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**TEMPORARY MIGRANTS:
BEYOND ROLES, ACROSS IDENTITIES**

PART ONE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Migration and Mobility

In this text I would not reflect upon different approaches towards migration; many books deal with this issue (to point just a few: Chow R. 1993; Baubock R. 1994; Cesarani D. and M. Fulbrook 1996; Appadurai 1996; Massey et al, 1998; Brettell and Hollifield 2000; Wallace and Stola 2001). Here I want to focus on a specific type of migration – temporary migration and its influence upon the self-perception of temporary migrants. My paper is based on a qualitative study of Bulgarian gastarbeiters in Western European countries that are members of the EU. Why have I chosen this topic?

Migration is usually thought of as a specific type of mobility, which seeks a settled way of life, in a new, though imagined, group belonging. It is an expression of a kind of static linear mobility – starting from one point and arriving at another, uprooting oneself from one territory and culture and planting him/herself on another territory and culture. Migration contains both the endeavor to territorial «anchoring» and nostalgia of one's previous belonging.

The interesting thing about temporary migration¹ is that it is permanently indecisive, always in-between, because temporary migrants attempt to be in two places at the same time, and it is not clear which place holds greater appeal or which one will prevail in the end as the ultimate choice. Temporary migrants are torn between staying and belonging; they are twice deterritorialized – the place at which they stay is incidental, a hotel; the place to which

1 There is research done on temporary migration but my impression is that it is more focused on return migration, than on temporariness, and the attendant constant movements between different cultures that temporary migration entails (see Brettell C. in Brettell and Hollifield, 2000: 100).

they belong has been abandoned. There is a split between territory and the sense of belonging, break down of the nation-state to nation and state, as Appadurai would put it.

This phenomenon is not new. In Bulgaria temporary migration has its roots in the “gurbetchiistvo” (the Bulgarian term for people seeking temporary employment outside the borders of their country); recently it is associated with the “gastarbeiters”. And it is in the comparison between the two, that the specifics of the new type of temporary migration are hidden. The “gurbetchiistvo” is not deterritorialized, it always presupposes return to one’s real home, it does not contain imaginary belonging, because the belonging is always one – the place from where one departs and to which will later return. The journey is instrumental, the identity – local. It is part of a natural cycle, it does not presuppose change of roles, it does not affiliate to the others.

Temporary migrants are more similar to “gastarbeiters,” yet look at Turkish gastarbeiters in Germany: they tend to live longer in the foreign country than in their home country, they try to domesticate the Foreign or to put a border between “them” and “us.” The temporary migrants I have been investigating (at the moment) come and go, but do not follow natural cycles. My hypothesis is that **this persevering movement causes a sense of double deterritorialization, a possible loss of sense of belonging, or at least a schizophrenic feeling – one lives, where one does not belong, and belongs to a place one has deserted. The double deterritorialization entails a game of sojourning and identity, which brings about change in social roles and also has impact on self and group identifications.**

Actually, the figure of the temporary migrant or the temporarily residing person becomes more and more universal. Beyond the specific example, it is the global society that gives rise to different forms of movement, with different length duration, which cannot be described as migration or temporary migration, but as a longer stay – for example an expert working in different countries, students studying in different countries, etc. Therefore, **it would be more appropriate to study migration in its dynamic aspect, as a peculiar mobility, which contains movement in itself and does not necessarily seek permanent settlement; as a cyclical, maybe spiral movement from one place to another, one returns and then is off again.** This is the type of mobility, which does not substantiate territory, i.e. places of departure and return; it is beyond all places, or perhaps it imagines some utopia of a place. Of course this is only a hypothesis that needs to be tested. In any case, I am interested in migration as part of mobility, and not as its peculiar form. Hence my next question (if we regard the temporary migrant as a moving figure be-

tween different cultures) is: **could s/he be regarded as a mediator between these cultures, what does s/he take from the new culture, and what does s/he keep from the old one? This question, in turn, poses the problem of identity: what kind of identity would the constant transition from one place to another form?** The stable migrant Diaspora shapes its identity in an imaginary homeland, possibly institutionalizes its nostalgia thereby adjusting itself to an alien culture. What identity does the constant traveler have? And what happens to the places, if they lose their function of refuge, and become mere temporary stops – places of departures, arrivals, comebacks.

Probably here is the place to give a more strict **definition for a migrant and temporary migrant**. The legal concept of a migrant defines him/her as a person who spends abroad more than a year. This definition is quite relative; the purpose of stay varies as visas stamped in passports remind us: there are work permits, student visas, visas given for family reasons. I prefer to work with the following classification: settlers – those whose aim is to live permanently in another country; temporary migrants (gastarbeiters) – those who work abroad for a period more than one year but less than three; seasonal migrants – those who travel for seasonal work that usually lasts less than six months.²

I analyze temporary migration of Bulgarians to other EU countries in three related contexts: 1) scholarship on mobility (taken both in its social and spatial aspects); 2) the concepts of cultural encounters and transfer of institutional cultures as developed by cultural anthropologists; 3) postnational studies, like the work of Arjun Appadurai (Appadurai 1996), that deal with the imagining of new and old identities. Let me review now in more detail the theoretical hypotheses.

