Transnational democracy on migrant route

The » sudden appearance« (in quotation mark) of Balkan route was catalytic for various political tendencies and processes. It has become kind of testing ground for certain beliefs and notions of political. At the same time developments around Balkan route highlighted some central contradictions of neoliberal globalization, revealed hierarchies of power in the context of emerging post-national spaces as spaces of hierarchical inclusion.

Balkan Route has come into focus of public attention in 2015. After so called summer of migration, the notion that describes struggle of refugees, migrants and solidarity initiatives to affirm the right to migrate Merkel’s Germany decided to allow refugees stranded in Hungary to enter Germany. Dublin agreement has been temporarily suspended when it comes to citizens of Syria. The struggle of refuges and migrants to reach safe destinations in Northern Europe has incited massive mobilization of solidarity with them and also led to backlash in the form of surge of right wing populism and scaremongering. The Balkan Route has become the catalyst for various political tendencies and processes. It gave pretext to Orban from Hungary to start what he himself later named conservative counter revolution in Europe. It gave an opportunity to Germany to aspire for position of the new leader of the free world. It gave Serbian government an opportunity to present itself as liberal and human rights sensitive and Macedonia could present itself as reliable partner ready to perform dirty job of closing Balkan Route for EU core countries. At the same time Slovenia could present itself as reliable Schengen watch dog. All those different attitudes when it comes to the existence of Balkan route were in fact the expression of highly unequal structural position of different states and regions in EU and its neighbourhood. They have once again revealed Europe as hierarchical space or space of hierarchical integration.

The claim that Balkan Route suddenly appeared is misleading. Transnational routes as migrant route does exist even when they are not in the spotlight. And their existence is as certain as the existence of other transnational spaces. What defines transnational space? They are spaces of encounter, of multiplicity that does not have any prior, transcendent or essential foundation. They are spaces without absolute authority, defined by plurality of authorities, non state authorities that affirm themselves in practice and are involved in negotiations with an open end.

The existence of visible Balkan Route was mainly understood as exceptional, as an urgency that has to be dealt with using exceptional means so that normality could be restored again. Normality that is externalization of one of principal contradictions of nowadays Europe and global capitalism: while capital, goods and services can move freely, movement of people is administered in such a way that hierarchies among populations and labour markets are reproduced and strengthened. This contradiction is violent and violence against refugees and migrants on Balkan Route was just a temporary image of violence that is taking place daily on the external borders of EU. The other contradiction is related to dissolution of form of nation. This dissolution is the result of capitalist globalisation but also the result of realization that national liberation in anticolonial struggles turned out to be poisoned gift. The establishment of nation states was the only possible and allowed outcome of anticolonial struggles although nation state is the result of historical development in Europe, the result of antagonism between absolute authorities that exercise monopoly over right, force and cultural expression on designated territory. Being inappropriate for much more diversified and plural realities nation form often led to intense and sometimes destructive conflicts in the states that freed themselves from direct colonial rule but not from political forms imported from metropolis. In globalization even nowadays Europe becomes ever more postnational, but only to the extent that colonial legacy of unequal and hierarchical global division of labour is preserved.

Migration is neither new nor extraordinary social practice. It becomes such when populations are supposed to be organised in the form of nation, and when unfree labour for plantation economy had to be efficiently channelled and contained. Nevertheless, discourse on migration in Europe is completely permitted with the idea of exceptionality. What does it mean? To treat some social practice as extraordinary is a precondition to establish sovereignty, sovereign power. In “old” fashion, as foundation of social order on transcendent norm, and in “new” fashion that is theorised as governance, as the way to define norm upon dealing with extraordinary event in ad hoc arrangements.

Sovereignty is therefore defined as:

Foundation of social order is not imminent to society but is prior to it, transcends it; it constitutes and reproduces itself by grasping social phenomena as exceptional that demand exceptional measures; it is based on existence of absolute authority that is expressed as monopoly over production of law and force on designated territory and as cultural homogenisation.

Migrant routes are not exceptional in this sense. They are extraordinary in another sense. In theories of the state of exception the later does not lead only to dictatorial power but could also be revolutionary and transformative. As site of encounters of irreducible multiplicity, of encounters with open end were strivings, hopes, struggles for decent life clash with and articulate with attempts and practices to govern the mobility of people. As sites that avoid sovereignty and were relations are in constant making and remaking.

