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## A CONTRIBUTION TO UNDERSTANDING "ČEFURKE"

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### ABSTRACT

*The paper deals with migratory processes from the area of the former Yugoslavian republics towards Slovenia, focusing primarily on women migratory population. By combining theoretical knowledge with empirical findings the article tries to shed light on the poorly researched immigration processes in Slovenia, despite the fact that immigration rate has exceeded emigration rate already since the 1960s. Its main perspective proceeds from personal narrations which transgress the usual monochromic conclusions and expose the need to study women's migration in a contextualized perspective. The main methodology used rely on the oral history method of collecting life stories; a free, conversational method of gathering information about migratory experiences, which also reveals new perspectives, new research questions.*

**Key words:** women, immigrants, Slovenia, former Yugoslavia, life stories

### UN CONTRIBUTO ALLA RIFLESSIONE DI "ČEFURKE"

*Il presente articolo tratta i processi di migrazione dalle repubbliche dell'ex Jugoslavia in Slovenia e in primo luogo si concentra sulle migrazioni della popolazione femminile. Combinando il sapere teorico e le constatazioni empiriche, l'articolo cerca di chiarire i processi di immigrazione in Slovenia non abbastanza ricercati, anche se le percentuali della popolazione immigrata superano le percentuali delle emigrazioni già dal lontano 1960. La prospettiva principale nasce dalle storie personali che vanno oltre le classiche conclusioni monocroniche e sottolinea il bisogno di una ricerca contestualizzata delle migrazioni femminili. L'approccio metodologico, scelto dalle autrici, si basa sulla raccolta di storie di vita secondo il metodo della storia orale, sul metodo della conversazione aperta che raccoglie informazioni riguardanti esperienze migratorie e al contempo rivela nuove prospettive, ma apre anche nuovi punti di domanda.*

**Parole chiave:** donne, immigranti, Slovenia, ex Jugoslavia, storie di vita

PROLOGUE<sup>1</sup>

*“So I told my family I was leaving. I’m going to Ljubljana... they thought I was joking. Then Mirko came and we went to see my mother. Nobody even knew about him and suddenly he was there to take me to Ljubljana. I wrote him a letter and told him he should write a letter to my parents, to console them a little bit. So I told him what to write, he just copied it with his handwriting. He promised them he would take good care of me and that he would find me a job. You know, to comfort them a bit because it was a big shock for them... the news about me leaving came out of the blue. They didn’t even know where Ljubljana was.”*

The above quote of Vladanka, a migrant woman from Serbia, depicts only one of the ever-unique circumstances in which departure from home takes place. In contrast to the common assumption, her emigration wasn’t stimulated by economic motives, as she had already had a steady job, a place to live and was financially self-sufficient. Her decision to emigrate was sudden and encouraged by an invitation of her future husband Mirko to start a new life in Slovenia. The quotation also indicates the strategy of announcement of the decision to leave home, in which Vladanka played a major, yet hidden role. In many ways, such a role resembles undisclosed positioning of women migrants.

The following article sheds light on the migration of women in the territory of ex-Yugoslavia. Regarding the time frame, this migration took place within the federal state of Yugoslavia until 1991, and from then on between former Yugoslav republics, which after the disintegration of Yugoslavia formed sovereign states. Migrations in the Yugoslav framework took place in multiple directions, however in this article we focus particularly on the women immigrants from other parts of Yugoslavia to Slovenia. In many aspects these migration flows from South to North of Yugoslavia resemble the ‘Gastarbeiter’ (guest worker) system, where non-qualified or semi-qualified workers from the European and wider periphery (Italy, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Morocco, Portugal, Tunisia and Yugoslavia) started working in growing industrial concerns across Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and Skandinavian states on the basis of

bilateral state contracts (Castles, Miller, 2003; Shonick, 2009). Guest workers were believed to be working there temporary, but gradually, particularly with the birth and acculturation of their offspring, their permanent stay was significantly consolidated.

Since Slovenia was economically one of the most developed republics of Yugoslavia, its growing industry and greater work opportunities since the 1960s surely provided an intriguing imagery among people who lived in poorer living conditions within the once common state. There was a growing influx of workers from Southern republics to Slovenia reaching its peak in the 1970s. However, despite the undeniable importance of economic factors in understanding people’s mobility, preoccupation with the economy, states and markets often obscure cultural, social and psychological elements such as interpersonal relations and personal characteristics (Boyd, 1989; Eitinger, 1981) and consequently migratory processes appear to be monochrome. Only with the broadening of the causal spectrum, by taking into account personal contexts, it could be elucidated more convincingly why not all but only a limited number of certain community takes advantage of leaving home. Studies on the phenomenon of guest workers overlooked its women segment largely by highlighting economic reasons (Shonick, 2009); similar conclusion could be drawn for Yugoslav women immigrants in Slovenia, who were until recently only scarcely studied.