1. 2. Social and Spatial Mobility

In his book *Globalization* (1999) Zygmunt Bauman argues that the world is becoming divided into two main types of people: global cosmopolitan individuals who are alike; and people doomed to their specific locality, wherever they go; the cultural identities of those two types of people are diametrically opposite (Bauman 1999: 112-113). Both groups are traveling, the first one always living in the center and collecting different experiences of different centers; the second one is always in the ghettos, excluded from the others and wherever it travels it carries like a snail its cultural shell. The main question

2 Of course there are different typologies of migration – for more see Brettell C. in Brettell and Hollifield, 2000: 99. I can not comment upon them now, I introduce this typology here for the objectives of my research.

for me is the following: **Is migration a chance for possible upward social mobility, or does it create poor ghettos where immigrants live in inhuman conditions and lose their human rights?**

In what way does social mobility relate to spatial mobility? Are the social/spatial divisions really so simple (I highly appreciate Bauman's beautiful metaphors of social inequality but a social analysis must be more complex); doesn't everybody start a journey with the hope that this movement will take him/her out of the ghetto and upward to a higher category? Doesn't spatial mobility implicitly contain the idea of ascending social mobility? Of course, the opposite could happen as well. One's perception of the present status presupposes hope for the future, the imagining of the future probably becomes a part of the status itself. It is possible that the new global situation redefines the consistency of the existing social statuses and recombines in a different way prestige and lifestyle, income and education, one's own present status and future children's status. In my opinion the typology of moving persons is much more complicated than that presented by Bauman.

It is true that people of high social standing (those who occupy the top of the social hierarchy), be they Bauman's "tourists" or Freedman's "cosmopolitan elite", are beyond spatial limitations. **Mobility itself – the ability to change places of residence without a problem – becomes an element of the social status, not just as a consequence of income, property, prestige, education, but together with them – as a lifestyle, as access to different places, as a mark of the status.**

At the bottom reside the totally immobile – they can't move across space and across society. They are the people whose horizons have been narrowed down to immediate survival – in space and time. This is what poverty is all about – lack of future, the impossibility to hope for any movement – up the social ladder, forward, or around the social space; poverty is about being anchored in one spot, which means vegetating, not living.

But between the top and the bottom, there is climbing, i.e. there are different mobility options – some people replace one residence with another because the change will provide an opportunity for leaving the dead zone of hopelessness. Others climb the social ladder via "career development"; yet others wonder around at the expense of social declassification in order to achieve personal satisfaction. Those who are settlers hope that the move shall improve an element/elements of their status – at least their material situation. Temporary migrants are participants in a more complicated play of changing roles and identities.

This paper will analyze the peculiar relationship between spatial and social mobility. Specifically, I analyze the dimensions of the desired status: I trace its eventual re-definition, I ask whether there is conflict between old

and new roles, or a mere expansion in the scope of roles; whether there is conflict between new roles and previous identities, between old roles and present identifications.

1.3. Stable or Fluid Identities?

Identity is one of the most popular concepts in the social sciences and the humanities, and as Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper argue those sciences “have surrendered to the word “identity” to a degree that it “tends to mean too much (when understood in a strong sense), too little (when understood in a weak sense) or nothing at all (because of its sheer ambiguity)” (Brubaker 2004: 28).

The first famous definition of identity as “a subjective sense of sameness and continuity” (Ericson 1996: 38) has lost its popularity and is replaced by discourses about fluid, multiple, imagined, negotiated identities that are regarded mostly as collective phenomena. In the research on migration identity is usually conceptualized as ethnic (Appadurai 1996, Brubaker 2004) or viewed as specific reimagined national identity, i.e. it is assumed to be a collective or a group phenomenon. I shall not cite here important definitions of collective identities, like those of Jan Assmann (Assmann 2001: 131-32), or the famous statement of Benedict Anderson that “communities ought to be distinguished not by their fallacy/truthfulness, but by the way in which they imagine themselves as communities” (Anderson 1998:22).

But in a world that is seen as unstable and risky (Ulrich Beck) and is changing dynamically, I am inclined to agree with Bauman that „'identity' is a name given to the desired escape from this insecurity. Hence even though ‘identity’ is apparently a noun, it behaves as a verb... Although it is all too often hypostasized as an attribute of material entity, identity has the ontological status of a project and postulate” (Bauman 2000: 110-111). If one lives in the comparatively closed and less amenable to change world of a rural community, for instance, then one will reside in or cling to one’s postulated identity, terrified of the surrounding differences. If, however, one is caught in the whirlwind of a changing world, one will be forced to constitute new identities, changing them constantly.

Yet the old ethnic or national collective identities may become hardened or even produce newly recycled, but strong, group identities, should a situation of cultural encounter with Otherness occur, that is, if some form of “us”

clashes with some form of “them”. Hence the question I will address next is: Does temporary migration form multiple fractured identities (Bauman), or does it harden old ones in a situation of cultural encounter?

1.4. Cultural Encounters Between Different Institutional Cultures

The concept of “culture” is a concept to which, as probably Brubaker and Cooper would argue, the social sciences and the humanities have surrendered as well. I shall look for such a definition of culture which could be useful in explaining the specific situation of the temporary migrant. The concept I prefer is that of *institutional culture*.

The temporary migrant is a person who has to adapt to a new institutional milieu (with all its legal regulations, organizational requirements and informal rules and norms) since s/he comes from a different institutional background with supposedly different legal regulations, organizational requirements and informal rules and norms. I use the concept of institution in its wider understanding as “the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, the humanly-devised constraints that shape human interaction” (North 2000: 12). Thus in order to explain the complexity of adaptation or tensions when changing one institutional milieu for another, I believe that scholars need a multidimensional understanding of regulations and norms.

