

THE BALKANS AS A GATE OF NATIONS – NEW CHALLENGES FOR POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN THE NEW ERA

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Abstract. *During the history the Balkans has been the seat of great civilizations, including Ancient Greece, Byzantium, and Ottoman Empire. Many different nations lived here, or just passed through: Illyrians, Romans, Slavs, Avars, western crusaders, Turks, and many others. One of the most important novel in whole Serbian literature is “Seobe” (Migrations), written by Miloš Crnjanski. Serbs have a long history of migrations, including 1915. when whole Serbian government, military forces, state administration and many ordinary people left the country through Albania to Greece.*

Therefore, in collective memories of all people in Serbia, migrations occupied important place. These days, we are facing with immigrants from other nations and different cultural background, who are now just passing through, but many of them could stay with us in near future. What kind of people’s reactions – emotions, attitudes, behavior; can be expected in that meeting of the different groups? Could it be possible to bypass potential conflicts and to provide mutual understanding and positive relations to the benefit of both sides? What can we learn from previous historical experience and how we can use and apply existing body of knowledge in political psychology? Recent pool studies have not shown optimistic results.

We will propose large empirical study, both on the immigrants and in host societies, which will include many socio-psychological variables, like RWA, SDO, self-esteem, as potential predictors of people’s relevant attitudes and behavior toward new migrations. That is well known psychological procedure to mark potential obstacles in the situation and also to find space to establish new positive relations in the current immigrant’s crisis.

Keywords: the Balkans; Serbia; migrations; immigrants

INTRODUCTION

Human migrations are inherently characteristic of humankind, from the first Homo sapiens settlements in Africa, hundreds of thousands years ago. Our species has spread all over the Globe. However, all those migrations were not flow smoothly at all. It was always followed by stern problems of accommodation to new surrounding often followed by the struggle for pure survival. New possessed terrains demanded new skills in making necessary tools, adaptation to new food, and new kind of clothes and settlements.

Today, millennia after those days, in our highly differentiated and developed societies, with over 7 billions of humans in almost 200 states, some problems of human movements stay salient. New peoples on new territories at any of very structured modern countries make difference to previous balance and both newcomers and native-born people need new adjustments.

Many migrations through the history shaped civilization and made the world we live in today: to mention only conquests of Alexander the Great 23 centuries ago, or Napoleon “just” 200 years ago, or all European conquistadors of “New Worlds”. Many other

people from almost all nations tried to escape from dangerous places and to save life of them and their descendants. Such great and frequent movements made the world we live in.

SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In Serbia, people also experienced many massive human movements, not only one time. Let's take just recent 350 years and mention several important movements. Such events are not only more or less relevant historical facts, but parts of social representations of history of whole nation. And socially shared representations of history are crucial in creating and maintaining a people's identity. Collectively significant events become incorporated in social representations that enable positioning of our social identities. Even more, these representations condition nations to adopt different political stances in dealing with current events, like new immigrant crisis. (Liu and Hilton, 2005). Therefore they are important for today's attitudes toward large crisis with immigrants that has shaken whole Europe in recent months, and they should be taken into account in today's studies.

The first important migration of Serbs in the New Age, were happened in 1690, under Patriarch Arsenije Čarnojević, when numerous groups of refugee families, with all their belongings, mainly with flocks of sheep, set out toward north, to the lands northern from Sava and Danube river.

One of the most prominent painting in whole Serbian art history shows just that exodus (photo 1).

The second example is from exactly 100 years ago, when, during the second year of The Great War, whole Serbian government with the king, whole army and many civilians left their own country and went through Albania to the allied shelter in Greece. This "crossing over Albania", or more precisely its mountains in the midst of winter presents one of the strongest symbol of suffering in Serbian historical narrative.

