

AN ALBANIAN WIFE AND MACEDONIAN “NATIONAL PURITY”

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Poreče, a mountainous region in central Macedonia is largely depopulated. Rural-urban migration started during the times of industrialization in Yugoslavia and intensified after the collapse of the federation. Currently, one of the most visible groups of inhabitants consists of elderly single men. For a decade, characteristic phenomenon associated with the depopulation of Poreče is the importing of Albanian women to the village, who then marry the local bachelors. At the same time, inhabitants of Poreče claim that their region is *clean*, i.e. inhabited only by Macedonian Orthodox, although surrounded by *Others* – Albanians, Turks, Torbeši – who are mostly Muslims. The questions that this paper attempts to answer are what role is played by female representatives of what is considered to be a hostile nation in this issue of ethnic or national purity? And how are Albanian wives “tamed” and integrated into a society defining itself as mono-ethnic, mono-national and mono-confessional?

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Artykuł przedstawia wyniki badań prowadzonych w górskim regionie Macedonii, Poreče. Obecnie jest on silnie wyludniony i w wielu miejscowościach mieszkają jedynie starsze osoby lub kawalerowie w średnim wieku. Jednocześnie mieszkańcy Poreča podkreślają, że ich region jest *czysty* – zarówno w sensie nieskażonej przyrody, jak i etnicznie oraz narodowo: mieszkają tu *jedynie* prawosławni Macedończycy. Jedną ze strategii mającej na celu powstrzymanie dalszej depopulacji jest sprowadzanie kobiet z Albanii, które wchodzi w związki małżeńskie z miejscowymi kawalerami. Kobiety te są katoliczkami pochodzącymi z północnej części Albanii, a ich przyjazd do Macedonii jest zapośredniczony przez swatów. W większości nie znają one na początku języka swojego męża, a także dopiero na miejscu poznają lokalną kulturę, obyczaje czy nawet dom, w którym zamieszkają. Pojawia się zatem pytanie, na które niniejszy artykuł próbuje odpowiedzieć: jak postrzegane są Albanki – przedstawicielki narodu będącego w stałym politycznym napięciu z Macedończykami – na Poreču? W jaki sposób są one dyskursywnie “oswajane” i włączane do narracji o *czystości* regionu?

Key words: migration, wedding, mixed marriages, anthropology, Macedonia, Albania, ethnicity, nationality

B. – “It’s clean around here. But we’re surrounded by them [Albanians, Muslims]. People used to go to Kičevo to work, but now only Albanians work there. The mayor is Albanian, no Macedonian can find a job there. And if one gets a job, one earns less than them [Albanians] (...). We’re like slaves”.
M. – “Just like in the times of the Ottoman Empire [vo osmanskoto]”.

The above quotation is a statement by a man who lives in Poreče, a mountainous region in central Macedonia. He has an Albanian wife, whom he brought to Macedonia more than ten years ago, and he himself engages in matchmaking from time to time.

They have no children, but their marriage seems to be harmonious and they clearly respect one another. The second statement comes from a Macedonian woman in her twenties, resident of the village of Samokov¹, who was present during the interview and insisted on giving her opinion in the discussion on the current situation in Macedonia. The question that this paper attempts to answer is: What role, in this issue of ethnic or national purity, is played by female representatives of what is considered to be a hostile nation? How are Albanian wives “tamed” and integrated into a society defining itself as mono-ethnic, mono-national and mono-confessional?

Poreče is a mountainous area located in central Macedonia, with Makedonski Brod as the administrative centre. In 1932–33 Józef Obrębski conducted ethnographic research here and wrote about the region that:

“Poreče is a land located even further away than on the periphery of civilization. It is separated from the busy Macedonian plains, in whose numerous villages and towns all of the local commerce and industry is concentrated, with steep slopes of mountain ranges, whose few paths and trails can only be negotiated by one travelling on foot or on horseback. A journey along those rocky and uneven roads will take one day to Gostivar, likewise to Tetovo, two days to Skopje and two to Prilep. For an ethnologist, Poreče is an area with special qualities. This place, cut off by natural barriers from the surrounding farming valleys and urban centres, is a preserve of primitive and archaic south-Slavic culture well conserved here” (Obrębski, in press).

