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CROSS-CULTURAL TRANSFER OF HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES AS A FACTOR OF DESTABILIZATION OF THE EUROPEAN SOCIETY

– *Bacha Bazi* phenomenon case study –

Abstract

Tradition is a belief or behavior passed down within one group or a society with a symbolic meaning. However, not every tradition is positive – there are many harmful traditional practices throughout the world, most of them centred around treatment of women and children in various cultures. Even though most of them predominantly target women, that is, girls, such as early child marriage, female genital mutilation, honour killing, etc., it is a quite unknown fact that boys, that is, male minors, face similar problems as well. In this paper, the author aims to analyse the harmful traditional practice known as Bacha Bazi, that is, “the dancing boy”, referring to culturally approved, centuries-old tradition of child sexual abuse practiced in Afghanistan and Pakistan, which has emerged as a negative phenomenon within the migration crisis, and thus, entered the European space. In exploring the origins and forms of cultural justification of this ill practice, the author seeks the answer the following research question: “Does the emergence of the harmful traditional practice of Bacha Bazi along the migration routes pose a threat to Europe?” By using

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the method of content analysis, as well as through interviews with humanitarian workers in the Republic of Serbia, the author intends to shed some light onto this negative practice, as well as offer possible detection and prevention methods aimed at saving the male minors from such environments.

Keywords: *migration crisis, violence, children, negative customs, Bacha Bazi phenomenon.*

INTRODUCTION

The end of 2015 will, for the eternity, remain remembered as the year when a global record was set regarding the number of forcibly displaced people fleeing warzones and persecution. At that point, our planet was inhabited by 65.3 million displaced individuals, of whom 21.3 million were refugees.¹ In 2015, the majority of those refugees were hosted in “the Global South”, that is, in countries like Turkey, Iran and Lebanon, but soon, Europe emerged as the final destination to many, if not all migrants and refugees. By 2018, on average in the EU, 80% of asylum claims in Germany, France, Greece, Spain, the UK, and Italy, were predominantly made by the Syrians, Eritreans, Afghans, Sudanese, Somalis, Iraqis and Iranians.²

The causes of the European migration crisis are numerous, but it is evident that most of them are rooted in violence, that is, terrorism and civil wars, as well as in poverty, economic hardship, and humanitarian crises. It is estimated that, in 2015, a total of 1,015,078 refugees entered Europe by sea, and a total of 34,887 of them arrived to the European continent by land.³ In the years to follow, up to the present day, the number

¹ Alm Mustafa, M. (2021, February). *Reframing refugee crisis: A “European crisis of migration” or a crisis of protection?* Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654421989705>, p. 1.

² Archick, K., Magresson, R. (2019). “Europe’s Refugee and Migration Flows”. Congressional Research Service. In Focus, p. 2.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

of refugees and migrants continued to rise, only to become a constant phenomenon in the contemporary international relations and politics. Not only has it become a quite useful leverage for some countries, such as Turkey, which holds a vast number of refugees in its numerous refugee camps, but it has also become a fruitful topic of multidisciplinary research in almost every field. Arising from the need to understand the current state and security and political situation that has caused the migration crisis, many have attempted to analyze the consequences of migrations, not only for the countries of origin, but also for the host countries.

Given the current political and security situation in the world, as well as renewal of conflicts and violence in certain parts of the world, notably Afghanistan, the main topic of this paper will be the Bacha Bazi negative cultural phenomenon, in light of detection of cases of its practice along the migration route towards Europe. In order to better understand the said phenomenon, the following pages will present the reader with the current “anatomy” of the migration flows, as well as the forms of harmful traditional practices present in the countries that contribute the highest portion of the refugees and migrants. These two segments will serve as a form of justification for further research directed towards describing and explaining the Bacha Bazi practice, seen through the eyes of humanitarians engaged in relieving the migration crisis.