Many people from the most underdeveloped parts of Yugoslavia went to America from the beginning of XX century, "trbuhom za kruhom" (for better fortune, literally stomach asked for bread). This expression has also very strong connotative meaning in whole area of former Yugoslavia. Many others also went to Western European countries, mainly



PHOTO 1. PAJA JOVANOVIĆ SERBIAN MIGRATIONS (1896)



PHOTO 2. SERBIAN RETREAT THROUGH ALBANIA IN 1915

Germany and Austria, from 1960s, as “gastarbeiters” (guest workers). Almost all families from Serbia and other former Yugoslav republics know somebody who left their country in search for better life conditions.

The last but not the least, both The Second World War and recent Yugoslav wars from 1990s produced hundreds of thousands of refugees. One new popular and nostalgic song says “My friends are pearls spread all over the world.”

ACTUAL PROBLEMS

Thesedays, our region has been affected with largest migrant crisis since The Second World War, and maybe even in longer period. According to UNHCR datam only this year more than 100 000 passed over Serbia, from its south border, toward north and west. Those people are mainly from Syria, but also Iraq, Afghanistan, even Bangladesh and some other countries. It is not superfluous to say that all these countries, during the biggest part of the second half of XX century had very good relations with Yugoslavia, mainly through The Non-Alignment movement, and significant

number of students from those countries studied at Belgrade University. Indubitably, those people are, culturally, very different, but not at all totally unknown even for ordinary people in Serbia. It is also important fact for our following discussion.

Finally, since Serbia, and other Balkan countries is not rich destination, almost all of those refugees or asylum seekers, just want to go through it to their final wishful destination, usually Germany and Sweden. Moreover, our part of world has also been ruined by war, relatively recently – only two decades ago we had similar situation like in their countries today. Could this fact be one more rason for higher degree of empathy? This could be one of the crucial questions in near future.

People from Syria and other mainly Asian countries just passing through Serbia these days (photo 3), usually pay themselves for their food, bus tickets and a couple of nights usually in some hostel, and go further. People in Serbia accept them generally without negative sentiments, many people try to help with some necessary sundries, some people volunteering a day or two in some centre that works with them. The government handling

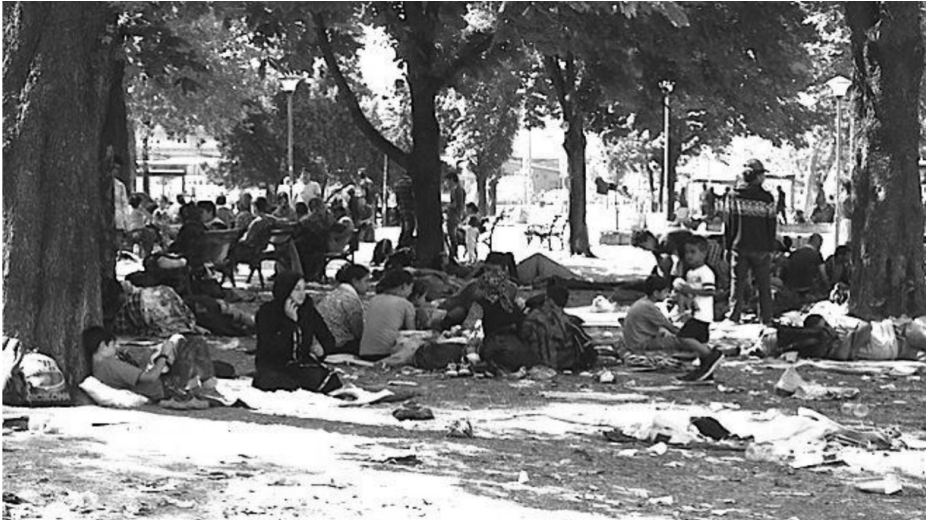


PHOTO 3. IMMIGRANTS WAITING IN A PARK NEAR BELGRADE RAILWAY STATION TO CONTINUE THEIR WAYFARING

of situation is also mainly without objectives. However, what could be happened if situation changes? What if several thousands of those people express wish or simple be stucked and forced to stay here for a longer period, maybe for very long period?

