

New Solidarities: Migration, Mobility, Diaspora, and Ethnic Tolerance in Southeast Europe

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Abstract

The social landscape in Southeast Europe has changed dramatically over the past twenty years: increased globalization, new migration and mobility patterns, the refugee crises, economic uncertainty, and the emergence of other salient identities, have all influenced the region dramatically. However, while the continent-wide increase in Euroscepticism, right-wing populism, and disillusionment with globalization points to the need for examining new solidarities and new permutations of difference, research on the effects of these social changes is scarce. In the following articles, we examine the new cleavages and new solidarities created by these changes: effects of global phenomena such as international youth exchange programs, music/film festivals, language, diaspora and dual citizenship, and migration, and the ways in which they are assuaging or amplifying ethnic tolerance in the region, exploring both the determinants of these societal changes, as well as the effects of the changes: emerging political issues and cleavages, new intersections of identities, and new forms of ethnic (in)tolerance.

Introduction

The social landscape in Southeast Europe has changed dramatically over the past twenty years: increased globalization, new migration and mobility patterns, the refugee crises, economic uncertainty, and the emergence of other salient identities, have all influenced the region dramatically. Increasing numbers of the region's youth have participated in study abroad programs, leading to a surge in international friendships and marriages, fundamentally transforming youth's sense of national belonging (Carnine 2015). Co-ethnics in the diaspora are heavily engaged in the politics of the region (Štiks 2010, Ragazzi and Balalovska 2011), send remittances that exceed fifteen percent of some of the countries' GDPs

(World Bank 2018), and many of them frequently return to their origin countries or actively engage with them in online communities, influencing local landscapes with the cultures and world-views from their new societies (Stubbs 1999, Skrbiš 1999, Halilovich 2012); trends accompanied by high levels of "brain drain" – and active plans and hopes for emigrating – from all of the SEE countries (Erdei 2010, Sergi et al. 2004). Pressures from the European Union during the accession process of the region's countries, both in terms of formal rules pertaining to policies such as environmental governance and rule of law reform (Kmezić 2016, Fagan and Sircar 2015), and in terms of a transfer of values (e.g. LGBT rights; see Elbasani 2013) and memory politics (Milošević and Touquet 2018), have led to lasting changes on the landscape of Southeast Europe (Džankić et al. 2018). Globalization in all its forms, including environmental trends (Erik-

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sen and Schober 2015), popular culture including music (Baker 2008, Mišina 2011), television and film (Volčič and Andrejević 2010), and sports (Eichberg and Levinsen 2009, Poli 2007, Hughson 2013, Wood 2013), and increased economic precariousness (Flere et al. 2015), has permeated throughout the region, affecting ethnic identities and existing social cleavages.

While these sweeping changes have fundamentally transformed the ethnic landscapes of the region, research on the effects of these social changes is scarce. Most empirical research on identities and tolerance remains focused on ethnic identities as understood through the lens of previous generations. Ethnic identities are still largely measured using questions regarding national pride (see Meitinger 2018), and surveys on blatant and “hot” issues such as war crimes or refugee policies taken as proxies for the level of ethnic tolerance – results that rightly give rise to alarmist warnings that the region is sinking deeper and deeper into the abyss of ethnic intolerance (see Taleski and Hoppe 2015). However, it is precisely the continent-wide increase in Euro-skepticism, right-wing populism, and disillusionment with globalization – which points to the need for examining new *solidarities* (Hoskins, Saisana and Villalba 2015) and new permutations of difference. Migration, mobility, diaspora, and above- and below-ethnic identifications, moulded by novel lifestyles, technologies, educational experiences, consumer/labour markets, gender norms, leisure opportunities, and fashions (Mandić and Trošt 2018), have modified and transformed “old” identities and solidarities and produced new ones. Yet, when hysteria regarding the inflow of refugees from Syria in the Balkans broke out in 2016, for instance, we remained focused on studying old ethnic cleavages towards new outgroups (migrants), while neglecting to consider whether and how these new cleavages interact with old ones (e.g. attitudes towards the local Roma population), or how the refugee crisis affected refugee solidarities as opposed to right-wing mobilization and nativist identities.

Indeed, examples of identifications that are not related primary to ethnic identity, and instead represent cross-ethnic solidarity, are abundant. These include class solidarities: the “Bosnian Spring” movement slogan “We’re hungry in all three languages”, referring to the irrelevance of language politics in the backdrop of mass poverty (see Petritsch and Solioz 2014), demonstrated the degree of fatigue with the assumed primacy of ethnic identities, while other research has pointed to the need to move beyond the dichotomy of the urban, educated, liberal, pro-Europe vs. rural, uneducated “masses” (Vetta 2009, Kalb and Hamai 2011). Other regional and cross-national grassroots and civic society movements have promoted beyond-ethnic attachments, such as anti-fascism movements, Yugonostalgia (Petrović 2013, Palmberger 2008, Velikonja 2013), and the revival of Serbo-Croatian as “our” language as means of transcending ethnic linguistic boundaries (see Bugarški 2012). Cross-ethnic trends are also visible in the realm of popular culture, in sports, film, and music manifestations: celebrities from minority groups in popular shows, regional celebrity advocates of movements such as LGBT rights, international film festivals, “friendship networks” in regional manifestations such as Eurovision (see Dekker 2007), local manifestations attracting regional attendance such as the Exit music festival, rock music, or reality television (Baker 2008, Volčič and Andrejević 2010, Mišina 2011). On an even more grassroots level, local carpooling groups such as “442”, created by individuals traveling frequently between Belgrade and Zagreb, the “442 crew” running team, created in 2015 between the Belgrade Urban Running team and Zagreb Runners “focusing on a future full of miles and smiles”, and the Albanian Serbian Friendship Association group on Facebook, have flourished into “communities based on solidarity, resonating within intimate, artistic, cultural and political fields” (Popović 2017, 2020).