Such a complex approach is applied by the New Institutionalists who are interested in the possibilities of institutional change. Douglas North accepts that institutions include two levels: the level of formal rules or organizational structure; and the level of informal constraints, which belongs to the sphere of culture and which I would call *institutional culture*³ The level of institutional culture includes, as Mary Douglas has put it “the right course of action and behavior deeply rooted in the national cosmology,” or in Klaus Offe’s terms: “social norms and values” (Offe 1996: 203).

The definition of institutional culture as a tradition deeply-rooted and incarnated in institutions implicitly holds the assumption that there is no contradiction between values and norms, on the one hand, and rules, on the other; i.e. there is no contradiction between the two levels of institutions. The globalization processes, and more concretely the enlargement of the European Union, problematize the consistency of the two levels of institution for at least two reasons: imposition of new (the EU) institutional models upon different cultural backgrounds; and enormous migration flows – millions of people, moving from one country to another, are facing the challenge of adapting their institutional cultures to new institutional environments. Hence, the role

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

of personal cultural encounters is extremely important in the process of European integration and we should investigate **the results of the encounters between different institutional cultures: Will they lead to assimilation by the foreign institutional culture, or to mutual adjustment? Or will they “produce” specific hybrid behavior?**⁴ In our case specific “old” institutional cultures are transferred to new social milieus thereby requiring new norms and rules of behavior. What is happening?

PART TWO: THE RESEARCH.

2.1. Research Scope

I do not aim here to present the research done on migration in Bulgaria (some recent publications include: Guentcheva et al. 2003, Gachter 2002, Mintchev at all, 2003, Stanchev et al. 2005), which illustrates the multidimensionality of the emigration phenomenon as well as the difficulty of making straightforward conclusions. What recent scholarship on Bulgarian migration does show, however, is that temporary migration prevails over attitudes towards settlement and that it tends to be circumscribed by the following trends: 1) most Bulgarian emigrants are engaged in work requiring lower qualifications than their own; 2) both men and women work abroad – in countries like Greece, for instance, female emigrants are the majority; 3) not only young people emigrate but a lot of people aged 50 and over are short-term emigrants; 4) not only the poor emigrate, but also those who are employed in relatively high income jobs (3 minimal salaries per month) (Mintchev at all. 2003). The fact that most Bulgarians who go to work abroad take up jobs that are under their level of qualification, demonstrates the contradictory nature of mobility as well as its potential to cause role and identity conflicts: Do migrants have identity crisis? How do they handle it? Why do they emigrate? What does emigration mean to them – reconsideration of status or escape from it, or hope?

My study is qualitative: it is based on 42 in-depth interviews with temporary migrants from the following locations:

I have chosen the small Bulgarian towns of *Momchilgrad*, *Doupnitsa* and *Kalofers* because of their large percentage of workers abroad. The research in the first two towns was carried out in December 2005 and in the third one –

4 I stick to Jan Nederveen Pieterse’s understanding of hybridization, which is based on Rowe and Schelling: “the ways to which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices.” (Pieterse 2004: 64)

in April 2006. I conducted interviews with migrants who had come back for Christmas and Easter. I made 9 interviews in Doupnitsa, 7 in Momchilgrad, and 9 in Kalofer.

I conducted 11 interviews with Bulgarian migrants to *Italy* – 5 men and 6 women; 7 lived in *Milan*, 3 in *Sondrio* and 1 in *Livigno* (Sondrio is a small town near Milan, and Livigno is a resort in the Alps). I decided to interview Bulgarian migrants in Milan during my interviews in Doupnitsa, when I discovered that many people from Doupnitsa work in Milan. The “dispersion” of female work force took me to Sondrio, where Bulgarian women took care of elderly women. The interviews were done between July 5 and 11, 2006.

My analysis also includes 6 interviews that I had taken in *Hague* in 2003 on the so-called “Bulgarian” street; this is a street on which illegal Bulgarian immigrants live.

I would like here to thank everybody, with whom I have spoken, for his/her sincere response.

2.2. Paradoxes of Status. Escape from Roles, Return of the Self

A large number of the interviewees have higher education, and prestigious social standing in Bulgaria: I came across two ex-mayors, who at the time of departure had relatively good jobs, yet one of them had gone to Ireland, where he washes dishes, and the other to Spain, where he is a construction worker. A secretary at one of the municipalities worked for a year as a waitress and supplier in Greece; a teacher, an engineer, a hospital nurse cares for elderly ladies in Spain and Italy; another teacher worked as chambermaid in the Netherlands; small bankrupt businessmen work in green houses and in construction as builders, etc. All interviewees, with two exceptions (a dentist, who worked as such in Turkey but returned to Bulgaria, and an owner of a small firm in Italy, who had managed to establish it there) had social status in Bulgaria, which can be determined as relatively high; they worked (or still work) in low qualification and unpopular jobs “there” – in the respective country. Most of them went to work abroad when they were not so young – over 40. Furthermore, a large part of them, especially men, at first live in inhuman conditions. Women who are employed as baby or “granny” sitters or as chambermaids have a room of their own somewhere, but they are perceived as servants. In light of these conditions, **at first, migration seemed to me as voluntary disqualification and declassification, leading in some cases to self-humiliation.** Such an interpretation is possible, of course, if we accept the classical sociological definition of status as bound to education,

prestige, and income, which are considered to be interrelated by Western sociologists.

