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CONCOMITANTS OF INDEPENDENCE: CLASS MOBILITY IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

Abstract: In enforcing liberal market economy in post-socialist independent Macedonia dramatic economic changes affected the lives of a group of young female engineers in Skopje. Entering one of the most prestigious professions in Yugoslavia, engineers in the independent and contested Republic of Macedonia found themselves in a class mobility they had not anticipated. Foreign agencies define a new working class, a new emerging class of ‘nouveau rich’ alters ownership. I argue that, in redefining their relationship to the process of production through their consumption patterns and not through their labor my group of informants subvert the new emerging class mobility in Macedonia.

Keywords: Macedonia, social mobility, class.

Introduction

In 1991 Macedonia declared independence and broke away from what was left of Yugoslavia. Declaring itself to be the independent Republic of Macedonia it found itself in the situation of having to justify its existence to its closest neighbors and to the international community. Greece challenged the right of Macedonia to its own name, Bulgaria recognized Macedonia, but declared that only Bulgarians live in Macedonia, Serbia declared Macedonia to be South Serbia and at the same time pulling the Yugoslavian national army with all its resources and even some of its manpower out of Macedonia leaving it utterly defense-less, and Albanians in Macedonia, Kosovo and Albania were asking for half of Macedonia to form their own utopian state of Illyria – a united Albania. Only Turkey as former occupying force, then the Ottoman Empire, recognized Macedonia, which was neither welcomed by the Macedonians nor the Greeks. At this point Macedonia appealed to the international community that send UNPROFOR to protect Macedonia – for the first time on a mission in a region where no conflict had arisen – yet. The international community argued that Macedonia was a powder keg that easily could draw Greece and Turkey and with this the whole European community in a bloody conflict. This was to be avoided at any price and Macedonia was suppose to be led peacefully into being a civil society arising from the ashes of communism. It was found that the best way of introducing Macedonia to the concept of a civil society was through making demands on its political structure and formulation of the constitution as well as introducing the former socialist Republic to liberal Market Economy. In effect this introduced a socialist society that felt a relative debt to benefactor Tito to the concept of class. Had the ideology of socialist Yugoslavia been the eradication of class, at least

in its ideology, in independent Macedonia a emerging class structure was seen as the necessary effect of a liberal Market economy. My group of informants, young female urban engineers, that had started their studies in Yugoslavia entered the workforce in independent Macedonia. Coming from an ideology of egalitarianism in entering the workforce they come to experience new ways in which difference of status is created and justified.

Reflection on change

In May 1995 in an interview, Nane Ruzin, Member of Parliament of the Macedonian Assembly, sums up the current situation of Macedonia. For many people, the dissolution of Yugoslavia has meant rethinking what they had believed during Yugoslavian times and discovering what to believe today. Upholding socialist values was becoming increasingly difficult as the all encompassing framework of Yugoslavia had disappeared and nationalist identity was defined relative to the contrast between ‚Macedonians‘ and ‚Albanians‘ (Thiessen 1999). The redefinition of the state boundaries, no longer reaching toward Austria or Italy, was greeted by Macedonians with a partial glorification of what they perceived as ‚Western,‘ that is, what had been close to the physical boundaries of Yugoslavia and accessible to them through travel. Today people feared that they would lose the connection they had with the West and regress to being Balkan again, rather like the Albanian minority is perceived as doing. The economy of Macedonia is, despite financial aid, battered since it relied heavily on the Yugoslav economy. As Mr. Ruzin points out, it is specifically the economic situation of Macedonia that has the most impact on the lives of Macedonians, specifically in Skopje, the largest urban centre without direct access to agricultural produces. Most of the agricultural produces were from Albanian landholdings who have taken over the Macedonian farms when, after Skopje’s earthquake, young Macedonians moved to the city to re-built a socialist icon, or they were from small family farms from family members that still lived in the villages, especially elder family members. Since Macedonia’s industry had been based on producing parts for other factories in Yugoslavia, Macedonia’s industry has ground to a halt despite an abundance of workers, while there were not enough farmers working the land.

