



# “Money Can’t Buy Me Love”: Remittances, Return Migration, and Family Relations in Serbia (1960s–2000s)

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## INTRODUCTION

Labor migration and the remittances it produces have long been an essential aspect of socioeconomic and political change in the region of former Yugoslavia. During socialism, guest worker migration affected a significant proportion of the population. Along with the inbound tourism to the Yugoslav seaside, the migration of guest workers generated the most significant inflow of hard currency to socialist Yugoslavia. Migrants’ remittances, however, went far and beyond foreign currency deposits in Yugoslav bank accounts. Migrant workers often visited their home villages with savings, consumer goods, tools, and ideas acquired abroad; they built houses,

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paved streets, bought workplaces, and opened small businesses. The volume and spread of remittance-related practices to the Yugoslav emigrants' regions of origin was a result of the fact that the vast majority of migrants regarded their stay abroad as temporary. They sent money and brought goods back to their home villages, where some members of their family prepared and waited for their return home.

With the collapse of socialism and the ensuing wars in Yugoslavia, a significant shift occurred in migration patterns. While the typical migrant of the socialist period was a peasant worker with low qualifications and skills searching for savings opportunities, the post-1990 period saw an unprecedented migration of not only displaced and impoverished people but also of highly skilled migrants in pursuit of stability, safety, and better opportunities abroad. The remittance-related practices of the post-socialist Yugoslav migrants represented a paradigm shift and a break from socialist practices. In this later phase of migration, remittances were no longer directed at children and their caretakers to ensure their future in Yugoslavia. Instead, migrants were sending remittances to aging parents and other relatives who could not leave the country. Return migration, if still considered possible or desirable, assumed very different meanings and forms after the socialist period. More broadly, while migrant remittances continued to be a significant financial resource for governments in many former Yugoslav countries, the social function of "informal" remittances and their beneficiaries changed remarkably.

This chapter outlines some of the most relevant changes in remittances and migration practices from the socialist to the post-socialist period in Serbia. It relates these changes to transformations in relationships within migrant families in both urban and rural Serbia. It brings together long-term research on Serbian remittances from a social history and social anthropology perspective. Combining anthropological micro-level research on remittances and motherhood in post-socialist Belgrade and long-term historical analyses on peasant migrants' investments during socialism, this contribution represents a first attempt at providing a long-term and multidisciplinary examination of some of the social transformation in family relationships brought on by the collapse of socialism in former Yugoslavia as evidenced in the phenomenon of migration and the remittances inflow it generated. Exploring family roles across the prisms of gender, generation, and class reveals the complexities of remittance practices that statistical data does not show. This contribution argues that

migration and remittance practices had a profound and sometimes traumatic impact on family relations.

### THE INFLOW OF MIGRANT REMITTANCES IN (POST-) SOCIALIST SERBIA: AN OVERVIEW

Migration and the remittances have long been important factors of social change in Serbia and the broader Yugoslav region. Before the fall of Yugoslavia and the massive migration movement prompted by the conflict and by post-socialism, labor emigration from Yugoslavia consisted mostly of unskilled labor employed in Western Europe as guest workers. The substantial remittances sent home by guest workers captured the interest of the broader public both at home and abroad. In Yugoslav public and political debate, citizens, migration specialists, and the communist leadership dreamed of the gains generated by the revenues migrants sent back home. Yugoslav migration policies attracted considerable attention by foreign analysts and policy makers because Yugoslavia was the only socialist country in Europe to rely on guest worker remittances to achieve development.

In the 1980s, the rise of youth unemployment fostered an increase in the emigration of young and educated people (Dević 2016, p. 27). The war and the further deterioration of the economy in the 1990s exacerbated this trend. This brain drain diaspora differed from the previous generations of both guest workers and political émigrés who had fled communism. With the fall of Yugoslavia, a new wave of migrants left the country, some as refugees and others as economic and political migrants, but all with the same goal of escaping war, economic collapse, and political turmoil (Vuksanović 2001). The 1990s in Serbia were marked by the United Nations embargo and hyperinflation. Access to foreign currency became a lifeline as prices changed hourly. The suspension of air traffic following the UN embargo and the significance of informal networks suggest that pre-1990s’ migrants were sending financial support through informal channels during this period, as well as some of the post-1990s’ migrants (Petree and Baruah 2007). As many of the pre-1990s’ migrants settled in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and other Western European countries, their geographical proximity to Serbia enabled them to send remittances via friends or bus drivers, or to deliver them directly to their families, thus helping alleviate the precarious situation of the 1990s.

