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Leaving the Ethno-National Ghetto:
Macedonia Beyond Identity Politics

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Summary and acknowledgements:

In the chapters to follow I will attempt to analyze the operations of identity politics in Macedonia with reference to class and cultural labor division. I will particularly make use of the notion of ideology in my approach to the subject matter. Chapter one will introduce the theoretical framework through which I will introduce my reading of ideology. Chapter two will gloss over the relationship between class, ethnicity and their relationship with ethnographic research in the region. Chapter three will focus more intimately with the operations of ideology on the subject and issues of resistance, structure and agency. This will be followed up with some concluding remarks and tentative suggestions for future research.

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Needless to say, all errors in my understanding and use of theories and materials below is entirely my own.

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Introduction

The question of identity has been the main focus of interest in scholarly debates on Macedonia since the country's independence following the demise of Yugoslavia. It is no mere coincidence that this should be so. The ethnic conflicts that tore the old federation apart found its less volatile reflections in the new country where the nationalist rhetoric was taking on vibrant dimensions, seeking to incorporate into a unified narrative events suffused over a period of more than two millennia. Yugoslavia had rapidly and thoroughly lost its academic attraction as an economic experiment of worker self-management that interested social scientists from socialist and capitalist countries alike. Instead it transformed into an export industry for studies on identity politics and conflict management. The economic experiment was over and out and replaced by a social one for observing the limits and dynamics of ethnic and cultural interaction, a topic of great interest in the dawning era of globalization and transnational politics. The re-publication of the Carnegie report in the heat of the Bosnian conflict suddenly brought to life ideas that very little had changed in the Balkans in the past one hundred years (Todorova 1997: 4). Long standing ethnic tensions had simmered beneath the façade of brotherhood and unity of the peoples of Yugoslavia. The impact of Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" and Fukuyama's "The End of History" reflected wide academic and political attempts to close the door on economic and political (ideological) debates and leave identity politics as the prevalent framework for the assertion of individual or group rights. As Žižek notes the "Clash of Civilizations is politics at the End of History" (2009: 120). This has indeed been one of the defining features of western liberal society where the concept of tolerance has operated at its ideological best. The iron curtain of ideology has disappeared and been replaced by the velvet curtain of culture, or so tells us Huntington. The latter has become one of the chief obstacles in

reconciling the neoliberal economic model in practice, thus isolating culture as a definable empirical problem to be “managed”.

The underlying conceptual opposition here is between those who are able to simply “enjoy” their culture as a free non-binding individual choice and people who are slaves to culture, totally determined by the cosmology into which they were born. Culture here becomes synonymous with the parochial, exclusivist domain from which conflict, misunderstanding and barbarism erupt. Paradoxically, it is precisely the individual that becomes the site of universality, insofar as one is able to elevate oneself above the determinants of culture and relegate these to the private sphere (such as family), whilst maintaining adherence to a universal principle of public norms and regulations. In other words the subject has to become culture-less in order to overcome senseless violence and intolerance (ibid: 121). This is the precious achievement of the modern Western subject’s de-essentialism. Culture, nation, ethnicity are no longer oppressive determinants but categories of private enjoyment. The move to modernity is also the move away from sex as a natural determinant to sex as a set of discursive practices, i.e. to gender. This tendency is also symptomatic of the dislocation of the struggle for modernity away from production and towards the contingency of the subject. Maturity is no longer sought at the sight of production but achieved through the subjective values of the individual. Yet at the same time as modernity has praised its achievements of progress towards a peaceful, civilized tolerance of difference it has by structural necessity projected its opposite negative reflection elsewhere. Tennenhouse suggests this *elsewhere* is none other than the ‘past’, which is simply the name for a process of rationalization by which humanity is captivated in a state of savagery, barbarism and senseless violence in order to add credulity to the modernist narrative of a non-oppressive civilized state of progress. No sooner than this operation is finished however, we become outraged and scandalized by the repeated outbursts of violence, savagery and intolerance, as if the repressed ghosts of the past have come to haunt us (in Chow 2002: 39).

The Balkans have been one of the many places where such scandalous outbursts have served as a reminder of that anachronistic Other whose negativity serves to define the culture-less western subject (Todorova 1997: 11-12). Yet for all the essentializing cultural divisions there remains an implicit reference to economy as their underlying determinant. To take Huntington as an example, we can see how his 'fault lines' that separate the 'Slavic-Orthodox' civilization from the 'Western' one are not explicitly based on economy or politics but on culture. However when he proceeds to define in more detail the contours of the separation economy factors come to the fore. The historical events which mark the essence of Western peoples are "feudalism, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Industrial Revolution; they are generally economically better off than the peoples to the east; and they may now look forward to increasing involvement in a common European economy and the consolidation of democracy. The peoples to the east are Orthodox or Muslim ...; they are generally less advanced economically; they seem much less likely to develop stable democracies" (Huntington 1993: 30-31; also in Todorova 1997: 131-2). Interpretations of the Balkans have often revolved around notions of race, culture and evolution, as had much of Western discourse on the Other that emerged during the project of colonialism (Young 1995: 9). Yet one can hardly escape the conclusion that the "cultural divide was there to mask the *real* divide: between rich and poor" (Todorova 1997: 132).

When entering the debate on contemporary operations of ethnicity one is almost ineluctably compelled to draw certain parallels between ethnicity and certain types of labor. It requires no scientific vocation to establish that in the developed world the majority of lowly, basic services that cater for the needs of well educated and highly paid people are in fact provided by various "ethnics". Whether these are Mexicans, blacks or Asians in the United States or South East Asians in Saudi Arabia, Japan and Hong Kong there is an obscene relationship between their class and ethnic status. Rather than focusing on the experience of migration and the social role of "migrants" the important question here is how "certain people within a particular society become marked as ethnics at the same time that they occupy socially inferior

positions as low level laborers” (Chow 2002: 34). If we focus solely on the experiential process of migration, exile, diaspora and different modes of mobility we risk missing out on the aspect of ethnicity as produced outside the reach of a given society. In other words we fail to recognize the ethnic of modernity as the sight of the Other, of the foreignness produced from privileged societies as a reflection and constitutive part of that society’s hierarchical division of labor (ibid). For Wallerstein the process of ethnicization must be related to the operations of capitalism and its objectives of maximizing profits and minimizing production costs. Ethnicity in this operation a key component that actively contributes its labor to the accumulation of capital yet receives the least of its rewards. Ethnicity thus represents the magic formula that resolves that crucial contradiction within capitalism between theoretical equality and practical inequality (Wallerstein 1991: 84). Once we approach ethnicity as commodified labor the one dimensional “specific culture” definition becomes inadequate. Rather, ethnicity becomes a society’s mechanism for projecting outwards features in deems foreign and inferior. It is nonetheless a shifting relation and the labor boundaries it marks can be flexible. In Wallerstein’s words, the ethnicized groups “are always there and always ranked hierarchically, but they are not always the same. Some groups can be mobile in the ranking system; some groups can disappear and combine with others; while still others break apart and new ones are born. But there are always some who are the ‘niggers.’ If there are no blacks or too few to play the role, one can invent ‘White niggers’” (Wallerstein 1991: 34; also in Chow).