My group of informants, children of the young Macedonians that had moved from the villages to built up Skopje, entered university while there was a Yugoslavian state. They were to become Yugoslavian engineers, ‚intellectual‘ workers and an elite of the socialist state. Until 1994 the number of first year engineers exceeded other faculties at the university of Skopje, when more first year students registered for economics. When my friends graduated, they were leaving a university in The Republic of Macedonia. The boundaries of their state had shrunk and their freedom of movement and work opportunities had been greatly curtailed.

Liberal Market Economy

Mr. Ruzin describes the common expectation of a free market economy held by those in post-socialist countries: a free market will solve their economic problems and lead directly to a Western lifestyle. The disillusion after such expectations is common. For the Republic of Macedonia, according to BRIMA (British Macedonian Social Surveys 1994):

“[In] June 1994 32% of the surveyed people indicated that, generally speaking, they and their family’s living standard had decreased significantly, 32% answered it had somewhat decreased and 30% said it remained the same; 1% stated that it had increased a lot and 2% did not know.”

The free market was clearly not a system to covet. In the same report, „42% of the surveyed people agreed that the privatization of state companies is the wrong step, 42% said it was the right thing to do and 16% did not know.” To the question „Do you think you will lose something if you don’t participated in the process of privatization?” (direct quote, including error), „23% surely felt this, 15% thought it probable, 41% thought that they would lose nothing and 21 % did not know.” And to the question, „Do you think that the creation of a market economy which means the ending of state control is right or wrong for the future of our country?” „32% thought of it right in November 1993 as well as in June 1994; in November 1993, 51% thought it wrong as compared with 49% in June 1994 and 18 to 19% did not know.” My young informants knew they did not have the same security as their parents had had when they started their adult life: there was no longer a workforce or working community to enter. But not only is their choice limited through less work, at the same time Macedonia is undergoing changes towards a free-market economy which has a great impact on how many young people perceive the world around them. „So the western economy is about everybody fending for themselves and trying to gain as much as possible at the expense of others?” (Informant, 1993). Even though the ideal of ‚Western’ was embraced, people were aware of the social consequences and distrusted efforts to turn Macedonia into a copy of Western Europe.

In a café with friends, we saw three girls burst in, one girl in tears, all of them obviously upset. As often happens in Skopje, my friends knew these girls from the faculty and asked about their distress. It turned out that the girl in tears had just finished university and had started work with one of the private computer companies that were springing up very quickly. She had been very happy to get this job and, as the factories were closing down, it was private businesses or ministries that were hiring. She had worked for three months for this company and banked much over-time. No contract had been signed and payment had been promised after observing her work performance for three months. She then was laid off without any payment and someone new was hired.

This is not an isolated case. Another informant, a mechanical engineer, was offered a job installing alarm systems into cars. He was a specialist in Turbines, a much more skilled occupation, but he needed money quickly as his father had just died and his brother had just married and there was another mouth to feed. He was offered 100 DM, around \$50. When he started working, his manager also employed another man on the same job. After observing them for a month, he told them that he would hire the

better one who would start getting a salary from the third month onwards. My friend quit. Few jobs my informants hold today give them sufficient income to make a great change in their financial situation and they remain largely dependent on the earning of their parents. Important benefits of working, like status and self esteem, cannot be achieved by them. During socialist times, it was commonly believed that changes to the political and economical structure of a system would form a new society, a belief again prevalent among my informants. What they are searching for however are new values drawn from what they see on American television, values that they do not see in their own society. They believe that if these were the values in Macedonian society, their success would depend only on their own strength and knowledge: they could earn appropriate wages, recognition and afford the happy life they seek.

Where do we go from here?