ANATOMY OF THE CURRENT MIGRATION CRISIS

Before tackling the task of describing and explaining the negative tradition of Bacha Bazi, present in Afghanistan and Pakistan, let us look at the current migration trends in the world and compare the predictions of political analysts from the beginning of the migrant crisis with the present-day situation. Namely, even in 2015, with the increase of influx of migrants and refugees to Europe, the analysts warned that the situation is only to

worsen.⁴ At the time, most of them observed that “the war in Syria continues, Afghanistan is on the verge of collapse, the offensive against the Islamic State (IS) risks creating a new wave of refugees, and the situations in Libya and Ukraine are far from stable”.⁵ From the present standpoint, we can conclude that this estimate is not far from the truth, though there are some mild discrepancies regarding the developments in the said regions.

For instance, when we speak of the Islamic State, it is evident that this terrorist organization was slowed down, but is still far from being completely eradicated, given that it is “struggling to maintain operations along the Kurdish-Arab ethnic front lines in Iraq as well as along the Euphrates River in the northeast Syria”, but also in the government-held areas of the latter state, namely in the Badiya desert south of the Euphrates and east of Palmyra.⁶ Thus, the ISIS is indeed weakened in Syria and Iraq, but still present and active.⁷

“After a decade of war and division, Libya has made progress towards peace this year”⁸, but the situation still remains gloomy. Namely, the Government of National Unity was formed to unify the Government of National Accord of Fayed al-Sarraj, and the Eastern authorities led by field marshal Khalifa Haftar, that is, the commander of the Libyan National Army, until the Libyan nation gets to state their opinion on the future leader in democratically-organized elections, planned for the beginning of 2022.

In Ukraine, tensions continue to rise due to concerns regarding growing violations of the cease-fire and a massive Russian military buildup near

⁴ Marković, D.M., Zirojević, M. (2020). Irregular migration as latent threat to the Western Balkans security, *Nauka i društvo*, Vol. VII, Issue 1(12), p. 41.

⁵ Kugiel, P. (2016). *The Refugee Crisis in Europe: True Causes, False Solutions*. The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs, 2016, no. 4, pp. 41-42.

⁶ Jeffrey, J. F. (22.12.2020). “Part 1: The Future of ISIS”. Wilson Center. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/part-1-future-isis> [Accessed: 09.07.2021]

⁷ Djoric, M. (2017). Impact of the migration crisis on the development of Islamic extremism and terrorism, *Nauka i društvo*, Vol. IV, Issue 1, p. 16.

⁸ Wilson, N., Abouaoun, E. (2021, July 14). “On the Road to Peace, Libya Makes Progress but Hits Pitfalls”. United States Institute of Peace. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/07/road-peace-libya-makes-progress-hits-pitfalls> [Accessed:13.08.2021].

its border with this nation that threatens to explode in yet another direct conflict in the region. The number of refugees arriving to Europe from this region has definitely decreased, as a result of the cease-fire brokered in 2015, but the new developments are indeed promising to bring along a new wave of Ukrainian refugees if the war is to break out in the near future.

Unfortunately, Afghanistan indeed collapsed. The complete deterioration of the security situation begun on May 1, 2021, with the final offensive of the Taliban and the beginning of withdrawal of international forces. Soon enough, by mid-August, the Taliban have taken control over 17 of 34 provincial capitals, resulting in President Ashraf Ghani fleeing the country and Taliban leaders entering the presidential palace.⁹ With the rise of the Taliban came along the increase in ISIS-claimed attacks in Afghanistan, targeting the rival Taliban fighters.¹⁰ This increase of political and security instability in the country served as a catalyst for renewal of migrant flows from the region.

Having all this in mind, it is evident that the migration trends nationality-wise are still the same, with a minor shift in places among the Syrian/Iraqi refugees and the ones fleeing Afghanistan. According to the data acquired by Frontex, “the number of illegal border crossings at EU’s external borders in the first nine months of 2021 rose 68%, most of them arriving via the Central Mediterranean and the Western Balkans route”.¹¹ Regarding the Balkan route, which includes Serbia as well, about 40,200 illegal border crossings were registered in the first three quarters of 2021, which is a 112% increase in comparison to the same period the previous year. That being said, it is worth noting that the majority of migrants and refugees

⁹ European Asylum Support Office (2021). “Afghanistan Security situation update: Country of Origin Information Report”. European Union, p. 11.