Our main intention is to rise above the generally spread stereotypes regarding women migrants, originating from such restricted knowledge, existing especially among average people and media representations. Despite the fact that in international scientific discourse migration is not a male story any more, as it was considered decades ago, gender aspect of migration in the researches carried on in Slovenia seems to be (with few exceptions until recently) more or less overlooked. Namely, the usual representation of immigrants in Slovenia depicts poorly educated, unqualified or semi-qualified male workers in the building industry, who come from the rural, underdeveloped parts of the former Yugoslavia. They are believed to live in poor living conditions and to be “uncultured” (and not of a different culture). As it was found in many reports on this issue, they are also pictured as uninvited, even potentially dangerous intruders (Kuzmanić, 1999; Komac, 2007;

<sup>1</sup> The term *čefur* is a vulgar neologism which started being popularized by the urban youth scene in the late 1980s, early 1990s Central Slovenia. Depending on a context, *čefur* may label immigrants from the Southern republics of the former common state in general or it can mark a member of the ‘*čefur* mileu (noisy, recognizable and supposedly problematic youth with immigrant background). Some of them conform to this label, but not all immigrants from the former Yugoslavia are referred as ‘*čefur*’; more often they are associated with the terms *bosanci* (Bosnians), *jugoviči* (Southerners) *švedi* (Swedes), etc. From cultural, interpersonal aspects, the term *čefur* resembles the nowadays controversial meaning of the term ‘nigger’, depending on who uses it; usually, the term *čefur* signifies people of the ex-Yugoslavian provenience as ethnically disadvantaged and inferior, yet it also means ‘a brother’ when spoken out by *čefur* himself (for comparison see the lyrics of N.W.A. rap group). However, the term cannot be defined concisely and definitely for its meaning is constantly gaining new features. *Čefurka* is a feminine form of the term ‘*čefur*. We have chosen this colloquial term in order to illustrate the power of oral sources we use predominantly. It also depicts rather marginalized, sometimes also pejorative attributes that have been ascribed to migrants, especially to female migrants.

Komac, Medvešek, Roter, 2007; Medica, Lukić, 2010).

For a long time women were absent, not recorded in the classic migration studies (Cukut Kirilić, 2009: 35–43). Nevertheless papers and researches dealing with the topic of women migration appeared in Europe as early as in the 1980s (Morokvašič, 1984) along with general broadening of women's issues within the fields of humanities and social science (see also Kofman et al., 2000). Up until then, women were supposed to have been passive, depending and invisible agents in the mobile layers of society, who – if at all – only exceptionally took the initiative for migratory decisions. According to these beliefs, they stayed behind when their men went abroad and only later joined them, almost exclusively for the purpose of uniting the family and mostly remained secluded in the private sphere as mothers and housekeepers. They also shared similar stereotypical images that were ascribed to male immigrants, as being poor, uneducated, unambitious, "uncultured" etc. However, the empirical findings we collected and presented in the last chapters of this article, reveal a rather more diverse picture.

Many of such stereotypical standpoints emanate from historical accounts on migrations in the past centuries, where the women segment of migrating population – with the exception of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – is barely noticeable. Women were often merely a subject left to historians' imagination, despite the fact that they were statistically always present in different forms of mobility. The main reason of women's invisibility lies in the predominantly gender-blind nature of traditional historical interest and historiographical preoccupation with political events and 'important' layers of society, exposing renowned political leaders, priests, aristocrats, combatants, literates etc. The established, traditionally patriarchal and culturally conditioned social norms limited women mostly to various forms of work within the private sphere. But even such a perception requires a closer look at the family context, where women nonetheless left an important imprint of their original culture: the transfer of original cultural values and behavioural patterns, language, religion, culinary practices and traditions to their children. All these transitions, routes of culture and intercultural relations are major subjects within migration studies and even a migrant woman, emerging from traditional patriarchal norms plays an important role in such perspectives.

Generally, public and mass media in Slovenia has been until recently predominantly dealing with male migrants, ignoring the topics related to women migrants. Only recently specific issue on female migrants coming mostly from the Eastern Europe are covered and dealing with the problems of prostitution, dancers in the night clubs and trafficking as well as researches on female migration connected to the labour market. The presence of female migrants can also be detected through the activities of migrants' cultural societies in some urban centres

in Slovenia. Despite the fact that presence of woman migrants in Slovenia has been noticed, they have mainly been considered insignificant and unimportant. This is mostly a consequence of the public attitude to women's issues as such, but also of the fact that often women migrants themselves, who – whether they engage in the field of 'invisible' domestic service or in the public sector – avoid public attention. Even the accounts of the victims of discriminatory practices have not drawn as much media and public attention as, for example, those of their male countrymen, even though the discrimination they experienced may have been multiple and intersectional (for more see Hrženjak, Jalušič, 2011; Kuhar, 2009).

We believe that the actual women migrant's heterogeneity has been reduced to certain homogeneous stereotypes. Correspondingly, the understanding of their migratory decision was often simplified, and equated better economic opportunities to multilayered and dynamic motives for their self-actualisation. The majority was reckoned not only as dependent and passive, but also lacking any cosmopolitanism and "sophisticated ideas". Also poor language skills were frequently ascribed to them, and their ethnic, professional, or other ways of self-identification was seen unified and consolidated. Viewed from afar they were often unambiguously characterized as simple-minded "bosanke", "južnjakinje", or recently as "čefurke" who occupied rather low-paid jobs, mostly as cleaners, and who master in making cheese-pie, sarma or pasulj, drink lots of coffee and listen to "Southern" music. Such simplifications will be refused and put into contextualized personal perspective. We tend to show that women's migratory experiences presented in personal contexts (mostly through their perceptions of the reasons to migrate and questions of identity and identifications) may reveal an active and autonomous approach towards new life experiences and better living conditions.

#### THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

As in many other research areas, traditional migration theory is largely gender-blind, but on the other hand deeply gendered, as men are considered the key players in migratory processes (Anthias, Cederberg, 2010, 20). For being treated as accompanying dependants, women were only rarely given attention in theoretical accounts of migration (for example see Boyd, 1989; Chant, Radcliffe, 1992 in Carling, 2005). Even when women were recognised as active migrants their experiences were often neglected, despite the fact that women's migratory experience might substantially differ from men's. One of the common conclusions of these studies was also that the one who decides to migrate is in most cases a man, *pater familias* and the breadwinner, while a woman was treated only as the one who follows and/or migrates for

the reason of family reunification. But researches in the field of migration have gradually become aware of the gender dimension of migration (especially in the studies influenced by feminist theory); as a result, discussions about the feminization of migration have been recognized as a tendency at the global level (Castles, Miller, 2003, 67).

