

CHAPTER 1

SOCIAL TRANSITION AND WAR IN POST-COMMUNIST SOCIETY

1. INTRODUCTION

As some authors have already noted, living in transition is nothing new for former communist countries (Drezov, 2000:195; Bolcic, 1995:13). Countries which are presently faced with “post-socialist” transition¹ are a special group of countries of the modern era because their global societies have undergone two “transitions” during a period of some (five to seven) decades: first a transition from capitalism “to socialism” and now a transition “from socialism” to capitalism.

However, while in the “first transition” the global social system was to provide a new social role for workers as “direct producers”, the “second transition” should establish an institutional framework for a new role of owners, entrepreneurs and managers. Also, in the “first transition” the “totality” of necessary social changes was reduced to the political and ideological changes, while in the “second transition” the essence of the transition is placed in the domain of the economy, which boils down to privatization understood as privatization of state/socially owned firms (Bolcic, 1995:15). One of the important characteristics of the “second transition” is also the fact that it was very fast so that it did not allow people the time either to adjust their everyday lives to the requirements of global changes, or to understand the essence of these changes. And finally, the “second transition” is mostly designed according to the solutions in the political, economic and overall social “order” originally created in developed “Western” countries, which do not always fit to the conditions in the Eastern part of the world.

It seems that people did not have a clear idea of the cost-benefit ratio when they casted their vote for change of the political system. Or, even more probably, as I will show later, they neither had a lot of choices nor were able to predict the consequences which the change might have for their everyday lives. The collapse of

¹ Some authors also speak about transition to a new social order (Bolcic, 1995:14), while others use terms such as transformation from “communism” to “post-communism” (Blagojevic, 1998:19). Bearing in mind both Marxist philosophy and ideological discourse accepted in the former communist countries, the terms such as socialism, transition from socialism and post-socialist society may be more appropriate for naming former and present social systems in the countries included in the survey. However, in order to avoid confusion, throughout this work I will use largely accepted terms such as communism, transition from communism and post-communist society.

communism and disintegration of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, followed by social and economic reforms within countries and the globalization and creation of a new social order outside of them, were echoed in dramatic changes in the everyday lives of millions of people. Burdened with a narrow perspective from the everyday struggle for bare survival, a large part of them are hardly able to understand and predict the global trends, which caused these changes. Nevertheless, macrosocial changes had a strong impact not only on the social and economic situation of individual people, but also on how they lived together.

In this chapter, using the sample of countries included in my survey, I will explore the main macrosocial changes, which occurred in post-communist society during the first ten years of transition. The principle aim of this chapter is to review the major similarities and differences among countries included in the survey (before and after the changes), to enable a better understanding of the changes in the everyday lives of people and violence against women, which will be analyzed in the chapters which follow.

2. HUNGARY, BULGARIA, MACEDONIA AND SERBIA: SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COMMUNIST AND POST-COMMUNIST ERA

During the Cold War, Hungary and Bulgaria, on one hand, and Macedonia and Serbia on the other, belonged to two strikingly different communist entities. While Bulgaria and Hungary were the part of the Soviet bloc and Soviet model of communism, Macedonia and Serbia were republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, i.e. they belonged to the Yugoslav model of communism. However, the countries that belonged to the same bloc or model of communism sometimes differ more than those which share a different communist heritage but have strong cultural and historical ties. Also, the dynamics and directions of social transition in the post-communist period are strongly affected not only by the type of communism but also by both the political and economic position of the specific country within the former communist entity, i.e. by the status of its economy at the beginning of transition.² These four countries differ significantly in terms of the dynamic of both economic and political transition, i.e. regarding the level of economic reforms, real democracy and abandonment of communism achieved during transition. Also, they differ significantly regarding their relationships with both other East European and Western countries, especially in terms of Western interest and commitment in their stability, democratization and economic development. Also, one of the important differences between Serbia and all other countries is that ethnic conflicts and war had an important influence on the dynamics and directions of the Serbian transition.³ Thus, social transformation in Serbia was slowed and, for a time, blocked, by wars

² However, in spite of differences in their economic situation in the pre-transitional period, it was common for all former communist countries that, before changes, they endured long lasting and deep economic crises which showed the impossibility of the continued existence of state-planned economies, i.e. of their partial economic reforms. (Lazic, 1995:61).