All this would lead into a somewhat uncomfortable ground. The suggestion implied in the claims above is of course that identity politics today offers itself as an ideology of cultural equality whose function is to mask the underlying structure of economic inequality. ‘Ideology’ is a difficult concept however that has received an irresistible amount of thrashing since the demise of Althusserian structuralism and the affirmation of ‘discourse’ as one of the “most popular ... terms in the vocabulary of Anglo-American academics” (Abu-Lughod & Lutz 1990). It nonetheless remains an essential element in the discussion to follow where I will attempt to demonstrate that Žižek’s Lacanian

reworking of the concept offers some stimulating pathways which may allow us to revive the concept of ideology critique and reinvigorate politically engaged scholarship. The following sections will thus attempt to outline my general theoretical approach to ideology and demonstrate its operation using ethnographic materials.

The Vagaries of Ideology

Ideology in its most recognizable form can be identified as a composite set of ideas and beliefs specifically designed to convince us of a particular truth in the service of obscuring and maintaining the hidden mechanisms of power and domination that lurk beneath it. Marx perhaps did most to promote this view of the ideological operation which transforms a historically contingent state of affairs into a falsely perceived universality of the human condition, such as when the interest of a particular class disguises itself as the interest of humanity as a whole (Žižek 1989: 50). The critique of ideology would in this case consist of penetrating the surface of the ideological construct in order to reveal these mechanisms and unmask ideology for what it truly is ('the free-market ideology guarantees equal opportunity for all but we know that in fact it privileges the owners of the means of production' etc.). This, argues Marcuse, is the defining feature of philosophy insofar as it devotes itself to the task of freeing thought from its enslavement by the constraints of 'ordinary language [which] tends to coagulate into a totally manipulated and indoctrinated universe' (Marcuse 2002: 203).

For Habermas, perhaps the last great representative of this tradition, ideology is a communicative form systematically vitiated by power interests. It is a discourse which serves to legitimize uneven power relations by imposing limits on language that prevent the articulation of heterodoxy. The very existence however of a distorted form of communication implies its opposite - an authentic communicative act somehow free from obscured manipulative constraints. Only under conditions that allow for the enunciation of such 'ideal speech acts' is an ideologically unrestrained language possible. Persuasion and truth would depend only on the force of a better argument rather than rhetoric and coercion (see Eagleton 1994: 203-5).

This form of critique came increasingly under attack with the arrival of discourse analysis on the academic plateau. The main criticism was directed precisely at that implication of a possibility of an extra-ideological vantage point which allows us to ‘step-out’ of the ideological grip on reality and experience the real truth of this world. Belief in such a vantage point is, as discourse analysis reminds us, ideology at its best. There exists no reality independently of the discursive devices that make its articulation possible and no discursive devices undetermined by the complex network of power mechanisms struggling for the hegemony over truth (Owen 1994: 209). The only possible non-ideological position thus becomes the very denial of a symbolically unfiltered ‘reality’. Analysis is thus brought down to mapping the specific network of discursive mechanisms responsible for any particular set of ideas experienced as ‘truth’, of pointing out “on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged ... modes of thought he practices we accept rest” (Foucault 1988: 154). Derrida for example suggests that the symbolic constructs we employ to represent ‘reality’ do not designate an imposition over some primary pre-discursive meaning, but are instead responsible for the continuous re-definition of this primary effect. In his words, discourse designates “a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences [which] ... extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely” (Derrida 1990: 280).

The thrust of discursive relativism has been more than well received in social anthropology, itself a discipline acutely aware of the limits of modernist approaches to such concepts as ‘reason’ and ‘truth’. To give a specific example we may turn to Marilyn Strathern’s systematic engagement with Marxist and feminist critiques of exploitation and male domination, particularly her dialogue with Lizette Josephides on Melanesian exchange systems (Graeber 1998: 37). In short Josephides’ argument is an anti-Maussian one which objects to the exchange-centric analysis popularized by Mauss’ influential essay on the gift. Instead of focusing on the act of exchange of pigs through which men (and only men) acquire symbolic capital we should look at all the social dynamic that precedes the act of exchange, i.e. that of

production. Here we must face the reality that it is women who are mostly responsible for gardening and raising pigs. Even though they provide most of the labor involved in their production it is the men alone who publicly benefit from their exchange. Only after we acknowledge this subtle structure of male domination can we acquire the 'true' meaning hidden behind its explicit narrative of exchange. The latter operates under a logic of fetishization insofar as it locates the value of an object in the act of exchange itself rather than the labor and creativity that went into its making (ibid: 38).

Strathern says no: why must we assume that a person has some inalienable right over what they produce? Western notions of private property assume the immanence of the individual whose property, rights, and mind are to be protected from foreign intrusion. Marxists simply extend this concept to include the intrinsic right of a person over the products of their labor. But is this the case everywhere? Melanesians, Strathern argues, do not conceptualize the value and meaning of an object to be determined by the individual that produced it. It is in fact derived from the social relationships that both give meaning to, and are given meaning by, acts of exchange and giving (ibid: 39). Before the man publicly exchanges a pig its value is determined by the marital relationship between husband and wife. After exchange its value stems from the new relationship between the exchanging parties. The ultimate value of the pig is this derived from both the relationship where it originates and its capacity to be 'detached' for the creation of a new social bond. In a counter Marxist fashion, Melanesian producers, e.g. the wives, see work as a commitment to their marriage relationship. We need not see this in terms of a Marxian 'mystification' or 'false consciousness' for the reason that Melanesians themselves can under no circumstances imagine a world where they are free to work for who and what they wish for (ibid: 41). Even if they could, such an approach would be no less ideologically contaminated, only this time with western notions of individualism.

Althusser and Structuralism:

What has been outlined so far may be termed ‘ideology in-itself’, insofar as the subject’s ‘false consciousness’ foregoes and guides her ideological practices. We may now turn to ‘ideology for-itself’ and the tradition of Louis Althusser where ideas appear as secondary to their material representations (Althusser 1971: 40). Ideology here represents itself through its externalized manifestations in the form of ideological practices, rituals and institutions, or what Althusser has termed the Ideological State Apparatuses. Althusser insists that the ‘false’ consciousness of ideology does not precede the practices conducive to it but instead functions the other way round. It is the very performance of ideological rituals and practices that in turn creates an ideological foundation at the level of consciousness. Althusser’s approach was inspired by Pascal’s answer to the question of belief. His argument is that for belief to emerge you must abandon rational argumentation and submit yourself to ritual performance *as if* you already believe and belief will come by itself (Žižek 1989: 39). This dynamic implies that the enactment of ideology at the micro level already presupposes the massive presence of a state, a center of power ensuring the reproduction of a social structure of dominated and dominant (ibid: 54-5).

It is precisely this insight that was overlooked by Adorno in his refusal to treat Fascism as an ideology in its own right since for him Fascism did not represent a rationally defensible corpus of ideas that could be argumentatively supported at any level. Instead he saw it as a system of raw coercion of a cynically detached mass that could not be indoctrinated through the spread of such obviously inconsistent ideas (in, Žižek 1994: 13). But Althusser would remind us that this is where ideology functions in its purest form. Mussolini for example was particularly skilled in creating those ideological practices at the micro level, through an elaborate and consistent performance of public parades and rituals that in turn sustained the structure of the system. One such ritual performance were the magnificent operatic events orchestrated by Mussolini where women were encouraged to support the production of

armaments by swapping their gold wedding rings for iron bands symbolizing their marriage to *Il Duce* (Barrett 1994: 242).