Obrębski lived in the village of Volče for about six months. Today, it is almost completely deserted (only four people live there permanently), and one can only get there in an off-road vehicle. A monument to Obrębski and a street named in his honour are to be found in Samokov, the largest village of Upper Poreče. In the period of socialist Yugoslavia, and indeed up until 2004, Samokov was the administrative centre of the area, and the country’s strategic weapons factory was located here, ironically named “Suvenir”, for camouflage. In its heyday it employed more than 200 people. A housing estate (*naselba*) was built for the staff in Samokov and a kindergarten was opened as well as a crèche and a hotel. The new residents of the *naselba* were mostly young couples from the surrounding villages (today they are parents of people in their 20s). In 2004 the factory was closed down and the workers were made redundant. In the ‘1960s and ‘70s migration had begun to the fast-growing cities and the process continued after the collapse of Yugoslavia to extent that the villages a now deserted. Many people moved from Poreče to the village of Brvenica near Tetovo in north-western Macedonia when a large textile factory, Tetex, opened there. Many of the former residents of Poreče now live in the nearby towns of Gostivar or Prilep, as well as in the capital city of Skopje. The “Suvenir” factory has recently been bought by a Czech investor who is beginning to hire workers for weapons manufacturing, and administrative staff. Moreover, during

¹ Photo on the cover of this volume presented an Albanian woman with her children from Samokov, municipality of Makedonski Brod, Macedonia. Photo by K. Bielenin-Lenczowska, 2013.



Zvečan – a village located high in the mountains, inhabited mostly by elder bachelors; municipality of Makedonski Brod, Macedonia; photo by K. Bielenin-Lenczowska, 2012.

this period work has continued on the construction of a road to link Poreče with Skopje. The distance on the map is about 80 km, but currently the only route is a roundabout one via Makedonski Brod, Kičevo, Gostivar and Tetovo, adding an extra 100 km.

This paper is based on field research conducted in Samokov and the surrounding villages in May and July 2012, and in May and August 2013. It is based on interviews with Albanian women and their families, as well as on observation of their participation in the life of the community at the time of various festivals and celebrations (Gjurgjovden in the village of Kosovo in May 2013, a funeral in Zvečan in May 2013, and the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord celebrated on the top of Mount Foinik in August 2012 and 2013)². The interviews were conducted in Macedonian, and were sound-recorded or written down and then translated into Polish.

² The research project "Macedońskie Porecze w 80 lat po badaniach Józefa Obrębskiego. Antropologiczne studium ciągłości i zmiany [Macedonian Poreče 80 years after Józef Obrębski's field research. An anthropological study of continuity and change]", No. 2011/01/D/HS3/03583, was conducted thanks to a grant received from the Narodowe Centrum Nauki [National Science Centre]. I also wish to thank Emilia Polak and Meri Todorovska for their part in conducting the interviews and for sharing their insights. Thanks are also due to Prof. Anna Engelking for providing me with Józef Obrębski's yet unpublished texts that I have used for this article.

ALBANIAN BRIDES FOR BACHELORS

The permanent inhabitants of the Poreče villages are largely old people and forty- to fifty-year-old bachelors. Some of the elderly do not in fact live in the villages all the year round as many of them spend the autumns and winters with their relatives in towns. Those who live in the villages have their own, mainly small, farms, and supplement their incomes by picking herbs and mushrooms, or earning money by logging in the forest.

Old bachelors in the villages are relatively numerous, often several in one village. They are referred to as *samci*, or loners. It should be stressed right away, however, that the lives of many of them are remote from the fixed stereotype of a bachelor as a helpless untidy man often abusing alcohol. In the village of Zvečan, where I came across the largest proportion of unmarried men, they were coping very well – they run their own farms which were often large, they cook meals, bake bread, and make preserves for winter. When asked why they do not have wives, they respond: “And what girl would want to live in the country now, with goats, and without a decent bathroom and kitchen?” When I ask, “And didn’t you want to move to town?” the usual answer is “No. I’m fine here”. Generally, it is the men’s own decision to remain in the country, on a farm, living a very modest but calm and quiet life. The older ones even say that they do not feel lonely and that they have someone to work for: “I have four brothers and three sisters. They have children, they come to me, I go to them”. This interlocutor makes very tasty goat cheese, most of which he gives away to his siblings. He also shares the vegetables he grows and the herbs he picks in the local woods with them. We – the researchers – also left his house with gifts of excellent *rakia* (home-made brandy), bread, cheese and tomatoes. And we returned to Samokov with a bag full of fresh cucumbers, peppers and tomatoes. Our younger interlocutors, on the other hand, make plans. A bachelor in his thirties said: “I’ll build a house down below [on the road to Samokov, in the area called Stara Vodenica] and then I’ll find myself a wife”. When asked where he would find a wife when all the girls have either left or are already married, he replied right away, “I’ll bring one from Albania”. This would probably not be difficult, because two of his brothers already have Albanian wives.