It was common for an engineer still at university to become employed full-time. A friend of mine had to leave university to work because her father, despite having the same training as she did, had been laid off, her mother was a lower income earner and her father's drinking was expensive. Her most employable skill, however, was her 33 and not her engineering abilities. Others left before they graduated for other reasons: family issues and, „...war will come, so why should I study?“ (1992). As engineers they were not filling the need in their own society that put all its economic effort into trading, mostly with Turkey or Germany and illegally with Serbia. The factories that once employed engineers were closed. Often the fathers were laid off and the mother would solely finance the family on her income as an economist, a common choice in the parents' generation. This made the mother and sometimes the daughter, with her language ability able to work for one of the foreign agencies that are flooding Macedonia, the only income earners in the household, in addition to their responsibilities of running that household.

“Yesterday my mother and I did the weekend cleaning; my sister had to study. I asked my father to help me to put up the curtain as I could not reach and he screamed at me and told me that this was my job to do and not his. He sits there all day and does nothing. Watching television all day. He would not touch a thing in the household. My mother is working overtime at the company to get some extra money, comes home and then has to do the cooking, cleaning, washing and ironing. I cannot understand how she can take this. And then she wants me to marry!” (1994)

In considering these various factors, I would argue that the social life of my informants is directly linked with the economic and political transition of the Republic of Macedonia. In the past few years, The Republic of Macedonia experienced an increase in marketing and sales and a decrease in production.

The decrease in production is related to the closure of factories that produced parts for assembly elsewhere in Yugoslavia. Since this union does not exist anymore and Macedonia does not have the capacity or the capital to build an independent infrastructure, the factories are closed and the unemployment rate is 30%. Funds offered by the EC and the USA are used to subsidize large programs of government spending. Often this money

is spent in ways that are far from useful, and the work created is neither demanding nor rewarding. In the administration, the young engineers work at the level of technicians and their intellectual potential and acquired skills are not well-utilized. For instance, I was told about one of the ministries that was subsidized by a foreign aid program of 10 Million DM. A computer system was bought with this money. The deal was made between the ministry and a private computer company that belonged to the brother of a very high official of that ministry. This computer system was the newest on the market and offered opportunities of which some of my engineer friends could only dream. However, this computer system was never put to use as none of the responsible staff had the expertise to work on such a system. With their potential unfulfilled and the society making limited demands on them, my informants respond with a growing demand for leisure goods and services that promise them some reward and will bring them closer to their dream of a new society that closely resembles what they might have seen in western European countries and on American television. A good life is equated with buying things that seem to represent images of happiness.

New Class Mobilities

In Skopje no one I know got a job without connections although sometimes these connections were concealed. Some of my friends tried to convince me that it was solely their credentials that got them employment. However, even with their credentials they still needed connections to beat other candidates who might not have had the credentials but had the connections. The nature of the job determined the extent to which connections were a factor. It was easier to get into private business with credentials as sometimes expertise, in particular facility with foreign languages and being a specialist on a specific computer program, could outweigh the 'connection factor.' According to BRIMA (British Macedonian Social Surveys 1994) and my own knowledge which can affirm this, to the question „If you want to have success, you must have ‚connections,‘ in our country?,” 90% of respondents answered „agree,” 4% answered with „Don’t know,” and only 6% did not agree. I asked a friend who was running a music store some questions about connections:

Question: “How important do you think connections are for being able to have a business?”

...Here? Oh, I could talk a lot...

Question: Is it possible to have a business without connections?

...Probably not. Many of these rich people around who have big companies now use their connections from the socialist times. Many of them were managers in state enterprises and they just transferred the capital with their connections to their private companies. Connections are very important. I have many friends, lots of connections, but I never use them for my job because it’s a special kind of job, you know. I have friends everywhere, but people cannot really help me with my business. As I told you, we are probably the only people who deal with this material in a legal way. So, it is important to have connections, especially here in

Macedonia. Probably everywhere, but here in these circumstances nothing would even work without them.”