It suggests to me there is a distinct advantage in the Althusserian approach to ideology that avoids a direct confrontation with an anthropological relativism concerned particularly with non-state societies. As was already said for Althusser, ideology is always of and presupposes the state. This line of reasoning is consistent with Marx for whom ideology in terms of 'mystification' (of, for example, the above mentioned Melanesian women) in a pre-class society is not yet ideology proper. Engels also insisted that 'primitive' societies are class-less (Bloch 1983: 162) and Geertz suggests that ideology can emerge 'precisely at the point at which a political system begins to free itself from the immediate governance of received tradition, from the direct and detailed guidance of ... the unreflective precepts of conventional moralism ... ' (Geertz 1994: 287). The point to be made is that ideology is at work only when the illusion is no longer part of an organic social structure but emerges from the antagonistic class-split within capitalist social relations where the division of labor includes that between physical and intellectual labor (Žižek 1994: 19; see Gramsci 1986: 5-7). Only when the latter serves to legitimize the position of the dominant does ideology begin to assume its proper form (Eagleton 1994: 222). This is the main reason why Marx refuses to define commodity fetishism as ideology in and by itself, since for him ideology is always of the State (2004: 68; 1990: 164-5). It is also one of the central points of Michael Taussig's analysis of commodity fetishism in South America where he has argued that even though commodity fetishism existed before the arrival of industrial capitalism it is quite different from the fetishism within industrial capitalism. The former results from an organic unity between social persons and the products of their labor whereas the latter from the split between people and the means of production making the products of labor alienated things which appear to have qualities and potentialities of their own (Taussig 1980: 37).

Between 'Discourse' and 'False Consciousness':

Here we can introduce a third possible model of ideology critique which can be loosely defined as a combination of the above. Counter to the totalizing effect of Althusser's ideology it is perhaps better to avoid treating it as both a homogenous and ubiquitous mechanism that determines social reproduction at every level. Instead we can begin to speak of a set of vaguely connected ideas and practices whose reach is partial and localized at best. We may cite here the Protestant ethic of production/consumption which ensured the reproduction of emerging capitalists whilst bypassing a good number of peasants and workers whose models of organization operated under alternative sets of ideas. Ideological interpellation here occurs not only at different but also at intersecting levels of conflicting ideologies. Roles of worker, husband, Protestant, national etc. all compete for dominance (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner 1994: 161). In other words ideology is not only partial but a relational phenomenon which expresses the lived experience of a possible identity (class, gender, race etc.) in relation to others. Historical Marxism ultimately assumes a too organic view between the class, i.e. the subject's position in the relations of production and her ideological consciousness (Eagleton 1994: 186-7). This is one of the main criticisms of Gluckman's analysis of African workers which led him to the assertion that 'an African townsman is a townsman and an African miner is a miner' (1963: 69).

Furthermore we have to face the dilemma of subjects who are compelled to enact ideological practices yet are neither explicitly motivated by ideology nor does any such motivation arrive as the effect of such practices, as Althusser would have us believe. It would appear that we are in this case dealing with a system which completely bypasses ideological indoctrination of any kind and relies exclusively on different modes of managerial coercion be they legal, economic, bureaucratic and so on. It is as if ideology has become an entirely unfashionable concept and subjects persist in some form of 'enlightened false consciousness' i.e. people far more cynically aware of their value-positions than a concept of false consciousness would allow for (Eagleton & Bourdieu 1994: 266-7). This invites an understanding of capitalism as less concerned or

driven by ideological rhetoric and increasingly reliant on its own systemic logic. The system works without the need to validate itself through consciousness in order to secure its own reproduction (ibid).

Here we must again acknowledge that at the very heart of the particular types of practices that coercion supports there often lies an ideological foundation. We see this in the current neoliberal emphasis on 'independent' conduct that has forced Universities across the UK to redefine their operations by adopting more of a managerial market oriented approach where various institutions would compete on the student market for more pupils of the 'right kind' (Burchell 1993: 274-5). One can thus easily argue that the logic of this operation is based on core Western values (of the independent individual competing with others on the free market of opportunities) that are necessary for the reproduction of the system.

Back to discourse?

In the end it seems we are faced with ideology neither as a totalizing 'grand narrative' nor as the secondary effect of raw coercion. Instead we are dealing with an 'elusive network of implicit, quasi-"spontaneous" presuppositions and attitudes that form the irreducible moment of the reproduction of the non-ideological (economic, political, legal, sexual...) practices' (Žižek 1994: 15). This is the very reason why Foucault refuses to treat liberalism as an ideology. For him it is neither a doctrine nor some philosophico-juridical testament to individual freedom that dictates the practices of government. Rather, he approaches it as 'a rationally reflected way of doing things which functions as the principle and method for the rationalization of governmental practices' (Burchell 1993: 269). Here 'civil society' is not the coerced outcome of government but a kind of self-regulating de-centred conglomerate of affiliations, friendships, antagonisms and exchanges where the task of government is defining and carving out the space and techniques for intervention into what is already a more or less a self-creating sphere. Hence the description of government as the 'conduct of conduct' (ibid: 267). Power,

or the power to govern is reduced to the guidance of self-governing individuals; the carving out of the limits of possible action of subjects. Such guidance does not necessarily exclude the use of coercion or violence: but these are only the effects or instruments of governance - not the underlying foundation of power (Lemke 2002: 52). In fact the very notion of a 'foundation', that is, an essence or Centre of power (government) is made redundant in favor of a field of interaction between the self-regulating practices of individuals and the rationality that informs the guiding hand of government. In Foucault's words:

"... if one wants to analyze the genealogy of the subject in Western civilization ... He has to take into account the points where the technologies of domination of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself. And conversely, he has to take into account the points where the techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion and domination. The contact point, where the individuals are driven by others is tied to the way they conduct themselves, is what we can call, I think government" (in, Lemke 2002: 52-3).

This interaction stands for the very discursive process that determines the historical creation of particular 'regimes of rationality' throughout time and space (Lemke 2002: 55). As Foucault points out there is no absolute form of 'rationality' against which we can measure the truth value of any particular symbolically distorted manifestations of it. Thus when speaking of neoliberal rationality one should not merely question whether it is a 'real' or genuine representation of society. Instead we must ask how the rationality of neoliberalism operates in the 'politics of knowledge'; how it produces new forms of knowledge and extends these to emerging spheres of interest (ibid).

Verdery (1995) has applied much of this approach in her analysis of nationalist ideology in Romania. Even though she uses the term 'ideology' in the title (and throughout the book) she goes on to say that this is "partly because some of this book's possible readers would never even pick it up if the title contained the word 'discourse' which in some ways might serve my purposes better" (8). Anyone who uses the word 'ideology' is, according to her, 'asking for trouble' (ibid). What she is referring to here is the troubled

legacy of Marx and Althusser and the concept of 'false consciousness' which, as has been shown, suffers from serious inadequacies. Discourse is far more apt for her analysis because she approaches ideologies in the plural, i.e. "always more than one, forming ideological and discursive fields ... materialized in action, often in political conflict, and often in discursive form" (ibid: 9). Humphrey (2002) follows a similar approach in her discussion on 'Eurasian' national ideology in Russia. Ideology provides an 'arena of the political imagination' which engages a wide and 'complex range of disjunctive ideas' (ibid: 271). The theme that combines both is precisely the production and politics of knowledge. For Humphrey and Verdery ideology is never total and never singular. There always remains that critical space for resistance and plurality. In the case of national ideologies in Romania Verdery writes that the intellectuals who produced such knowledge always operated in a discursive field of conflicting ideas (1995: 9) but that the process simultaneously created a hegemonic national form of discourse, "an ineradicable feature of Romanian scholarly life, governing the forms of statements that might be produced" (ibid: 70). One can easily deduce this logic from knowledge production in and around Macedonia. Questions of identity have captivated not only state intellectuals who seek to legitimize their position as well as that of a dominant 'autochthonous' ethnicity, but also their more scholarly opponents who, in seeking to de-essentialize ethno-national representations, have been caught up the whirlpool of a particular "gatekeeping" discourse of identity politics (Brown 2010).

