The entertainment quality of this practice is also visible in an internet application launched on Facebook.¹⁶ This application, which allows one to choose a language – not only from the region of the Balkans, but also French or English, is a digital fortune-teller. The fortune-teller wears non-specific ethnic clothing and attempts to surround herself with an aura of magic of a stereotypical medium. Pressing one’s finger to the cup may seem a bit problematic but the mouse cursor fortunately turns into one. When moved onto a digital cup it changes its shape and turns into a palm.

Although few Porečans use these kind of applications or express similar views, and these who do, live permanently in Skopje, it is important to take them into account. Nonetheless, many people have permanent access to the internet and thus have access to the applications or forums, and the abovementioned articles on tasseomancy.¹⁷

The tradition opens to the new

Fortune-tellers are open to novelties and new methods. Riza did not use the internet or watch TV programs other than music shows, but when I gave her a seashell and told her that such items increase magical powers, she smiled and said “for luck” and hid it in her pocket.

¹⁶ https://apps.facebook.com/coffee_prophecy/?lan=MK

¹⁷ <https://web.archive.org/web/20130312160347/http://glamstik.mk/questions/razno/gledanje-na-kafe-15941/>

Miloš was in turn really excited that I am interested in ways of divination other than coffee grounds fortune-telling. He was happy to talk with somebody who had knowledge on fortune-telling, but of a different character than his.

Mitana was probably the best example of a folk healer who combines her own wisdom with outside knowledge. Not only does she use books about herbal healing (she bought them in Skopje), but she also collects magical items given to her by close friends.

I have a little stone that helps me a lot in Skopje. [My friend] was in Bulgaria, in a monastery and there was a hill-side. Once, a lightning struck and smashed the rock, and stones flew in all directions. [...] She gave me this stone I hold, because it helps women who do such things... "I gave it to you, and use it". And I use it [Interview, Mitana, woman, 70 years old, Gorno Zrkle].

It becomes clear based on these cases that traditional Macedonian professions are open to novelties.

Conclusions

I have described the character and changes in approach to magical practices in Poreče, focusing on observed practices and information passed to me by two *bajački*, Riza and Mitana, and by the fortune-teller Miloš. I was able to meet these people thanks to other inhabitants of Poreče who directed me.

There are many conditions which determine who becomes a fortune-teller, what are her/his tasks, and how is (s)he treated by the community. Esthetic tastes and beliefs of people performing the divinations are essential to their techniques. Riza and Miloš recognize and pay attention to different symbols. Each of them prefers a different shape of the cup for the tasseomancy, as the entire process looks differently in Riza's and Miloš's practices.

The same applies to restrictions put on *baenje* and the classification of magical practices (as one's moral obligation/calling or a job). This could be connected both with the past and with the present economic situation. Riza demands some kind of gratification for the divination, Miloš treats it as a passion, and Mitana never requests a payment.

The differences however do not influence the authenticity of these people. They are regarded as comparably effective and enjoy a similar level of respect from (most of) the community. All differences derive from individual features. Each person, although based in traditional practices, shapes the performance in a way which suits him/her best, and does not form a dissonance with knowledge already acquired.

As it was shown in the case of the tasseomancy manual, globalization, technological discourse, and commercialization have also had a strong influence on fortune-telling. Traditional ways of this esoteric ability are seen as a DIY activity, or a normal form of entertainment.

Despite all these influences, there is one important, constant common aspect: magical practices still play an important role in the everyday life of Porečje. Józef Obrębski noticed the pervasiveness of magic in life among ordinary people. Fortune-telling is something common for most of the Porečans. Everyone knows or has heard about (bad or good) magic, divination, or about a person who engages in such practices. Sometimes this knowledge is popularized and amplified by media. The fact that fortune-telling can be perceived as entertainment, reveals the belief in magic, and closeness of it to everyday life.

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“SO THAT SOMEBODY GIVES YOU A GLASS OF WATER”: ETHNOGRAPHY OF OLD BACHELORS IN POREČE

Then Jehovah God said: “It is not good for the man to continue to be alone. I am going to make a helper for him, as a complement of him”. [...] So Jehovah God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep, and while he was sleeping, he took one of his ribs [...] And Jehovah God built the rib that he had taken from the man into a woman, and he brought her to the man. Then the man said: “This is at last bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one will be called Woman,¹ because from man she was taken” [Genesis 2:18–23; New World Translation of The Holy Scriptures, 2014: 45].

Considering the biblical message, it seems that since the very creation of the world there was an inclination for every human being, a man or a woman, to find a “soulmate”, to create a family, and, hopefully, to live happily ever after. Through time people have tried many different organizations of life in various societies, but it seems that the only thing that has not changed is the search for a life partner. If we exclude the group of people whose personal choice was to remain unmarried and lead a solitary life, for example monks, nuns, and, in some religions, priests, the rest were expected by the society to get married. Any exceptions to this rule were treated, at the very least, as a mistake, if not an anomaly. The realization and success of an individual in society, especially in regards to those who held leading positions, was always perceived through their personal success at home and family. Just as it was in the past, these days the unmarried people who contribute to the public sphere are – aside from their successes in public life – expected to become married and fulfil their lives in general.

Macedonian tradition and society is no different. In contemporary and especially in traditional Macedonian society there is a communal pressure

¹ In Hebrew, literally “a female man”, *ish-shah*.

and help provided to the individuals to form couples. As an obligation, or an unwritten rule, this awaits every individual when they reach a certain age. Being married is “normal”, whereas being alone is not. According to common thinking marriage is an obligation of every individual, and those who do not fulfil this obligation become subjects of discussion. There is a quest to find their mistake, deficiency, and, in most cases, it is stated that nobody wants to remain unmarried, including those individuals who openly and definitely stated that such is their choice. As for the latter group, it is usually assumed (by the community) that their decision is not serious and that deep inside even they want to find a “soulmate”.

My research, which is the subject of this article, is devoted to the old bachelors from Poreče region – men who reached a certain age but did not manage to form a family. The aim is to examine their status in the community; their view of themselves, the attitude of the community towards them, their everyday struggle with lonely life, and ways of searching for a partner. The choice of the subject was inspired by one of my respondents and a spontaneous recorded conversation. I followed a goat trail which leads from village Brest to the village of Kosovo with my respondent, who wanted to show me one of the few fountain wells built in the surroundings. Though the conversation sounded like a joke to me at first, luckily I decided to record it. As it turned out, the recording documented rich information about the rules or life, ideas, wishes and expectations of the community.

If we talk about the traditional family, authors who conducted research in this area about a century ago documented that family and getting married were an extremely important issue, expressed through a patriarchal system:

The main feature of social life among the population of Poreče is a clearly expressed patriarchy, which is apparent in every social form. [...] Its first manifestation is to be found in the family, because the family and family life are the core of the entire social life [Jovanović 1935: 290].

The marriage in Poreče is not a private matter, nor a matter of an individual. It is an issue of the family. Also, in Poreče it cannot be said that “a boy or a girl is getting married”. A boy and a girl in Poreče are marrying the family. This means that a boy and a girl are not marrying but are being married (by others). In Poreče this expression is by no means figurative [Obremski 2001: 247].

Every so called old bachelor is picturesque in his own way, and every one of them participates in forming the general picture of their quest to find a life partner, undertaken of their own free will or through pressure of the community, especially as the expectations of the community – consciously or unconsciously, become their own expectations.

The strategies to cope with this problem vary. In the village community marriage is still arranged by go-betweens/matchmakers. All of my interlocutors have indicated this as an acceptable solution, and also a safe one. One of the reasons for this attitude is apparently tradition, since the institution of go-betweens/matchmakers was present in this community for generations. In addition, so called "old bachelors" most often use this institution because of the nature of their work – they cannot leave their livestock or land without any care for a longer time, and hence they do not have time to look for a wife. Also, their material resources are limited and it is better for them to spend their savings on a go-between, who is guaranteed to fulfil the task. On the other hand should the bachelors decide to look for a prospective wife on their own, they risk spending all of their resources and still ending up empty-handed: without money and a wife.

While "urban" understanding of marriage involves love as one of the basic elements that should be fulfilled in order to become married, old bachelors would never mention it. The need to pass the life with somebody seemed to be a purely practical matter in which love is not really included, and the main aim of the marriage was for them to make the everyday obligations easier, to have children, and to have help in the old age, "so that somebody gives you a glass of water" [Interview, man, born 1967 in Upper Poreče, 08.2013]. Similarly, a marriage which is set as an obligation by the tradition would change their social status, which is unfavourable as long as they are bachelors, and is perceived as such by their community. Through marriage they would attain full rights and enter the circle of members of the village community. The rejection of love, as a concept, or a desired element and requirement for marriage, can mean that from a practical point of view marriage is only a way of solving one or more problems. There was no mention of love interest or passion, of kissing or desiring a woman, or being an object of woman's desire, and none of the respondents expressed that they wanted to be loved.