The emphasis of the first studies dealing with women migrants was to make migrant women visible (Morokvašič, 1984). Decades of research, a substantial collection of books, special issues of the journals, papers at conferences, many collections of evidence and documentation in this field brought to the surface plenty of evidence that women not only constitute significant proportion of many migration flows, but are often active migrants themselves. Many researchers have also shown that women had different experiences of migration from men (Pedraza, 1991; Morokvašič et al., 2008). In the last decades the growing number of migrant women has been studied in the light of family and refugee migration (with far larger share of women than men), which might be quantitatively comparable to labour migration. But on the other side, there is also an increasing number of women migrating independently for work or educational purposes (Carling, 2005; Metz-Göckel et al., 2008). The term *new migration* is connected to the diversity and shifts in motivations for migration, where particularly educated women take part in the 'solo migration projects' (Anthias, Cederberg, 2010, 22). Feminist scholars call attention to the more complex understanding of migration including multiple gender dimension and importance of the ways in which migrants make choices to move (ibid., 24).

When setting the theoretical frame, we came across the scarcity of the studies concerning women migration in the Balkan area, especially those who deal with the subject of immigration to Slovenia. Only recently the research interest in this field has grown, notably in the works of Razpotnik (2004), Kalčič (2007), Cukut Krilić (2009) and Pajnik, Bajt (2012). Therefore, we also relied on feminist surveys, which pointed out the distinguishable features of women migration elsewhere (Gültekin et al., 2006; Kofman, 2003; Morokvašič, 2006; Women Immigrants: Stewards of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Family<sup>2</sup>). Moreover, in the referential literature, there have been ever growing discussions of the feminisation of migration and of the need to emphasize the gender dimension in migration processes (European Women's Lobby, 1995; Kofman et al., 2000; Piper, 2005; Morokvašič, 2010).

In order to go beyond the generally accepted views on women migrants and to analyse the peculiar char-

acteristics of the ex-Yugoslav and Slovenian area, we decided to research the terrain from below by collecting life stories of women migrants. Such a biographical method according to our conviction optimally enables the contextual and intersectional insights in migration processes, which highlight social, economic and historical facts at a certain moment, while it also provides very personal and intimate circumstances (Milharčič Hladnik, Mlekuž, 2009). Furthermore, it also brings out the everyday life perspective, which sheds light also on traditionally invisible social groups (such as women migrants) and pays special attention to the actual variety of their behaviour, norms and thinking patterns that substantially add to the comprehension and evaluation of migration experiences.

In choosing the life story or a biographical method which has regularly been used in gender studies and in other fields of sociological research (Aritzsch, Siouti, 2007), we relied on the rich experience of renowned oral historians (Portelli, 1997; Thompson, 2000; Thomson, 1999; Passerini, 2008; Perks, Thompson, 2005; Ramšak, 2004) as well as on extensive ethnographic and gender studies (Reinharz, Davidman, 1992; Oakley, 2000; Savić, 2001; Rosenthal, 2004; Savić et al., 2008). According to the findings of the above mentioned researchers who deal with the narratives, we were not aiming at samples, but trying to get interesting and telling perspectives. In this regard we consider the story more important than the sample. Consequently we were searching for contextualized life stories, for people who would freely speak out themselves.

We cannot ignore the fact that life stories of these immigrant women are 'caught in the moment' and would be different on another occasion. We are also aware that their stories are not permanent truths. Temporal and spatial contexts have important consequences for their narratives and for the analysis and interpretation of their accounts. These life stories offer only partial answers and are subjective self-representations of the narrators, but they can offer us an important broader social context (Roberts, 2002). Much like the reality of everyday life is socially constructed and re-constructed, so does a biographical story have to be understood as a social construction in which one can detect an interdependent intertwining of the macro, mezzo and micro levels of life (Hoerder, 1997).<sup>3</sup> An individual evaluates and contextualizes broader social contexts (general political, economic, cultural and other moments) and private social reality (familiar and various social networks) through a subjective range of experiences, which are constantly redefining. For a better understanding of a context concerning personal aspects, a high level of

2 <http://media.namx.org/images/communications/immwomenexecsummary.pdf>

3 The three levels address different scopes on which an individual has different degrees of influence and determination. Micro level addresses one's personal circle, intimacy, family and home, mezzo level corresponds broader interpersonal relationships, local community, co-workers and acquaintances, while macro level signifies national and global structures in the fields of economy, politics, culture etc.

methodological sensibility – how the individuals form their biographic stories, what they emphasise or withhold and to what extent various social and cultural contexts influence the narration – is needed. Nonetheless, these stories all carry the message of the importance of social contacts and connections between different cultures, which enrich our ever-changing society and generate improvements.

The analysis of a biographical account helps us understand how these individuals place themselves in their social contexts and how they understand them (Gültekin et al., 2006). By using it, we can research the structures of individual and social actions in order to discover possible origins of persistence and change. General questions concerning migration were all answered with individual emphases and conclusions, which reveal diverse relevancies in their stories. The consideration of these narrative accents also enables the setting of new research perspectives. Here, we have to point out these women's common starting point that there was nothing particularly remarkable in their stories. Only after browsing through their memories, they found out that their life stories include many telling and interesting details, realizations, conclusions. The conviction about the insignificance of their life-experiences could denote the contours of their damaged self-image, not used of public exposure.