Different circumstances changes people's motives and behavior. For instance, it is well known that people are willing to be more involved in altruistic behavior when their "costs" (invested time, efforts...) are not high, i.e. high costs led to less helping (for instance Maner et al., 2002).

RECENT EMPIRICAL RESEARCH IN SERBIA

Therefore, a good prediction of peoples (both newcomers and inhabitants in host countries) psychological characteristics like attitudes, motives, and their intentions for actions could help a lot in preventing almost certain misunderstanding and potentially more serious conflicts.

In Serbia, several research about public opinion on current refugee crisis has been done recently, on representative sample, but, unfortunately, before the main peak of migrants wave, that is in 2014.

The results do not show so bright picture. We will give several illustrative reviews of results.

The public opinion survey carried out by CeSID and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees involved a representative sample of 600 adult citizens of Serbia, 100 respondents from each town with an asylum centre (http://www.unhcr.rs/media/CeSID_UNHCR_311014_EN.pdf). Their goal was to explore the experiences of local residents in direct and close contact with asylum seekers. Although great majority of the respondents understand principal reasons principal for emigrating - concerns for one's own safety and the safety of one's closest family members, and many even express feeling of compassion and awareness of the fact that the people involved are in distress and need help.

The reason for optimism is in finding that citizens of Serbia are convinced that the country has both the moral and legal obligation to offer all necessary assistance and protection to those people.

Unfortunately, there is also the other side of the medal. The researchers have also found that one, not negligible number of respondents foster exceptionally negative feelings

and named them even by racial terms as ‘mu-jaheddeen’, niggers, or Gypsies, or by very negative stereotypes like thieves, criminals or terrorists (in fact, those over 100 000 migrants committed almost no one criminal act at territory of Serbia), and by rising concerns for the future and security of the Serbian people and Serbia as a state. The serious potential problem lays in the fact that people who are aware and absolutely sure that Serbia is nothing more than a transit route, are still afraid that migrants will eventually ‘take Serbia over’. So we should be cautious and prepared for much worse psychological acceptance and even for some violent acts against migrants in case of worsening crisis that would cause that many asylum seekers will stay in Serbia. Some indications for negative development in people's feelings toward migrants can also be find in this UNHCR research. Residents of areas with asylum centers are evidently not satisfied with having asylum centres in their neighbourhood, and their main concerns, reported from the research , are fear for their own safety and the safety of their families (25% of respondents), then potential crime (10 percent) and unfamiliar cultural patterns and habits (8%). Some also expressed fear of contagious disease.

Social distance is usual measure of two groups relations (Bogardus, 1947), and could be a good indication for potential discrimination. In this research 32% of respondents oppose asylum-seekers settling in Serbia (despite the fact that only a few dozen of them asked permanent residence); 38% are against having asylum-seekers as neighbors or as co-workers; 46% oppose friendship; 49% are against having asylum-seekers teach their children; and two-thirds reject marriage or close family ties with an asylum seeker. The distance increases with the degree of social interaction – just opposite to the contact theory (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006).

The next research, conducted by International Organization for Migration and Serbian High Commissariat for Refugees, on representative sample of 1298, has also be very profound and informative, but the problem is that data was collected in 2012, so many

findings might be different now (http://www.kirs.gov.rs/docs/izvestaji/Stav_gradjana_prema_izbeglicama,_IRL_i_traziocima_azila_12_10_2012.pdf).

Finally, UNHCR recently published a brochure on mental health of asylum-seekers in Serbia (Vukčević et al., 2015), with the main objectives to gain insight into the psychological wellbeing of the asylum-seekers in Serbia with a special focus on refugees from Syria. They also offered some recommendations for work with this vulnerable group. They use interviews with 250 asylum-seekers using standardized psychological instruments that measure post-traumatic stress disorder, levels of anxiety and depression, and the instrument for assessment of traumatic events from their point of departure to Serbia. It was found that 89% of asylum-seekers in Serbia suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, 67% from anxiety and 77% from depression as a consequence of their experience in the countries of origin and in transit.

