

Chapter 10. The Points of Continuity: Muslim Migration from Monarchist and Socialist Yugoslavia to Turkey

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Abstract

My paper points out some (unexpected) similarities in migration of Yugoslav Muslims to Turkey during the two ideologically opposed regimes: the monarchist (1918-1941) and the early-socialist Yugoslavia (1945-1955). In both cases the migration was a state-facilitated process, as Yugoslav primary sources have shown. Despite a kind of international benevolence towards the de-Ottomanization of the Balkans, the Yugoslav Kingdom attempts in demographic engineering sharpened its ethnic and religious boundaries, compromising its own minority policy at the same time. Although the uncontrolled emigration was legalized after the Yugoslav-Turkish Convention was signed in 1938, many manipulative factors have survived. Treating Kosovo Albanians as 'people of Turkish culture and language' enabled their legal expatriation and relocation to Asia Minor during the both interwar and postwar years. Furthermore, the expected improvement of their social status was why many ethnic Albanians declared their nationality or even mother tongue differently, depending on current propositions for emigration. This circumstance was systematically abused by both Yugoslav states in a very similar manner which I intend to show. Owing to restriction of their civil and religious rights, cultural and educational marginalization, the growing waves of Turkish and Albanian migrants continued to move towards Turkey within the two decades after the Second World War.

Keywords: expatriation, migration, Muslims, Turkey, Yugoslavia

Motivational capacity of social segregation

If we ignore the Milošević short-lived simulation from the early 1990s - a hasty federation created in the midst of a struggle for Yugoslav legacy - there were actually two Yugoslav states: the interwar monarchy and the socialist republic established after the Second world war. Unlike the interwar kingdom, the socialist Yugoslavia was mostly represented in historiography as a more humane society with a more equitable minority policy, which is generally not hard to prove. However, while doing my research on emigration of Yugoslav Muslims to Turkey, I have noticed several points of continuity that could challenge the notion of impeccable socialist Yugoslavia.

The political and social situation of Muslim population in Macedonia and Kosovo after the fall of the Ottoman Empire was unfavorable for several reasons. The agrarian reform and colonization processes after both world wars were similar in their nature and the extent. Due to a disintegration of feudalism, former Muslim landowners remained without sources of income, so most of them had to start trading in order to secure their existence. The fourth of all the estates provided for the colonization of Christian settlers were properties abandoned by Muslims after 1912. In both cases the so-called

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'abandoned plots' were used as a prize for Serbian and Montenegrin war volunteers (Jovanović, 2015, pp. 87-103).

Among prevailing reasons for migration there was a fear of retaliation for the crimes against Christians committed during the wars of 1912-1918, political repression over Yugoslav Muslims, their social extrusion and cultural neglecting. On the other hand, Turkish propaganda began to encourage Muslims to emigrate by emphasizing that, since the Ottoman Empire collapsed, the Turks in newly established Balkan countries should not suffer of contempt and slavery.

Certain forms of educational and cultural discrimination were obvious in both Yugoslavias. The establishment of Turkish schools within the Albanian communities, the lowest rate of Muslims employed in civil service, but also the banning of their political parties and political instrumentalisation of religious jurisdictions - are some of the possible sources of dissatisfaction and overwhelming sense of injustice (Jovanović, 2007).

Despite the constitutional obligation to finance the Muslim religious infrastructure in Macedonia and Kosovo (along with the Islamic Religious Community), Yugoslav administration demonstrated the lack of tolerance through politicization of Muslim priests and schools, and especially in terms of abusing Muslim property. Many mosques and graveyards were turned into army warehouses, gardens and homesteads. Yugoslav Department of Religions interdicted such usurpation, but their colleagues from the Ministry of agriculture usually evinced dissent (Osmanović, 1922).

Political activity of "southern Muslims" in the interwar period was carried out through the organization *Cemiyet* that gathered both feudal and religious circles of the Turkish-Albanian communities from 1919 to 1925. Its leadership was well-connected to the ruling Serbian Radical Party, betraying the hopes of Muslim population. In fact, the ruling radicals used this coalition rather to inhibit Serbian opposition, than to solve the most vital issues of Muslims, such as educational, religious and agrarian. However, the success of *Cemiyet* in parliamentary elections in 1923 triggered a series of repressive measures taken by the government: forced migration to Asia Minor, night raids, blockade of Turkish merchants, electoral manipulation, but also physical elimination. Turks had their own newspaper *Hak* which was banned by the Skopje County soon in 1924. Simultaneously with the banning of *Cemiyet* party in the next year its leader Ferhat Draga was arrested and consequently, emigration increased. District officials started to fill passports for whole days and nights in order to speed up the expatriation process (Jovanović, 2007, pp. 96-99).