¹⁰ Jeffrey, J. F. (2020, December 22), *Op. cit.*

¹¹ Relief web. (2021, October 15). “Frontex: Migratory situation at EU’s borders in September: Increase on the Central Mediterranean and Western Balkans routes”.
<https://reliefweb.int/report/world/frontex-migratory-situation-eu-s-borders-september-increase-central-mediterranean-and>. [Accessed: 17.10.2021].

detected along this route were from Syria, Afghanistan, and Morocco.¹² Moreover, an analysis conducted by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) shows that, even in July 2021, “applications by Afghans increased for the fifth consecutive month to about 7,300”, coming quite close to the number of applications by Syrians. EASO also concludes that “the gap between Afghans and Syrians has been shrinking almost steadily since December 2020”, and we can, from the present standpoint, firmly conclude that the number of Afghan refugees arriving to Europe has definitely topped the number of refugees originating from Syria and Iraq.¹³

Every nation has their own traditions, customs, and beliefs they carry along with them wherever they go. It is an integral part of their identity, and thus inseparable from their bodies and souls. Moreover, “each individual's identity is made up of a number of elements, and these are clearly not restricted to the particulars set down in official records. [...] Of course, not all these allegiances are equally strong, at least at any given moment. But none is entirely insignificant, either. All are components of personality – we might almost call them “genes of the soul” so long as we remember that most of them are not innate”.¹⁴

This is best seen in the fact that every diaspora, wherever it is and from wherever it originates, still tends to preserve its customs, and transfer them to their offspring. For example, the Russian diaspora visits their Christian Orthodox churches in, for example, the US or Canada; the Turkish diaspora in Germany, and in other countries as well, gathers in mosques, typical Turkish cafes and Turkish associations and cultural centers; the Maghrebi population in France still practices Islam and frequents traditional restaurants. Examples are numerous. So, when faced with mass migrations to Europe, it is important to examine and get acquainted with cultural

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ EASO. (2021, September 16). “Asylum applications by Afghans approaching those by Syrians”. <https://www.easo.europa.eu/news-events/asylum-applications-afghans-approaching-those-syrians> [Accessed: 22.09.2021].

¹⁴ Maalouf, A. (2003). *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*. Penguin Books, pp. 10-11.

practices ones bring along, not only the good ones, but also the rare, negative ones. Since Europe is currently witnessing an increase of Afghan migrants in the heartland, the main body of this paper with herein forth be directed towards defining and describing the negative custom of practicing Bacha Bazi, as well as towards examining the experience of humanitarian workers with such occurrences along the migration routes.

However, before we step into examining the data available on this negative phenomenon, we must stress that “although the literature and examples show that the practice exists, we would be hesitant to refer to it as Afghan culture. First of all, it is likely that the practice is not an accepted social norm, nor it is the main culture in Afghanistan. It can simply be a subculture of wealthy and influential men”¹⁵, which found its way into the migration routes and possibly refugee camps. Moreover, this practice is not restricted solely to Afghanistan, since some versions of the practice were also noted in other Asian countries, such as Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh¹⁶, and thus cannot be regarded as an Afghan custom.

HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

Harmful traditional practices (HTPs) are deeply entrenched behaviors or actions that violate the human rights of affected individuals¹⁷, predominantly directed towards young women and children. Besides from being perceived as cruel and inhuman by the Western society, they have negative consequences on the physical and psychological health of the persons subjected to such practices. That being said, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child¹⁸ define traditional or cultural

¹⁵ van Baarle, E.M. (2018). *Ethics education in the military: Fostering reflective practice and moral competence*. VU Research Portal. Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Netherlands, p. 86.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹⁷ Glover, J. et al. (2018). *Persistence and Resistance of Harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs) Perpetuated against Girls in Africa and Asia*. Journal of International Women's Studies, 19(2), 44-64. <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol19/iss2/4>.