PSYCHOLOGICAL VIEW TO PROBLEM OF IMMIGRATION

Since the problem of migration is relatively prominent social problem, with large social impact, especially in countries with the biggest number of psychologists such as USA, Netherlands, Germany... there is relatively large psychological body of knowledge, embodied in many research, journal articles, conference topics. Migrations open many economic, political m but also various important psychological topics, from stereotypes, intergroup relationships to cultural integration.

The Report about immigration in the new century given by American Psychological Association had intention to be a comprehensive report, developed on evidence-base that addresses the psychological factors related to the experience of immigration, with particular attention to the mental and behavioral health needs and strengths of immigrants across the life span. They examined many factors including the effects of acculturation, prejudice/discrimination, stressors connected with

immigration process on individuals and their families, considering relevant subpopulations of immigrants (e.g., children/ adolescents, refugees/ asylum seekers, individuals from diverse countries of origin, and other vulnerable subpopulations). (APA report, p. 9). They have warned on several problems: first research cultural bias that failed to explore immigrants' points of view, and also shortage of research on the psychological factors that predict attitudes toward immigrants and how those psychological processes predict support for related policy.

The USA is traditionally country of migrants, and Europe's history is more connected with departures and settlement other places. Also, in the current crisis there are many people who are arriving in relatively short time period, and from other cultural background, different pattern of socialization norms, values, habits. Hence, what is necessary is longer period of time for adjustment of people from arriving and hosting groups. That period should be planned very carefully, to escape misunderstandings and potential conflicts as much as possible. Political negotiations on top level are undoubtedly important, economic decisions regarding funds for daily life necessities for maybe a million or even more people are definitely of highest importance, however, social psychologist also should give their contribution in that complicated mosaic of peoples, needs, interests and values.

We are pleading for a collaborative effort of governments, NGOs and experts in different fields, including political and social psychologists. Their goal must be to resolve a very serious problem that affect many people, their lives and their quality of those lives, i.e. dignity and wellbeing, and to prevent potential catastrophic developments. In such great and demanding endeavor all we should enter benevolently, with good intentions and with all our knowledge. We should find ways to make ordinary people cooperative and motivated. In Serbia, it may be reminder of Serbs own great migrations and put into practice

Staub's idea of altruism born on suffering (Staub, 2015).

The main proposal of this article is call for two relatively large and well prepared empirical research, as picture of current situation and basis for future policy oriented proposals and actions. The first research should be done on domicile inhabitants in Serbia (and maybe some other surrounding countries affected with migrant crisis: Bulgaria, Macedonia, Hungary, Croatia). What is necessary to be found are different aspect of attitudes toward migrant population, and factors that could influence such attitudes. Among those factors value and ideological orientations should be included; then some more basic psychological characteristics like empathy, and unavoidably some of the most common used variables for such themes: RWA and SDO. Peoples' attributions of migrants unenviable respondents own position in sense of relative deprivation, in perception of justness of the world we live in, should also be very useful elements for final, complete picture. What is important are not only number and names of proposed relevant variables, but also validation of different models of the variables interactions. Such research, could give many important answers not only for sci community but also for politicians and other policy makers.

The other research should be focused on immigrant community, their hopes, fears, expectations, but also sistemof values and readiness for adaptation to new surroundings. The knowledge from cross-cultural psychology (for instance Berry, 1997) should be combined with empirical data from both sample in one coherent and comprehensive program that should help us to pass through a potential great crisis, and to find a way, eventually, for new harmonious coexistence of groups and individuals who currently do not know sufficiently each other. The promising, not so distant future, could be marked with another milestone movement in human civilization and example how frightening crisis can be transformed into chance to establish better humankind.

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