Pension provisions were a significant source of revenues sent to Serbia by the pre-1990s' generation. While still residing abroad, many retired guest workers spent several months per year in the houses they had built in their home villages (Widmer 2010).

The post-1990s' economic migration in many cases painted a different picture. First of all, the proportion of more highly qualified migrants had significantly increased. The destination countries of the post-1990s' brain drain migrants included overseas countries with settlement programs. Post-1990s' migrants were also younger than the previous guest workers. Thousands of young people left Serbia in the 1990s and early 2000s as highly skilled migrants on settlement visas to Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, in addition to those pursuing better opportunities in Western and Central Europe, as well as further afield in Africa, South America, and elsewhere (Grečić 1994, 2010).

The influx of remittances was also affected by changes in migration patterns. Overall, there is a lot of evidence to suggest that post-1990 migrants from Serbia were sending much less money in foreign currency in comparison to the pre-1990 migrants. Nevertheless, throughout the first two decades of the twenty-first century, the media in Serbia reported an exceptionally high influx of remittances. These reports originated from the World Bank, who in turn collected the data from the National Bank of Serbia (NBS). Despite significant discrepancies in the volume of remittances between these two sources, with the NBS reporting significantly fewer remittances in comparison to the World Bank, Serbia was ranked as one of the top ten remittance recipient countries in the world in the early twenty-first century. With more than 3 billion euros annually, Serbian remittances constitute 15 percent of the country's GDP (Gajić 2020). Divided per capita, Serbian residents are among the top five recipients of remittances in the world.

Bombastic newspaper headlines about the alleged billions of dollars pouring into the country from the diaspora fueled people's imaginations of fortunate parents whose children were sending them money from abroad (Mikavica 2006; Krivokapić 2007). This narrative was part of a broader political discourse about the role of migrants in the newly established, independent Serbia. In the early post-Milošević years, subsequent governments reached out to Serbs abroad for support in restoring national pride and economic wealth. Two critical steps toward building a stronger relationship with the diaspora in the post-socialist period were the creation of the Ministry for the Diaspora and the passage of the Amnesty Law,

which allowed army deserters from the wars of the 1990s to return to the country. In more recent years, however, there was another turn in the relationship toward the diaspora. The former Ministry for the Diaspora was replaced by an Office for Cooperation with the Diaspora and Serbs in the Region, governed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Bobić 2009). Over the past few years, the interest in the financial input of the diaspora remained; however, the willingness to create a more dynamic relationship with the diaspora returned to that of the Milošević era. Like in the 1990s, remittances in post-socialist Serbia continue to flow to individuals, with no government-supported programs for diaspora investments.

The high volume of remittances in post-socialism was a continuation from the socialist period, when Yugoslavia was among the top European countries in this respect. Yugoslav guest workers remitted more than their Greek, Turkish, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish counterparts (SOPEMI 1979, p. 125, 1981, p. 149). According to the annual reports of the Yugoslav National Bank, worker remittances became a vital relief for the external balance of payment deficits from 1967 onward. Despite its socialist ideology, the Yugoslav leadership greeted these remittances with great enthusiasm. The expectation was that workers’ savings would finance the development of underdeveloped regions (Bernard 2019).

In both socialism and its aftermath, these expectations about the role of remittances in bringing development to Yugoslavia and later to Serbia were, for the most part, disappointed. Overall, migrants were disaffected with the politics in their homeland. Instead, remittance practices were defined by individual ambitions and family needs. State regulations did indeed affect the ability of migrants to send remittances and their uses. However, rather than support migrants in investing their savings into their home country, government interventions were often perceived by returnees as obstacles to profitable investments (Bernard 2019, pp. 240–242). Migrants and their families primarily used remittances to cope with the failures of socialist and post-socialist development on a political and everyday level, rather than support its achievements.