¹⁸ UN General Assembly. (1948). Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948, 217 A (III). General Assembly Resolution, article 3 and 4; UN General Assembly. (1989). Convention on the

practices considered 'harmful' as "those that hold negative consequences for the physical or psychological health of affected individuals and have adverse social and political implications".

Harmful traditional practices are directed most often to young women and children, and they occur in many different forms, of which, son preference and infanticide, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, child marriage, honor killings, acid attacks, stoning, virginity testing, breast ironing, to mention just a few, are the most common. But what is evident in this list is the fact that most authors choose to omit a harmful traditional practice directed against young (often also adolescent) boys, probably in fear of stepping into the field of taboos and topics that are most often ignored and not talked about. Namely, when examining the existing literature, the author found that the harmful traditional practices directed towards men and boys are continuously being ignored, which can, to a certain extent, be an example of reverse gender inequality, since men and young boys are most often perceived as strong pillars of the community and "manly" protectors of their families and loved ones.

Of the previously mentioned harmful traditional practices, it is worth mentioning that son preference, as a form of denouncing of female children through abandonment or even infanticide has been present world-wide, and even in South-Eastern Europe, while the other harmful traditional practices are predominantly linked to Asian and African societies, and are, in most cases, present in rural Muslim societies. Moreover, as it was previously pointed out, it is evident that most of them target women, given that women are in these societies perceived as the "weaker sex" and even property of their male members of the family. However, the current migration crisis and the upsurge of Afghan migrants on the outer borders of Europe have stressed the necessity for analysis of other forms of violence conducted against male children, given that it has emerged as a dominant, peculiar, and perverted form of not only exploitation, but

Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577, p. 3.

also survival for certain migrant and refugee populations, depicted in the harmful traditional practice of Bacha Bazi relationships.

THE ORIGINS OF *BACHA BAZI* NEGATIVE TRADITION

Somewhere in Afghanistan, at night, a group of powerful men gathers in a room filled with smoke. They drink chai, talk, make plans, enjoy listening to music, and – watch a pretty young creature dance in the center of the room. That pretty young creature is a young boy, usually 12–13 years of age, that will, after the gathering ends, be taken home, or more often to a hotel, by one of the present men and forced into having sex, because, “real men [in Afghanistan] are required to smoke like a chimney, love horses, wear a beard, and of course, enjoy watching boys dressed as women dancing in a room full of grown men. Here, they call it a cultural tradition”.¹⁹

The parties during which this “cultural tradition” takes place are not called parties, but weddings. “However, in these ‘weddings’, the bride and the groom are missing. There are no women in sight either, men hover there, with their guns. Almost everyone’s attention is focused on young dancing boys who are made to wear feminine clothes”.²⁰

In a paper published by CARE International Balkans NGO, based on research conducted in September 2017 in the reception center in Preševo, Bacha Bazi is defined as “a slang term in Afghanistan for a wide variety of activities involving sexual relations between older men and younger adolescent men, or boys, which may include, to some extent, sexual slavery and child prostitution”.²¹ According to the same research, this

¹⁹ Russia Today Documentary. (2016). “Bacha Bazi Boys”.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i6eL1js7zTo&ab_channel=IncognitoStranger [Accessed: 06.04.2021].

²⁰ Verma, S. (2019). Por qué el problema de Bacha Bazi merece atención internacional. *Novum Jus*, 13(2), 41-55. <https://doi.org/10.14718/NovumJus.2019.13.2.3>, pp. 43-44.

²¹ CARE International Balkans. (2018). *ON THE ROAD TO EUROPE: Gender Norms Among Young Men in*

negative tradition has existed throughout history and is currently reported in various parts of Afghanistan. “Force and coercion are common, and security officials state that they are unable to end such practices because many of the men involved in Bacha Bazi-related activities are powerful and well-armed warlords”.²²

This “relationship”, as many Afghans call it, includes at least two participants – the Bacha Baaz, that is, the adult man, and the Bacha Bareesh, a young boy who dresses as woman “and wears makeup in order to perform dances for their masters”. After the dance ends, “the boys are then taken to the home of the highest bidder. [...] The boy is taken into the family or social circle of the man and is sometimes given some form of special payment and/or financial support for his family”.²³