Reserved, or even hostile attitude of Muslims towards Serbian or Yugoslav state during the both world wars made authorities suspicious about them in

Sandžak and Kosovo, whether it was a royal or socialist Yugoslavia. In other words, their modest participation in the anti-fascist movement turned them into “undesirable” minority even in Tito's Yugoslavia. For this reason, already in 1945 Sandžak lost its territorial autonomy which was projected only two years earlier, notwithstanding the war crimes that *Chetniks* committed to Kosovo and Sandžak Muslims, have also reinforced the sense of collective fear and existential threat. In this way, the people of Sandžak were “punished” for not being revolutionary enough, which turned them into an “unreliable element”, which quite affected their social status. The ban of wearing the veil and the abolition of Muslim religious schools encouraged further emigration (Bandžović, 2006, p. 668).

The postwar emigration was encouraged through rigid social measures by which the socialist government fought the “religious narrow-mindedness” (Bandžović, 2006, pp. 478-479). The persistent atheistic propaganda seemed to be too radical for a conservative and patriarchal Muslim society. Having lost their class position in the era of nationalization and expropriation, the richer Muslims began to leave Yugoslavia along with traders and artisans: “They were afraid of losing the religious liberty they had enjoyed during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and strongly believed that `religion without a king` was something impossible” (Karadžoski, 2009, p. 122). The scenes of lawyers riding mules in Muslim villages in order to promote emigration to Asia Minor were typical for the late-1940s, especially after the Cominform resolution of 1948, when many Albanians were accused of espionage in favor of Enver Hoxha's Albania (Bandžović, 2006, pp. 510-513).

Even after 1945 the measures of collectivization, expropriation and land holding limitations directly affected Turkish landowners. The Law on nationalization of rental buildings and building lots (1958) decreased the migration intensity, because it prevented the owners of selling their own land (Karadžoski, 2009, pp. 123-124). The most notable interest in emigration was among the peasants and former landlords whose property was nationalized by the new state. Besides, the socialist regime treated the peasants as a symbol of backwardness, trying to organize them according to the Soviet model of cooperative farming. There was a general agreement that this “non-revolutionary” area should not be developed economically but displaced, as the “Muslim fatalism hampered the initiative and desire for progress”, thus preventing the formation of the industrial working class. One of the most influential Serbian politicians, Jovan Veselinov, had a very interesting recommendation for local authorities in Sandžak: “Finish your schools, serve in the army, and move out from here. We cannot raise factories everywhere” (Bandžović, 1991, p. 103).

The problem of national identity of Muslims and its legal dimensions were particularly demoralizing for potential emigrants because they had to declare differently on national censuses: “Muslim-neutral” (1948), “Yugoslav-neutral” (1953), “Muslim in ethnic sense” (1961), or “Muslim by nationality” (1971, 1981). Furthermore, during the census of 1953 Kosovo Albanians had to declare themselves as Turks and move to Macedonia for a while, if they ever intended to leave the country. For such interest in emigration the socialist government has blamed the “religious fanaticism” of Muslims and their sympathy for Turkish capitalism (Jovanović, 2013, pp. 208-209). The majority of Albanian nationalist intellectuals have persistently spread the anti-migration propaganda, because they considered the migration an insurmountable obstacle for the eventual unification of Kosovo and western parts of Macedonia with Albania (Ilijevski, 2007, pp. 167-182).