The patterned set of interviewees was formed within rather unconstrained categories, since the main interest was to qualitatively and not quantitatively contextualize their immigration experience. We took advantage of talking to a broader range of migrant women, who were either immigrants themselves or were descendants of immigrants.

The diversity and variety of their fates or life trajectories is mirrored in their stories (Antić Gaber 2011). Individual women have been chosen on the basis of snow ball method. We started to collect the possible informants using recommendations to find immigrant women for whom we were positive that they would trust them and openly tell their stories. In order to deconstruct the prevalent image of immigrant women from the former Yugoslavia, the aim was to collect the stories of women from urban and rural environments, from different religious, national, class, educational, professional, etc. background, with different marital status and from different age groups. We visited the interviewee once or more times depending on the need for additional clarifications. Interviews lasted from two to six and more hours and were carried out in the environment chosen by the interviewees themselves, in the places where they felt comfortable to talk about sensitive issues (mostly at their homes). Their narratives were recorded (some of them also video recorded), transcribed and served as a main source for the book of written stories, which were in great part made of their quotations. At the very beginning each woman signed a consent in which she agreed to let her story be published under her real name. Af-

ter the story had been written, each interviewee read it through, commented and approved it.

In total we collected twenty life stories of women migrant, six coming from Bosnia, six from Serbia, two from Macedonia, two from Croatia, one from Kosovo and three born in Slovenia. They were coming in different period, half of them before the collapse of Yugoslavia and one third from 1990s on. One fifth have less than secondary education, one third has finished some kind of secondary schools and half of them were highly educated professionals. At the time of collecting their stories (in the years 2010 and 2011) they were living in different parts of Slovenia, three of them in rural areas, six in smaller towns and the rest in the bigger cities and the capital city Ljubljana, where they were also interviewed.

While collecting the stories of migrant women, we were interested in all sorts of questions: When and why did they come to the decision to leave their homes and come to Slovenia? What were their first impressions, experiences, fears and hopes, disappointments and surprises when encountering the new environment? What help or obstacles did they experience in their contact with the people in the new environment? What were their first experiences of the people, language, culture, habits and traditions in the new setting? What methods did they employ in keeping in touch with their native environment? How did they see themselves in the new environment and how were they perceived by others? How were their lives and decisions marked by the fact that they were women? How do they feel in the new environment today? How do they feel about not being ethnically Slovenian? What possible discriminatory treatment or stigmatizations within the public sphere or private life have they experienced? Could they provide a general evaluation of their lives in Slovenia (benefits and shortcomings) and their thoughts on the (near) future?

In order to limit the life story narration to the migratory experiences, we clearly explained to the interviewee the point of their purposes. Thus the conversation was not limited to any strict questionnaire, but rather took the form of a more or less open talk about migratory experiences that often revealed noteworthy perspectives and significant anecdotes. For the following paper we selected only a few aspects that decompose or even reject the stereotypical assumptions about women immigrants from other parts of the former Yugoslavia in Slovenia. Each of the mentioned stories discloses at least a part of the (until now) unseen, hidden or veiled, maybe even intentionally overlooked features of the lives of migrant women from the former Yugoslavia.

#### FROM PERSONAL ACCOUNTS OF MIGRANT WOMEN

The choice of taking into account migrant women's stories as a tool to elucidate migratory experiences was

stimulated by their contextualized significance. It was also a convincing and reasonable way to go beyond many stereotypes including such as the exclusively suffering or solely liberating image of their migratory story. Moreover, all the stories regardless to their perspectives are reflecting hardships as well as improvement of their living conditions, which shouldn't be seen as oppositions, but rather as polarities, as extreme parts of life confining the wholeness.

Here we have decided to present only a few perspectives that present women's migratory experiences, namely their own explanations of migratory decisions, the making of their social network and the developments of their identification processes. These – as already described above – are among the most ordinary, yet highly one-dimensionally presented issues in the understanding of migration through the perceptions of the dominant society. Many of the findings may not substantially vary in the light of gender differences, in spite of prevalence of the gendered stereotypes. However, this empirically based conclusion calls for making women recognized in the migratory processes, not only due to their long-lasting invisibility or alleged unimportance, but because they constitute a comparable share of the migrating population and thus adequately contribute to the societies, the sending and the receiving ones.

### Behind the decisions to move

We already mentioned that migrations in former Yugoslav context (as in many other cases) were mostly understood in economic terms and for a long time primarily related to a male population (Malačič, 2008) or researched in a family context (Mežnarič, 1986). Researching the reasons and motives behind people's decision to move, to leave the country of origin is not an easy task. Official statistics can only partially explain migrant processes, as they merely reveal official perspective imposed by the interest of the state. Without a tendency to marginalize their importance, we have to emphasize, that they usually lack information enabling an insight in the combination of various factors and actors according to which the decision to migrate was formed. In terms of statistics the prevalent motive to migrate might be still "to find a job", but the real stimulation might also be different, like family unification and studying (Medvešek, Bešter, 2010, 57). It is often assumed that under the reason "to find a job" stays a man and under the reason "family unification" stays a woman, however empirical facts do not always confirm such an assumption.

The following bits and pieces from the stories of migrant women in Slovenia show that many women themselves either made migratory decisions on their own, or significantly influenced the decision of their partners. Apart from that the economic reasons were not the only or not at all the cause of migration and their migra-

tory experiences have some gendered specificities. As in other researches of migrant women in Slovenia and elsewhere (Slany et al., 2010; Kofman et al., 2000) our research too, found variety of reasons, motives and factors that lead women to come to the decision to migrate. Variety, multiplicity and intersection of reasons include not only economic necessity, but also love and marriage, personal independence, escaping from unfortunate environment, violence in private or public life, oppressive familial or gender roles, gendered roles and normative expectation, seeking better chances for personal development in schooling or in professional life, new opportunities for social and occupational mobility (compare also Metz-Göckel et al. 2008). Such motives were often found as reasons to move in many stories we collected.