The boys are sometimes lured into participating in a Bacha Bazi relationship, and sometimes they are bought from the poorest families or even kidnapped from the streets of Afghanistan. They are a sort of a status symbol, given that only rich and influential men are able to keep a Bacha Bareesh for themselves. “The more attractive the boy, the more prestige the adult man (bacha baaz) “owner” receives. [...] Boys who are good performers are respected and often have the chance to give dancing lessons, earn a reasonable wage, and, in some cases, become a bacha baaz themselves. It is a vicious circle”.²⁴

Even though this practice implies a relationship between two men, in Afghanistan, the practice of Bacha Bazi is not treated as homosexuality, since “homosexuality is sex between men, but young boys are not yet men. These boys have a feminized role in terms of appearance and conduct” (van Baarle, 2018:86), and in no way are portrayed as males by their “masters”. However, it is evident that “this practice also seems to contradict Islamic norms in Afghanistan. For example, the boys may often be considered to have

the Migrant Community in Serbia. Qualitative research, p. 12.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ van Baarle, E. M. (2018), *Op. cit.*, p. 80.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

breached their family's honor, or commit suicide, which suggest that the practice is far from being well accepted in Afghan culture".²⁵

The origins of this tradition are often explained by a common maxim that can be heard on the streets of Afghanistan, stating that "women are for child bearing while boys are for pleasure".²⁶ Namely, there is a very clear stereotypical division between male and female roles and duties, conditioned by situation and norms in wider social context of contemporary Afghanistan, in which women are obliged to preserve their virginity, and certain rich and influential men opt to turn to young boys in order to satisfy their needs. That is, these individuals regard Bacha Bazi relationships as more moral than defiling a woman.²⁷ For example, a documentary directed by Afghan journalist Najibullah Quraishi and published in 2010 depicts a former commander from Takhar Province named Dastagar, who stated that he has been involved in Bacha Bazi relationships for 20 years, and that, for the said period of time, he has seen about 2,000-3,000 Bacha Bareesh.²⁸ In other documentary, produced by Russia Today, another former commander, Japar, presents the Bacha Bazi scene of Mazar-e Sharif, explaining that the best Bacha Bareesh are twelve to fifteen years old, because "under twelve they're kids, people don't like them".²⁹ In order to keep them "in shape" and willing to participate, sometimes, the Bacha Bareesh are provided with alcohol, and in other cases, the Bacha Bareesh himself chooses the man he will go home with. Even though most of children, especially the youngest ones, are tricked into becoming a Bacha Bareesh, it is evident that, in some cases, they allegedly willingly opt to this "profession". Two Bacha Bareesh interviewed by Najibullah Qureishi and depicted in the documentary "The Dancing Boys of Afghanistan", Abdullah and Iman, confirm to the camera that it was their choice, stating that they

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

²⁶ Verma, S. (2019), *Op. cit.*, p. 44.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

²⁸ Clover Films. (2010). The Dancing Boys of Afghanistan. Documentary. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7eMUwkKiFY&ab_channel=MichaelHealy [Accessed: 17.07.2021].

²⁹ Russia Today Documentary. (2016). Bacha Bazi Boys.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i6eL1js7zTo&ab_channel=IncognitoStranger

[Accessed:

“had a passion for it” (Abdullah), and that, when they grow up, they wish to have their own Bacha Bareesh (Iman).³⁰

However, even though this tradition is quite prevalent, especially “across southern and eastern Afghanistan's rural Pashtun heartland, and among ethnic Tajiks across the northern country-side”³¹, it was confirmed that such “weddings” occur in urban cities as well. The practice was officially banned under the Taliban's rule from 1996 to 2001, only to become popular again during the past two decades, as soon as the Taliban “iron grip” on the country loosened. The Taliban have traditionally nursed an aversion towards this practice, considering it as un-Islamic and wrong, a form of homosexual expression. The punishment for such act, under Taliban rule, was, or should we say – is death or mutilation.³² Given the sudden surge of Taliban violence and consequent takeover of power in Afghanistan, it is expected that, among the refugees fleeing the country, Bacha Bazi practitioners will be present as well, fearing Taliban retribution and punishment.