During my research I did not think that I should conform to every stereotype or norm of behaviour that were expected of me as a woman. Thus, I unconsciously went against them: knowing them, but not taking them into consideration, breaking them; not assuming that the traditional system, which is still in use in the villages, should also refer to me as a woman. In the end it turned out that this was a wrong strategy. I knew that the old bachelors and other male villagers most often gather in village shops which also serve as cafeterias, as there is nothing else to do, so we would often go there together. These places were cosy, with thick, unpainted walls, filled with many old objects: old radios, gas lamps, big cupboards with decorated glass. Since these places represented

a typically male world, in some of them the walls were decorated with interesting iconography: calendars with nude women and small erotic photos cut out of magazines. During our visit, since I did not look around, I did not realize that me and other ethnography students would be the only females sitting there, or allowed to sit there. As we were once told by an old woman we should not have come to this place. Men were sitting on benches around two-three tables, all of them with glasses of alcohol in their hands. We were sitting at a separate table, and when we said why we came there, some of the conversations stopped, and some became louder. Some men ordered juice for one older lady who came in for some shopping, and she was told openly that she should leave as soon as she finished drinking it. This she did without any argument, even though those who had asked her to leave were of the same age as her children, or maybe even grandchildren. When I later asked why it happened, I was told that this was not a place for her. Her silent departure once again confirmed that women still have a lower social status and are subject to social degradation that affects women of all ages, including the older ones who should not be sexually interesting anymore and should thus be granted freedom from prescribed norms of behaviour that bind other women. Later on, when men became more relaxed, some agreed to talk to us. Others, who did not agree to a conversation, excused themselves by saying they had to go because of “important work”, and in case of one respondent I had to “pay” him with a beer for an interview. Apparently, even though I was a woman, because I came from a big city, it was neither shameful nor unbecoming – I was not expected to behave like women from the village. Thus, I was allowed to sit here, *barabar* (together) with men, it was not unusual for me to buy somebody a beer in exchange for a talk. This was apparently possible because I was expected to behave in a way characteristic for “urban girl/woman”, which was also well known to my respondents, but opposite to the way of local girls/women. Afterwards, this respondent, supported by others, got the courage, and became interested in my and my friend’s marital status. When he learnt we are not married, encouraged by his friends, he offered to marry both of us.

After a couple of days, I had a very different experience. During research in the village of Crešnevo, which is full of old bachelors, I talked to one of them, introduced to him by an older man from the same village. The bachelor agreed to talk, and to being recorded, apparently at his colleague’s instigation, but what was especially striking was his sense of being ashamed, which he manifested throughout the conversation. For as long as we talked, he did not raise his head or look me in the eyes, he looked down and was trying to clean the invisible crumbs from his trousers. He had his arms crossed, as if he had to defend himself, and

from time to time he would reach with his hand and touch the ridge of his nose with a finger, push it hard, as if he had to concentrate on something important. I felt like I did in primary school, where one would see some ashamed fourth-grade boy nervously talking to his teacher. He managed to look me in the eyes only several times, and only then I was asking him questions about the freedom of movement of his future, potential wife. In these moments, he tended to forget the shame, and would enumerate the rules his future wife had to fulfil. Thus I got a confirmation, once again, of my knowledge about treatment of women, and the conclusion was that even the most shy men, when they spoke about the rules of women's behaviour, would forget their shame and openly, with confidence, enumerate them and expect women to comply, with no exceptions.

In order to establish who is categorized as an old bachelor by the contemporary inhabitants of Poreče, I shall present the rules which have to be followed by an individual. According to my interlocutors, twenty years ago all young men had mandatory military service, and after that they were considered ready to marry. Since military service was obligatory after coming of age, after high-school graduation, it would refer to 18–19 year-olds, who would spend a year in military service.² If they did not marry soon after the return, they would be considered old bachelors. A bachelor of 25 was considered too old to become a husband, and girls would not take him into consideration at all. When this obligation was removed, the age limit was lifted, and according to my respondents, even a 25 year old bachelor was not considered old [Interview with Bojan, man, born 1935, 07.2012, Crešnevo]. This, and indications of older villagers suggest that the age-limit for marrying has been substantially raised, and nowadays even 30 year old men are not considered old bachelors.

Apart from existence of such age-limit in the villagers' perception, none of the interlocutors who were themselves over this age, and thus they would fit into the category of old bachelor, gave specific numbers. When asked, what is the age that categorizes a bachelor as old, none of those who – according to the aforementioned criteria – fulfilled them, did give a specific answer. Most frequently they would refer to such a question as to an abstract category which is unknown to them; "I don't know" was the most common answer I was given.

It was obvious that they were conscious of the fact that – according to the criteria of the community, they were perceived as old bachelors. Every one of them signalled with specific facial expressions, and also by

² In former Yugoslavia the army training lasted for one year, while after the Republic of Macedonia began self-governance, it was shortened to 9 months, but the age of recruitment is the same, and in both cases men of 18–19 years old would be sent to serve in the army.

looking away, that the question was unpleasant for them. Aware of their age, an irrefutable fact, none of them wanted to define the age limit for becoming an old bachelor. The reason apparently lied in the linking of the word “old” with the word “bachelor”, which might have been perceived by them as an oxymoron. Although this was the general belief which related directly to them, they did not want to link the specific status of the bachelor with the old age. That might sound logical if we consider the perception of the old age in the folk culture, where it is associated with powerlessness, and because of that, bachelors may be perceived as a burden for society, and also as unable to carry out biologic reproduction. To quote:

[...] both children and the elderly are useless for the community in terms of reproduction and labour, and according to this logic, they are only a burden and another mouth to feed. The sexual-reproductive incapability of old men is a frequent motive in the folk erotic stories [Jakimovska 2009: 197].

Since these men were still not of the age defined as elderly, they would refrain from any answer through which they would associate themselves with the notion of “old”. Also, their powerlessness after fulfilling the expectations that community has placed in them: to form a family in a certain age, made them feel inferior because they did not act within the frames of what is a suitable and expected social behaviour, one which is perceived to be “normal” in their environment. Thus, they were placed in an “interspace”, neither here nor there, since they reached the age suitable to fulfil the obligation.

Reaching sexual maturity serves as a borderline in itself, after which every individual is expected to form a family, and pass from one social niche to another (from that of a maid and bachelor to that of a mature woman and man). Changing the reproduction status connected to the physical development of the body (and with the degeneration of the body in the old age) is the perfection of its “biological time”. It is however relevant for the definition of adult groups only if it is referred to the “social time” of the individual – then the biological age becomes a basis for the social one [Jakimovska 2009: 174].

I received different responses when I asked the same question to young men, who were of the same age as the old bachelors, but were married, and have formed a family. Then I would be given exact numbers, just as the older villagers would provide them. Since these men completed the obligation to form a family “on time”, it was no problem for them to define the exact age limit after which somebody becomes an old bachelor. “When is it? Well, after 30 they are already old bachelors” [Interview, man, born 1974 in Upper Poreče, 10.2013].

Among the old bachelors, the only respondent who had higher education and lived in Skopje (which should have influenced his worldview), still remained anchored in the rules implanted by the community in which he grew up, but even he did not want to give the age limit. Instead of giving me the answer, he shared a story from which I was supposed to draw a conclusion on my own:

– What is the upper limit for a man to get married, and after which, if he is not married, to be considered, let's say, an old bachelor?

M. You're recording, yes? I will give you an example. There was an island with only beautiful women on it. And whenever a man would go there, they would fulfil his wishes. I want to sleep with that one, I want on Monday, here you are...

– I asked you about the upper limit...

M. Listen, but I am answering to that. I am answering, but you need to understand me. And every man who would go to that island would be granted his wishes by her, by them, and they would kill him. There was one who went there and came back. What did he do that he came back? Alive. That is, there was nothing that could come true for him, and yet he returned. You know what it was? I need to tell you so you understand me. He told them: I want the ugliest of you all to kill me. I want to be killed by the ugliest one. And now draw the conclusion from that? I need to tell you the conclusion... That is...

– I asked about the limit, now the conclusion. What is the lower limit, what is the upper. I asked about what is being said in the village.

M. But have you heard me now? I mean, I told you a very good tale. [Interview, man, born 1974, 10.2013, Upper Poreče]

Apparently he wanted me to draw the conclusion that no man, no matter what age, should be put in the category of an old bachelor. Similarly, what I came to notice, was that he chose a tale about women taking into consideration my own gender. Apparently, leading me towards the well-known paradigm of "there are no ugly woman", he expected me to think, as a woman, that just as women should not be categorized as pretty-ugly, men should not be categorized as old-young.

The approach to the age of getting married was different in regards to women. In the past, as a rule, they would be older than their husbands at the moment of marriage, whereas nowadays girls get married much younger. The choice of a woman for a boy was being done in his young adolescence, which was in accordance with family economy. Thus, the age for the boys to become married was around 17, and for the girls – 25, which can be described as female seniority [Petreska 2013: 34].

It can be assumed based on the data collected in the fieldwork, that nowadays, the rules changed in comparison to the past – now young

women get married up to their 20's, with 25 being the upper age, while for the men suitable marriage age is between 25–30 years at the latest.

Usually until 25 everybody is married here. It is seldom to find someone in these villages to remain unmarried. Up to 25 at most [...] A spinster is older than 30, but there is no such left. It is very seldom. 22, 25, all are married [Interview, man, born 1979, 10.2013, Upper Poreče].

In Poreče there is a large number of old bachelors. In contrast to many unmarried men, there are practically no “old maids”: all the villagers would inform me, that there are only two-three of them living in the village of Benče. The respondents claim that their situation is their own fault: the women remained old maids because they were too choosy. However, when it comes to old bachelors, the fault was never theirs, but reasons for this state were searched for in the surroundings, the remoteness of the region, bad road infrastructure which makes it impossible to communicate with other villages or bigger centres, and finally, the lack of interest of girls in the local men, as well as their unwillingness to live in the village. However, after reaching a certain age, the old bachelors have lesser motivation to find a partner, and the perspective of remaining alone seems to them as a better personal choice. On the other hand, because of the pressure of the society to marry, and also because of the status that comes with lonely life, most of them still do not completely reject the possibility of looking for a potential wife. However, sometimes such a search is only perfunctory to retain a proper image in the society, and not because of willingness to change one's own status.

