

REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING IN A TRANSNATIONAL NETWORK  
CREATING MEMORY AND IDENTITY IN FORMER  
YUGOSLAVS IN SOUTH FLORIDA

By

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After the fall of Yugoslavia, those displaced by war have found themselves permanently relocated across the world. In the communities of South Florida, two migration waves, one from the early 90s after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and one from the 2010s coming on the promise of a “better life” after slow rebuilding in the successor states. Here, they interact with one another and their kinship networks abroad to deconstruct and recreate their ethno-national identities. Almost forgotten both in host and home countries, they experience more liberty to create what these identities mean to them, selecting from history and their own social and collective memories. In this liminal place, state and individuals are forming meaning and belonging that are often in contention with one another, yet exist in a delicate balance. The process of identity (de)construction thus negotiates new relations within the diaspora community, creates belonging and meaning in one's life and makes us reconsider the importance of identity in cultural research.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### **The Scope of the Project**

This dissertation explores the use of ethnonational identity in the self-formation of individuals from two modern migration waves from Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav successor states in Palm Beach County. Despite much recent anthropological debates (Williams and McIntyre 2001; Bauman 2001) that ethnonational identity might be losing importance in the post modern deterritorialized world, freeing people to creatively invest in new post-national identities (i.e. professional, cosmopolitan, gender or age-based etc.), I have found that ethnic identification is persisting and, at least in my group, strengthening and empowering the individuals in realizing their new place as a diaspora in the US of home states undergoing radical transformation. So why and how does ethnonational identity persist in our globalizing deterritorialized lives? How does ethnonational identification that is seemingly so bound to land, work within our ever more mobile lives?

The answer is that it is the very fact of deterritorialization, the weakening of ties between culture and place, that makes individuals gravitate towards these identities (Tsuda 2001; 413; White and Wyn 2004; Giddens 1994; Appadurai 2005). Now we have a progressive sense of place (Massey 1993) making geographical locations not necessary in identity formation. Deterritorialization and the effects of denationalization, the process in which most of the global gets constituted partly inside the national, (Sassen 2003; 2009) have in fact left many, not just in my group, but throughout the world, confused and insecure over their sense of self in the modern world (Sassen 2009; Somers 1994; Bauman 2001; Tsuda 2001; Massey 193).

The emptiness felt in oneself from the collapse of official symbolism and the radical reorganization of politics and economies in the former Yugoslav republics is fast filled with desires of belonging which are accomplished by my group via ethnonational identities (Sassen 2011; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Verdery 1998; Kalb 2001). After all, the structures of these identities are already in place so it creates an instant gratification of belonging once one engages the world with the language of these identities while also giving freedom to decide just what these identities mean for the individuals. Now that they are abroad, they can claim these identities without necessarily prescribing to all the rules now that they are outside of the jurisdiction of their homeland (Guibernau 2004; May 2013; Beck 2003; Brubaker 2010,66). Using their lived experiences and collective memories, all informed by the cultural trauma of the collapse of Yugoslavia and from the transition to America, they are rediscovering the purpose and meaning of their ethnonational identities to fit their new needs in the speedily transforming and dynamic post-Cold War world.

### **The Makeup of the Research Group**

I have pursued my ethnographic work among a group of former Yugoslav immigrants who are currently living in Palm Beach County of Florida. They came to the US in two waves, one as refugees, directly after and during the wars in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s; and another, more recent one, as work migration that began in 2010s and is ongoing. I have interviewed altogether 77 individuals. Roughly 35 (45%) came from Bosnia, 30 (39%) Macedonia, 8 (11%) Serbia, and 2 (3%) Croatia and 1(2%) Kosov.

Though the main difference between the two waves of immigrants is a generational one, I uncovered further divisions largely based on how people arrived in America and their goals as immigrants. For ease of discussion, the first migration wave I have labeled as the Diaspora and the second as the Transnational, through which I simply invoke the more permanent residence status of the first group and the extended mobility patterns and transnational activities of the second. In my sample, the Diaspora makes up roughly the half of the group I studied, and consists of previous refugees from the Yugoslav Wars. They are part of the global displacement of people and refugees from the former Yugoslavia from 1991-2007 when between 3.7-4 million people fled Yugoslavia. Statistics suggest that approximately 600,000-800,000 emigrated throughout Europe while 10,000-15,000 were replaced to the United States and Australia (Migration Policy Institute 2007; Robinson 2012; UNHCR 2007). After the Dayton Accord was signed in 1995, and the war was officially over, displaced people were free to return home. Post-war conditions on the ground, however, were not conducive to easy return. Consider in particular the situation in Bosnia. Intentional destruction of homes, power grids, phone lines and other infrastructure damage done by opposing forces, as well as occupied homes and ethnic discrimination, kept many refugees from returning. Three years after the Dayton, only 450,000 had returned and as of 2009, 117,000 registered Internationally Displaced Persons (IDP) remained abroad. The 117,000 does not include those who no longer, or never did, register as IDPs or have since been able to build lives for themselves abroad where this identifier no longer applies (UN New Center 2009; UNHCR 1998).

Palm Beach County was never a hub for former Yugoslav refugees, but rather a secondary move that was made after attaining some success in America. Many in the Diaspora left their original resettlements, as I was told, for the reason to separate themselves from other Yugoslav immigrants. Yet, paradoxically, once separated, they found themselves again reaching towards the populations from former Yugoslavia in Palm Beach County. For the Diaspora, the move to America was thought to be temporary, yet the majority of refugees have rebuilt their lives in the US and more and more no clear way out and back to their former homes is seen. Feeling a need to recapture self-respect, and to make themselves useful one way or the other to the war-torn communities back home, they invest in keeping memories of home alive. What shapes their immigrant identities are memories largely from lived experience in Yugoslavia, before the war, these memories are also fed by occasional visits and sometimes remittances sent back home, if there are still loved ones there left.

The second wave of migrants from the former Yugoslavia region, the Transnationals, is a labor-based migration, which begun largely as those in the Diaspora invited more compatriots to work in the businesses they opened in the US, taking advantage of cheap migrant labor and proving their own worth to those back home. The Transnationals, being as a rule much younger, often have limited to no memory of life before the war and find the successor states, while the source of their newly-shaping national identity, still lacking. They reach to the “glorious past” to cement their identity in ancient heroes and tales of bravery and adventure, transmitted in family traditions, as they charge to exciting new futures. Where the Diaspora shares a sense of responsibility to loved ones back home, the Transnationals are more intent on

creating a new life for themselves in America and despite having intentions to remit, often find the break from their culture, and especially the more oppressive aspects of family life and responsibilities liberating. It is on this basis they start carving out more individualistic interpretations of the cultural repertoires with which they were raised, searching for new meanings and self-actualization while abroad.

When the two groups interact together they find a common community sharing mutually-agreeable interpretations of their common history and stories of the complications of migrant life, food, family and friendship. Because of this and the hardships in America, many unlikely friendships form in what one participant labeled the “Opa Effect”, named after a chain restaurant, Taverna Opa, where many of those Balkan immigrants I first met in my research worked alongside each other, and often became friends despite their groups officially not getting along or even having personal prejudices. The Opa Effect, connotes the possibilities of rebuilding solidarities across groups spurred on by the trials and tribulations of immigrant life in Palm Beach County.

### **Methods and Places of Research**

It was in one of these Taverna Opas, ran by Lirim, a Macedonian who owned several restaurants in the area, that I worked as a bellydancer and discovered the connections between the Diaspora and younger wave of Transnationals. Consequently, I decided to turn my employment into an entry-gate for my research and I had a unique opportunity to work along with my interlocutors, observing a side of their immigrant experiences that is not necessarily very transparent in how they want to discuss themselves to the world. I worked almost every night alongside the employees at Opa

as well as dancing at weddings and New Year's Eve parties, allowing me to build rapport and participant observe way beyond simply living in the surrounding area. Though there were a few other Diaspora ran businesses in the area such as Fontana, the Italian/Bosnian restaurant owned by Adnan, and Lutina's, another Italian restaurant owned by Semir, it was Lirim, who was largely responsible for the channel of work migrants coming to the area from the former Yugoslavia region. Lirim was originally from Gostivar, Macedonia and had a constant stream of work visa (Transnationals) coming through his restaurants to experience America. He would put them in crowded apartments together and while here they would find ways, usually through student and marriage visas to remain beyond their initial employment.

Research for this project took place over the course of eighteen months, from March 2013-September 2014; but I have been involved in the community since 2006. I was first introduced to this group via a rental opportunity, when between undergraduate and graduate school I was renting a room from a Bosnian woman, who was also finishing up her undergraduate studies. In the townhouse, becoming friends, we slowly started to welcome more people, other friends moving from Jacksonville or other refugee hubs, a cousin whose mother died unexpectedly in Bosnia and so on. It was here that I came to know quite intimately this budding new community and to appreciate the incredible resilience and comradery, on which they built their relations to each other and to their home countries.

Already enmeshed in the group, participant observation – this backbone of anthropological engagement – became almost a daily practice at work and afterwards socializing. On a snowball principle, I sampled my group for observation and

conversation, seeking equal representation between men and women, as well as Diaspora and Transnationals. I started with open-ended discussions and interviews to allow my interlocutors to shape more openly the agenda of my further work. I then followed up with more structured and semi-structured interviews, which I audio recorded, and collected from all participants a questionnaire with basic demographic details. Samples of questionnaires and interviews can be seen in the Appendix.

All interviews were executed in English, with the exception when interviewees felt challenged or compelled to express phrases or sentences in their native tongue. In the structured interviews, I used the tape recorder to double check my translations but semi structured interviews and participant observations were a mixture of my understanding and then double checking with someone else to explain what was happening or what was said if I thought it was important for the project. I have also studied BHS (Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian) as a FLAS Fellow for three years, prior to going in the field, which gave me certain leverage in understanding, even if I feel my level of comprehension is still at the intermediate level. Besides a few phrases in Albanian, I was dependent on my interlocutors to elaborate on discussions around me when languages switched. Since everyone involved in the project had either already been established in America for about 10 years or more or less had come with the expressed interest to work, English was no issue for interaction.

### **Sites of Research**

This project was predominantly researched in Palm Beach County and following the transnational experiences of my interlocutors also in Gostivar in Macedonia.

## **Palm Beach County**

The county is large and diverse, making it a great place for transnational people to live and not stick out. The population also ebbs and flows with "snowbirds", the retired from the north of the country and Canada, who move down to Florida for the winter months, making the county, which is already the third most populated county in Florida, become even more crowded. The international and often moving population gives Palm Beach County a resonance for Europeans to live.

Milica: We had chosen Wellington [a city in Palm Beach County] I was visiting US before [the] war and loved Florida better. I loved the weather and so many different cultures living here, that was what attracted us to come here. We didn't feel like foreigners cause so many people here are not from here. We were a little embarrassed to use our language publicly but then we heard so many different languages and we realized, we are just like everyone else!

According to the last census of 2010, 26.87% of the population speak languages other than English, and 23% of the county residents are foreign born, making it a top 10 counties in America for immigrants. Palm Beach County is aware of its diversity, offering many different ethnic restaurants and street festivals throughout the year. Indian, Greek, Italian, Caribbean and Haitian are the largest which occur several times throughout the year but there is also an Asian Fair and Trade Show, representing all countries from Turkey, India, China and so on. There are also smaller festivals held almost exclusively for those from the specific countries such as Turks, Russians, Polish and many other groups. There are several foreign holidays such as Guy Fawkes Day, Bastille Day and others celebrated by the expat populations as well.

## **Macedonia: Gostivar, Skopje**

While interviewing in Opa, I noticed that almost every worker from Macedonia would place Gostivar as their hometown on their survey. With a little investigation, I

came to find that this was Lirim's hometown, which explained why he would bring people from there to work to begin with. At the start of the project, Lirim, his wife and three children lived in Palm Beach County. Business was very good for Lirim and at his height he had, nine restaurants opened throughout Palm Beach County that were manned largely by Macedonian and Albanian workers that he brought.

Things did not last, however, restaurants started closing and his personal domestic disputes poured into Opa frequently. He was openly having an affair with one of the few American managers, to the point of having photos of her and him in the office, and his wife had had enough. She packed up the family and moved back to Gostivar where she and the children remain still. Whether the move was because of the affair or something that was planned outside of it, I do not know since I have been given many conflicting versions of that period of time. From his children's side, it was a move to help them learn their culture and their mother came to be with her family; from his perspective, however, it was a power play on her part.

But regardless, because of his family living in Gostivar, he started to visit several times a year, even sending American managers to Gostivar to help start up pizza restaurants and bring back new employees. Because of Lirim, the line between Palm Beach County, Florida and Gostivar, FYR Macedonia, was a direct one, creating a new pathway for individuals to travel between and interact with former Yugoslavians already here. His direct network was something unique to Palm Beach County, making it an interesting of field sites.

Gostivar is a city nestled in the foothills of the Sar Mountains in Northeast Macedonia close to the borders of Albania and Kosovo. There have been inhabitants

in this region since 170 BCE when the city was known as Draudak. In the 19th and 20th centuries it was part of the Kosovo Vilayet of the Ottoman Empire and in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, it was part of the Vardar Banovina. It has always been a merchant city and place where trade commenced for all the surrounding villages. According to the 2002 census, there are 81,042 residents though 20,000 of them are expatriates who send remittances back to the city and are the major engine for the city's economy. Numbers of emigrants are more significant now, I was told, though there has been no successive census run since 2002. The city, however, is majority Albanian (47%), followed by Macedonians (33%) and other ethnic communities among which Turks (12%) and Roma (5%) are the largest. Though these are the official numbers, anyone in Gostivar will tell you the city is way over half Albanian today.

In the mountains surrounding Gostivar used to be prolific sheep herders who would produce and sell sheep milk, cheese and meat. You will still see herds of sheep throughout the surrounding villages and still the first activity a guest will do upon entering a house is try the house made sheep cheese and perhaps a glass of sugar water, but the shepherding is dying out in modern times. Because of the drop in sheep herding and the lack of proactive veterinary medicine, there are hundreds of large stray sheep dogs that roam the streets, especially at night. During my time there, the mayor stated he would reward citizens with 100 Euros for each dead dog brought to him which started a hunting season on these dogs. I was told they were quite vicious and dangerous since they were meant to fend off bears and boars though the dogs I encountered still seemed domesticated, just scared and hungry,

Gostivar is a city in the flux of change. Albanians are rising in numbers and political prominence and are pushing for equal rights and representation of the Albanian language and culture. Just a few years before I arrived, the then Albanian mayor was beaten and thrown in jail for hanging an Albanian flag, but when I was there, Albanian flags hung throughout the city. Macedonians fear the takeover of the city is for the purpose of Greater Albania but are at a loss of what to do. A quarter of all citizens are ex patriots who return in the summer from abroad with money to burn and drive around the small city in luxury cars and treat the city like a vacation spot. I am told that most of the ex patriot citizens are Albanian. "When Macedonians leave here, they don't look back," as Tommy put it.

Over the summer, when I visited too, the city fills with these expats, some looking for spouses, some just for an annual dose of home culture before returning abroad. Not all are rich, though they can pretend when in Gostivar since the currency is so low. Migrant Albanian workers return during the summer for shorter stays and live a pretend life of luxury back home before returning to their menial jobs in Europe.

The ironic thing about the summer in Gostivar is that it becomes anything but Gostivar. Never is the city so busy and cosmopolitan as during the summer with all the ex-patriots returning home, some bringing friends or spouses that are not local. Though they are coming home for a dose of "culture", they are really providing the city with a spell of the outside, leaving the city and the people reenergized. Remnants of these changes are seen in the names of clubs and cafes with Italian and English names: Baby Blue, Black and White, Obama, Havana or outright imitation American companies. Even the hotel where I stayed was named Hilton, though not part of the chain. There was also

a club called Hard Rock, complete with an imitation of the sign, but not much else. Through the looking glass we go with ex-patriots longing for a connection to "home" while home longs for a connection to the world, and it is in Gostivar that both meet and jumble together.

### **Opa Effect**

Throughout this project I have addressed several key themes and narratives which seem to be more central to the formation of post-war diasporic identities of the former Yugoslav communities that I explore here and I have devoted a separate chapter to each of them. I begin with the "Opa Effect," (Chapter 4) to which I have alluded earlier already, named after the chain restaurant, Taverna Opa. The Opa Effect expresses the raise of cross-ethnic solidarities and the formation of seemingly unlikely interethnic friendships, even amongst those who harbored former prejudices, based on memories of the recent Yugoslav conflicts and wars. The setting of these social interactions is the service industry in the US, and especially the one geared towards tourism, which is extremely stressful, particularly in the peak season of Palm Beach County when the whole of South Florida is transformed by thousands of European and Canadian tourists and seasonal "snow bird" retirees. Friendship forming under arduous work schedules and forced separation from more familiar environments at home has been documented in anthropological literature sporadically, arguing that high stress environments, isolations and improved personal economies combined are indeed conducive to the emergence of new solidarities (Reed 2003; Brain 1972; O'Loughlin 2010).

Though the high stress environment was what my one participant said was the reason bringing together members of ethnic communities, once in war elsewhere, there was also another dimension to the Opa Effect. American and post-Yugoslav friendships

differed significantly in intensity and quality for my group, as I came to learn. Often confessed to me was “the loneliness in America” arising largely from what my community referred to as the “epidemic of fake friends”. Friendship, according to my group, requires long visits nearly daily and often without invitation, just sort of happening upon each other or neighbors visiting. But with the overcrowded apartments that my interlocutors occupied, the varying work schedules they were subjected to and living with neighbors who remained strangers, friendships just did not happen in the same way in America as “back home”. Furthermore, the depth of loyalty and love experienced in friendships back home simply were not replicated in the fast-paced, technology-filled America. With the vast difference in the importance of loyalty and face to face contact for friendship formation and preservation, those in my group gravitate towards each other over Americans despite themselves. These concerns weighting the benefits and differences between American and “Yugoslavian” friendships are expressed in anecdotes of the extreme loyalty of Yugoslav friends and in the dangers of becoming “American” by choosing work over relationships.

Such predicaments were shared by all members of the former Yugoslav community across ethnic groups. With face to face socializing being the cornerstone of the type of sociality they aspired to, old routines were modified to accommodate new settings. Sitting in front of Diaspora ran businesses that would not send them out for overstaying like American-ran ones would came to provide the needed common space for mitting points. This routine allowed my community something of their old life as well as friendships to form across ethnic lines in ways that were directly opposite to what I

observed occurring across the ocean in Gostivar, the home town of the majority of those I worked with in Palm Beach.

I further explore the conditions and context of this type of socialization in Chapter 5, where I move to Gostivar, the town where many of the Transnationals are coming from. Here we see just how divided and ethnically tense the Transnationals home is. In Gostivar, the tension between Macedonian and Macedonian born ethnic Albanian population, something which occurs throughout Macedonia, is heightened due to its reversed population ratios, Albanians being the dominant group here; poverty and isolation from the capital. The city thrives from remittances sent back from transnational workers and has become in this a classic migrant culture, maintained by the Albanians, but not the Macedonians, further strengthening Albanian influence in the town. Albanians keep the flow of remittances going by insisting marrying age children return to the city to find spouses from the “old” home every summer.

Despite feelings of tension and unease, ethnic Albanians have come to occupy territory in Macedonia since Tito created the state lines shaping modern Macedonia, many families predating the Socialist Republic of Macedonia Tito created. After the break up of Yugoslavia, the Macedonian government of the nationalized state rescinded important rights of the Albanian population, including ease of citizenship and right to language which led to the Albanian Insurgency in 2001. The Insurgency concluded with the Ohrid Agreement giving ethnic Albanians some, but not all, of their previous rights but at the same time leaving a drastic rift between the two groups.

The tension between the two groups is felt as an omnipresent weight, but there have not been any major outbreaks of violence recently. I argue that both communities

compete to gain political dominance of the region, by using their “insider connections” to government and other major institutions. One way of prevailing politically, which Albanians in Gostivar have used, is by engaging in electoral manipulations “from the side,” as Vasiliky Neofotistos qualifies them, like flying in expats to vote. The Albanians’ growing power in local government creates some fears and tension within the Macedonian community, because after all, it is expected that Albanians will “only hire other Albanians”, just as Macedonians have once done earlier, so who will be “their inside person to fight for them” now?

In Chapter 6 I explore more closely the cultural norms, which keep the two communities calm but disconnected. The strictly separated spheres of life that the two groups maintain, living side by side, never mixing, and yet remaining peaceful, are sustained via strict marriage and dating taboos placed on the Albanian youth, which Macedonians in turn respect, albeit for different reasons. For Macedonians, there remains a stigma of interacting with Albanians, who are seen as being without *kultura*, or uncultivated. For Albanians, dating is all but forbidden, even amongst each other, with idealized virginity until marriage for the women, and strict endogamy for all, making any socialization between Macedonians and Albanians suspect. On such taboos the Albanian young women experience the brunt of the criticism.

Many, though by no means all, of the younger generation approaching or in marrying age are rebelling. This was especially true for those whom I met in the US, and who experienced the full force of the “Opa Effect”. The young women I met in particular, related to me that if they were leaving to work in America, they all but swear off men from their own culture. They saw their experiences abroad as an opportunity to

break free from norms imposed from back home, and spoke expressively of not wanting to repeat their mother's lives. The men also rebel, insisting on choosing wives they pick themselves rather than selecting one of several women, presented to them by their parents over a summer stay in Macedonia. Once in America earning money, the young people hold a new power that allows them to make their own decisions, but it is not without repercussions. The shame placed on them by their family is a strong repellent. Thus, I argue, although relationships in the hostland have room for flexibility, still almost no one in the period of my study took the step towards interethnic marriage. The reason for this is the need, at least for men, to renew their masculinities back home and reaffirm their masculine identities by complying with the cultural norms back home. While abroad they are just workers, home they are heroes and can enjoy the feeling of being the sacrificing and strong patriarch, a trope beloved from the communist era when men traveled for work to support the family. While both women and men enjoyed their freedom for relationships and friendships abroad, I contend, men feel more acutely an attack on their masculinity, being demeaned to occupy in the US just the status of a migrant worker at a low level job. That, combined with familial urging, creates a need to reaffirm their masculinity and sense of worth via “magnified moments” of attention and respect back home: respect, which they can receive when participating in culturally valorized behavior (Smith 2005, Thai 2011). Participating in these magnified moments, defined as moments of extreme importance to one’s identity, provides a sense of empowerment and Albanian transnationals’ renewed importance for their families and community at home suddenly transforms the demeaning work abroad into a sign of men’s strength (Smith 2005).

Chapter 7 brings us back to Palm Beach County, where conflict between those abroad and those in the homeland are seen more clearly. I argue that the homeland's main power over those abroad is to bestow "true culture", whenever behaviors are unpleasing, and there is a claim that those abroad are losing their "culture". Threats of social death (Kankonde 2010) is the strength of the home, but is this death losing importance with the lack of benefits for those abroad being "remembered"? Many in my group have been already cut off from their homeland, having all their family in the US or dead. The new wave of immigrants to the US holds new views on relationships and importance of back home. They are less certain of the worth of being "remembered", sending remittances and participating in transnational marriages just to be bestowed their ethnic identity, which they can claim abroad without the approval of families back home. I contend that this is the terrain of crossroads, on which new relationships with home occur. Yet, despite the anger and resentment felt for families' exacting rules back home, when tragedy hits, transnationals respond without a doubt. The help that poured in 2014 to repair areas affected by unprecedented floods, is an evidence of the united force of the post-Yugoslav diaspora.

Just as the individuals in my group feel compelled to reach into their lived and ancient pasts to recreate meaning and find a more stable ethnic model of identity against the stresses of a confusing present, the successor states of former Yugoslavia are experiencing similar pressures of redefining national pride. In Chapter 8, I explore the various levels of recreation of identity, pursued in the public body (monuments building) as well as the body individual (tattoo creation) as the state and individuals express their often exclusive and personal views of history that best fits their

interpretations of identity. A large construction site in downtown Skopje – Macedonia's project Skopje 2014 – has been a source of tremendous tension for the young state, a project that has been controversial not only for its subject matter – emphasizing constructed Macedonian heritage – and apparent silencing of large aspects of Macedonian history, but also for its cost, estimated beyond any reasonable amount for this economically-starving post-war country. But this is not the first time Skopje has been subject to a top-down recreation of its downtown. After the 1963 earthquake that left Skopje devastated, the city was rebuilt in the style of then prevalent views on aesthetics influenced by Soviet models. The intentional revision of the landscape of Skopje's downtown, now twice in history, reveals the continuous importance of national symbolism to the state and state-building processes (Kubiena 2012; Yomadic 2015; Halbwachs 1992). The aesthetic language of the post-Yugoslav ruling elite bespeaks a renewed national pride and Macedonia's aspirations of joining the European Union as a country with unique identity.

Chapter 9 shows just how deep memory of recent and ancient history goes in the formation of identities for my group. Here we explore the story of Sulltana, the folk hero of Macedonian Albanians, and how her story directly ties to a family in my group. Her story is integrated into the family history, bestowing importance and roots. Further use of history is seen in every day conversations and humor with those in my group as they joke about the darker aspects of modern history; deadly nationalist groups, communism and more, using humor to remove the power these memories have in dividing the modern people and uniting them in the shared knowledge and cultural intimacy of their pasts (Halbwachs 1994).

The aftereffects of war and the transition from socialism to capitalism have profoundly affected the community with which I worked. In Chapter 10, I explore the captivating ways in which post-Yugoslav communities use traditional and folk symbolism to explain tragedy, informed by concepts of the evil eye and the power jealousy that have changed their lives. The evil eye is a belief based on the idea that by praising or looking upon someone admiringly one can cause harm either provoking known or unknown jealousy in the viewer, or stirring evil spirits to do harm to them (Dundes and Forbes-Cross 2002; Herzfeld 1987). The evil eye and the various charms and beliefs to deter it, were widely used in the community I observed, with several methods preferred: from nazar charms, blue glass beads with eyes painted on them; to washing with salt or wearing an especially large accessory. Following on Michael Herzfeld's (1987;28) analysis of the metaphor of the original sin that leads to the fall away from grace, which he observed in secular readings amongst the Greeks, I interpret the belief in the power of jealousy among the post-Yugoslav communities to connote a way of dealing with tragedies, public and personal. The evil eye appears to have risen to a dominant trope among diverse ex-Yugoslav communities, explaining everything from losing one's job, to the closing of a restaurant, failures of friendship or even the collapse of Yugoslavia. Jealousy caused a fall. Overwhelmingly it was jealousy of other nations looking upon Yugoslavia that was cited as the reason for the dissolution of the federation, a notion that trumped even blaming one ethnic group or the other. Lesser tragedies in life took on a similar tone. When Opa suddenly and quickly shut down, for the very real reasons of not paying rent or franchise fees, jealousy was again

cited as the cause, blaming jealousy of other businesses in City Place or jealousy of the new owner of the outdoor mall as reasons for the closure.

## CHAPTER 2 THEORETICAL REVIEW

Coming into this project I had an interest in two theoretical veins that I felt would be helpful for understanding my community. The roots of my project are in several works within Diaspora and Transnationalism theory and Cultural Intimacy (Herzfeld 1997). Both concepts interweave in the mapping of my group to display their complex reimagining of identity through memory and history with each other and transnationally. Furthermore, each chapter has additional theory that applies to specific situations within that chapter.

### **Diaspora and Transnationalism**

In the deterritorialized global age, travel and communication are possible in quicker and more efficient ways than ever before. Changes in travel and communication styles allow for incredible shifts in how humans interact with one another. Individuals now have options to move across the world to follow opportunity while still maintaining connections to the homeland and kin groups they leave behind. With these connections intact, it is possible to exist in many ways simultaneously, between one's homeland and host land, interacting with people in one's social networks abroad and locally, almost seamlessly. Maintenance of these connections allows for financial remittances, marriage arrangements, voting in local elections, and many other everyday socialities to stay intact while still being active in communities in one's local environment. It is in this system my group finds themselves, and in this situation, they find their debates and dilemmas of identity and belonging.

For my research, I found that both transnationalism and diaspora theory applied to my group due to the two waves of migration that have occurred. Diaspora for this

project has been defined as the following: "people with a common origin who reside, more or less on a permanent basis, outside the borders of their ethnic or religious homeland, whether homeland is real or symbolic, independent or under foreign control. Diaspora members identify themselves or are identified by others, inside and outside their homeland, as part of the homeland's national community, and as such are often called upon to participate, or are entangled in homeland related affairs" (Shain 2007, 249).

I view those who arrived under refugee status as a diaspora because they were forced to flee their homeland (Yugoslavia), which is now destroyed, and replaced with ethnic states. Yes, many of the buildings, people and land are still there and accessible, and there are no restraints to travel there, yet many feel that the place is no longer "home." The new countries that have replaced Yugoslavia do represent a homeland that they ideally want to return to, but at the same time they feel it is impossible. Between the lived and remembered histories of violence, destroyed economy; which they partially blame the current residents for, and assimilation to American culture, returning is just a dream that will likely be unable to occur. They also match the 5 characteristics of diasporas outlined by Butler (2001) and Safran (1991) of being dispersed to two or more locations, having a collective mythology of homeland, alienation from homeland, ongoing relationship with homeland and idealization of return (Butler 2001, 191).

Bruno: My country is not there anymore. I love my country. My country is Yugoslavia only! I love my language, I love my freedom and I will never have my freedom back there. Yugoslavia is gone. What replaced it takes freedom away.

Transnationals have been defined as those who maintain "heightened connection with their countries of origins making home and host society a single arena

for social action by moving back and forth across international borders and between different cultures and social systems, and by exploiting transnational relations as a form of social capital for their living strategies” (Brettell 2000 as defined by Dahinden 2005, 192). While the Transnational section of my group are as part of the larger former Yugoslav diaspora, their unique experience with Lirim and Palm Beach County gives them a distinctness for this project. Though I am making the distinction between the two migrations, there are scholars who will argue that the whole group is a diaspora (Clifford 1994; Sheffer 2003; Hall 1990) as well as another group who would say diaspora does not apply to Yugoslavs (Connor 1986; Safran 1991; King and Melvin 1998; Armstrong 1976). Much of the issues and confusion within diaspora research and definitions is that the term “diaspora” has been expanded to include almost all dispersions, not allowing for the diversity within dispersions to be adequately explored (Toloyson 2007).

The Diaspora in my group feel an ambivalence towards the Yugoslav successor states, finding their home only in memory while the Transnationals in my group often fail to see the issues with the state they were born into. Though Toloyson argues that those who fled will have more commemorative and public displays of mourning while those who left for economic reasons will have nostalgia but not commemorative mourning, I found it was more complicated than just a difference in the public displays of memory, rather it is from what sections of history were preferred in creating an identity. The younger Transnational group reaching towards an ancient past and the older Diaspora remembering, perhaps in an idealized way, their life in Yugoslavia (Toloyson 2007).

Gendered and familial expectations also play a role in my project. Women will

experience diaspora in vastly different ways than men, diasporas are always gendered (Clifford 1994). Trapped between patriarchies, women often have their gender roles and identity explicitly linked to cultural identity whereas men's roles are not as linked, though not entirely removed either. In general terms, a woman's responsibility to her nation is often categorized with giving birth to and raising the next generation, but in a diaspora her role may not be as clear. In more traditional patriarchal gender roles, a woman's identity is solidified only after marriage, and in an environment where she can "marry out" of her group, she has different opportunities and possible judgments (Clifford 1997; Bryceson 2002; Anthias 1998; Al-Ali 2007).

Decisions she may make for her own individual life and happiness maybe be interpreted as directly linked to a betrayal and backing away from her cultural identity. This is the conflict being felt by the women in my group. Many feel they "have to" marry within their culture, yet dread the eventual giving up of freedom and becoming a wife and mother to a man they fear will mistreat them through the openings he has in their cultural norms. This is especially true for the young ethnic Albanian sisters I spoke to who grew up in America but now live in Gostivar. They are hyper aware of the difference in culture and their new roles (Clifford 1997; Bryceson 2002; Anthias 1998; Al-Ali 2007).

Men are not free from gendered limitations either. They too have cultural expectations linked to their gender, being expected to maintain traditional family values, in culture spouse selection and so on. When exploring gender, the focus can be, and to some extent should be, on women who have been historically neglected in social research, but at the same time, men and their gender role's unique reactions to diaspora need to be explored as well. Just as a woman is questioned if she marries out

or takes on less than traditional roles, such as being a principal earner in her household, her counterpart will be questioned in his cultural and masculine abilities if he extends away from his expected roles as well. Though many men in my group find themselves in the marriage their family approves of, there is a growing group who also want to escape the expectations of endogamy after seeing other variations in romance and lifestyle once abroad. Both men and women in my group experience a tension while assimilation involves compromises in cultural gendered expectations (Anthias 1998; Bryceson 2002; Al-Ali 2007).

Tali: Like literally every day I get a call from my mom like, "Why aren't you married yet? Come back home and we will find you a nice girl. You need to create some grandchildren for me!... Well I think about how it would affect my family [marrying outside of the culture] but ultimately it comes down to how I feel so it's not gonna be the family judgment. I respect my culture a lot. Without culture, what are you? But I draw line on culture picking a wife.

Once in America, the mindsets of those in my group of themselves, home, family, and America all shift to accommodate their new roles. The tangled web of social structures and responsibilities my group finds themselves in makes decisions both personal and political, convoluted, complicated and at times unexpected. The changes in their beliefs and responsibilities return back to their homelands, as their influence, now perhaps stronger due to perceived success and financial contributions, affects daily life and interaction with back home. Often, there is internalization of the judgments of their home country, and its people strengthen the power of the elite States. All of this means really that macro issues with the States find themselves in direct interaction with micro spheres of individuals making the State's influence pervading and hard to map (Schiller 2005,455).

Interaction among the dispersions, politics in America and back home, and host land populations is intricate and often confusing. Individuals that make up my group often create their own narratives to justify their own lives and choices, regardless of metanarratives from history. In a time when history is being manipulated by governments and constantly being questioned it is possible to bend metanarratives to fit almost any belief system. The official interpretation of history itself is also in constant flux as governments of former Yugoslavian states have actively manipulated how and what to use in their official histories (Huttunen 2005; Daiute 2010).

The personal narrative is an important aspect of my project, especially in how these narratives diverge from the “official histories.” Further analysis of personal narrative is seen in Laura Huttunen's work, which focuses most of her work on the concept of home and how it exists as a mental and physical place for Bosnian refugees. Here she details accounts of two Bosnians living in Finland. Through their autobiographies she reveals how memories of home do not coincide with ideas of ancient ethnic hatreds or the language of ethnic violence, largely because these were narratives placed onto Yugoslav history during and post war. Like my group, she attributes the discrepancies to not only the idiosyncrasies that the West often loses sight of in the Balkans, but also to how the narrative of ethnicity and home has changed to fit these individual's needs currently (Huttunen 2005).