Apart from its emergence in Europe along the migration routes, the issue of Bacha Bazi relationships has gained international coverage when, in 2020, a Facebook page was discovered featuring “more than 100 videos showing the alleged abuse of boys in six schools by teachers, headteachers and other authority figures”, hidden under the auspices of an NGO called “Logar Youth, Social and Civil Institution”.³³ After the scandal broke out, Afghanistan's attorney general launched an investigation into an allegation that the said individuals engaged in Bacha Bazi relationships with about 500 children, however, the case soon “went cold”, due to the fact that many high officials still partake in such traditions.

06.04.2021].

³⁰ Clover Films. (2010), *Op. cit.*

³¹ Verma, S. (2019), *Op. cit.*, p. 44.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

³³ The Week Staff. (2020, January 29). Bacha bazi: the scandal of Afghanistan's abused boys. <https://www.theweek.co.uk/105442/bacha-bazi-the-scandal-of-afghanistan-s-abused-boys>.

THE PRESENCE OF BACHA BAZI NEGATIVE TRADITION ALONG THE MIGRANT ROUTES

The young men who participated in workshops organized late-2017 in Preševo stated that in Afghanistan, rich people find young boys from the lower class and rape them, identifying this vile custom as Bacha Bazi relationship. “It happens a lot in Greece”, stated one participant. “Older men want to have sex with young men and they give them money for that. We saw this happen in Victoria and Alexander Park. In Greece, an older man approached me, put me aside of my friends, and asked for sex. I know young men from Iran who did that and got paid good money”.³⁴ The same practice was reported in Turkey, where it was closely linked with migrant smuggling, whilst the smugglers would verbally, physically and often sexually abuse the migrants and refugees they trafficked until the payments for the continuance of their journeys would be made. Many refugees and migrants who found themselves in such situations later reported that such acts were often recorded by the smugglers, with a threat that these videos would be sent to their family members. “Some of them report that they were forcefully made to take the gender role of a girl, to dance for adult men and were sexually exploited by the same men”³⁵ in a traditional harmful practice (HTP) known as Bacha Bazi.

Another report, published by International Center for Migration Policy Development, stated that such testimonies were recorded in migration camps in Greece, but also in Austria, Sweden and Finland. In the said report, it was stressed that sexual exploitation affects unaccompanied and separated male children, “especially Afghani asylum-seeking boys, as well as young men, exploited as Bacha Bazi (“dancing boys”)”.³⁶ In Bulgaria as well, upon conducting interviews with the refugee and migrant population, it

³⁴ CARE International Balkans. (2018), *Op. cit.*, p. 12.

³⁵ Vještica, S. A., Dragojević, M. (2019). *Game people: irregular migration and risks*. Belgrade: Crisis Response and Policy Centre, p. 9.

³⁶ Forin, R., Healy, C. (2018). *Trafficking along Migration Routes to Europe: Bridging the Gap between Migration, Asylum and Anti-Trafficking*. European Union, p. 66.

was stressed that “a number of interviewees in Bulgaria had come across cases of sexual abuse of children, particularly of teenage Afghani boys, perpetrated while the boys were accommodated at Bulgarian reception or detention facilities for asylum applicants”.³⁷

Skilled humanitarian and social workers possess sufficient knowledge regarding the consequences of Bacha Bazi tradition on young boys, and thus stress that, for example, such cases are closely monitored due to the fact that childhood sexual abuse and dysfunctional family life, in which they include Bacha Bazi relationships as well, represent high risk factors for future involvement in prostitution and sex trafficking.³⁸ In this sense, workers within the migration crisis explain that male children with such backgrounds are more prone to engage in “survival sex”, that is, consensual sexual exploitation or sex trafficking, and thus represent a highly vulnerable group. Moreover, some countries, such as Norway and Switzerland, go to the extent of providing former bacha bareesh with grounds for refugee status, which is also granted to children without fathers and street children, who are at risk of persecution upon return to their homeland.³⁹