However, it seems that the women's role is emphasised in this situation, and they are indirectly blamed for men's single status. Their lack of willingness to remain in the village is associated with unwillingness to take responsibility for the so called “female work”, and thus, worsening living conditions of those who stay behind. According to the general thinking pattern girls choose the easier way of life instead of taking up the responsibility and staying in the villages. They get married at a very young age, frequently without finishing high school, only to leave the region. There were also given examples of girls who married Albanians or Macedonian Muslims. The respondent did not speak about these girls in a negative way, but they were described in the context of running away from the village, and it seemed as if the girls' main goal was to leave the place permanently, taking any opportunity to do so, even if it involved marrying a person of a different faith or ethnicity. In regards to that, the respondent mentioned that the girls' parents agreed on the marriage, and thus, since the women had the family's blessing, others should not interfere or oppose.

And they learn, finish high school, find a boy, leave. I don't know if you heard that, now our [locals] from Brvenica go, marry even Albanians in Tetovo. A girl from there married an Albanian. And one from Makedonski Brod married in Debrešte. One from Samokov married in Plasnica. So our girls marry also Albanians. I do not have a problem with that, as their parents agree on that, so that's what they do [Interview, man, born 1967, 08.2013, Upper Poreče].

Even Józef Obrębski provides data on the lack of women in Poreče:

Certain phenomena show that the marital question in Upper Poreče has to be perceived as favourable for men. [...] There is a permanent, even if not big, outflow of women from Upper Poreče which is not proportional in regards to that of men. [...] The main difficulty is to find a marital partner for widowers shows that lack of women in the local community is apparent [Obrębski 2001: 253].

Today the situation is even more drastic, and young unmarried girls are often simply absent. The harsh living conditions, isolation of the region, and difficulty to leave the traditional norms which, even if to lesser extent, still apply to the female population, all this motivates young women get married as early as they possible, and as far from the village as it is possible (in which their parents support them). After finishing primary school young people usually go to high school in Makedonski Brod and to other nearby cities: Prilep and Kičevo, Tetovo and Skopje. For some of them it is the first occasion to leave the village where they have lived until now. The contrast with city lifestyle makes them want to return to the known environment and the old way of life. For girls, who often get married and stay in the towns, it becomes much easier to adapt to the new lifestyle. They meet their potential husbands when they are still at school, and some of them, even prior to high school graduation, decide to end their education, marry and thus, fulfil their life goal.

For men relocation to the cities through the marriage is much harder, because they have to fulfil different obligations. Firstly they need to have their own house in the city, and a job to provide for the family. This is difficult to attain for the men from Poreče, because most of them come from families of modest affluence, so buying a property in the city is an impossible mission to accomplish. Even if they decide to rent a house or apartment instead, it is also difficult because of their modest financial prospects.

M. And why don't you go back to Tetovo, maybe there you could somehow...

– But I don't have a house. If I go, my brother has his house, has children. I need to pay the rent. If I pay the rent, I will find work there, I have worked seven years. First as... I was transporting bread by a lorry, I was selling it to the shops, then I was working in one. And I left it because of personal...

because of the old ones [*starite*, a common word used for “parents”]. And now [...]. Unemployed, if you go from here... whether to Skopje, or Strumica, Tetovo, Gostivar. It matters a lot. You need enough money and even this, if you pay the rent, there is the mentality of paying [Interview, man, born 1967, 08.2013, Upper Poreče].

Apart from that, for the same reason, after graduating the obligatory high school, not many local people from here go to universities to gain a chance for a better work and salary, to eventually buy a house or an apartment to live in with the family. Thus, it is difficult to fulfil the expectations of the community which require a man to marry before his thirties or earlier. The pressure is clear and all of the bachelors expressed its existence, although it is not always expressed directly:

– And how does the community perceive you? Do they tell you anything in the neighbourhood, the village, why you don’t marry?

M. No, no, no. No, no, they don’t tell us anything [Interview, man, born 1972, 10.2013, Upper Poreče].

However, every conversation with other villagers stresses on the fact that everybody has to be married, this opinion which was voiced even in presence of bachelors, which was not a contraindication to do so. It can be assumed that in the conversations led among the locals on everyday basis, willingly or not, the subject of marriage is mentioned. Thus the status of old bachelors is confirmed, and probably, the confirmation of this status is stronger where no outsiders are present.

Some villagers claimed that among the bachelors themselves (especially over the age of 30, when they automatically fall into the category of old bachelors), there is no interest or will to become married. Because of this, some locals would voice interesting ideas, which, if used as reference, showed a positive assessment of marriage.

Well, yes, everybody expects to... form a family, but it depends on... on men. Some... After 30 they are not interested in marriage anymore. There is no, he says, time to do that. I would pose a tax on those who are not married and who do not want to be married. Let them pay a tax. [Interview, man, born 1979, 10.2013, Upper Poreče].

Thus, a continuous outflow of girls from Upper Poreče leads to an enormous imbalance between male and female population ratios. However, we have found examples of people who came back from Skopje and settled in Poreče. Among them is a man who, despite his higher education as a machine engineer, not being able to stand the city life pace, came back to his family village of Belica. He wanted a peaceful life or as he put it, he “did not find himself in the city” and did not want to become “a slave of others”.

Yes, I worked, I studied in Skopje. I worked in Skopje, paid the rent, I didn't settle well in the big city. I didn't want to be servant all my life, so I came back [Interview, man, born 1974, 10.2013, Upper Poreče].

Another example is a woman born in Skopje, who left the settlement Karpoš III where she grew up, and got married in Samokov. The main reason she does not want to go back and live in Skopje is pollution and the tempo of life imposed by the city, which she cannot stand. It should be noted, however, that in both these cases, the respondents had stable income source, and it can be said that their material condition can be assessed as good, which they themselves confirmed. Because of this, their life differs from the lives of the poor, and is much easier.

Apart for these reasons for coming back to the country, one of old bachelors mentioned the will to take care after his old parents as a reason for his return to the family village. He lived for some time in the village Brvenica close to Tetovo, but when his parents became older and their health deteriorated, somebody had to take care of them and help them. Although he had other brothers and sisters, who also had been living in Brvenica for some time in, only he took the obligation upon him, because he had no fixed job, whereas others had formed their own families. The relocation back to the village seemed to be easier for him, as he was single.

I used to work in Tetovo, I came back from Tetovo because my dad and mom did not want to go there, and they could not, and somebody had to take care of the brothers [...]. Brothers and sisters who are in Tetovo, they all have their own houses. Everybody is alone [Interview, man].

The wish of some bachelors to become married reflects their fear of a lonely life. They notice that young people constantly leave the villages, and only the old ones remain, and those who stay alone need to be helped in their everyday obligations of taking care of the household. Some of the old bachelors help other co-villagers. This apparently makes them think about their lonely future. Seeing that villages are being deserted, being conscious of being possibly the last generation to stay in the village, they think what will happen if they do not manage to get married. Considering that their neighbours, also bachelors, are approximately of the same age, there will probably be nobody left to help them when they are old. Being aware of that, they fear loneliness in the future, and hence they do not reject the idea of becoming married and having children, which would give them a sense of certainty and security for the old age.

Years go by... Now I am still able, I work, but it will come, I won't be able to manage anymore. And there will be nobody to give you water. In the village

there were 200 people, now we are 40 at most. In 2–3 years there will be no voice heard here. How they leave... I don't because I work here. [...]

I have seen enough people, friends, neighbours in the village. They cannot make it. Like this Atanas, you have seen him. I supply him from Samokov. I bring him peppers and eggplants with a car, all he needs. And at home, I help him, I mow, I fix things [Interview, man, born 1967, 10.2013, Upper Poreče].

This lack of women leads to an interesting way of making marriage. An interlocutor of mine, in the village Kosovo, described how one of her sons, close to “the old bachelor age”, got married to a girl from the village of Sv. Nikole. The girl was brought to him from the side of the son-in-law of his sister who worked somewhere in Sv. Nikole. The bride was only 15 and she ran away from her home. My interlocutor did not mention whether she knew the man with whom she came to Poreče, but fleeing from home, she apparently wanted to escape as far as possible, in which she succeeded. The entire situation was apparently settled from the beginning, as the man who brought her to Poreče told her about the man who wanted to marry her. When they arrived to Samokov, he telephoned the man and offered him the girl. Initially, the interlocutor's son did not take the offer seriously, but when the girl telephoned him later on, he agreed to meet with her, and with no further delay he left the village and went to her to see if they liked each other.

A man from Samokov, he is a... he is my son-in-law, from my daughter, but he worked there two years, and he brought her. So neither his mother, or sister knows, that he brought her to Samokov. The phone rings. Who's that? Oh, he says, Efto, my son-in-law. From Sv. Nikole [...]. What does he want? He says... “Ah, you want *šura* [the wife's husband] to bring you... woman”. “Don't mock me, now, now I brought her”, he says, “she'll be there in the evening”. But he is a bit of a joker, he didn't believe him... [...] “No, really, she's here, if you want her...” She calls, he hears, they talk. And he says, I'll come to your son-in-law, but will you take me? Ok, he says, if so. But it is 8 p.m., it's late... If you like each other, if we like, I'll stay with you. If not, your son-in-law will take me back. This girl tells him so. He heard her and said, “Oh, really, female voice”. I told him: “son, eat the bread”. He said, he does not want to, he will eat by his sister, down there, he would go. I told him: “Don't, son; you don't know the family, the blood, you know nothing, don't. No”. “I will go and it is done”. And he left. And after some time, he called me and said: “We're coming. The thing is done”. And how can you tell him anything, how can you interfere? You cannot. And they came [Interview, woman, 05.2013, Kosovo, Upper Poreče].