State-facilitated migration patterns

In both monarchist and socialist regime, the methodology of expatriation was similar, ranging from withdrawal from Yugoslav citizenship to a simplified emigration procedure and administrative complication for returnees as well. The emigration of Muslims from Yugoslavia to Turkey was officially sanctioned in 1928 by the Law of Citizenship. If the “non-Slavic” citizens renounced their Yugoslav citizenship within five years, they would be removed from military and county registers. In the late-1920s Turkish passports were exposed to a restricted visa-system, while the outgoings were encouraged by many bureaucratic benefits. In the mid 1930s the Yugoslav consulate in Istanbul refused to meet the needs of those who wanted to go back to Yugoslavia because their return would affect municipal budgets. Confusing definition of potential immigrants - the “people of Turkish Culture” (1938) or “of Turkish ethnicity” (1953) - was used by Turkish authorities periodically to suspend immigration of Albanian immigrants.

Considering the methodology and patterns of state-facilitated emigration, we cannot avoid series of (in)direct measures, by which the Yugoslav governments incited Muslims to migrate, using the state institutions. The so-called Inteministerial Conference dealt with emigration problems in September 1935. It decided to encourage bilateral arrangements with Albania and Turkey, suggesting at the same time the measures to be taken in order to speed the non-Slavic migration towards Turkey (shortcuts in passport procedure, frequently call for Muslim conscripts, economical pressure in tobacco production, depose of potential emigrants from public service, nationalization of family names, etc.). Moreover, the measures contained a strong propagandistic mission aimed at attracting Albanians into Turkey, by putting about good life in Asia Minor (Jovanović, 2006, pp. 105-124).

The primary idea about expulsion of disloyal Albanians by removing 200.000 Muslims to Turkey culminated with the official Yugoslav-Turkish Convention, signed in July 1938. On the Turkish side, this project was seen as an “evacuation of the lost territories”, and therefore similar arrangements with Romania and Bulgaria were concluded as well. The main Turkish interest in these immigrants was to populate desolated territories in eastern Turkey, as well as to use Yugoslav Muslims in the fight against Kurds (Avdić, 1991, pp. 112-117). Yet, the Convention was not ratified for several reasons: in addition to financial disagreements and Ataturk's death, a possible obstacle to ratification was the fear of Yugoslav Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović that he will lose Muslim votes in the upcoming elections (Jovanović, 2013, pp. 209-210).

Just like in the prewar period, Muslims used to travel by train and after a stopover in Salonika, they would continue by boat towards Istanbul. After they sold their property for a pittance, the emigrants were given disposable passports labeled as “stateless”. They could visit Yugoslavia only after five years spent in Turkey (Bandžović, 2006, p. 539). Though, the procedure of emigration after 1945 created a less administrative problems than in the interwar period. After the intervention of Macedonian leadership, Yugoslav authorities decided to facilitate the release of citizenship. They allowed to potential emigrants to sell their property before they receive formal renunciation of citizenship in order to avoid the application of the Law on nationalization. In addition, passport fees were waived, while poor families were exempt from all transportation fees. Interestingly, emigrants from socialist Yugoslavia were allowed to carry home furnishings, a horse cart and two head of cattle, just like the Convention of 1938 had required. According to the pre-emption rights, Muslim emigrants were required to offer their farms to „national authorities“ within 45 days. It seems that the indemnification of immigrants` property was the hardest issue to be solved. Problems arose in January 1950 when the Ankara Protocol on Compensation of Turkish property in Yugoslavia was signed. It provided that Turkish property owners should be exempt from all liability including taxes, mortgages and other debts incurred before the nationalization (Jovanović, 2013, p. 210).

Already in 1951 the idea about expulsion of Albanians has been revived and all the Muslims began to declare themselves as Turks, in order to be considered for emigration, according to the procedure. Therefore, between the two national censuses in Kosovo (1948-1953) the number of people who identified themselves as Turks increased as much as 26 times! This declaration had to preserve both Yugoslavia and Turkey from unpleasant international reaction regarding the expatriation of the Albanians.

In October 1951 Turkish government demanded from their Yugoslav partners to ratify and implement the Convention of 1938, particularly its financial terms. For that reason Yugoslav President Tito invited Turkish Foreign Minister Fuad Köprülü to visit Yugoslavia. During a dinner in Split in the late-January 1953 they reached a verbal agreement on emigration process. Nothing was signed on this occasion, so the entire event became known as the Gentleman's Agreement that was supposed to revive the Yugoslav-Turkish Convention of 1938 (Pezo, 2013). In addition, this agreement was formally aimed at “humanitarian family reunification”, while the Turkish side treated kinship relations so broadly that they could apply to anyone. Furthermore, the notion of “Turkish nationality” was too expansive, very suitable for abuse (Pačarić, 2016, pp. 153-154). Consequently, the Turkish government started to complain about the large number of ethnic Albanians who had arrived as “Turks from Yugoslavia” (Bandžović, 2006, pp. 533-534).