To understand transnational space such as migrant route as exceptional event means to attempt to normalize it, to subject it to operations aimed at imposing sovereignty as exclusive power relation. Exactly this has happened when Balkan route was formalized, turned into formal and state controlled humanitarian corridor. Various instances of clashes and antagonisms could be detected around the governments’ attempts to formalize and eventually to close down the route. Those conflicts provide us with inspiring history of clashes between two notions of power: sovereign state power on the one hand and transnational autonomy on the other hand. (empirical cases)

History of Balkan Route could be read as history of the attempts of hegemonic powers to restore the control over people and resistances to it. Even more, one could claim, without denying or minimizing the role of struggle of migrants themselves, that Balkan Route was possible also due to existence of other understanding of politics and being in common.

Description of some hybrid locuses (sites) of enunciation

Macedonian Serbian border. Border turned out to be facilitator of movement. This site was crucial in keeping Balkan route informal until Serbian border with Croatia. It is defined by autonomy which is product of state apartheid and other understanding of power and of economy. “When we have problems, we do not call the police, we negotiate and resolve problems by ourselves”, was perhaps the most revealing statement of local activist that together with his group exercised authority in concert with other non state authorities while at the same time constantly negotiating with state authorities. For his group the appearance of refuges and migrants on the border was an opportunity to put into practice socio-economic model in which solidarity and prohibition of inequalities are internal to it. Refugees and migrants therefore were not treated as helpless victims or as menace but as agents in the process of mutual relocation of resources. Concrete practices were to negotiate and implement conditions of mobility (defining maximum price of transportation), prevention of profiteering, prevention of state monopoly over transportation. Discussions with different non state authorities revealed that this location is highly transnationalized with already mentioned autonomy, massive emigration around Europe, relations with Middel Eastern societies due to Islam, legacy of separate development in post Yugoslav Serbia, legacy of non alignment movement…

Camps (informal and formal) and common spaces

In informal camps like parks in Belgrade and Subotica different actors were engaged. Besides migrants forming various affinity groups there were NGO and informal collectives. NGO were trying to implement policies of international organizations and EU. They have considered the existence of informal route (flux) as anomaly and tried to on the one hand influence authorities to establish conditions for formalization of the route (flux) and to reassure refugees, migrants to enter formal structures if possible, if conditions have been met. It is clear case how necessities and extraordinary events lead to hierarchical inclusion in EU space.

The other actors were more informal organizations and collectives that were sceptical toward formalization of route (flux) and were putting their efforts into establishment of sufficient logistics for informal camps to stay and were trying to establish collectivities mixed of local activist and refugees, migrants (example of chai collective). Those intitiative often established common spaces.

Those hybrid sites of enunciation addressed some interesting issues:

Notion of rights based on individual experience vs. on communitarian

How global hierarchies articulate in such hybrid locus of enunciation

How to understand coexistence of different sensibilities, plurality of sensibilities.

Transnationality exists also in practices of thinking and in conceptual production. Just to mention few examples. Already at the beginning of European and western modern political thought one could find two different articulation of power and state. Firstly, power and rights have to be transferred to sovereign; multitude (as multitude of wills) have to be transformed into unity of will, it has to become people. According to Hobbes multitude is when people rebel against the sovereign authority. Secondly, to have political community there is no need to transfer rights and power. They stay with the multitude which is sufficient condition for political power and state. The answer to antagonisms in society is not to establish social order in some a priori foundation. It is in incessant process of perfectioning of political forms and institutions so that they and rights become the expression of the power of the multitude. And the power of the multitude is expanding, growing because interhuman relationship tempers autonomy of the subject. To quote Spinoza, the opposite of Hobbes in the beginning of modern political thought: “if two come together and unite their strength, they have jointly more power, and consequently more right over nature, than either of them alone; and the more there be that join in alliance, the more right they will collectively possess. It is understanding of democracy that privileges ad hoc associationism to associationism legitimised by the sovereign.

Such alternative did not exist only in the history of European and western modern political thought. Working on metaphysics of Amazonian Indians De Castro highlighted difference between western metaphysics and indigenous Amazonian. Western metaphysics is obsessed with grand difference, what separates humans from non humans and moderns from the other, it thinks extensive difference and is according to De Castro fin and origo of colonialism. Indigenous, “savage” metaphysics presupposes human immanence, the difference is understood as intensive, which means that we are not dealing with plurality of cultures but plurality in culture. The differences are not due to different representations of the same given and objective reality. According to indigenous cosmology and ontology reality is not given but submitted to agency, it is understood as affective multiplicity (pojasni) experienced by bodies. Reality therefore is not represented but experienced. Those bodies as all things (they are not separate from nature) on sociospiritual continuity are points of view. And communication and comparison happen as different points of view mutually contaminate and transform. So, if we understand differences as intensive and internal communication takes place on the borders, difference is pre condition for it and it is mutually transformative. And exactly such is the definition of intercultural societies among indigenous movements in Latin America.