It is interesting to observe his will to see the girl, but even more interesting is his impatience to do so immediately. Even if he had been hungry and tired after a whole day of (unsuccessful) hunting, it would not have stopped him from going and meeting this girl. Apparently,

because of the lack of women, he thought that if he does not meet her immediately, somebody else may do so, and he will be left empty-handed. Because the girl already decided to run away from home, he supposed she had no intent of going back, as she even said it in the conversation. He also ignored the warning of his mother, that they do not know the family of the girl, and hence they do not know what to expect from her. It can be therefore assumed that among adults, it is more important to know the background of the future spouse for their children, while according to the younger generation it is irrelevant. In this case it seems that the bachelor was thinking on how to make use of the opportunity to get married, which happened accidentally, and which did not happen every day, as in the villages there are no candidates for marriage. Apart from that, local girls are reluctant to stay and live in the village. The girl from Sv. Nikole did not have this problem, which was evident in her decision to go to Poreče, to hopefully get married and stay there.

In majority of cases it is not expected for a girl to be necessarily chaste when she is married, and there are even contrary opinions, that if she is – something is wrong with her, she is stupid, “she lacks something”:

M1. If she is chaste, she is stupid. She lacks something. There is nobody chaste now, man or woman.

M2. Noo, [laughter] that's extinct species. It cannot happen. How can she be chaste? If only she does not lie...

M3. No, no, no, no, no... If you have never been with anyone. This... has no chance nowadays, for anybody. That's what I think. Maybe somebody... Like, eh, like Tanja, who just left. She does not have, you know... [Interview, men, born 1967, 1974 and 1975, 10.2013, Upper Poreče]

Tanja was a relatively young woman who suffered from some mental illness, and was labelled “crazy” in the village. Her condition was considered by a respondent the reason for never being with a man, while other, healthy girls were not expected to preserve their virginity before the marriage. Also, it is interesting that local people knew and talked about men who had no contact with women. These men were labelled as an oddity, whereas people who would talk of them would later point to themselves and stress their own sexual activeness.

Even if you ask a man, if he is a virgin, he can only lie to you. If he is, he is stupid. For example, like our Zvonko, you remember. Maybe not now, I just happened to say that, like him. Everybody. But he hasn't been with a woman, he is like you say. And I have been in Tetovo... with one person [Interview, man, born 1967, 08.2013, Upper Poreče].

While virginity may not be relevant for bachelors, it seems to matter in case of women. The same woman from the village of Kosovo, told me

a story which confirmed that such moral norm of virginity is still a rule in her generation. Her own daughter-in-law lost her virginity with some boy who was her high-school friend. Because she was often away from her parents' home, sometimes for days, it made her mother doubt her daughter's truthfulness. When the mother discovered that her daughter sleeps at her boyfriend's, she forced her daughter to place her head on a log and wanted to cut her head off with an axe. Out of fear the girl decided to run away from home and to get married. She found refuge by a man from Samokov. The man took her to Samokov, where he called his brother-in-law – a bachelor – and offered him the girl for a wife. Since they liked each other, the brother-in-law brought her home. Some time after that, in a conversation with the mother-in-law, the bride told her the entire story behind the wedding. The mother-in-law, surprised that the girl was not a virgin, asked how her son accepted that fact, and she was puzzled that the entire thing was left without any problem from his side. It is noteworthy, that according to the mother-in-law, even if the girl had only one boyfriend before the marriage, she could have as well had "even ten", and was labelled at the end "a filthy whore". It is also noticeable that the mother-in-law has not talked with her son about this intimate matter, but she asked the daughter-in-law, which means, that, just as in the past, such conversations were not allowed between mother and son. However this topic can be discussed with the daughter-in-law, as a foreigner and a new member of family [Interview, woman, born 1956, 05.2013, Upper Poreče].

According to local old bachelors, the ideal of a good wife included fulfilling certain conditions. These conditions were uniformly defined by all my respondents. A perfect wife should be "normal in her head", that is, bright and intelligent, as well as be a good housewife and take over the housework obligations. That means doing housework chores, cooking, baking bread, and hand washing clothes. As the village lacked some facilities, the respondents were ready to improve the situation, but the woman should take the obligations of housework:

Eh, housework. Here the bread is being baked, the washing is done by hand. It is not a problem now we will order machine, and other things. If only she takes care of housework [Interview, man, born 1972 in Upper Poreče, 10.2013].

Inability to perform the housework, and lack of knowledge in some areas, especially when presented in front of the guests, is considered as a sign of low intelligence.

M. So that she understands a thing, anything, so she isn't a total wood.
– What does it mean?

M. It means... she should catch on... Like... there was this one who was putting salad instead of cucumber. And a cabbage with that... She was putting the spoon instead of a fork, a spoon. So that she is not like that [Interview, man, born 1975, 08.2013 Upper Poreče].

This example of a "stupid" woman is evoked in reference to Albanian daughters-in-law in his village. Not taking into consideration, that these women come from a different nation and culture, the interlocutor automatically expected her to know the proper behaviour. Thus, he expected her to know the rules which apply in his community, and he perceived lack of this knowledge as the lack of intelligence. The unpleasant situation, in which he would find himself because of such "totally wooden" woman, had no justification in his eyes.

Since receiving guests is an important duty of an ideal woman, it seems to be connected to the rule stating that she has to "be proper in her head... to know how to receive a guest" [Interview, man, born 1967 in Upper Poreče, 08.2013].

In regards to "proper" behaviour, the opinion of the environment is also very (if not more) important. Improper behaviour in front of the guests would be perceived as inhospitable, and both the husband and wife would become a subject of gossip in the village. No old bachelor, who improved his status through marriage to that of a husband would want it, as "nobody wants to be a black hen" [Interview, man, born 1967 in Upper Poreče, 08.2013], and the wife's behaviour would send him back to the category in which "somebody could point at him" [Interview, man, born 1967 in Upper Poreče, 08.2013].

There is still much to say about the status and needs of "old bachelors". What is especially meaningful, however, is the fact that despite of their difficult situation because of not fulfilling community's expectations (being the "black sheep"), local bachelors would not "solve their problem" of being unmarried hastily. They would not take just any woman to be their wife, simply to change their status. Their chosen one would still have to fulfil certain expectations. These expectations are not much different than in the past, and follow traditional norms, which are still relevant, even if in a different form nowadays. And even if the region is isolated, it is not entirely untouched by modernity, when it comes to the bachelors and their choice of a potential wives, they choose norms which have been stamped into their subconsciousness in the process of education and bringing up, through the environment in which they grew up.

Finally, I can conclude that the ideal of a desired wife does not differ from the traditional model. Still, it is the woman who is expected to follow the model of the housewife as it used to be in the past. What has changed, is that the requirement of virginity from a woman – now it is

not no more one of the criteria to be fulfilled by her. One can also observe, to some extent, changes in the division of roles in the household, as more and more men accept to perform some household chores. It may change more in the future, as old bachelors become accustomed to performing some tasks, traditionally perceived to be “feminine”.

Translated from Macedonian by Olimpia Dragouni

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BETWEEN FUN AND RELIGION: SLAVA AS A PERFORMANCE

Introduction

One of the first things I saw in the Poreče region was a village feast *slava* in Bitovo, which was organized in honour of saints Peter and Paul in 2012. Since then, the topic of my research continuously focused on religion and the celebration of different holidays. I concentrated on *slava* as the importance of this holiday to the local community interested me – especially as it appeared highly non-religious at the same time.

Slava is often described as a patron saint's feast originating in pre-Christian beliefs. Vuk S. Karadžić [Karadžić 2005: 265] states that when the head of a family (the father) was baptised, he had to choose a Christian name for himself. The holiday of his sainted namesake was from then on a familial *slava* (*krsno ime* as Karadžić names it or, as my interlocutors told me, *kukjna slava* [house *slava*] as opposed to *selska* [village *slava*] and other *slavas*). If a son from a given family had no Christian name, he could take his father's patron saint as his own. Meri Stojanova makes a hypothesis that *slava* originates from the process of Christianisation [Stojanova 2012: 152]: the former ancestor cult transformed into a cult of a Christian patron. Igor Nikovski, protoiereus in diocese of Debar and Kičevo, also sees *slava* as a Christianised pagan ritual. He narrows down the genesis of this holiday to the 9th century, when the Slavs began to be Christianised. The date when the family was baptised became the day of its patron saint's feast [Nikovski 2014: 19]. Mirjana Mirčevska explicates why this holiday continued to exist among Slavs after Christianisation. She claims that, because of the extremely patriarchal setting, Christianity was not easily accepted as a religion and that initially people only adopted the forms, hiding the non-Christian meanings [Mirčevska 2009: 201].

When it comes to the Poreče region itself and how *slava* was celebrated there in the past, there is Józef Obrębski's research conducted between 1932 and 1933. Although information about *slava* is scant in his works, in his notes he introduces the term *sveden* – a word that describes a day of a particular patron saint [cf. Obrembski 2001]. It can be understood as *slava*, but it seems that Obrębski did not perceive these terms as synonymous. If the term *slava* appears in his works it is described as a “special familial or ancestral holiday” [Obrębski n.d. b] in which the household host, family, and a priest participated. When writing about a priest, Obrębski also mentions a village *slava*. That is the day a priest censes a house and blesses bread with holy water. While it is hard to conclude definitively, it seems that Obrębski does not, strictly speaking, perceive *slava* as a Christian holiday. He describes the faith of his interlocutors as “pagan Orthodox Christianity” [Obrębski n.d. b] arguing that although they do believe in God, they cannot distinguish between the canonical *praxis* and *praxis* standing in the opposition to the canon.