While Huttunen focused on those who were already young adults during the war, Daiute (2010) focuses on those who were babies or toddlers during the Yugoslav Wars. Using the concept that adolescence is the most sensitive time in the formation of personal narratives, she explores how the environment of ethnic war affected these

individuals personal and ethnic identities. She presents 250 narratives from 108 adolescents, which show not only a picture of life after war, but also how war is internalized into these individuals' identities. Throughout these narratives, personal identity, values and eventual life changing decisions are made (Daiute 2010). It is also through narrative, memory and history that those in my group can create a cultural intimacy. The difference in what role Yugoslavia and its successor states play in identity formation and memory in her study is mirrored in this project as well.

### **Cultural Intimacy**

Cultural intimacy is a hard concept to simply define. Even Herzfeld's own definition: "the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality" leaves the reader wanting (Herzfeld 2005,3). Cultural intimacy reveals how the State presents itself to the world and how cultural identity is internalized within the State and its citizens. Likewise, citizens influence the state with their own definitions of cultural identity. The paradoxes and seeming discrepancies between state and citizens reveals the mutual reproduction of identity across the culture. It is a concept so rich that a simple definition does not quite portray the meaning. In my research, cultural intimacy is realized in several ways but most prominently in the definition of "self" by the Macedonian Albanian work transnationals.

"We are nothing but *zezaks*," was a phrase repeated to me over and over again. *Zezak* is the Albanian ethnic slur for those of African descent. Recently, however, the term is now used to describe the typical Albanian working migrant within the transnational community: working several, often menial jobs, sending the money back home and living in a small apartment with maybe several other work migrants all to

support the family through self-sacrifice. It is a self-deprecating term for a position considered an honorable sacrifice within home networks. Its definition can expand to all sorts of descriptions of freshly immigrated Albanians including dress, social and eating habits that cause them to stick out as not American. The term overlaps with the definition for *Siptar* that Neofotistos found Macedonians using ambivalently against Albanians.

Macedonians use the term *Siptar* to describe Albanians who are considered “without *kultura*” and described as “backwards, dirty, inferior stupid” etc., whose families are governed by dominant, aggressive males who force women into subservience and bearing multitudes of children (Neofotistos 2010,11). *Zezak* takes both the extreme good and bad perceptions of Albanian cultural identity and simultaneously mocks and honors the culture. One will affectionately mock someone as a *zezak* for working too much or for going to great lengths to save money or some other embarrassing action considered “typical Albanian.” *Zezak* at once encompasses the embarrassment and pride of Albanian identity displaying the cultural intimacy within the transnationals.

The concept of cultural intimacy is in itself still in flux, changing as Herzfeld has redefined it based on past criticisms and his own fieldwork and as other researchers apply to different concepts. Since 1997, Herzfeld has made efforts to treat cultural intimacy as a historic process over a static concept. After all, culture is not static, but ever changing. He has found the term useful in the description of other institutions besides the nation-state. Large institutions such as media, religious institutions and so on can offer their own cultural intimacies between the people in the institution. Throughout this paper we can see the cultural intimacies between not just ethnic

Albanians labeling a hard worker *zezak* or a Macedonian criticizing an Albanian labeling them *Siptar* but also in “top down” ways with the revision of Skopje downtown via the Skopje 2014 project in an attempt to create telling of Macedonian history that may only be accepted within Macedonia and through shared humor over dark events.

Despite revisions, there is still the problem that comes with all high theory. Where is the evidence of actual behaviors? In theory that relies so much on personal interpretation and vague concepts of identity, culture and the nuances between state and citizen, there is a lack of objective-correlatives. Intimacies exist simply because they are spoken into existence, but is that enough or does there need to be external evidence (Cohen 1998)? To combat the tangible with the intangible, concepts of truth exist simple out of belief, so why not cultural intimacies? “Truth” is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements. “Truth” is linked in a circular relation with systems of power that produce and sustain it, and to the effect of power which it induces and which extends it— a 'regime' of truth (Foucault 2000,132). If the citizens of the nation-state, state its truth and it is accepted and replicated, than that is all that is necessary to make future actions be dictated by this truth. There is no need for “proof” as the proof is in the future actions of the people. “Memories shape the capacity to produce the future (e.g. Werbner 1998), and are themselves shaped by the kind of future we think we are heading for” (West 2000; Shaw 2013).

Notably, Vasiliki Neofotistos (2004; 2008; 2010; 2012) has utilized the concept of cultural intimacy to explore the relationships between Macedonians and ethnic Albanians in Macedonia, two groups who find themselves in contention with one

another often at the macro level, yet must live together at the personal level. While her research was in cities where the Albanians were a minority, my research locations: Gostivar and Kicevo, were the reverse, where Albanians were an ever growing majority and perhaps a perceived threat to the Macedonians. Despite the reversal of who was the majority in my cities, many of her concepts still held, specifically Macedonians holding the power to grant *kultura* to an ethnic Albanian. Albanians were considered backwards until proven otherwise; if they appeared more Macedonian, i.e. small number of children, later marriages, less religious, in other words assimilating to a perceived Macedonian ideal, they were deemed to have *kultura* (Neofotistos 2010). But how important having *kultura* was differed for Albanians in Gostivar.

Since the fall of Yugoslavia and the subsequent shifting of Albanians official status within Macedonia, there has been conflict between the groups about rights to land, citizenship, federal benefits, voting and more. The closed off nature, traditional religiosity, and intermarriage of the Albanians is often perceived as a threat to the Macedonians and a source of embarrassment for the more worldly Albanian youth. But despite the facade of "ethnic tension" between Albanians and Macedonians, which is often displayed for outsiders through the recalling of stories and sentiments that expose problems between the two ethnic communities, living together in Macedonia in everyday life is never cut and dry. The two ethnic groups not only work together in daily interactions, but are entangled in business with each other and maintain friendships that undermine the rigid stereotypes of animosity in public representations. Sociality and human interaction is more complicated, Neofotistos argues, than its superficial expressions in media and fast-cooked official representations. This is because

“ethnicity” is porous and individuals are able to navigate “between” ethnicity, sharing both common materiality, practices and activities of everyday living, as well as common cultural symbols and orientations, specifically in what is commonly referred to in Macedonia as people’s *kultura* (Neofotistos 2008).

In Neofotistos' work, Macedonians often portrayed themselves as victims of Albanian pressures much as those in Gostivar did. Romantic relations between Albanians and Macedonians were secret, but occurred, while in my research there was only hearsay of interethnic relationships. She goes further to consider the interethnic relationships as a cultural intimacy akin to the Cretan shepherders. Though not a state upheld law that interethnic relations are forbidden, it is a culturally upheld one, therefore holding the same weight for the people, she argues. In Skopje, Neofotistos had accounts of intermarried individuals as well as casual encounters that were not shunned but instead embraced by both sides as a display of the sexual prowess of the Albanian (Neofotistos 2010). Yet, in Gostivar the divisions between the two groups are too strong to allow for such deviations. In an Albanian dominated city, far from the opportunities of Skopje, Albanian women specifically had much more to lose in such a tryst than a Skopje woman who could find privacy in the larger city.

These divergences do not weaken her case, but rather show the fluidity of identity. In Neofotistos' work, Macedonians held the rights to decry an individual with or without *kultura*. The same power remained in Gostivar, but the weight of having *kultura* was much less. Here Albanians did not need to fit in and erase their traditions, rather it was to their benefit to remain in the past upheld traditions. In her work, the cultural intimacy went between the two groups, but in Gostivar the intimacy remained within the

group; outsiders could critique, and maybe there was some embarrassment, but there was no need to change.

A final caveat of interest from Neofotistos' work is in her concepts of "making do" and "from the side" which she labeled as uniquely Albanian traits but in Gostivar, Macedonians exhibited them as well. "From the side" behavior is described by Neofotistos as using inner, social connections with individuals in order to get benefits such as cutting lines at government agencies, securing jobs and so on. Though, I would argue that "from the side" behavior is common throughout all the Yugoslav people I interviewed, as a leftover from securing help during Communism (Neofotistos 2009). I expand her theory to suggest that it a learned behavior from times of oppression. I would argue that the behavior comes from Communism, and all groups had to learn some "from the side" and "making do" behaviors to get through the end of Communism and subsequent post War era. But it is seen stronger among minority groups: Albanians in Skopje, or in my case, Macedonians in Gostivar.

## CHAPTER 3 HISTORICAL REVIEW

To understand the current situation former Yugoslavs are experiencing both at home and abroad, there first must be a brief overture of the past. This historical review is by no means inclusive, but instead it serves only to highlight the events that had the greatest effects on my participants. Though the wars that led to the fall of Yugoslavia (1991-1995 & 1999-2001) are the main catalysts to the “explosion” of memory the group is experiencing, the long history of the formation and transformation of current ethnic identities serves as the backdrop to these wars. In addition to these past major events, for my group there are two additional events which occurred during the study and affected them personally: the Southeastern Europe Floods (2013) and the elections in Kicevo, Macedonia (2013), which I will also touch on. When Yugoslavia fell, the country divided into seven separate countries: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Slovenia and Macedonia. My project focuses mainly on people from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Macedonia, so only these regions will be the subject of the following historical review.

### **Historical Origins of Modern Ethnic Groups<sup>1</sup>**

The ethno religious identities of Yugoslavia have ebbed and flowed in their importance since their inception in the 1300s with four main historical events: World War I, World War II, Tito's Yugoslavia and Yugoslav Wars, causing major changes in their importance and uses by governing bodies and individuals. Since the Yugoslav Wars, there has been a period of questioning and re-attributing meaning to these identities,

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<sup>1</sup> These do not represent all the national groups within the former Yugoslav states, but simply the national groups that correlate to the ethnic groups.

which is part of what my study explores. Though the names of modern ethnic groups in former Yugoslavia: Serb, Bosniac, and Croat, to name a few, sound very similar to some of the national groups from the area: Serbian, Bosnian, and Croatian, they are in fact different concepts. The national groups being where one has citizenship and the ethnic group being what identity and sometimes what religion or historically what religion one's family holds heritage in. Often the national and ethnic identity will overlap, but not always.

The modern ethnic groups were first introduced during the Ottoman occupation of Southeastern Europe (1398-1878) as part of the Millet System. The Millet System divided communities based on religion, not ethnicity, since different religions were taxed different amounts. When the Ottomans arrived in Southeast Europe in 1398, the Great Schism of 1089, which divided the Church into the East Orthodox and West Catholic branches, had already occurred. The Great Schism had divided people between the East and West Churches roughly based on geography more than actual belief structures of the Churches. The Ottomans named the Catholics and Orthodox Croats and Serbs, respectively. During the occupation, many of the people converted to Islam, but Muslims were not given another name, as that was the religion of the Empire. They were just called "Muslim," but were known as Bosniacs in contemporary times.

Control of the region was not uniform and the Ottoman Empire constantly feuded with the Austria-Hungarian Empire for control. By 1878, the Ottoman Empire lost its hold of the area and the Austrians took their place, but the names for the ethnic groups, including simply Muslim for the Islamic converts, remained with budding importance attached to the ethnic names. The names for the groups remained throughout occupation by the Austria-Hungarian Empire (Malcolm 1994; 93-5, Sells 1996; 33-5).

## **World War I**

At the end of World War I (1914-1918), the Austria-Hungarian Empire collapsed and the region was able to self-govern for the first time since the 1300s. The Illyrian movement, the first pan South Slav cultural and political campaign, ran on the belief that the only way to regain freedom after centuries of foreign occupation was for all the Southern Slav groups to unite. As the Austria-Hungarian Empire grew weaker, more people united under the pan Slav movement including many exiled South Slavs in America and Britain. By 1915, the now named Yugoslav<sup>2</sup> Committee continued to grow in support especially among the exiled South Slavs. With the crumbling empire and ability to reach outside of their region for support from the rest of Europe and America through their exiled population, the Austrian controlled regions and Kingdom of Serbia, which was independent at the time, merged to form the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes which would rule the region until 1943. Though the kingdom was known colloquially as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, ethnic identity still remained important, especially for Serbs who were not unified in support of the merger of the Kingdom of Serbia and the Austrian Slav states (MacIolm 1994).

## **World War II**

Though the movement for pan South Slav unity created the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, there was still unrest within the region. During World War II the region divided support to three different movements; the Ustasha, the Nazi puppet state for the Croats, the Chetniks; the Serb Royalists, and the Partisans; a pan Slav movement for what would become European Communism. Each group wanted to take over the region for

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<sup>2</sup> Yugoslav/ Jugoslav literally meaning "South Slav" in BHS language

themselves through different methods of uniting supporters. Ethnic identity sprang to the forefront of importance for the Chetniks and Ustasha as they fought for control of the region, while the Partisan movement focused more on the rhetoric of the Communist party. Ultimately, the Partisans came out victorious and Josip Bronz Tito took power forming the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

### **Tito's Yugoslavia**

During Tito's rule (January 14, 1953–May 4, 1980), ethnic identity was secondary to the national identity of Yugoslav, so ethnic identifications went largely dormant, at least publicly. But the silencing of ethnic identity was done largely through the heavy hand of the State. At the beginning of the new state, many wanted to remember the atrocities of war through art and literature but Tito censored the efforts suppressing memory of injustice between ethnic groups into family lore. It is in this period that calling someone a Ustasha or a Chetnik took on a derogatory tone and remains an insult to this day.

Though the forced forgetting was hard at first, soon with time, the forgetting became authentic and many, though not all, took on the Yugoslav identity with pride. Many entered mixed marriages, producing children who would also enter mixed marriages, making it difficult to even choose an ethnic identity if one had the desire to. Despite the mixing, however, last and first names still carried ethnic connotations and remained in the common knowledge of the people. To this day, one from the region can accurately guess the lineage of another based off their first and last names (Bringa 1995). During this time, there remained a pride both for ethnic and national identity, focusing on the positives and unifying the population instead of remembering past injustices. Despite the Communist period being a period of relative stability, it was not to last.

Though Tito's death in 1980, was not a complete surprise and he made plans for a successor, his plans were heavily flawed. Due to his long rule, most of his partisan compatriots were dead or retired; other politicians who were emerging were of "nationalistic" tendencies and were thus removed from politics in the 1970s. Because of these issues, there was no clear successor, so instead a rotating presidency was put into place whereby each of the six republics could have their president in place for a year so every region was represented, at least in theory. Poor economic conditions and the failings of European Communism eventually broke down the successful nation and with no Tito uniting the people, nationalists started to come to power and with that came digging up and creating animosities between ethnicities.

### **Yugoslav Wars: Bosnian War (1992-1995), Croatian War of Independence (1991-1995)**

After Tito's death in 1980, this period of relative unity was overridden by the use of pseudo-histories by political leaders who wanted to take the country for themselves. They divided the population and exaggerated history to form "ancient ethnic hatreds" in an attempt to convince the people and the world that they could not live together and that the country needed to be divided. During the wars in Bosnia, Croatia and Slovenia (1991-1995), time collapsed and the new past was constantly revived in the present, rewriting history in the minds of the people, reforming ethnic identities based on these new histories and creating a faux history of mistrust and hate. Two periods of history in particular held the most weight: the invasion of the Ottomans and World War II (Malcolm 1994, 82-85 and 156-8; Sells 1996, 50-55).

## **Use of the Battle of Kosovo in the Yugoslav Wars**

In the beginning of the Ottoman invasion the infamous Battle of Kosovo was fought. This battle occurred in the late 1300s and led to the fall of Southeast Europe to Ottoman rule. Though this was a military defeat, it was seen as the birth of Serbia and is celebrated as such. The battle was used repeatedly by Slobodan Milosevic during his regime to create and strength of Serb unity. Through the unification of Serbs across Yugoslavia under this mytho-historical banner, Serbs rallied to claim, "Greater Serbia" encompassing most of Yugoslavia. In this battle the mystical Prince Lazar, an old folk hero embraced by all of Yugoslavia, was now reinvented as a Christ figure in a

Serb nationalistic Passion play. This myth has had constant reinterpretation since the 1400s, but in this last incarnation, it evolved into a nationalistic history to prove the betrayal of Bosniacs/Muslims, portraying the Judas character as a recent convert to Islam. It is important to remember that at this time Bosniacs, the ethnicity of Muslim descent, was not being used and the only difference in identifying an ethnic Muslim and a religious Muslim was the upper or lower case 'm'. Because there was no official name, it was stated that they had no culture or history, that they were Serbs or Croats who "betrayed" their people by converting to Islam. (Sells 1996, 2002; Tomashevich 1991; Colovic 2002).

## **Use of WWII in the Yugoslav Wars**

World War II was resurrected through the use of symbols: Croat leaders brought back the flag and currency that had not been used since the Ustasha regime and Serb leaders reinstated symbols used by the Serb royalists, the Chetniks, including the slogan "*Samo sloga Srbina spasava*" — Only unity saves the Serbs. These identities of Ustasha

and Chetniks were used by the political leaders to instill hatred and fear in each other and draw boundaries between the ethnicities, orienting the groups against each other. Such reinterpretations affected all parties strongly, even though these new definitions were not embraced by many. Even in groups already abroad, the effects of the political uses of the history of Ustasha and Chetniks were felt. For example, in Canada in 1994, Croat immigrants were cited in newspapers for defacing Orthodox churches under the headline of "Neo-Nazis Deface Orthodox Church." Though not in Yugoslavia, the effect of the utilization of these histories in the reformation of ethnic identities was felt (Bakic-Hayden 1995, 917-20; Denich 2000).

### **Political Uses of Ethnic Identity**

The goals behind all of these strategic uses of history, religion and legend were to allow each of the ethnic groups to be dehumanized so they would be seen as an invader of land that was claimed by the different political parties on the basis of their ethnic group's supposed antecedence. In societies that are under increasing amounts of stress from multiple dimensions, ideology is created by the elites through the manipulation of pre-existing cultural materials projecting imagined communities within the society. These images play a crucial role in social transformation, showing the continuous dialectic between power and ideology (Wolf 1999).

In times leading to ethnic conflicts, elites are able to carve out specific narratives to push forward their agendas through the manipulation of history. Via mythical history and nationalistic propaganda, these new narratives appeal to the common person, offering solutions for current issues through the raising of importance of their common identity. Through this process, the people will fight and kill for causes that often do not serve them

(Smith 1988). Naturally, the academic validity of the history is of little importance and usually these histories are flawed interpretations of events that mythologize small parts of history. This reconstructed history thus creates a common enemy and a need to exterminate this enemy from their ancestral land that this new history decrees as theirs. The political group's utilization of such ethno religious platforms allowed for atrocities such as ethnic cleansing and genocide to occur (Smith 1988; Weber 1996).

The acts of genocide, ethnic cleansing and rape warfare during these wars was what made the world pay attention to Yugoslavia. Ethnic cleansing was used by all political parties to forcibly remove ethnic minorities and replace them with the ethnic majority. Such tactics succeeded in not only creating a more geographically segregated population, but also began the manifestation of valid reasons for hatred between individuals, creating the "ethnic hatreds" being sold to the media. In some cases, those in the majority were forced to make a decision to either kill their neighbor, who was a minority, or be killed themselves by the army officials supervising the cleansing. It is not hard to see how this can quickly digress into actual hatreds, outright genocide and the embracing of bigoted political rhetoric. Genocide in Yugoslavia was heavily laced with symbolism and the revival of the past: Croat Nationalists reopened concentration camps from the Ustasha regime to hold prisoners and eradicate them, and some Bosniac victims were impaled by Serb Nationalists in reference to the Ottoman period. It can be argued that the purpose of ethnic cleansing was not so much to eradicate people, but to eradicate the prevalence of cultural groups. The digression into some of the more extreme and brutal aspects of the Wars all exhibit hatred of the opposing cultures and the desire to eradicate these cultures from the historical record. Evidence of this cultural

annihilation is seen in which buildings were chosen for bombings: libraries, mosques, churches and museums were all targeted during bombings on cities (Colovic 2002; Sells 2002 & 1996).

## **Post War Era Bosnia-Herzegovina**

### **Bosnia EU and NATO Aspirations**

After Bosnia's independence in 1992, and the creation of a constitutional framework via the Dayton Agreement (1995), Bosnia was divided into two entities, the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Republika Srpska. Due to ethnically driven location changes from war and ethnic cleansing, the Federation is largely Bosniac and Croat majority, and Republika Srpska is largely Serb. Both entities have their own constitution and certain legislative power, but remain under the supervision of the High Representation for Bosnia-Herzegovina. Because both entities have their own governments, there is often conflict between the two regions that causes significant challenges to development and stabilization in the region. In 2006, Bosnia joined the Partnership for Peace and has begun cooperation with NATO. It was predicted Bosnian would join NATO by 2011 if they continued with reforms. As of 2016 Bosnia has yet to join NATO despite aspirations and cooperation with NATO led missions (NATO 2015).

The decision to join NATO also has a country dividing element to it: 70% of Bosnia supported an ascension but this approval rating was 89% in the Federation while only 35% in Republika Srpska. The In 2008, the Stabilization and Association Process for ascension into the EU began and a SAA agreement was signed, and ratified in 2010, but came to a halt in 2011. The process restarted in 2014 with a 2016 submission of an application (Toal & Dahlman 2011; b92 2015; NATO 2015; Sarhic 2010; Associated

Press 2015).

### **Bosnia One Year Without Government 2011**

Bosnia has been plagued with ethnic politics and issues within their federal government and the two interior independent governments since the formation of the country. Issues of mistrust between ethnic groups and of politicians exasperate an already stunted development and has caused significant delays in Bosnia reaching goals. Part of what has pushed back joining the EU and NATO are three major events within the country. In 2010, there was no government for a year, followed by protests over employment and deadly floods in 2014.

From 2010-2011, Bosnia-Herzegovina went for one year without a government. On October 3, 2010 the general elections were held for the ministerial posts for both the Federation and Republika Srpska. About 3 million voters registered but there was only 56% voter turnout. While there were no challenges or change in ruling bodies presented in Republika Srpska, in the Federation, the Party of Social Democrats (SDP) was the new party in majority. SDP is a self-declared multi-ethnic party, though still majorly Bosniac and considered the successor of the Communist Party. The change in political parties caused unrest and up to a year later, the new members of the Council of Ministers had yet to be agreed upon. While the new Parliament seats were decided, this also took 8 months and was done right before summer break. During this year, state level decisions that required more than just presidential approval were all blocked. Only when the EU threatened to take back a previous 96 million Euro and redistribute it to the rest of Southeastern Europe did the political leaders reach an agreement (Pasic 2011).

## **Bosnian Spring 2014**

Besides the obvious issues of having no government, public concern focused on the fact that those who still held political office continued to receive full salary, already inflated for the region, while being unable to do their jobs. So the citizens paid for these politicians to not work. Insult added to injury as Bosnia continues to suffer huge unemployment and low wages. Bosnia has the highest youth unemployment in the world at 57.5%, caused not only by lack of development but also widespread corruption and ethnic nepotism in employment (Public Radio International 2014). By 2014, with the worldwide coverage of other rebellions like Arab Springs and Occupy Wallstreet, Bosnians started their own protests beginning in Tuzla (Pasic 2014; Zuvela & Sito-Sucic 2014; Judah 2014).

On February 4, 2014 a peaceful protest in Tuzla turned violent when police clashed with picketers. Picketers stood outside the governmental buildings of Tuzla demanding compensation for what was seen as the government intentionally allowing several factories, Tuzla's main income, to collapse between 2000-08. News reports stated that 600 protestors eventually tried to storm the government buildings throwing eggs, stones, flares and so on through the windows and setting the building on fire.

After news of the protests traveled, several other cities in Bosnia started similar demonstrations eventually totaling 20 more cities in Bosnia and two cities in Serbia and Croatia. As protests grew more heated, the police reacted with harsher weapons. Tear gas, rubber bullets, high pressured hoses and arrests were all used against protestors. Four Prime Ministers resigned as a result of protests, in Tuzla, Zenica, Sarajevo and Una-Sana. As demonstrations continued to gain momentum for over three months but

around April participation began to wane and halted when nature intervened (Pasic 2014; Zuvela & Sito-Sucic 2014; Judah 2014).

### **2014 Southeastern Europe Floods**

From May 14-18,2014 a low pressure cyclone, Tamara, dropped record amounts of rain over the region causing flooding and landslides. Rainfall broke a 120 year record for the Balkans and caused over 2,000 landslides which in some cases dislodged past landmines and brought them into villages. 1.6 million people were affected in Serbia and Bosnia alone and 62 people died. Though Serbia and Bosnia were the most affected, Croatia, Romania and Slovakia all experienced flooding (Santiago & Meilhan 2014; Associated Press 2014). Damages were estimated at 1.55 billion Euros in Bosnia and Serbia, exceeding those during the Bosnian War. The destruction caused by the floods set back progress and renewed trauma as the destruction of property and loss of life renewed memories of war.

The silver lining of the tragedy is, however, the transnational community involvement. In my group in Palm Beach County, people banded together to send donations to cities in need, many times outside of ethnic and national lines. Though some stayed donated just to their personal communities, many, including the majority Macedonian work transnationals, donated to Bosnia and Serbia out of new feelings of commonality between the countries after their work experiences abroad and concern over tragedy hitting “home.”

### **Post War Era Serbia**

While Bosnia experienced issues within the State politics, Serbia felt the pains of further separation with two of its regions declaring independence after the formation of

their state. In 1992, Serbia and Montenegro established themselves as the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) which in 2003 was renamed the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (SCG) after the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic. With the new Constitutional Charter (2003) in place, the FRY Presidency was terminated and replaced with the President of Serbia and Montenegro. A month following the new union, the Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic was assassinated. The assassination led to a crackdown and arrest of 4,000 people who were part of an organized crime circuit within Serbia. Boris Tadic replaced Zoran Djindjic as head of Democratic Party, but support continued to grow for the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) over reform parties. Despite the support for the SRS, by 2004, Boris Tadic took over the Serbian presidency until 2012 when he was succeeded by Tomislav Nikolic (Cirkovic 2004). Nikolic was a long standing SRS member until formation of his own party, the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). The cause for forming the new political party was to push Serbia towards EU ascension which the SRS was not interested in doing.

### **Kosovo War and Kosovo Independence (1998-1999)**

In 1998 the Kosovo Liberation Army, with NATO and Albanian military support, started the Kosovo War to gain independence from FRY. In 1999, the Rambouillet Conference restored Kosovo's autonomy within Serbia (FRY). The NATO led Kosovo Force (KFOR) was responsible for safety in the handover of power but complications arose when an estimated 100,000 Serbs and non-Albanians fled Kosovo during and after the war. Many left when international security forces did, fearing retaliation from returning Albanian refugees. By 2002, Serbia and Montenegro reported hosting 277,000 refugees from Kosovo, though this number has been questioned on the basis of exaggeration. The

European Stability Initiative estimated the number to be closer to 65,000 (Kosovan Death Toll 2009; NATO 2000).

By 2004, unrest plagued Kosovo as ethnic conflict between Kosovar Albanians and Serbs erupted leading to the destruction of religious sites and 19 deaths.

International mediation began in 2006 when it became clear that the situation between Kosovo and Serbia and Montenegro was not working. In 2007, the Ahtisaari plan fell apart and negotiations were unsuccessful. Ahtissari's plan was to give Kosovo a supervised independence where Kosovo would be allowed self- governance under EU supervision. Kosovo would be given a flag and other national symbols as well as a border demarcation at Macedonia. While Kosovar Albanians, EU and US were largely in support of the plan, Serbia and Russia blocked the plan in the UN. After several rounds of failed negotiations, Kosovo declared independence in April 2008 (Pavlowitch 2002; NATO 2000).

### **Montenegro's Independence and Independent Serbia**

It was not just Kosovo that wanted independence from Serbia; Montenegro also shared these ambitions. Montenegro started fairly soon after the Yugoslav Wars in the severing of ties with Serbia. As early as 1996 Montenegro formed a different economic policy and adopted the Deutsche Mark for currency. Differences between Serbia and Montenegro continued to grow throughout the political and economic turmoil following the Yugoslav Wars until May 21, 2006 when Montenegro voted on independence. June 6, 2006 marked the day of independence for Montenegro and the first time Serbia was an independent state since 1918. After Montenegro and Kosovo left Serbia, Serbia officially applied for EU membership in 2009. Despite considerable setbacks the EU unfroze trade

with Serbia and which signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement. Serbia has planned for EU integration by 2018 (Boralovac 2010; Pavlowitch 2002; Xinhau 2016).

### **Post War Macedonia**

Though almost half of my group comes from Bosnia and Serbia, the other half comes from Macedonia and experienced a different set of events from the fall of Yugoslavia. Like Bosnia and Serbia, the main catalyst for their renewal and redefining of identity was the destruction of Yugoslavia, but their experiences were quite different. Macedonia seceded peacefully from Yugoslavia in 1991, and it wasn't until mounting tensions between ethnic Albanians and Macedonians erupted in conflict that they experienced a quick and much less detrimental war. In February 2001 the Albanian National Liberation Army (NLA) began attacks on Macedonian forces. The reasons for the conflict were due to Albanians feeling as if they were second class citizens in Macedonia after the fall of Yugoslavia (Spaskovska 2010).

Albanians have historically been in Macedonia since 1945 when Tito, for political reasons and to create a large enough entity, placed a large number of Yugoslavia's Albanians in Macedonia. From this point on, more than a third of Macedonia's population was non-Macedonian, and this number continues to grow. At the time of its creation, Macedonians were happy that Tito granted them an identity separate from Serbs, and Albanians were happy to have the past WWII Axis alliances forgotten.

However, after the death of Tito in 1980, inter-ethnic relations throughout Yugoslavia deteriorated (Spaskovska 2010; Courbage 2003).

## **Insurgency in the Republic of Macedonia (2001)**

In 1992, Macedonia created its first citizenship laws as an independent country. The law stated that non-national residents would be required to leave fifteen years of continuous residency, fluency in Macedonian, although biased, and guaranteed income production, as well as several complicated administrative practices to be granted citizenship that appeared to have discriminatory ulterior motives. Albanians felt discriminated against and with no more “Dream of Yugoslavia,” suddenly their ethnic identity was the most important aspect of their identity to the state (Courbafé 2003).

Because of the dissolution of Yugoslavia, many documents were lost or never officially filed to begin with, leaving many non-nationals, who had lived their entire lives, for many generations in Macedonia, with expensive and confusing paperwork to fill out and no guarantee of citizenship (ECRI 1999; Petrussevska 1998). Besides creating a bureaucratic nightmare for non-nationals, measures were taken specifically against Albanians during this period. The Macedonian government forbade the flying of Albanian flags or officially recognizing Albanian as a secondary national language, despite both having no contention previously. Furthermore, Albanians were downgraded from a *narodnost*, Yugoslav nationality, which afforded political and cultural rights, to a minority. Tensions continued to grow and led to an Albanian boycott of the 1994 census and even previously in 1991, to the independence of Macedonia. Though these were reactions to what was happening to Albanian rights and identity within Macedonia, the rebellions were spun in news outlets as Albanians being disloyal and having desires to create an Albanian ethnic state. Ethnic Macedonians became untrusting and nervous about the

Albanians within the country and what the goals of their protests were (Spaskovska 2010; Courbage 2003).

Besides issues within the country, Macedonia also was experiencing issues with Greece, who felt Macedonia should change their name due to Greek's historical ties to the name Macedonia. As a result, Greece initiated an embargo from 1994-95. Resolutions were met when Macedonia became officially the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYR Macedonia) though the official term is rarely used. To add to complications for the forming state, Macedonia also became overwhelmed with Kosovar refugees, majorly Albanian and Roma, as the non-Albanian refugees fled to Serbia during the Kosovo War (1998-1999). The sudden influx of Kosovar Albanians contributed to growing tensions and animosity towards Albanians. At the height, 344,500 refugees from Kosovo were received in Macedonia and 21,000 remained in Macedonia after the stabilization of Kosovo (UNHCR 2000; Spaskovska 2010; Courbage 2003). Despite several attempts to amend the new constitution, the Macedonian government ignored Albanian pleas until the NLA rebelled and started attacking Macedonian forces in 2001. The conflict only lasted eight months, by September 2001 the Ohrid Framework Agreement was created and under significant international pressure, signed. The Ohrid Framework Agreement made Macedonia a multi ethnic state through modification of the Macedonian constitution. By 2004, further modifications were signed allowing a loyalty oath for non-Macedonians and dropping the language requirements from fluency to being able to communicate. Transparency was added to the citizenship process, requiring a written rejection to citizenship detailing why the person was rejected. And perhaps, most influential, in September 2009 voting was opened to emigrants of Macedonia. This

amendment allowed for large changes in election patterns especially in the mayoral race in Kicevo of 2013 when hundreds of Albanians flew in to vote (Spaskovska 2010; Agich 2013).

### **2013 Kicevo Elections**

In March 2013, the first local elections that actively encouraged diaspora voting occurred in Macedonia. Though pandering the diaspora had been a large part of Former Yugoslavian elections, it was a first major attempt in Macedonia. Specifically, the mobilization of the diaspora occurred among Macedonian-Albanians in the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), the Albanian party in Kicevo's local mayoral elections. The push to have diaspora vote was to gain Macedonian- Albanian control over Kicevo and thus give the DUI party more control in the central Macedonian government (Agich 2013).

Though Kicevo is unofficially 54.5% Albanian, a formal census has not been successfully completed since 2001. Furthermore, Kicevo, like Gostivar and several other cities and villages in Western Macedonia, does not have enough jobs to support its citizens, so many of the inhabitants leave to work abroad sending remittances back home. Kicevo is only full in the summer when the transnational workers return home for a brief vacation. Albanians in Kicevo were worried that without the majority of their people there to vote, a Macedonian mayor would be selected who would not care for Albanian interests. Whether this was true, or a story perpetuated by the DUI party to win is not known; however, with the brief history Macedonia has had with their ethnic Albanian population, it is a fair guess. The DUI party campaigned amongst those abroad and chartered a plane for the day of the election to fly thousands of Macedonian- Albanians into Kicevo to vote (Agich 2013).

Through analysis of the history of ethnic identity, rulership and war of former Yugoslavia, we can see that identity is anything but static. Not only is it not static, but it has been used very deliberately for the ruling party's gains throughout history. In the post war era, mistrust of anyone who is not "us" runs rampant and leads to many voting and political trends that ultimately have stagnated state development and economic growth in the successor states. What was seen as the the foolproof way to secure votes has now stunted the region with no easy way out. The only hope is for the broadening of "us" which was seen, if only briefly, in uniting for aid in the southeastern Europe floods. It is in this frame that my study and its subjects find themselves in and must navigate when forming their perceptions of self.