### SOCIAL STATUS AND THE RURAL/URBAN DIVIDE

In Serbia and the broader Yugoslav region, the transition from socialism to post-socialism had a profound impact on class identities. While Yugoslavia did not experience a straightforward transition from communism to capitalism, people’s experiences of change in their everyday lives

in the 1990s embodied the end of socialist values attached to particular social(ist) classes. For these people, as for millions of other Eastern Europeans, the changes brought about by post-communism meant, as Verdery (1999, p. 35) described, “a reordering of people’s entire meaningful worlds; [...] a rupture in their worlds of meaning, their sense of cosmic order.” Migration was a substantial aspect of this reordering. The changes affected old and new migrants in different ways. While labor mobility and employment opportunities for the former were restricted and became more precarious, new opportunities for employment and professional advancement were offered to the latter.

The open borders and freedom of movement which had characterized socialist Yugoslavia as a unique case in Cold War Europe ended in November 1991 when visa restrictions were introduced. These were gradually relaxed, but only lifted entirely in the 2010s. The sanctions and embargo on Serbia during the wars of the 1990s, as well as more stringent immigration policies introduced in Western Europe after the two oil crises in 1973 and 1979, greatly affected the rural migrants of the socialist period. In the 1980s, their employment had already become increasingly discontinuous and less profitable than in the past (Schierup 1981; idem, 1986). Post-1990 emigration was different. The new urban emigrants possessed qualifications and skills that made their employment in the Western markets profitable. They were young and highly educated, with the skills and knowledge to navigate the intricacy of application procedures. The post-1990s’ urban emigrants were leaving their friends and parents behind, often as single individuals who wanted to fulfill their passions, talents, and dreams. They left with the prospect of pursuing successful careers abroad.

Although they were better positioned in the international labor market than the old generation of unskilled migrants, the post-1990 generation of migrants remitted much less than the guest workers from the socialist period did. Sources suggest that guest workers still contributed most to the staggeringly large pool of remittances to Serbia recorded by the World Bank in the mid-2000s (Petree and Baruah 2007). In the cities, there is no evidence to support the euphoric messages conveyed by the Serbian media and the Serbian government about the wealth that the Serbian diaspora was displaying at home. The ethnographic fieldwork of Bajić-Hajduković in Belgrade in 2005/2006 and from 2007 to 2014 did not uncover the presence of this vast influx of foreign currency into people’s everyday lives. Her findings were supported by an International Organization for

Migration (IOM) study that suggested that post-socialist remittances were not channeled to the families of post-1990 migrants from Belgrade (see Bajić-Hajduković 2020; Petree and Baruah 2007). As in the 1970s and 1980s, a large proportion of payments to Serbia were still channeled to the same recipients—the guest workers’ families with closer connections to the countryside. The quantitative data from the 2011 census in Serbia also highlighted a discrepancy between urban and rural remittance destinations in the country. The 2011 census recorded that people above the age of sixty from the Belgrade area received the lowest volume of remittances in the country, while most remittance recipients above sixty lived in southern and eastern Serbia (Stanković 2014, p. 98).

In the Belgrade families affected by the post-1990 migration, remittances were never mentioned, nor was there any evidence of additional income within those households. The post-1990s’ migrants who originated from urban parts of Serbia remitted much less, either because they did not think they should do so or because their families did not expect them to. For Belgrade mothers, remittances were acceptable only if they remained invisible and unused. In most cases, Belgrade mothers kept their migrant children unaware of the severity of their material circumstances, in line with normative expectations. In the few cases where mothers received remittances, they insisted that the money was not used for everyday consumption. They made a clear distinction between the money that their son or daughter sent occasionally and the remittances that guest workers on temporary work in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s sent to their families. Belgrade-based elderly mothers thought that receiving financial support or a gift with a value that was not purely symbolic was something that only peasants could accept (Bajić-Hajduković 2010, p. 29).

#### THE (IN)VISIBILITY OF REMITTANCES IN FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

The visibility of peasants’ remittances stands in stark contrast with the invisibility of the gifts sent by adult children to their mothers in Belgrade. The guest worker migration of the socialist period was intended to provide financial support to alleviate the poverty of peasant families. Whether used to refurbish houses, buy farming machinery, or secure a job outside of agriculture, remittances were spent for the benefit of the migrant family.