A characteristic phenomenon is associated with the depopulation of Poreče. There are not enough brides for the local bachelors and the bachelors are not mobile because they want to live and work in the countryside. The response to depopulation is the phenomenon of bringing of Albanian women to the village, who then marry the local bachelors. These women mostly come from large families in which there are many sisters. In their own country they cannot find a husband because many young men emigrate to Western Europe. This indicates how complex the regimes of human mobility are in this region (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013). All this is possible in the current era of globalisation when people move both within their countries and beyond, and their motivations for mobility stem from supra-local economic and political factors

(migration from the countryside to cities undergoing rapid industrialisation in the socialist times, and – after the collapse of socialism and communism – to Western Europe), as well as from social factors (migration in order to get married).

In the small village of Kosovo there are now³ three Albanian wives, in the bigger Brest as many as seven, and in the even bigger Samokov (especially in its above-mentioned part, Stara Vodenica), eight. Two Albanian women live in Bitov. The vast majority of mixed Macedonian-Albanian families have children (usually two or three). The mayor of Makedonski Brod told me that there is a total of 68 Albanian women in the whole area and that 192 children have been born in their families⁴.

THE ROAD FROM ALBANIA

Bringing women from Albania for them to be married in Macedonia is not a new phenomenon, nor is it limited only to the region of the Poreče. Eli Lučeska's fieldwork in the neighbourhood of Prilep reported that Muslim Albanian women were already arriving there in the 1990s and the immigration of Catholic women began in about 2002 (Lučeska 2011). This type of migration is called "wedding migration (*svadbena migracija*)" (see Lučeska 2011; Stojavik'-Lafazanovska 2008) or marriage migration (see Davin 2007; Gates 1996), as the primary motivation of these women is to get married in Macedonia.

The importing of women from Albania is often referred to as "buying wives" and although this is an oversimplification, it does highlight several issues: first, the importing of women into Macedonia involves the transfer of money and goods to the family of the bride and to a third party (the matchmaker), and second, it deprives the women of the power to decide, or indeed take any causative role. Yet it is difficult to compare the situation of Macedonia with, for example, that in China, where the buying of wives appears in the context of violence and human trafficking (cf. Gates 1996). Similarly, the literature on the kidnapping of women in Kyrgyzstan also refers to the selling of women. There, the groom pays a fee for his wife (*kačym*) to the bride's parents (cf. Mroczkowska 2009, 131–143). The conclusion of arranged marriages in contemporary Macedonia should instead be analysed in the context of traditional customs connected with the arranging of marriages and social roles within a patriarchal and patrilocal extended family.

Marriages are concluded through the agencies of a matchmaker (*strojnik*), and the marriage is a kind of contract entered into by the respective families. The woman's opinion is nevertheless taken into account, although sometimes the agreement/

³ Information from August 2013.

⁴ A private conversation of 5th May 2013.

disagreement of a male family member seems to have more weight. One of the men engaged in matchmaking told me that in one case a girl's brother, who lived in Greece, did not consent to the marriage, so the matchmaker and the would-be groom had to go home empty-handed.

It should be noted that most of the brides in marriages thus concluded nowadays are friends or relatives of women who are already living in Macedonia. Indeed, it is they and/or their husbands who usually play the role of matchmakers. Here is one example: Dragan⁵ was at a wedding and he happened to be on his own because Suzana [his Albanian wife] was acting as an interpreter for the bride's family. When he was dancing *oro*⁶ he was joined by Valbona, who smiled at him, thinking that he was a bachelor. Later, they began to talk and Dragan asked if she was free, and if she would be willing to marry a Macedonian man and live in Macedonia. Valbona thought that Dragan was speaking for himself, but he corrected her and explained that he had in mind his neighbour, a very good friend of his. She wasn't risking anything because if something went wrong, he himself lived just 25 metres away. Valbona consented⁷.