Discourse analysis thus allows for a deconstruction of any notion of 'truth' by denaturalizing it and dissecting it to the level of its contingent discursive devices. But in doing so it invalidates the possibility of a non-discursive subject position. The very word 'ideology' here becomes vacuous and irrelevant since to dismiss a certain position as ideological one must traditionally assume the existence of its opposite. In the end, to use Lévi-Strauss' paraphrase, social scientists much like everyone else "study the shadows on the cave walls" (1976: 45).

Žižek's Critique of Ideology:

Have we thus returned to the inevitable impossibility of defining a reality that is not completely dissolved the moment we remove from it its ideological (discursive) component? In all fairness, discourse analysis does have very distinct advantages over traditional ideology critique. Whereas Althusserian Marxism and structuralist anthropology offered universalist and ahistorical notions of ideology and culture, discourse analysis allowed for an analysis of knowledge and practice as historically situated and contingent phenomena (Vighi & Feldner 2007: 144). Moreover discourse analysis was above accusations of teleological idealism insofar as it concerned itself with particular material and symbolic practices. Its horizontal approach avoided the reductive deficiencies of the sociological model of base and superstructure whilst retaining its critical analytical functions. Lastly, and most importantly for our debate, the Marxist emphasis on ideology in terms of class struggle did not allow sufficient space for any theoretical articulation of conflicts regarding *gender, race and identity* which were of paramount importance to the expanding field of feminist, cultural, and post-colonial studies (ibid: 145).

This is precisely the point where Žižek objects. For him the very abandonment of the problematic of ideology points towards an acute deficiency in the work of Foucault. Žižek's concern with Foucault's approach is that the discursive mechanisms operate as a spontaneous event devoid of any ideological pressure and that the very impossibility of drawing any clear line between ideology and non-discursive reality directly undermines the articulation of radical political projects and isolates political struggle in the micro realm of identity politics. Antagonism is dissolved into a game of differences and a language of tolerance. This post-modern stratagem, in Žižek's view, only ends up favoring an unhindered proliferation of ideology (Vighi & Feldner 2007: 148). The more we pride ourselves of being free thinkers in a free world the more we commit ourselves to the superegoic commandment to 'Enjoy!' which binds us to the logic of the market (ibid: 146).

How are we then to traverse this impasse: although everything we experience as ‘reality’ is already a product of ideology, Žižek reminds us that we must, in spite of this, “maintain the tension that keeps the critique of ideology alive” since “ideology is not all; it is possible to assume a place that enables us to maintain a distance from it, *but this place from where one can denounce ideology must remain empty, it cannot be occupied by any positively determined reality* – the moment we yield to that temptation, we are back in ideology” (Žižek 1994: 17). What Žižek has in mind here is the displacement of the classical opposition between ‘illusion’ and ‘reality’ with a Lacanian formula of the ‘Symbolic’ and the ‘Real’ the former being the universe of (socially constructed) representations and the latter the non-representable remainder. For Lacan, what we experience as reality is never the ‘thing itself’, it is always represented and constructed by symbolic mechanisms whose function is to create the semblance of ‘reality’. Thus far the approach veers very little from the Foucauldian network of discursive devices. But the crucial distinction for Lacan (and Žižek) is that Symbolic representation ultimately always fails to ‘cover’ the Real, the remainder of which (this part of reality that eludes symbolization) *returns to haunt us in the form of spectral apparitions* (ibid: 21). This is a difficult passage to digest for a social science such as ethnography concerned primarily with the observable, but let us try and reconstruct Žižek’s reasoning in more detail.

The logical distinction between the ‘Symbolic’ and the ‘Real’ ultimately arises from a Hegelian dialectical dynamic of ‘oppositional determination’. This represents the basics of the Hegelian logic where what is can be conceived only in relation all that which it *is not*, that is its otherness. The negation of a thing however does not constitute an external opposite but an internal contradiction that defines its essence (Marcuse 1955: 124). In other words Symbolic reality can only exist in opposition to the non-symbolized Real on whose repression reality itself is based. This is what Žižek has in mind when he says that “if what we experience as ‘reality’ is to emerge, something has to be foreclosed from it – that is to say reality, like truth, is never whole” (Žižek 1994: 21). Reality is thus self-contradictory insofar as it cannot know itself without this primordial failure to absorb the Real (non-reality). It turns into a

structural-dialectical paradox of an effect that exists only in order to efface the causes of its existence – reality is trying to engulf the Real yet its very existence is a secondary effect of its inability to achieve this goal. Consequently, the notion of the Real as that void that resists symbolization allows for the logical assertion of a non-discursive generative kernel. Yet it remains unclear at this point how this unrepresentable place can allow us to enunciate a non-ideological subject position?

Žižek's short answer would be that it doesn't, or at least not directly. But this does not undermine our capacity to denounce a certain subject position as ideological since it is no longer necessary to step-out of ideology in order to do this. As was already mentioned the repressed Real returns to haunt us in the form of spectral apparitions that emerge from that gap between reality and the Real, their function being to "fill the void of what cannot be symbolized. What the spectre conceals is not reality but what must be repressed in order for social reality to emerge" (Žižek 2005: 80-1). What it tries to conceal is the traumatic antagonism, the immanent contradiction within (symbolic) reality that forever prevents it from achieving a harmonious whole. The task of ideology critique would then be (instead of naively making futile distinctions between 'reality' and 'illusion') to traverse the ideological fantasy and discover the Real of antagonism that eludes symbolic reality. Žižek's wager is that this can be done only by an "overidentification with the gap of ideology itself, i.e. in the full assumption of the traumatic core of ideology" (Vighi & Feldner 2007: 148).

In an almost ironic reversal he objects to the postmodern trend of 'over rapid historicization' which, in the beginning of this chapter was opposed to the Marxist form of 'over rapid universalization'. To state it thus: If over rapid universalization blinds us from the historical contingency of socio-symbolic determination, then over rapid historicization makes us blind to the *Real kernel* which always returns as the same in the guise of different historical symbolizations (Žižek 1989: 50). Laclau and Mouffe have defined this kernel as a traumatic-antagonistic social division that cannot be symbolized (ibid: 45). What ideology offers us is an escape from this traumatic-antagonism via

an explicit socio-symbolic reality, an attempt to postpone the fundamental impossibility of achieving harmony.

In Marxist jargon we might define this real kernel of contemporary society as class and commodity fetishism (exploitation, separation of the producers from the means of production etc.). We would thus be able to state that for all the diversity through which local cultures may filter global capitalism, this remains a diversity of content as opposed to the form which remains the same: market exchange and commodification. Yet in our daily practice we fail to recognize this. This failure however cannot be explained with the traditional Marxist understanding of 'false consciousness'. What Žižek proposes is the formula of fetishistic disavowal: 'I know very well, but still...'. In other words, in our daily acts of exchange we know at the level of 'consciousness' that behind commodities there are relations between people and not relations between things, yet we behave *as if* this were not the case. We know that the exchange 'value' of a commodity is not contained in-itself, i.e. in its immanent physical properties, yet we proceed as if this were the case. The Hegelian point here is that form matters: the very form of commodity exchange on the market requires us, by structural necessity, to behave (enter Althusser) *as if* money is beyond material relations and has properties in-itself; as if it is made of *sublime* indestructible material that defies corruption. Crucially, the explicit content of this sublime body is always offered via a particular symbolic order, i.e. the issuing authority stamped upon a coin which guarantees its worth beyond the physical wear and tear of the coin. This symbolic authority however is only a discursive distortion of the symbolic order, i.e., the form that structures our practice of commodity exchange external to it (ibid: 18-19). The real kernel of antagonism is thus always present as a series of effects, never directly; it must be constructed retroactively as the "traumatic point which escapes them" (ibid: 163). Read in this way, the term 'class struggle' can never be the ultimate signifier of the totality of social phenomena, but on the contrary, a certain limit, an internal split within society that ensures the impossibility of totalizing the social field or assigning a definite place for all social phenomena in the structure (ibid). In other words, every attempt to articulate the totality of social relations via 'class struggle' will be determined

by its relative position within the struggle, hence, partial and ideological. ‘Class struggle’ can thus manifest itself only through its distorted symbolizations as its effects, and only insofar as they efface it as the cause of their existence. Insofar as they succeed in doing so, these effects can be termed, ideology.