Such evident recordings of emergence of the practice of Bacha Bazi relationships in our region, namely in Greece and Bulgaria, but also probably in other countries of the region and our country as well, has raised certain concerns among the humanitarian workers, who stress that such negative practices have their way of being inter-culturally transferred among the migrant population and, if not eradicated, might be “here to stay”. Certain humanitarian workers, engaged in the refugee camps along the borders of the Republic of Serbia, as well as in Greek islands and the Greek mainland, stress that such occurrences are common, but remain unregistered and untreated due to the fact that the only legal solution lays in the arrest of the Bacha Bareesh, who in fact, in this case, represent the victims, and not the perpetrators.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

³⁹ NOAS. (2018). Who's the strictest? A mapping of the Afghanistan-policies in Western European countries.

Moreover, the humanitarian community stresses that the known Bacha Bareesh often end up being “repeat offenders”, given that, once they enter the circle of violence, they start justifying it, and finally see it as a good method for earning money, necessary for the continuance of their refugee journey.

CONCLUSION

The migration crisis is a two-way problem, benefiting and harming both the refugees and the host countries, whether they represent the final destination, or simply a transit country. Given that Serbia, situated on the European continent, has found itself on the hosting side, following migration trends and examining all segments of the migration crisis – from the point of origin of the refugees to the journey along the Balkan route, all the way to the EU, as well as all phenomena emerging along the way, seems to be detrimental for creating a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon that lays before us.

The current anatomy of the migration crisis, that is, the increase in number of refugees arriving from Afghanistan, is additionally complicating the existing migration crisis, present on the European soil since 2015. It is evident that the highest burden at the moment is being carried by the countries surrounding Afghanistan, as well as the countries that have willingly taken certain numbers of refugees. However, since the arrival of more than a million migrants and refugees, mostly from Syria, many European countries have become increasingly hostile to migrants and asylum-seekers, and since the collapse of the Afghan state, have urged the EU leadership to continue deporting Afghan asylum seekers whose claims were rejected. However, as much as certain European countries plan to “defend” themselves from the migrant crisis in such a way, it is inevitable that many of Afghan refugees will end up exactly in Europe, especially given that some 100 countries pledged on August 15, 2021 to accept Afghans fleeing the Taliban

rule, which was followed by evacuation of EU citizens and Afghan nationals from this country.

Afghans already make up the second-largest group of asylum seekers in Europe, with 570,000 asylum claims submitted within the European Union since 2015. Moreover, about 123,000 Afghan refugees have arrived in Europe in August and September 2021 alone. Thus, the numbers had been increasing in the last few months, and it seems that this trend will not stop anytime soon. All this serves as a good reason for conducting research and getting acquainted with the problems faced by some of them, that is, the minors, who definitely represent the most significant age group, given that, as soon as they permanently settle in a certain community, they will enjoy their rights of attending schools, participating in the work environments, basically – become equal members of European communities. This emersion into a different culture is also a two-way process – in order to accept a new culture, one has also to be accepted in return. This is why learning about the cultures and heritages carried along by the new potential inhabitants of Europe is essential.

For Afghan refugees, violence is a vicious circle, having in mind that the fight against the Taliban have been present in this country for almost three decades. However, war atrocities themselves turned out to be not the only violent occurrences that scarred the Afghan people. A negative tradition called Bacha Bazi, that is, almost culturally acceptable form of molestation and rape of young boys aged 12–15, and even younger, has contributed to deterioration of human rights, that is, rights of children, as well. Moreover, this custom has made its way onto the main migration routes and travelled all the way to Europe, and thus – to our country as well.