## CHAPTER 4 THE OPA EFFECT

Getting off my shows late one night, I rushed to my friend Dan's birthday party. After a quick toning down of my show makeup, I hurried in only to find the party to be mostly people I did not know. My friend, was deep in conversation with a new girl, and him being newly single, I did not want to interrupt. Instead I headed to the kitchen with the bottle of whiskey I brought as contribution to the party.

Boris: A girl who drinks whiskey is my kinda girl! an accented voice behind me exclaims. I turn to see an impossibly tall and wide man grinning down at me.

Lauren: Would you like some?

I offered but my question is unneeded as he is already filling two cups with ice and opened the bottle. He lifted the second glass to me while holding his and waited to toast me. We continued to talk a little while longer. It turned out he was Serbian and a DJ for one of the locations of the Opa restaurant chain I had just danced at that evening.

Boris: The funny thing is, besides the family that owns it, I never see a Greek person there. he was saying, I see my own people more than anyone else, but they always want us playing the same Greek music.

Lauren: Yeah it is the same with ours. Our owner is actually Macedonian-Albanian so we can sneak in other music for the belly dance shows at least.

Boris: Oh, I know that guy, my buddy works there, Damjan, do you know him?

Lauren: I do actually, he just started, right?

Boris: Yeah that's him! Biggest asshole nationalist ever, but he's working with an Albanian boss! But you got to over here. Back home we had so much to fight about but here it just doesn't matter anymore, you know? Here we are all just foreign, so you work next to your sworn enemy at the bar

but you know what, those customers are such assholes we have to tolerate each other to survive. Either that or lose the job and why should the other guy get the money? And next thing you know you have a Turkish or Albanian friend. It's fucked up how it happens. Only in Opa will you see that, we hated each other for hundreds of years and now we are working together in some crap restaurant in America. It's the Opa effect!



Figure 4-1. Photo of some of the multi ethnic staff (Albanian, Macedonian, Serbian, Turkish and Greek) at Opa, for the so-called Opa Effect. Photo courtesy of author

### **Life in America: Public Spaces, Friendship, Working Too Hard and Fate**

One of the most striking aspects of transnational life versus life "back home" is that of public/commercial space, such as restaurants and cafes, replacing the home and the private space as a terrain of social interactions. While plenty of people still entertain newly-acquired friends in the US in their houses, "home" as a rule tends to be reserved for close friends and family and the occasional party, and only when they are in the situation to have a home that can host a reasonable number of people in it.

More often than not, the homes and apartments were too overcrowded to even try to have any real socialization. Instead many ex-Yugoslav immigrants hang out in

front of cafes and restaurants that offer Balkan style food and/or European style coffee. Men and women come alone in search of company but not wanting to call anyone, or sometimes with one other friend, with more often joining as the night progresses. Public socializing is chosen to best recreate “Yugo friendship” or a form of socialization when met with the complications of busy work schedules, cramped living situations and urban sprawl. Public socialization allows extended groups of friends and acquaintances to have face to face friendly interactions during their downtime despite all the complications modern American life presents to prevent these interactions.

Sasha: It is how it used to be back home. We didn't have to call or warn anyone we just showed up. You don't do that here. Here I need to call and ask permission, then when I arrive, call or text again to let you know, “Hey, I am about to knock your door.” And then knock at the door! If I'm such a burden, I'd rather not come!

Zee: Your friendship here is fake. Beautiful but fake, like your nature and your buildings and everything in America. Beautiful but fake, and not built to last.

The differences between American and Yugoslav friendship is something that was a frequent topic of conversation. The formality here with calls, texts and invitations prior to hanging out was foreign and strange to them. Though a lot of it is not such a specifically American experience, but a modern technology experience, my interlocutors saw it as an American quirk. "You just can't make friends here like your friends back home" was a common theme from people 21-46 years old, who left at 10-35 years old. Conversely, those who left under 10 reported friendships were better in America and so did those who were born in America but now live in their home country. Whichever norms were established early in teenage life are the ones that are considered "correct".

Milli: I guess nothing can compare to the friends that you made when you were little. Like you pass at someone's house and knock and see and you spend maybe 15 minutes. You don't call, it's a great feeling to knock and oh my friend is there and she is so happy to see me and she is cooking and she needs my help so I finish the cooking and she runs her errand and then we eat and all of it is so very nice... The biggest problem here is it's such a big country and everyone is always moving. But my town lets say in my whole class, five of us moved out of twenty-five people. But when we come back it is like we never moved. But here, I don't know, people move away and they are texting or on the phone and no time to see each other and I am old fashioned I want to see them in person. The phone helps, but it's different when you see each other, it's special, you can open yourself and over the phone, it's hard. You don't feel it. I don't feel it.

### **Yugoslav Friendship**

The strength of Yugoslav friendship, praised by the majority of my interlocutors as a superior form of intimacy between acquaintances, was shown to me in many different stories of friendship surviving adversity, even surviving marital infidelity. A story that revealed itself again and again over my fieldwork was that of unfaithful spouses.

When these affairs were discussed they were always long term romances that went on with one extramarital lover, often a close friend of the couple. Sometimes the tone was mournful, but usually it was used to express the strength and pureness of Yugoslav friendship over any other type of friendship. In the true fashion of urban legends, it is always claimed that the story teller knows the parties in question yet almost never supplies names or reveals who the people are. Almost always the story is related from the male perspective and follows the same formula: husband has a friend and they both have wives. Through some discovery, the husband finds out his friend has been sleeping with his wife for a long time, divorces ensue and some bitterness, but the husband and his friend eventually return to each other.

In fact, the only story that I collected on this subject was the one told from the female perspective, with her being the cheated on spouse. As told by a female the motif took on a note more of warning about pride rather than a tale of the pureness of Yugoslav friendship. Her husband had claimed his infidelity was due to her being too old to have children, her peak child bearing years being during war and refugee status, yet upon leaving her it was discovered he was the infertile one. She went on to have a family with a new husband while the ex-husband is presumably miserable and childless.

Though this folkloric motif was related to me at least in 10 different versions, my favorite tale came from Bruno. He was in his late 50s and a mural and fresca style painter from Croatia. He had fled the war to Milan via an Italian wife where he quickly assimilated into being Italian. He actually refused to ever admit he was anything but Italian, despite always socializing with the Yugoslav circles. One day, armed with some new vocabulary from my BHS lessons, I asked him how he was in Croatian. "How do you know that?!" he exclaimed flabbergasted and from that moment on. he dropped the pretense with me. He was a frequent guest at Opa and if I did not have another obligation, I would stay and talk with him after shows.

Bruno looked like something out of comedy to me: tall and exceedingly tan with a mane of slicked back white hair. Usually he had some sort of goatee that was perfectly groomed or he was freshly shaven; either way his facial hair, or lack thereof, was very intentional. He always wore tinted eyeglasses with sporty frames and had the most extensive Italian fashion wardrobe I have ever seen. I do not think I ever saw him in the same outfit twice. This is not to suggest the outfits were attractive. Usually they were far too trendy and of garish colors that perhaps would have worked on a younger man. He

was always topped off with too much cologne and was either smoking a cigar or chain smoking cigarettes. He frequented the outside bar, waiting for friends to arrive and if not, striking up conversations with the patrons. Despite always talking to his friends in BHS<sup>1</sup>, he would insist that he was Italian to Americans, though he was in fact Croatian.

Usually our conversations would revolve around him trying to set me up with this or that young Bosnian or Serbian guy he had met that night. One particular night I knew the guy, who was a friend of a former roommate of mine, though Bruno had no idea. I also knew that he had a long term girlfriend and I said so as my excuse to stop the matchmaking.

Bruno: Ah, but we don't care about that!

Lauren: Well, I'm not interested anyways.

Bruno: Let me tell you something.

Getting low to the bar and closer to me, he beckoned me as if to whisper, then exclaimed loudly.

Bruno: You have one life, you're young once, enjoy it!

The conversation quieted as Ado, his would be suitor, returned from the restroom. Soon though, he drew the conversation to the commonness of infidelity within Yugoslavs. Tied along to the trend of straying was also their fierce loyalty.

Bruno: I will always come back to my wife! Until she tells me no or she betrays me.

Ado and he nodded in agreement and dragged on their cigarettes.

Lauren: So, does her betraying you mean sleeping around on you?

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<sup>1</sup> BHS is Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian language

Bruno: Well...

Bruno trailed off and took another drag while chuckling.

Bruno: Listen to this: I knew this guy once and he had a best friend and they had been through everything together. They grew up together, went to war together, came to America together. Always by each other's side. During the war once, he saw someone trying to rob his friend's house and he risked his own life to stop it. Anyway, they got married, got jobs, had kids, made good life here. And they would visit and their wives became friends too. But they had different schedules one worked a little late and one worked a little early so the one, he would go running in the mornings and he would sometimes run into the other's wife. Soon they started running together because, you know, it is a good thing to do. And well, you know, it is a wooded path and they start fucking in the woods.

Not expecting the plot twist, I snorted and Bruno, satisfied with the response, turns to Ado and quipped in Croatian, too fast for me to catch that makes him laugh as well, I am sure at my expense.

Boris: But soon the husband he starts noticing his wife is taking longer and longer on her runs and the other wife she starts noticing too. They talk to each other about it and decide to spy on them. Well, it is all discovered and of course there are fights and, because this is America, divorce. But, to this day they are still friends and I see them getting coffee together almost every week!

He claps his hands on the bar and then together, and leaning back, he lets out a laugh.

Boris: Now you understand! We are more loyal than anyone. Anyone!

With his last word, he points at me for added effect, finishes his drink and gets up to use the restroom. And now I do understand, though not perhaps what he was hoping to achieve with his story. These infidelity stories, true or not, are not about infidelity but about the loyalty of Yugoslav friendship, that of course can never be duplicated with anyone but a fellow Yugoslav and is destined to die out in America. Both the Diaspora and the Transnationals have experienced the inadequacy of American friendship. The

perception is that the pureness of this friendship compared to its American counterpart is unfathomable and makes America just that much lonelier.

Of course, the forms of socializing adopted in the US and involving public and commercial spaces serve not only to recreate the spontaneity of visits back home but also has largely to do with living situations in America. Often houses and apartments are shared and cramped or far away from city centers in urban sprawl fashion. It is inconvenient or uncomfortable to socialize in the house. Also, since many rentals forbid smoking indoors and patio's are even smaller if they exist at all, it makes the ease of coffee and cigarettes all the more problematic.

Besides housing situations, another quirk of American living is that of work schedules. There are no two hour lunches and barely vacation time, especially in the service sector, plus construction and transportation jobs which the majority of my interlocutors practiced. Though the criticism of working too hard was frequently directed at Americans, those in the network living in America also fell victim to it. One of the biggest issues I came across in the project was finding time to meet with fellow compatriots. Beyond the polite excuse, time scarcity was a very real issue. Before I got on the circuit of sitting outside the popular cafes and restaurants and waiting, I was chasing people who just worked so much they barely had time for anything else. When there was time they definitely did not want to "interview," but, if we met suddenly while having coffee, well, that was something different.

### **Forming Friendship in Adverse Situations**

While the friendship between the ex-Yugoslavs and Americans is weak, those between ethnic groups from Yugoslavia seem to flourish. The so called Opa Effect, as

coined by Ivan, i.e. making friends out of alleged enemies, seemed to provide real ground for interethnic solidarities. What Ivan noticed; is not an isolated incident, but has a history. Although working in a busy restaurant in America is not the most extreme adverse situation, it holds enough stress to create unlikely friendships.

An especially effective way to form new friendships emerges as a result of the forced separation from existing networks, cultural, ethnic or otherwise. In one extreme example, consider the observations of Reed (2003), who has conducted fieldwork at Bomana Prison in Papua, New Guinea, and reported that friendships were formed among inmates despite diverse ethnic and language backgrounds. Friends would share tobacco, meals and clothes, took care of each other when they were sick and provided socialization (Reed 2003).

Further fieldwork conducted by Brain (1972) revealed similar trends in Cameroon where children of Bangwa farmers were sent to the chief's palace for training. Once the children were isolated from their families, they formed strong friendships with each other. Similar trends were also noted in Korean college students from rural villages once they came to their college campuses. Brain's observations reveal patterns of friendship formation when individuals are isolated from their social networks which are directly applicable to the Opa Effect within the restaurants. Uprooted and in unfamiliar territory, unlikely friendships can form (Brain 1972).

In his study, O'Loughlin (2010) suggests that inter-ethnic friendship after ethnic conflict can only occur after the economy has become more stable. Once the economy strengthens, inter ethnic trust becomes stronger. As personal economies strengthen with American jobs, barriers between Yugoslav ethnicities are easier to drop away,

allowing for interaction without any lingering prejudices. The question is will these friendships remain? Are these "true" friendships in an Aristotelian sense or more of a false friendships? And will they change behavior when the transnationals return home, or will it remain an American phenomenon? The collective memory and crisis of memory formed by the fall of Communism may become enough to link those in the network together while abroad, but when returning home the cultural intimacy maybe replaced with an intimacy with one's own ethnic group (Herzfeld 2005; Halbwachs 1992).

### **Forming of Friendships**

Despite outside influences and interactions not everyone we meet will be our friends. Friendship forms in context, yes, but is also based on attraction. There has to be a mutual attraction to serve as a reason to begin socializing. Mutual attraction motivates the parties to have future meetings where they build trust and loyalty and leads to shared experiences. It is in the easy times that the bonds are formed, so when hard times come, ideally, the friendship remains and one party helps the other (Hruschka 2010).

An important part of friendship formation is the movement from calculated gift or favor exchanges to an instant reciprocity towards one another. In Kreuger's (2007) experiment, strangers were paired and asked to play 36 trust games in which the role of investor and investee switched with each game, hence encouraging gift exchange, even if only in context of the game. As the games were played, a Magnetic Resonance Imaging device recorded brain activity and blood flow. After finishing the games, the pairs were divided into two groups: those who successful cooperated with one another

and those who did not. Those who had cooperated felt much closer to one another and showed decreased blood flow to the ventral tegmental area of the paracingulate cortex than they had prior to the experiment, while those who did not, felt no change (Kreuger 2007).

Looking at the biological activity of the pairs, Kreuger and his partners argued that in the cooperating pairs of strangers, the paracingulate cortex (center of brain representing mental state of ourselves and others) was very active in the first 18 rounds, but depressed rapidly in the next 18. Kreuger theorized that when the decreased activity started in the paracingulate cortex indicated when unconditional trust was being established. Oxytocin, and other social bonding hormones, increased as the games continued for the cooperating pairs, while the uncooperative pairs remained in conditional trust mode (Kreuger 2007).

Nowhere can I think of a real life version of trust games where the investor and investee have to switch so rapidly than in a service industry job. In service industry jobs, such as serving at Opa, the role of investor and investee is constantly switched as you ask your fellow workers to help with tables, get drinks, run food, bus tables, cover shifts and so on. In one night it is easy to build camaraderie with a relative stranger over help with tables or create enemies when someone is not helpful. It is easy to see how that environment would form a crucible for rapid friendship formation, or disintegration.

### **The Limits of Friendship**

Despite the strategy of public semi-coincidental meetings, the strength of Yugoslav friendship is not always foolproof, nor can it stand against all temptation. The biggest threat to Yugo friendship is that of the American work ethic. The creation of

desire, and hence the need to work more and rest less, is seen as both a duty, in order to send remittances back, as well as a threat against maintaining one's identity and a good life. Working hard either for the goal of a good life for oneself or for one's family is integral to the identities within my group and gives meaning to and answers to the question of why they choose to remain abroad.

While not shying away from hard work, the group I studied has achieved more academic success than the average American, and almost all appear to live within their means, but there is still a balance sought. One should not lose their identity or friendships, for the sake of work, even if you are working for your family back home. It was considered quite a troubling problem when someone worked "too hard." Once work started to inch its way to top of the priority list, the person became guilty of being not a real friend.

### **False Friendships**

False friendship was not a light matter in the community. It was considered very troubling and lead to a downward spiral of gossip, fights, betrayal and so on. Fake friendship is something that has been touched on previously, going back to Boncompagno Da Signa's taxonomy of the many different forms of fake friends. The concerns of manipulation via friendship is a common theme the world over, not just within the Yugoslav community. But within the community it was considered a specifically American problem. Americans are thought to be the main perpetrators of false friendship in my group. But American style friendship is not exclusively for Americans; those in the group can learn the behavior such is seen in a former friend Huso.

## Huso: A Morality Tale

Fake friendship was not an ailment isolated to Americans, however. It was brought to my attention one evening when I was meeting Sasha, Zee and Esad for coffee. They almost always met at Amicii starting as early as noon and would usually remain anywhere from five in the evening until sometimes the restaurant closed. Coffee switched to alcohol to food to coffee again as the day progressed. It rarely was all three people the whole time, but usually one would arrive and if no one naturally showed up in an hour or so the texts would start urging the others to join. Then the rotating door of friends and acquaintances would start with the group expanding and shrinking throughout the day. The conversations were fueled with coffee and cigarettes and the location was ideal, with a grocery store next to the restaurant so cigarette runs were easy. Though the group could expand to 10 or more, usually the main three were Sasha, Zee and Esad, mini-Yugoslavia, they liked to call themselves being Serbian, Macedonian and Bosnian respectively. One of the three would start the session and finish it.

I often frequented their table, but rarely daily as was expected of me. One night I was scolded harshly by Sasha who, being the eldest in his late 60s, felt it was his obligation to help the young people.

Sasha: You can't spend your whole life working! There is more to life than working!

Lauren: Yes, of course, I don't, but I am very busy. You are supposed to be at my age.

Sasha: No, you're supposed to be enjoying life now. Work is for the old and who knows, you might find a husband who won't need you to work then you did all of this for nothing!

Lauren: Well, I don't really plan on finding a husband as a future investment plan.

Sasha: Of course, you'll never find a husband rushing here and there it takes time. He may walk in here every Wednesday and you'll never know because you are coming Tuesday.

Zee: You'll end up like Huso.

Lauren: Who's Huso?

Zee and Sasha interrupt each other trying to answer. Finally it is decided Zee should be the one to tell the story.

Zee: Well, Huso was screwed over. He didn't have good friends.

Sasha: He had good friends. They just weren't very smart.

Zee: They were trying to help but they didn't understand America and they had it easy. Huso came here from Bosnia because his friend told him he was making so much money in the trucking business. They said, "Oh, Huso, come here and you will be rich like us!" So he came. And first thing they did was tell him, well, you need a truck and those big trucks they are \$70- 80,000, so he first went and got him that and had an American friend cosign on the loan. Huso didn't even speak English yet, he didn't know what was happening. "Ok, next you need a regular car." his friend offers and to the Porsche dealership they go. "Oh what are you doing?" he said to his friend. 'I can't afford this!' But his friend told him he will make so much money he can and again American friend co -signs on the loan and now he has another \$70,000 loan. Now Huso didn't understand loans and I don't think his friend did either and everything was fine for a little but, until the bills started coming. The interest was so high he had no choice but to work all the time. And he worked hard man. All day, all night, he did nothing but drive that truck for 5 years. Then there were repairs on the truck and he had all this damage but he couldn't afford it and the payments so he worked even harder. And now his family is calling and he is embarrassed you know? He can't tell them oh I have no money to give and besides they wouldn't believe him anyways. So then they start calling me and Sasha and are asking, "Where is Huso? He came to America and is rich and now forgot about us?" And "I said "No, no he is in trouble, but don't tell him I told you." Anyways that was a long time ago, he made his money he is not bad off anymore but now he is used to it. Now, all he wants to do is work, even though he doesn't have to anymore! He

has become American and now he doesn't trust us. I ask him to come to coffee and he tells me, "Jebe."

With the beginning of the curse word Esad's eyes shoot to my own and back to Zee, worried I would be offended by the harsh language.

Zee: Oh, I'm sorry, I forget she understands. Anyways he says I don't trust you guys and I would rather make money.

Lauren: Well, he is probably still angry.

Sasha: Why is he angry? Everything worked out in the end. Everything his friend told him is true. He is rich in America, able to support his family. Why not still be friends?

Lauren: Are you sure he paid everything back? Maybe he still has to work and is embarrassed to tell you.

Zee: No, he is rich now and he has forgotten what really matters. He only wants money not friendship. Maybe for you this doesn't seem bad, but for us there is nothing worse than this. Our friendship is forever, no matter what and he, he has thrown it all away!

### **What Matters in Forming Friendships?**

Though Huso is seen to be a failure in regards to his loyalty to his friends, there is not as much difference between what is expected in friendship between Americans and the group as they seem to feel. Despite the group's assertion that friendship is very different between Americans and themselves, what is looked for in relationships overlaps throughout Western cultures. That is, what the sample, Americans and most of Europe are looking for in friendships are nearly identical. In research conducted over sixty societies via the HRAF files, the US idealized 10 out of the 12 attributes studied and proven as favorable, only differing in desires for ritual initiation and the importance of touching. Factors that overlapped included mutual aid, gift giving, self-disclosure,

informality, frequent socializing, equality, volunteering aid and positive feelings  
(Hruschka 2010,50)

So if the ideals are the same, then why is the group in Palm Beach County experiencing discontent in friendship formation? One reason is that while the same qualities are looked for in friendship across Western Culture, the study did not quantify just how much these behaviors need to be performed. For example, gift giving is important, but is it a gift at a holiday only or every few weeks? Just how much self disclosure and informality is desired and what exactly is frequent socializing? Once a week? Once a day? And so on. While the desires are the same, how the desires are executed seem to be the issue. In my fieldwork, I was often cited for not visiting in front of Amicii enough, so while the markers of friendship are the same, the prevalence of these markers are shown seems to have vast differences.

Spontaneity is also something that is lost. While it is common to suddenly decide to go somewhere, coming to a house or event uninvited and without alerting anyone is more of a social faux pas than ever with the advent of modern communication, specifically texting. With perpetual contact, the expectations of friendships have changed drastically and part of the change includes an almost complete lack of spontaneity (Hall and Baym 2011). Perhaps the feelings of dissatisfaction in American friendships is part a difference in expectations but also it is the modern shift in communications

In the modern world, commodification of intimacies is nothing new and well documented throughout anthropological literature (Anderson 2000; Adams & Dickey 2000; Lan 2006; Parrenas 2001; Sim & Wee 2009; Constable 2003; Thai 2005).

Intimacy can cover a wide range of “being close” including physical and/or emotional closeness, personal, private, caring and loving; it is a social relationship that is/gives the impression of closeness (Swader et al. 2013, 599). Once something is commodified, defined as the act of assigning market value to goods or services previously not on the market, money and the goods become interchangeable and the goods or service is forever altered. Commodification of intimacy thus opens a new world of situations to explore in social life as most aspects of the human experience can be assigned a price tag (Marx 2011).

Most of the work in anthropology covering the commodification of intimacies looks at nursing, childcare and hospice care as well as hostesses, exotic dancers and other sex work. Overwhelmingly female intimacies are bought and sold to male consumers, but this does not exclude men from working the same gamete; they simply are not as visible or well documented. The “new gold” as Hochschild (2003) labeled it, emotional labor, is extracted from the global south to the global north (Aufustin 2007a; Hochschild 1983; Russ 2005).

No one in my project participated in intimacy labor such as care work or sex work but what they experienced in their issues with friendship in America appears to be connected. Though friendship is not commodified in the same way as other emotional labors, there are reasons to include friendship in the analysis of commodification of intimacy. First, after the commodification of emotional labors such as love, sex and care have all been normalized, could it be a natural progression to start association friendship as a possible commodity? Boundaries do exist in fictitious commodities

(Polanyo 2001) dividing what is considered self and what is considered something for sale, but these boundaries are not uniform between individuals (Selver 1994).

Boundaries are fluid, linked with the fluidity of identity and can fluctuate with the evolution of one's concept of self.

Furthermore, though there is not business of friendship per se, the impact of SNS (Social Networking Sites) has started to fetishize and commodify the concept of friends. Friends, followers, “likes” and views, all status symbols of social importance on social media, can be attained via micro-engagements with others. With very little emotional and physical investment, “friendship” can be maintained, cataloged and utilized as a social currency to show an individual's social worth. The more friends, likes, views and so on are seen as applying directly to the worth of the person online. Though most SNS sites have a policy against outright purchase of views, friends, followers, there is little regulation and a quick Google search reveals hundreds of companies offering “pay for likes” services as a way to purchase the illusion of popularity and social importance (Kreps 2011, 690-692; Charles 2010).

In anthropology, it is not new to pay attention to the increasing interconnectedness and impersonal nature of social relations. Through these new and growing connections, no part of human interaction appears to be without a price (Russ 2005, 142). Before feeling cynical, however, it is important to remember that a perhaps idealized pre-capitalist past included bridewealths, dowries and all sorts of gift exchanges for intimacies and kinship to be official (Constable 2011, 54). The point is not to mourn the passing of the “sanctity” of past social relations but to study the complex, ever changing and fluid ways communication, technology, economy and intimacies are

realized. We seek to further understand these new spaces and expressions of intimacy (Constable 2011, 58).

### **Texting and Modern Communication in Friendship**

Hall and Baym (2011) examined the effect of mobile phone use on contemporary relations and how it affected expectations and experiences of entrapment and over-dependence amongst friends. Cell phones are the most pervasive communication device worldwide. By 2010 there were 5 billion mobile connections, which is three for every one computer with internet access (BBC News 2010). International Telecommunications Union estimates there are 80 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 inhabitants (ITU 2010). Between 2006-08 the amount Americans texted jumped 450% and just continues to grow (Nielsenwire 2008).

For their study, they surveyed 247 participants in a Midwestern university who were 18-54 years old on their mobile phone use, both talk and text, and discovered that while cell phone use for relational maintenance could provide increased satisfaction when used in moderation, it often created dissatisfaction in relationships due to guilt and pressures to respond to texts quickly and communicate throughout the day (Hall and Baym 2011).

Or perhaps technology is not alone to blame. After all, it has only been in the last 5 years that social media and texting have really exploded and most people in the sample have been outside of their home country for much longer (13 years on average). Another facet is the employment aspect of friendship building. In Fong and Isajiw 2000 study they found that immigrants who worked in environments with the local population were more likely to find friendship cross culturally in contrast to those who worked in places with majority of people from their own ethnic group.

Though it would seem purely culturally based as to why immigrants work with other immigrants from their own culture abroad, there are economic components as well. Those immigrants who are working jobs where the majority of workers are the local population, often are working higher pay scale jobs and have higher host language skills than those who are working with their peers who can resort to speaking in their native language together to get through tasks (Fong and Isajiw 2000).

Though the ethnicities in my sample would consider themselves separate in their home countries, they often spoke languages that overlapped or had a shared language besides English. The majority within the group I studied also experienced some form of higher education in America and were all proficient enough in English to work in service industries. The employment context in Opa pushed all the groups together. Despite any preconceived notions of one another, they were working and interacting daily, helping friendships to form. In these service jobs like Opa, often common ground was found amongst those from the former Yugoslav states which made for quick friendships. It should be noted that in other service jobs that also employed high levels of Eastern Europeans the friendships also formed there, even when the only common language was English. Again, people cited there was more in common between say a Romanian and a Bosnian than a Bosnian and an American. They found camaraderie through perceived shared experience, cultural trauma and cultural intimacies from leaving their post communist countries than with American workers, even without shared language (Fong and Isajiw 2000; Sztompka 2004; Herzfeld 2005).

## **Fated for America, Despite Its Flaws**

But before this chapter begins to feel like an attack against American work and social lifestyles, not everything in the US was seen by my interlocutors in a bad light and in fact was quite the opposite. Despite the complaints and criticisms of American work ethics and friendship, life in the US is still seen as the lesser of two evils. Of course the ideal would be to go back home, have a good job and live life as one thought it would have gone before the dissolution of Yugoslavia, but this is a dream that cannot be realized until there are severe economic reforms. Since the job market and living conditions were far from perfect back home, the next best place in the view of my interlocutors was America. America still holds an allure despite recent economic issues here as well.

There is a certain mysticism in the way my Yugoslav friends described how they have managed to come to America. Though not always explicit, they seemed to assume some Higher Powers were involved in their fate, be it God or Fate or something else, which allowed for them to escape and come to America. This higher purpose is not negated even when the people experienced job and life downgrades from the lives they lived back home to the life they have now. If anything, the current hard times created a need to believe in a higher purpose for their survival and escape. These stories were intensely personal and almost never revealed on the first interview, but usually months later, often with some alcohol in their systems. And yet, again, there is something folkloric about them.

It was on one of these days off that Natasha, Esad and I went to the beach. Natasha was a waitress at Amicii, the latest restaurant of Lirim's. She was not brought over by him, but she still came recently from Serbia. Though young, in her early 30s,

she prematurely aged from her troubled life. Despite her history, she always had a warmth and kindness to her. Her first couple weeks at the restaurant were hard. She had exaggerated her English skills and while many customers could speak to her in Serbian, all it took was one American customer to rattle her. She had once told Esad and me she had gotten her degree in economics but was unable to find work her with a Serbian degree being considered useless here. Esad always felt the need to tip her 100% on our coffees though he was not in a much better work situation himself.

The three of us had become fast friends and soon took to going to the beach on Mondays when we were all off work. One such day I arrived later than they did, armed with supplies, ice and tonic, since they had depleted theirs before I arrived. Indeed, I came upon them tipsy and happy at the shore. Esad exclaimed happily as he got up to set up another umbrella and make new cocktails for all of us.

Esad: Did you bring your cards?

He was referring to tarot cards, which I had promised the last time but had of course forgotten.

Natasha: What cards?

Esad: You know,

*tarok*

Natasha: Oh! I didn't know you read them. You have to read mine too!

Lauren: I will next time, but I forgot them.

Esad: She can read hands too. She claims she can't, but she's gypsy!

Esad had already had his hand read several times before by me, each time with me telling him it is just for fun and there is no correlation between lines on your hand and your life, but he always insisted. This time, however, was different, because he opened up about his life. A line considered the fate line runs down the center of the palm, under the middle finger. Not everyone has it, but it is thought that only those with a destined life will have it. Esad's palm had one that forked in the middle and one line ended shortly after the split while the other continued to his wrist. I explained that his life had two destinies, one that would have ended his life early and the other that would let him live long.

Esad:           That is me coming here!

He snatched his hand away to examine the line himself. He said something to Natasha in a language I could not catch and then looked at me seriously.

Esad:           You aren't the first one to tell me that. Back home, before the war, a gypsy told me everything about my life. She told me I would play basketball across the ocean but never for Yugoslavia and other things too. All that came true.

In fact, how Esad left was through a basketball scholarship that allowed him to come to an American university where he got his degree, and, of course, he never was given the opportunity to play for Yugoslavia.

All the excitement had Natasha over to my blanket with her hand outstretched wanting a reading as well. She asked in her language if she would ever have children and I looked on the side of her hand under her little finger for the lines that would indicate children as well as husbands or serious lovers. Being I was especially rusty in the language, in particular in future tense, Esad acted as an impromptu translator.

Lauren: You have two major love affairs in your life, with one you will have two children.

I told her with shaky confidence at best. I went on to try to comment on a few other aspects of her hand but she was obviously still excited and wanted to tell me her story. She spoke slowly so I would understand with Esad translating in between, which he hardly ever did for me but he felt an importance in me to understand the story correctly.

Natasha: A gypsy once grabbed me in the market and demanded to read my hand. She told me she was pregnant so I couldn't refuse her. She told me I would not marry the man I was in love with because there was something better for me. I was so devastated! I really loved my boyfriend and we had plans to marry. I paid her so I wouldn't have the bad luck and pushed it out of my mind. Less than a year later though, we were broken up and I had come to America where I met my husband! Those are my two serious loves!

We all sat in silence after contemplating what had just been shared. I was hesitant to speak not wanting to break the spell of the moment when finally Esad pulled out his cigarettes and offered Natasha one. After lighting he said, "We are meant for something, I wish I knew what. Something wants us here and it can't be for nothing." With that I took a sip of my drink while they dragged on their cigarettes and we continued in silence.

It was very important for the transnational workers and diaspora to find meaning in their move and their sacrifice, and that it was indeed a sacrifice and not abandoning their families for perceived fortunes. The idea that their migration was fated, somehow outside of their hands because some higher power was moving them, relieves some of the guilt replacing it with a sort of martyrdom. "Migrants struggle to convert their experience into symbolic capital, and struggle over how to represent this becomes part

of their process" (Malkin 2004,80). As individuals seek to create meaning and definitions of themselves and their actions within my group, they create personal folklores of sorts that fill the void and answer the question of "Why?" Why did they move? Why do they stay? While some would tell me their reasons are unapologetically for self interested, others, like Esad and Natasha, feel pulled down by a constant pressure to return home, whether real or imagined.

### **The Opa Effect: A Destiny of Unity?**

Esad's words stayed with me throughout the day and into the evening. As I was writing my fieldnotes for the day, I sat for a long time staring at the computer screen. It can seem cruel even to the most idealistic of people. Fate, luck and influence converge to allow for certain individuals to miss the worst of civil war, crossing oceans and learning new languages, surviving the impossible, only to find themselves making ends meet with a serving job in a Greek restaurant, working construction or whatever less than fulfilling job in America. To come so far, and to feel the pull of destiny, yet is the destiny to simply survive? Ivan's words, from months ago, came to me.

Perhaps it is not the type of way we want to see destiny work, not a heroic stand or climatic finish. Perhaps it is a bit too idealistic to call it even destiny. But the tiny push towards conversation and working together, even in a tourist trap theme restaurant, could lay groundwork for a more cohesive unity. This is not to say that there is any sort of "ancient ethnic hatreds" or that rebuilding has not already happened within the transnational networks of former Yugoslavia. It is also not to say that Palm Beach County is free of ethnic tensions. What I am saying is that working together towards a goal helps ease tensions among groups. It is a proven method and one implemented by many NGOs within the former Yugoslavia: Firefly, Tuzla Summer Institute, and the recent

UN funded Summer Camps for Flood Survivors, just to name a few, all of which used multi ethnic group camps to help build towards the future. But there is no summer camp for adults. The closest thing could just be having relatives working in America who are building friendships with some unlikely people. Perhaps the Opa Effect is the destiny for which Esad searches. It may be idealistic, but it is better than the alternative.