There was no secrecy about the provenance of the acquired wealth. Instead, it was proudly displayed.

Although emigration was prompted primarily by economic necessity, the desire to climb the social ladder was typical for many peasant migrants. The opulent houses that guest workers built in their home villages and the impressive number of tractors dropped off on neglected fields were symbols of the migrants' aspiration for social recognition. Sociological research on rural Serbia has shown that middle-class peasantry in eastern Serbia went abroad primarily to be able to surpass the wealth of rich peasants (Bratić and Malešević 1982; Schierup 1973; Tanić 1974, pp. 83, 305). Within peasant communities, some ethnic minorities were overrepresented among the migrants. They were also more likely to invest remittances to enhance their family's social status rather than to secure employment (Vuksanović 1996; Tanić 1974, pp. 87, 88, 94). For instance, workers' remittances were used to display family wealth in the Vlach community of Ljubičevo (eastern Serbia) where social status was acquired through the marriage of adolescent children with wealthy families (Schierup 1973, p. 46).

The different remittance practices speak not only about the desire to enhance the social status of peasants. More broadly, they account for how migration reshaped class identities and became a social stigma for peasants. This is not, however, a social phenomenon particular to Serbia. The investment of peasant migrants in social status is neither specific to Serbian guest workers nor the wider Balkan region. The building of opulent houses and the import of tractors and expensive consumer goods were widely reported in many rural emigration areas around the world during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Körner and Werth 1981; King 1986; Gardner 1995; Dalakoglou 2010; Boccagni and Erdal 2020). As in Serbia, these investments have been described as symbols of the uncultured otherness of peasants. In the case of Serbia, however, the remittance practices of rural migrants acquired a broader significance than in other emigration countries due to the sizeable proportion of the peasant population throughout the entire twentieth century.

Although socialism tried hard to dismantle the peasantry, as it did not fit within the parameters of the classless society Yugoslavia claimed to be, the rural population in Serbia formed the majority until the 1990s. In 2020, the rural population still accounted for 44 percent of the total population (Worldometer 2020). In socialist Serbia, peasants were systematically constructed as the "enemy within" (Bajić-Hajduković 2020, p. 11).

The working class considered peasants backward. Political and intellectual circles often questioned the peasants’ loyalty to the communist regime. Left behind by socialist policies of industrialization and proletarianization, peasants found employment abroad to be a way out of economic misery and social exclusion.

Whether migrating within Yugoslavia or further afield, the majority of migrants from Serbia in the socialist era came from the countryside (Burić 1973, p. 251). Before the legalization of temporary employment abroad (1963), large numbers of the agricultural population left the countryside and moved to the urban peripheries in search of a job in the public sector. This immigration led to a notable growth of the urban peripheries (Tanić 1989). Here, self-made houses and informal trade proliferated but were poorly tolerated by the authorities and urban dwellers, who saw the peasants as “others” who were corrupting the urban milieu. Employment abroad did not end this rural exodus, but it transformed the interaction between rural and urban areas. Peasants acquired the status of workers abroad, a status that came with privileges which they wanted to keep once they returned to Yugoslavia. Upon their return, guest workers tried to obtain jobs in industry and to leave the agricultural sector. However, they did not leave their home villages permanently. Peasants populated urban peripheries but kept one foot in the countryside, where they returned daily, weekly, or monthly (Nejašmić 1981; Vedriš 1978).

During socialism, migration and the revenues it generated played an essential role in constructing stereotypes about the otherness of peasants. The investment of guest workers and their flaunting of wealth were widely discussed in political debates and media (Bernard 2019, pp. 95-98, 150-166). When Yugoslav socialism started to tremble, the discrepancy between the wealth displayed by guest workers and the underdevelopment of their regions contributed vastly to the growing antagonism of the urban population toward the peasantry. This dissatisfaction increased in the 1970s, when the employment of workers from the Serbian countryside abroad was booming. From the 1970s, Serbia and the broader Yugoslav region experienced a rise in social inequalities and economic disparities between its republics and within its regions (Pleština 1992). The uneasy incorporation of rural into urban patterns of development was one of the symbols of this unevenness.