In order for ideology to succeed it must function on two separate yet interdependent levels. Each time we attempt to impose a totalizing, harmonious fantasy (e.g. national narrative) of our society we disavow the fundamental antagonism of the Real that renders this project impossible. The failure of this attempted totality opens up a gap in the fantasy that is sutured by the spectral apparitions representing the obscene Other that threatens the totality of our fantasy (Jews, migrants, the Neighbor etc.). Ideology cannot complete itself without this duality of the fantasy-spectre. The Nazi project of *Volksgemeinschaft* was precisely that project of a total harmonious symbolic fantasy. Failure to achieve an actual harmony opens up a gap in the fantasy that exposes us to the Real (Žižek 2005: 244). In order for the fantasy to sustain itself it sutures this gap with the spectre of the plotting Jew who is deemed responsible for this failure. In Stalinism we have the figure of the ‘traitor’ who could be potentially anyone, and in Macedonia the ethnic Other always hindering the full realization of the community.

The favorite example of the above that keeps reappearing in Žižek’s work is the spectral character of the conceptual “Jew” that serves as the basis for anti-Semitism. There is a certain split between knowledge and belief in the discourse, where the observable, representable qualities of any particular Jew in reality are always accompanied by a shadowy double of an obscene fantasmatic figure that escapes our gaze. This conceptual Jew offered by anti-Semitism stands for the “the multiple fears experienced by the ‘common man’ in an epoch of dissolving social links (inflation, unemployment, corruption, moral degradation) - behind all these phenomena lies the invisible hand of the ‘Jewish plot.’” (Žižek 1993: 80). The crucial point is that in order for the discourse to complete itself it is not enough to provide a set of specific characteristics that annoy us about “them” (exploitative, secretive etc.). It is

also necessary to go a “step further by saying ‘they are like that ... because they are Jews.’ The transcendental object of Jewishness is precisely that elusive X which makes a Jew into a Jew and for which we look in vain among his positive properties” (ibid: 82). The conceptual Jew is that spectral apparition that the ideological fantasy of a harmonious society requires in order to complete itself. The point here is that the ideology of anti-Semitism has nothing to do with actual Jews. For that very reason we cannot refute its power by referring to reality and making distinctions between the ‘illusion’ of the ‘Jew’ and actually existing Jews (‘look they are not really like that’). Much the same goes for the ethnic tensions between Macedonians and Albanians that has characterized the political mood in Macedonia for so long. Even when stereotypes that are invoked to represent Albanians contradict everyday experience (neighbors can be Albanians that fit none of them) this in no way disrupts the ideological fantasy (see Dimova: 2010). Instead the discrepancy itself is turned into an argument against Albanians (“These ‘normal’ looking Albanians are to be feared the most because you cannot immediately recognize them for what they are”). We can tell that ideology has really succeeded when even the facts that contradict it begin to function as arguments in its favor. What Žižek suggests here is that we must confront ourselves with the Real of our society which announces itself through the “ideological figure of the ‘Jew’ [and] ... with how we have constructed this figure to escape a certain deadlock of our desire” (1989: 48).

For Lacan the object of desire never offers itself through its phenomenological properties but from the elusive surplus that always resists representation – the *objet petit a* - the object cause of desire that serves as the driving force of my desiring it (Žižek 2005: 236). Violence in its most radical thus becomes an (unconscious) desire to destroy this empyreal kernel, an attempt always already condemned to failure. The annihilation of the Jewry in Nazi Germany was, Žižek says, an attempt to strike a blow at this X, this uncanny Other which is in a positive sense indestructible: the more the Nazis destroyed the Jews in reality, the more powerful and horrifying were the dimensions acquired by the remainder (ibid).

We see this split between knowledge and practice in the refusal to acknowledge the Holocaust during the early days of the war. Langer (1997) writes that even though the American and British governments had numerous reports by eyewitnesses of the atrocities taking place in Nazi occupied territories they maintained their skepticism and refused to act and find a way to stop or limit the murders (50). Langer suggests this refusal is a result of an American cultural ideology of individual success and an infinitely improving future that seeks to protect its romanticizing imagination from “an unholy world with millions of victims and few heroes” (52). Even when recognition of the unthinkable crimes finally occurred and the fantasy was ruptured, the result was to relegate the phenomenon to the Other and reduce it to a concrete social order whether Fascism, Stalinism etc. (Žižek 1989: 50). Is this perhaps one more attempt to avoid confrontation with the always returning Real of one’s society and elude the traumatic recognition that the first concentration camps were used by the USA to isolate Native Americans in the 1830’s and again to isolate the Japanese population during the war, as well as by England during the Boer war and later again during the Kenyan war of independence (ibid)?

A more familiar example that illustrates the interaction between the Symbolic and the Real can be taken from Claude Lévi-Strauss’ *Structural Anthropology* (1968). In the chapter on Dual Organizations Lévi-Strauss analyses the curious discrepancy of the Winnebago representations of moiety influence on the organization of village structure. The village was divided into two moieties, the *wangeragi* “those who are above” and the *manegi* “those who are below”. When the former were asked to draw up a plan of the village structure they would produce a circular arrangement with the moieties separated by an imaginary diameter running through the middle of the village. The latter would however draw a concentric arrangement with the chiefs’ houses situated in a small circle at the heart of a larger one, thus occupying the centre rather than the periphery (ibid: 133). This curious discrepancy was originally dismissed by Paul Radin who first observed it ethnographically, on the grounds that insufficient information prevented him from ascertaining which one was the ‘true’ organization of the village. From this perspective one could

be tempted to say that all one needs to do is take an aerial snapshot and capture the ‘objective’ organization on the ground, but Lévi-Strauss is quite justifiably not concerned with this. His analysis leads him to conclude that the different representations of village organizations are but “superficial distortions of structures whose real nature is quite different and vastly more complex” (ibid: 161).

Žižek adds here that the split in representation which occurs in the village implies the existence of a “fundamental antagonism [which] the inhabitants of the village were not able to symbolize ... to come to terms with ... and so stabilize into a harmonious whole” (Žižek 1994: 26; 2005: 242). The specific name we give to this antagonism (class, race, gender etc.) concerns concrete social analysis and in the above case Lévi-Strauss, being the rigorous researcher that he was, held back from speculating what structural impediment was the cause of the anomaly, only offering hints to its presence. For Žižek (and Lacan) the very presence of distortion is in itself revealing insofar as its failure to ‘grasp’ reality opens up the vital gap for the emergence of the Spectre of the Real.