Here are the stories of the interviewees about the beginning of their migration “journey”, which are full with traumatic memories.

A man from Doupnitsa, 52, ex-military, went to Milan and returned:

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

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

A teacher from Momchilgrad, 50, Bulgarian Muslem, worked as chambermaid in Holland:

“The life of a gastarbeiter is very hard abroad. Your psyche is stripped, especially if you are someone who used to live up to certain standards in your own country, you had a name, social standing. At one time you go there and you are nobody, and it is hard, and I felt really good when I had a joint”

In all of the interviews the worry of this woman is present, in one way or another, in the form of a tale on the departed “they”, a part of whom were “you”: one had a name and a social standing in his/her native country, and then s/he leaves and becomes nobody.

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

And yet, we are not talking about extremely poor people, but people who had lived well within the Bulgarian context. Let’s look at the interviews to find out why respondents decided to leave.

P.P., works in Spain as a housekeeper, 53, female, an ex-teacher:

“Life became more and more expensive – how could I go by on a teacher ‘s salary? Besides, to be a teacher nowadays is a torture, not a joy... I was lonely anyway, I had no close friends, no lover, my daughter started her own life, so I felt quite bad, middle age crisis probably... A woman told me that she knew people working in Spain who could arrange for me to work as a cleaner in a private house. so I decided to try. It was not humiliating for me to become a housekeeper, because the two sisters were good to me, respected me. But it was a totally different world, I tried to forget my entire previous life.”

Ex-Mayor, works as a dishwasher in Ireland, 53:

“I went to see my son, who was working there, and after that I told myself – why not prove that I’m still young, that I can handle it, I’m tough. And here I am, I lost weight and physically I feel really good. Took 10 years off my back. You are nobody there and this allows you to be yourself. Everything got messed up here anyway – people started arguing, got alienated, left.”

A man from Kurdjali, 42, works in Hague:

“I had a small business, but 4 years ago I got bankrupt. I had taken a credit from a bank and I could not return it. I was desperate and did not know what to do... So I had no choice than to look for work abroad... You see that stop over there. Every morning a bus passes and takes the illegal workers, delivering them wherever there is need for work. So I started in that way. We got about 20 Euro per day, we lived 10 persons in a room and I could save about 200 Euro per month. This was at the beginning...” (to be continued below)

A woman, engineer, 55, looks after an elderly woman in Sondrio:

“Look, I was even Head of a Department at Energoproect. And at the beginning of the 90s they laid off the designers. The younger ones will be OK, they speak at least two languages, but I – where should I go? And so it went on for seven years without a permanent job, all the odd jobs I did during that period – I was even a cleaner in a hospital. And for what – you just fill in gaps in the budget. And I decided to come here. I am being respected here and I make money. It’s true, I am lonely, but I manage. One has to forget one’s past and live in the present. There’s no future.”

What do I find in the interviews? In most of them (with the exception of the youngest) there is bitter dissatisfaction with their status in Bulgaria; because of its devaluation; and there is disappointment with the situation in the country as a whole. To my question whether they intend to return to Bulgaria, most immigrants in the Hague and in Milan answered «yes,» but if **Bulgaria becomes a normal country**; this means that it should have a legal framework that would guarantee stability, safety, equality before the law, and the absence of chaos. Perceptible in the interviews is the devaluation of place,

not the birthplace, but the state – Bulgaria is not what it used to be: “*Bulgaria is not Bulgaria. What state could it be? We are one wagon of people, but occupy the first place by crime, lying, imitation, everything. Nothing’s left of this crappy country*”- the 48-year-old man from Doupnitsa rambled on.

In this situation going to a foreign country, the move away from the devaluated place, becomes an element of status. Living abroad itself, regardless of one’s role there, indicates prestige in the same way that the status of an urban resident is more prestigious than that of a village dweller. The post-communist transition period has enhanced the periphery complex of Bulgaria, and globalization has made the West not only a prestigious destination, but a Center that holds; **the movement towards the Center is part of the status itself. Spatial mobility becomes part of the vertical mobility, especially when social hierarchies have been dislodged.** As sociological surveys show, there is no legitimate success model in Bulgaria, and consequently no legitimate vertical mobility; **spatial mobility is regarded as a form of accepted vertical mobility.** The movement village – town – capital – abroad, regardless whether it is to a ghetto abroad, and regardless of the role performed there, is perceived as prestigious vertical mobility. The temporary migrants returning from Italy to Doupnitza are called “the Italians”; most of them built new houses as a sign of prestige; this practice resembles so much the socialist “habit” of building a villa in your birthplace as a sign that you had started from “here” but climbed up the social ladder.

This interrelation between spatial and social mobility is very typical of **young people** as well, though without the drama of denying Bulgaria – they simply run away out of boredom, stagnation, or lack of opportunities. “*I wanted to travel, to see the world, for that we had not enough money. It was a kind of adventure. You know, living in a small town like Kalofer is very boring and one has no opportunities here.*” (**a man, 26, barman in Cork**); “*One day I woke up and said to myself – why don’t I go to Italy. Packed a bag and left.*” (**a man, 25, Milan**); “*A girlfriend of mine wrote to me – why don’t you come visit me in Italy, and I decided.*” (**a woman, 36, Livigno**). I astounded how quickly, as if almost by accident, decisions for departure had been taken: all of a sudden s/he tells her/him – “hey, why don’t I hit the road”, like a Jack Kerouac hero...