## CHAPTER 5 OURS AND THEIRS

### **Gossip, Gender, Identity and Rebellion in Gostivar**

As I exited the plane in Alexander the Great Airport in Skopje, FYR Macedonia, I scanned the crowd. The airport lacked the formality of large airports, despite being the newest and only airport in Macedonia. The old habit of landing in Kosovo and driving over is still the most popular option, but my frequent flyer points dictated my decision. Because of the airport's lack of popularity, I had a tiny fear that my friends would be in Kosovo instead of here, despite my near nagging reminders of my arrival date, time and location. As I turned the corner, there was not the usual wall of plexiglass or other substantial barriers between those just arriving and those waiting for them, but just a small rope partition to separate us.

To my relief, I quickly spot Tali in the crowd despite his short height. His distinctive anime-styled hair, sharp widow's peak and arched eyebrows made his face stand out even half a world away from where we last met. I go to greet him and a teenaged cousin of his; they take my bags and lead me to the cab.

Tali is a friend that has turned into a key player in my research. We met at Opa in City Place where I belly danced and he briefly had a DJ job before his parents, worried about the influence such a job might have, spirited him away from West Palm to New Jersey. He is the nephew of the owner, Lirim. We reconnected years later when he had moved back, and he instantly became fascinated with my project.

Tali: I'm Macedonian you know! Well, I'm Albanian but I'm from Macedonia. My parents forced me back when I was a kid but the economy was too bad so even they decided it was a bad idea. We're going back this summer for a few weddings, you should come!

That invitation was only a few weeks ago and here I was on the other end of it, walking alongside them to the cab. The cab driver was sitting in his car, half awake, staring at the horizon. As the sun disappeared behind the mountains, he mumbled what I assumed to be, "Close enough," in Albanian and pulled out a cigarette. It was the first day of Ramadan so those who practiced Islam were still trying their best to keep to the daytime fast, though with a Balkan touch. He turned to us as the cousin yelled some sort of directions. The cousin stood at the back of the car expecting a service he was not about to receive until he yelled something again, and the cab driver reluctantly loaded the suit cases.

Milli:           Don't you remember me, Lauren?

Tali's cousin's accent was so thick I first mistook it for Albanian. I glanced at him but no recognition came to me.

Milli:           You probably just don't recognize me. I was short, fat little kid the last time you saw me.

It was then it hit me that he was Lirim's son, Milli. The last time I saw him, five or six years ago, he was indeed a short, fat twelve year old who was a little shy sitting in the back of the restaurant with his older sisters. Now he was a tall and lanky teenager with the voice of a 35 year old and an attitude that could only come from living in impoverished Gostivar with an American income arriving every week. He was transformed from a shy American boy to a brazen Albanian, not quite man.

The cab pulled out, weaving around cars parked in no logical order.

Tali:            You see this? No laws here, people park and drive however and just don't give a fuck!

I laughed and started to feel around for a protein bar in my bag.

Milli: No, no! We're going to Skopje to eat so you can try the best food!

Tali: And get something to drink! I'm tired of the skank eye I get trying to drink right now, I'm not fasting.

Lauren: I'm down for whatever.

We arrive in the downtown and Milli gives some instructions and Euros to the cab driver and practically skips over to me to show me the Alexander the Great fountain, though officially named "Soldier on Horseback," in a half attempt to appease Greece who opposes any Macedonian claims to the ancient hero. He revealed the fountain to me as if I could miss the eight story tall structure complete with thousands of LED changing lights dancing in the water. It completely dwarfed everything around it, both in grandeur and newness. The crumbling office buildings and forgotten historic centers in the Brutalist style framed the new modern monument, an attempt at rewriting history through the landscape.

Milli: This is Alexander the Great! You know, his mother was Albanian.

Lauren: Is that a statue of King Philip?

Milli: Oh, who knows, they keep building this crap everywhere.

His response was suddenly much less enthusiastic as he looked around at all the changes since the last time he was in Skopje. I turn to take a photo of a bronze bull statue I found particularly perplexing.

Lauren: Why is this here? Is this the financial district?

Milli: Who knows, it just looks cool!

As he said that his energy returned and he jumped on top of the bull for a photograph on it. I refused at first, but after some pleading. He strikes a pose and I snap the photo, satisfying his teenaged desire to show off.

Lauren: I'm not sure that was such a great idea.

Tali: It doesn't matter, nothing matters here. They have no laws. It's kinda awesome but it's also complete shit. Everything is better here, yet terrible, you'll see.

Currently Macedonia is experiencing something of a revitalization of history and identity at every level of society. After the fall of Yugoslavia and fights with Greece over ownership of the name "Macedonia," the state as well as the people are feeling a pressure to create a history and memory to go with their identity. Two of the biggest symbols of Macedonia have become Alexander the Great and the Vergina Sun, the symbol on Alexander's shield and the design of the Macedonian flag. Greece has fought Macedonia every step of the way denying them any history and identity linked to the historic Macedonia and the land. Despite these debates with Greece, it has not stopped the Macedonian government from funding one of the largest endeavors in the Balkans, Skopje 2014. This is an intense rebranding of downtown Skopje, erasing the old buildings from communism and building new Greco-Roman pseudo historical buildings.

After having a quick dinner in Skopje, we arrived in Gostivar, and I was dropped off at my hotel. Though I had had many offers of places to stay, I never feel quite comfortable putting someone out. I figured I would spend the first couple nights in the hotel and see who would want me to stay and for how long and make a sort of couch surfing plan, with

worst case scenario being I would live at the hotel. Tali and Milli dropped me off but Milli came in to be my liaison. He greeted the front desk in Albanian, and she looked us both up and down remaining silent. "*Dobro večer*" I offered, hoping BHS<sup>4</sup> would get me through Macedonian as it was clear she did not speak Albanian so my friends were of no help. She turned her attention completely to me and after some failing between languages, we switched to English. Her demeanor never softened, but I took it as me still acclimating from American customer service to Balkan.

I told Milli, I was fine from here, I would see them later and he left. The clerk photocopied my passport and brought me to my room. Though it was only a few steps from the front desk, she gave me a list of rules. "No other guests, do not use more than one bed, no one else is allowed in the room besides you or you will be charged, no loud music, no overnight guests." It was clear that the last was the rule I really needed to follow. I thanked her and started to unpack. I was not sure of the time and worried that maybe it was too late to go out. But the streets were loud with Ramadan celebrations, so I decided to take a quick shower and plan after.

Before even getting to the shower, however, there was a knock on my door. I thought it might have been the clerk making sure I did not unpack another guest from my suitcase, but it was Tali and Milli again, now with several other people. Behind them, was the now worried clerk, so I hurried everyone out of the hotel. I could tell the clerk's impression of me was quickly spiraling downward.

After I went to bed for my first night in Gostivar. Night is really only a matter of expression since the sun was more than peaking over the vast mountains surrounding the city. Just a few hours later I was awoken by a strange sound. I tried to ignore it, but it

persisted and I started groggily searching for the source of the disturbance. I soon realized it was my room phone.

"Detective Pozhuri is waiting for you," the clerk said warily, clearly no longer interested in practicing her Croatian with me in interest that I not misunderstand the task at hand. Confused, I hurriedly got dressed and grabbed my passport and travel itinerary but before I could leave the room there was a knock on the door. I opened it to see Armend, a busboy from America, apparently a "Detective Pozhuri" in Macedonia.

Armend had been one of the many transnational workers at the restaurant. Despite his excellent English and being much older than any of the normal workers from Macedonia, he worked as a busboy, a job typically reserved for those who could not speak English, which I always found odd. He stood out among the mix of young former Yugoslavians and short Latin American bussers, not so much from his height but from his age. Though he had told me he was in his thirties, he seemed vastly older with a creased face and rapidly fading hair line. He had the ruddy skin and nose of someone who spent a lot of time in the sun with gentle but somewhat sad, or maybe it was worn out, blue eyes, deep set in the worry of his thick brows.

"*Ehhh Kako ste?*" he said in our familiar greeting from the restaurant. He is Albanian, but is proud to speak "all of our languages," so he used to love small talk in BHS

Armend: Why didn't you tell me you were coming to Gostivar? I had to find out on Facebook!

Lauren: I was actually going to call you when I woke up. I have the baby clothes for Marija's brother she gave me from America.

Armend: No, not for that. You have to come and stay with me and my wife I can't have you staying in a hotel.

Lauren: I don't really mind. I will be here a long time and I don't want to put you guys out.

Armend: No you don't understand. No one comes to Gostivar and uses a hotel. You only come here because you have family. Only, forgive me, whores use hotels.

Suddenly the disapproving looks the clerk had given me, her random, surprise searches and passive aggressive note made sense. I wonder what she thought of me when three young men had come to fetch me the evening before for an all night tour of the city?

Lauren: Oh, I didn't realize. I have one more night here and I doubt I will get a refund though, so I might as well stay until then.

Really, I just wanted to be left alone for at least four hours to get some sleep, though it was true that I had another night.

Armend: I suppose that's ok, but let me get you breakfast at least.

With that, we went downstairs to his car, and he drove me to a burek shop where I got burek and yogurt. From there he had to go to work but was still clearly worried for me. We stopped by a small stand where he collected more fruit than any single human could eat in a week, let alone a day, and several bottles of water.

Armend: Is this enough food? I don't want you leaving without a friend from there. It could be very dangerous.

I told him it was more than enough and we went back to the hotel. As I went up to my room, I heard him giving an explanation of me to the clerk, and finally I got to sleep. A few hours later I woke up, this time to the sound of my phone off the hook. For a moment, I contemplated sleep but realized I would lose my chance to see my Macedonian friends

before Iftar, when I would then switch to the Albanians, so I forced myself up. I looked at my phone and my Viber and Facebook were filled with messages of greetings as the news spread I was in Gostivar. I made plans with Maja, another former server, and started to get ready.

While waiting for her, I looked out my hotel window and took the opportunity of being so high up to take some photos of the city. It was a small city lacking anything glamorous about it. Old and dirty cars were parked in the middle of the narrow streets while moving cars weaved between them. Most of the stores appeared closed but some sold wedding dresses, others were hair and nail salons or gold and jewelry shops. It appeared most of the local economy was almost all wedding centered. There were several cafes and impossibly small grocery stores and bakeries tucked in the corners of the city.

In the northwest corner, I could see the newest cafe "Obama Cafeteria" with a terrible painting of President Obama, an eagle and an American flag. Men sat in the cafe silently on their phones, using the complimentary wifi that all the cafes offer if you ask for the password, while chain smoking and drinking coffee. Women in full abaya and hijab walked alongside more Western fashions and more fashionable hijab wearing women. As evening approached many of the Muslim women were rushing to get food ready for the breaking of the fast. There were no monuments or plant life on the streets. On the corners sat Romani, some begging or some dressed in Albanian and Macedonian folk dress with instruments waiting to be hired for the evening. The clock tower and the mosque stood out as the prettiest of the buildings, surely the oldest and best maintained. It was no

wonder that visitors only come because of family relations; this was not a vacation spot by any stretch of the imagination.

I received a notification on Viber that Maja she was downstairs, but unwilling to go into the hotel, she is in her boyfriend's car. I go to leave and am stopped by the clerk. "Here, you will need this." She hands me a piece of paper. On it is a semi official form written in Macedonian, English and French and is roughly filled out with my information. "For the police. Our police will not care but the Federation police might give you a hard time." It appeared that whatever Armend said had been the magic word for her opinion of me to change. I thanked her and she actually smiled, which I felt was especially amazing from her, and left.

In hindsight, I can see that in less than 24 hours, I experienced all the major themes of life in Gostivar. From the tensions between Macedonians and Macedonian Albanians, gendered expectations as seen with the clerk, the way gossip governs the city when Armend discovered my whereabouts, due to someone checking me in, without my knowledge, at a cafe in Gostivar it turns out, to the tension between local and state government as the clerk again demonstrated with the ID card she gave me. These four trends rule every aspect of life within the city from where you have coffee, to what job you have, to whom you are friends with, how and where you socialize, who you marry and how you display your own identity. Of course, not all the rules are followed, but deviant actions require secrecy.

Gostivar and the surrounding cities of Kicevo and Quafe are in many ways microcosms of Macedonian politics as well as examples of Macedonian fears. Ever since the fall of Yugoslavia, Macedonia has had tensions surrounding ethnic identity and

representation of all the identities, specifically Macedonian and Albanian, within the government and public sector. Following the Ohrid Agreement in 2001, a constitutional amendments were made for the Albanian minority but even after this agreement, Albanians still experienced less freedom than they did in Yugoslavia. Since the Ohrid Agreement there have been many of changes within Macedonia both at government and social level but to quote Sulejmani's observation "there is calm, but no harmony" (Sulejmani 2011). Official acceptance of Albanians does not mean acceptance across the board; if anything, the more political representation Albanians get, the more Macedonians start to worry. Below are some examples of concerns Macedonians expressed to me:

- Vlado: Look at it! The streets are empty because they are fasting. This is no longer our city.
- Tommy: There is no point in me looking for a government job, even with my degree. The Albanians run everything now and I won't get in no matter what."
- Dejan: They have all of the world worried about their rights. What about our rights? It's still our country. It's still Macedonia! They want to turn it into Albania, why not just go to Albania then?
- Maja: We [Macedonian females] can't go out without an escort if we want to wear something fashionable. If we want to wear something, you know, sexy, we have to be driven to club, not walk. The Albanian men, they make it too dangerous.

The feelings of unease are not one sided, and Albanians express the similar tensions feeling as if they are still underrepresented in the country.

- Milli: We have to fight! Just a few years ago the mayor was thrown in jail for raising an Albanian flag. You can't buy or sell Albanian flags here, maybe the tiny ones, but not full size; the one in my house my mom and I made.

Fati: If they [Macedonians] have their way we are all back in Kosovo or Albania but this is our land too! It was ours before the Macedonians or the Greeks or anyone. We are Illyrian, we are the first.

### **Calm, But No Harmony**

Throughout my stay in Gostivar, it became increasingly apparent how divided the city was. The division was subtly heightened by the month of Ramadan, which most Albanian businesses observed through being closed during the day and not serving alcohol for the month. Of course, the alcohol abstinence and practicing of Ramadan was not followed by all Muslim Albanians all the time, nor are all Albanians Muslim.

Even on the first night, when going to celebrate the arrival of the brothers, Valon and Luftar's and me in the city, we went to a Macedonian place so we could drink alcohol.

At the cafe, called Baby Blue, we drank and celebrated without a hitch. People ordered in a mix of English, Albanian and Macedonian without issue, and we left the place when we were finished. The only hint of issues came as the men, who were drinking very heavily especially compared to Dona, Fati and me, started getting very loud.

"You guys shut up!" Dona hissed while grabbing one of her cousins by the pant leg. "This isn't our place. You don't want make us look bad!" She was of course referring to the place not being Albanian and not wanting to fit the stereotypes of Albanians being low class. Her cousin, however, was from America and did not know or particularly care at the moment about the dynamic between groups. He brushed her away and continued with the other men.

Dona: We aren't even supposed to be drinking now.

Lauren: Well, they are on vacation so people will understand.

Though, as I said it, I could see the waiters watching our table silently despite the cafe being full. They were clearly concerned over the late night, drunk group of Albanians that just came into the restaurant.

Dona:           If we were at an Albanian place, I wouldn't care, but all they want to do is drink and they can't do that there, at least for this month.

She lit a cigarette and we watched them continue to horse play until they almost knocked over the bottle of vodka at the table. The near accident led to yelling from both the men and women at the table and an almost intervention of a waiter to our table, but he stopped when no glass was broken.

"Let's get a pizza or something. I'm hungry" Fati groaned and with that we all left the cafe. At the pizza place, an Albanian owned restaurant, we sat down and started going through the menu. The waiter came for the drinks and despite the insistence of the men, he said there was no alcohol due to the holiday. They were clearly drunk and Albanian which led Dona to become embarrassed here as well.

"Oh, I hope they don't tell anyone. Did you hear him? He said they are not serving alcohol because of Ramadan and we clearly have been drinking." She gave me a worried look and lit another cigarette, tapping it anxiously in her fingers. The waiter never outright made a comment but between his and the chef's looks, it was obvious they were judging us. Dona chain smoked throughout the whole dinner tapping her perfectly manicured nails on the table to calm herself until we were safely out of the sights of her community's judging eyes.

Though it was clear that there were both Albanian and Macedonian places to hang out, I did not at first think it was something that was strictly followed. After all, I went repeatedly to almost exclusively Macedonian places with the Albanians during Ramadan, and we never had an issue, despite Dona's concerns about the men behaving badly. It was not until one night when I ran into a group of Macedonian women I knew while with the Albanians that I realized the depth of the division. I waved at them and they waved back, and we both continued with our nights. I thought nothing of it until the next day when Sofia apologized to me.

Sofia: I'm so sorry we ignored you the other night!

Lauren: What do you mean?

Sofia: We couldn't be seen with you when you were with the...

Her voice trailed off and she looked away for a moment. I realized she meant she could not be seen knowing a group of Albanians.

Lauren: Oh! It's fine really, I wouldn't want to hurt your reputation. I am probably bad to be around anyways because I keep going back and forth.

She nodded in agreement then corrected herself.

Sofia: No, no you are American and everyone knows that so you can do anything here, only us, we have to be careful.

Albanians have gotten the reputation of being "backward villagers" with strict men and repressed women producing almost triple the number of children other European women produce. There is a long history of mistrust and contempt towards Albanians throughout Europe, but especially in Macedonia. Usually the reputation centers around the high birthrates of the women and the lack of assimilation via language and culture to

the state they are living in (Babuna 2000). Though outright war has not occurred since the 8 month insurgency in 2001, ethnic driven scuffles, boycotts and other protests have been a staple of Macedonian and Albanian interactions in Macedonia since the fall of Yugoslavia. It was the boycott of the census and 8 month war that led to the Ohrid Agreement that even allowed for ramifications to be made for Albanian rights to begin with (Babuna 2000; Neofotistos 2004).

The stigma of Albanian, specifically in Macedonia, had been documented extensively in Neofotistos' research (2004, 2008, 2009, 2010). Here, she reveals the term *Shiptari*, a misnomer of Albanian self identification *Shqipart*, a derogatory term used to describe Albanians and those who show the character traits associated with Albanians without *kultura*, culture. Throughout her fieldwork, she created a list of traits associated with *Shiptari*: uncultivated, dirty, smelly, stupid, wild, closed, dangerous, powerful, fanatics, aggressive, criminals, left in the past and machines for birth (Neofotistos 2004,14).

Besides cultural differences, the division between Macedonian and Albanian is further accentuated by language. Albanian is the only non Slavic language of the region making learning both it and Macedonian even more cumbersome. After the Ohrid Agreement, Albanians won the right to have schools and universities taught in Albanian which further divides socializing outside of their group. It was not uncommon for Albanians in Gostivar to have zero Macedonian language ability, despite the Ohrid Agreement requiring it for citizenship; many fell through loopholes or simply passed the language test and never maintained the skill.

Frequently I was told, Macedonian narratives about Albanian plans to take over Macedonia via higher birthrates and convincing Turks and Romani to put Albanian on census forms and vote for Albanian parties; the lack of learning Macedonian was seen as just one more evidence of their plans. From the Albanian side, people are simply finding ways to get representation in the government since the new Macedonian government took away many of the rights and freedoms they had in Yugoslavia. With no way to get representation the “correct” way, they have found a way “from the side” to gain rights (Neofotistos 2004, 2009).

Navigating Macedonia "from the side," Albanians are able to apply their outsider-ness in a positive way. Using connections with other Albanians, who now hold more government positions partially due to new hiring requirements, they are able to, according to Macedonians, flourish in the corrupt government system where they only increase the corruption (Neofotistos 2004, 2009). Through being granted more rights and exposure, Albanians should be on the road to more acceptance, the derogatory views of Albanians are not something one can escape from without abandoning all claims to Albanian culture, history and language to gain *kultura*. Through gaining *kultura*, the European ideal, Albanians can shift from *Shiptari* to *Albanci*, the term for an Albanian born and raised in Macedonia and has achieved some levels of *kultura*. *Kultura* can be accessed through time spent in Macedonia and learning the Macedonian language, education and attaining "modernity." Essentially *kultura* is equal to assimilating to Macedonian cultural practices, or at least the perception of them. With such strict ideals, it is no wonder that the preferred method is “from the side” while maintaining identity (Neofotistos 2004).

The ability to move “from the side” is further expanded with transnational influence in Gostivar, with no better example than Lirim. While he is financially successful, born in Macedonia and fairly modern with his divorce and transnational life, his lack of formal education, refusal to assimilate and his pride in Albanian culture prevents him from gaining Macedonian acceptance and *kultura*. It is a choice for him though, to remain *Shiptari* with his giant Albanian flag flying on the five story mansion he is building on the outskirts of Gostivar; he chooses pride over his ethnicity over acceptance from the Gostivar community. This is something he is able to do with his finances being tied to American business rather than within the city. America is his “from the side;” through his success abroad he is able to forgo adhering to any rules within his native city (Neofotistos 2004).



Figure 5-1. Lirim's house under-construction, note homemade Albanian flag. Photo courtesy of author

The low level tension within Gostivar stems from feelings of insecurity and unease between both ethnic groups. Macedonians feel they are losing their city to Albanians, and the Albanians I spoke to mostly denied any attempt and instead point to past cases of violence and death towards Albanians in Skopje and Gostivar over small incidences such as trying to raise Albanian flags or celebrate Albanian national holidays. During the most recent celebration, the 100 year anniversary of Albania's Independence, there were no

incidences of violence while Albanians celebrated, and there were still Albanian flags hanging throughout the city from the celebrations when I was there. While Macedonians express frustration over Albanian demands, Albanians point to equality and wanting equal representation, like they had in Yugoslavia.

Though Albanians I spoke to just expressed wanting equality, there continues to be political maneuvers to seemingly attempt to "take back" southeast Macedonia for Albania, since Albania's historical border included the region. Getting closer to the Albanian border, it is not uncommon to see Macedonian road signs spray painted out with Albanian written over it and make shift red banners with double headed eagles alongside the road. Sometimes there were Orthodox crosses placed nearby in roadside one upmanship to symbolically mark the land as belonging to one group or another. On the hill overlooking Skopje is a giant, illuminated cross just as Albanians have an illuminated crest going to Gostivar.

The issues within Gostivar are far more complicated than "ethnic conflict" and ultimately, ethnic conflict may not even be the best term for the condition. Macedonia is experiencing an upheaval in political and national procedures which in turn affects identity and leaves the individual at a loss of who to trust and ultimately who they are. Even the history of Macedonia, contested by Greece, Albanians and Macedonians themselves, is under debate. All of the underlying issues of history are currently being white washed under treaties and agreements and the construction of the delayed project Skopje 2014, which attempts to create a heterogeneous state of the *macedone*, fruit salad, the state mixed since the beginning.

To add to issues, the citizens of Macedonia feel the attack from politics and political campaigning, a relatively new phenomenon and one that is met with contention. Combined with mistrust are beliefs of being threatened and mistreated by corrupt government officials and politicians while also feeling lost in their country. According to Transparency International, which surveys "everyday people" about corruption in their countries, 41% of Macedonians believe corruption has been on the rise over the past two years, 29% stating it has stayed the same and the remaining indicating a small decrease: 51% say corruption is a severe problem, 38% a small problem and the remaining saying it is not with the top entities exhibiting problems being government, elections, media, education, police and medical services. Individuals on average are reported as spending 470 Euro a year on bribes in order to get basic public services (Transparency International 2013; Marusic 2012).

All of these factors combine with feelings of the opposing ethnicity getting all the ideal treatment. Macedonians get the insider ideal treatment, while Albanians find their own path through an outsider's way of achieving goals and through their own nepotism. Both sides feel abandonment from the state and loss of political power creates a need to find one's way outside of the bounds of bureaucracy. "From the side," Neofotistos' metaphor of getting government services via personal connections with bureaucrats is used by Macedonians and Albanians alike to navigate this new world they do not have a hundred percent trust in (Neofotistos 2009).

Yet, despite the Macedonians in Neofotistos' study citing Albanians as the sole users of this side behavior, Macedonians, at least in Gostivar, will use the same strategies when they can. I theorize the difference comes from the changing political climate

between the studies as Albanians gain more political control in the country and the Macedonians increasingly feel like the outsiders. Neofotistos' research was also in Skopje, a vastly different city than Gostivar and 5 years prior to my project. Skopje receives the majority of the government's budget and has a much more Macedonian dominated population (63% Macedonian) versus Gostivar (33% Macedonian). A Gostivarian would argue the percentage is even less since these numbers are taken from the 2002 Census and many more Albanians have returned. Becoming a minority in their microcosm of Gostivar, Macedonians feel threatened. Despite having more "insider" clout with the nation wide macrocosm, Gostivar is removed from Skopje and more metropolitan cities which creates a need to also come "from the side."

#### **Citations and Rebellion- Macedonian's Coming "From the Side"**

Another day, I was at my apartment waiting for Maja to text me. One of the few problems with using wifi service for all phone use was that neither of us could receive or send messages after leaving our apartments, so I sat, looking out the window for her boyfriend's car. The whole scene felt reminiscent, oddly enough, of before cell phones. Then, when there was no way to text or call to indicate your arrival, you were dependent on watching for your friend, or their coming to your front door. There is something to be said for the loss of that practice in the modern world. I saw her boyfriend's car and started the descent down the building in the precarious elevator to join her and her boyfriend, Marco, in the car and we took off to go to their surprise for me. Maja turned in her seat to inspect my outfit and offered all sorts of compliments.

“I miss most shopping in the US!” she sighed, “But you will probably be cold.” We were going up the mountain to Mavrovo, the state park, and everyone's “surprise” for me on the trip. “It's the only nice thing we have!” I was often told.

Mavrovo is a beautiful place maybe an hour outside of the city. A large forest for hiking, mountains for skiing in the winter, several lodge style restaurants where they catch the river trout to serve you and a large man made lake for electricity for all the people of Gostivar. That evening we went to the same lodge I had been at a few days earlier for coffee with Armend, The air was sharply cold, thanks to the river and altitude. We rushed inside while Maja exaggerated her girlish screams over the weather. We entered the lodge and were met with the instant warmth of the place. Animal skins and antlers decorated the walls, and the smell of wood from the furniture and floors was at once welcoming and overpowering.

We situated ourselves in an empty booth; besides the workers we were the only people here. Marco apologized in Macedonian explaining it is not tourist season. Due to the mountains, Mavrova experiences a small boom in tourism in the winter for skiing. A waiter came and asked our order in Macedonian, but before I get a chance, Marco interrupts me and orders a red wine for the table. "You have to try Macedonian wine!" Maja says. "Best in the world!"

The waiter brought the wine, and we enjoyed our evening. Marco did not speak much if any English, and Macedonian, though similar to BHS, is not the same language so we can barely communicate. Maja acted as our translator for harder concepts and to express his desired to come to America and hers to return.

Maja: Because of my work visa I can not apply again for a long time, I need to go to school or get married. But I don't want to be away from him and his English isn't good enough yet. I fear I am losing my English staying here and waiting though!

I searched her eyes trying to figure out if she was asking for my help or if there was anything I could do. I began to offer help, but she shot down any real efforts to try to go back rather quickly. She never does bring it up again for the rest of my stay. It would be unfair to try to analyze why. Conversation quickly moved back to light topics and my plans in Gostivar. Though flattered I chose to come visit them, she and almost everyone I spoke to are at a loss as to why I would come here. "There's nothing to do here!" she explains "We are so bored here and yet you chose to come here!"

We got on the road and I was warned as always not to wear my seat belt. Putting on your seat belt indicates you do not trust your driver's skills. Every time in my trip I attempted to put on a seat belt, I was met with anything from a sideways glance to a full out "Why don't you trust me?" Having already been in the car several times with Marco, I know not to bruise his ego with wearing a seatbelt.

On our way back down the mountain, the road was blocked by police officers. One held up a small sign indicating for us to stop. I asked if I should put a seat belt on now but Maja hushed me.

Maja: They are Federation police.

Lauren: What do you mean?

Maja: They aren't City police. They are the State.

Lauren: Is that worse?

Maja: No I think there might just be a problem.

Not feeling reassured I leaned back in my seat and slowly slipped my seat belt on as we slowed to stop for the officer. Marco suddenly looked at Maja and asked her to ask me if I had my American passport on me. I did as well as my proof of residency I had to fill out at the hotel and for Armend's apartment and I handed it over to him. Marco rolled down the window and was asked for his papers and car documents. He quickly got them out along with my papers and the officer took them. I did not hear the officer state any reason for why we were being pulled over which worried me.

Lauren: Did the officer say why we got pulled over?

Maja: No, he said nothing. They do this a lot, don't worry.

Marco's face made me think maybe this was a false reassurance, because he looked more than worried. My mind instantly went to the fact that Gostivar is majority Muslim, and this is the month of Ramadan when Muslims will be out later in the night disproportionately over Macedonians and the checkpoint might be ethnically charged. Perhaps they were looking to create a higher number of arrests or tickets in the Muslim/ Albanian population. Or maybe I was simply being paranoid. I hoped that perhaps the fact that Maja and Marco are both Macedonian, we would be given a break.

The officer walked back, now with two more officers, and it was clear I am not the only one who is worried in the car now. We had broken no laws, Marco was not speeding. the vehicle was in working order and there were no curfews in place. My mind was swarming with questions of the legality of this stop. Moments before the officers approached the car, Maja turned around and almost hissed "Start speaking in English, act really scared, mention the US Embassy!"

It was a last ditch effort, a hope that country pride and wanting to make a good impression on an American tourist would trump the officers' duties, whether official or personal. I obeyed and started blubbing about America and safety and I can not really remember what else. Marco, having not understood what Maja had said in English so quick and low, took it as authentic emotion and looked even more worried as I carried on my performance. The officers hesitated and exchanged glances, but they did not crack, nor did they return anyone's papers. Sternly, Marco is asked out of the car. Maja and I watched helplessly as Marco exited the vehicle.

Lauren: What's happening?

Maja: I don't know. I think they are just talking.

Lauren: I have 2000 denars with me if we need to pay something.

Maja: No, I don't think it's that- Oh no I think they are going to make him blow![check his blood alcohol levels]

Lauren: Oh, well, he should be fine. We only had 2 glasses of wine over 2 hours.

Maja: No, it doesn't matter. They will find him drunk no matter what.

We watched in silence, trying to decipher a verdict while the four men moved silently. There was some conversation, but the echo in the mountain made it impossible to hear. Several other cars drove by us, escaping the check point since they have Marco.

Lauren: Where will they take him if they decide he's drunk?

She did not respond because Marco was walking back with our papers and some extra documents in his hand. I was delighted internally, he was found sober, thank goodness! But I noticed Maja was not as enthusiastic. Marco came into the car and they

started talking seriously and quickly in Macedonian. After the exchange, Marco turned around and smiled at me to make sure I was ok.

Marco: You were scared?

He laughs and Maja laughs too and explains her plan in Macedonian to him making him laugh even harder.

Lauren: Did it work?

Maja: What? Oh, my plan? No. Not at all.

Lauren: Oh, what was he charged with then?

Maja: Drunk driving.

Lauren: What? But he is driving now! They don't make someone else drive?

Maja: Why would they do that?

Lauren: Well if he is drunk driving allegedly then he can't continue.

Maja: Why? When they pull you over for speeding you keep driving and probably speeding. It's all just as dangerous.

Lauren: It's just different in America. So, what now?

Maja: Well he could pay fine but we will fight it. My Dad is state police, he will know someone and we can get it settled.

She confidently brushed off whole thing. I offer to pay the fine or at least a portion and was met with an adamant refusal. I felt completely to blame but she reassured me that nothing bad would happen and no one would have to pay anything.

Maja: It's all pretend. They ask for so much money, no one can pay it and there isn't really a way to enforce it.

Lauren: Well, they would suspend your license, right?

Maja: Yeah, but so what? You still drive.

Lauren: But what happens if you get caught?

Maja: Another fine! And you won't pay that either!

Traffic fines in Macedonia are the highest in Europe. Drunk driving fines, which are 320 Euros, or 19,807 Macedonian Denar, are 97% of the average salary. Not wearing a seat belt, contrary to popular opinion, is a ticketable offense and is 50 Euro, 3,094 Macedonian Denar. Maja and her boyfriend, thanks to their "from the side" connection, were able to get out of the DUI without penalty however (Neofotistos 2009).

Beyond the extravagant prices for traffic citations, there is contentions between locals and the state government due to issues with funds:

Armend: It's not the Macedonian government, it's the Skopje government. They just drain the rest of the country and put all the money back in Skopje. It's because all they care about it is what Europe sees. They think they can make Skopje look modern and then the country will become EU, so they let us suffer and for what? What happens when we are in the EU? Same shit.

It is worth noting that at the time of my research there were no hospitals in Gostivar. Any medical emergency required an expensive cab ride or a friend with a car, because the ambulance did not come as far as Gostivar, at least 90 minutes away from Skopje. There were limited schools, no garbage pickup, roads were in disrepair and many street lights were out. Though everyone in Macedonia pays taxes, the money often goes to Skopje first, leaving the rest of the country largely without key services. With Gostivar feeling excluded from the aid of the government and existing without representation of their needs, both Albanians and Macedonians from Gostivar are the minority. The

dominant figure within the country is the Macedonian from Skopje with the lowest being the citizens of the small cities and villages. It is because of these issues of silencing of needs that both Macedonians and Albanians in Gostivar must come “from the side”. Though the enemy is often seen in each other, they are on the same side fighting for representation from the central government and Skopje.

## CHAPTER 6 DIVISION'S EFFECT ON RELATIONSHIPS AND DATING

Nowhere was the divide between Albanian and Macedonian seen more than in dating circles. Obviously, with people not even being able to be seen with those of the other ethnic group without risking their reputation, there is not much room for dating, but it is not entirely void.

Dmitriy: Yeah, I have one girl, she was Albanian cause where I live around my neighborhood is all Albanian and Turkish. And the kids we were all playing with each other and this Albanian girl was my age. We all grew up together. And well you know, we ended up together but then her friends were talking and everyone was making it hard so we ended up broken up. We were teenagers and now I know it was fucked up that they did this to us. Anyways, she is married now and with a kid, I think. I don't know who she is married to but 5-6 years she has been married.

In another conversation, Nadija also shared her experience.

Nadija: Well, this one time during St. George's Day, I saw this one guy and he was very handsome! But I didn't know him and no one I knew knew him so all we could do is look at each other. And, well, it turned out he was Albanian, I don't know what he was doing at the festival. I guess not all are Muslim. But anyways, once I knew, I knew it couldn't be.

Lauren: Why not?

Nadija: It's just not worth the risk! And besides, we would have no future. Maybe I could convince my dad, but his family would never!