Slava as performance

Slava is a type of event containing elements of both religious ritual and revelry. The expectations of participants indicate that *slava* should honour a religious obligation and ensure entertainment. It may seem that these aspects exclude each other. Many people come to *slava* to revel, eat, and drink with friends. Others want to honour traditional religious obligations besides being entertained.

However, one of the definitions of performance is “ritualized behaviour conditioned and/or permeated by play” [Schechner 2006: 52]. This duality comes from dissonance between efficacy and entertainment, which are not antithetic but rather in interplay, being in fact a base of performance [Schechner 2006: 80]. Ritual emphasises efficacy whereas theatre – entertainment and this is generally the only difference between them, since both are genres of performance. For Richard Schechner, against a propensity of Western science, ritual and theatre are on par. He points out that it is impossible to verify which comes from which [Schechner 1994: 613].

As a form of entertainment *slava* takes a lot from theatre – play, enhancement of social solidarity, and education [Schechner 1994: 613]. There is also a division into audience and performers, but only theoretically since observers also become participants [Schechner 2006: 95]. Nevertheless *slava* is also a religious ritual – it takes place in a church and the priest is present to conduct mass. The examples of conflicts

around this holiday (which I describe later) indicate another element of religious ritual given by Richard Schechner – it regulates relations between potentially clashing participants [Schechner 1994: 620] who transform, then, into Turner’s *communitas*. This creates the feeling that the ritual symbolizes something bigger [Schechner 2006: 87] although not every individual has to be conscious of that at the same time [Schechner 2006: 70–71].

To properly describe *slava*, it cannot be perceived as a strictly ludic event, just as it is impossible to stress only its religious aspect. *Slava* does not aim exclusively at entertainment or efficacy. Thus, it is not only a form of theatre or ritual. No performance aims exclusively at entertainment or causing an effect [Schechner 1994: 622]. Considering *slava* as a type of performance prompts all exclusive elements to interplay. Performance blurs a boundary between sacred and secular ritual [Schechner 2006: 53–56] because it “centres around participation and actions incident to participation, experience and its meaning” [Baraniecka-Olszewska 2013: 47].

A number of issues should be considered in reference to the category of performance which I use in this article to describe *slava*. Edward Schieffelin in his paper about spirit séances among the Kaluli people of Papua New Guinea lists emergence, agenda, form, means, strategy, embodiment, historicity and authority among the aspects of performance [Schieffelin 1996: 64]. Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska [2013: 43] adds spatial boundary and reflexivity.

Slava as a mode of celebration

The shortest definition of *slava* is a patron saint’s feast. However, as there are a few types of *slava*, this definition requires elaboration. Igor Nikovski [2014: 19] mentions church, village (or city), house, family and artisanal guild *slavas*. According to my research in Poreče there are generally two types of this feast – house (or familial) *slava* (*kukjna slava*) and church or village (*selska slava*). I have never heard of or seen anything I could describe as a *slava* of artisanal guilds although in one case a village called Kovač (“smith”) celebrates the Feast of Saint Athanasius believed to be the patron saint of smiths [Kitevski 2013: 88]. Nonetheless, today it is celebrated in the same way as other village (or church) *slavas*.

Slava can also be understood as a mode of celebrating specific to this particular holiday. When asked about the most important components of *slava* in general, my interlocutors invoked a village *slava*. The elements they named were: meeting in the church (where the priest blesses bread,

wine, water and basil prepared by a *kum*¹), dancing (traditional *oro*²), music (almost always live), sharing food (what is eaten depends on whether *slava* is during a fast³), *rakija*, and the auction of objects collected in the church throughout the year.

The most general way of celebrating village *slava* in Poreče begins with liturgy and blessing of gifts by the *pop*. The *kum* then distributes them to participants and the next year *kum* is chosen. Afterwards the *pop* informs that eating is allowed. The food is often prepared by the participants but sometimes it is *kum's* obligation. According to the tradition, women eat after men but I could observe that this is changing. In the meantime *kum* prepares things to be sold during the auction and when everyone finishes eating, the bidding starts. Then, as the music starts to play, people dance *oro*. They drink *rakija* and invite each other to their houses.

It is important to note that even in an area as small as the Poreče region modes of celebrating differ depending on the customs of the particular village. For example, in the largest village in the region – Samokov – the *kum* is selected by a draw. Everyone takes a piece of blessed bread and whoever finds a coin⁴ inside is next year's *kum*. In Belica, on the other hand, the priest asks people gathered in the church who wants to be next year's *kum*. There can also be more than one *kum* as opposed to Samokov where there is always only one *kum* who prepares the next *slava* together with his family. The responsibilities of the *kum* can also differ – in one village he/she can be obligated to sponsor the priest, food, drinks, and music for the entire community, while in another village the *kum* only bakes the bread and prepares wine, and water with basil. There are other differences in Poreče, for instance those connected to the order of named components, which can be nearly discretionary. My interlocutors were of course conscious of these dissimilarities, but when asked, they named these given elements as “obligatory” or most common.

Modes of celebrating can thus be understood in two ways – as a cultural script and as a form of performance. *Slava* is not a type of theatre in the colloquial sense, therefore it does not have a script. On the other hand Gary B. Paler and William R. Jankowiak who introduced the term

¹ *Kum* – a person responsible for organising *slava* and other holidays common for the whole village (village *kum*). *Kum* may also be a godparent.

² *Oro* – a traditional dance in which dancers form a circle.

³ During *slava* followers of the Orthodox Church abstain from meat and animal products.

⁴ Here and later I mention a coin, because this is how my interlocutors referred to it. In practice it does not have to be a coin – it may be something made of gold, for instance, a cross.

“cultural scripts” describe it as “conventional images of idealized or stereotypical social discourse”. According to them, every performance is a script which “presents a form that invites subsequent re-enactment” [Palmer, Jankowiak 1996: 251]. Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska understands this term as existing in a culture pattern of an event and behaviour that is in accord with it [Baraniecka-Olszewska 2013: 124]. In this sense *slava* also has its own script which is common for all *slavas* and is the script my interlocutors were invoking when asked what this holiday is and what it looks like.

Edward Schieffelin seems to understand the script similarly but he calls it the form of performance [Schieffelin 1996: 65]. For Schieffelin, every genre of performance has its own form. I understand the form as pertaining to a particular performance (not a genre) – every performance has its own form. A particular patron saint’s feast has its own form that refers to the cultural script but is not its exact copy.

Defining *slava* as a mode of celebrating brings another difficulty. The boundaries between different kinds of *slava* as well as between *slava* and other holidays (*praznici*⁵) become blurred. House *slava* in Poreče starts in the evening, the day before saint patron’s day when the guests come for the first time to celebrate with the host and his family. In the past, as one of my interlocutors said, midnight marked the beginning of celebration – which was not allowed to start earlier as “the saint has not come yet”. Today, as people have to go to school or work next day, *slava* starts earlier. The guests are given snacks, beverages (including coffee) as well as hot meals and *rakija*. The next day – on the day of actual *slava* the *pop* comes to bless the house and the bread baked for that occasion. Later that day food is served twice to the guests. Everyone takes also a piece of the blessed bread and the person who finds a coin inside is to be lucky that year. It seems that it is easy to differentiate between house and village *slava* but in practice there are examples which contradict the said boundary.

In Brest there is no mass gathering for St. Petka (the 8th of August) which is said to be village *slava* there. People from that village prepare food for guests who come from other places to their houses. The *pop* visits them and, only if asked, blesses the bread prepared by the hosts. There is no *kum* who would organise common celebrations, no music and no auction takes place.

⁵ The word *praznik* (plural: *praznici*) means “a holiday”. When asked about whether *slava* is a *praznik* some of my interlocutors said that *praznik* does not have to be a religious holiday and that *praznici* (for example Christmas) are rather celebrated by the whole country on the same day while *slava* is a community celebration of a given village. Others claimed that *praznik* is a very general word for holidays and so *slava* is a kind of *praznik*.

Furthermore when a family moves from one village to another, as it often happens in Samokov, it is possible to choose new saint patron for the new house. The choice may be made by the *pop*⁶ or by taking the same patron from one of the family members. As a result of the latter situation family members cannot visit each other because they have guests at the same time. Because of that, as my interlocutors informed me, there is a possibility to celebrate as a new house *slava* the saint patron's feast of the village from which the family comes from or to which the family is moving. One of my interlocutors who lives in Samokov does not celebrate St. Elijah (a village *slava* of Samokov) as he comes from Brest where the day of St. Paraskeva (the 8th of August) is a village *slava*. He took the latter saint as his house *slava* in Samokov (the 27th of October).⁷ At the same time he does not visit Brest for village *slava* but has guests in Samokov on that day.

Such situations make it more complicated to differentiate between house and village *slavas* just by looking at their distinguishing characteristics. But even though telling apart these two kinds of *slava* is often a declaration, my interlocutors had no problem with its identification.

When it comes to differences between *slava* and other holidays the best example is the feast of Saint George's Day (*Gjurgjovden*, the 6th of May) which I had a chance to attend in Kosovo village. We (myself and a group of students) were invited to the *trpezarija*⁸ to eat with the whole village. No one organised the meal – each family brought something for themselves and yet we were invited to eat and drink together with them. As guests, we sat with the men while the women served the food. When we finished our meal, the women sat down to eat together. There was a lively atmosphere full of people chatting with one another. When everyone had eaten, we gathered outside the *trpezarija* and one of the men started the auction. He sold things that can usually be found at events like this: oil, sweets, socks, small towels. Besides these objects he was also selling Easter eggs which are a part of *Gjurgjovden* tradition [Kitevski 2013: 148]. After the auction people returning home invited some of us to pay them a visit.