As for the Albanians, there was a kind of alternating interest, or occasional sympathy among Turkish authorities for the Albanian immigrants, manifested through temporary suspension of their immigration. Since the licenses were massively issued to Macedonian Albanians, Turkish Consul in Skopje started to reject Albanian applications for a while. At the same time, his colleague from the Turkish Embassy in Belgrade said that Turkey is “willing to accept Albanians tacitly” (Jovanović, 2013, pp. 211-212).

As noted before, in both periods the initiative came from the Turkish officials (H. Saka, R. Aras, F. Koprulu, Turkish Embassy in Belgrade), while Macedonia was a transit area for expatriates. The similarity was evident in simplified procedure of citizenship withdrawal, and therefore it was easy to obtain the documents that prove “Turkish origin”. At the same time, it was almost impossible to return to the land of eviction. Furthermore, the emigration mechanism in both periods was entrusted to Yugoslav ministries of agriculture and agrarian reform, in which there was obvious personal continuity (Sreten Vukosavljević was the state secretary of agricultural reform in 1920s, but also the Minister of Agriculture and Colonization in the first socialist government in 1945). Strikingly similar were disarmament actions among Kosovo Albanians that usually preceded major migration tides in early 1920s and the mid-1950s. In 1955/56 the State Security carried out a weapon collection campaign among the Albanians, just like the one from the early-1920s. As a consequence, there were 22.000 new personal files created, ‘allowing’ the Albanians to retain their inconvenient status of the ‘most distrustful element’.

Similarities in the extent of migration and international context

Between the two world wars the Yugoslav authorities used to register only regular cases of emigration, losing the sight of illegal immigration and the real extent of this phenomenon. Therefore, the official statistics are incomplete,

underestimating the actual number of emigrants. According to the Yugoslav Statistical Yearbook for the period 1930-1939 only 13,678 people emigrated to Turkey. On the other hand, the political abuse of other sources has led to the almost fantastic exaggeration, especially in the Albanian historiography. In both cases, there were fake numbers of displaced Albanians, although their emigration in the first decade after the Second World War outreached the entire interwar period. The Yugoslav official sources present figures of 450,000 Yugoslav Muslims who emigrated to Turkey during the period 1918-1949 (Jovanović, 2013, p. 213).

The post-war immigration to Turkey culminated in the mid-1950s, when the most wealthy Muslims were moving out, capable to start business in Turkey. Poorer population emigrated before 1966 when the immigration wave has fallen sharply. Many historians tend to connect it with the political decline of Serbian nationalist politician Aleksandar Ranković², but there is no solid documentation that would confirm this. Even in the mid-1950s, Kosovo Albanians considered Macedonia a transit point on their way to Turkey in spite their religious leaders and intelligence urged them to stay in Yugoslavia in order to avoid further false ethnic identification - as Turks (Crvenkovski, 1957, pp. 6-13).

The Yugoslav official statistics from 1952 to 1965 show that 390,000 Turks and Albanians received release from Yugoslav citizenship which corresponds with Yugoslav diplomatic sources from 1970 that registered nearly 300,000 Turkish citizens who came from socialist Yugoslavia. Interestingly, during the 1960s more than three-quarters of emigrants were actually Turks. An English historian Hugh Poulton tried to comprehend those shifts in number of Turks in Macedonia, scoring with a conclusion that Albanians began to identify themselves as Turks *en masse*, while the ethnic Turks declared as "Muslims" (Poulton, 2003, pp. 83-84). The fact that the post-war migration was almost twice as large as the one between the two world wars might seem surprising for those who use to idealize the minority policy of the socialist regime.