It appears that at religious holidays and social events, there is a chance for the barriers between the groups to break down as another man also noted an event where he met a romantic interest from the other group:

Tommy: I work a lot of weddings cause of the restaurant. And we do all weddings, even though it is a Macedonian restaurant, because we are the best restaurant in the city. So, we do Turkish and Albanian weddings too. And every once in awhile there is a beautiful girl. They have really beautiful girls, at least when they are young, not after babies! And she will give you a look and you know you can have her so I write my number on a piece of paper and slip it in her purse and if she wants, later she calls. That's all you can do with Albanian cause everyone knows they will end up with Albanian so you can just sleep with them. I have a friend, who is Turkish, and she is publicly dating a Macedonian but that is one case in a thousand. If you want something with Albanian girl or Turkish you have to be secret and hope you don't fall in love. There are some who will try cause of love but not much love is strong enough to break how everyone will treat you. If you love someone you have to love all about them which is impossible when their family hates you. But if they do get together they move out of Gostivar. The two cases I know are Macedonian and Turkish, my friend, and even rarer, Albanian and Macedonian, but they had to move.

I could not help but think of a song popular during my stay there by an Macedonian- Albanian artist, Adrian Gaxha; "*Kjo Zemer*," This Heart, in Albanian. In the two part music video, the scene of two star crossed lovers, an Albanian and a Macedonian, plays out with their meeting in the woods to consummate their love before her brothers come on her father's orders to bring her back and chase the Albanian lover away. The music video climaxes with her being married off quickly to avoid her ruining her reputation, but at the last minute she runs away with her Albanian lover a la "The Graduate" in her wedding dress. Though nothing about the song's lyrics suggested a

cross ethnic affair, the music video placing the story as such made the song a hit, if only because of the very romantic notion of it all.

The *Kjo Zemer* video represents a budding localized collective group memory comprised of many folk stories and accounts of cross ethnic affairs in recent Yugoslav history. Most famously, there is the historical accounts of the Sarajevo Romeo and Juliet, Admira Ismić and Boško Brkić, a Bosniac and Bosnian Serb couple who died by snipers trying to cross the Vrbanja Bridge to Grbavica. One reminiscence consistently told to me by the older generation, though not as much with Albanians, is that ethnicity did not matter in love during Communism. The singer of *Kjo Zemer* himself is a mix of Albanian father and Macedonian mother, perhaps revealing a bit of an autobiographical account in the video. The social memory stands for the idealized past where love could exist without ethnic expectations (Halbwachs 1992).

### **Albanian Social Scene**

While Macedonians were very forthcoming about information on dating and social expectations of their romances, many of the Albanians I talked to were silent on the matter. Things were explained simply as “We do not date.” if we do it is absolutely secret, which it appears the secret extended to me as well. No Albanian who was living in Gostivar anyway, admitted to ever dating, despite evidence to the contrary.

No one bemoaned the dating scene's social dynamic more than Tali and Valon, the two brothers who were returning to Macedonia after a decade of absence. On our second or third night out they were ready to find a summer fling and were met with strong opposition. “You can't do that!” Fati protested as Valon walked up to girl and tried to buy

her a drink, a normal courtship behavior in America, but forbidden for Albanians in Gostivar. Besides the social faux pas, we were in a Macedonian cafe where most of the women were Macedonian. Even when the women were not Macedonian, it still did not work out for the brothers.

Fati: You can't approach anyone without having a connection. Girls especially can not talk to guys but guys have to know your brother or someone and be introduced.

Lauren: Or what happens?

Fati: Well, it's bad for your reputation and if you talk to a guy he will think you're a slut and won't take you seriously.

As she was explaining this to me we were in the process of taking laps around the city., searching for romantic suitors the socially acceptable way. Her other cousin, also visiting from America, liked this one guy, but he had not introduced himself to her brother or anyone, despite apparent interest. He was Albanian and a viable match for her so she was doing everything in her limited power to grasp his attention. In efforts to entice him to ask, the three of us were walking by him every 10 minutes or so, and she would smile and he would smile but that would be it. They could not talk to one another. Once we turned the corner, it was a cascade of giggles and an analysis of what actually happened would ensue. What was so unique was these were not born and raised Gostivar women but born and raised in America women who were prescribing to their parents' wishes and culture. Fati had moved to Gostivar at 14 but it is hardly the same thing as being raised in the environment, and Buki was born and raised in America. But here we were, three American citizens obeying the antiquated rules of courtship in hopes that Buki would

eventually get a proper introduction. It eventually worked too; Buki was engaged to her admirer 8 months after the trip and married shortly after.

### **Macedonian Social Scene**

The rules were not just in place for Albanians but Macedonians as well. Usually you could tell the difference between the Macedonian and Albanian young women by their dress and makeup styles. The Macedonians would have less makeup but more revealing clothes, while the Albanians would have more makeup but much more conservative clothes, though, of course, personal style allows for not very clear lines between the two. Going out with Maja one night she asked me what I planned to wear. Lauren: I'm not sure. I have mostly dresses long and short.

Maja: I am going to wear something sexy! You do the same and I will have my brother pick you up, or do you want to get ready over here?

Lauren: I can walk over to your place, you aren't far.

Maja: No, no we will get you!

Within ten minutes she was at my place.

Maja: Pack what you want to wear. And maybe you can do my makeup the Arabic way you do, so bring makeup.

I was a little confused but did what I was told, and her brother brought us back to her parent's house, where they all lived. Here, I visited with her mother and father and had some coffee before Maja decided it was time to get ready. Once in her room she explained her reasoning.

Maja: I'm sorry for rushing you. My brother had soccer practice and wouldn't be available later, so I had him get you early and Marco will take us later.

Lauren: Are you afraid to walk in your heels?

Maja: No! I want to be safe! You have to be careful you know, with the Albanians. Whenever you want to dress a little sexy if they see you walking the street they will start bothering you. That's why Marco is going to take us. It's not far, but we will not make it dressed like this. We are too sexy for them!

Maja was not the only Macedonian woman to express the discomfort of Albanian male presence. While they had less social pressures to be chaste than the Albanian women, they often found themselves adhering to Albanian rules to avoid male harassment when alone in public. Even I found myself changing my habits subtly throughout my stay there. One of the most obvious was I would not linger outside alone for too long but I had taken it as my own personal feelings, not as something other women were experiencing. The street harassment was not anything life threatening or out of the ordinary. I have experienced worse in America. Nor was it solely Albanian men, I am sure. Many times, it was not words, just whistles and hisses, though I never heard anything but Albanian spoken when the harasser spoke. I never took a survey, and of course the Macedonian women did not either, but the assumption was always that they were Albanian men due to an underlying assumption of the class levels between Macedonians and Albanians.

### **Marriage and Gender**

Maintaining the peaceful divide occurs in many ways, but is most apparent through the control of young Albanian women. In Albanian families in Gostivar and Kicevo, arranged marriages are still common, though not decided until the children are older. The young adults have a certain amount of say, but parents do the matchmaking and decide on the details. Though, as was expressed by some Macedonians I spoke to, there are sexual dalliances, for the most part Albanians in Gostivar always end up with Albanians in

terms of marriage. Dating is very secret, if it happens at all, and with no future. Though there seems to be a desire to break out of the intermarriage trend amongst the younger generation, it has yet to occur.

The cultural differences and gendered expectations were something brought to my attention frequently by Dona and Fati largely because they were of the age to be married; and being born and living in America up until 5 years ago, the difference really pressed on them.

"I want to move back to America, but I can't until I'm married," my mom told me, Dona explained one day. "And it's so hard because people here know my past and it makes me um...," she trailed off and checked her phone.

What she was referring to was her past relationship in America. When she was a teenager, I would see her frequently in Opa. She loved spending time around her dad, Lirim, and she was interested in one of the Albanian cooks. Her father also liked him and it was decided they would start dating and eventually get engaged. She was 16 and he was in his early 20s, but the age difference was not seen as an issue. What exactly occurred between them is up for debate, but the relationship ended after a year. It was shortly after the end of the relationship that her family decided to move her and her siblings back to Macedonia. Part of the reason for the move was the failed relationship. There were fears that Fati and Dona, were becoming too Americanized by their parents' standards and were having problems attracting traditional Albanian men which would lead to a more traditional Albanian marriage. However, the fact that Dona was engaged before was very bad for her reputation in Gostivar. She lost many friends and suitors when knowledge of her past began to spread. It was not a surprise that she would be looked

down on for the failed engagement, but her parents' were more concerned with maintaining a future Albanian identity and were confident that their station would allow for a future husband to overlook her past.

“First it was, 'Why don't you have prom in Macedonia?' my mom had said, then it turned into a long vacation and I ended up applying for college here,” Dona explained.

Fati went with her sister Dona and their brother joined them that summer. Soon all three siblings were living in Macedonia with their mother while their father stayed in America to work.

It sounds weird, right? Dona laughed, But, it's the normal thing here, people get married but the jobs are bad here so then the husband leaves and works somewhere else so he can provide for his family. It's very chivalrous, our men are like that.

Now in Macedonia, the siblings were not getting the culture from just their parents. Though the university that Fati and Dona attend is taught in English, it is an private Albanian university. Now they speak Albanian fluently and are under the surveillance of their culture outside of the house as well as inside. The effects have been significant; all three of the siblings are clearly more in touch with their culture and understanding, at least on the outside, of why they must adhere to certain rules that they previously rebelled against.

Fati: It's like this. We were just so American before, we didn't know our language or religion well, I used to sneak away and drink even during the Holy month. Our grandfather would yell at us when we came back here but it just didn't make sense to us. Now that I am here I get it. Culture and tradition is so important and it's what we are. We couldn't keep it in Florida without seeming weird.

Dona: Uh, this is so weird cause in America, I never felt like I belonged but then here I don't feel like I belong either so I am always wanting to be where I am not. Technically I was born and raised in America this is my birthplace but then my family is very traditional so I always felt a little weird in America. When I came over here I have American mentalities so I am kinda different so now I have learned the mentalities I personally haven't been changed but I know what the common laws are and how the people are and I can blend in. I am more well aware of what to do and say. You have to be here. You know how they are.

Though Fati and Dona feel they are unchanged by their experiences in Macedonia, their cousins, who had not seen them since they lived in America, had very different views of them.

Valon: Oh my God, they are so annoying now. I mean they always were a little bratty but now they act just like all the girls here. Oh, I can't talk to anyone or dance or do anything because someone might see and say something, who cares? It's like "Game of Thrones" for them now. They have nothing to do but wait to get married and have Albanian babies!

Valon and Luftar also grew up in strict Albanian households and actually were sent back to Macedonia for two years as young children, but the lack of the culture outside of the home in America allows for rebellion and the formation of the identity outside of what the parents expect. The attempt to keep culture and identity alive without the reinforcement of gossip surveillance and social exclusion makes it more challenging, though not impossible. Despite Tali and Valon's rebellion against a traditional marriage, every summer hundreds of marriages occur in Macedonia that began from transnational semi-arrangements. All five of the cousins exhibit the double consciousness of diasporic groups, feeling both in and out of the West and the Balkans (Gilroy 1997).

Though their cultural citizenship feels unchallenged, how they exhibit their citizenship is affected by their geographic locations and gender, the female cousins within

Macedonia having stricter guidelines over the male cousins residing in America (Ong 1997; Bercovitch 2007).

### **Summer Wedding Season**

While sitting at the table of one of the many weddings held over the summer in Gostivar, I noticed that everyone at my table was female. This was not because it was a woman designated table but because all the men were gone. I had become a little dazed as the loud *cochek* music played monotonously and the endless parade of guests dancing the *kolo* streamed by. Every wedding followed the same formula and the novelty had worn thin. Looking over the too brightly lit banquet hall I could see I was not the only one feeling the drain of all the weddings. The women at my table were all busy on their phones texting or going through Facebook or Instagram, liking and commenting on more weddings of the season.

Curious about where my male friends were, I went outside, pretty sure I would find them drinking in the parking lot with most of the other men. At first I did not see anyone, but then I noticed they had retreated inside cars because it was so cold in the mountains despite summer. Walking quickly, I assessed each vehicle looking for a familiar face, many cars were occupied, but not by my friends. But then I found Valon, Milli and Luftar in a car together. They opened the door and I jumped in.

Luftar: Tired of all the weddings yet?

Lauren: I just needed some change of scenery. Anything exciting?

Valon: Nah, just waiting for it all to be over.

Lauren: It'll be hours, why don't you go somewhere?

Luftar: Where?! Look at this place. We are a good 20 miles away from anything!

Lauren: Ok well, I am going back, don't want to start any rumors. Want me to have Dona grab you guys when the show starts?

Milli: Oh, we will be heading back before that.

I returned to the wedding and my table was now completely empty. I noticed a few of the older women dancing in the line and joined them. The *kolo* gave me a way to look across the room in a nonchalant fashion. Everyone looked bored or tired or maybe both. As this was the fifth or sixth wedding I had attended in two months, I could only imagine what everyone else had experienced. I saw Dona and Fati heading to the bathroom and they screamed in delight at me doing the *kolo*. I imagine my doing it was something akin to a monkey doing tricks for them. They signaled they are going to bathroom for a smoke and I continue around the room.

Because of my dance career, I have been to hundreds, if not more, weddings. From the super expensive to the lower end of the spectrum and it seems globally, or at least between Macedonia and America, they follow the same patterns. Cheap satin colored fabrics in bows on backs of chairs complimenting the bridesmaids' dresses and bouquet, a head table for the bride and groom and their closer family and friends, toasts and pressures for the new couple to kiss via clinking flatwear on glasses. The difference of course being that most of these couples in Macedonia did not have a typical courtship but one over the transnational network.

Eligible partners have been selected and then the individuals living abroad makes the final decision. It feels like a reality show. After a brief courtship in person, the couple has to rely on social media to communicate for the next year or so and if all goes well, the

wedding date is set. Then there is the wedding and the new couple travel back to America, or somewhere else abroad, to live. Individuals from Macedonia have to pack up and move, leaving behind their friends and family. Often there is very little choice in the matter once the parents get involved, but the spouse to be is not entirely without options. The bride in the wedding I was attending was actually not the woman who the groom's mother originally picked. She is the best friend of the woman favored by the mother, but her choice did not like her prospective groom and pushed for her friend instead to take her place. All parties involved eventually agreed, and the wedding was set.

The dance was interrupted by the clinking of forks to glasses, demanding the couple to kiss. Neither looked prepared. They exchanged glances and seemed set to ignore the request until cheers accompany the clinking, and they finally gave in to a quick peck. I use the interruption to find Dona and Fati in the bathroom. The bathroom is filled with smoke as the women smoked and chatted. It seems that the one place where people feel free at these functions to hide with each other enjoying their vices.

Fati: It's just so sad, you know?

Lauren: What's sad?

Fati: Just all of this, these weddings always make me sad.

Lauren: Why?

Fati: Just I don't know. I know I have to get married one day too, but the bride never seems happy. And our men are such jerks.

Dona: Yes! Within a few months, he will be cheating on her and there's nothing she can do about it.

Lauren: He's allowed to do that?

Dona: Well, not allowed, but it's not a surprise and she has to do all this crazy stuff. My mom, she's up at 5 and dressed perfectly before any of us are ever awake and she spends her whole day cleaning and cooking. She never gets any fun.

Fati: It's just too much.

Outside the bathroom, the wedding continued and eventually the guys came in. Things stayed about the same but when I looked up I saw that the bride was quietly crying. I pointed it out to Dona and asked why. She replied, "Oh, her parents and friends are probably gone now. They are supposed to leave part way through the ceremony." The departure or even absence of the bride's kin is a cultural norm, but it is different to read about the practice and see it done. I felt for the bride who was about to start a new journey, perhaps one that would be great for her but standing on the precipice is terrifying.

Valon: Oh, boo-hoo! I'm leaving this garbage country for America and marrying into a great family. Oh, poor me!

Dona and Fati shoot him a look that I am sure I was guilty of making as well and he laughed.

Valon: Well, she signed up for it. You want to marry the American, then you have to go to America. He's going to give her a way better life than anything she could dream of here!

Fati: It's not so simple as a plane ticket and accommodations. It's supposed to be love.

Valon: Love? Who marries for love around here? There are so many rules. I can't talk to this girl cause our families don't know each other, and not to this one cause she isn't Albanian, and no one can talk let alone date. Then one day you marry someone and you want to say it's for love. It's some family bullshit no matter what and she just won the lottery that her family and his know each other and she gets a way out.

It is clear that there is a gendered divide in how the transnational semi-arranged marriages are used. There is also a divide in who the chooser, i.e, abroad, partner is. He also has the freedom of choosing, being the American, if he were to follow through in this type of arrangement though he expressed several times he would never condone the arrangement, “My parents are just going to have to understand. It will be hard. I will probably be the first, my eldest brother did it and Luftar will probably never get married so I am next.”

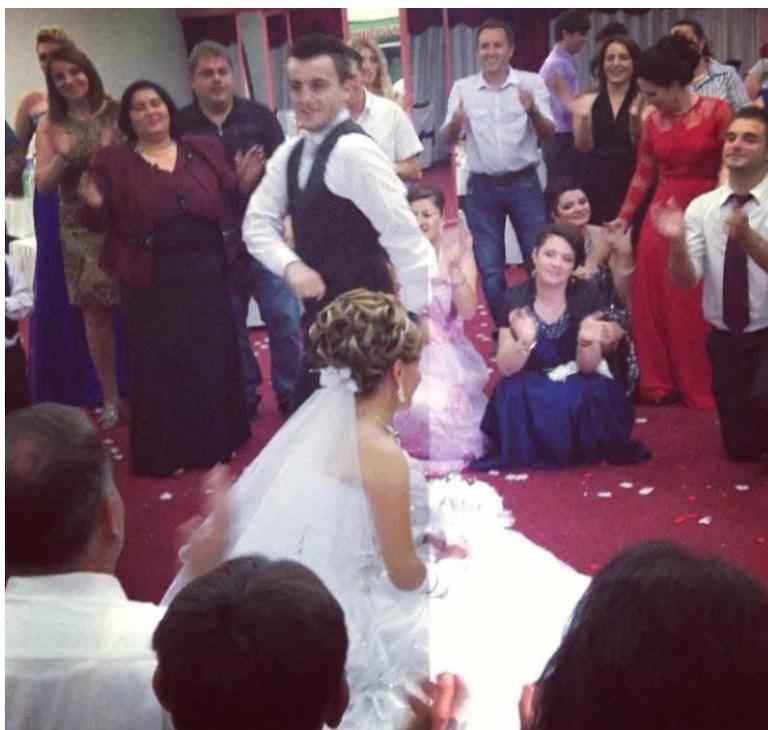


Figure 6-1. Bride and Groom at one of the many summer weddings. Photo courtesy of author

### **Transnational Marriage in Macedonian-Albanian Culture**

Transnational marriage is an increasingly common occurrence for all former Yugoslavians, but Albanians in particular rely on transnational marriage to not only preserve ethnic identity, but continue remittances and restore Albanian concepts of

gender as well. As has been noted previously, a large part of the "dangerous" notion of Albanians to Macedonians is their high birth rate, and traditional, often seen as "backwards," ways of treating women. Both of these aspects require marriage and children and unofficially a marriage between Albanians. It also requires regular returns to the homeland to renew concepts of masculinity and femininity. Through visits and contacts via technology, gender and culture are renewed as these times abroad and with family become magnified moments. Magnified moments are defined by Smith as "Episodes of heightened importance, either epiphanies, moments of intense glee or unusual insight, or moments in which things go intensely but meaningfully wrong. In either case, the moment stands out; it is metaphorically rich, unusually elaborate and often echoes... One thing a magnified moment magnifies is the feeling a person holds up as ideal. It shows what a person, up until the experience began, wanted to feel.

Thus, there is an ideal expressed in the moment and there is culture within the ideal" (Smith 2006;4).

Transnational marriage in some ways has existed throughout Yugoslavia and now into the post socialist states. Labor mobility was something required to support families historically, especially for Albanians in Yugoslavia as many men opted to work abroad and send money back home, only being able to visit their families briefly (Markov 2013). Albanians in Macedonia in particular have a long history of labor migration, first starting with farm work. In the Socialist period, Albanians often did not have the same opportunities for employment as the Macedonians due to language barriers and discrimination and would find themselves migrating for half the year to work on farms and returning home after the harvest (Dimova 2007).

By the mid-1960s there were amendments to the Yugoslav constitutions (1963 and 1974) that allowed for guest worker employment for the underdeveloped areas of the country, specifically Macedonia, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The amendments allowed for workers to go abroad for part of the year for employment; Albanians followed with the rest of the Yugoslavs to Sweden, Germany, Austria, France and Switzerland all of which were experiencing the post war boom (Dimova 2007). Once the 1970s, recession hit, however, need for migrant labor dropped severely. Fear of returning to Yugoslavia and not being allowed to leave prompted many Albanians to remain out so they could continue to provide for their families. After the fall of Yugoslavia, the Albanian migration to Macedonia was halted and severely regulated so that the only way Albanians could return was via marriage. This prompted a renewed vigor of transnational marriage to both bring family back and renew the need for remittances lest the abroad Albanians living abroad forgot of their Macedonia bound family (Markov 2013).

Besides the economic needs of the transnational networks and the needs to renew connection via marriage, there are additional motives for the return visits and marriages and that is for culture, specifically gendered expectations. One of the major issues affecting labor migrant men is the rapid downward mobility they experience in their host country. Though the often menial work they are doing in the host country provides them with a lot of money for their families, their status only exists in their home country and within their families. In the host country, they are simply a labor migrant.

However, interactions with the host country via short visits or living / coming of age there can cause the different gender ideals to clash (Markov 2013).

Although the normative masculinity of the West includes Albanian and Macedonian concepts, masculinity is evolving at a different rate and perhaps towards a different end product in more urban environments. The result is that men and women who spend a lot of time abroad start to change their expectations, as seen with the Albanian cousins, yet their family's goals for them remain. Furthermore, there is no glory in the modernized gender roles, where the men in particular fall again from being to just a labor migrant instead of a savior of the family. Because of the clashes between different cultural gendered expectations and the family's, the trend goes towards modernizing women, and men holding to the traditions and thus their personal glory, renewing their masculinity with every return visit home (Smith 2005).

Similar challenges are seen in case studies of Mexican and Vietnamese male labor migrants (Thai 2011; Smith 2005). In both studies, returning home renewed masculinity and created the desire to marry a woman from the home town, to continue the cycle of renewal in traditional masculinity. When return did not happen consistently, then Mexican labor migrants in New York started renegotiating their ideas of gender and what they were wanting for their future and partners. But, despite New York creating a new expectation, so -called "magnified moments" of return can be enough to renew masculinity for men, since they have more to gain, but are not always the same for women, who gain more by adopting the host country's norms (Smith 2005; Hoschchild 1994).

But the power of magnified moments of return is only possible in those who migrated to another country. By the time people were born in America, even short visits back to Mexico would not shift the new gendered expectations. Just as the Macedonian

Albanians are in flux with gendered expectations, the result has been the men created a combination of masculinities from New York and Mexico for themselves and the women combined the American ideals of higher education and independence along with the domestic and child rearing responsibilities, which looks like modern femininity in most Western countries (Smith 2005).

In the Vietnamese example, labor migration has remained flowing for generations, much like the Balkans, and men have longed for their returns to their home country to experience their renewal of masculinity and the gratitude from their families. These magnified moments were able to sustain their gendered identity for their long times away. It is not just a renewal of gender but a feeling of brief upward mobility in social class shifting from labor migrant to head of household or savior of the family. Feelings of gratitude and superiority are obviously intoxicating after living as a migrant working often long and grueling hours (Thai 2011).

There is a generational divide in Gostivar, with both Macedonians and Albanians. Gendered expectations and goals for life are dictated by parents, but once there is exposure to the outside expectations begin to shift. The younger generation is renegotiating gender and culture but only time will reveal the outcome. Could something like the Opa Effect return to Gostivar? Could the effect open up with possible interethnic marriage as walls between the old and new break down, or will non harmonious peaceful separation continue? Those in the network in Gostivar have several macro problems coming at them all at once which is affecting their daily interactions within and without their ethnic groups. Gostivar is situated in a historically contested area of land between Albania, Macedonia, Greece and Bulgaria. It also is part of a country which is still fighting

over its right to history and identity with Greece which is causing very real delays in progress to UN and EU status. Combined with a tension between ethnic Albanians and Macedonians that the Ohrid Agreement has only served as a temporary bandage, and the infrastructural and economic neglect of the country outside of Skopje, Gostivar finds itself at the proverbial fork in the road. Tension between ethnicities, combined with economic and infrastructural issues are so far kept at arm's length, and out of daily interactions, despite feelings of mistrust and paranoia expressed to me. Whether there will be a move past tensions, to join together and push for governmental attention, or if the tension will remain static or worsen remains to be seen. Those same Albanians and Macedonians in Gostivar were able to form friendships and work together in Palm Beach County at Lirim's restaurants, but do not seem able to maintain that once they return back to Gostivar.

CHAPTER 7  
BLURRED BOUNDARIES, ETHNICITY AND BELONGING IN THE GLOBAL AGE

**Transnational Work: Outsourcing and Working Abroad**

Coming back to America after my time in Macedonia, I felt I required a bit of an adjustment. It is always the little things: getting used to driving again, waking up and realizing I do not have to try to plan all the phrases I may need for the day, things like that. Somehow this time, however, I had scheduled a meeting with an entertainment coordinator on Palm Beach Island almost the day after I landed. Going from the still rebuilding Macedonia to the extravagance of Palm Beach felt more than a little strange. Palm Beach Island remains one of the wealthiest areas in the country and about as far from Gostivar as I could get.

Arriving at the resort I found my way over to my meeting. Impressive chandeliers lit my way through the Mediterranean villa inspired archways as perfectly tailored service workers darted this way and that allowing for stylish retired guests to saunter the grounds undisturbed but always waited on. I found Kirill, the coordinator I was to meet, already seated with another man. I would later find out the man was part of a management team that regularly outsourced to Macedonia. He was not supposed to attend but had ended up joining at the last minute, because Kirill had car troubles and needed a lift. We went through the normal conversation I have at these type of meetings, explaining pricing, dance styles, insurance and so on. All through the meeting, the friend kept getting texts and phone calls that were a little distracting. After about the fifth or sixth interruption, he apologized and excused himself from the table. By the time he had returned we were wrapping up and getting ready to say our our goodbye, when he responded;

Friend: I'm so sorry for all of that. I have these guys working on a project for me in Macedonia so they don't know how late it is here.

It was such a strange coincidence that I felt as if I physically jumped at the word Macedonia.

Lauren: Oh, really? What city?

Friend: Skopje.

Lauren: Oh, I was just there, well not really, I was in Gostivar which is close, but I spent a few days there.

Friend: Yeah, these guys are amazing. They blow every American engineer out of the water and I can pay them next to nothing and they're so thankful!

I looked to Kirill, wondering if he would have an opinion on this being from Ukraine but if he had an opinion, he wasn't showing it.

Friend: Like, ok look at this. I gave these two projects out just the other day. My American team, still working, no communication. These guys in Skopje? Done! And my American team will be complaining about money soon and I will have to find new recruits out of the universities. So much work and they don't deliver!

Lauren: Well you know a lot of them are probably hoping one day you will bring them to America on a work visa for your compan-

Friend: Ha! I would never do that. Then I would have to pay them real money and some other firm would snatch them up and I would be back to where I started.

Lauren: Are they aware there is no hope for that?

Friend: There's no reason to talk about that and besides, I am helping them! I pay them more than they could hope for in Macedonia, but my company can't survive if they were over here.

Lauren: So your company budget is designed where it can't afford to hire enough engineers or you have just gotten used to the extra cash?

Friend: Look how serious she is getting! Don't worry, it's a compliment, honey. I like a girl who is feisty. Let's change the topic, do you want a dessert?

Lauren: I actually have another engagement.

This was not entirely a lie. I scooted out of our horseshoe table. I looked at Kirill, thanked him for the meeting and said goodbye to the friend and left.



Figure 7-1. Ad originally found in a magazine for outsourcing to Macedonia. Photo courtesy of author.

### **Balkan Outsourcing and Technology**

The outsourcing to the Balkans, specifically to Macedonia, is nothing new, nor is it seen as altogether too negative. Though my personal feelings for my friends in Gostivar and their goals to come to America made me look at the outsourcing in a negative lens. Not everyone is looking to leave Macedonia and keeping talent within the country is beneficial for growth. Macedonia has benefited greatly from outsourcing in the past decade. In 2008 alone, outsourcing to Macedonia grew 38%. When the economic global crisis hit in 2009-10, Macedonia continued to grow in outsourcing as companies needed more than ever to reduce costs. The most common industries outsourced to Macedonia include software development, IT and telecommunications. As of 2008, it is estimated by Macedonian ICT Chamber of Commerce there are 420 companies outsourcing to

Macedonia in IT industries alone. As of 2011, the highest paid professional in these jobs was the senior software developer with an average monthly salary of 1,050 Euros (\$1,118.53) compared to the average monthly salary in the US at \$8,965 (8,412.10 Euros) (Glassdoor 2015; Starkell 2011).

Besides a significantly cheaper and highly skilled labor force, Macedonia offers several other incentives for foreign investment. There are no corporate taxes for the first 10 years of business and only 10% thereafter; 5% personal income taxes for 5 years, 10% thereafter; no VAT or customs duties during export, and companies are given the right to buy or lease land (Starkell 2011; Invest Macedonia 2015).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, FDI (Foreign Direct Investments) are a large and important point of growth for the country. As of 2011, 87% of total FDI was from telecommunications with only 4.5% from software development. To encourage more software and IT investment, the Macedonian government has started a "Computer for Every Student" campaign which offers free training and basic IT training for elementary students and the unemployed alike. Whether this will translate to increased outsourcing in technology fields remains to be seen (Starkell 2011).

The effects of Macedonian outsourcing are very ambiguous. Those who benefit the most are businesses and the Macedonian government. The state benefits even more so because they do not lose their skilled labor force via a brain drain, and they have income coming in. Sure the employees are gaining jobs that are higher paid than other jobs available, but they would be higher paid if outsourcing were not possible and they had to come to America or whichever country to gain employment. Of course, immigration is not

always the goal. Though the young people of Gostivar I spoke to largely wanted to escape Macedonia, not everyone has the same sentiment.

On the other side, in Palm Beach County, plenty of people the same age would love to go back to their home country if only they had higher paying jobs there, as they stated in their interviews.

Esad: I mean, of course, I want to go back! But it just isn't possible, we ruined everything, now I just spend all my money going to visit.

Tajma: Yeah, if I found a good paying job, I would go back in a heart beat!

While just over 1,000 Euros a month is poverty in America, compared to the average Macedonian monthly salary of 226 Euros, it is a huge benefit. The problem for me is the fact that the choice is not being made by the worker. Though perhaps some would rather remain home with their friends and families, they are not ever given the opportunity.

But the outsourcing of work is not always such a large, government ran outlet. Sometimes, it occurs in the network as something between outsourcing and a remittance. I saw this in a small website Dado was building. He had come to live with me and his cousins after his mother suddenly died of stomach cancer in 2006. His father had stated he only had enough money to send one son to university, which was the older brother, not Dado. Being close in age, we were elected to take Dado in. Our bedrooms were all full, so we had to convert a downstairs room into a bedroom for him.

No one was happy about the situation. His cousin was angry that his life was still being dictated by the whim of his parents and the other roommate, though initially happy, he was quickly angered when Dado was not religious as he had hoped for a mosque

buddy. This meant, despite my already full schedule of work and school, prepping him for American life fell largely to me. Dado lacked any real drive to learn English well enough to attend university here and despite being only a few years younger than I, felt like my foster child. Instead of trying to work on his English, he spent all his time Skyping with friends back home expecting me to do his ESOL homework.

One day, out of a mix of anger and sleep deprivation, I snapped at Dado. Here he had an opportunity of a lifetime, a wealthy aunt and uncle to foot an American university degree if only he would improve his English and all he could do was feel sorry for himself that he missed his friends and home. Another deeper aspect to the story was that he was from Livno and his family was the only Muslim family remaining in the city after the war. There were no jobs period, let alone for a minority. All of his friends had been shipped to Croatian universities as the city hoped to be annexed into Croatia eventually. If he failed here and got sent back, he would have zero opportunities and potentially be in a threatening situation. The conversation quickly turned from tough-love to a harsh berating as I was admittedly more than a little insensitive and pushed him to tears. But from that day forward, he did start trying considerably harder.

Overtime he became closer to me than the other roommates. His cousin and he never quite got along, and Kerim was constantly pushing his religious agendas leaving Dado with few allies in the house. When I went to Croatia for research, he visited me as he had a cousin in that city and he became something of a friend that summer, no longer a foster son.

However, when I moved to Gainesville, we lost contact. I thought my dissertation research would be the perfect rekindling even if it was just for a couple interviews. I was

curious how he was doing and hoped for the best. We met after a dance rehearsal one night at a gelato shop, which just happened to be the first place I ever took him years ago when he had arrived in America. He was waiting for me when I arrived, outside and already finished with a cup of gelato. Still tall and skinny as a rail, he no longer had his long wavy hair. Instead it was cut short and professional to match his now manicured eyebrows.

Lauren:       Your hair!

Dado:         I know! I hate it! But you can't have a real job with long hair here!

Lauren:       I like the eyebrows though.

He laughed rubbing between his brows where hair had once been. When we were roommates, he used to come to me to fix his uni-brow.

Dado:         Come on, he said I want another scoop.

While in line he bragged about a new car and new apartment he was getting soon and his joy at finally not be living with his cousin. We joked about problems in the old house. He asked about my cats and all the typical catch up stuff. When we sat back down, I asked what he was doing for work. "Oh, I work for this software company. It is ok" he trailed off. I asked for more details, and he did not seem to want to talk about it

Dado:         You know, it's just a job. I don't really like it but it gives me money. What I am really interested is this.

With that he started on his phone to pull up a website that was an encyclopedia of beer. He went on to explain how the site has a picture, and origin, taste and rating of hundreds of beers, and he hoped to make money from it some day.

Dado:           Already smaller breweries are paying to be reviewed, and I got a letter from Budweiser asking me to take down their photos, which means it is getting traffic!

His excitement was apparent as he went through several beers on the list and explained how they tasted and reviewed them. “The best part is I was able to get my friends back home to help. They are even better with web design than I am but they have no jobs there. That is why I am hoping this works so I can give them work. When I am able to pay them it feels really special.”

As far as I know, the site was not making money. He was hoping to attract advertisers eventually, but at the moment the only thing close to an income was the free beer sent to be reviewed. Paying his friends back in Livno was coming directly out of his pocket. It was part a brag and part helping now that he was in the place to. Though he hated coming to America initially, he now saw the advantage he was given. But his arrival in America was not a choice either, although now he is thankful to be here and sees himself as improved compared to life in Livno.