This in-between status of the peasantry and the working class which characterized many guest workers was the reason why in cultural productions and media debates the figures of the economic migrant and the

peasant often overlapped. However, the meaning of the peasant migrants changed over time. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the peasant was portrayed sympathetically as naïve, warm-hearted, and simple. From the early 1970s, this changed, and the image of the peasant began to become more complex and increasingly negative. (Bernard 2019, pp. 205–212). In these years, employment abroad, a phenomenon until then mostly affecting the impoverished working classes from the northwestern republics, became a widespread practice among peasants in the southeastern Yugoslav regions (Brunnbauer 2009, p. 28).

### THE TRANSFORMATION OF VALUE SYSTEMS AND THE IMPACT OF CLASS ON FAMILY TIES

In the 1980s and 1990s, when the economic crisis deepened and stricter limitations on the international mobility of Yugoslav and later Serbian migrant workers were introduced, the pressure of the rural population on the urban peripheries increased. In addition to being viewed as “uncultured,” the meaning of the term “peasant” in the 1990s amalgamated the anxieties of nationalism and the eroding socialist system of values—it stretched far beyond a symbol of someone who hailed from the countryside. It became an archetype of post-socialist aesthetics: turbo-folk music, fake Diesel jeans, Nike trainers, and thick gold chains with crosses (Marković 2005; Gordy 1999, pp. 106–110; Bajić-Hajduković 2020, p. 85). This new peasant was someone who lived for the day, who cared how much they earned but not how they earned it, even if this involved illegal activities in the flourishing black market. In other words, this was someone with no morals or regard for the social values of the socialist era. The peasant became an embodiment of the changes that were sweeping away the familiar system of values and social norms. Remittance practices in post-socialism affirmed the class distinction between the “useful” children of peasants and the working class and the “priceless” children of the urban middle class (Zelizer 1994). The concept of “priceless children” emerged with the mass-industrialization of the USA at the turn of the twentieth century, which saw the role of the child changing from a unit of labor to an object of parental sacrifice and unconditional love (Zelizer 1994). A similar phenomenon occurred after World War Two in parts of Yugoslavia. Children born in the postwar period became objects of their mothers’ love and sacrifice—“priceless children.” Their mothers, even

when their dire material conditions in the 1990s and early 2000s suggested otherwise, could not and would not accept financial support in the form of remittances.

In the post-socialist reordering, receiving remittances or other forms of financial support from a migrant child indicated a loss of middle-class status. The socialist middle class had become so impoverished that it had become an empty signifier, clinging on to class values that had become hollow in the new post-socialist class system in Serbia. (Bajić-Hajduković 2020, p. 88).

Nevertheless the socialist middle class still clung to their old habits and beliefs, some of which manifested themselves in their relationships with their children. The social norms relevant to these generations implied that mothers were there to protect their children and to look after them long into adulthood; they did not expect their children to sustain them or materially support them. This was considered something that peasants did, such as those who had guest worker sons or daughters in Germany, Austria, or Switzerland. The old socialist urban middle class was there to support its migrant children in every possible way, and not the other way around (Bajić-Hajduković 2020, p. 88).

Employment abroad, for the peasant, was a family matter which formed a bond between older and younger generations. Rural emigration was conceived of and organized by both the state authorities and the migrants themselves to be temporary. This is pivotal to understanding the relationships in migrant families. The temporary character of guest worker migration meant that the migrants were expected to return and that family unity would eventually be restored. The major investments typical of Yugoslav guest workers symbolized these expectations: the building of a new and bigger house, or the import of machinery to enhance the productivity of the small plot owned and worked by the family. The time and the costs sustained to raise the family’s living standards required a commitment by all family members abroad and at home over several decades. Even when guest workers invested in securing jobs outside agriculture, these were principally intended as employment opportunities for family members who were not yet employed abroad. This was the case with the opening of small shops, which were usually run by family members, but also when guest workers took advance of the possibility to “buy a workplace.” This practice was introduced in the 1970s by the Yugoslav government to support local development. It consisted in the payment, in hard currency or the equivalent in dinars, of the amount of money required by factories to

open a workplace. The vacancy was usually offered to the payers or one of their family members (Ivanović 2010). Well-established informal networks in the local community were essential to ensuring the success of the peasant migration strategy. Family members and their circle of friends and relatives were key actors in guest worker migration strategies. Guest workers from the same villages shared the costs of accommodation abroad and could help driving back remittances and gifts to family members who had remained in their villages to take care of the land.