As Vladanka, coming to Slovenia from Serbia in the late 1970s, trained as economist explained her decision by emphasizing her falling in love as a main factor to start such an adventure, when she was only 19:

*"We met by coincidence because he was visiting my neighbour during holidays. We met in May, ... and I was already here in November. I didn't come because I had to. I had a great job down there.... Here, it took me a long time to become somebody.... Maybe if I had waited a little longer, I could've changed my mind."*

Or as Magdalena, an ambitious and aspiring student of medicine, coming from smaller Macedonian town in the late 1970s pointed out obsolete, enclosed surrounding and prevalent apathy among its habitants:

*"I somehow always wanted to leave. I don't know why, I never saw myself in this Kruševo of mine.... People were ignorant. I always wanted to go somewhere. I'm an urban type, small environments bother, kill me. I always thought that I was only here [in small town of Krško, Slovenia] temporarily, that I would eventually move to some larger city."*

Another stereotype that is also strongly anchored in the gender-blind perspectives on migrants, is that migrating women were simply following their husbands. However, a detailed view of their decisions to leave their original environments reveals further complexities, indicating numerous reasons for their migratory decisions.

In our cases (for comparison see also Slany et al., 2010) we frequently noticed other reasons, such as escaping from the destiny of being a woman in a rural environment, subordinated not only to the husband but also to his family and relatives, being controlled by the small and enclosed rural communities, who expected of young women to stay at the home of her absent husband, who was working abroad as "gastarbeiter".

The idea of independence and the wish to avoid the control of patriarchal family patterns led one of our in-

interviewees to propose to her then-boyfriend, a worker in Slovenia, to marry. The disappointment over the fate of a married woman in rural Bosnia encouraged her to depart for Slovenia. Her departure could easily be understood as following her husband, but from her narrative it is evident, that it was mainly conditioned by the escape from the farm work. Dinka, coming to Ljubljana in the beginning of the 1980s recalls her thoughts about that time:

*“Independent in Bosnia, come on! /.../ Then I really saw what life is. ... A stable full of cows, a farm ... man, you had to work hard, you work there from four in the morning to nine, ten in the evening, get it?”*

In recent periods (during the war in the region and immediately after) and in multiple cases, emigration was connected to the possibilities of studying at the university level, which were not available in their home environments; or to escape from political pressure, growing nationalism; or to find new opportunities, challenges, “free and creative expression” etc. In this period, we observe the trend of an active migratory participation of young and educated women.

The following narratives of a young theatre director and a woman at the beginning of her academic career prove, that they were not at all followers of their partners, but independent actors in their migration processes, finding the ‘room of one’s own’:

*“I basically came during the spring of the Belgrade bombing in 1999, and I somehow managed to enrol into a postgraduate course...” (Ivana)*

*“1986 was crucial for me.... I started lecturing in Ljubljana, I became a feminist, and our nomadism got new qualities..... And when I lost my job in ’88, my position in Belgrade, all because of politics, because at that time I had already been a national traitor... I started spending more and more time in Ljubljana.” (Svetlana)*

Gender dimension in the decisions to move is clearly visible in the selected quotes. Many (not only educated and emancipated) women were not simply followers of their partners and husbands, but played an active role in their migratory life trajectories. Mostly as ones who consciously escaped a predictable fate of a woman in their native cultural settings actively engaged in the construction of their education or professional careers abroad. Allegedly dependant role seems to be transferred from the past understanding of the women’s social position, despite the fact, that women’s migratory paths were partially planned independently in the past as well, particularly as paid domestic servants outside their homes.

### “Old” networks in new places

Migration processes within ex-Yugoslav context manifest some specificities for it was a once common state, that shared similar educational system, comparable labour market, same legal system, and official Serbo-Croatian language, that was understood and spoken throughout the state. Surely that made the migratory decisions for people from other Yugoslav republics to Slovenia easier. Apart from that, in Slovenia there has been a growing community of immigrants and their descendants from the South since the establishment of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918–1941). Moreover, there were vivid migratory flows within the Habsburg Monarchy (that occupied the territory of nowadays Bosnia and Herzegovina already in 1878) since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century on. Historical evidences confirm longer tradition of social ties between the society in Slovenia and its Southern neighbours than supposed at the first glance.

Migration does not represent a completely new phenomenon for the interviewed women in our sample either. Coming from either rural areas, from the parts of lacking opportunities to suit their ambitions, or from the social backgrounds with poorer possibilities to lead an independent life, many of these women have already experienced migration within their familial or communal circles. Thus, in many of the cases the decision to migrate was made easier whenever they were able to lean upon the migratory experience of their social networks. Relatives, friends, neighbours or acquaintances who had already migrated either to Slovenia or to other places in Europe offered them help in the difficult beginning phase of their adaptation to an unknown environment (for comparison see Slany et al., 2010). These social networks, consisting of family members and relatives, who provided them with information about proper housing or offered them at least a modest room to stay for a certain period. With their help they often obtained even a substantial financial support.