Saint George's Day is a holiday where a particular saint is celebrated. In Kosovo, on that occasion people gathered in a church, ate together and bought things in an auction. The atmosphere was similar to a village *slava*. Other holidays also have elements typical for a *slava*. Another example

⁶ A family may ask the *pop* to choose a new saint patron for them. He draws the saint patron from a book by opening it to a random page. Once chosen that way, the saint patron cannot be changed.

⁷ The difference in dates results from the fact that this saint, as many in the Orthodox Church, has two days – in the summer and winter time. A summer date is often chosen for village *slava*, whereas a winter one is for house *slavas*.

⁸ *Trpezarija* – canopied tables next to the church or a freestanding building in which tables are placed in a way that provides a sit for every participant.

can be the Old New Year⁹ (*Stara Nova Godina*) in Samokov. On that day, residents of this village gather by the fire prepared by the *kum*. In photographs from 2014 which can be found on the Facebook page “Samokov Poreche Macedonia”, one can see people dancing around the fire. There are also food and beverages. The *kum* is chosen in the same way as in the village *slava* in Samokov.

Here I would like to emphasise that while there are a lot of elements typical to a *slava* in almost every other holiday (but not the other way around), it cannot be said that every one of them is in fact a *slava*. It is easy to ascribe, for example, an aspect of exaltation of a particular patron saint to other holidays. Jesus Christ could be treated, then, as patron saint during Christmas or Easter, Saint Basil the Great during the Old New Year, etc. Yet, even though every one of these holidays consists of elements typical of *slava*, they are also far more complex, and dismissing their distinguishing characteristics is impossible. Also, or maybe especially, because my interlocutors never did that. However in my paper I use their, *emic*, understanding of the term “slava” which seems to be wider than the one used by the Orthodox Church officials.¹⁰

Place

Every performance is spatially bound. The patron saint’s feast takes place in a particular space – a house or a church. House (or familial) *slava* is held in the home of a particular family who then invite guests and entertain them in an appointed space – often the living room or the biggest room in a house. Usually it is specially furnished with additional tables so that everyone can be seated.

The village *slava* in Poreče takes place in a church or near it. Usually a liturgy, blessing of gifts and revels are held outside the church building but on church property. In Bitovo village, an official religious ceremony took place in a temple outside the village. Later, participants gathered on a site in the village near another church where a band played. Some of village *slavas*, as in Brest, take place in the houses of inhabitants who pay each other a visit that day as there is no gathering that would be organized by a *kum*.

⁹ In the Macedonian Orthodox Church it is the 14th of January (according to Gregorian calendar), but is celebrated the night before like New Years’ Eve.

¹⁰ For example my interlocutors never used the term *sveden* which also means “a Saint’s day”. This does not mean that they always called holidays like Old New Year *slavas*, but some of them used that term when talking about holidays other than *slava* in a strict sense.

Before the church in Samokov was built, people went to the neighbouring village, Kovač, where they celebrated by the special, flat stone called *Ilinica*¹¹. One of my interlocutors described it as a grave on which the name of the Saint Elijah was engraved. Some of my interlocutors told me that older people still go there on the day of this saint.

Until 2012, one of the local *slavas*¹² organised on the Fojnik Mount had been taking place in a space with no church. The residents of neighbouring villages (Brest, Trebovlje and Kosovo) who celebrated this *slava* told me that there was a church on that mountain in the past but for some reason the building decayed. Only in 2012 was the new church built as well as a provisional *trpezarija*, and in 2013 a temple was officially consecrated by the *vladika* (an Orthodox bishop).

Village *slavas* take place in an especially designated sacred space. It is unknown why residents of Samokov used to gather by the stone of Saint Elijah (*Ilinica*) in Kovač. There is no church there although several other saints have churches nearby. It is hard to say whether it was a grave stone indeed. It was demolished in 2012 by an unknown offender and so the inscription was lost. Despite that, many of my interlocutors confirmed that it was a place where *slava* was held. Some stones have great meaning in Macedonian religious and ritual tradition. Those named after a saint may have been used as altars or places of prayer. It explains why after churches were built people would stop celebrating by the stone and moved to the temple [Vražinovski 1999: 160]. Mircea Eliade [1958: 216–238] describes stones as representative of God or His actions. Stones were placed where a deity had emerged. They symbolised graves and were perceived as the abode of a deceased soul. Confusing a sign with the deity or the deceased occasioned that stones were treated as idols [Eliade 1958: 230–231]. Therefore the stone of Saint Elijah was surely an important and sacred place. Meri Stojanova also mentions places like this when writing about Prespa, so it is not something specific only to the region I researched [Stojanova 2012: 152].

The place where a *slava* is held impacts the behaviour of its participants [Schechner 2006: 71–72]. Some of them, such as my host, feel that for a *slava* one should dress appropriately and light a candle in church before conversing with other participants. For others, attending an event in a sacred place does not obligate to keep calm and respect the priest. I believe that this rises from the fact that the space of any particular church is seen as the property of the village community. It is they who have built the church with their own hands and their own money, and it is the tradition that indicates the patron saint for a newly built temple.

¹¹ This term can be translated as “a place of (Saint) Elijah” (*Ilija*).

¹² This is the term which my interlocutors used when talking about the holiday that is celebrated there (Transfiguration of Jesus – the 19th of August) as well as other holidays.

Time

Historicity pertains to the elusiveness of event; a particular performance happens only once. Its form may allude to the form of a previous one, but a performance is “a particular moment articulating cultural symbols and ritual genre at that particular time [...]” [Schieffelin 1996: 66].

In the Orthodox Church every day is dedicated to at least one saint. Most saints have only one day a year but some of them have two days – in summer and winter time, for example, Nicholas and Athanasius. This does not mean that every day there is a *slava* – not every saint is chosen to be somebody’s patron. In practice, altogether, *slavas* in Macedonia take less than one third of a year [Nikovski 2014: 21]. I think it shows the popularity of some saints and may entail their protective functions [Stojanova 2012: 153]. Obrębski described this tendency similarly. He writes that saints:

[...] rule different powers and natural phenomena and by being patrons of different human activities and competences they function as intercessors between people and God. Some of these saints also appear as special patrons of particular families, lineages and villages [Obrębski, forthcoming b].

Slava always takes place on the same day of the year – the day of the patron saint. Village *slava* mostly takes place in the summer, although, for example, *slava* of Saint Athanasius in Kovač is held on the 31st of January. House *slavas* are usually organised during the winter but the exact date depends on the way of choosing a patron saint. Nonetheless the general rule given to me by my interlocutors remains the same.

Slavas should last two days. According to Igor Nikovski, village *slava* starts in the evening of the day before with a mass in church and lasts until morning. After morning liturgy, a *litija*¹³ takes place and then feasting, revelry, and choosing next year’s *kum* [Nikovski 2014: 25–32]. This is how it should be according to the official representative of the Orthodox Church. However, I have never seen a *slava* like this in Poreče. Those which I have attended lasted one day – beginning in the morning of the day of the patron saint (not the evening before) and finishing in the afternoon or evening. One of my interlocutors argued that in the past (before the church of Saint Elijah in Samokov was built, i.e. about 20 years ago) *slava* was also celebrated the next day (after the day of the patron saint). House *slavas* usually last two days and start with a supper the day before the actual *slava* and end the next day with two more meals for guests.

¹³ *Litija* – blessing of gifts (usually wheat seeds, wine and oil) at the end of a service on eve of some holidays [Smykowska 2008: 45]. In case of Poreče it is usually bread, wine and cooked wheat.

Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska, writing about the Passion Play, adds to the understanding of the term historicity. For her, it is understood as a particular date as well as a moment in history. Content and form are adapted to it. Baraniecka-Olszewska calls this adaptation an actualisation that can shape events [Baraniecka-Olszewska 2013: 89]. An actualisation is a process that inscribes these events in a particular moment in linear history and adjusts them to participants' requirements [Baraniecka-Olszewska 2013: 96]. I believe that actualisation can also be ascribed to a *slava* although this process does not take place in every event of this type. Surely one of the forms of actualisation is the newly built church on Fojnik as well as the plan to build a new road and parking lot there. This may cause more people to attend *slava* there because currently it is almost impossible to reach by car and takes about an hour on foot. *Slava* in Belica village may also be treated as a form of an actualisation. Having bands play at these holidays is nothing new, but in Belica more and more well-known bands, popular throughout all of Macedonia, arrive every year. Due to this fact, crowds come every year; many not from Poreče. The reason for the popularity of this *slava* may also be its patron – Saint Nicholas – who is one of the most popular patron saints in Macedonia [Nikovski 2014: 46].

Participants

In this section, I describe each person who plays a role in *slava*. Some of the participants have complex responsibilities (such as the *kum* for example) and some of them have none. Characters taking part in this holiday differ but all are mandatory – without them *slava* cannot actually happen. It is they who perform this holiday as their actions (such as dancing, praying, eating, singing, lighting a candle etc.) are the embodiment of the cultural script [Schieffelin 1996: 66].

1. *Kum*

The *kum* is, in my opinion, one of the most important characters in *slava*. He/she organises a patron saint's feast. During a house *slava* the host plays a similar role. Often during village *slava* the family of the *kum* helps him/her. They prepare food, beverages (sometimes including alcohol) and products that would be blessed – bread, wine, water, and basil. The *kum* is responsible for summoning the priest, helping him during the blessing, and organising music – usually a band that would play live. He/she cares for the needs of other participants but that role is sometimes limited.

Organising *slava* may entail considerable expenses and that is why in Belica village there is always more than one *kum* and people volunteer to carry out this role. Also, the *kum* do not have to provide the food. As my interlocutor told me, this way everyone can be a *kum*, regardless of their financial status. In some villages, money for food can be taken from that given to the church by worshippers or left from the auction. Part of that money is assigned for the renovation of the church. Expenditures are monitored by the community and a treasurer, so sometimes there is no money to provide food and beverages for participants. Nevertheless, there are still plenty of people willing to be the *kum* and the prestige that comes with this position is a powerful motivation. Similar to the house *slava*, during the village *slava* its organiser is proud if a lot of participants attend and their needs are satisfied.