The custom of marriage payments, paying a fee, or offering goods to the family of the bride by the groom, have been described extensively in anthropological literature (cf. Stone 2010, 289–290). Linda Stone (after Jack Goody) notes that marriage payments in Eurasian countries can be called “indirect dowry” because the goods accompany the bride and become part of the conjugal fund (Stone 2010, 229; cf. Goody 2004, 110–118), i.e. they are part of the newlyweds' property. Payments for a wife have been known in the Balkans, including Poreče. Obrębski wrote about them (he used the term *bride wealth* for it), especially in the context of the economic strategies of the inhabitants of Poreče. Bride wealth, negotiated and agreed on by both parties, is part of the exchange of gifts between the two families taking place at different stages of concluding the marriage, i.e. during the first meeting of members of both families, the wedding itself, and the bride's move to her husband's home. Obrębski concluded that:

“(...) what happens here is not a unilateral transfer of a payment for the bride to her family by the husband's family, but that the *prit* [bride wealth – KBL] is clearly reciprocated with the dowry (*rubá*) and wedding gifts (*darojite*) (...) that accompany the bride when she moves to her husband's home. (...) The value of the money and gifts in kind handed over as *prit*, together with all the small donations made by the family of the groom (such as the money paid for the gifts and jewellery for the bride), (...) roughly corresponds to the value of the dowry and gifts handed over at various stages of the transaction to household members and relatives of the groom” (Obrębski, publication in preparation).

The economic aspect of a marriage transaction is particularly important when one takes into account the fact that inheritance took place – and largely still does – along

⁵ All the names of our interviewees have been changed.

⁶ A circle dance (*kolo*) well-known throughout the Balkans, in Macedonia called *oro*.

⁷ Quoted from the note of an interview I conducted together with Emilia Polak. The note was drafted by E. Polak (08/22/2013).

the male blood line, and that families are patrilocal. The context of the traditional extended family is also relevant, many aspects of which survive to this day, although of course no claim can be made about its direct continuity or that it determines contemporary practices.

The traditional Balkan extended family, called by researchers *zadruga* and by the locals *zaednica*⁸, was a kinship community, but above all an economic entity. Milenko S. Filipović, who did his research in other areas of the former Yugoslavia, mainly in the 1950s and '60s, notes that the common feature of all types of *zadruga* is that it has one person who is in charge (usually the oldest man), there is a strict division of labour by sex and age, and that there is democracy. This means that decisions of the greatest importance to the community (e.g. the purchase of real estate or a girl's marriage) are taken by all the adult male members of the family (Hammel *et al.* 1982). While the researchers usually wrote about very large *zadrugas*, counting more than 100 people, the communities tended to be small, numbering up to twenty people (Svetieva, unpublished). Such *zaednici* of a dozen or so members are still remembered by elderly residents of Poreče, who point out that their main feature was a strict division of labour between men and women and the roles played by different people. My female interviewees mention that women's work was supervised by the oldest among them, while her unmarried daughters and daughters-in-law living in the same household decided among themselves what each one would do in a given week. For example, one was responsible for baking bread and cooking, another for cleaning, and the others for work in the fields. The following week, they would swap their tasks, firstly so that each of them knew how to do everything, and secondly so that none of them felt they were being treated unfairly by always having to do unpleasant or harder jobs. For individual members of the family to cooperate together successfully, the decision about who was to join the group was a decision taken together. Arranged marriages are a well-known phenomenon in Poreče and many people, especially the elderly, view them positively: "A young man or woman falls in love, doesn't think. And the parents will prompt, will find out whether [the suitor] is good or not good". That is how one of the interviewees assessed the choice of her partner. Her parents did not impose the choice but advised her, she accepted their advice, and in her opinion it was the correct choice. The general opinion about arranged marriages of Albanian women to Macedonians is also positive. It is believed that an important role is played here by the matchmaker; that is the person who gets the two young people to meet. It is his or her responsibility to find

⁸ The word *zadruga* itself is of course South Slavic, today usually denoting a collective farm from the time of socialist Yugoslavia. Referring to the extended family, terms like *velika kuća* or *zajednica* (in Serbian), literally, 'big house' and 'community' appear more often. Aneta Svetieva reported, in different regions of Macedonia, labels such as *u kup*, *zaedno*, *naedno*, *drustvo*, *kalabalak*, *tajfa*, *golema kukja*, *golema familija*, *familija*, *jaka kukja*, which mean 'community', 'common life' or 'big house', 'large family' (see Bielenin-Lenczowska 2008, 161).

out about the potential partners' family situation, their financial standing and their reputation in the community, and, finally, to bring them together. The reward for his or her efforts may be up to 1000 Euros. It is paid by the groom. The final decision, of course, is made by the parents and the young people themselves.