*“One roommate gave us some space occasionally... we just had to wait for the doorman to leave’... ‘And then he found a flat... and his brother lent us some money.” (Dinka)*

*“Then we stayed with his sister for three months ... she had a flat. My father who was working here and saw that this could not go on in a two-bedroom apartment, that there were too many of us, as she had her own family... Then my father found us something with some lady...” (Arzija)*

This phenomenon could be understood as an aspect of chain migration, whose constitutive effect is an establishment of ethnic enclaves, a space with characteristic cultural identity and a high degree of economic self-sufficiency (Waldinger, 1993). However according to the

narratives it seems that immigrant's social networks in Slovenia were far from enclosed communities. All these women, who were forced to engage in the new environment outside their familial circles, gradually established rather firm contacts with the collective, regardless to its ethnic background. Furthermore, contacts these women made at work or with acquaintances, neighbours were often two-directional; they were slowly integrating into Slovenian culture, yet they also determined and changed it in certain aspects.

*“When I was working at home /.../ we all drank coffee together. But here, every woman had her own džezva [a coffee pot] and her own coffee. There were fifteen women in the collective here and each had her own džezva! /.../ Another day my boss asks me, if I drink coffee at all. I say, yes, I do, but we don't drink coffee the way you do it here, I haven't brought any džezva and anything with me. And she says, how did you drink coffee then? I say, we had a big common džezva and we drank coffee together. Then she says, what if we do it the same way? So we bought a big džezva and coffee and started making coffee together. /.../ At the end of the month we again had to pay for coffee precisely according to how much we drank. I don't like it, it's a bit funny, I say. She says, and how would you do it? Well, we shouldn't write down each and every coffee. We should collect the money or I will bring the coffee myself. And then I bought a kilo of coffee, till it lasted. And slowly they got used to not to check up every single cup of coffee.” (Vladanka)*

The above telling excerpt from Vladanka's story demonstrate how important are social networks for the migrant women to feel as a part of a new collective. It also gives interesting insight into how Vladanka made contacts – through the concrete situation of making coffee. As in many other migrant women's accounts, Vladanka's narration also contains many parts about food and particularly about coffee, an important socializing element in her country of origin. Talking about coffee in this context tells less about the ritual itself and more about her feelings of disappointment, acceptance, hospitality etc. in the light of cultural encounters within her working collective.

### ***The questions of identity and identification***

Starting to live in a new cultural, ethnic, religious settings, becoming a part of new social networks (in local community, professional contexts, schools etc.) does affect every person's perceptions of belonging and identifications. Although the new Slovenian environment had many similar elements with the immigrant women's native one, there were also some cultural features mak-

ing newcomers distinctive, what lead to the process of “othering”. To make and keep immigrants different, the nationals in Slovenia in the 1990s created boundaries along the ethnic lines to show who belongs to the nation (and who does not) in the newborn state, which was predominantly formed on cultural (ethnic) foundations (comp. Yuval Davis, 1977).

One can often hear remarks that immigrants who came to Slovenia, stay here for good and endanger the small Slovenian nation. This notion came from the linear, one-directional model of migration in which there is a clear division between the nation-state and their nationals and the outsiders, newcomers.

It is true that many of them stayed longer than they planned, many of them stayed for good, but there are also many who went further to other European countries and some of them also returned to their native homeland. Regardless to the time of their staying in Slovenia, the creation new social networks, familiarizing with new norms, values and habits valid in Slovenia, affected their individualities, their self-perceptions and their perceptions in the eyes of others – those in Slovenia and those in their native homelands.

The perceptions of identities of our informants reflect the notion of identifications that are not fixed but subjected to change, constantly forming and re-forming and being contextual and relational (both, in the relation to their relatives and friends in their homeland or to their relatives and friends in Slovenia). There is a constant negotiation between a conscious belonging to the community in which they were originating and their own personal position, affiliations and belongings to a new context. They often found being perceived as “the others” in both environments.

Goga, a Ljubljana-born booking agent, whose parents came to Slovenia from rural Bosnia in the 1970s, comments the following:

*“When I come among quasi ‘my people’, they call me Slovenian, while in Slovenia I'm considered čefurka. I was long thinking about who actually am I. Basically I can't label myself – and that doesn't even bother me very much – but I feel at home here, my roots are there, I was baptized as an Othodox ... My father says, I'm a pure Southerner by nature and I've always been proud of that.”*

Goga recognizes the influence of her parents' culture in her up-bringing, but she doesn't define herself in ethnic way, as one would expect. We could determine her identity as a mixture of various cultural features, which contain no special ethnic labels. She ties her identification to the place, where she feels at home, to the place of her parents' origin, including a symbolic religious adherence, and culturally based psychological characteristics that are rather ascribed to a region and not to a nation.



The stories in our collection confirm how problematic the understandings of fixed and stable identity are. There is a wide variety of self-perceptions and perceptions of the community in which the interviewed women lived before and perceptions of them in the communities which they moved to. There is a strong need for a complex understanding of their positioning within relations in their homeland, within the country of migration and within their own ethnic communities and networks (see also Anthias, Cederberg, 2010, 21). All these moments can be important for their identifications. These perceptions can be opposing and conflicting and have an impact on the self-perceptions of who they are. They often observe to be neither true Slovenians in the eyes of their Slovenian friends, neighbours or colleagues at work nor true Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian or Macedonians in the eyes of their relatives or friends in their native lands. They always lack something (or have something too much): they either do not speak properly native languages any more, do not follow their native cultural habits or do not understand their politics, which among their natives place them on the side of the “other”. On the other hand, their neighbours in Slovenia will always treat them as different as they will never speak Slovenian without an accent or they may talk too loudly or be dressed too differently. Consequently, they will be quickly identified as ‘not us’, but as ‘the others’, ‘southerners’, ‘bosnians’ or ‘čefurs’.