Dado:           My dad thinks I'm going back when it gets better, but I don't know. Three years ago I was there [Bosnia] for month and half. I notice changes in myself so I had greater expectations. And what actually happened was nothing happened! It was exactly the same, how I left it, the people and the place while I had changed so much! So, it kinda made me in some way aggravated why when I'm trying to explain to people, no one understands what you are doing and that if you work hard you can actually make it! But they are like, no it's not going to happen. Cause I guess people from over there that are still there, they don't have faith anymore. They lost it and don't give a damn, they just wait for summer for the sun and that's the peak of the whole year for everybody.

### **Power of Technology in the Network**

You can not look at this transnational network without acknowledging the incredible importance of technology has in it all. Beyond traditional globalization there is, ease in

transportation and communication, but also the extreme advancements of the last 5-8 years with iPhones and all the social media. Now there are zero issues calling, texting, sending photos and videos and live streaming anywhere with internet connection. It is something that is easy to take for granted. I remember the days of timed long distance phone calls, my mom placing an egg timer by me while I called cousins, and only on Sundays, when it was the cheapest. Later, calling through long distance codes and phone cards offered cheaper rates, but of course it was all still expensive. Old ways of communicating were remembered in various ways:

Milli: Oh yes, Magic Jacks and Skype and we can talk whenever for as long as we want which I am so thankful for. Before, yes, it was expensive. There were some services that give you much better rate and it was more cheaper than ATT and prepaid cards but we [Bosnia-Herzegovina] were always one of the most expensive countries to call but I was calling everyday my mother.

Tajma: When I first came here, I was so sad. I would use up all the money I made calling back home everyday. Finally, my mom made me stop, saying we couldn't afford it.

Now we text half a world away without a second thought. Even the most expensive countries can be free if via Viber or Skype to Skype. Social media outlets like Facebook and Instagram add a further layer of being able to see photos, videos and thoughts posted from loved ones.

It is no big epiphany that social media has forever changed communication, not just for transnational networks, but western society in general. Even the change from MySpace, during my Master's Thesis and Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Skype, Viber etc. combined with smart phones has caused incredible changes in communication.

Though the initial purchase of the phone and internet services can be cost prohibitive, almost everyone has a hand me down, if not brand new phone from family abroad. Once someone has the phone, the communication is virtually free, joining the user into a constant network no matter how geographically distant.

Social media has infiltrated every level of life and this is especially true with my sample. Mothers and aunts, already armed with home DVD of weddings and gatherings to search for future spouses for their children, now have the added the level of social media to search through networks or even find a pretty girl in the wedding video from last summer. Cousins can maintain friendships and conversations well past the summer visit and mutual support and bonding can exist on all levels. I have performed at several weddings both abroad and in Palm Beach County where there are laptops setup with Skype channels or cellphones with FaceTime held in my face for those not physically there to be part of the show and reception.

Despite these great advancements, I never thought of the freedom the new technology offered in any real way until being in Gostivar. There it seemed the whole city had figured it out and every cafe broadcast their wifi and though password protected, the password was given easily and never changed. I could hop from wifi network to wifi network never once having to switch to my expensive international phone plan or buy a trac phone for the visit. I was not the only one; the locals and other visitors alike all used the same strategy. For me, it was a quick fix to avoid phone expenses abroad, but for locals it was a way of life, how to survive on little money but still benefit from technology. With all uses of phone are just from free wifi, there is barely even a need for a phone plan.

The interconnectedness, of course, is not all positive. Where social media perhaps allows people to create a fantasy, best possible worlds life for everyone to see, in a transnational network it can be different.

Valon: Oh, I can't post anything on Facebook! I didn't even post this 15 minutes ago and already what 60 likes? Who are these people? Weirdo cousins I don't even remember, some girl still thinking we are gonna get married cause our moms talked to each other?

Lauren: Can't you just block your parents or create a separate page?

Valon: Well it's not just my parents. It's all of them. And then if I get caught sharing a photo with one and not the other oh then the craziness will start! And besides I think my dad knows Facebook better than I do. You know he actually got into my account once and added all these Albanian girls and started conversations with them! I didn't even notice till one started talking to me and I saw the chat history. He thinks he's so slick!

The issue is not new and the seeking of privacy or a separation between life in America and life back home is something many want, but few attain. One busboy at Opa actually took the advice of creating a separate page and it worked only briefly. He had one page with his American pseudonym "Michael" and another with his true name "Mefat". While I was not entirely sure what happened, one day Michael disappeared. A new friend request came in from "Lucky" which Mefat roughly translates into luck in Albanian. The same thing happened a few times until he finally gave up and has the one, Mefat, with limited photos of just himself. I asked him one day what was happening with all the Facebook pages.

Mefat: People just can't live their own lives you know? Someone always has something to say, so I just said I don't need this.

Lauren: Was it issues with back home or something?

Mefat: Just everything I don't need opinions. I am the one that dropped everything and came to America, not any of them. I work like a dog! I could

forget them but I don't but that's not enough. They want to say how I live my life in my off times too.

Perhaps the strongest example of just how much and how quickly information passes through modern communications comes from my first few days in Gostivar. Besides Armend knowing I was there from a friend checking me in on Facebook at a local cafe, I later experienced an even greater example of rapid communication. Sitting on top of "Hilton" hotel in Gostivar I was sipping a coffee and looking at the city. Valon and Mili were talking about the wedding the night before while waiting for a pizza and I was feeling as if I was just settling in. I had only been in Gostivar a few days, but it already felt long with the number of events that had transpired.

Looking over the balcony I was doing my best to map out the city when Mili's phone rang. "Ah, it's my Dad!" he exclaimed and picked up his phone. They exchanged a greeting in Albanian and then he paused. "He wants to speak to you," Mili said handing the phone to me.

"To me?" I asked, shocked. Though I had originally planned on telling Lirim I was coming to Macedonia, specifically his town, he had been traveling for months and then with his restaurant closing, I had lost all contact with him for the month before my arrival. The trip was not exactly planned in advance. When I was invited by Luftar I only had a few weeks to prepare. Only Marija knew I was coming to Gostivar since I had offered to take some presents back to her brother for her. No one else in America, outside of my mother and grandmother, knew where I had gone. Yet, clearly, Lirim knew, since he just called his son to speak to me.

Lirim:            Hey! Lauren! How are you?

Lauren: I'm good.

I said this a little cautiously. I had worked with Lirim for 6 years and knew his temper was something that came out of nowhere and usually with little provocation. I wasn't sure if my arrival in Gostivar without his blessing would be a trigger or not.

Lirim: I'm good, you know. Things have been bad but I am surviving. Have you seen my kids? he continued just as cheerfully.

Lauren: Yes, I have already hung out with them a couple times. Mili has grown up so much! I didn't even recognize him!

Lirim: Yeah! He looks just like me!

Lauren: He does, but with blonde hair.

Lirim: Listen, don't talk about Opa while you are there. Not to my family, not to anyone. If someone asks, just say you don't know. Can you do that for me?

Lauren: Sure.

My eyes darted to Mili. He was close enough to still hear the conversation so I was looking for any indication he heard.

Lirim: Thank you, baby. Listen, you have fun in my country! It's a beautiful place and maybe you will understand just how much I had to struggle to get to where I am now.

Lauren: Yes, I will. Do you want me to put Mili back on?

He hung-up before I got a response as Mili took the phone anyway and said hello a few times before realizing he was gone. He called his dad back but it went to voicemail.

Milli: "Pssh! I haven't spoken to him in a week and he only called me to talk to you! What did he want to talk about anyways?"

Lauren: Oh, um, he just wanted to know why I wasn't on the dance schedule. You know how the other dancers are. They can be catty and he was making sure I wanted the time off, not that they took me off.

Milli: Where at Opa?

Lauren: Yeah.

Milli: Why, that place closed down.

I did not react. I was not sure if he was testing me or not and I did want to honor Lirim's privacy to tell his family in his own time and way. Mili interpreted my silence as ignorance.

Milli: Yeah, you didn't know that? I thought everyone knew that. How long have you been in Europe? It must have happened right when you left.

Lauren: Oh yeah. I was in New Jersey and Turkey for a couple days before getting here so I must have just missed it.

Clearly Lirim was too late. Communication with back home exists in a delicate balance. There are not many jobs and the ones that are there there are only few that pay well. The city almost entirely lives on remittances sent from abroad. Every time someone leaves to work abroad, the fear sets in. Will they forget their family?

Assimilate, forget their traditions and maybe most importantly, stop sending money.? All that fear accumulates in the Facebook newsfeed where evidence of an assimilated life threaten a family's stability. But the interference does the exact opposite of its intentions, pushing the subjects to hide themselves even further and thus feeling more disconnected from back home then before.

### **Social Death and Gostivar**

The fear is not one sided; those who migrate also fear losing status or being forgotten. According to Kankonde (2010), the main point of remittances is coming from

the fear of social death beyond everything else. Though the need for remittances is a very real economic need and the reason why people leave to work abroad is due to lack of opportunities to provide for their families, the continued pressure to send money is more complicated. While the need to send money is obvious, how much is sent is largely based on trying to build a perception of success for those abroad via a well taken care of family back home. This ensures they are important and valid family member despite not being part of contiguous space, where face to face interaction can occur. Modern theory bases remittances a 5 interlocking approaches; altruism, self interest, mutual beneficiary arrangements, perceived obligation and prestige. Kankonde adds to this the fear of social death (Kankonde 2010; Krueger 1986; Bruyn and Kuddus 2005; van Wey 2004; Lindley 2007; Bruyn and Wets 2006). Through the accumulation of communication via technology and money, those abroad are able to create and maintain their space in the community back home.

### **Visiting Back Home**

Of course, no matter how expansive technology gets, no amount of Facebook or video chat can replace actually being in the same geographic location as your loved ones. Visiting back home is an important part of the lives of about half the sample, which surprised me. My prior Master's work showed just about everyone visiting, and if they did not, it was because of legal issues, not lack of desire. This new sample, though, is almost evenly split between those who go back and those who do not. 48% of all interviewed have gone back at least once, while 42% of that group go back annually, meaning only 20% of the total sample go back annually or more frequently. The remaining 35% of the

going back group go back once every 6-12 years which make up 17% of the total sample. The remaining 63% have only gone back once or not at all.

The change is curious as it seems that though the importance of identity, history and memory remain, the need to remain relevant in the home country and family back home has diminished for an increasing number. It is worth noting, that out of the 63% who have gone back once or never do not participating actively in remittances, all reports they have sent money back fewer than 3 times. With no perceived obligation, prestige, self interest or fear of social death, there is no need to remit and no need to return home. Home becomes a memory to fasten one's identity on but not a place that needs to be visited. In fact, visiting can cause damage to the perceived image and identity one clings to.

Lauren: Did it feel like home?

Zee: Well it felt more like - it's funny you ask that. When I first flew in and got out of airport, roads seemed weird nothing like what I was used to here. It was extremely small and tiny streets were narrower I lived kinda on a hill and I always imagined it a huge mountain but it was not. I was like was it always this short? It felt weird. Then when I came back here I started to miss it a lot. It's heartbreaking that I am here, I cried a lot for 3 weeks then back into reality.

Most of the sample has no desire to go back, either because there is no one left, they fear the place has changed beyond recognition or they simply do not have money or citizenship status to travel. In fact, only 22% had the desire to visit in the next few years.

Milli: No, we have no reason to go back. We are old, both our parents are dead and our friends, we miss them but I suppose we are just too busy now.

Lauren: You have never gone back?

Milli: No, never.

Other interviews revealed darker reasons for wanting not to visit besides no relatives.

Bruno: My parents are dead and my sister is here, so I have no reason to go back.

Lauren: Do you miss your country?

Bruno: Yes, but my country is not there anymore. I love my country, my country is Yugoslavia only! I love my language, I love my freedom and I will never have my freedom back there. Yugoslavia is gone, what replaced it takes freedom away.

### **Conflict within the Network**

Despite technology's ability to keep communication easy and open throughout the network, not everything is shared. The culture will always differ within different geographic locations and no amount of technology will be able to change that. While a memory of identity will affect people in their symbolic and philosophical attachments, the localization of culture affects larger aspects like work ethic, gender roles, goals for the future and so on. Living in Palm Beach County exposes and changes those in the network. As was seen in the case of Dado: he had changed so much in his time in America, yet Livno remained the same to him. Though there is not a problem with these differences between friends and family interacting, it can prove more complicated in marriages and expectations within the marriage.

Luftar: Did you hear? Dino's marriage is over!

Lauren: Who?

Luftar: Remember the first wedding you went to in Kicevo? Well his wife went back to Macedonia.

Lauren: Oh, I'm sorry!

Luftar: Don't be! It's just what I need to prove to my parents that their whole idea of arranging marriages doesn't work anymore.

Lauren: Oh, well, congratulations then? What happened?

Luftar: Oh, I don't know, I'm just heard.

This was perhaps the first time I had ever heard of someone being excited about a cousin's marriage not working so soon, but I could see his point. His parents had not let up on him after his return to America and now were putting the blame on him for not being husband material. He was not following the traditionally accepted "safe" career path but was instead hoping to get into movie production. He is moderately successful, already working on several low budget films, but not at the point for wife and family both financially or emotionally. Perhaps a modern example of failing arranged marriage would help. I was curious though about what happened so I made a point to be available for conversation when his brother and cousins texted as the news circulated.

Sure enough, a few days later his brother texted me with the same news. He also was excited for what it could possibly mean for his future relationships.

Lauren: Yes, but do you know what happened?

Valon: She didn't want to work, she was lazy! See, in our culture the *nuse*<sup>1</sup> isn't supposed to have to do anything her first year of marriage, but of course no one does that and everyone wants to make a good impression so they work hard and that is what's expected. Dino's mom, she works her ass off! She cleans office buildings and it is good pay, she wouldn't need to know English yet, and she could start right away but Dino's wife refused!

Lauren: What do you mean refused?

Valon: His mom would say, "Would you like to come to work with me today?"

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<sup>1</sup> *Nuse* is Albanian for a new wife

and she would say, “No, I am fine sitting at home.” His mom complained to him and he asked the wife but she still refused. She said she didn't come to America to work like a dog. After some fighting she flew back to Macedonia.

The texts stopped as quickly as they had begun and I sat wondering about the situation. It is not an uncommon story about new brides returning to their family's house in the Balkans, usually she is encouraged to go back and eventually everything works out. Perhaps it would be the same story, just more expensive to act out at the international level. Weeks and months went by and still she had not returned to America. I checked in on her status throughout conversations with the family and up until the moment I am writing almost a year after she left, she has yet to return.

Valon: It's because they're too spoiled there now. My parents' generation, they are used to work nonstop just to make it. And us the first generation here, we have to work even harder because our parents expect us to be more successful than them since we have the advantage of America. But this generation back home? Useless! They just call America and ask for money and we send it because it's what we're supposed to do it and then they just sit around all day drinking coffee or whatever. It's bullshit! We work so hard here, we are the *zezaks* then they talk down to us like 'Oh, look you've lost your culture you forgot your heritage, shame on you!' Well maybe I would have more time to find my culture if I wasn't busy putting food on the table for you and your bazillion kids!”

The resentment for relatives back home is not something new, nor is the feeling that relatives back home have it easy. Several memes and chain jokes are about being any of the Yugoslavian identities often mention a trait of back home relatives as being poor yet having nicer clothes and phones than the subject does. Increasingly the younger generation is pushing back, not wanting to inherit the responsibility of taking care of back home family for their own lives after their parents retire. This is another reason back home

marriages are seen as important for maintaining the network because a spouse from America will likely have issue with sending remittances while a back home spouse will likely ask for their family to be added to the remittances' list. But without that renewal of importance, sending money back when there is no crisis seems pointless.

### **Southeastern Europe Floods 2014**

Yet, despite any irritations over sending remittances in peacetime, when tragedy hits, everyone in the network jumps to help. The connection to back home and feelings of financial responsibility to them remains despite expressions of irritation. From May 14-18, 2014, a low pressure cyclone caused flooding throughout Southeastern Europe hitting Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina the hardest. The rain fall broke a 120 year record for the region and lead to 62 people dying as a result. Floodwaters caused over 2,000 landslides, which unearthed old landmines sometime sliding them into inhabited areas. The damage was only compounded considering the region's recent history. Over 1.6 million people were affected by the flooding, and the World Bank estimated damage at 1.55 billion Euros, exceeding monetary damage of the Bosnian War.

The Southeastern Europe floods hit the Palm Beach County community hard. What started as posts on social media sites about the flood turned into supply drives and a large amount of pan ethnic effort. When I went to La Fontana to pick up my check from a recent show, Adnan had the news on with a segment about the flood. Picking up a paycheck is never just that with Adnan, and soon I am sitting with him drinking coffee and we are talking about our days. I wanted to bring up the flood but I was unsure. When the segment repeated about the flood, Adnan stopped mid conversation and looks at the TV. He let out an exasperated sigh.

Adnan: Have you seen this?

Lauren: Yes, it's a tragedy.

Adnan: It is worse than a tragedy. We still weren't ok, we were just getting back on our feet and then, Bam! We are back to ruins. He took off his glasses to clean them and continued, We never get a break it's like we're cursed you know? One step forward two steps back, the whole history of the region is like that.

We continued to discuss the tragedy and possible cures when he got up to smoke a cigarette outside. I followed him out and used it as a time to exit. In that period we had decided to do a charity event to raise money and supplies for the relief effort.

Adnan I'll make sure the money goes to the right places! I don't know if you know but we have issues with sending money back home, it always goes to the wrong people, but I will make sure it will get to the specific families not bad people. I will buy things here they need with the money and send it or we will do clothes donations. The politicians won't steal diapers hopefully! Ok *vidimo se, cao*.

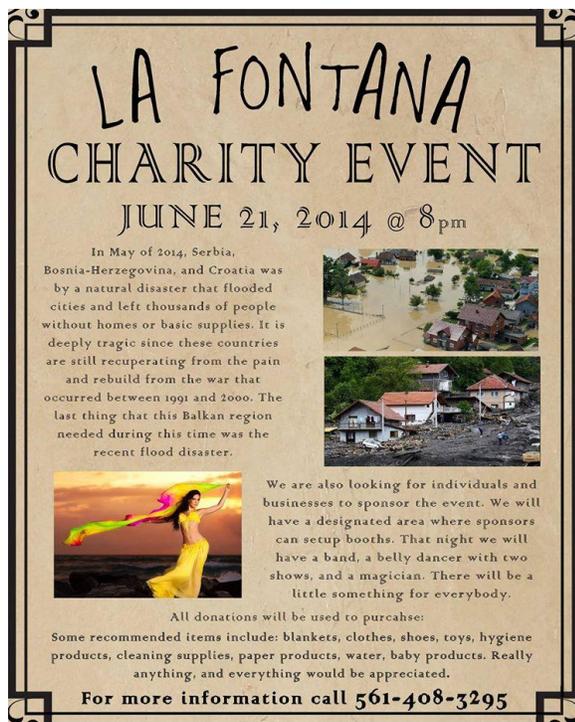


Figure 7-2. Flyer for flood fundraiser. Photo courtesy of author.

In the days leading up to his charity drive, several other similar drives began to pop up. Unknown to him, two of his waitresses posted two separate events on Facebook to bring clothes and toiletries to his restaurant, and other members of the community started their own drives too. Though everyone wanted to send donations across the region, regardless of state, there seemed not to be any trust in each other to do the job properly.

Since I was dancing at La Fontana anyway for the charity event, I brought a couple bags of clothes with me, not realizing that all the efforts were independent. When I gave Danica the bags, she was overwhelmed with gratitude. Her drive I found especially touching since she was Macedonian and although being part of Yugoslavia, she had no connections to Bosnia or Serbia. No friends or family, she never even visited the countries. Despite this she told me.

“I was just so sad when I found out. I was crying! What if that had been Macedonia or my family? I would feel so bad. I feel guilty just being here and not there.” Even with Danica's sincere efforts, she did not have backing for her drive besides her friends and a few Americans she knew. She did not have the support of other members of the community. After finishing the show and heading to the next engagement I got text from Ivana, the second waitress doing a drive.

Ivana: Is one the bags for me?

Lauren: Yeah, it's for the clothes drive.

Ivana: Yes, but Adnan, Danica and I are all doing one.

Lauren: I didn't realize they were separate. You three can all split it if you want, as long as it goes to people who need it I don't care.

Ivana: Ok!

And that was it, or so I thought. A few days later, Esad invited me to a Facebook event for relief efforts for the flood. I told him I had donated to the people at Fontana but he told me they are too lazy and probably will not get it over in time. Not wanting to disappoint him, I went through my closet one more time, bothered my roommate for clothes she might not need anymore and brought him over a bag a few days later. In that time period I had been invited to several other events on Facebook and received a few texts from some other casual acquaintances about donating items. Each time, when I mentioned I had donated to this or that person, I got the response that somehow my donation was not going to get to the right people, and so I also had to donate to this person's drive. Never was it said that anyone was favoring one region or ethnicity over the other, even when donations were hosted by religious centers. It was simply thought that others lacked the responsibility to get the donations over properly.

"You know Miran." Ado would say, "He will get drunk and forget and it will sit in his car until next year!" The lack of faith in each other was disheartening. But was it lack of faith or simply wanting to have one's name attached to a large donation? Was everyone under the gun of their families to personally be responsible for a charity drop or was it in fact a lack of trust in each other? Perhaps it was a mixture of both.

Though I did want to explore the issue of why people were so specific about donating to them personally over other, I did not. It was an incredibly emotional time for everyone and prying seemed inappropriate. Rebuilding is still continuing as I write this and though some time has passed, it is still too fresh for the Network to really discuss in analytical ways.

### **Keeping Contact Present and Future**

Maintaining connection within the network is important for all parties. Those back home, need these connections often for monetary support while those abroad use the connection to keep their ethnic identities alive and legitimate. Though local cultures change personal attitudes in work ethic and gendered expectations, those in the network still consider themselves at the core to be the same identity, despite geographical locations and customs. Marrying within groups, specifically to those from "back home," renews the attachments but as was seen in Dino's failed marriage, is not guaranteed to work. How the network will strengthen its ties over the years remains to be seen.

CHAPTER 8  
MEMORIALIZING AND FORGETTING:  
SKOPJE 2014, FORGOTTEN MONUMENTS AND TATTOOS

**Tattoos**

Memory and forgetting all exist in a delicate balance that is at the same time, unique to each individual and also able to fit into the larger collective memories of their different networks and identities. Self, family, community and nation all exist despite sometimes contradictory feelings from the macro levels to the individual. One of the most personal ways of remembering was via tattoos. Four of the men sampled; 1 Bosnian, 2 Macedonian and 1 Macedonian-Albanian, used tattoos to display their pride and personal concepts of identity and memory of back home. The tattoos varied from memorializing famous historical figures to representing their own personal journeys and hybrid identities. In their own words, their tattoos are as follows:

**On Transnationalism: Zee, Two Tattoos**

Zee has two tattoos with roughly the same meaning shown in two different artistic ways. The first on his right shoulder is done in a tribal style.

Zee:           It's actually the Sun of Vergina which was on Alexander the Great's shield. That's the rays of the sun from his shield and then a Native American eagle symbol. Eagle to me is symbol of American land even before it was America. The two are becoming one because this is me. I am becoming something that is both Macedonian and American.

His second tattoo on his back followed the same motif. This time a Macedonian Lion crest was falling apart and turning into a flock of birds which turned into a Native American stylized eagle feather.

Zee: This is the same thing sorta but I like it better. I had more of an idea when I got this one so I am more proud of this one. It is one of our oldest crests with our Lion on it. The crest is breaking though but still remembered. The birds are flying from it. This is my people, we are fleeing our past because it hurts us but we are still remembering. And for me, it means getting in touch with something perhaps as old as in America. But you don't have anything old! So I again use Native American eagle. From our old time to your old time. We must remember.



Figure 8-1. Zee's two tattoos. Photo courtesy of author.

### On Moving Forward from War: Crni

Crni has one tattoo on his back in English saying, "What you give is what you get." draping over a nautical star in Bosnian flag colors of blue and yellow.

Crni: Well, I got it in Bosnian colors to remember where I come from, but it's in English because I speak this more than Bosnian now. It's really about karma and energy. What you give is what you get, those who did bad things to us will have their own karma. God or whatever will take care of it, so we don't need to ruin our lives trying to make it happen ourselves.



Figure 8-2. Crni's tattoo. Photo courtesy of author.



Figure 8-3. Mefat's tattoo. Photo courtesy of author.

## **On Past Greatness- Mefat**

Mefat has one tattoo on his left arm from shoulder to elbow that is a portrait of Gjergj Kastrioti, also called, Skanderbeg, in the middle of battle with Ottoman soldiers. Skanderbeg is the most influential historical hero of Albanian heritage. He was an Albanian lord in the 1400s that was the leader of the Albanian resistance against the Ottomans. He died in battle never seeing success against the Ottoman occupation.

Mefat: Oh, you know him? Well it is Gjergj Kastrioti. He fought against the Turks when they were trying to take us over. He kept the Turks away for a long time and he is my heritage and you can never forget that.

## **Tattoo Analysis**

Western use of tattoos has a long history of marking identity, whether as a personal choice such as for those in military platoons or kinship groups, or as an imposed one such as prisoners and slaves. Each tattoo tells the unique perspective of each man and his identity but all still fall within collective memories using symbols, colors and people of their identity to display themselves, creating a bodily memory. Tattoos are a way to symbolically change the body to preserve a memory or own a previous injustice or attack. It forces the tattooer's perception of history and memory as the true one (Tyrer 2003;144). The tattoo narrates the body, resymbolizing trauma allowing the wearer to find identity in its symbolism and permanence.

A tattoo can be presented as an aspect of non-verbal identity, the same way dress, appearance and style to non-verbally create and display an identity. But a tattoo is more permanent than outfits and style which can be changed easily and frequently. Furthermore, the use of meaningful symbols, colors and patterns can create a symbolic self-completion in one's identity (Phelann & Hunt 1998). Through the use of tattoos,

these men have been able to solidify their social memory and personal history onto their bodies, legitimizing their experiences.

### **Forgotten Monuments of Gostivar**

One of my favorite things was to have people give me walking tours of Gostivar. It was a small enough city so that we could make the rounds of most of it in an hour or so, depending on whether we stopped anywhere. The city was small but filled with points of interest that changed dependent on ethnicity, age, sex and so on.

I was on one of these trips with Tommy when he pointed out an abandoned and spray painted park. I had walked by it a few times and found it odd with its seven shaped metal structures raising from the ground but no one had ever mentioned anything about it to me. We had been talking about the monuments in Skopje and in general the corruption of the government when he stopped at the park.

Tommy: These used to be busts of leaders.

Lauren: Of who?

Tommy: Oh, I don't remember, something from Communist times. People stole them and melted the bronze down and sold it.

Lauren: Because they're poor?

I also noticed 1991, the year Macedonia gained independence, spray painted repeatedly over the remains of the park.

Tommy: Because they're poor, because they hate the government, because they don't want to remember. All of that. The point is, we don't deserve monuments or statues. We just destroy it one way or another.



Figure 8-4. Looted Communist monuments in Gostivar, note the spray painted date, 1991, the year of Macedonia's independence. Photo courtesy of author.

He sniffed in sharply as if to spit but contained himself and took out a cigarette instead. It was cold by the river, even in summer. I took out my phone to take photos of the park and he looked at me surprised.

Tommy: Nah, come on, don't take photos of that! It's ugly! If you want to take photos I'll take you to Mavrovo, that's what you should remember.

Lauren: I've seen Mavrovo but this is interesting too.

He laughed at me in his exhale blowing a huge cloud mixed of smoke and warm breath in the cold. There were a few other monuments throughout Gostivar and the National Park Mavrovo that were not looted, but forgotten just the same. Despite name

plaques discerning them National Heroes, no one could tell me anything about them. "Oh, someone from Communism/ WWII." was the usual response. One man, Chede Filipovski Dame, actually had two monuments, one in Gostivar and one at the crash site where he died, which I later found out with my own research, but this history was forgotten. No longer was he or the other hero, Zlate Malakovski, part of the collective memory to form Gostivar identity. "You're crazy. Tommy laughs, "But if you want to take pictures of ugly and forgotten things, Gostivar is the place to do it. "

### **Skopje 2014: Creation of History**

#### **What is Skopje 2014?**

Skopje 2014 is a VMRO-DPMNE government funded renovation project for the downtown area of Skopje. It began in 2010 with the goal of finishing in 2014; the project is still under way as I write this in 2017. The project includes the destruction and revamping of many old buildings, as well as creating over 40 monuments, several new bridges, each with 28-30 bronze statues on each bridge, 20 new or renovated buildings, and 41 smaller scale monuments and bronze statues. All but one business building are done in Neo-Classical and Baroque styles, some say imitating the great monuments of Europe. The monuments attempt to tell a cohesive story from 527 BCE Byzantium to modern day Macedonia, with a more than coincidental near silence from 1941-1991 during Yugoslavia. The new monuments also hide the actual historic sites such as the Old Bazaar and Opera House (Graan 2013; Kubienna 2012).

The Macedonian government has remained silent on the complete costs of the project, making many believe it is an elaborate money laundering scheme. It is estimated the project has spent 208 billion Euros thus far and will reach 500 billion by completion

(Zantvoort 2014; Graan 2013). The government also has not engaged the public in any discussion or debate about the nationalistic undertones of the project.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the governmental silence, it is speculated that the goal of the project, besides money laundering, is to create an official history of Macedonia, proving its legitimacy to Greece and the world and erasing the Muslim and Communist eras. The overwhelming number of people memorialized are Macedonian, 57%, and Bulgarian, 32%, and only 4 statues making 6%, are Albanian statues. There are also no Turkish statues, despite the long history and large modern population of Turkish people in Macedonia, specifically, Gostivar. The monuments still are not complete so there is a chance these percentages will change at the completion of the project.

It is further thought to be erasing the Communist era because up until Skopje 2014, Skopje was the premiere example of Brutalist architecture. Because of the terrible earthquake of 1963 which left the city destroyed, Kenzo Tombe won a contest that allowed him to create a unique architectural vision for the city. Though Tombe is a famous architect, his vision was not the local vision but Yugoslavia's, thus marking the first time Skopje was used as a canvas for an outside vision. Now, with the so-called Antiquation of the city, it appears to be happening again. The trend of the ruling power projecting the image of a certain identity and collective memory appears not to be a new predicament for Skopje (Kubiena 2012; Yomadic 2015; Halbwachs 1992).

### **Individual Feelings on Skopje 2014 and Official History**

"Before you leave you should really see Skopje." Armend told me over an afternoon coffee. Ignoring the fact, I had already been to Skopje several times including with him and his wife. Also, nevermind that we would drive out there and back today only

to return the next day for me to go to the airport. But I had yet to go to Skopje during the day when I could get some decent photos of the Skopje 2014 project and I was curious what his take was on all of it. I also suspected they had a reason to go, and I did not want to be ungracious guest so I agreed.

We ate and went shopping in the big American style mall and then headed to the new monuments. Armend was not excited about the prospect.

Armend: Why do you want to see that? It's all fake, you will do better in looking at monuments where you are going in Rome.

Lauren: I know it is, but I find it interesting why the project would be created now and why this.

Armend: It's all a scam. They are getting billions of Euros and pocketing it then having their friends build cheap monuments. They won't let anyone see the books or the plans, because they are making it up as they go for whatever will make the most money for them and their friends. Look at this junk, you know how much that fountain cost? he said pointing at the monstrous Alexander the Great statues. Five million euro! We are only a country of two million it makes no sense! We need jobs, roads, public transportation, we need a hospital in Gostivar not this! They are just wasting money and getting rich.

He paused a moment to toss his cigarette and light another immediately after. But he rushed through it so he could continue his criticism. With the cigarette still dangling and an inch long flame emanating from his lighter, he continued while trying to light his cigarette which was bouncing from his talking.

Armend: Look how cheap that fountain is! It's not nice, just big. No way that cost 5 million Euro. Maybe one, most two and they pocketed the rest. And Alexander isn't even Macedonian, he's Greek! These *malakas*, they don't know the difference they just want history but they have no history! Macedonians are made up from Tito during Yugoslavia. They never existed before and now they want to pretend they are Alexander. He's sooner ours than Macedonian. At least his mother was Albanian!"

He was not alone in this sentiment. Almost everyone I spoke to whether Macedonian or Macedonian-Albanian, felt the same way. The sentiment was usually that the government was corrupt and the money was being wasted. But it did not stop the areas surrounding the new monuments from being very popular with locals and small groups of tourists alike. Perhaps it was because there was nowhere else to go but taking pictures of the monuments alone and standing in front of them seemed to be the favorite activity regardless of personal feelings on the monuments expressed to me. The fountain, obviously, Alexander the Great, is officially named "The Warrior" because of the controversy.

Armend, however, had no mixed sentiment and I had to sneak photos in while we hurried to the "real history" as he put it. We were trying to get to the Old Bazaar, a shopping location that has existed since the 12th century in Skopje. Though there were several foot bridges over the Vardar River, he declined them for the Old Stone Bridge, the only original bridge in the square. As we approached it the whole atmosphere quieted down. There were no more crowds or high pitched screeches from the other pedestrian bridges' technologies which are used to scare birds and insects, and no more outdoor speakers piping in music to accompany the walk. It felt empty and desolate but it was clear for Armend this quietness proved the historical sacredness of what we were about to enter.

Crossing the bridge, the architecture shifted to the distinct Ottoman style of the Balkans. No more fake Greco-Roman temples with pillars and white statues sparkling in the sun. Instead there were dark stone walkways, Ottoman style buildings, cafes with low

level tables serving Turkish coffee and decorated with woven red rugs. Besides the workers and a family of stray cats, we were the only people there.



Figure 8-5. The maybe soon to be forgotten Turkish Old Bazaar in downtown Skopje. Photo courtesy of author.



Figure 8-6. Detail of cafe in the Turkish style. Photo courtesy of author.

Armend: This is the real historic Skopje, the part they don't want to remember. There is only one bridge here now and I hear they are going to tear it down so the new square can have more business.

Leyla: Armend is exaggerating, it is still very busy here, just not now because it's summer and everyone is traveling.

They start to bicker on whether there is a conspiracy to shut down the bazaar, as they often do whenever one of them tries to reveal something of Macedonia to me, and I wander a little ahead to take some photos. Trying to get a shot without the glare of the setting sun, Leyla chides me for taking photos of some old office buildings on the other side of the river.

Leyla: Now that, that is something they want to forget. These were the buildings built for us by Tito and no one wants to remember we were communists. Skopje used to be an amazing city and all these buildings were full of business. Now they are abandoned and no one is trying to keep them nice.