In addition to getting a job through connections, it seemed that knowing someone ensured that one would not be laid off so easily even out of economic necessity. That had the strange effect that some engineers became teachers or economists as these were the connections their parents had; the serious issue of relevant expertise for these jobs was irrelevant:

“They do not care what you are, the only thing that counts is, ‘who you know.’ In my mother’s ministry, they employed a woman who was in her eighth month of pregnancy. Nobody has ever seen her since she is now on maternity leave - and she is getting 80% of the salary from a job which she has never done! And you ask if woman are discriminated against! What kind of job I get depends solely on the people my parents know.”

In summary, these young engineering students leaving university and entering a different phase of their lives were far from becoming the self-determined agents they had once dreamt they would be:

“I want to be independent, to have a job that is challenging, colleagues who are fun. I do not need a boyfriend. I will have my own little place, or Ane and I will move into her flat together. It will be so nice to do whatever you want. I would like to have my own room, decorate it as I want to, have my own stuff. On the weekends I will go for lunch to visit my parents or maybe invite them over. This would be nice.”

Instead, they were thrown into greater dependence than they had ever expected from their perceptions within Yugoslavia or their ideas about Western Europe. This is what my friends faced when they started work:

“My father had to change his job because his company was completely run down. He and his colleagues went to work just to keep their jobs, although there was no work for them to do. They did not get paid anything. He is now working for an electric company. He has a very low position, like I have. He had no other choice: he had no social security, no health security. Such things theoretically existed, but his factory did not have the money to pay for that. The state does not pay either. He needs his social security payment for his pension which is another reason why he changed jobs. People are very scared to lose their jobs. We hope it will become better, but they said that this year it will be very, very bad. There will be an enormous number of people who will lose their jobs. Everyone is afraid that they could lose their jobs. The government is supposed to pay unemployment insurance, but the government does not have enough money. The money which is in the country is not regular, not for taxes. The money one can see is not money which is put somewhere, in an account or something, there is only cash in hand. The taxes are up to eighty percent. That’s why the private companies do not pay any taxes. And the government is not strong enough to enforce such laws. It is very easy for the private companies, they pay 3000 or 4000 DM to some official in the government instead of paying 10000 DM tax. It is simply the way things go here.

There is an organized Mafia in the government. And people are afraid, they are afraid that they will lose their jobs. That's why nobody does anything about it. My father is the same. He only talks and talks. I do not like this about people here, they only talk and never do anything. People are afraid. We would not have been 500 years under the Turkish empire if people had been different". (Informant, 1995)

Macedonia was developing into a class society where the nouveau riche, socialist managers who bought up their companies through the illegal devaluation of those companies, or people who made a fortune through illegal import and export operations with Serbia which was under an embargo from the European community, were able to build beautiful houses in the mountains and drive beautiful cars, whereas the engineers and economists, state and factory employed could only afford to buy their state-owned flats and keep driving their 30-year old car. My friends as such were looking for their own way to access the new wealth at least moderately. The only way this could be achieved was through contact with Western companies and agencies or through kinaccumulated resources, often supported by family members outside of Macedonia.

Interestingly, the *nouveau riche* in the mind of my informants represent the typical Balkan personality (illegal activities) and not something they necessarily aspire to. My informants still saw their entrance to this new world-order warranted through their superior knowledge. Nevertheless, the access to consumer goods was the one thing that was competed for. These competing ideas about success and business, have produced an understanding of a means to success. Whilst previously people pooled their cleverness, nowadays the kind of understanding required to run a business is shared by only a few. For many of my friends, their parents and relatives, the knowledge and experience they have acquired has become meaningless. In this world, a polarization takes place that stands against socialist and ,European' valued ideology, as both are seen as valuing equality in some way. The middle class as ,Western' ideal has disappeared in Skopje before it had been formed. Possibilities and the standard of living rises for a few people while for most people, it declines. For my friends, it is in this world that the struggle of who they want to be and who they *can* be, takes place.