As one of respondents recalls, she had not thought about her nationality until she came to Slovenia. Slovenians signified her as non-Slovenian, and that made her aware of her ‘otherness’:

*“Even when we were still in Bosnia I didn’t know what I was until, you know, when I came here ... and I had to go to the council office to get my employment record book and they asked me what I was, and I had no idea what to say. I said I was Serbian and they would always put that down in my book, but I’m not Serbian ... I didn’t know ... Because back then it wasn’t important what you were.” (Arzija)*

In the so-called new migration migrants do not follow the pattern of linear migration, but are rather migrants with multiple ties and interactions with the people and institutions across the borders of nation states and with different dynamics in the field of economy, culture and politics (Vertovec in Anthias, Cederberg, 2010). These transnational migrations are often multi-dimensional, multidirectional movements of people, capital, goods and ideas. Moreover, being transnational could mean going beyond national belongings. They go in many ways and include multiple locations, multiple belongings, hybrid language adaptations, hybrid cultural choices and last but not least hybrid identities (Sedmak, 2011).

Through the personal accounts, we can find all sorts of identification that are articulated through language similarity, habits and customs and that reflect the nomadic nature, multi-layered character, complexity and hybridity of their identities (sexual, ethnic, social and other). Similar findings had been observed in other studies, too (Braidotti, Vonk, 2004; Razpotnik, 2004; Kalčič, 2007; Milharčič Hladnik, 2007).

Personal responses to these complex realities are different, and mirror not fixed but ever-changing and constant reflection on oneself. In this regard it is important to take into account also the identifications with various groups (whether be ethnic, regional, professional, sub-cultural, familial etc.) one wants to belong to and is accepted or not.

*“Years ago when I was younger I felt more Bosnian. But actually I’ve been getting to know myself for years now and I can see today that I am a mixture of different identities. There is a part of Slovenian culture in me, I carry it inside which becomes quite obvious when I come to Bosnia. The Bosnians there always notice that you’re from Slovenia... And now that I live in Koper, I feel I’m from Ljubljana. I’m not a local from Koper, Primorska and so on. And the locals immediately recognize my accent “Oh, from Ljubljana.” A mixture.” (Emina)*

Others, who are conscious of their complex identities and sometimes even opposing features of their identification avoid labelling, believing that the personality is what really counts:

*“If anyone asks me what I am, I am Goga. I don’t feel, and not in a bad way, I don’t feel Slovenian, not a person from the South, I am what I am. I don’t want to classify myself, I originate from down there, my habits and upbringing are a bit mixed, but I grew up here and Slovenia is my home.” (Goga)*

A successfully engaged theatre director noticed changes and instability of being labelled by the Slovenians as well. Ivana for instance observed that she got several different signifiers in a very short period, in which her native city (and not a nationality), profession, age and gender took an important role:

*“First I was ‘a female director from Belgrade’, and ‘a female director originating from Belgrade’ and ‘a young female director’ ... now ‘an established young female director’, well now I’m going to be ‘a former Belgradian’ in the play introduction for the first time... but that’s the way it is...” (Ivana)*

Jasminka, born in Rijeka, Croatia in the 1950s, living in Brežice, Slovenia since the 1970s, describes the ways

of coping with different layers of one's identifications. It is interesting and telling, how she can switch from one to the other without being particularly bothered about that:

*"I don't really care nowadays ... I am both ... I watch Slovenian news, I watch Croatian news, I watch 'Slovenia's got talent' and 'Croatia star search' ... Sometimes I don't know if I listened to the Slovenian or Croatian area and it's still an obstacle for me. I could speak Slovenian flawlessly, but I can't because I'm in constant contact with Croatian people and TV shows... so... I'm torn between the two. The border bothers me horribly because my country is basically both, Slovenia and Croatia."*

As we could see the identities of these women are – as is true for all of us – composed of various (not only ethnic) components and they often adapt to different situations and face opposing influences and perceptions. At the same time we have to recognize that collected statements reflect the moment in which they were collected, for all narratives are subjected to changes and modifications at a different time and location.

Despite their multifaceted identity, stories of every single immigrant women contained a clear adherence and affiliation to their original space and a rather strong identification with tradition that is evident through various cultural practices, use of language in privacy, possession of symbolic items, values or interpretations of the past. Yet it is not hard to notice that their original cultural features seem altered, "contaminated" by the cultural influence of the receiving society. Apart from their own traditional, some of them celebrate Slovenian national holidays, for they "don't need to work in those days" and they can "associate with Slovenian friends". When they speak Slovenian, one could notice, Slovenian is not their maternal language, yet also their native language has tended to lose its richness. Objects from/of their home-countries, like pictures, statues, little fridge-magnets and other souvenirs are accompanied by objects, carrying memories of the times spent in Slovenia. And as Vladanka said, her culinary tastes have broadened enough to love Slovenian *kisla repa* (pickled turnip) and *pečenica* (sort of bratwurst), that could not be found in her country, besides her favourite "Serbian dish, *sarma and goulash*". For the end, maybe we should just return to Vladanka's own words:

*"Somehow it seems to me, it's better here. Especially in the way how things are organized. Sometimes I miss this efficiency in Serbia. Down there things are often in disorder. /.../ This really annoys me sometimes. My brother-in-law often says that I became a real Slovenian /laugh/."*

## CONCLUSION

In this research, we did not want to collect a representative sample of life stories, but to gather a diverse collection of personal accounts which could give us better understanding of migration movements from the other republics of the former Yugoslavia, mutual influences at the macro, mezzo and micro levels on decisions for migration and the course of acculturation in the new environment. These stories map numerous directions in these women's journeys, swinging and shifting in spaces, 'spaces' and places, not only geographically, but also culturally and symbolically.