³ As we will see later, although much less than Serbia, Macedonia and Bulgaria also experienced some consequences of ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia.

and disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, UN sanctions and isolation of the country.⁴

As some authors have already noted, there is not one “transition to capitalism” but a plurality of economic strategies which are being applied, albeit within some shared parameters (Molyneux, 1996:232). Differences regarding history, national identities, religion, level of economic development before changes and type of communist system help to explain different patterns and manifestations of social transformation, as well as their different impact on the everyday lives of people. However, apart from great differences, all countries also share many similarities, especially in terms of economic problems and their concrete manifestations, i.e. consequences in the everyday life of their citizens.

2.1 Socio-demographic, historical and political characteristics and changes

The population in countries included in the survey range from 2 million in Macedonia to 9 million in Bulgaria, and about 10 million in both Hungary and Serbia⁵. In all countries the capital cities dominate the population map (Turnock and Carter, 1999:2; Turnock, 1999:73).

Macedonians and Serbs are Slavs, while Bulgarians are also predominately of Slav origin. Serbia, Macedonia and Bulgaria are countries where ethnic diversity is especially emphasized.

In Bulgaria, Bulgarians constitute over four-fifths of the total population, while Roma are the second largest ethnic group.⁶ Also, Bulgaria has both Turkish Muslim and Macedonian minority related problems. There are also difficulties in Macedonia caused by a substantial Albanian minority, which seeks accommodation in cultural matters in the form of elevating the status of Albanian as a second national language and the creation of an Albanian-language university. The 1994 census in Macedonia recorded that 1.3 of 2 million of the population (65%) reported their nationality as Macedonian, while around 23 percent were Albanians, four percent Turks and there were significant Slav Muslim, Roma and Serb minorities. Hungarians originate from Magyars, who are mostly a part of the Finno-Ugrian race, who are thought to have entered Pannonia in 896. Apart from the Hungarians, Romanians, Slavs and Germans also live in Hungary (Turnock, 1999:75). Serbs constitute about two-thirds of the population in Serbia, while the rest are 15 different ethnic minority groups (Albanians, Hungarians, Roma, Croats, Muslims, Montenegrins, Romanians, Turks etc). The most numerous ethnic minorities are Albanians (17.1%), then Hungarians

⁴ These contradictory social processes are so complex that they make comparative analyses extremely difficult. It seems that Blagojevic is right when she calls these processes the transformation from “communism” to “post-communism” (Blagojevic, 1998:19).

⁵ Data for Serbia are based on 1991 census and should not be taken for granted, since the ethnic structure was changed due to war-related migrations – immigration of Serbian refugees from other parts of the former Yugoslavia as well as emigration of both people of Serbian and non-Serbian ethnic origin from Serbia.

⁶ However, since, as in other countries, Roma people tend to conceal themselves under another group identity, their number may be much bigger.

(3.5%), Muslims (2.5%), Roma (1.5%) and Montenegrins (1.4%). Albanians are a majority in Kosovo (southern part) and Hungarians in Vojvodina (northern part).

During the last 10 years, as a result of nationalistic politics of its Government and ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia⁷, Serbia experienced serious tensions between Serbs and ethnic minorities. Tensions were especially emphasized in relationships between Serbs, on one side, and Muslims, Croats and Albanians, on the other. The tensions between Serbs and Albanians led to the Kosovo conflict. Also, during 1999, when political relationships between Serbia and Montenegro became strained, new tensions appeared in relationships between the Serbian and Montenegrin populations in Serbia as well. In addition, Hungarian minorities' political parties' struggle for increased autonomy and Hungary's participation in the bombing of Serbia contributed to tensions between Serbs and Hungarians in Serbia as well.