We continued through the Old Bazar, though not much was open since we were there a little later in the day. It resembled most historic areas that attempt to draw in tourists or visitors, beautiful historic buildings with overpriced souvenirs or restaurants inside. We crossed the bridge to the lure of Turkish music which got Leyla, being Turkish, excited. As we crossed one of the new bridges we saw a small dance troupe performing to a recorded piece of Turkish 9/8 music. We noticed there were several other troupes in folk costuming to the side and realized it was for all the different ethnic groups of Macedonia. There were Turkish, Bulgarian, Macedonian and Albanian groups with an emcee speaking in English announcing each group. Armend laughed to himself and was going to say something judgmental before Leyla hushed him so she and I could watch.

There was one tourist bus that had parked and a couple dozen or so tourists watched the show and presumably went on to tour the "monuments" of Skopje.

Bypassing the rebuilt downtown after the Earthquake of 1963 and the remains of communism for the Neo-Classical inspired architecture of Skopje 2014 with all of its LED lit fountains and Parthenon and bridges in the styles of a hundred other European cities.

### **Analysis of Skopje 2014**

Skopje 2014 has had plenty of criticism on almost all sides of its creation. The government's refusal to narrate the project makes it increasingly easy for the people of Macedonia to put their own narratives to the monuments, none of which are complimentary. The placement of certain key historical figures' statues in the landscape also are very easy to read into, and without an official narrative can stir the pot of injustice. Speculation on the real motives range from an ethnic cleansing of Macedonian history to the formation of a classical Macedonian history, creating a linear narrative that

previously did not exist for Macedonian identity. But the question remains just how effective are symbols in creating results? Is the homogenization of historical narrative simply a symptom of a larger desire in the Macedonian identity or is it being created to force a belief in this identity?



Figure 8-7. Panorama of construction of Skopje 2014. Photo courtesy of author.

One of the most apparent issues with this are the Macedonian figures chosen to stand guard on the Old Stone Bridge to the Old Bazaar, which is the historical Turkish section of the city. Goce Belchev and Dame Gruev, two figures prominent in the struggle for Macedonia's autonomy from the Ottoman Empire, frame the bridge, as if to say they still stand to keep the Turkish hordes from entering Europe in the city of Skopje. Adding to this potential narrative, two pairs of Orthodox saints stand at the opposite end of the bridge, along with the new architecture hiding the remaining true historical architecture from view. It appears Skopje 2014 is attempting to forget and silence a certain history while reclaiming, and perhaps creating, a Macedonian heritage that is so linear they can no longer be denied (Kubiena 2012).

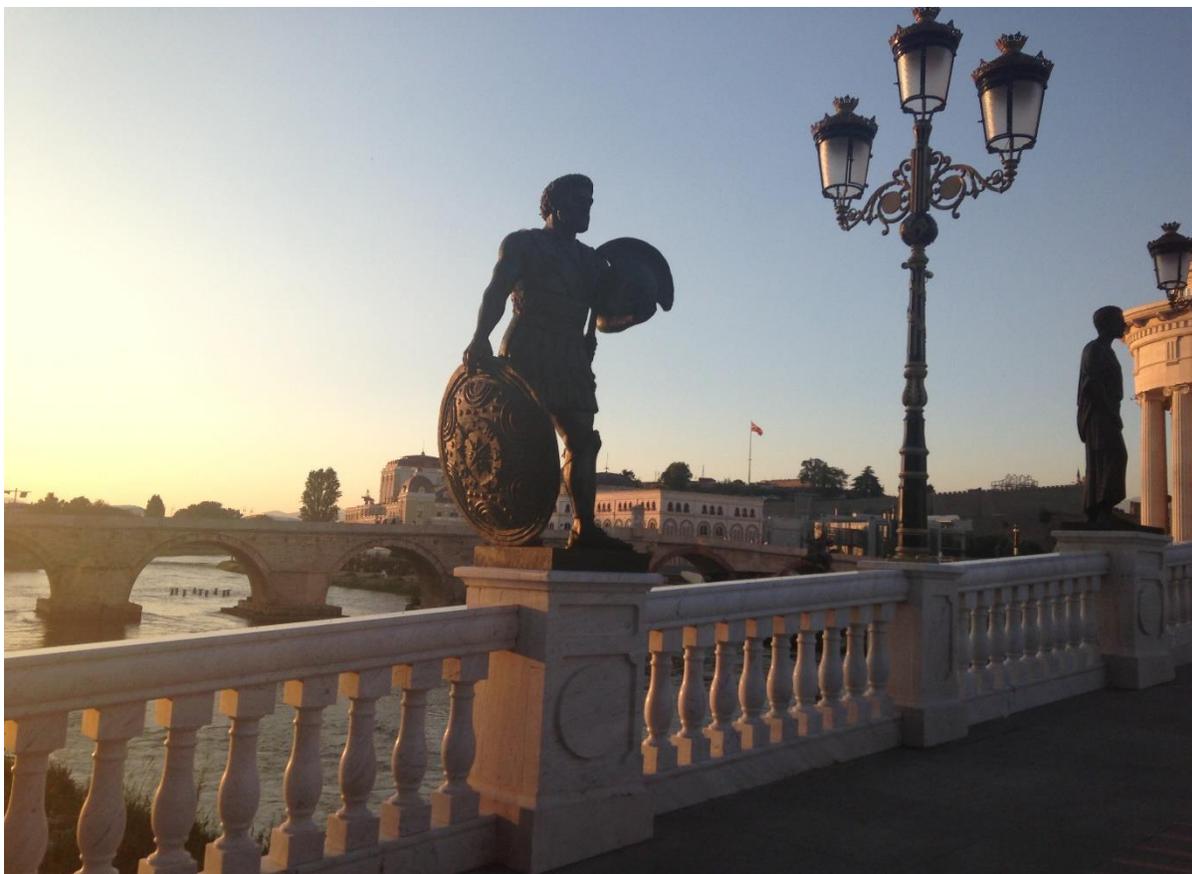


Figure 8-8. Detail of new bridge, with statues of important figures from a chosen Macedonian history. Note the Old Stone Bridge, the original bridge, behind it. Photo courtesy of author.

The fact that construction began shortly after the rejection of UN and EU membership for Macedonia, largely due to Greek contentions, but also their own shortcomings, seems to suggest the whole project is an elaborate attempt to prove to the world they are right and Greece is wrong in their perceptions of history. Unfortunately for the government, besides cries for equal representation from minority communities, mainly Albanian and Turkish, even the Macedonians are not thrilled with the concept. Besides suspecting the government of money laundering and worries of what the project will do to taxes in the future, the Macedonians themselves do not feel represented by the project. In fact, the common feeling is that it is historic kitsch and will actually backfire,

making them look like ridiculous copy cats to the world further delegitimizing them. Not only will it not bring tourists, but the tourist who do come will laugh at Macedonia and with no tourist revenue and being even further distanced from the EU, they will be stuck embarrassed and paying high taxes to cover the costs of nothing but foolishness. In their attempts to fit in with Europe, they will fear they instead only be alienated further (Muratvowski 2013).



Figure 8-9. The “true” downtown Skopje. Remnants of another forced upon architectural change, this time the Brutalist style rebuilding of downtown Skopje after the 1963 earthquake. Photo courtesy of author.

Though there remains official silence on the symbolism of the project, there are many theories. One of the most obvious obstructions of the Skopje 2014 is the ethnic homogeneity of the historical figures represented despite the ever rapidly changing demographic nature of Macedonia. Through the creation of a glorified past, a false Other

is created, standing in juxtaposition to the true history and modern climates. Metis (2015) argues that despite the project being largely symbolic, it threatens the community as it creates ethnic national memory and has the potential to further divide the multi-ethnic citizens of Macedonia. Vangeli (2010), Muratovowski (2013) and Kubienna (2012) are just some of the researchers who agree on the risks associated with this new representation of Macedonian history.

To some, the project seems part of a larger scheme to create a new Macedonian identity. The six basic characteristics of an ethnicity according to Smith (1986) are the following: collective name, common myth of descent, shared history, distinct culture, association with territory and sense of solidarity, are all represented in the linear, homogenized history Skopje 2014 attempts to create. Linking the modern day, Yugoslavia born Macedonian identity, to the ancient Macedonians gives them a history, culture and territory, but not everyone, including Macedonians, agree with the history. The whole project seems to be an attempt to prove to the world Macedonia's legitimacy and historical claims though its history formation is also hand in hand with the forgetting of communism and Ottoman rule. Through the creation of history, Macedonia is attempting a top down narrative identity, fusing history with fiction to create a national story/collective memory (Ricoeur 1991). Though at the beginning, these narratives are contested, they eventually become part of identity argues Venn (2002). Collective memory and thus, national identity, are not permanent but always in flux, a memory people choose to believe (Halbwachs 1992).

Skopje 2014 can be seen as one of these attempts, digging deep into a "forgotten past" to bring a new uniqueness and pride for the Macedonian people. It is not so

different from Albanian and Serbian narratives of ancient, powerful Kingdoms that will one day rise again (Olin 1990). The main difference lies in the memorialization of these collective memories; in Macedonia, it is through the creation of Skopje 2014 (Muratovski 2013).

Of course, the production of history and memory, especially factually dubious ones and those that embrace a heterogeneous population despite the long standing diverse population, can be potentially dangerous and tinder for ethnic conflict. Metis (2015) explores the issue of memorialization of public space and how it creates a new national ethnic identity further segregating and enhancing ethnic lines. The polarization of ethnicities in the post transitional former Yugoslavia is often cited as the leftovers and seeds of future ethnic crisis (Djerić, 2008; Stojanović 2008). Memorializing public space not only segregates the space but keeps the feelings of separation ever present in the minds of the people living there regardless of their opinions on it. Post communist ex Yugoslavia has experienced the ethnic polarization on many fronts, from language division, to changing the names of roads after independence and segregating schools on ethno-religious lines. Symbolically separating the groups is done on many fronts and Skopje 2014, with its lack of diversity and "ethicized way of seeing (and ignoring) of construing (and misconstruing), of inferring (and misinferring), of remembering (and forgetting) (Metis 2015;5).

Despite the academic arguments for the creation of possibly "dangerous" history that could lead to nationalism and ethnic conflict, in my stay in Macedonia I did not find anyone actually proud of Skopje 2014 or accepting of the history it allegedly is creating. Of course, this is not to say that it could not change or that people still feel an ethnic

segregation despite not condoning Skopje 2014. What the project has done, however, is make the "other" feel that this is the opinion of Macedonians, further justifying their feelings of alienation that led to the "from the side" behavior mentioned previously (Vasiliki 2004). In places like Gostivar, where they live alongside each other, but have limited communication between each other, this could potentially cause increased tensions. Yet everyone, Albanian and Macedonian, agreed it was a wasteful project and perhaps a front for government corruption and money laundering, not the most flattering of shared narratives, but perhaps the most truthful one.

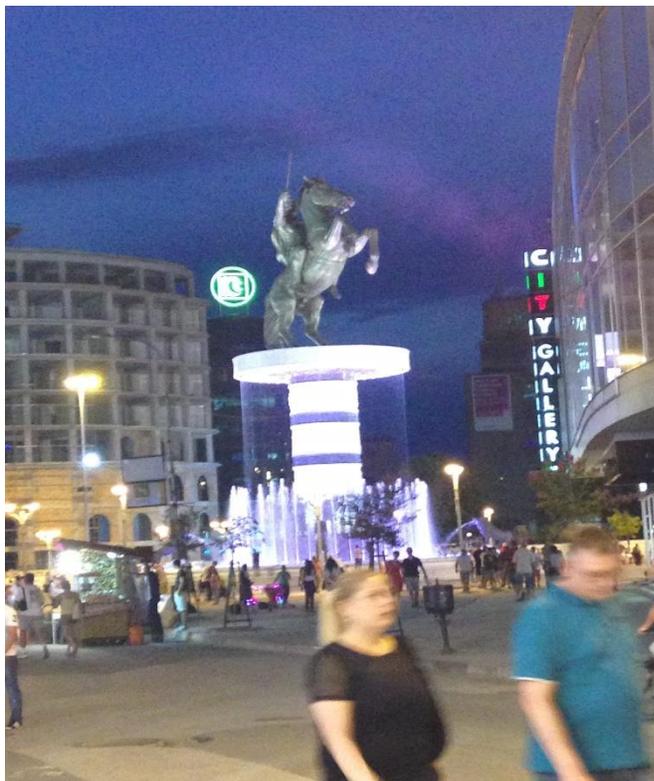


Figure 8-10. The infamous and enormous Alexander the Great, officially named, “Solider on Horseback” fountain. Photo courtesy of author

CHAPTER 9  
THE GREAT DIVIDE:  
MEMORY VS MEMORIALIZATION VS. HISTORY

Memory is a large driving force for my group. From identity preservation, arguments between parents and children over marriage partners, moving and visiting back home or using technology to enhance communication, all of these aspects have an origin in memory, memory preservation and creation and how memory affects identity. Though it may not always seem so obvious.

**Who has the right to history?**

Memory and social history are a fiercely personal concept. Despite a sudden boom in memoir production over the past few years, 36% of all Yugoslavia memoirs being published just between 2013-14 and 64% being published since 2007, and a few large Hollywood movies such as *Land of Milk and Honey* and *Whistleblower*, no one in the sample has taken the time to read these memoirs or watch these movies, or at least are not admitting to it.

Ado: I don't want to watch that, it brings back memories and it makes me upset. My dad, he can't stop remembering and that's what makes him so crazy.

Esad: I don't have time to read or watch movies as it is! If I do I'm going to watch something funny and light, not something depressing like that.

Others were more concerned about the history not being right and it would upset them.

Zee: I mean I see the previews but what could Angelina Jolie tell me about what happened? I don't even know and I was there! And it's just going to make me irritated and I just rather not.

Despite assertions that they do not want to bring up the past, the same people will talk the most about it, both the pleasant and unpleasant aspects. Really, I believe the statement should be, "I don't want someone else telling me what the past was". rather than "I want to remember in my way." Not many shies away from talking about the past, but those who talked did not want to be told if it was incorrect. Recent history is still being sorted out but not just recent; ancient history and how it affects modern society are still at play as well. Albanian and Serbian claims to territory can quickly resort to "who was the first," and Macedonian naming disputes come largely from Greek history and claims that Macedonians "have no history or culture" compared to Greece. It is easy to slip between the decades and centuries in a single explanation over one's identity.

Luis:           The Serbs they wanted to destroy us, said we were just Turks but we have a right to the land just like them. That's why I won't let my children forget, we have to remain proud.

Luftar:        Well, Albanians were the first, we have the oldest language so obviously, we are the first in Europe, yet there are so few of us left. Because when the new people came to Europe they tried to destroy us.

Armend:       Macedonians have no culture and no history, now they are trying to pretend they have something but they don't.

Despite the contentions between each other's claims to historicity there is relative uniformity on the memories of experienced war, at least in context to location. The localization of memory is a strong trend within the Yugoslav Wars because of severe variations in which city dealt with war and to what capacity. Each city experienced different aspects of the wars over different periods. As long as the individuals were from the same or close cities, experiences and accounts of war were very similar regardless if

it was an interview in the network or a memoir. Though, there was division between ethnic groups, usually it was because of location. As I mentioned previously, no one was too fond of being corrected on what happened, yet memory and war came up often, especially as punchlines in jokes or general assumptions of each other.

### **Joking with Bosnians**

Spending several evenings a week at Amicii, I got used to doing a lot of nothing. Even when people were at the table, there were sometimes long periods of everyone using their phones. Amicii had free wifi streaming so sometimes people came to simply take advantage of the faster internet.

"Look at them" Sasha joked "Worse than a bunch of girls just texting and calling." When his words had no effect he tsked loudly and shook his head. Sasha is older than everyone at the table by at least fifteen years. In his late 50s or maybe early 60s, he has salt and pepper hair, still thick and swept to the side in a voluminous classic way. His skin is dark and leathery from too much sun and smoking and his nose large but he has kind eyes deeply set under his bushy brows. He looks perfectly old fashioned, and I could see him with a cap and cane playing chess outside of a Yugoslavian cafe if history had turned out differently. He looks positively out of place in this modern plaza with a Starbucks and Panera Bread framing Amicii.

I tried to start conversation but he was distracted with shaming Zee off of his phone. Finally, he reached over and grabbed Zee's phone "Ah, it's pornography, no wonder he's distracted!" Sasha exclaimed, which of course it was not but his desired effect was created and everyone from the table looked up. Everyone settled back down

and some conversation started in language too fast for me to catch besides the excessive cursing.

Ivan: I'm sorry for this dirty old man.

Sasha: What did I say that was dirty?!

Ivan: What didn't you say? You said just about everything, she understands you, you know. She speaks our language.

Sasha: No, you don't understand, do you?

Esad: Yes, she's better than me!

Lauren: *Razumem sve*, I understand everything.

I respond, though, of course not true, and the table erupts with laughter at Sasha's surprised and embarrassed expression

Ivan: You see! And she's gonna write it all down in her book. Old Serbian men are perverts and rude especially this one Sasha! Thank God, I had a Bosnian and a Macedonian to save me!

The table erupted in laughter. As everything died down and Sasha was still embarrassed. He apologized several times, because along with his old-fashioned appearance, he was often quite polite and was always pushing the younger ones at the table to be more polite. He acted authentically mortified to be caught swearing in front of a lady, despite my assurances I did not care and despite reminding him that we have a similar interaction almost weekly.

"We need to give her a better impression than this!" Sasha exclaims, "Esad tell a joke, we need some Bosnian humor for the book." Esad smiles and wasted no time preparing. He grabbed the sugar container from the table. Not finding what he wanted he

asked Natasha for some toothpicks and then grabbed a penny out of his pocket. He moved to sit by me and started to explain.

“I am going to stick the penny on your forehead and then you have to try to make it fall without using your hands.” Esad says to me. I saw the others getting their videos ready on their phones so I was pretty sure the joke was going to be me looking foolish. Sensing my hesitation, he did it to Zee first. He pressed the penny into Zee's forehead until it stuck and Zee forcefully brought his head forward, catching the penny in his hand. Not convinced, but not wanting to ruin the fun I let him press the penny into my forehead. I made a fool of myself shaking my head forcefully down while they laughed. At the end he revealed the penny had always been in his hand. We all laughed and they played back my video a few times letting me see myself shaking my head with nothing on my forehead. Being a popular game they also showed me several other videos of previous victims.

Natasha returned with the toothpicks and he continued with another joke. The first was tame. He made the number 619 out of toothpicks. Now he said, “Give me 100 while only moving two toothpicks.”

Ivan:           This isn't a joke it's a riddle!

Zee:             I know how!

Before anyone stops him, he moved the two toothpicks to create "STO" which is one hundred in BHS. Everyone groaned and started demanding a real joke. “Ok, ok!” Esad said and created two squares the top one connecting at bottom right corner to the lower one at upper left corner. “This is East and West Germany. How do you unite them moving only two toothpicks?” Everyone took turns trying to move the toothpicks to create

a large square. Nothing seemed to work and Esad sat off to the side smiling at us while we all tried and fail.

“So how do you do it?” Zee asked. Esad took two toothpicks forming the outerwalls of the squares to create the hooks in the cross for a swastika. When realization hit the table, there was a controlled laugh until I started laughing and then it grew in volume causing Natasha to come back to our table. She saw the toothpick swastika on the table, with no backstory, and made an exaggerated, mocking gasp and looked at Esad since it was in front of him.

“It was him!” Esad exclaimed pointing to Ivan, the Croatian of the group which made the table laugh even louder. “*Ustasha*<sup>1</sup>!” Natasha said in mock anger while slapping Ivan on the shoulder making the table reach a fever pitch as she smiled and walked away. After the excitement of the moment died down Esad looked at Zee and asked him to tell jokes too.

Zee: Ah, I'm not the funny one, that's not my job!

Esad: Then what are you? We have the lazy one, The prick...

Pointing to Ivan, the Croatian and Sasha, the Serb, respectively with each insult.

Esad: So what do you have? You have nothing.

Zee: We have everything!

Esad: You have your fight with the Greeks, that's it!

Zee: Ah, the fucking Greeks, bunch of faggots and gays. You know it was Greeks who invented sex but it was the Macedonians that came to them and said “You know, you can do that with women too.”

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<sup>1</sup> Ustasha were the Croatian branch of the Nazi Forces during WWII. Hence the joke of claiming the Croatian guy was the one making swastikas with toothpicks.

The table responds with laughter. In the midst of it Zee looks at me, “Oh no! This is what I'm going to be known for then in your book? Well just as well, maybe we are funny after all.”

The layers of humor and understanding in the circle require both the times of living together and against each other. Seventy plus years of historical issues all passed fluidly in the evening's conversation and jokes. On more serious evenings these issues might be debated in this same group of friends, but tonight it was a point of humor. It is not uncommon within the network for the same person who jokingly called someone an ethnic slur one day, to use the slur again at someone else's expense in quite a serious way. “There is no difference, in this respect, between recent and distant memories” (Connorton 1989;37).

### **Memory, Identity and History**

The complexities of memory, identity and the discourses of history are not uncommon and have been explored before in memory work, notably from Halbwachs and his concept of collective memory as well as Trouillot (1995), Connorton (1989) and Sahlins (1981) with their contributions. Collective memory states that individual memory can only exist inside a much larger collective memory be it from state, memorials, family and I would add, networks. Because what is memory without the act of remembering and sharing? After a memory is decided upon, the decider will form their identity and life around this decision. Of course, private memory exists and shapes people but it is the larger aspects of self, such as identity and historical place in world that require at least some sort of community to share it with, no matter how small. Halbwachs only has one piece of the puzzle, though, in the case of the network. Here, in the network, there are

many divergent and contradicting memories, and each has its own collective. Silenced histories, though not represented in official histories, still have their own collective, whether family or small networks (Halbwachs 1953;57; Trouillot 1995;16).

When I was first starting this project, I was really hoping to find a lot of embedded and silenced stories, not just of war but of life before and after, something against the grain of perception in the Balkans. And while I did find this amazing mix of contradictions between collectives within the network and sometimes within one person, about their heritage and identity, I did not find anything that was not already mentioned in the revised and more even handed analysis of the region. Even though the memoirs were allegedly not read, the memories and histories all overlapped with others from the region. Of course, a fair amount of that is to be expected, but I felt there would be a lot more truly personal accounts. What I did find however, was a silenced heroine of Albanian history. Though she has had a slight resurgence in popularity amongst Albanians at the hundred year anniversary of her deed, she has no mention outside of this recent revival.

### **The Story of Sulltana**

The first time I heard of Sulltana, I did not take it very seriously. I was sitting at Mojitos with Luftar during his interview. Mojitos, despite the Latin inspired name and menu, was run by Greeks, many of whom had worked at Opa. In fact, it was right next door to Opa. Because of this, many former and current Opa employees worked and ate there. Luftar was excited to check it out and picked it as the spot to interview. We were being served by Lucky, another Macedonian who had previously worked at Opa and knew Luftar as well. Lucky laughed when he saw me walking in with Luftar with my folder.

"Ah, she got you too?" he said to Luftar, referring to the interview. Luftar laughed and used Lucky as a reference point several times during the interview for dates and locations. Most interviews were like this. Rarely did anyone opt to go to a private or quiet place for an interview, but usually somewhere where they knew other friends would likely be and they could join them after. Sulltana came up after more than a few mojitos.

Luftar: One time I walked from my Dad's village to my Mom's village and it was like an hour walk cause my Dad's village is on top of the mountain and my Mom's is even further up the mountain. Half way there we stopped and laid on the grass and there were just hundreds of butterflies flying My Dad said that this was the same spot where my great grandfather had been saved twice. We got to the top and we met my Mom's family members that were so old. And learned about the story of my Mom's great great cousin back in 1920 or something and her name was Sulltana. My mom's village was being raided by Serbs or Turks, I can't remember which and they took everyone's money and killed almost everybody. They came to Sulltana's house and they were like, "I know you have a daughter here," wanting to rape her but her parents hid her. And they eventually killed the parents and she grabbed a pair of scissors and when they were coming up stairs she stabbed and killed the 2-3 soldiers that were coming up to her and she defended the village but then was killed after that. I dunno it's a crazy story, pretty cool, I need to learn more about it to confirm it.

With that he finished his drink and started talking about how his Dad had worked in Germany for a long time before he could join the family, leaving this incredible historical nugget like it held no more importance than a dream he had before. I got excited about the story but when I came home and searched for "Sultana", I could not find anything. I called Luftar to confirm the spelling of her name "Sultana" and he agreed, later I found out it was actually spelled Sulltana. He was not sure of the date. 1920s, nothing special was happening, he could be late or early, putting her in World War I or II. Lucky for me, though, I was going to meet even more of his family in Macedonia, so I planned to make a point about asking about her.

I wasted no time trying to find out about her. I asked Luftar's brother, but he was just as vague as Luftar. The first person I interviewed in Gostivar was Mili, Luftar's cousin, and I could barely wait to ask.

Lauren:       What about this girl I heard about Sulltana?

Milli:         Sulltana? That was World War... uhhh... 1913? World War I and the village over there my Mom's village Quafe. My Mom's Dad, he was a 3-month-old baby in a little carriage and he was only one that survived in the whole village. He was hidden by that Sulltana lady. She's actually a warrior! She killed all the guys with scissors and the rest ran away cause if that little girl killed their men, wait till the men come!

He laughed at his own joke and took a moment to smile into the distance feeling the pride this story gave him. "They have a sculpture of her there in the village. I have a picture of her." With that, he opened his phone and started scrolling through his pictures. And there she was. I could not see much of the sculpture, because Mili has a habit of standing on monuments, even ones he had a respect for, in all of his photos. It appeared to be a torso of a woman with her arms lifted in hostility holding two scissor blades. She had a kerchief on her head and is screaming with her head thrown back. She is surrounded by mini white tombstones.

Milli:         These little things are for the people who died. They burned the bodies. They actually threw them down the valley and used them to burn the houses. The village is still up there somewhere, though no one really lives there. But those stones are for the dead, though no bodies under them. It's the 100th year august 17 it's gonna be an anniversary party, if you're still here you should come!

I could not believe my luck! I would have a chance to see the statue and the village, or what remained of it. The discrepancies in the story were troublesome to me, however. I asked a few more cousins and received other pieces of the story but it was still disjointed. I realized I needed to ask someone of the older generation but this would

prove tricky. The main issue being I did not know any of the parents and though was doing my own thing, from what Luftar and Valon told me, no one would be too happy I was there. At this moment, the parents of the Luftar and Valon and their aunt and uncle only had a vague understanding there was an American in their midst. At this point I was still a threat for ruining the betrothal plans for Luftar, either due to a perceived romantic interest or serving as a constant reminder of how backwards the betrothal process looks to Americans. From my hearsay understanding of myself, I was not a welcomed presence to at least Luftar's parents. Lirim, by this time knew I was there and was very happy, but he was still in America and his wife and I had not spoken since she moved back to Gostivar. I had to win over at least one person for the story.

A second problem came from that the parents simply did not socialize with the kids. Part was because it was Ramadan and the parents were fasting so the kids were escaping during the day to eat and socialize since they were not fasting at all. Then came Iftar, which was a strictly family affair, and I could not dream of being invited in my current social standing. I would have to wait for the first wedding I would be attending to find the parents and strike up a conversation.

The wedding day arrived and I was seated at the "*Amerikojt*" table along with the rest of the American living families. But their parents never sat with us. I am not sure if they were meant to, if their children had begged for space or if they simply were also tired of their children. There was another uncle and aunt, though, who looked at me with pure suspicion. And really who is to blame them? Gostivar is not exactly a vacation spot, especially for an American. I traveled half a world to see Luftar experience his homeland for the first time in 10 years but I had no romantic interests in him? It is for a school

project? It all seemed highly unlikely and Uncle Timmy, as he called himself, had no shame in saying so.

Uncle Timmy was short and overweight with strawberry blonde hair in a comb-over and mustache. His face quickly turned red due to laughter or anger, and he has a loud, booming voice. He was wearing an ill-fitting suit and appeared slightly sweaty, despite the temperature being very low in the mountains at night. Next to him was his wife who had a regal elegance to her. Her blonde hair in a low chignon and she was one of the few women at the wedding in an understated dress of satin navy.

Uncle Timmy:        So, you came all the way here to write a school paper?

Lauren:              Well, more than that, a dissertation. It is like a book.

Uncle Timmy:        Why come to this dump? Ha-ha!

While he laughed, he knocked his empty glass against the table like a rattle of a machine gun. His wife quietly glared at him and he caught her eyes. "Oh, sorry. You'll have to forgive her, she was born here." More laughing, more pounding of the glass while she adjusted the silverware at her place setting.

Lauren:              You aren't born in Macedonia?

Uncle Timmy:        No, I am but not Kicevo, thank God!

We went on this way for a short time before Dona and Fati came back. Women were encouraged not to openly smoke at the wedding, they told me, so they had been smoking in the bathroom. Luftar and Valon, as well as the other male cousins were all gone for most of the night drinking in the parking lot. The wedding had no alcohol due to Ramadan. Feeling a little out of sorts and not at all getting the information I needed I kept

scanning the crowd for a familiar face. Uncle Timmy seeing my search, leaned in for a sly joke.

Uncle Timmy: Don't worry, your boyfriend will be back!

Lauren: Oh trust me Luftar would be my last choice.

He looked at me, unconvinced, the rumor was that I was Luftar's American girlfriend who came to Macedonia out of jealousy and insecurity.

Lauren: He's a good 5 inches shorter than me!

He kept staring at me for a few moments, trying to maintain composure, but he failed and burst out laughing, placing his head on the table.

Uncle Timmy: That's a good point! You're too good for him anyways. So what you'll be a doctor? I'll find you a husband tonight.

Lauren: Oh, I'm not here for a husband remember? For research.

Uncle Timmy: Well why the hell not pick up a husband in the process? That's the only reason people come here is to get a wife or a husband. Last time I was here was to pick this one up!

Lauren: I'm here to find out about history that the books forget. Like Sulltana.

Uncle Timmy: Sulltana? You came all the way out here to talk about Sulltana?

Lauren: Not just her, but I am really curious about her.

Uncle Timmy: Well, there's not much to know. She was in that village up the mountain, Quafe. The Serbs came one day doing what Serbs do and she hid while her family was killed. Meanwhile her two sisters hid this baby that later would be the patriarch of all the Jonuzi. They were going to die out cause that village was killed. Anyways Sulltana killed a few soldiers with a pair of sheep shears she broke in two but they killed her in the yard. All the commotion allowed for baby Jonuzi to be snuck away though so she is responsible for saving this whole family. But anyways, that's boring stuff.

Though a little harsh and brash, Timmy was my key into the adults. After Timmy played a few more jokes at my expense, mainly convincing the Hall's owner that I was a food critic from America and was going to do a write up about his hall in an American magazine and telling a particularly unsavory cousin that I was pregnant and needed a husband quickly to save my honor so he should talk to me, I was in with the adults. Though still seen as a thorn in the side of Luftar and Valon's mother, I was accepted by the others and able to talk about Sulltana.

When the anniversary of Sulltana came, ironically enough, Valon and Luftar were not in Macedonia. Though they had loved the story and so had their parents, attending the anniversary was not something they cared to do. Or maybe it was not that they did not care to do it, but rather there were more pressing matters to attend to. These matters being the betrothal of Luftar. Not satisfied with the available women in Macedonia his parents decided to go to Albania for one last search. They also had already visited the monument, alone as a family, which perhaps is much more pleasant experience than the national and political undertones her anniversary event held.

I had gone to see the monument twice, once with some cousins in the family and another time with them but during the anniversary. It was not something you could go alone to do. The trip included an hour drive to get out of the city followed by another hour up a mountain on paths really more than roads. If there was a car coming down the mountain while you were going up, you had to squeeze by with one car teetering off the mountain as pebbles from the path cascaded down. I trusted the drivers and their lifetimes driving roads like these over my inner dialog that kept telling me death was near.

After this drive, you parked the car and continued to walk up the mountain; it is too narrow to drive at this point. Some people opt to take horses for the journey to avoid the walk but the walk was my favorite part. Arriving at the village people seemed to be living there though I was assured no one lives there anymore and we must leave before dark to avoid bears.

The first visit felt magical. Seeing the monument confirmed the stories I was told first in America. I felt as if I had stumbled upon a piece of history the world forgot. The monument is still very new, only built in 1993, from Macedonian Albanian diaspora donations. Of course, the family and I are not the only ones who know of her, but the feeling of the visit was personal.

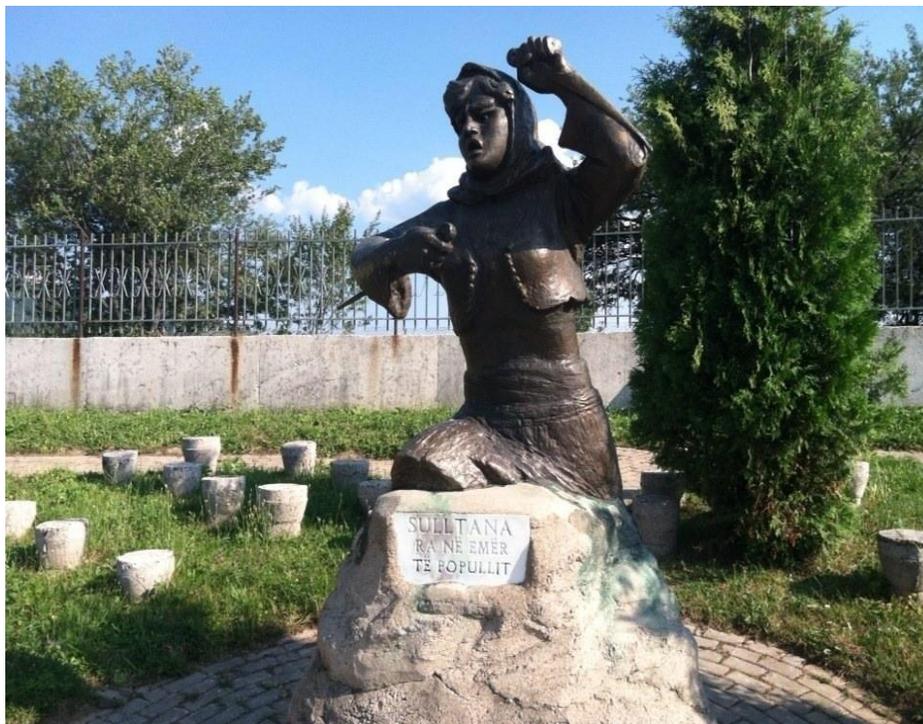


Figure 9-1. Statue of Sulltana. Photo courtesy of author.