Personal accounts of women migrants offer insights in the daily routine of their immigrant life in Slovenia, which differs substantially from the usual or official representations. Their narratives frequently diminish the dependent migrant role they were ascribed to. Yet there are also cases, which do correspond to the traditional image, as some of these women indeed came from patriarchal communities, where social roles were more traditionally gender-specific than in Slovenian context. However, the participation in a different environment significantly influenced their behaviour, their social expectations and values.

In contrast to the expectations, the ever-present economic factor is surprisingly not so much emphasized in the women's narratives. It is often so, that personal positioning does not always match the official classifications. In their narrations women often exposed other crucial reasons for moving abroad, despite the fact that they were widely seen as economic migrants in the Slovenian society; they were talking about psychological and emotional stability, about feelings of safety, about fulfilling their ambitions, making an adventurous step in their lives. Dealing with individual's perspective may change the usual viewpoint of the researcher and calls for a different language register. Every categorisation, be it juridical, bureaucratic, academic or personal, brings out different perceptions of who a migrant is and what is to be expected from him or her.

The structure and contextualization of immigrant women's narration expose the meaning and importance of familial or communal or *mezzo* level that has repeatedly been obscured by other over-presented themes in migration studies, such as ethnicity, nationality and religion. In women's accounts about themselves family matters are quite emphasized. The majority of life stories thus prove the importance and strength of family and community ties, which provided the respondents with the needed social and emotional capital to enable easier adaptation and acculturation in the new social environment. Consequently, also the ways women identify themselves often tends to identifications at micro and mezzo levels, such as familial, gendered, generational, professional or completely unique personal identification. This does not necessarily mean, that they ignore,

neglect or deny their ethnic or national descend or original religious belief and practices. Yet their identification in ethnic or religious sense shows a great variety of choices, often quite ambivalent, which are a consequence of the “testing” atmosphere of living in immigration.

From empirical findings we could see that cultural practices in immigrant families do not necessarily fit those ascribed to their ethnic origin, and similarly they

also differ from those of the country of immigration. Be it liberating or anxious, perception of the new environment, new life-experiences, possible shifts in their system of values and cultural practices may induce unique cultural features. Taking into account the immigrants’ micro and mezzo level, where women proved to be the finest spectators and narrators, could add to the less stereotyped image of not only immigrants, but also of women in their midst.



*Ženska s starim kovčkom/Woman hold old suitcase. <http://depositphotos.com/>*

## PRISPEVEK K RAZUMEVANJU ČEFURK

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## POVZETEK

Članek osvetljuje migracijske procese žensk iz prostora nekdanje Jugoslavije na območje današnje Slovenije. V časovni perspektivi jemlje v raziskovalni fokus tako protagonistke notranjih državnih migracij v okviru povojne Jugoslavije kot tudi novejša valove priseljenk, ki so prišle v Slovenijo iz držav, ki so se oblikovale po razpadu skupne države. Glavni namen pričujočega besedila je izzvati poglede, ki se slovenski družbi o teh priseljenkah posredujejo skozi medijske podobe, ki ostajajo pretežno nereflektirane. Obenem se avtorici osredotočata predvsem na prikaz posebnosti, ki jih v omenjenih migracijskih procesih določa vidik spola. Poleg običajne nevidnosti, ki velja za priseljenke, so raziskavo, ki je vir tega zapisa, spodbudile prevladujoče podobe priseljenk iz bivše Jugoslavije kot pasivnih in »odvisnih« migrantk, predstavljenih kot manj pomembnih članov družine ter zaprtih v zasebno polje gospodinjstva in materinstva. Prispevek skuša iti preko takšnih posplošitev, poenostavitev in stereotipnih predstav, zato za empirično podlago jemlje osebne pripovedi samih priseljenk. S pomočjo biografske metode, ki omogoča kontekstualne in interseksijske vpoglede v migracijske procese, avtorici analizirata dvajset življenjskih zgodb priseljenk iz različnih okolij in socialnih ozadij, da bi lahko ugotovili spolne specifičnosti priseljenjskih in integracijskih procesov, v katere so vključene priseljenke iz okolij nekdanje Jugoslavije. Empirične ugotovitve, ki so predstavljene v članku, razkrivajo dokaj raznoliko podobo priseljenk v Sloveniji. Skozi ženske migracijske izkušnje se kaže njihov, pogosto jim zanikan, aktiven in avtonomen pristop pri vstopanju v in prilagajanju na novo okolje. Zgodbe razkrivajo tudi, da se ekonomski dejavnik, ki z makroperspektive ostaja ključen pri odločitvi za izselitev, v pripovedih priseljenk sploh ne kaže tako pogosto, kot na splošno velja. Priseljenke so pogosto izpostavile druge ključne razloge, ki so botrovali njihovi izselitvi, predvsem v navezavi na vprašanja duševne in čustvene stabilnosti, občutek varnosti, kjer velja izpostaviti beg usodi njihovega spola v patriarhalnem okolju. ipd. Zlasti pa so izpostavile pomen in moč družinskih vezi in povezanosti z okoljem, v katerem živijo, oziroma pomen socialnega in emocionalnega kapitala v procesih prilagajanja novemu okolju in akulturaciji vanj. Pokazalo se je tudi, da kulturne prakse v okviru priseljenjskih družin ne ustrezajo vselej tem, ki se pripisujejo njihovem etničnemu izvoru, podobno pa se razlikujejo tudi od družbe, kamor so se priselile. Njihove zgodbe razkrivajo, da nove življenjske izkušnje, premiki v vrednotenju in kulturnih praksah pogosto sprožajo povsem unikatne kulturne poteze in identifikacijske inovacije.

**Ključne besede:** ženske, priseljenke, Slovenija, nekdanja Jugoslavija, življenjske zgodbe

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