The choice of next year's *kum* depends on village custom. This role may be assigned through volunteering, as it is in Belica, or drawing lots as is done in Samokov. A person who finds a coin in a piece of bread would become the next year's *kum*. Finding the coin is considered lucky and because of that a similar practice applies to the house *slava*, but in this case it is not connected with choosing an organiser.

A person appointed as the *kum* is a kind of authority. When the community lets somebody organise a holiday it is a sign of trust. My interlocutors declared that in theory anyone can become the *kum*, especially in Samokov, but after further inquiry they expressed some doubts about this rule. Some of them told me that I might not be allowed to organise *slava*, because I come from far away and might not be equal to the task. Others claimed that as a Pole I am of another faith which automatically excludes me from this role.

Gender might be another limitation. Obrębski wrote that a family is represented by a male host (the head of the family) [Obrębski n.d. c]; and a whole group or village by a man chosen as a representative [Obrębski n.d. a]. Therefore, when a family volunteers to organise *slava* it can be expected that official functions would be assigned to a man – the head of his family. It seems then, that the method of choosing the *kum* in Samokov changed this situation. In 2013, a woman drew a coin. However, when I later asked my interlocutors if they knew who would be next year's *kum* they spoke only about her husband. They only admitted that it was indeed a woman who drew the coin when I asked specifically. It appears that the position of *kum* is still associated with men.

Contrary to the situation described above, one of my interlocutors told me a story about how drawing became the method of choosing the *kum* in Samokov. She told me about a woman who volunteered to

be the *kum* since no one else wanted to. The next year she placed a coin in a loaf of bread. So in this case (probably because of precedent) she was not identified with her husband. Another important issue is how this woman as *kum* influenced the organisation of this holiday. The way of choosing its organiser, one of the most important elements of *slava*, was indelibly changed.

To fulfil the *kum's* responsibilities one has ensure that all participants' needs are satisfied. The woman who drew the coin in 2013 in Samokov did not know much about the *kum's* responsibilities or how to fulfil them. She asked my other interlocutor how to prepare the food and what was this "twig" the priest was blessing (basil). She admitted that she did not know *adeti*¹⁴ or what should be prepared for the ceremony since she had never seen one. Still, she was very happy about being next year's *kum*. She planned to ask previous *kums* about proper preparation and she suggested that she might order a barbecue in a nearby hotel.

The function of *kum* involves responsibility and good organisation. A lot of things have to be planned and, the *kum* must learn about some requirements (if he or she lacks such knowledge) to make sure everything will turn out well. Since in Samokov only the music is sponsored by the church, the rest depends on the *kum's* financial capacities and resourcefulness. The *kum* may prepare food at home or order it and has to decide what will be put in the bread to choose the next *kum*. He/she can ask family or friends for help or find a replacement if necessary.

To conclude, for Schieffelin's the *kum* is an authority who has to use available means and strategies to be equal to the task. This person also has socially creative potential [Baraniecka-Olszewska 2013: 113] as in the case of the woman who introduced the drawing method of choosing the *kum* in Samokov.

2. Other organisers

In villages where the role of the *kum* became highly limited, other people replaced him and thus became personally involved in organising practices. One of them was my interlocutor from Belica, builder of Saint Nicholas' church. He attends every *slava* in this church and looks for sponsors who will provide food and beverages for participants since the number exceeds the financial capabilities of the average *kum* (usually 200–300 people from all over Macedonia). My interlocutor from Belica organises a band that will play live during *slava*. He strives to make it a high-ranking

¹⁴ *Adet* (from Turkish *âdet*), plural: *adeti* – a custom, tradition [for more, also about distinctions between *adeti*, *zaroki* and *zakoni*, see: Obrębski n.d. b].

event, so he invites popular bands. For 2014, he was planning to invite the popular Macedonian band “Synthesis”.

There are many people personally involved in the proper organisation of a *slava*. For example the man who initiated rebuilding the church on Fojnik in the village of Brest and who would also like to build a road there to enable car transport. Before there were only vestiges of the previous church although its name was preserved. There is also a woman, involved in the organisation, who oversees the preparations of the Brest residents and the proceedings of *slava*. I think she could be described as “a person who knows”, an authority, or expert on tradition. It is she who answers questions and to whom I was referred when I wanted to discuss this holiday. During *slava* she gives signals to stop and says what should be done next. She also told me what *slava* should look like and she knew a great deal of *adets*.

Each of these people, though they are very different, is a kind of authority in their village and for the participants of *slava*. They have a significant impact on how each particular feast looks. Their knowledge, experience and status in the community are of great value compared to the *kum*, who was chosen by volunteering or by draw, and because of that they have similar capabilities.

3. *Pop*

Another personage in *slava* is a priest (*pop*) as an official representative of the Orthodox Church. He is invited to each village and each house *slava*. His duty is mostly to conduct mass and bless the bread, wine, and water. He also gives the signal to begin eating during the village *slava*. Though his presence seems to be necessary, the liturgy is sometimes ignored by part of the community.

During the *slava* in Samokov many people ignored the *pop* who was occupied with blessing the gifts prepared by the *kum*. There was an atmosphere of merriment, people chatted and lit candles in the church. Nobody waited for the priest to signal that eating and drinking were allowed – the participants freely took food while the *pop* was praying. Some activity around him occurred when the *kum* began to hand out the blessed bread.

It was similar during *slava* on Fojnik. The newly built church was blessed by the bishop (*vladika*). The liturgy was exceedingly long and toward the end many people gave up participating and began eating. At some point it was too loud for the bishop and he sharply requested silence.

I believe that these two examples show clearly that the *pop*, though usually present at *slava*, has a rather limited function in the community.

People unwillingly admit that sometimes they do not summon the *pop* for *slava* or other holidays. They usually explain that they do not have the money that should be paid to him as a ministrant. I think that this is the source of this attitude towards him. He is called by the community for a ministrant which is paid for only because they are not able to perform it themselves. Although the *pop* who is usually summoned comes from Poreče, the priest himself, as a figure, is treated as a stranger. Obrębski drew a similar conclusion calling the *pop* a “functionary of local society” [Obrębski n.d. b] who is forced on the community by the official Church and who is less respected than the “village *kum*” [Obrębski n.d. b].

The priest is however present at most *slavas*. Although the vast majority of the participants ignore him, there are still people for whom both the liturgy and the blessing of the gifts is an important religious event. They come not only for the festivities but also to light a candle and pray. They are often indignant at the behaviour of other participants’ for whom this formal personage is not significant. Impingement of Church authority is not a matter of rejection or decrial but rather an attempt at negotiation [Baraniecka-Olszewska 2013: 116]. Plenty of *slava* participants think of themselves as believers and consider it important to properly prepare for a holiday and attend it. However, participation is not always understood in the same way by them and by the Church. For this reason, Church authority (represented by the *pop*) and an authority of local tradition (represented by community actions) sometimes clash. The Church expects everything to happen according to official rules, considering anything outside those bounds as idolatry or lack of faith. The community wants everything to be according to tradition or custom. For many worshippers it is also the most frequent and most popular explanation of the majority of elements of *slava* (or other celebrations).

This does not mean however that Church authority is irrelevant. Both sources of influence – of tradition and religion – are often reconcilable. The *kum* becomes a mediator between the local religious community and the Church [Obrębski 2005: 78]. One of my interlocutors told me that he decided to build a church because of a dream in which he saw a newly built temple of Saint Nicholas. He waited to build this temple until he got permission from an official representative of the Church even though he has had a dream that is traditionally recognised as one of the reasons to start building. In dreams like this, a patron saint asks to create a church in his or her name [Vražinovski 1999: 143]. My interlocutor plans further cooperation with the Church and says that during the *slava* of Saint Nicholas people always wait for the priest’s permission to begin the revels.

4. Other participants

Slava participants are mostly people who live in a given village or who come from a neighbouring village. Because of the large migration from Poreče, there may be attendants who moved to the city or abroad, but return for holidays to visit family and friends. However, as in the case of Belica village, sometimes people outside these groups also attend. Participants are of both genders and every age – often whole families attend *slava*. Most (if not all) of them do more than just observe. They eat, dance, talk and buy items at the auction. All these actions are elements of *slava* and the participants have to be present for this holiday to happen. Among them are also people not easily ascribed to the categories of *kum* or *pop*. It is then difficult to categorise people as actors or spectators since, as in theatre, everybody performs during this holiday.

Participants can however be grouped according to their motivation for attending *slava* – entertainment, religious or traditional. Among my interlocutors one of those aspects usually predominated but the rest were not irrelevant. Nobody attends *slava* solely because of curiosity or only to pray. Curiosity and fun are strong motivations for many *slava* participants. It is also the reason why non-believers take part in this holiday.

The woman who drew a coin during the *slava* in Samokov told me that she did not know *adeti* and how the ceremony of blessing the gifts looked, because she went there to meet friends. A lot of people in Samokov were there mostly to meet friends, talk to them, eat together and play. They did not care about the *pop* and some even arrived when the blessing was over.

For those who just wanted to spend their free time at *slava*, a small stall was placed near the church where two men sold bracelets, toys, towels with logos of popular sports clubs, and lottery tickets. This was especially interesting for the children; adults were less interested but did not oppose.