The decision taken, as well as the explanation for it, is more complicated with the elderly. Apart from the devaluation of place, meaning the Bulgarian state, the whole existing social hierarchy has vanished. The post-communist transition period has caused a typical anomic crisis – previous statuses became devaluated (both literally and symbolically): “*everything got messed up here anyway – people started arguing, got alienated, left;*” “*Besides, to be a teacher nowadays is a torture, not a joy.*” “*I got bankrupt and had no choice.*” The

usual, normal world was turned upside down; the same has happened to social hierarchies. So what is the meaning of social status, of social role? Spatial mobility has become the solution to the crisis of status. We are witnessing escape from the shadow of the previously already non-existent status (the Mayor, the military, the bankrupt, the engineer) or the presently devaluated one (the teacher, the librarian). **Going abroad resembles rushing into the desert in search of oneself:** “One does not go into the desert to find one’s identity, but to lose it, to lose one’s individuality, to become anonymous. But the desert is a space, where one step makes way for the next one, which deletes it, and the horizon means hope for a future, which begins to speak.” (E. Jabey cited in Bauman 2000: 113). **The apparent role conflict between the old, prestigious, requiring high qualifications role and the new, low qualified, non-prestigious one is resolved through the escape from the social identification any of the two roles carry, as well as through the re-discovery of the self as a person (one’s strength, will, free choice)** – “I can handle it, I’m tough”.

There is a clear distinction in all interviews between the story of the beginning of the journey abroad and the present. The beginning is narrated as “very tough,” the point at which there is certain humiliation, loss of self, “you are simply nobody.” The end of the story is narrated **from the position of the “now;” at this point people talk dispassionately, they have overcome the beginning, the trauma has subsided or has been suppressed because they have endured gotten back on their feet, and have started their life anew:** *“This was at the beginning. Then a Dutch employer liked me and I started working for him permanently and he paid me more. I got myself back on track, I returned my debt, my wife came to me, now she is working too, then my sister came, then we took the children, now they are studying in the Hague.”* – **(a man from Kurdjali, 42, Hague, see the beginning above).** *“When I came here, I found a mattress someone had thrown out, took a blanket from the church and slept on the pavement for two months. With my first salary I bought a secondhand car and slept in it. After that I bought a trailer. After that I slept in a shed. And after that I rented a place. I have done everything. Least of all I have worked under my specialty – a turner. Now I own my own home and my own legal company – since the New Year I have sent over 30 long vehicles loaded with cars to Bulgaria. **If you persist and don’t give up, you are bound to succeed.** Now I work at what I’ve always wanted – I’ve been interested in cars since I was little”* **(a man, 38, Milan).**

Having returned to their birth places, migrants manage to reclaim their previous status because they have tried both ends of the stick, they have done well, and can now dispassionately make the comparison between “there” and “here,” evaluating the pluses and minuses of being “here” and “there. **They had had the freedom of choice and when the choice is to return, the previous status acquires a new aura of value.**

Upon return, migrants may also decide to radically change their lives:

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

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

This feeling is enhanced by the fact that there is role reversal – almost all interviewees work something different from what they had worked at home, and while abroad they often change jobs several times: “all the odd jobs that I have taken” was a frequent leitmotif in the interviews, especially of male migrants. Although my respondents performed jobs that did not require much qualification, they did require the acquisition of some skills that the respondents acquired quickly. This process of fast skill acquisition is considered both a challenge and a mark of endurance and success: One of the women in Milan said, with a mixture of pride and self pity, *“I have cleaned toilets as well, I have been waist deep in shit.”* We are witnessing something like **life long learning by doing. In this process roles do not matter so much, as much as the capacity to acquire them; the focus falls on the potential of one’s personality, and not on the realization; the present is important, not the past. Thus the personality may handle eventual nostalgia- the centre of your life is here and now, and depends on you alone.** *“It is only here, that you can prove yourself, by not being bound with family ties, friendships. In Bulgaria someone will help you, a couple of calls here and there. Here, you are alone, you learn to be independent, and you count on yourself. In Bulgaria this does not happen – you are at home” (a man, 38, Milan).*

My research confirms Ulrich Beck’s and Anthony Giddens’ thesis that individualization and globalization are two sides of the same process. „Individualization means, first, the disembedding and, second, the re-embedding of industrial ways of life by new ones, in which the individuals must produce, stage and cobble together their biographies themselves.“ (Beck 1995:13)

The social identity is replaced by proving oneself capable – rediscovery of the self, starting one’s life anew. **A new personal identity is acquired, for which we cannot use Ericson’s definition** “identity as a subjective sense of sameness and continuity” (Ericson 1996: 38). **It is rather that identity is determined by the ability to overcome discontinuity, to start anew, that is, identity as a subjective sense of overcoming discontinuity, of the possibil-**

ity to be different. Now I could fully agree with Bauman that “identity has the ontological status of a project indeed and it is an indirect confirmation of the inadequacy or incompleteness of ‘that which is’” (Bauman 2000: 110-111). If this sense of discontinuity and starting anew could be called identity at all.

So, the next question to be posed is: Does the strengthening of one’s self perception and confidence while scurrying to and fro between “here and “there” leave any room for, or does it produce or relate to any group identities?”