Present-day Bulgaria occupies the eastern portion of the Balkan Peninsula, while Macedonia and Serbia are located on its Western part. The history of these three countries is characterized by the movements and conquests of many peoples. They occupy the territory that has always formed something of a bridge between Europe and Asia, providing a transit region and crossroads for people from east to west and north to south from time immemorial. Bulgaria, as well as Macedonia and south and central Serbia were under Ottoman domination for nearly five centuries. However, although Ottoman influence still remains visible and strong, Bulgaria's chief historical, cultural and, until recently, political ties have connected it with the former Soviet Union, whose most faithful satellite it was (Carter, 1999:71:108). Also, the inclusion of Macedonia into the Ottoman Empire was significant for both its culture and later development of ethnicity. Apart from the settlement of unusually large numbers of Turks, Macedonia experienced higher rates of conversion to Islam among the indigenous Slav population than most other Balkan regions under Ottoman rule (Popovic, 1986 quoted by Allcock, 1999:144). The centuries of Ottoman rule also witnessed the movement and settlement in the region of other diverse groups, such as Albanians, Vlachs, Jews and Roma. Despite diverging Cold war histories, Sovietized Bulgaria and Yugoslav Macedonia shared deep-rooted common traditions that went back to the Ottoman and pre-Ottoman periods of their history. Namely, as pointed out by Drezov, under the Ottomans the contemporary territories of both countries were part of a single linguistic and ethnographic area and, as a result of that, both countries remain intimately connected by common history, traditions and language. Their similarities became even more pronounced once they gained independence from Soviet and Yugoslav control (Drezov, 2001:413).

Unlike Bulgaria, Macedonia and Serbia, Hungary is not a part of the Balkans (southeastern Europe). Geographically, Hungary is a Northeast European country

⁷ On the first pluralistic elections nationalistic parties won in all republics of the former Yugoslavia. "Building of national states became the main political aim which undermined the establishment of democracy and civil society, while establishment of a welfare state was also forgotten"(Vrcan, quoted by Milic, 1994, p.124). In the struggle for power between communism and anticommunism the winner was nationalism, while democracy lost again (Milic, 1994, p.124)

and, as put by Wandycz, although it was generally regarded as part of Eastern Europe, in terms of religion and culture, it belonged rather to the West (Wandycz, 1992:2). Together with Bohemia (Czechoslovakia) and Poland, Hungary differed drastically from the East, as embodied by Russia, or the Ottoman Empire that ruled over Hungary for only 150 years, i.e. until 1526, when Hungary came under Habsburg rule (Austria). In the 19th century Hungary achieved autonomy and became an equal partner with Austria within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which lasted until the beginning of World War II. During the Soviet era, Hungary found itself in a semi-colonial relationship of dependence on the USSR which was culturally, socio-economically, and politically more backward. (Wandycz, 1992:236). After the failure of the 1956 Hungarian revolution, 12 years of Kadar rule, characterized by reforms, had a significant impact on the everyday lives of people. The power and authority belonged to the Party but everyday life was gradually depoliticized and rendered more tolerable. Educational and cultural activities became much freer than before and in comparison to other Soviet bloc countries, contacts with the West started to be more regular and an emphasis was put on economic progress. Private initiative was permitted in agriculture, retailing, and services. This kind of communism was oriented toward the consumer ("goulash" communism) and as put by Wandycz, in fact was bribing people to acquiesce in the regime.

The country was the "best barrack" in the Soviet camp, which was recognized both in Hungary and in the West. However, in the late 1980s it was also becoming "an expensive barrack to live in" since prices were rising and many people had to have several jobs to make ends meet. The initial hatred for Kadar turned into a grudging acceptance by many people. But, as pointed out by Szalai and Orosz, the organic development of a second economy and hidden civil society, as organic development of bourgeois activity, ensured a smooth transition from the old order to the emerging one (Szalai and Orosz, 1992:144). Kadar's fall from power in 1988 marked the end of an era, but "no great personalities emerged on either the communist or opposition side" (Wandycz, 1992:255-66).

The contemporary Republic of Macedonia dates only from the reconstitution of Yugoslavia in 1945. Within the former Yugoslavia, Macedonia was consistently rated as the poorest of the Yugoslav republics (after Montenegro) and was largely economically dependent on Yugoslavia. In addition to economic underdevelopment, Macedonia also exhibited classic patterns of underdevelopment in educational provisions, unemployment and health (Ramet, 1995, quoted by Allcock, 1999:159). Similar to Bulgaria's close ties with the Soviet Union, Macedonia had the reputation of being unreservedly pro-Yugoslav, unlike the majority of other Yugoslav republics (Drezov, 2001:414). Thus, although no one in Macedonia ever imagined that Macedonia could survive as an independent state, the declaration of its independence was made in January 1992, following the insistence of the EU's Badinter Commission (Ramet, 1995, quoted by Allcock, 1999:159).

However, in spite of the strong dependence of Bulgaria on the Soviet Union and Macedonia on the Yugoslav federation, they were not affected in the same way by the liberalization/democratization processes started in the 1980's in their respective countries. Gorbachev's *perestroika*, for example, had an important impact on the

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