During socialism, the reliance on the family and the importance of the local community was not a peculiarity of rural migration from Serbia. However, peasant solidarity between home community members and within intergenerational families had a long tradition in Serbia, which was challenged but not eliminated by socialism. Before World War Two, 90 percent of the Serbian population were peasants, with families organized into collective households called *zadruga*. The child in a *zadruga* was considered primarily a unit of labor (Isić 2006). Once social reforms and rapid industrialization began in post-World War Two Yugoslavia, the role of the child began to change.

Nevertheless, this change was slow, and it did not affect all of Yugoslav society equally. Although it became a common feature of the urban classes, this was much less the case in rural areas, where socialist modernity was a contested symbol of identity. Indeed, in rural, underdeveloped areas, reliance on extended family networks remained a response to falling employment opportunities and an overall lack of welfare services. In these settings, children remained economic assets to the family and not vice versa. Children's education and professional careers were determined by decisions taken by the family and for the pursuit of family unity and wellbeing.

The family migration established during socialism survived its collapse, albeit in new forms. The "guest worker" had become a way of life rather than a temporary status. Not even wars or the low economic prospect of return migration could interrupt the investment of an entire working life in one's home village. Moreover, migration had transformed families and community life so radically that both family and societal relations became dependent thereupon. Migrant children today, just like their parents before them, still leave for employment abroad while keeping one foot in their home villages, where aging parents and relatives wait for their return and live on the remittances they send home. This explains why older generations in rural areas have been the principal recipients of remittances in recent decades. The most traumatic changes, however, were wrought on

motherhood and the role of women within families more broadly. This was the case in villages and cities—during socialism and thereafter.

### MOTHERHOOD AND GENDER ROLES

Even though the Belgrade mothers discussed by Bajić-Hajduković were not all in the same financial situation—some were struggling to make ends meet, while others were much better off—what they shared in common was an understanding that, if received, remittances should not be consumed for mundane purposes because they came from their children, whom they considered sacred objects of love and care. This attitude to children is typical of the generation of women born around World War Two who belonged, in their view, to the middle class. Women in socialist Yugoslavia considered motherhood an essential aspect of identity. Milić even argued that Yugoslav women worked and lived for their children (2008, p. 195). While socialism motivated women to pursue education and employment, they were not free from traditional patriarchal norms of having primary responsibility for their families and children. However, employment and (relative) financial independence enabled women to feel respected for their work in the domestic sphere, if not so much by their husbands, then by their social circle and above all their children (Milić 2008, p. 1959).

During socialism, emigration was one of the principal means for women to find employment. Although the communist leadership proclaimed women’s emancipation, female unemployment remained very high and even began to rise in the late 1960s (Woodward 1995, pp. 206–209; Davidović 1986). This prompted a significant number of women to find employment abroad. Women from the Serbian countryside usually went abroad with their husbands but had fewer opportunities to gain skills than their spouses. Women were overrepresented among the unskilled and the poorly educated. Unlike the majority of male guest workers, only a small number of female migrants had finished the eight years of compulsory education, which was a precondition for attending vocational training abroad (Archives of Serbia [undated], Socialist Alliances of the Working People of Serbia (dj75), box 1, No. 12). More often than their husbands, women held poorly paid physical jobs. They were rarely members of trade unions (p. 8; Marić 1990, p. 35). Female guest workers were often in a relationship. If they did not have children before leaving, they had them while they resided abroad. Unlike female domestic workers, though,

female guest workers did not take maternity leave when they had children. Instead, they continued to work, even working extra hours, because the main reason they had joined their husbands abroad was to save enough money for a decent life in Yugoslavia (Morokvašić 1987, pp. 122–127; Burić 1973, p. 258). As childcare was too expensive and guest worker children underperformed at school, the elderly in the family considered the earlier return of the children to be the best course of action (Vegar 1986; Vuksanović 1995, p. 352; Petrović 1973). In fact, research on Yugoslav women residing abroad during socialism suggests that mothers were more hesitant than their husbands about investments in Yugoslavia. However, their doubts rarely led them to revise their plans to return. Yugoslav mothers abroad lamented in particular the traumatic experience of sending their children back to Yugoslavia to be raised by family members, usually grandparents (Bernard 2019, pp. 246–248; Schierup 1990, p. 105; Morokvašić 1987, pp. 218–222). This wound could never heal properly.