If ideology is conceived as an effect of discourse, this is a necessary but insufficient predicate. Only the explicit ‘text’ of ideology is the result of discourse whereas the implicit crucial core on which it rests can only be reached via the non-discursive kernel of the Real (Vighi & Feldner 2007: 153). To thus paraphrase Marx’s thesis eleven: discourse analysis has only deconstructed the world in various ways; the point however is to discover the Real in what appears to be mere symbolic fiction, and to change it (ibid: 142). In the following chapters I will explore the possibility of identifying class antagonism and capitalism as the Real that structures the diverse effects of identity politics in Macedonia.

Class, Ethnicity and Anthropology

Much of the ethnographical research in Yugoslavia before the mid-seventies focused on questions of assimilation and acculturation in an environment of rapid industrialization and social change. Economic geographers like Hoffman (1959) had as their main interest the impact of socialist reforms on peasant households, and the superimposition of economic and political doctrines upon previous kinship ties and loyalties. The entire project is seen in the context of the irresistible thrust of modernization where culture is but one anachronistic obstacle. Thus the agricultural ‘backwardness’ of the ‘oriental’ regions of Yugoslavia (Kosovo, Macedonia and Southern Serbia) is a result of ‘five hundred years of Turkish (sic) rule’ and the ‘large birth rate of the Albanian population’ (ibid: 576).

Ethnographic texts such as Halpern’s *A Serbian Village* are far more nuanced, yet it is conspicuous how culture is again treated as a non-political factor in the community:

“From the outset we made it clear to Communists and non-Communists alike that our purpose was to collect data about their way of life and not to meddle in their politics.”
(Halpern 1958: xiii).

This assertion is owed in part due to the fact that Halpern addresses culture from a materialist perspective. The first half of the book is devoted to detailed descriptions of agricultural tools and techniques, clothing, food stuffs, recipes and cooking utensils. Very little space is spent on what villagers say about them or how they relate to or value their material culture. On the other hand Halpern’s main interest is in socio-cultural change and modernization in rural Serbia and the tensions that arise from this process. These tensions are expressed in the colliding modes of agricultural production, notably the socialist collectivization of land and the pre-war system of peasant

accumulation.¹ In any case the very idea that culture can be approached without intruding into the delicate sphere of politics seems to have been unproblematic in an age where the parochial strains of identity could not pass as the building blocks of political action. What Halpern is concerned with is precisely those questions of acculturation and assimilation, that is, the social transformation of peasant society through the process of rapid industrialization. His perspective is that of the neutral, detached observer, offering an insight into the mechanisms of social change.

In opposition it would seem beyond the pale nowadays to claim that one could be researching, for example, the cultural logic of veiling among European Muslims at the workplace without meddling in anyone's politics. Much the same would apply for any contemporary analysis of structural adjustment programs in third world countries where the encounter between global neoliberal economic programs and local culture is invariably a political hot potato (see Fairhead, J. & Leach, M. 1997; Ferguson, J. 2002; Goldman, M. 2006).

This is not to say that the people Halpern studied were politically resigned. As was mentioned the political moment was defined by the antagonistic relationship between colliding modes of production. The struggle for social change was not articulated over the 'right to self-determination' but over wages and the control of land and the tools for production. Many of the teenagers in the village were more than explicitly vocal about their excitement regarding the political project of socialism and the rise of the working classes. As Halpern states, much of that excitement was a result of ideological indoctrination and it is well known that in spite of the official ideology class divisions remained endemic throughout the socialist period. But it none the less expressed a genuine identification with a political project that by its very

¹ The accumulation of private wealth was closely intertwined with kinship structures so that the more land the peasant would accumulate the higher the number of household members would be. The latter would eventually split up and inherit the land at which point they would all receive minor parcels. As Halpern notes the main grievance over the socialist collectivization programs was the cultural and moral attachment peasants had towards their land (1958: 267).

formulation had the capacity to cut across cultural and linguistic divisions and focus on the *struggle* that unites each and every one of them.

Lockwood's ethnography of rural Bosnia shares some of the same observations. Cultural differences in the region he studies appeared to be following more of a rural urban dichotomy rather than an inter-ethnic one (1975: 52). Even though people seem to have nurtured certain prejudices and stereotypes regarding the surrounding ethnic groups, this was hardly a zero-sum contest between various groups seeking to assert their cultural, ethnic or national rights.

Pratt suggests that the rural-urban divide was historically the driving antagonism of the political dynamics that characterized Yugoslav social relations. In the immediate aftermath of the formation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia around eighty percent of the total population had been employed in agriculture (Pratt 2003: 131). The social ramifications of this division of labor were of considerable significance for the later development of national identities. On the one hand it emphasized the stability and continuity of the moral peasant community with its attachment to land, on the other it pitted this community against that parallel dimension of destruction, war, migration and political change (ibid). Moreover even though peasant communities have proven to be the bedrock of Serbian and Croatian nationalism there is no reason to indicate that peasant communities have always been nationalistic. One example of this would be the recurring revolts of Serbian serfs against their newly appointed Serbian landlords who merely took up the role of their Ottoman predecessors and did little to alter the master-slave relationship between landlords and landless.

The Russian revolution prompted authorities in Yugoslavia to enact a thorough land reform program that broke up large estates and redistributed land to the peasantry in order to prevent more violent upheavals. Interestingly this peasant victory did not strengthen the political position of the communist party which had little hold over agricultural labor force before the Second

World War². Instead it was the Agrarian and Populist parties that enjoyed the highest political appeal and presence among the peasantry. The programs of these parties coordinated the interests of communities across national divides, both within and between states. Such action was considered by the state authorities to be treasonable and the Agrarian parties soon found themselves the subjects of severe state oppression (ibid: 133). Their political programs were based on property rights, the creation of co-operatives, small scale rural industrialization, direct proportional taxation, investment in rural infrastructure and democracy. As such they were in direct collision with the mercantile elites in the cities and towns simultaneously rampant with corrupt bureaucrats and soldiers (Mitrany 1951: 121) that jointly represented the corporate state machinery whose apparatuses depended largely on revenues extracted from the rural population.

A federation of (ethnic) self-management:

Yet any analysis of Yugoslav political economy will immediately suggest that identity in the federation was of paramount importance, not least in the second half of its existence. This rural-urban dichotomy was gradually obscured by economic policies directed towards rapid industrialization achieved through the control of labor, the extraction of raw materials and the holding down of agricultural prices. Very high investments in heavy industry caused some of the most impressive growth rates in Eastern Europe and the cities boomed. However, in spite of some federal efforts to improve the economic situation of Yugoslavia as a whole, regional disparities became ever more salient as the decades followed. Even though such disparities in terms of economic development existed well before the communist government took over, government policies only further exacerbated the problem. Due to strategic military and economic concerns the government invested all the light export

² In fact Shoup suggests that in the pre-war years, or at least until 1934, the communist party played the game of national differences by supporting secessionist movements in order to undermine the dictatorship of the monarchy (1967: 67-8). This information was later vigorously suppressed by the party after it assumed power in Yugoslavia due to its efforts to integrate the many different nationalities into the federation (ibid).