2.3. The Vanishing Group Identities

As I had already said, in the research on migration identity is usually conceptualized as ethnic (Appadurai 1996, Brubaker 2004) or viewed as specific reimagined national identity, i.e. it is assumed to be a collective or a group phenomenon. Let us check that hypothesis by analyzing the interviews I have conducted. In addition, the other issue I will address, concerns the strength of possible “us” and “them” oppositions.

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

The most clearly expressed love to Bulgaria as Bulgaria came from Bulgarian citizens of Turkish origin:

Momchilgrad, a photographer, a Turk, a Muslim, 55 *“Personally I love my country (Bulgaria) very much. I have two brothers and two sisters in neighbouring Turkey. I am all alone in Bulgaria. I came back from Switzerland and didn’t move anywhere after that. I love my town, I love my work, I love my country. I have many more Bulgarian friends, than Turkish. My adolescent years passed in Sofia – Bulgarians, Armenians, I had all kinds of friends. Along the coast I had Czechs, Poles, East Germans. I keep in touch to this day with some of them. I am an internationalist. I love all nations, as long as they are hygienic.”*

Momchilgrad, a dentist, a Turk, around 50

“The Bulgarian Turk feels Bulgaria more as a homeland than the Bulgarians, because the Bulgarian according to me is a nihilist. Here’s an example: when they show the weather forecast in the news, he says “it will be snowing over the country, “ and in Turkey they say “over our fatherland.” But while in Turkey 10% literates rule, here it is just the opposite – 90% are literate and 10% illiterates rule, i.e. the difference is in the elite. It is very important who will be in front of the cart, more precisely who will pull the cart. It is not possible for a nation not

to have an ideal. The national ideal of the Bulgarian is to become a foreigner.”

But these opinions are an exception of the rule – most of the interviews reveal the hidden bitterness toward the situation in Bulgaria. The feeling is one of “abandonment” – by the state, by the homeland; and it does not matter whether you live in Bulgaria, or abroad. It is even better to go abroad, because there you can have a better life. The exasperation is sometimes frightening: “*What are you doing in this crappy country, get up and go! Pack your bags and hit the road, you are a young guy; you should go abroad somewhere, so that you can earn your living. Here, in Bulgaria it isn’t Bulgaria*” (**Doupnitsa, a man, 48**); “*I won’t go abroad, but I will improve my situation at the expense of the state, the system, the neighbour, etc., do you get me? Everybody wants to screw up everybody, so I will do the same. I don’t give a damn about the country. If I can, I’ll eliminate Bulgaria. I won’t leave Bulgaria, but if I can, I’ll delete it, you see?*” (**Doupnitsa, a man, 19**). What national identity could we detect in these interviews, what “imagined community”.

The Bulgarians whom I interviewed abroad were not as extreme in their evaluations as the above quoted people from Doupnitsa, though I did not feel any sentiment to the homeland, or any painful nostalgia. To my question “Do you miss Bulgaria? What do you miss most from your home country?” **only three people answered: “Yes, we miss Bulgaria.” All three of them missed the same thing: “I miss the Balkan,”** further specifying: “*The green of the Balkan, the trees, the flowers... I dream of coming back to Bulgaria when I retire, of sitting in my garden, planting flowers, looking at the Balkan*”(a woman, 53, Spain); “*...I miss the Balkan, the lakes, and going fishing...I have no intention of staying here, I’m homesick. May we be well and in good health, we’ll work for another three years, and then we are going back. I want my kids to grow up in Bulgaria*” (a man, 38, Milan).

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

One group of respondents missed the food: “*I miss the white cheese, the pickled gherkins, the pickled cabbage, the home-made brandy*” (a man, 38, Milan); “*I miss the white cheese, what else could I miss from Bulgaria...*” (a woman, 28, Sondrio); “*I miss the home-made brandy*” (a man, 53, Cork).

A second group of respondents missed their kids, family and friends (a typical response by women sounds like): “*I miss my kids very much. But, you know, I’m doing it for them.*” (a woman, 40, Milan).

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

“*No, I’m not homesick and I don’t miss anything in Bulgaria. I went back a couple of years ago; I lived there for a while and immediately decided to come back here (Milan). It’s not easy for me here, but it feels good.*” (a woman,

50, Milan). *“Don’t be ridiculous, what should I miss...My biggest dream is to marry an Italian woman, she may be an elderly one, too, she’ll die, right? But she’ll be rich. Money is the most important thing.” (a man, 25, Milan).*

So I wasn’t left with the impression that they had any national, “imagined community”, all of them are alone, with their own memories and dreams – memories of places, foods, friends, dreams about the future, in which Bulgaria is simply missing. The homeland is at best reduced to gastronomic specifics, a whiff of nature – of a lake, of greenery, fresh air, or is even further reduced to the concrete birthplace, the family and friends. Only one worn out woman in her forties, living in Milan, told me: *“I am proud to be Bulgarian. I am proud of the yoghurt – bacterium bulgaricus is known worldwide, the only one. That’s what we are famous for”* The woman that sat next to her watched her with affectionate condescension.