The ludic aspect is not specific only to *slava*. Other holidays also consist of elements of fun or competition (such as the auction). During Saint George's holiday in Macedonia, it is a tradition that adults swing children from tree swings, while during the Epiphany a priest throws a cross into a nearby river. Young men gathered on the river bank jump into the water to catch it. The one who does wins a reward.

Others of my interlocutors talked about *slava* more seriously and drew attention to their faith. One of them told me that she is "a believer" which she understood as believing in God, going to church, celebrating holidays, and keeping fasts. Another one stopped attending *slava* in her home village, Ramne, since she moved to Samokov, but lights a candle in church on Saint Petka (the village *slava* of Ramne). During one of our interviews she criticised people who on Saint Elijah's *slava* started eating

and drinking before the priest blessed the gifts. From her point of view, disrupting the course of events in this way was a sin. She complained that people like her, who waited until the ceremony was finished, had no chance to try anything from the prepared food. She seemed indignant at those who ignored the *pop*, which, according to her, did not used to happen earlier. Among religiously involved people I also count the builder of Saint Nicholas's church in Belica. During our conversation he repeatedly underlined the connection between the Saint Nicholas *slava* and the Church. Even though he cared about the participants having a good time, he could not imagine that a situation of defying a priest in this way could happen.

I also asked two of my interlocutors (a believer and a non-believer) to comment on what I found unusual and unfitting for a place like church. I wanted to know if what seemed improper to me was improper for them as well. I perceived *slava* as a religious holiday, so I was surprised when, in Samokov, I saw some young girls standing outside the church dressed rather inappropriately. My interlocutors told me that this is improper and one of them was sure people would talk about them (just as we did) and that they would be criticised. Similarly incongruous to me was that a few people were taking pictures with the icon of Mother Mary.

The aspect of tradition seems to me the most complicated of the three. Firstly, as the term tradition keeps appearing in my paper, I will elaborate on it now. I use this term because my interlocutors evoked it to answer my questions. It was one way to explain why something is done and why it is done that way. Jerzy Szacki defined tradition as:

[...] such modes of feeling, thinking and acting which because of their real or alleged affiliation with the social heritage of the group, are either positively or negatively valued by its members [Szacki 2011: 176].

Edward Shils also indicates that it does not matter whether specific tradition is actually rooted in the past. What is important is whether it is believed to be coming from the past [Shils 1971: 131]. I am therefore not interested in judging whether what was perceived as "traditional" is actually a historical fact. I assume that if it was described by my interlocutors as "tradition" or "traditional" it is somehow "involved with the past" [Shils 1997: 105]. This is also how, I believe, my interlocutors understood tradition.

One day my host and her daughter took me to my host's mother in law. The three women were sitting and talking trying to help me formulate questions as my Macedonian at that time was not very good and it was hard for the oldest people to understand. As they formulated the questions they debated asking the eldest of them about how things were in the past and whether certain activities are still performed

or not. My host and her daughter were interested in how certain things were done when the mother in law was young since they do not do those things anymore. I perceived this conversation as a negotiation of what was traditional and why. It seems that the two younger women saw what was done in the past by the oldest as traditional while their own actions were only possibly traditional. For them activities which could be described in books and “found in the minds of elderly people” were a tradition. Therefore, tradition seemed to be understood as certain actions rooted in the past that need to be performed in a specific way in order to be traditional.

Changes within tradition or activities perceived as traditional and negotiations with actions perceived as traditional, although present and noted by me and some of my interlocutors, were generally seen as something that makes tradition pass away. Some of my interlocutors did not care about this at all, while other tried to keep it untouched and somehow codified. And yet, as Edward Shils writes:

All novelty is a modification of what has existed previously [...]. The mechanisms of persistence are not utterly distinct from the mechanisms of change. There is persistence in change and around change and the mechanisms of change also call forth the operation of the mechanism of persistence [Shils 1971: 122].

One of my interlocutors from Brest, one of the personally involved authorities, told me how she had procured her costume which she wears for *slava*. She said she got some elements from her family and some parts were bought or made by her. She was not very concerned about whether what had been assembled was in any way typical of the region where the celebrations took place. What was important was that she could wear what she herself decided was traditional costume for holidays. The tradition and its maintenance were significant to her. She knew a lot of *adets* of this and other holidays. She told me about them and she seemed sad that so many of them had changed or disappeared. Many people named her as a person who wears a traditional costume for *slava* but in 2013 she did not wear one. Still, she showed me elements of costumes that she kept in her house and she told me how she collected them. I recognised her in one of the movies on YouTube which presented the Epiphany festivities in Brest. She was not the only one who wore a traditional costume. A lot of my interlocutors also mentioned that there are still people who want to dress traditionally for holidays, which is, I assume, an attempt to uphold customs.

Another of my interlocutors from Modrište, who is responsible for a church in that village (he has a key to it), sponsored the restoration of the *trpezarija*. He described himself as a Communist (he has built himself

a grave with a red star) and the religious aspect was irrelevant to him. To him, the church was village property; hence, I think that his involvement in the restoration of the *trpezarija* came from the attachment and respect he has for common ownership.

Under the category of tradition, I also note stories from my interlocutors about unusual events that happened during *slava* or were connected to it. No one directly called it a motivation for participation but there were so many of these accounts that I do not think it is possible to exclude them. Strange events are frequently explained as possible punishment for abandoning tradition. Many of my interlocutors told me about a child who was killed by lightning a few years ago during *slava* on Fojnik. One of them told me that this was a punishment for eating meat during the fast. A woman told me a story that she heard about some village which stopped celebrating its *slava* and consequently children under the age of six began dying. When *slava* was reinstated everything returned to normal. There were also many stories about diseases that fell on people who did not keep fasts.

To sum up, I should return to the issues of performance I mentioned at the beginning of this article: Palmer and Jankowiak write about reflexivity through self-reflection, self-discovery and self-commentary. Self-reflection is observing one's feelings, memories and experiences as well as evaluating one's own performance with regard to competence [Palmer, Jankowiak 1996: 246]. Self-discovery is the evaluation of one's "performances for their effect on audiences" and seeing oneself "in the responses of others". Self-commentary is an ability to comment on one's own experience and may be critical or praiseful [Palmer, Jankowiak 1996: 247]. I believe that this pertains to all *slava* participants. They all perform *slava* and they all can make this kind of self-evaluation. When it comes to evaluating others, the term reciprocal commentary is suitable. It is what my interlocutors did when I asked them to comment on taking pictures with icons or wearing tracksuits to church. It is also what I did as I was also one of the participants and all these categories applied to me as well. Making comments about others is also possible because of differing and even conflicted agendas [Schieffelin 1996: 65]; different participants may have different agendas, but the performance is successful when everyone's goals are achieved.

Conclusion

Perceiving *slava* as a performance allows one to capture diverse aspects of this holiday. *Slava* is both a festivity, a religious ritual held by Church authorities, as well as means of upholding local tradition. The variety of its form of performance in Poreče (and in the whole Macedonia) makes

it difficult to define unambiguously. It is enough to mention the lack of music and dance in Samokov and their ignoring the priest in contrast with Belica where a big popular event takes place and where the organiser cares about how the priest is treated.

However, my paper aims not only at describing an ideal type of *slava* (its cultural script does not exist outside the performance) but to show the relationship between these two: the form (existing expressions) and the script. Also, describing *slava* as a performance allows every dimension to be shown without excluding any of them or dividing this holiday into two separate events (which never happens in reality). Its religious and ludic components are complementary. A synthesis of these elements causes different social responses – from affirmation to contestation (though the majority affirm it). There is a place in *slava* for a *pop* who conducts mass and the people who pray with him as well as for those who are not interested in the mass and would prefer to propose a toast in the meantime. There will be people who will wear short skirts or track-suits and those who think that is tasteless. Conflicts like these do not cause people to stop attending or organising *slava*. Rather, this leads to a transition within this holiday, to changes that cause it to become more attractive. Formerly, *slava* was something personal for the residents of a village – their own, private holiday. Today it is actualised, open for participants from abroad and makes its organisers proud.

The *kum* is still an authority but has lost most of his/her meaning and status. The *kum's* place is being taken by other characters whom I call organisers. Nonetheless, there is always somebody respected who oversees the event – it may be the *kum*, an organiser, or a priest. This person uses available strategies and means such as finances (one's own or the community's), other community members' knowledge, and one's inventions or status among participants (in the case of a priest). This is intended to achieve a certain, proper effect, but just as the case study of the priest shows, it is not always so in reality. The performance is therefore successful when the agenda derived from a participant's expectation is achieved but lack of success does not mean that an event did not happen.

Possible failures lead to search for the causes of failing. Conversations about *slava* and its remembrance, which I had an occasion to hear, bear testimony that emergence of the ritual evokes particular feelings. It may be the pride of a well organised *slava* or a large number of guests, fear or sadness caused by unexpected tragic events, but it may also be the indignation towards other participants.

Participation in *slava* may also be a mode of constructing one's religious identity. A person may attend mass to show his/her faith. Some attend this holiday to commemorate their origins or to underline their

attachment to their place of birth or upbringing. Many people who live outside their villages return to celebrate these holidays and see friends and family. That is how while conducting interviews in Samokov I was able to learn about *slavas* in other, neighbouring villages. The patron saint's feast may also be a way of showing others one's involvement in the life of the village. It is a gesture of solidarity toward other participants when one is present at a *slava*.

Sometimes, it is hard to think of *slava* as a patron saint's feast, something solemn and very religious because in the end it is not always this way. It is embodied through the actions of the participants – lighting candles, crossing oneself, or participating in mass. These gestures can easily be eclipsed by the ludic elements – the songs, the cheerful dances, the auction and the *rakija*; eclipsed but not dismissed because *slava* bonds these two seemingly irreconcilable aspects.

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