oriented manufacturing industries in Slovenia and Croatia, whereas the less profitable capital intensive industries such as energy, mining and military were allocated to Bosnia, Macedonia and the south of Serbia including Kosovo (Woodward 1995: 285). The reasoning was that export oriented light manufacturing should be closer to West European markets, whereas heavy industry needed to be strategically distanced from Yugoslav borders with the Soviet bloc in case of military confrontation with the latter (ibid). The split with the Soviet Union also entailed the abandonment of the Soviet model of central planning and its replacement with a Yugoslav breed of Market Socialism and the concept of worker self-management. Enterprises throughout the country were to establish Worker's Councils responsible for drafting production targets and proposals to increase productivity and efficiency (Shecter 1994: 128). The Council members were elected by all the employees in the enterprise through a secret ballot. The latter had the legal right to replace any of the Council members if two-thirds agreed that they were not doing an adequate job. The market model allowed enterprises the advantage of not having to seek approvals from distant bureaucrats in capitals around the federation. On the other hand they also suffered from similar problems as firms in capitalist economies, such as raising initial capital and reaching sufficient levels of profitability necessary to pay off debts and hire new workers (ibid: 132). After some promising growth rates during the first two decades the system began to falter. The market model that was supposed to secure economic efficiency created vast inequalities across the federation thus lending proof to the "thesis that the market tends to produce winners and losers, leaving the latter with increasingly little bargaining power" (ibid: 133). By 1970 the GDP of Slovenia was six times that of Kosovo and a struggle emerged between the more affluent regions (Slovenia, Croatia) and the poorer ones (Serbia and the south) over the distribution of wealth in the federation. Unsurprisingly the former insisted on more decentralization and market-based decision making whereas the latter wanted increased centralization and redistribution (Pratt 2003: 136).

The end result was the new constitution of 1974 which granted substantial rights to the individual republics. The latter gained presidents, parliaments and

ministries, ran their own education and labor allocation policies as well as their own media. The federal government retained control over questions of foreign policy and the military. Concerns over the efficiency of the Yugoslav economy as a whole fell to the back of the queue and republics began to increasingly trade with other countries while being constrained to divert funds to the poorer regions. Given the new constitution any dissatisfaction over such arrangements was voiced via the platform of parochial republican opposition to an antagonistic federal regime. Since the republics themselves were carved in a way that was supposed to territorially correspond to the distribution of a dominant *narod* i.e. people or nation, the interests of the former were conflated with those of the latter. Republican elites began articulating their regional concerns in terms of nationalism. Since the communist leadership suppressed alternative forms of political expression national ideologies became the only available tool for channeling opposition to federal decision-making. What the constitution of 1974 managed to facilitate was the “creation of a political structure that channeled all dissent into arguments about the rights of national majorities and minorities” (ibid: 139).

The lack of interest in the volatile qualities of culture that early Yugoslav ethnographies displayed was perhaps less owed to the actual presence of identity politics and had more to do with the prevailing ideological and theoretical debates of the Cold War era. This is not to say that theoretical models were entirely unavailable. Debates on ethnicity received a powerful thrust with the publication of Fredrik Barth’s influential introductory essay to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. His situationist rejection of ‘primordial’ approaches to culture however was less than well received in analyses of ‘modern’ industrial societies. However, with the demise of the Soviet Union and the announcement of a post-ideological era Barth’s theoretical models received new significance.

The Barth Effect:

The year 1993 was marked among other things by the peculiar declaration by the UN that it was to be the International Year of Indigenous Populations. It signaled a new commitment by the international community to prescribe specificity and importance to the preservation of 'native' culture and identity. Politics received a new tool that was a long time in the making not least in the workshop of anthropological theory. The idea that native cultures should be preserved against the ruthless onslaught of ever expanding western economic and political models has been alive since the early days of anthropology. Margaret Mead was one of the more iconic figures to champion the cause of resisting programs of assimilation and development. However, as Morin and d'Anglure argue the debate only drew significant political attention with the publication of Fredrik Barth's influential introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1998). The peculiarity of Barth's approach was that it focused on the boundaries maintained between groups, rather than the cultural traits contained in them. The analysis could focus on the strategies chosen by peoples to interact and participate with any surrounding social system, i.e. their group-environment relations. In many cases this implied acceptance of minority status or a reenforcement of ethnic identity followed by political mobilization (ibid: 33). What Barth and his interlocutors managed to achieve was to provide a theoretical platform that supported the political development of ethnicity. The latter could be mobilized in order to engage politically with the larger social environment and bypass the question of abandonment of traditional values and structures or the threat of assimilation and acculturation.

Post-socialist studies in ethnicity began to describe this process in operation in, for example, the Yukagir ethnic group in post-Soviet Siberia. The Russians made contact with them for the first time in 1633 during an expedition of explorers who estimated their population to be around 5000. Little was known about their numbers or society during the Tsarist period but records suggest that through a combination of warfare, migration and intermarriage their numbers dwindle significantly in the coming centuries. Yukagir identity received a short lived revival during the early years of communist rule when

the party encouraged the promotion, development and protection of 'the small numbered peoples'. Schoolbooks were published in indigenous languages and collectives were organized along the lines of the former 'clans'. This trend was brought to an end however with the advent of Stalinist policies that cleansed the country of anything that smacked of ethnic nationalism (see Blitstein 2006: 288-9). As a result the 1959 census showed a record low few hundred registered Yukagirs. The trend was to be once more reversed with Gorbachev's liberalization policies that began in 1985 and the rights of ethnic minorities were back on the political agenda. The republic of Yakutia which contains the two largest Yukagir groups has pressed hard for indigenous rights by adopting a new constitution that closely reflected proceedings of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations in Geneva. Yukagir writers, artists and intellectuals have been actively engaged in promoting the cause of their people. The leaders of the movement have shown no lapses in their dedication to the cause and continue to move back and forth in political engagements on a local, federal and international level. Adult Yukagirs today speak of concrete benefits they have received as a result, such as privileged fishing and hunting rights, government aid for schooling children and special quotas at universities (Morin & d'Anglure 1997: 167-179).

Interestingly, the core argument weaved in the debate on rights is the claim that Yukagirs are the autochthonous population of the regions they inhabit and are therefore entitled to certain rights and privileges. Needless to say the entire process has involved a significant re-invention of Yukagir ethnicity as a concept. Moreover, long term interaction with tsarist and communist policies, followed by changes in the climate of international politics and far reaching UN legislations, have all taken their part in shaping the cultural stuff that the ethnic community encloses. One can hardly claim that Yukagir ethnicity today is a continuation of some 'primordial ties'. Instead it would seem to make more sense to approach the concept as constructed on the platform of identity politics which defines the boundary that designates who and what will be included in it.

The trouble with Barth's model is that ultimately it reduces the cultural stuff of ethnicity to a market model of economic and political maximization. Cultural symbols are almost treated as devoid of value and meaning in and of themselves and entirely determined by the changing political circumstances. Duijzings (1997) has applied this method of analysis to the fullest in his scrutiny of Yugoslav and Macedonian Egyptians. Once a curious and infrequent mode of identification during most of the Yugoslav period³, Egyptians have since the break up of the federation become a fully legitimate ethnic category in state censuses in Macedonia. Duijzings' thesis is that Egyptians have emerged from the ill defined Gypsy populations in the region and in response to both political manipulation and crude self-interest. In Kosovo he suggests that during the communist period when the province enjoyed its Albanian dominated regional autonomy the same Egyptians were more likely to declare themselves Albanian on the population censuses. With the abolition of the status of autonomy under Milosevic, the Serbs regained their hold over the key political and institutional positions thus making the Albanian association unfavorable for the (later to become) Egyptians. In short it was now the Serbs who could offer favors, bribes and patronage relations making them the more profitable wager. But why 'Egyptians' of all things and why does this make them well received among the Serbian and Macedonian elements? One answer suggested by Duijzings regarding the first question comes by negative evaluation: since being a Gypsy was considered pejorative by the Yugoslav peoples many Gypsies who achieved some form of social mobility preferred to identify themselves with one or another more 'prestigious' ethnicity (ibid: 209). But this explanation seems to almost obviously contradict much of the other claims in the text. If cultural symbols are but tools in the struggle for resources, why would people brandish them *after* achieving upward social mobility? This would suggest that they have some relevance beyond any immediate material concerns.