Probably **the lack of clearly expressed national identity** is due to the fact, that there is no big Bulgarian Diaspora – neither in Milan, nor in the Hague, although there are “Bulgarian” places, where people gather and meet, and even a Bulgarian street in the Hague. There is no clearly expressed “living within a group,” there is no ghettoization, people are scattered here and there. Women

looking after elderly Italian and Spanish women practically live in Italian and Spanish families. This puts them in a completely different situation from factory, construction, or green houses workers. At the same time, everybody in Milan watched Bulgarian television, listened to “chalga” (pop-folk music) and “estrada” (Bulgarian popular music), communicated mostly with Bulgarians – as if in some quiet sadness with their previous way of life. **The ethnic lives in the language**, although everybody with whom I talked in Italy managed very well in Italian, the Bulgarian language remained in their private space, while the “working” language was Italian. **The ethnic also lives in the music, to which they listen, in the Bulgarian cooking, in their friendships.** There is some **network connection to Bulgarians** – friends, relatives, who help their close ones join them, but this is not happening along the line of national fellowship and compassion, but along the following line: we are close, let’s help the guy, these are “global village networks”. **This is kind of traditional familiarity based on proximity and reminiscent of pre-modern social ties, because it is focused on face to face relationships and has nothing in common with contemporary identifications with imagined communities – be they nations or classes.** There is countrymen fellowship, which is among relatives and friends, though it is beyond the grand identities and unfolds in the semi-private spaces of the search for human closeness.

The constant perseverance to be independent, to cope alone, to survive, to help yourself, mentioned in the previous paragraph nevertheless dominated over any group identities. Even **the sense of family has been shaken,**

because the family itself has scattered – in most cases the relatives are in Bulgaria, but there are a number of cases in which, for instance, one son has gone to Cyprus, the other one to Spain, the husband has stayed behind in Bulgaria and the wife works in Italy; the wife works in Spain, the daughter – in Germany, the Grandma – in Bulgaria, etc., etc. You can never take all your relatives with you – even the family, with which I spoke in Milan, and which included a husband and wife, a child and the brother of the wife, had left their elder child in Doupnitsa, because he could never adapt to the Italian school and had cried all day long. “So, who looks after that child in Doupnitsa?” I asked. “His Grandmother,” replied the mother with resignation. Back in Bulgaria (working on another project) I came upon heart-breaking tragedies of children, whose parents work abroad; social workers spoke to me about the “dead mothers’ syndrome” in children whose mothers work abroad: the children simply stopped eating. In other cases children started “calling” their parents through aggressive behaviour – theft, brawling and usually end at a Labour Corrective School.

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

Of course, there is the “us” talk, and it is precisely the “us, the Bulgarians” as opposed to the Italians, the Spaniards, the Dutch, but it is not so much “us” as “imagined community” and “them” as “the Others”, but rather to comment some qualities of “them” and “us”. *“The Italians are more of politicians – sleek, sweet-talk you, and then stab you in the back...(pause) On the other hand, we are the same”* (a woman, 40, Milan); *“The Italians are warmer people, I don’t feel a great distance between us, and they treat me well..”*(a woman, 55, Sondrio); *“We Bulgarians are more capable, we can handle anything, you just tell a Bulgarian what to do – he gets used to it, learns how and does it. The Italian is a limited man – he has studied something, and that’s where he stops. I am not a specialist, he says. Me neither, but I learn.”* (a man, 38, Milan).

2. 4. The Cultural Encounters

Staying abroad leaves deep imprints: the comparison “they do this there in such a way, here we do it differently”, emerges in every story of migration.

Stories of migration often start from these comparative descriptions of “their” and “our” social worlds. But unlike the assessment of the qualities of Spaniards, Italians, Dutch, etc., which vary, and sometimes are not so flattering, the evaluation of “their” world is positive, and the contrast with “our” world is enormous.

Doupnitsa, a man, 52, spent 2 years in Italy

“I was really impressed in Italy; you see that everything there is in garlands, everything is spotless. And look here – dead. No lamps, no lighting, no one is thinking about it. Here, look, can this be a square – dark everywhere! There, the bulbs are like these, but higher and not in every other lamp, but everywhere. And here – gloomy.”

It is amazing that a man, who has lived like a “hamster in a derelict factory,” who has worked constantly, sees the world “there” only as bright and beautiful, and the “homeland,” to which he has returned as darkness.

Momchilgrad, a lady librarian, worked in the Netherlands: *“And when I went to Holland, what do I see – communism is already built. People live so peacefully. Even as gastarbeiters we had mobile phones. There are good and humane people there, who were not brought up by communists, so they lend you a helping hand and not because you are asking for their help, they try to direct you without breaking their laws, they never want to break their laws. . . .”*

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

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

There are **two types of responses:** A person changes “there,” but once s/he is back “here,” everything goes on as before; and the second type is – yes, one has changed.

A typical **first type of response** is given by a **52-year-old man who worked in Italy:** *“People work hard, but they get money. And here, I got back and started work in a place, and they laugh at me and say: “wait a sec, this is not Italy”. And I say: “Look, you’ve got to work. You can’t go on like this: you go for a coffee, then for beer... And as to myself, I worked for a while, and saw that they were laughing at me, and I started like that, just sitting pretty, as they did. “*

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

The first and the most obvious is the change of consumer practices, **i.e. higher standard of living**: “When they come back, a small part of them set up some business. And the bigger part buys apartments here.” (**Doupnitsa, a woman, 25**); “When he comes back, his standard is different. He buys a car, he shows himself, because he’s back from abroad. He buys himself a house.” (**Momchilgrad, a housewife**)

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

The secretary (55 years of age) in the Municipality of Kalofer says: “In Greece I understood that I had to take control of my life, to be more enterprising, up and about.” After her return to Kalofer, she registered the first and only NGO in town, which deals with alternative tourism. From its beginning until the present the NGO has developed and applied numerous projects and has helped a lot of people to start hotel businesses.