In addition to these similarities in motivation and mechanism of migration, there were some parallels in the international context as well. In 1938, when the Yugoslav-Turkish convention was signed, Yugoslav Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović was openly flirting with fascism, while the Balkan pact of 1953 (following the Gentlemen Agreement) was an expression of a strong anti-Soviet orientation of socialist Yugoslavia. Both Yugoslav-Turkish

² Ranković was the most powerful Yugoslav communist of Serbian ethnic origin of that time. During the 1950s he advocated a „hardline approach“ against Kosovo Albanians, as a head of military intelligence and secret police. He fell from power in 1966 when he was expelled from the Yugoslav Communist Party.

demographic arrangements (1938, 1953) have been achieved in the shadow of the two Balkan Pacts. The first one was signed in 1934 between Romania, Greece, Turkey and Yugoslavia while the other was signed in February 1953 between Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey, growing into a military alliance the very next year. Moreover, in both cases Yugoslavia was approaching the leading military alliances. At the end of 1930s, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was turning towards Germany, while in 1953 it approached NATO, seeking for a protection from the possible Soviet attack.

However, Yugoslavia was not the only country having such a “double” experience with Muslim migration. Moreover, both methodology and patterns of Muslim migration from Bulgaria were similar to the last detail (Vasileva, 1992, pp. 346-352). In the mid-1930s Turkish government negotiated with Bulgaria about displacement of 789.000 Bulgarian Muslims to Turkey. After the Second world war, due to a bad religious and cultural position, the Bulgarian Turks have decided to move to Turkey again (more in: Şimşir, 1985). Although the number of potential emigrants increased significantly after 1947, Bulgarian authorities started to obstruct the procedure of issuing passports. However, the first great postwar migration started in August 1950 when Bulgarian government was ready to send off 250.000 Bulgarian Turks towards Turkey, though „only“ 150.000 managed to emigrate (Vasileva, 1992, pp. 346-352).

Concluding notes

Since the ethnic and religious minorities were seen as a “necessary evil” in the interwar Yugoslavia, one could expect completely the opposite when the communist regime proclaimed an absolute discontinuity with their predecessors in 1945. However, whether it was a monarchy or socialist community, Yugoslavia appeared a land where Muslims were easily identified with the rulers from the Ottoman era (regardless of their ethnic or social origin), which created an atmosphere for radical solutions, such as expatriation or even forced migration. Behind these two migration projects there was a strong intention for homogenization: in 1930s its core should be the ethnicity and religion, while in 1950s the ideology should be the main factor of cohesion. It was almost the same process in two completely different situations under two ideologically opposed political systems.

During the first decade of the socialist regime the Yugoslav authorities failed to achieve comprehensive integration of national minorities primarily due to a lack of economic and cultural development of areas with a Muslim majority. Under such circumstances, Muslim emigration from Yugoslavia to Turkey became a state-facilitated process, as a part of a broad Balkan “demographic de-Ottomanization” trend. At the same time, the interweaving of identity boundaries indicated a sort of pragmatism, demystifying stereotypes on

'ethnicity obsession' in the name of which the Muslims would sacrifice their own prosperity.

In spite of prevailing stereotypes about Serbian hegemonism and 'affinity' towards the ethnic engineering, one could conclude that the whole idea was constantly being thrown in Yugoslavia from the Turkish side, during the both 1930s and 1950s. Regardless of its political or ideological structure, Yugoslavia was nothing but a 'partner in crime' who gladly accepted the idea of emigration for further implementation. In times when Yugoslavia was economically even more stable than Turkey, there was undue emphasis on economic motives of Muslim migration while historians usually neglected or overstated their political motivation. Besides the objective difficulties, the causes were also inconsistent enforcement of authorities in providing minority rights (such as bilingual education and administration). The insufficient economic development of Muslim communities in Yugoslavia has further hindered the integration of minorities, while the benefits of land reform were partly reversed by establishing peasant cooperatives. Most of these issues were not resolved until the end of the Yugoslav state; all the more, these unresolved issues have indirectly led to the disintegration of the entire state.

Although the Muslim migration to Turkey was a broad Balkan process (Romania, Bulgaria, Greece), the Yugoslav case was somewhat different. By using the Yugoslav-Turkish agreements Yugoslavia tried to expel Albanians as "people of Turkish culture". It seems that this was precisely the main motivation/incentive in both migration periods. Disloyalty of an 'undesirable nationality' was seen as a propensity to irredentism during the interwar period, but also as a product of a blind devotion to both Soviet and Albanian leaderships, the most dangerous ideological enemies of the Yugoslav socialist regime in the early-1950s.

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