Consumption

Shopping is the locus in which this particular struggle becomes visible. Western television conveys an image of the world where supermarkets predominate, where one just goes and get the things one needs within minutes. Life in Skopje looks very different however, my friends disregard this disjunction and interact with the outside world *as if* it were actually available to them. It follows that economic activity has intrinsic political and ideological value. If my friends browse through shops in which they will never be able to afford to buy something, they are, nevertheless, making a political statement. This intrinsic political statement is determined by history, in this case the history of socialist Yugoslavia, as well as by Western television and global consumerism. In socialist Yugoslavia it was production that was glorified, whereas on Western television, glamour is produced by speculative gains. Each value condemns the other, but promises the same thing. In Skopje, the world of consumerism arrived because of risky speculation and

the contact this produced with the outside world embodies a particular political/moral attitude. Shopping in Skopje illustrates this well. Shops that I would call small department stores are often bulging with Western goods and employ a staff that is well-dressed and well-mannered. These shops are run by the typical *nouveau riche*. Many of my friends automatically cross to the other side of the street when they pass such shops, feeling it inappropriate to walk next to the ‚new‘ shops, as if the shops suggest a world to which they do not belong. As such, shopping is still a long way from being a leisure activity in Skopje with its burning pavement and dust hanging over the city; this world is almost surreal when seen through its haze. The shopping depicted on television is still a long way from the reality of Skopje. Miller (1997:39) describes shopping as a social occasion to look at other shoppers. In Skopje the shopping malls seem relatively deserted while the Green Markets are buzzing with life.

Shopping in Skopje is not a social occasion, but a direct encounter between the objects to be bought and the shopper who would like to identify herself with these objects, not so much to present herself to others, but to stress a specific aspect of herself. Shopping in Skopje is not so much a personal desire, but a political enactment of choice. If the shopper can access this specific choice to buy ‚Western‘ consumer goods such as Ray Ban Sunglasses, she is partaking in a life like that of her fellow shoppers in Germany or England. The fact that her choice does not fit into the economic environment of Macedonia makes her choice a political act. In Skopje friends rarely shop together, only the ‚expertise‘ of the ‚Western‘ and shopping-committed anthropologist is sought, otherwise shopping for ‚Western‘ consumer goods is a solitary enterprise. This is a contrast with shopping for food and necessities that is often done with one parent or siblings. Friends only accompany the shopper if a present has to be selected for another friend, which is most commonly given as a present from several people.

Spending money then cannot be seen as demonstration of financial means, sociability or sensual satisfaction as Miller suggests for Trinidad (1997), but has to be understood as a real and desired barrier between the shopper and ‚normal‘ life. Miller’s comments (1997:45) coincide with mine for Macedonia when he writes: „ It is through consumption that political values may be formulated in such a manner that populations are at least able to appropriate the images of the possible worlds they seek to create. Through this objectification they come to consider who they might be in relation to the gamut of political identities.” The reasons why Western consumer goods are imported and exported are secondary to the primary issue of the specific symbolic value of Western objects in Skopje. This value is not created either by the ‚European‘ media or by the Macedonian government fulfilling their political agenda, but the shopper in Skopje that actively chooses the symbolic value of the objects. This act of shopping is a solitary one, but the value ascribed to the objects that are shopped for by all my friends in today’s Skopje lies in the idea of living a ‚normal,‘ and therefore European, life.

As such class is formed through consumption in Macedonia, though obviously consumption, as it is carried out by individuals, is a very private affair. What happened in Macedonia prior to the arrival of the pretty people, *the nouveau riche*, and the emergence of the world of consumption? The answer is twofold. Firstly, the Yugoslav state fell apart and, what was once understood by my informants to be a unit, disintegrated into ‚so called‘ ethnic enclaves. If they could go back in time and alter history they would prevent the break up of Yugoslavia, however, as a friend put it, the time for dreams is over. Secondly,

Macedonia aligned itself with the material and ideological culture of the West, a process which began in the mid-1980's when Macedonia was part of Yugoslavia. 'The West' was understood by everyone as West Germany and America followed by the more intellectual choice of England and France which were only important to people who had traveled there. This world in the 1980's had been accessed specifically by the young traveling engineers. It was this experience that was carried forward in independent Macedonia. It was this experience that gave my informants the legitimization of knowing the West.