The presented testimonies of several young Afghan refugees, as well as statements from humanitarian and social workers, stress the fact that this harmful traditional practice has not only emerged in formal and informal refugee camps and a forced practice, but has also evolved into sometimes even consensual form of prostitution, which can best be described as “survival sex”. Namely, the practice of Bacha Bazi relationships manifested along the

migrant routes in their “traditional” form, that is, as a tradition of having young boys dress up as women, wear makeup and dance for wealthy men. This form of Bacha Bazi emerged twofold – as a practice that ended upon the boy's flee from the country and as a practice occurring in migrant communities outside Afghanistan. Then, this practice evolved into a method of coercion used by certain smugglers in order to force the refugee's family to pay for the said individual's journey, but honor as well. Among the smuggling “community”, it also became a method for forcing refugees to pay their debts to the smugglers. Finally, it has evolved into a consensual form of child prostitution, whereas the underage male refugees chose to use their bodies as a tool for earning.

Whichever form of Bacha Bazi practice we speak of one thing is the same – every Bacha Bareesh, that is, the underage boy participating in a Bacha Bazi relationship, enters this form of relationship without true will, and leaves this vicious circle of violence only through death, or with good and persistent help of the humanitarian and social workers. This is why examining all the segments of this harmful traditional practice is detrimental for providing relief and help in such cases.

The scars the underage boy is left with after participating in such a practice are both visible and invisible, that is, written not only on the young boy's body, but also on his soul. For this reason, the best solution for acting in such cases must be multidisciplinary, and include not only medical help, but also psychological, and finally legal.

The final question is also the most significant one, given that the answer to it might serve as an early warning to the European community. Namely, is there a possibility that this harmful cultural tradition is “here to stay”, that is, will it remain to live on the European soil within some Afghan migrant communities, or will it be eradicated with the clash of the two cultures? To this sense, early detection can be the best solution for prevention of spread of this practice within the European continent, given that, once eradicated, it will serve only as a remainder of the ill practices and perversion of a small social group of the Afghan people, only to leave a space for the future Afghans

that will be living in Europe to make a successful adaptation to the European way of life. In this sense, in order to preserve the current state of the refugee population, as well as to prevent the spread of negative practices such as Bacha Bazi relationships, it is necessary that the decision-makers, as well as the humanitarian and social workers and legal aids present in the field, remain vigilant and react to any cases of such practices, not only through legal responses, but also through organizing workshops and psychological counselling for possible cases of Bacha Bareesh.

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МЕЂУКУЛТУРАЛНИ ТРАНСФЕР ШТЕТНИХ ТРАДИЦИОНАЛНИХ ПРАКСИ КАО ФАКТОР ДЕСТАБИЛИЗАЦИЈЕ ЕВРОПСКОГ ДРУШТВА

- Студија случаја *Бача Бази* феномен -

Апстракт

Традиција представља веровање или понашање које се преноси са једне групе или друштва на друго, уз одређено симболично значење. Међутим, не мора свака традиција имати позитивну конотацију – постоје бројне штетне традиционалне праксе широм света, при чему су многе од њих концентрисане на третман деце и жена у разним културама. Поред тога, иако је већина таквих пракси усмерених против жена, то јест, девојака, попут дечијих бракова, гениталне мутилације жена, убијања из части, итд., непознаница је да се и дечаци, то јест, мушки малолетници и адеолесценти, суочавају са истим проблемима. Циљ рада је да пружи анализу штетне традиционалне праксе познате под именом Бача Бази, то јест, “дечак који плеше”, која се односи на културолошки правданим, вековима старим видом сексуалног злостављања који се практикује у Авганистану и Пакистану, а који се као негативни феномен појавио у оквиру мигрантске кризе и стога, ступио у европски простор. Истражујући порекло и појавне облике културолошког оправдавања ове лоше праксе, ауторка настоји да одговори на истраживачко питање: „Да ли појава штетне традиционалне праксе Бача Бази односа дуж мигрантских рута представља претњу по Европу?“. Користећи се методом анализе садржаја, као и кроз спровођење интервјуа са хуманитарним радницима у Републици Србији, ауторка даје приказ претходно наведене негативне праксе и примере метода детекције и превенције, усмерених ка пружању помоћи наведеним категоријама лица.

Кључне речи: мигрантска криза, насиље, деца, негативни обичаји, феномен Бача Бази.