Family migration patterns in the post-socialist context presented different challenges to Belgrade mothers than those faced by rural women under socialism. The fall of Yugoslavia and the massive emigration of grown children that coincided with a change in social norms and values created an incredibly difficult situation for elderly mothers. With the departure of their children, their world collapsed: there was no one left in the inner social circle or family to appreciate these women's sacrifice. Elderly mothers, perhaps more than anyone else, felt the crumbling of socialist values—they lost everything in this process, including themselves.

Mothers of post-1990s' migrants from Belgrade considered it unacceptable to receive material support from their children. Most of the women included in this research lived in small apartments in concrete socialist apartment blocks, furnished with household appliances that were on average thirty years old. The very question of whether they received money from their migrant sons and daughters abroad caused embarrassment among Belgrade mothers. They would blush, look away, and explain that they had not given birth to their child expecting their support (Bajić-Hajduković 2020, p. 77).

The appropriate gift for a mother–child relationship, according to Belgrade mothers, was a gift with little or no material value, a gift that was symbolic and inalienable. Money thereby became a form of inalienable gift that mothers did not use for consumption, but saved so that their children would get it back as their inheritance. The only exception was when it was

used for a purpose that transcended consumption, such as treating a severe illness or paying for funeral costs. A gift that came from a “sacred object” of a mother’s love and care—a child—could not be consumed in a mundane way. Instead of remittances, what stood out in the research conducted with Belgrade mothers was their loneliness. The elderly mothers talked for hours on end about their loss, their migrant children, and the emptiness, physical and emotional, that remained in the wake of their children’s departure. Money could not fill the absence and the profound sense of loss.

The case of the Serbian middle class resonates with Patico’s study of consumption in the post-Soviet middle class (2008). The post-Soviet middle class defined itself by having been born and socialized within middle-class families and a middle-class milieu during the Soviet period. The socialist middle class in post-socialist Serbia, like its Russian counterpart, had become impoverished, but people still defined themselves as middle class based on their culturedness. Even though the former occupations of Bajić-Hajduković’s interview partners in Belgrade varied substantially in terms of income (including a retired teacher, a seamstress, a company director, a translator, and a housewife), they all shared in common that they lived and had raised their children in Belgrade, socializing them with a socialist middle-class identity and providing the education and skills that subsequently facilitated their children’s emigration. The comparison with the Russian self-professed middle class, the diversity of backgrounds, with many an urban dweller in Serbia coming from the countryside, as well as the very different occupations ranging from blue- to white-collar workers to the unemployed, points to the fact that the class discourse in the Belgrade context was highly subjective. In other words, appropriating a middle-class identity was the result of an active process of self-positioning and constructing one’s culturedness in opposition to the “Other,” embodied as the peasant. The middle class created this new peasant as a way of navigating the murky and tumultuous sea of post-socialist metamorphoses; the peasant was a counter-balance to a crumbling system of socialist middle-class values. As long as one could point out a peasant and their ways, the middle class could still hold on to their values, regardless of how much the realities betrayed their middle-class identity.

The narratives of Belgrade mothers about the different experiences of motherhood between rural and urban families also belong to a broader understanding of modernity and belonging. The Belgrade mothers’ narratives about migrant sons and daughters are evocative of the study of the

making of the “priceless child” in early twentieth-century America (Zelizer 1994). Zelizer argued that a shift in constructing the “sacred child” emerged as a result of the massive industrialization that took place in America at the start of the twentieth century. Kopytoff argued along similar lines that material affluence in most modern industrial societies has allowed Westerners to “purge relations with kinsmen of much economic content and make them almost entirely ‘social’” (Kopytoff 2004, p. 273). According to Kopytoff, parents in Western societies are in a position not to expect any material benefits from their children. This, however, is not the case in poor peasant societies, where arduous material conditions engender rather different relationships between parents and children (Kopytoff 2004, p. 273).