The Albanian women's move to Macedonia follows a similar pattern. First the suitor goes to Albania with the matchmaker to find a suitable candidate or to the house of a girl already known to them or recommended by someone. This is how one of our interlocutors told us about it:

"I wanted to get married and this [name of the matchmaker], who has brought a lot of women here, said: Give me 400 euros, and I'll find you a wife. So I said O.K., we fixed the date to go to Albania, and went".

To start with, there is the first meeting at the girl's house with her family – parents and siblings. Then there is an exchange of information about the future spouses and their families – what they do, what they own. If the girl's family likes the candidate and of course if she does too, a preliminary agreement takes place to go ahead with the marriage. The bachelor buys his future wife some jewellery – a watch, a necklace and a ring. He may also buy gifts for relatives of the bride, but what matters is that an odd number of gifts be given to one person. The man also leaves money for the bride to obtain a passport and cover travel costs to Macedonia (about 100 Euros). It is up to the man how much money he spends on the jewellery; the interviewees reported that a man's expenses during his first stay with the parents of his future wife are around 500–700 Euros. As we were told humourously by, Teuta, one of the girls:

"He gave me one ring. And I also wanted a chain and earrings. Oh, wasn't I upset! (...) I had a chain and big earrings from my parents, but took them off when we went into town so that he didn't know I had them [laughter]. And he says to me, just one ring now, I'll buy you the rest in Macedonia. Yes, but how will I look in front of our guests, I told him. For with us it's expected that the girlfriend be showered with gold. (...) In the end I got a chain, but it was so thin it broke right away. Ah, here are the guests waiting, and how can I show myself to them? Fortunately, I had another one [laughter]. Later he also bought me a watch. There is a custom here to give the girl a watch, but it was also no good, broke down immediately [laughter]. But that's what he's like, he says there's no point spending money on silly things. Maybe he's right, although in Macedonia I did force him to buy me earrings!"

Fortunately, it was not only the gold that mattered because the couple are now living together quite happily. During the first visit, the families arrange to meet again, this time in Macedonia. The father or a brother may come, but never the bride by herself – "after all, she isn't yet a wife, so it would not do for her to stay overnight at his [the fiancé's] house". There is also another, more practical, reason – women do not usually have passports, and men do, because many of them have lived and worked abroad. In Macedonia the visitors become acquainted with the man's family and neighbours, and his property and possessions are inspected, as well as the place where the woman is to

live. The assessment focuses primarily on the home and the garden – they should be clean and well looked after, the house should be equipped with a kitchen and a bathroom, or money should be available for the renovations.

“My brother said to me, the man has a good job, a new house, but it is far from everywhere. And I thought: If he has a new house and money, I will arrange it according to my own taste”.

There have been cases when relatives of the bride did not agree to the wedding because the groom’s house did not meet her expectations. Such situations were reported to me, however, as having happened in distant places – it never happened in Poreče. Similarly, there had never been a situation that a woman left her husband because he mistreated her (there were mentions of a husband’s violence, laziness and drunkenness). In Poreče all the married couples, according to the declarations of our interviewees, live in harmony, the failed marriages occurring somewhere around Prilep, and those were due to the matchmakers’ incompetence.

“Didn’t check what kind of family it was, just took the money and that’s it. In our area it is checked exactly what one is like, questions are asked both here [in Macedonia], and there [in Albania]”.