The second visit was very commercialized. I could see why the family did not care to go. There were giant banners in red and black, folk singers and dancers, speeches and

all the political appropriations of history you would expect. I do not understand Albanian, but was told the speeches were about fund-raising for an upcoming mayoral campaign in Kicevo. The Kicevo race that was approaching would prove to be a pivotal election for Albanian representation in the region, especially in how the diaspora was used to raise votes. I was unaware of the severity of this election until I returned to the States but the overarching sense of political and national commercialism was enough to make me lose a little idealism for the story of Sulltana.

Upon returning, I learned not only about the election but the proper spelling of Sultana's name "*Sulltana*" and more resources opened up to me. Though unwritten about in English, in Albanian she has a folk hero status with a song made to her and allusions to her in political writings about the strength of Albanian's preservation. A book is even written about her in Albanian by Bezgat Bezgati. Her public story, however, only included her killing of the soldiers and eventual death by them. She did not scare them away or save the town, but she simply died bravely. I am not trying to discount her heroism, but simply recount the more popular telling. The family story of survival, thanks to Sulltana, may indeed be true, but not part of her public history, only family memory.

### **Sulltana's Official Story**

From what I have been told and some few pieces in Albanian I had translated for me, this is what I was able to get from Sulltana's story. In 1913, the *komitis* were invading villages and killing all the men. Quafe, Gostivar and Kicevo were all invaded by the Serbian forces in an effort to control a supposed rebellion in the area against the Kingdom of Serbia. In Quafe all the men had been killed, but the soldiers were still in the area patrolling. They entered Sulltana's parents' house and her mother hid her and the other

children in the basement. While the soldiers were looking for things to loot, Sultana broke a pair of sheep shears and hid them in her hands under her sleeves. Armed with a blade in each hand, she came out of the basement standing over her dead father and killed several *komitis* in the house. The rest of the soldiers ran out and were crying for help, and she chased them out of the house slashing at them before they circled her, knocked her down with the butts of their guns and stabbed her to death with their bayonets.

### **Additions to the Story from Jonuzi Family**

The Jonuzi family was from the same village and all twenty-seven members of the family, men, women and children were killed except for the infant Jonuzi patriarch, and his two aunts. The two old aunts snuck into the woods with the infant when Sultana was fighting the soldiers but they were still followed by two soldiers. Without Sultana, they would have never made it this far, but now these soldiers proved to be a new problem. Luckily, they were more interested in loot than murder and the aunts were able to bribe them with the jewel adorned circumcision vest in baby Jonuzi's basket. They were able to convince the soldiers to let them go.

A second addition, no longer about Sultana, but about the strength of family line, occurred in World War II when the infant, now as an adult, found himself injured in the fighting around Quafe and again, the same aunts saved him. It is said he fell in the woods at the same exact spot where they pleaded with the soldiers for their lives. The moment he fell, according to the story, both his aunts awoke and knew he was hurt. If you recall, also the same spot that Luftar mentioned all the butterflies surrounding him on his first hike up there. The aunts were guided to his spot through some psychic or Divine knowing, and dragged him to safety. Through their care he survived yet again and

eventually moved to America. Though the math does not add up, I was told he died at 120 years old and in some of the more bizarre aspects of this tale, that at 118 he grew new teeth and could chew his food like a young man.

CHAPTER 10  
WE ARE ONLY GYPSIES; DAMNED BY FATE: THE EVIL EYE AND THE FALL

*Mi smo ljudi cigani sudbinom  
prokleti Uvijek netko oko nas  
dodje pa nam prijeti*

We are Gypsies, cursed by  
Fate Always there is  
someone to threaten us

Throughout my time with the Palm Beach County community, I would notice underlying tropes used to describe life and circumstances both relating to life here and memories of back home. The age old question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" was revisited time and time again as twists of luck and circumstance held people back. Specifically, it was only when asking directly about the reasons for the dissolution of Yugoslavia and war that I started seeing the trend. For the group, when something unexpected and unfortunate occurred, there was only one simple origin to the problem: jealousy. Through jealousy from friends, enemies and nations, the consequences of the evil eye are felt beyond the typical malaise and become the basis for understanding the terrible, unprecedented events of the fall of Opa and the fall of Yugoslavia. But it goes deeper than this.

Envy can be used as the Original Sin in Herzfeld's secular cosmology. I will argue that the evil eye is the practice of the contentions between the ideal and lived aspects of life that secular cosmology attempts to address. The evil eye allows individuals to have some explanation for this contention as well as an attempt to cure the affliction in minor issues. It is not a practice that is aware of

itself, that is to say, it is not a functionalist process but rather a way of seeing the world and understanding one's place in it (Herzfeld 1987).

The evil eye is a popular and ancient belief that envy can either intentionally or unintentionally cause bad luck, sickness, fever, blindness, etc. in another (Dundes and Forbes-Cross 2002). Evidence of belief in the evil eye is seen throughout cultures, including but not limited to, the Balkans, Middle East, and Mediterranean (Wellman and Dionisios 2015). Those most at risk are young children and babies (from childless women's envy) but all can fall victim of it. The evil eye is caused either intentionally or not, by praise or being praise worthy. Even an honest and non-evil eye glance that lasts too long or a compliment paid without proper diffusing of energy can allow the evil eye to affect a person (Dundes 1981). Most commonly, the evil eye is caused by the giver being jealous of their victim. They are, however, often unaware they have inflicted any trouble.

In Muslim traditions, it can be further caused by a jinn and other malicious spirits who seek to punish someone after they have been praised. By paying someone a compliment, you put them at risk of a metaphysical attack unless the compliment is diffused somehow. This is most commonly done by saying the phrase *masha'lla* after the compliment, giving the praise to God, instead of the individual (Wellman and Dionisios 2015).

Despite the connotation that the evil eye has, the victim is also not entirely free of blame. Being boastful and pompous, showing off wealth or success will draw the evil eye to you as you have caused real pain in others. Any pain you caused others requires Divine retribution and the evil eye is one way of allocating that punishment (Dundes 2002).

This kind of punishment can range from developing a troublesome illness, like having a sty appear for eating in front of hungry person without offering them food, to a major life event, such as losing a job or fortune one was once so proud of. The lesson is, to take the higher road; there is no need to boast of your success and take care not to hurt those around you with it (Galt 1982; Abu-Rabia 2005).

The underlying theme of evil eye folk lore is that of the power of jealousy. Praise, even in a positive way, can still run the risk of creating jealousy within the praiser or those around the recipient. There is also the otherworldly aspect of tempting jinn and evil spirits to do bad things to those who are praised. The second threat is that of being boastful (Dundes 1981). Self-indulging praise can bring the metaphysical evil eye, and sometimes quite literal consequences, such as property damage or other physical attacks (Galt 1982; Abu-Rabia 2005).

Once afflicted with the evil eye, symptoms can range from a physical malaise such as headaches, colds or tiredness, to sudden and unexplainable breaking of jewelry or household goods, to fights between loved ones. For as many ways as the evil eye can affect someone, there are just as many cures. Most cures utilize water, both blessed and secular, to cleanse the spirit and body, sometimes mixed with salt. More intense cases call for more intense cures such as prayers or having the evil eye giver take the energy back from their victim. The connection to water to cure the evil eye also connects it to the possible origins of the fear of drying out. Dundes argues that the evil eye stems from control of limited liquids leftover from old theories of Greek humors. The evil eye

is an imbalance of the wet and dry causing the drying out of precious liquids such as breast milk, and semen or drying out of crop (Duendes 2002).

In Opa, fear and respect for the evil eye was alive and well. There were always evil eye charms at the entrances of both the restaurants and manager's office. Sometimes, several more charms were placed throughout the restaurant as it is important that the charm be the first thing people see when entering a place. The liminal space of entrances to buildings is especially vulnerable for attack (Turner 1969; Duendes 2002). Evil eye beads in jewelry and hanging from rear-view mirrors, purses and jewelry were also commonplace. When jewelry unexpectedly broke, especially when new, the evil eye was blamed. Despite the high number of evil eye warding paraphernalia at the restaurants, most mentions of the evil eye were hidden in half jokes used to tease someone who hurt themselves in a foolish manner or to insult a particularly ugly fashion choice. Despite the jokes about it, when individuals felt they had run into real problems, be it health, money, or even greater issues, the evil eye and specifically the main source of the evil eye, jealousy, were to blame.

I, too, fell victim to the evil eye on more than one occasion at Opa, or so it was believed. The most severe was an accident during a show. The first song of the show the other dancers and I would usually get on empty tables and dance there. The tables were huge and sturdy wood, made to resemble old Greek taverna tables, and became our makeshift stage. We had taken to using a prop while we were up there such as swords, fire or Isis wings, large pleated lamé capes with long wooden dowels at the ends to exaggerate the arm span of the dancer. The purpose of the wings was to create a swirl of shiny fabric which often

engulfed the dancer as she picked up speed. One night I was doing the performance with the wings, but because of the magnitude of fabric, I stepped off the table. Fortunately, instead of falling to the floor, I simply landed on the pulled out sturdy chair I had used as a stair to get on the table. Though the cyclone effect of the wings was cut off abruptly, I did not hurt myself and finished the song on the chair, though quite shaken.

Once in the back room, I was telling the other dancer what happened and asking her if it was obvious. I was beyond feeling frightened and just wanted to avoid the embarrassment. She assured me nothing looked bad but our conversation was overheard by Nina, one of the servers. "What happened?" Nina asked and I explained the story again.

Nina:                    You should wash in salt when you get home! She instructed me, Especially your hair.

Lauren:                Why do you say that?

Nina:                    Because someone must have given you the eye! You should really wear something to block it, dancing all the time.

Lauren:                I had one a while ago but I lost it.

Nina:                    You see! You need to be careful!

Avoiding the evil eyes was not reserved to the blue bead eye charms or hands of Fatima but sometimes was done with just a particularly bright hair bow or very shiny piece of jewelry, anything that would draw eyes to it first, to absorb the evil eye's power. Those in the public eye, such as performers, can help alleviate the eye with the use of any of these charms. To not wear some form of protection is seen as very dangerous and the dancers were often chastised for not being more proactive in our safety.

Even the most secular and non-superstitious in the network are at the very least aware of the threat of the evil eye and still live within the framework it provides. A noticeable lack of self praise is ingrained in behavior as well as the penance of severe humbleness after bad events occur and blaming the evil eye for mild problems (Dundes 1981).

### **Evil Eye and The Fall**

The evil eye does not exist alone, but within the grand cosmology of the metaphor of the Fall. Through the trope of Humankind's Fall from Grace in Abrahamic religions, we are forever cursed to fall again and again after the Original Sin and bound to repeat our transgressions despite our attempts at redemption. Or so life defined via the religious metaphor would say. In secular cosmology, Herzfeld identifies the tensions between the ideal and the lived aspects of life;

The fall is an etiology of original sin. It is perhaps the oldest, and beyond doubt the most pervasive, means of explaining the tension between the unity and diversity of human kind in the Judaeo-Christian hermeneucic canon. The expulsion from Paradise provided an explanation for the weary grind of human life; it is replication in the stories of Noachian Flood and of the Tower of Babel. (Herzfeld 1987;31)

The Yugoslavian Fall comes about through jealousy. The evil eye can be cast with or without knowledge, through the jealousy of others, be it other nationals or other states, causing the symptoms of disunity in the family, or in this case, the nation, as an expanded family.

### **The Fall of a Nation**

When discussing what happened to Yugoslavia and personal opinions as to why the country collapsed, the sample population fell into unsurprising patterns according to age and ethnicity. Jealousy of other nations, jealousy

between ethnic groups, Serbian greed and sometimes jealousy are all attributed reasons for the fall. Not surprisingly, Serbian greed was the smallest response and from only Bosnians aged 25-35 of those who answered. Jealousy of the world towards Yugoslavia came in second from across the sample aged 35-40 and 30% of those who answered. The majority response at 43% and from those 25-28, was jealousy between the ethnic groups which was believed to be the reason for the successor states' conflicts over borders and policies.

Why did the older group (35-40) view the reason for the fall of Yugoslavia as jealousy from the world versus the younger group seeing it as jealousy between the ethnic groups? The answer lies in the identification of those in these age groups. The older group remembers Yugoslavia and still feels more connected to that identity or to America since they harbor resentment of the successor states and what ethnic identity politics did to their nation. The younger group has only known the successor states or only have very fleeting memories of Yugoslavia. Though both groups believe the root for the fall is jealousy, where the evil eye comes from, between themselves or from the world, relies on how they identify themselves.

Overwhelmingly, jealousy and gossip or allusions to their, marked conversations about the fall of Yugoslavia. Here is a list of some of the most common explanations:

Tommy: [It] was because someone else was jealous because Yugoslavia was very powerful country at that time. We had a lot of money, everything, and the life was very good and we were very powerful and someone else from America or Europe couldn't stand to see us. It bothered them to see us get along despite it being bad everywhere else. They wanted to break down the country and then the politicians got involved and everyone. Suddenly we were jealous of each other. They planted this seed. Suddenly we

wanted our own countries and Macedonia and Bosnia got the worst parts. We were the poorest parts and Croatia and Serbia, they were very bad too. A lot of people died for no reason.

Marija: Well, it's all jealousy and greed. The politicians, they were greedy and they wanted more and more. You can't get a lot out of happy people so they turned us on each other. They were trying to be like the other European politicians probably. Then we got poor and it was easy to make everyone look at their neighbor and think they had it better and it was domino effect after that.

Zee: Well, it was war and a lot of bad things happen in war. Right now, after all these years, I really don't care whose fault it was and who started it. Personally, to me, I think it should have never happened but it did happen. And it was not good from either side and people do terrible things in war. And there is always the other side saying, 'Oh it's because of them they were jealous and evil, but everyone will say same thing when the first person dies. According to me, in a war there is no stopping. People will just start reacting it's like that... Everyone was just torn apart and it could've been peaceful but people didn't want peace, they wanted everything, all the land.

Dado: You know when there are a group of friends and they are hanging out and it's good for a period of time and your expectations are that everything is fine and no one is doing something behind another's back? Then, over time you realize that some of your friends are kinda against each other and spying on each other, never building trust, always are kinda jealous? So, this is what was happening in Yugoslavia in 60s and 70s. There were secret agencies that were training people to spy on their neighbors and other people to find out who is enemy of the state and how that started to elevate more and more and people understood there were more and more of these people. So, people kinda stopped trusting each other and enjoying that moment. And you know, that's when these religious and other parties started showing up... and in 80s they started separating people where everyone already knew who was who. And then everyone started thinking other people had it better. I am not sure if that was a plan but that was something that triggered people to mistrust each other. That's my theory, it can happen to anybody, any country. There is some agency here that we don't know the name watching us here I am sure.

Milica: You know everybody talking about Yugoslavia was Communist country and it's no way, we had unbelievable life we were happy too. We could travel anywhere and everywhere in the world with Yugoslavian passport. What happened with this country, someone did very bad things to it. I don't know who, but someone broke up the relationships of this country. Why, because they were jealous of us, we had everything! Yugoslavia was a very, very different country, we were geographically in center of the world. Second, we had so many different cultures and different people living in this country. Gypsy, Hungarian, Jew, Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic it was too easy for us! And so very easy to make fight and break up our relationships. To me, it was like brother killing brother it was ridiculous but now I see they made us think each group had it better and we all wanted the best then all.

Crni: My belief is it was political and is a way for the politicians and the war criminals and everyone else to make money cause the people had nothing to do with it. They were kinda told what to do and they kinda followed at the beginning...I believe it was in the politics to make everyone want their own independence. We fought and died all these years out of idea of independence and they just wanted to make money. And what is independence? We were independent, but someone made us think it was somehow better separate. Now they just want to be part of the EU so what you want to be under someone again? It's stupid why would you fight all this time just to join the EU? Because now someone is telling us it is better to be in EU and we see them and are jealous, the Euro is so strong and our doctors and engineers are homeless with no food.

Nadija The jealousy is contagious. Either an outsider or politician is greedy or jealous and does not want Yugoslavia to succeed or thinks they will make more money if it is several small countries so they plant the seed of jealousy and mistrust in the people through some unknown way. The gestation of the seed leads to a downward spiral of want and envy in the people so they will want to fight each other. Not only does the trope relieve individuals of blame, but it also strengthens concepts already cemented in the culture of the dangers of jealousy. These tropes also stem from a concept that it something fated to for the Balkans that they are doomed to always be under a foreign power or having wars. This is what it means to be Yugoslavia. We tried to unite and stop the others from coming in and taking from us. But we are doomed to always be slaves. It's what we deserve now how we treated each other. Our sins are too great since the beginning to ever be allowed our own country.

The fated Fall goes beyond the major historical events and into local tragedy as well. When Opa finally closed its doors, the same description of the reasons were explained to me: outside forces, jealous of the success of the restaurant contributed to the fall of Opa. The day Opa closed its doors was a day marked with tragedy as the closing meant not just losing jobs, but questionable work visa status for many of the employees.

### **The Fall of Opa**

It was summer and scorching. The air was thick with humidity in anticipation of the afternoon thunderstorm that never did come. The darkening sky rumbled angrily and I was pretty sure my show at Opa was going to be canceled. During the summer months when the snowbirds leave and storms set in, the shows become sparse and I text as Eddie, the manager, first before getting ready. To my surprise, he replies almost instantly with "Yes." That meant there were big reservations and I would have the potential for not one but two shows. I perked up at the prospect of perhaps actually making money today and started getting ready.

While allowing my fake eyelashes to set, I check my phone and see a text from Jillian, another belly dancer at Opa. "Did you hear? Opa closed!" followed by four or five emojis expressing her grief.

Lauren:       No! I just texted Eddie, he told me I had a show.

Jillian:       My mom just saw the article

With her reply, she included a link to the article stating Opa was closed.

Lauren: That's just *Palm Beach Post*! They have a writer that hates Opa for some reason. They probably got wind of the switch in ownership and think it means no Opa.

It would not be the first time Opa had been wrongly announced as closed. The *Palm Beach Post* has indeed made that mistake before. The article stated the reason as Lirim owing 200k in back rent. It was only the fifth of the month at the time and as he owns three restaurants in City Place, I could not imagine that was more than one month's rent for him in that expensive mall. But I texted Eddie again, to make sure that Jillian was just wrong.

Lauren: I heard we closed?

Eddie: Yes, I'm sorry.

And that was it. I text Jillian back as well as the other dancers at the restaurant to let them know and ask if Opa owes them any money. Dancers are usually paid immediately after shows but sometimes the managers ran out of checks or money in the drawer, especially over summer, so we sometimes go home with nothing hoping to be paid at the next show for the balance. As if reading my mind, Eddie texted again, "Do I owe you money? Hurry if I do they are taking everything!"

Not waiting to hear back from the dancers, I threw a dress on, looking a little ridiculous mixing show makeup and casual clothes, and rushed out. Suddenly I remembered I also was supposed to interview Bruno that night and so I grabbed my digital recorder and ran through the courtyard of my building to my car.

When I arrive to Opa the place has been stripped. In less than an hour all the liquor had been confiscated from the outdoor bars, the TVs, speakers and

colored lights all gone leaving the connectors sticking out of the walls and ceilings. Even the giant disco ball and bust of Poseidon in the center of the outside bar were gone. When I headed to the front doors there were cartoonishly large chains and a lock barring the doors and my heart dropped a little. I saw movement inside but I was not sure who. I walked to the bar entrance and saw Marija, one of the servers, and she let me in through a side entrance that was still open. We do not say anything as she opened the door, we just looked at each other for a long moment and she moved out of the way for me to enter. Her eyes were swollen and red, it was clear she had been crying.

Inside it was dark and I realized it was because all the light fixtures were gone.

Everything was gone. All that remained were chairs and tables which had been moved to the center of the restaurant with chains and locks on them, so they could not be removed. The registers were all open with the cash drawers removed.

Marija had disappeared somewhere, so I walked to the back where I heard some noise. There was an impossible amount of stuff on the ground in front of the office. Somehow it used to all fit in the tiny office but now it was spilling out. Five years of memories and lives. Old invoices, job applications mixed with photos, nazar evil eye charms, a bust of Skanderberg, a beautiful Qu'ran, empty whiskey bottles, empty cigarette cartons, a photocopy of Eddie's Albanian ID card from 5 years ago and countless other objects were strewn about the area. Eddie was in the back of the office rummaging with no clear intent, going through items haphazardly. I pick up the photocopy of his ID card and after glancing at it briefly, passed it to him.

For a moment, the mood was broken "Ohhhhh!" he exclaims, "I was so handsome! Where did my hair go? This place took it!" he laughed, muttered something in Albanian, then tore the paper up and threw it away. He looked up past me and stopped smiling. I turned around and saw two unknown men behind me. They introduced themselves as the new owners. They watched suspiciously as everyone cleaned.

I asked if I can help and Eddie refused. Most of the people cleaning were the dishwashers he explained. Marija returned with Danica, they were holding each other watching the cleaning and whispering to each other. Their faces were desperate and though I wanted to, I could not think of anything to say. Every time I looked at my phone there were more messages as the news circulates among the dancers. No one was owed money but they too were bemoaning their employment. Their futures were not as bleak as those of the two women standing before me trying to figure out their next step.

Eddie:           Come on let's smoke a cigarette.

Neither Eddie nor I smoke but I could tell he had something in mind. He started through the back door and was stopped by the new owners.

New Owner: You can't leave until the police come back.

Eddie:           Fine, I'll smoke in here, I'm sure you took the batteries out of the smoke alarms too!

They let us pass and we walked into the stairwell. There he pulled out of some unknown place a hundred dollar bill and gave it to me. It was my wages for the night.

Lauren           I can't, give it to Marija and Danica or the other workers.

Eddie: I paid them already don't worry.

I took the money and slipped it away before it became too noticeable what we were doing.

Lauren: Lirim never told you, did he?

Eddie: We had no idea.

Another restaurant where I danced at had told me Opa was closing a month ago, and when I had asked Eddie back then he told me no way. There were always rumors we were closing between the Opa franchise getting angry for Lirim changing the recipes and music, to the owners of City Place constantly raising rent. Our Opa had few friends in the business world. Up until this point the rumors were always a bluff and explained as jealousy driven gossip: an angry former employee or jealous restaurant starting a rumor. Eddie looked shaken and hallow. Lirim had often called him "son" and pushed him to give him absolute trust and loyalty at all times. Lirim was a tough boss, even to me and the other dancers. He had been so jealous of my dancing at other restaurants he had sent spies, probably Eddie, to figure out where I was dancing when I was not at Opa and demanded I quit the other place or be fired from Opa. We all had given him loyalty, and this was the pay back. It is not unusual for restaurants to not tell their employees when they are being shut down. But in my experience, usually the dancer and the pseudo son/manager are told in confidence. But this time, it was clearly not the case.

Eddie's future did not look so bad on that stairwell though. He already had citizenship from a marriage to an Opa waitress and was graduating with an MBA

soon. He ended up quickly bouncing back and getting better work as a manager in a restaurant at a nearby resort.

Marija and Danica, I was not so sure. They both had come from Gostivar really recently. They needed someone else to sponsor them. We came back in and sat in silence while the dishwashers continued to clean. Marija stood by herself and I went to hug her. I felt a little awkward about it, we were not too close, but she responded with a full embrace and started crying on my shoulder despite being a head taller than me. I felt weight on my back as Danica returned and hugged both of us. The three of us stood there for a long moment while the destruction of the restaurant continued around us.

Later I would be told by almost everyone there, the restaurant closed out of jealousy towards Lirim. Though it was more likely poor money management on Lirim's part and the anger should be directed towards him, no one from the last team blamed him.

Edvin:           It was those fucking Jews at City Place! They get so jealous when someone makes more money than they do!

Danica:           They were greedy! They saw how successful Opa was so they raised the rent for more money for themselves. Larry stood up against them and it worked a little while, but then they found a way they kicked him out.

Edna:            No one could handle seeing us successful, so they had to stop it.

Edna's was one of the vaguer explanations. Who was "us" and who was "they" falls into ambiguous and ever changing groups. Maybe "us" was the owners of City Place, or Americans, or even other Balkan people jealous of one another. Even when the mistake was blamed on Lirim, he was never entirely blamed, but was also victim to vague and ever present powers which are jealous

and almighty. The ever-present fear of retribution for being enviable is internalized in Edna's comment. With success will come a fall because success leads to jealousy and eventually the evil eye will balance the world. But it also gives a buffer for failure. There is always something outside of oneself, greater and more mysterious, that can be blamed for tragedy. Be it the fall of a nation, a closing of a restaurant or a bad day, there is always an option for an external source to the problem.

After leaving the restaurant, I rushed to my car to meet up with Bruno. After the time at Opa I was thirty minutes late. I was leaving for Macedonia in two days and I wanted to interview him before I left. He was such a fickle guy, always appearing and disappearing, I was afraid I would lose my chance or he would change his mind if I did not meet with him tonight. I also hoped he might have some insight, being a close friend of Lirim's, of what exactly happened.

The restaurant he had chosen for the interview was a small Italian place on Palm Beach Island. I drove past it twice before noticing the small sign. I came in to find Bruno waiting for me on the outside patio. He was talking in Italian to a pregnant young woman who said her father and Bruno were friends. The waiter came up almost instantly to pull out my chair and take my drink order when I immediately recognized him as George, a former partner of Lirim's.

He had been part of Opa when it started up and then left trying to start an identical restaurant nearby. It was his restaurant where Lirim had sent spies to find out if I was dancing there and made me quit. George's restaurant went out of business within the year and he had found himself in jail for check fraud, embezzlement and a few other charges. In a desperate attempt to hide money

he had issued 1099's with outrageous figures for all the belly dancers which most of us managed to fight. I had not seen George since where his restaurant was doing well and I was dancing at it. There were no goodbyes when I left, and I more than resented him for trying to pin money on me.

He recognized me too and stood silent for a moment. Bruno looked at us and then started with "Ah, you know him, he used to be a partner with Larry! Now look at him! Ha-ha that's what happens." George laughed uncomfortably and I gave my order, waiting for him to leave before asking Bruno about Opa.

Bruno: Oh, it finally happened.

Lauren: You knew?

Bruno: No I mean I didn't know. I know, I knew it would happen but I didn't know that it would happen now. But Larry [a nickname for Lirim] he's a dumbass sometimes and I tell him but he doesn't listen. He owes a lot of people money, it's going to be something.

Lauren: Yeah, I knew that, but I didn't think it would be like this. And the restaurant seemed to be busy.

Bruno: It has nothing to do with restaurant being busy or not. It has to do with that guy that runs City Place. You know they auctioned it off last year right? And the new owner he thinks he is going to make so much money. They just are a little jealous you know, they don't like our type being there.

Lauren: What type? Mediterranean?

Bruno: Mediterranean, European, Muslim. They want Europe but not really. They want Europe there but you can't sit on the steps and you can't smoke anywhere and you have to always be buying something or you can't stay. This is not Europe. They want Disneyland!

Lauren: So Opa was kicked out because they didn't fit the ideal of City Place?

Bruno: No, they got kicked out cause Larry keeps all the money for himself! But I'm the only one that will tell you so.

Despite Bruno's likely very true claims that the reason for the closing of Opa was due to poor financial planning and perhaps keeping money for personal use, he was alone in identifying the money as the problem. Instead, the reason for Opa falling was eerily close to the reason for Yugoslavia's collapse. Even looking back at Bruno's transcripts, he does not solely blame the money, but blames an unspoken jealousy and prejudice between the owner of City Place and Lirim.

Mefat: Well, they just thought they could make more money with someone else there. They didn't care about us or our lives. This always happen. You get some success and everyone wants a piece of it till there is nothing left.

Enes: They [City Place owner] was jealous of Lirim. Everything he touched he made successful and this guy couldn't even make City Place work! So, he wanted to hurt him.

Marija: No one likes us there, we were the burden. Everything is so quiet in City Place and we were always a party! So, it made problems. When they saw Larry wasn't doing so well they took advantage and kicked him out. They didn't have to do it, they did because they wanted to.

Edna: It was that stupid Jew [City Place owner] he hated us! He was always making up new charges and fees and finally Larry said no then he kicked him out. He wanted him out because he couldn't stand seeing us [Muslims] being successful.

Here the jealousy is more personally responsible for the fall of Opa. No evil eye is at work, just a personal vendetta between two businessmen or a vague us versus them scenario. But jealousy still remains as the Original Sin for the Yugoslavian Fall without the cosmic branch of its power. Though it can be easy to explain the jealousy concept as simply shifting the blame to vague others, I would argue that reason lies beyond that. Herzfeld offers the explanation of Secular Cosmology that the blame of jealousy comes from the

divide between ideal and lived aspects of life. Jealousy after all is not only used to place the blame on others, but on oneself or group as well. Explanations of why Yugoslavia fell do not end in just ominous forces at work but ominous forces influencing the people who were foolish enough to follow because they themselves had the seeds of jealousy already planted inside them long before the jealousy of nations was at play.

“We had everything but we ruined it” was the common theme underlying the stories. Yes, there were large powers at play: politicians, Fate, the evil eye, but it does not remove autonomy and ultimately blame lies within the fault of humanity's inherent weakness, our original sin.

## CHAPTER 11 CONCLUSION

Through deeper examination of the former Yugoslavs in Palm Beach County, we have been introduced to the way they have used their ethnonational identities to find their place in America. Influenced by their migration and past relationship with their homeland(s), they carve out what their ethnic identity means to them, using this story to gain importance and footing in the modern world. Specifically, through working in high stress service industry jobs in Palm Beach County, the Opa Effect takes hold and they find similarities and alliances. Will these friendships shift the view of opposing ethnic groups or is it just a unique moment in time and space? We can not be sure. Only longer research and following those who return back home will answer that question.

Conversely, in Gostivar, the origin of majority of the work migrants, the city is divided clearly between ethnic Macedonians and Macedonian- Albanians. The city hosts Macedonian and Albanian businesses with strict divisions of patronage. Here there is a stark difference from the Opa Effect, though many of the people in Palm Beach County are from Gostivar; location affects how identity is used.

Further research into the divisions in Gostivar reveal how dating and friendship are affected. Albanian women in particular felt increased strain as any dalliance would affect their marriage futures as Dona was experiencing once news of her failed engagement spread. Gostivar is run by reputation on both sides, so many young people are not willing to risk it for love, let alone lust. Looking at Gostivar it appears that the Opa Effect can not stand against the

tyranny of the past, at least not yet. More research over the years to come is needed to fully see how the group will develop.

Through this project it has been seen how identity functions in the globalized, deterritorialized world in one group that is still clinging to ethnonational identities and how identity is needed more than ever for individuals to feel roots in our rootless society. Not just individuals but also states, as was seen in Skopje 2014, feel the need to reach to the past and create meaning and identity. Work of this sort is not close to being finished. All research benefits from being revisited by other scholars and going to field again to collect new data over the years to capture the ever changing nature of culture and identity.

APPENDIX A  
VERBAL CONSENT STATEMENT

My name is Lauren Cheek, I am a graduate student at the University of Florida in America, in the Department of Anthropology. I am conducting a research study that will look at what you consider to be important in forming and preserving your identity. I would like to tell you more about it before you decide whether or not to participate. Please stop me at any time if you have any questions. Participation should take approximately 1-2 meetings.

You will be asked to describe what you feel is important in your self identification and how you feel about your city and country. Your involvement in this study does not involve any physical risk to you. The only foreseeable risk is that of emotional distress in the recollection of memories. There is no compensation or benefit for your participation. You are free, during the interviews, to withdraw from the research, and not to answer questions with which you are uncomfortable. You do not have to take part in this research study.

If you decide to participate, you can stop your participation at any time. Results of this study will be used in the construction of my dissertation and may be used for further research and publications. If you have any questions, you are free to ask them now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at the telephone number provided on the Information Card that I am giving you. Are you willing to participate in this study?

APPENDIX B  
QUESTIONNAIRE SAMPLE

Age:

Sex:

City and Country of Birth:

At what age did you leave your home country?:

At what age did you come to America?:

What other countries did you live and for how long?

How long have you been in Florida?:

Please mark highest level of education completed, and where each level was completed.

To what level?: ( ) Elementary School: In which country?

( ) High School: In which country?

( ) College ( ) A.A. Degree : In which country?

( ) B.A. Degree: In which country?

( ) Graduate Degree (M.A. or Ph.D.): In which country?

Do you have family in the city you live in?

APPENDIX C  
SAMPLE OF SOME QUESTIONS IN STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

(1) Explain to me how you came to America? Was this your first choice? What other countries did you go to before and for how long? Why did you leave? Why did you come to Florida and specific city? Which place, if any, feels most like home? Does home exist as a place?

(2) Do you have family here? Who? Where is the rest of your family? How often do you communicate, and how (facebook, Skype etc) Do you visit them in the countries they are in? Do you visit your country? Why or why not? Do you keep in contact with abroad friends? How so how often? Do you feel close to them?

(3) How would you describe yourself? Your ethnic religious identity, if any? Why? How would you describe what your ethnic religious identity means? Positive traits, negative traits? Do you ever censor around certain people or heighten it? Like if you meet another Eastern European, Balkan, Muslim etc. If you are religious how do you practice? Why? Are you happy with your level of involvement in your religion? Why are not?

(4) How would you describe your parents ethnic religious identities, if any? Do you differ from them, why or why not? Is there anything of your life you hide from them, why or why not? What about other family members? Who are you closest to in your family? Why do feel so connected or disconnected? Do you think this would be the same in your country?

(5) (For those working at Opa) How did you get the opportunity to work here? How do you like it? What do you think of America? Do you want to stay or go back, why?

What do you think of the food at Opa? Music? *Kolo*? Teaching Americans the *kolo*?

(6) How do like it here? Do you interact with Yugoslavs here? If so why or why not?

Describe your best friends, if any. What do you do for fun? Who do you hang out with, who do date? Are you looking to marry, have kids? Why or why not? What is your ideal partner? Why? Have issue about religious ethnic or other identites affected your dating? How?

(7) What do you do for work? Do you like it? Do you have goals to get into another line of work? Are you working to achieve these goals? Why or why not? What are your other goals?

(8) What would you like to be done differently? Do you think this can happen here or abroad? Does location matter?

(9) Give me your understanding of what happened in the early 90s wars in Yugoslavia./ Kosovo War for Macedonians. Were you personally involved in anypart of conflict? Explain.

(10) Tell me some of the things you remember most from the war?

(11) Do you do anything to commemorate memory of war? Are there things that remind you of it?

(12) Do you keep up with things like this? How do you feel about recent outsider attempts to explore themes of Yugoslav War like In the Land of Blood and Honey and Whistleblower? Why?

(13) What are some of your fondest memories from when you lived back home?/

What will be some of your fondest memories from here, you think?

(14) What are some things here that remind you of back home?

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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