Relation to the process of production is altered

Then my informants entered a new phase in their lives, finished university and started employment in a time that coincided with the political changes from Yugoslavia to The Republic of Macedonia. In comparing the 'coming of age' of my informants to their parents' in their adolescence, one comes to the understanding that both groups see themselves as 'the elite.' Their parents had come to play an important part in Macedonia's society after 1945 through hard labor and the responsibility of transforming a peasant society towards an industrial nation. The graduates in their time, in the last years of Yugoslavia, saw themselves as the elite through their advanced knowledge and 'Western' attitudes, bridging the gap, in their eyes, between Northern Europe and the Balkans. As their parents changed their society through socialist ideology, my friends intended to change their society through qualifications. They saw their parents generation still bound to the Balkan principles through Yugoslav socialist ideology.

In the same way their parents wanted to better the lives of their parents whom they viewed as downtrodden and oppressed peasants who had to be brought into modern, industrial Yugoslavia. My friends wanted to change their society away from this notion of Balkan, the backward, non-European, *ne kulturni*. This is a typical generational conflict, where the younger generation wants to improve the world of the older generation and both generations had a specific ideology about employment. Whereas the parents' generation saw employment as labor and received power through access to employment that could change society through party membership, my group of graduates viewed employment as a career, in which one would advance oneself and thereby society by improving oneself through several jobs and gaining power in the process of it.

For both generations, post-war Yugoslavia and 'pre-mortem' Yugoslavia, the younger generation had been the generation of change. In postwar Yugoslavia, power to change had been received through ideology, while in 'pre-mortem' Yugoslavia through knowledge. In the parents' generation, security was granted by the state and the graduates expected their lives to be secure through knowledge.

Today this situation has drastically changed. Young people do not have the same influence on changing society as external politics is taken out of their hands. Today it is not socialist ideology or qualification that holds the key to success in Macedonia but connections, an element that was identified by all my informants as 'non-western,' as 'Balkan.' Today employment is seen as a 'job' that holds no power. The older generation is seen by my young informants to misuse knowledge and assistance from 'the West,' again pointing towards their definition of 'Balkan.' In this world the young generation see themselves as unable to change their society, as it is only through connections that

they can obtain the means and security that would enable them to change their society. But aside from ‚loss’, I will examine the many ways this specific group of young female engineering graduates are understanding and altering their lives and thereby ‚taking charge’ of it.

Class in post-socialist Macedonia

Now let me summarize all these strands and let me suggest that class in Skopje, in independent Macedonia during my research, originates from a specific discourse within Macedonia, a discourse that entailed the relationship between the West and Macedonia, between images of the West and the Balkan, between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians, between socialist and post-socialist, between outside and inside, between consumption and production.

This discourse altered the social landscape of socialist Macedonia by sharpening social distinctions through a before unknown up or down class mobility. The question that arises is how the former intellectual elite of Yugoslavia, engineers, has been able to represent themselves as superior despite economical limitations and, the second question is, to whom they define themselves superior to? My informants see themselves as superior to ethnic Albanians and superior to what they define as Balkan, which includes the *nouveau riche*. As such I argue that class is not necessarily defined as access to production means but access to cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977). My informants, despite the fact that they have hardly any access anymore to the production process, see themselves as fundamentally superior. As such class is not created as ‚structure’ but as something that is created through the formation of a new identity. My informants came to „feel and articulate the identity of their [material] interests as between themselves, and as against other men [and women] whose interests [were] different from theirs” (Thompson 1964: 9, cf. Gewertz and Errington 1999: 2). It is within this process of identity creation that class is created, since essentially we have to look how difference is created in Macedonia. Through the introduction of liberal market economy Macedonia has altered the access to the process of production, but furthermore is has introduced new boundaries that have been more predominant, that is who has access not only to a liberal market economy principle but to the whole package, that is to Western ideology. Even though a certain class in Macedonia has access to the process of production, the so-called *nouveau riche*, the *nouveau riche* is also connected to the Balkan principle. Just as the Albanians so the *nouveau riche* are seen by my informants as lesser then they are because of lesser ‚Western’ knowledge. This ‚Western’ knowledge is acquired through consumption patterns, as such class is not only defined through what is consumed but also, how it is consumed.