At the same time, these trends have not affected the region’s countries uniformly, nor has their reach extended throughout the par-

ticular countries. Research is increasingly pointing to stark regional and urban-rural differences in ethnic attitudes. For instance, in Croatia, the percentage of people who think that war criminals indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) were heroes range from 44% in Istria vs. 77% in Dalmatia; while at the same time, when looking at how much time people spent traveling/outside the region, a typical indicator of positive social contact exposure, as many as 93% of people living in rural areas of Lika had spent zero days outside of the country during the previous year, compared to less than 50% in Zagreb (Pavasović Trošt 2016, for the full dataset see IPSOS 2010). There are stark regional and urban-rural differences in virtually every attitudinal and behavioural measure we use for capturing ethnic tolerance (Sekulić et al. 2007, Simkus 2007, O'Loughlin 2010). As such, a careful examination of how these patterns have affected ethnic tolerance at local – both below- and above- national – spaces, allows us to study the conditions in which ethnic solidarity becomes more likely.

In this special issue, we examine the new cleavages and new solidarities created by these changes: effects of global phenomena such as international youth exchange programs, music/film festivals, language, diaspora and dual citizenship, and refugees, and the ways in which they are assuaging or amplifying ethnic tolerance in the region. Papers in this issue explore both the *determinants* of these societal changes, as well as the *effects* of the changes: emerging political issues and cleavages, new intersections of identities, and new forms of ethnic (in) tolerance. Southeast Europe represents a particularly interesting case to study these issues, where the above-mentioned processes combine with remnants of post-war politics infused in daily life, brain drain, an ageing population, marked youth exclusion from the labour market (Goldstein and Arias 2013), and extensive adoption combined with distancing from Western cultural products (Roberts 2008). In an era of increasing globalization of culture, travel, and

economic inter-dependence, the countries in the region are still marked by marked ethnonationalism in the public sphere and the instrumentalisation of identity by political elites, offering fruitful ground for exploring new mosaics of ethnic belonging and difference.

The articles, in turn, explore these new mosaics, in particularly the emergence of new ethnic solidarities, in the region. The articles explore the conditions under which new kinds of ethnic solidarities have emerged: Anisimovich examines cinema-related grassroots incentives in Bulgaria, and the extent to which these events create dialogic spaces where the public sphere is constructed by below, evaluating the potential of grassroots cinema initiatives in challenging mainstream media's xenophobic discourse towards refugees. Takševa explores the (re)emergence of Yugonostalgia and Yugoslavism as an ideology of resistance to the unsatisfying political and economic present, as well as a shared cultural identity rooted in civic values of multi-ethnic co-existence and solidarity. Through extensive fieldwork in two Bosnian towns that experienced massive destruction during the war, Djolai explores the conditions under which positive interpersonal relations are more likely to arise given the new cleavages. Relying on two concepts, identity of place, the attachment to home communities, and identity of experience, a result of forced displacement and post-war migration leading to life away from home communities, she emphasizes the importance of studying other, beyond-ethnic, identities that people develop through their life projects, as well as the complex social dynamics at the community level which affect these cleavages.

Further, the papers examine how migration, mobility, and diaspora, have affected the ethnic landscape in the region. Hristova looks at identity dynamics in border regions, exploring how minorities on the border between Serbia, Macedonia, and Bulgaria navigate the spaces "in-between" national and ethnic identities. She shows how members of the Bulgarian minority construct fluid identities to help them navigate

these vague spaces, while Macedonian youth cope by living in a latent state of standby migration, a sort of “placebo identity” while they plan for their future migration to the West. Exploring ethnic dynamics amongst the diaspora, Savić-Bojanić and Jevtić look at how ethnic solidarities and networks differ among various cohorts of Bosnian diaspora in the United States. Through ethnographic research of Bosniak diaspora during their visits “home”, they demonstrate how recent waves of migration have produced new diasporas with very different views on the symbolic value of ethnicity and ties with co-ethnics. Kovačević Bielicki looks at the other side of this process – Bosnian migrants living in Western countries, but voluntarily repatriated to Bosnia and Herzegovina. She demonstrates the importance of not just economic, but also social and economic reasons, including perceived ethno-national sameness “back home”, in understanding voluntary repatriation. All of the articles emphasize the importance of examining new cleavages and new solidarities created by new migration and mobility patterns, the refugee crises, economic uncertainty, and the emergence of other salient identities, and the fruitfulness in studying the conditions under which above-ethnic solidarity – as supposed to ethnic intolerance – is more likely to occur.

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