Kalofer, a man, 35, who has twice gone to Greece for seasonal work:

“Anyway, in spite of all the troubles, work in Greece was a good start for our business. And what I learned from our work there was that the best thing in the world is to be your own master first, then to work for other masters – be they the state or employers.”

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

The cultural transfer relates most of all to the experience of the self: it strengthens one’s confidence in one’s own Self, especially the conviction that one can handle any roles, once faced with the need to forget the old ones, learn new ones, then return to the old ones again, but in a new way. In this process of “lifelong learning by doing,” the roles lose their prescriptive power; they become susceptible to the personal willpower. My research, then, confirms Ulrich Beck’s conclusion that “the individualized individuals... are no longer the “role players” of simple, classical industrial society, as assumed by functionalism. Individuals are constructed through a complex discursive interplay which is much more open ended than the functionalist model would assume.” (Beck, 1995: 16). Indeed, one is left with the impression that the most important lesson is **the ability to switch quickly from one type of institutional culture to another, from one role to another – in other words to make your personality both adaptable and resilient. This makes stable**

identities and roles senseless, but the famous metaphor of the whole world as a scene – still relevant. The respondents in my case do have roles, but they are not so important, the important thing is to perform them well. **The “talent” of the actor is important, to play a lot and quickly changing roles, to be in constant life long learning by doing, proving his/her identity through constant flexibility. Again, the importance of the Self appears; in a way the Self is de-socialized (without specific roles and identities, protean) but, on the other hand, the Self is re-socialized from the point of view of the successful management of differences.**

If I have to answer the question whether the cultural encounters between those (let us call them provisionally “Western” and “Post-communist”) different institutional cultures leads to assimilation, adjustment, opposition or hybridity, it is clear that we find neither assimilation nor opposition. I can define the result of the cultural encounters as a specific flexible adjustment, rather contextual-ized, sensitive to different social milieus and their institutional cultures, leading to switching over to their specific requirements. This switching over is possible just because of the cultivated trans-cultural sensitivity and it can not be defined as a hybrid in the sense of combining differences or mimicry. It is a process of mediating between two institutional cultures by carrying the tension between the old institutional culture and the new one, between the newly acquired and the suppressed old one. **The hybrid is a structure – not quite stable indeed; the process of personal cultural encounters cannot be expressed in terms like hybrids or hybridization. This switching over requires a constant process of remembering and forgetting – trying to forget the “own” in a foreign environment and to remember and apply the new foreign knowledge in the home country.** This makes the person different – more reflexive, even if s/he does not reflect upon that, and more innovative.

The enlargement of the EU produces institutional hybrids, combining new normative regulations with old institutional cultures, thereby creating institutional conflicts that are not resolved yet. Personal encounters with a new culture (unlike institutional encounters) will have greater impact upon one’s return home because one’s own institutional culture has changed, thereby also prompting change in the institutional culture of institutions at “home”. The change, apart from the legal regulations enforced from above, will most probably happen through the change of people who return to their home country and try to change the institutional environment. Precisely because they have become freer, more active, more self-confident, they have shaken off the infantilism that was nurtured by the communist regime, where somebody – the boss, the party, the state – had to take charge of everybody.

2.5. *What is Glocalization?*

The small town of Kalofer has turned into a ghost place – one lit house out of five, and in it – a lonesome old woman watches a soap opera. The Doupnitsa people also feel as if they inhabit a cemetery: *“Half of the people are in Italy, the other half in the cemetery, that’s it.”*

The houses are empty, but the walls are covered with photos – not of deceased relatives, but of the living family, scattered around the world, pictured in Granada, Seville, Munster, Milan. The global world through the lives of the beloved people watches old women from the walls, and touches their sentiments through the dramas of the soap opera strangers on TV. Appadurai would probably enjoy that, because he would assume that this would stir up the glocal imagined. The empty house resounds with the many voices of different places, the depopulated town is inhabited by many live virtual images. At yet another funeral of yet another old woman from Kalofer I overheard the following conversation between two women in mourning: “Did your granddaughter get Sprach diploma?” “Mine is in Delaware, she studies at an American school, Ganca’s granddaughter is in Munster. Where were yours?” „Ah, one granddaughter is in Bonn, the grandson and my son in Cork.“ The place Kalofer is dying with eyes staring at a place somewhere in Germany, somewhere in Ireland, somewhere in Spain, somewhere in the States. and in the background there is a Colombian, Italian or American soap opera...

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

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

2.6. *Tentative Conclusions*

The story of temporary migration as seen from Bulgaria is a story of disappearance – of devaluated roles, of vanishing group identities, of deserted places. What is left are the people themselves – with their personal aspirations and fears, feelings of self confidence and humiliation, acts of self assertion and muddling through, moments of hope and nostalgia. The other concept, which is still alive, is that of “cultural encounter” – the stories are about “them” and “us,” “here” and “there,” what is left again are the people, moving across places, comparing them, constantly adjusting themselves, being

there and dreaming of somewhere else. It looks as though we are witnessing the collapse of all normative concepts, prescriptive models of behaviour and belonging, and the rehabilitation of the individual Self as the only important topos. To cite Ulrich Beck again: the individual becomes „an actor, designer, juggler and stage director of his or her own biography, identity, social networks, commitments and convictions.“ (Beck, 1995:14). Temporary migrants are so flexible, protean, that the only Centre that could hold them is they, themselves, the reinvention of their “real” autonomous Self.

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