This Western knowledge has become crucial in Macedonia since Macedonia is dependent on Western intervention, economically and politically. Any luxury item, and more important, any item that is defined as luxury, is from the West. Any successful enterprise in Macedonia is financed by or run by ‚the West’, Western enterprises, or NGO’s. As such, ownership of the really crucial economy lies in Western hands, that is European or American organizations. Macedonia is completely dependent on the West with four unfriendly neighbors, being landlocked with no access to any crucial resource except being a vital land corridor for European interests.

Through privatization the Macedonia government, according to Nane Ruzin, tried to generate a private sector of employment, but substantial employment with any kind of security was still only to be found in government employment. This had an effect that people that had good positions in socialist Yugoslavia were able to retain these positions, and the only way to gain access to these people were through ‚connections‘. However, this was seen as a ‚Balkan‘ feature that was suppose to be challenged in the future through access to a specific Western cultural capital, gained through consumption of Western goods and knowledge. People that had access to this Western cultural capital became increasingly more differentiated from what they termed ‚Balkan‘, Albanians, socialism, a peasant past, their parents.

My informants, unacknowledged, tried to retain their elite status as engineers in Yugoslavia through manipulation of the meaning of access. Instead of following the classic Marxist definition of differentiation through the access to the means of production, access was redefined as access to Western consumption. As such my informants did not subvert their relationship to the process of production through their labor but through their consumption patterns and as such subverting a new class structure in Macedonia. As such this group of young urban intellectuals differentiated themselves more and more from what they rendered ‚Balkan‘, that is, anything that did not conform to their image of ‚Western‘.

Through their consumption patterns they created new forms of distinctions between ‚us‘ and ‚them‘, where ‚them‘ including the *nouveau riche* and the ethnic Albanians were seen as inferior. As such I am arguing that new forms of differentiation create new class-based inequalities in Macedonia that point to social change being constantly negotiated. This negotiation is based on the consumption of images and meanings, what is ‚West‘, what is ‚Balkan‘. What is termed ‚Balkan‘ is created as lower class, whereas what is ‚Western‘ is seen as upper class. Such a definition of class is, of course, based on exclusion, parents, Albanians and the *ne kulturni* (see Bringa 1995) *nouveau riche* are being excluded from the proper way of consuming Western goods. One can have access to those goods, but a proper context has to be created for the consumption, and it is this context in which class is experienced. Distinction is not created between workers and owners since in Macedonia, during my research, there was no such distinction in the classic sense. Factories were still not working and ownership was often in the hands of ‚Western enterprises or NGO’s, which in turn privileged some people that had access to a way of communicating to the West, through language ability (knowledge of English that was prevalent within the group of engineers, since all their university books were in English), through Western consumption patterns (which made the proper interpretation of Western consumption necessary) and through non-verbal communication of ‚Westernness‘ (which my informants achieved through body alterations; see Thiessen 1999) As such I argue that class in Macedonia during my research was defined in terms of a liberal market economy, but this liberal market economy was achieved not through the capacity to produce, but through the capacity to consume. Inequalities in Macedonia were created not through wealth or access to the means of production (many Albanians were guest workers in European countries and had access to considerable wealth, and many business joveks (Business men or *nouveau riche*) had access to the means of production), but through consumption patterns (the ‚know-how‘ of consumption – there was a reason why my informants watched Beverly Hills 90012 in Italian faithfully every day). As such,

class in Macedonia has to focus on life-style and status and not on access to the means of production.

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