On the next visit to Albania, the wedding takes place, about a month after the visit in Macedonia and the final approval of the marriage. Nowadays, the wedding reception is usually held in a restaurant, whereas formerly it would be held at the bride’s home. It is paid for by the bride’s parents, but if the groom is wealthy, he can give the girl’s family some money (one interlocutor calls it *bakšiš* – a tip). The wedding lasts one day, but no documents are signed, and there is no church wedding ceremony. Right after the wedding, the transfer of the bride to the groom’s house takes place, the wedding gown remains in Albania and the parents return it to the rental shop if it was borrowed. Then the newly-weds depart and the woman takes care of all the formalities connected with her stay in Macedonia – registration at the registry office, sometimes a wedding ceremony in church⁹, legalization of her stay; after three years, the woman may decide to apply for Macedonian citizenship. Next, everyday life begins at the new place, next to a man she hardly knows, while she learns the local language and customs.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

On arrival from Albania, most of the women did not know the Macedonian language. A notable exception is Elvira, who lived in an area bordering on Macedonia and was quite familiar with the Macedonian language so she quickly learned to speak

⁹ Sometimes the wedding at an Orthodox Church is delayed until the birth of a child and is held together with the christening.

it flawlessly. Most of them, however, have trouble with speaking correctly, many do not know how to write in Macedonian, and none of them have attended a course of Macedonian (indeed no such courses are available in this area). In only one case did I come across a situation where the husband was teaching the language to his wife, including writing in Macedonian. The other women have tried to learn it by themselves – from their husbands and neighbours:

“I myself don’t know how I did it [laughter]. Somehow on our own [with her husband], I don’t know (...) I asked what this or that means, and so it went on. It’s good to have contact with people”.

Teuta, who told it, speaks Macedonian well, but sometimes puts Albanian endings on Macedonian words and one can hear the characteristic Albanian ‘r’ in her speech. With their children they tend to speak in Macedonian, only the few who often travel to Albania teach their children Albanian so that they can communicate with their relatives there.

That is also how – by trial and error – the women learn to cook. When I asked about the differences in the preparation of meals, I was told that they are not big: “here’s pita, and there’s pita. Here’s salad, rakia, and there too”. But when I enquired about specific dishes, it turned out that the women had been learning from neighbours, mothers-in-law or – in one case – from her husband.

“He didn’t like my food, said that the salad was different, even the bread I baked was different. So I said, show me how to do it. And he showed me how to knead the dough. I learned how to, but now I know that I can say to him: Do it yourself, I know you can! [laughter]”.

As mentioned above, the women are Catholics. When I asked whether any man had married a Muslim, I heard about one such woman who got married to someone in Makedonski Brod. But no one knew her personally. Even though the others were Christians, they were quite willing to talk about the cultural and lifestyle differences which they encountered after their marriage. These primarily concerned celebrations of both family feasts and annual festivals. Firstly, their own feasts, i.e. those known to them from Albania, are evaluated more positively as nicer, more elegant, and as *more spiritual*. One of our interviewees explained it thus: “Here at every festival they drink rakia, it’s just food and rakia. It’s not good [*ne e ubavo*]”. The following is a conversation I had with an Albanian woman from Brest:

- Since I came here, I haven’t been to a wedding.
- Really? [I was surprised, because the interviewee had lived in Macedonia for seven years]. But there are many young married women [*nevesti*] here (...).
- Well, yes, but no weddings like what we have [in Albania]. There was just something to eat, but no music, no dances. I hardly noticed that there was a new married woman [*nevesta*] in the village”.

We had more conversations like this one, except that they referred to the past, when “there were a lot of people, plenty of fun and lots of things going on”.

What was particularly difficult to accept for our interlocutors (statements to that effect have also been also recorded by Eli Lučeska and Meri Stojanova) was the fact that the Orthodox Macedonians frequently visit the graves of their dead and that the graveyards are located right next to the church. This is how Hana described her first celebration of Easter and participation in the Easter vigil:

"It was still dark, and we walked around the church, and there were graves. I was scared because I was walking on the graves (...). I was afraid of ghosts (...). In our country, churches are set apart from graveyards, and graveyards from churches, but here everything is together – you go to church and you walk on the graves. (...) Here on the day after Easter people go to the graveyard. In Albania, it is not done. This is what the second day of November is for, that's when one goes to the graves. Not at other times. But here it's always to the graves! Oh give me a break, I for one like to wear high-heel shoes on a holiday and on high heels I can't go to the graveyard!"

A similar statement can be found in Lučeska:

"I'm afraid to go to the graveyard in the evening, we never went to the graveyard in the evening, let alone at midnight, only vampires go there then" (Lučeska 2011, 286).