During socialism, economic hardship was indeed a critical factor in shaping parent/child relations in rural areas. However, poverty is not a monolithic factor. There are significant disparities in wealth between different rural areas and within their communities. Moreover, social differences existed within the peasantry to no less extent than between the peasantry and the working class (Ströhle 2016). A closer look at how migration affected gender roles in migrant families during socialism is exemplary of these differences. The employment abroad of women was not welcomed equally in all rural communities.

In some cases, it was even prohibited. Data from the population census held in 1971 allows the geography of these dissimilarities to be discerned. Within the Republic of Serbia, the proportion of female workers among the total number of workers employed abroad varied from 42.7 percent in the autonomous province of Vojvodina, to an average of 35.7 percent in Serbia generally, and down to 4.2 percent in the autonomous province of Kosovo—the total Yugoslav average was 31.4 percent (see Künne 1979, p. 102). Whatever the dominant social convention or underlying economic condition behind female (non-)emigration, remittance practices changed gender roles within the family.

In his extensive work on rural emigration from socialist Serbia, the sociologist Živan Tanić (1974, pp. 32, 33, 99–101) illustrated that emancipation became possible for peasant wives left behind. As the birth rate fell, women were free to take up seasonal jobs outside agriculture and to cultivate their network of solidarity with women in the villages. However, hard physical labor on the land and responsibility for the construction of a new house indicated a masculinization rather than an emancipation of rural women. Remittances could well reproduce patterns of subjugation to the

patriarchy rather than challenging them. For example, during his fieldwork in eastern Serbia, Schierup reported that it was typical of women to take on male duties in the field. At the same time, men enjoyed watching the televisions bought with the savings they had earned abroad (1973, p. 10).

The different impact of remittances could also be seen with the children growing up in rural families who were profoundly affected by their parents’ employment abroad. Research on the guest worker children growing up in the Serbian countryside has revealed a distinction between poor and relatively rich peasant families. The latter were able to give pocket money and presents to the children left behind, resulting in these children disregarding work. In more impoverished peasant families, remittances were used to make essential improvements in the cultivation of land and in house maintenance. Children had to grow up fast. They assumed adult responsibilities as children while under the care of aging grandparents (Ciglar 1990; Tanić 1974, pp. 99–107). For girls growing up in deprived rural areas which were mostly inhabited by socially excluded minority groups, the status of adulthood would never properly be granted as they were promised, still at adolescent age, to a member of the community employed abroad, where they were sent at the request of the promised husband (Tanić 1974, p. 92).

To be sure, economic hardship could also affect urban migration. Research shows how, under socialism, when urban migration was driven by economic need (because of unemployment of both parents), children were more likely to be sent to an orphanage as urban parents lacked the family network and income from the land on which rural families relied (Burić 1973, pp. 259–261). The extreme poverty of unemployed urban parents is also one reason why family migration was rare during socialism.

## CONCLUSION

Recent data shows that as many as 70 percent of young Serbs would like to emigrate (Rolandi and Elia 2019). This suggests that migration continues to be the principal response of families to the new forms of poverty and deep social inequality that have emerged in post-socialism.

By taking Serbia as a case study, this contribution showed how reports about voluminous remittances can mask deep levels of poverty and social inequality. It did so by looking beyond the data recording a high volume of remittances over a more than fifty-year period. Instead, the study

focused on migrant families to examine who received and used remittances, why, and how. It compared remittances practices in rural families during socialism with those adopted by urban families after the collapse of Yugoslavia. It argued that class identity and social(ist) values were more important than economic status to explain why peasant migrants used savings to improve family living standards. By contrast, urban families rejected this practice as immoral. The perceived distance between rural and urban morality, which emerged in the narratives of Belgrade mothers, was contextualized in broader trends of women's emancipation and dichotomous urban/rural modernization from the twentieth into twenty-first centuries.

Albeit in changing forms, the inflow of remittances and their uses will remain a crucial driver of social change and adjustments to the challenges of globalization which socialism and neoliberalism have left unsolved. This prospect makes the study of how remittances (re)shape relations in migrant families in the past, present, and future highly topical.

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