This and other interlocutors also held a negative opinion about consuming food and drink on graves during the funeral, as well as at other times when the dead are remembered.

My interlocutors often talked about the differences in the landscapes, since most of them came from the lowlands or from the seaside. They spoke critically about the difficulties of living in the mountains and associated the word *ramno* (evenly, on the plain) with beautiful landscape. Moreover, some women came from towns, so on arrival they had to learn how to work on a farm and get used to living in the country without any creature comforts:

"At home, everything was within easy reach: the shops, the school, and the beach. Here, there's nothing, you have far to go, that's not good [*neubavo*]".

The interviewees, for example the very talkative and lively Lindita from Kosovo, cannot put up with the lack of company in their small villages:

"I like to meet with people, I like when there's a lot of people, a lot, a lot [she used the Albanian word *shumë* here], fun, music, I like it. Here, no one to talk to".

As the above statement shows, the interlocutor has not learned to speak Macedonian fluently. She falls back on Albanian words and constructions, but it does not prevent her from being a very talkative and open person, participating actively in local festivals (such as the feast of the Transfiguration on Mount Foinik, organised annually by the inhabitants of three villages: Brest, Kosovo and Trebovlje).

OUR ALBANIAN WOMEN VERSUS ŠIPTARI

Residents of Poreče boast that their region is *clean*. This word refers not so much to the beauty of its nature (this is also emphasised, though in this case the adjective *priroden*, i.e. ‘natural’, is used) as to its *ethnic purity*. What they mean is that it is inhabited exclusively (the interviewees’ term) by Orthodox Macedonians. Indeed, when one travels eastward from Makedonski Brod, the minarets of mosques disappear from the landscape, there are no Albanian flags flying from different buildings, houses are smaller, and cars are of poorer quality.

Macedonia is a multi-ethnic and multicultural country where the largest community, besides Orthodox Macedonians, are Albanians (according to different sources 25–40%)¹⁰. Albanians live primarily in the western and northern part of the country and the vast majority of them are Muslims.

As mentioned above, when selecting Volče in Poreče as his base for ethnographic research, Obrębski was looking for a place that was the most isolated and archaic. However, neither in Obrębski’s times nor today has Poreče been truly isolated. Residents of the region travelled to towns, on foot or otherwise, to the market, to a doctor or to offices. The nearest towns, except for Prilep, are Muslim (called in Obrębski’s time *Turkish towns*, although now Islam is associated primarily with Albanians): Gostivar, Kičevo, Tetovo. As illustrated above, a large group of migrants from Poreče settled in these towns in the 1960s and 1970s, moving there in search of work. Muslims from the surrounding towns or villages also come to Poreče, especially to Makedonski Brod, but most of them are not Albanians but Macedonian-speaking Muslims, usually referred to as Torbeši. In Makedonski Brod there is a temple which is a shrine for both Orthodox Christians and Muslims of various denominations; Orthodox Christians call it the Church of St. Nikola, while Muslims call it *tekke*. The former believe that the body of St. Nikola rests in the temple and Muslims believe that it holds the tomb of the Bektashi saint H’d’r Baba¹¹. However, the opinion about Poreče’s national and religious purity was confirmed by almost all our interviewees, even when they were not asked about it explicitly. The *purity* they talked about is connected with, firstly, the uniqueness of Poreče in that it has preserved the *genuine, unspoiled Macedonian culture* (as one of the interlocutors defined the very solemn celebration of the Feast of Vodici¹² in the village of Trebovlje). Secondly, it points to the safety of the region,

¹⁰ According to the last census, held in 2002, Albanians constitute 25%, but according to estimates by the Albanians themselves, the proportion is much larger (up to 40%), http://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/kniga_13.pdf (access: 24.04.2014).

¹¹ The temple in Makedonski Brod is presented in a documentary film by Elizabeta Koneska “Mir na site” (Peace be with you all), 2007.

¹² The feast commemorating Christ’s baptism in the Jordan, celebrated – according to the Julian calendar – on January 19th.

which is free of political, economic and social tensions that occur – according to the inhabitants of Poreče – in multi-ethnic areas. It is these tensions that the statement quoted at the beginning of the text refers to. In his opinion, the *slavery* the interviewee mentions in that statement is synonymous with the marginalisation of Macedonians on the labour market and in local politics. After 2001, i.e. after the end of the armed conflict between Macedonians and Albanians, amendments were introduced to the Macedonian Constitution and the law relating to the country's ethnic and national policies was revised. The Ohrid Agreement (*Ramkoven dogovor*), signed on 13th August 2001, stipulated, among its other provisions, that in areas where a community other than the Macedonians constituted at least 20% of the population, bilingual signs and bilingual education at primary and secondary levels would be introduced, as well as ethnic quotas guaranteeing those communities access to higher education and to jobs in public administration (Skarić 2004). The conflict of 2001 also led to the migration of many Macedonians from western Macedonia to other parts of the country. That is why, according to our interlocutors from Poreče, it is very difficult or simply impossible to find a job in the towns of western Macedonia, where Albanians are often in the majority. Moreover, as the interlocutor talking about *slavery* emphasised, Macedonians usually work for Albanian employers³, who take advantage of their privileged position. Local politics are also dominated by Albanians, who vote their men into key posts.

What, then, in the face of such a negative image of Albanians, is said about the Albanian women who get married in Poreče, especially as the interviewee who says that the Macedonians are now *slaves to* the Albanians himself has got an Albanian wife? It seems that two factors are important for the *assimilation* of the Albanian women: their religion and the fact that they come from another country (Albania). They are Catholics and this is always emphasised, as well as the fact that they have their children baptised, and usually have a wedding ceremony in the Orthodox Church. There is no Catholic church in the area (the nearest one is located about 120 km away), and when asked whether they would like to attend a Catholic Mass, the women say, as did one of the interviewees of Eli Lučeska:

“You have to follow the local laws [in Macedonia], and this is what I do, it's the right way. I do things your way, according to the local customs, and as for the Albanian ways, let my mother stick to them” (Lučeska 2011, 287; see similar quote in Stojanova 2013, 287).

In the times of Yugoslavia two terms for Albanians were used: *Albanci* and *Šiptari*. The former denoted the inhabitants of Albania, the latter the Albanians of Yugoslavia (Macedonia, Sandžak, Kosovo, etc.). After the breakup of Yugoslavia, the scope of *Albanec /Albanac* has expanded and it now denotes Albanians in general (i.e. people who declare they belong to the Albanian nation) and is an official and neutral

³ This interlocutor uses the terms *Albanian* and *Muslim* interchangeably.

term, whereas the word *Šiptar* is now marked as pejorative. Negative opinions can be heard primarily about Albanians who have come to Macedonia from the region of Kosovo, either as refugees after the war in Kosovo, or earlier, in the times of Yugoslavia. As one interviewee put it,

“Tito gave them [the Albanians in Yugoslavia] not only bread but also cake [*ne samo leb ama i kolača*]. He gave them everything, and they didn’t know how to appreciate it”.

He said they settled in Macedonia as squatters, they built their homes without proper permits and without paying any fees.

“And it was them that provoked the war¹⁴. And it’s because of them, the Muslims, Šiptari, that we can’t develop [economically]. Besides, he said, they stick together, not like the Macedonians who could gouge out one another’s eye [*da mu go izvadi okoto*]”.

The Albanian wives in Poreče are never referred to as *Šiptari*. Not only to indicate that they come from Albania and not from Macedonia (former Yugoslavia), but also because they are perceived positively¹⁵, in contrast to *Šiptari* (cf. Obrębski 1936). Their integration, or even assimilation, into Macedonian society is viewed positively, for it is often noted that they learn the Macedonian language and celebrate Orthodox festivals. Because of that, the interviewees said, these women do not have contact with Albanians (*Šiptari*) from Macedonia. Of course, such contact would be difficult because the Albanian women are not as mobile as men; even though they emigrated from their homeland to Macedonia, they now live in the country here and do not as a rule go out to work. In addition, the Albanian wives are Catholics and not Muslims, while Albanians from Macedonia are identified with Islam (see the statement above in which the interlocutor uses the terms *Albanian* and *Muslim* interchangeably). Albanian wives can thus become *domesticated* and included in the discourse on national and religious *purity* of Macedonian Poreče.

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¹⁴ Refers to the conflict of 2001.

¹⁵ Meri Stojanova notes that using the term *Albanki* for wives from Albania can sometimes have an ironic or pejorative meaning (Stojanova 2012, 286). However, I was never witness of this during my fieldwork in Poreče.

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