³ The category Egyptian has been alive in the Balkans for some time as one of the mythical tales regarding the origins of the Roma populations, though it was never picked up by any state apparatus in the region as a legitimate form of ethnic affiliation before the break-up of Yugoslavia. Whether or not it was actually practiced as such by people remains unclear due to the absence of serious ethnographic research on the topic. Duijzings suggests that it existed as a loose category for local usage only as opposed to the legally accepted denominators used on a federal level.

The second explanation is that the Serbs and Macedonians, being antagonistic towards Albanians, welcomed any effort that could splinter the numbers of the Albanian community and strongly encouraged the development of Egyptian identity through institutional assistance. This extends the argument to involve the penetrative power of the census to reify and render categories increasingly real to those being numbered (Anderson 1991: 185). Given that a popular trend of labeling oneself as Egyptian was in practice before it found its way to the official census, it is also tempting to interpret this as a pure case of “governmentality” where the technologies of state intervene in order to meet (or co-opt) a popular discourse. Nevertheless the last suggestion offered is that the Egyptian option may place them in an even more advantageous position as Egypt might decide to support them practically or economically (Duijzings 1997: 214)!

It is indeed difficult to imagine a more interest oriented model for the analysis of cultural symbols and practice. The Barthian approach seems to offer some very straightforward answers to some very perplexing questions. Yet it is quite fascinating how much it fails to address. While the analysis has something to say about why people choose to become Egyptians, it has virtually nothing to say about what a contemporary Balkan-Egyptian is. That is unless we are tempted to conclude that an Egyptian in the Balkans can be defined as ‘a self interested relatively flexible individual who morphs into whatever is the most advantageous social identity contingent on the socio-political circumstances of his or her historical period’. But this is precisely what Barth *is* saying. The cultural and symbolic patterns that invade the universe of whatever social group are merely the “materials that the actors themselves are deploying to construct their own identities and actions ... in a social struggle for meaningful change, not the revitalization of an unchanging heritage of aboriginal cultural traits” (Barth 1998: 6-7). The construction of identities and the struggles for change are treated as a fully conscious and rational-choice driven utilization of symbols for personal gain. This stance is widely reflected and present in Barth’s own analysis of Swat political organization and, as Asad (2002) has pointed out, suffers from numerous limitations.

It is worth offering a short review of Asad's critique here, given the nature of our debate on identity politics. Political activity in Swat is seen by Barth through a "means to an end" framework where individuals compete with each other using various strategies in order to maximize their personal gain (land, resources) and minimize their vulnerability. The local caste system provides the main framework for organizing social identities and stratifications and more importantly – occupation. In the absence of a monetary economy agricultural production is organized by multi-caste working teams where "each specialist contributes with the skills and resources ... appropriate to his [caste] status" (Barth, in Asad 2002: 67). The team is organized by dyadic contracts between the various specialists and members of the Pakhtun group who own most of the land and organize its allotment. It is the latter that provide remuneration for work rather than the person for whom the work was done. People are thus free to choose the particular group to which they wish to belong depending on their immediate political, economic or other interests and so regulate their contractual relations with the Pakhtun group. The caste system merely limits the available categories one can choose to belong to.

The landowning Pakhtun group is not seen by Barth as an organized political association due to the nature of his fluid contractual approach. The Pakhtuns are themselves involved in mutual competition and a struggle for power which depends on the number of supporters they can engage. Since the latter are free to disassociate themselves from one landowner and join another at will the system remains fluid and individual Pakhtun power only temporary and always contested. What Barth ultimately proposes is a market-type, individualistic, contractual theory for the analysis of politics in Swat society. It is frighteningly reminiscent of Realist political theory of international relations (balance of power) combined with the liberal economics of Milton Friedman (market self-regulation) and the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes (greedy, selfish individuals). What it fails to question is: who defines and applies the rules of the game and who frames the handicaps and advantages summed up in those rules (Asad 2002: 74)? The answer inevitably points towards the landowning Pakhtun class whose collective right to the land is legitimized by a

single genealogical charter; whose members alone come together to resolve disputes and apply Islamic law; whose leaders alone engage in spectacular displays of violence. It is the cumulative effects of exercising these (ideological, political and coercive) powers and privileges that constitutes the Pakhtuns as the dominant landowning class that ultimately rests on the exploitation of landless peasants. Rather than taking the individual drive for maximization as the starting point of analysis, we would be better off looking at the way in which class position structures the opportunities and disadvantages for people in the society under analysis (I shall return to this point later).

The Barthian approach to ethnicity has nonetheless been present in a very spectral form in the ethnography of Macedonian identity politics. The more recent writings such as Dujzing's have found it useful when analyzing some of the 'smaller' ethnic groups such as Gypsies, but it seems summarily inadequate for the analysis of any of the larger ethno-national cohorts in the region. A Barthian might find it difficult to explain the almost stoic refusal to change the name of the Republic of Macedonia in light of its quarrel with neighboring Greece over the former's use of cultural paraphernalia. Ethno-national identities in Macedonia seem to be anything but fluid and flexible or the result of individual "rational" choices. Much of the literature on the topic pays attention to the historical interaction between local events and state policies as external factors that have *determined*, in a usually very fixed way, the subjective mode of identification. It is true that ethnic identities remain ever contested and subject to change, but hardly in the fluid rational-choice manner envisaged by Barth.

There is more than a hint of this fluidity however, in the historical materials on pre-nation-state forms of ethnicity in Macedonia. Danforth (1995: 57) for example speaks of the confused way in which early ethnographers imposed national categories on people who organized themselves along linguistic, ethnic(?), and religious categories. Being an Orthodox Christian as opposed to a Muslim was the most important mode of identification in Macedonia. With the establishment of autonomous Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian Orthodox

churches Christians in Macedonia had “the *choice* of affiliating with either the Greek patriarch, the Bulgarian exarch, or the Serbian Orthodox Church” (ibid: 58; my emphasis). The element of choice is salient in an account offered by the English journalist H. N. Brailsford who toured Macedonia in 1903. After conversing with a wealthy peasant in Greek he noticed that he spoke the language well but hardly like a native and asked him whether his village was Greek or Bulgarian. To Brailsford’s amazement the peasant replied that the village was Bulgarian even though four years before it had been Greek. Then he went on to explain how:

“we are all poor men, but we want to have our own school and a priest who will look after us properly. We used to have a Greek teacher. We paid him £5 a year and his bread, while the Greek consul paid him another £5; but we had no priest of our own. We shared a priest with several other villages, but he was very unpunctual and remiss. We went to the Greek Bishop to complain, but he refused to do anything for us. The Bulgarians heard of this and they came and made us an offer. They said they would give us a priest who would live in the village and a teacher to whom we need pay nothing. Well, sir, ours is a poor village, and so of course we became Bulgarians” (Brailsford, 2009: 72).

The Barthian fluidity of ethnic boundaries can also be traced in another mode of ethnic affiliation that was closely associated with occupation as shown by Karakasidou (1997). She argues that “one’s relative position in the local division of labor was an important asset to constructs of identity during the late Ottoman era” (ibid: 54). The landowning, agricultural, political and military ranks were predominantly Muslim-Ottoman, the Christian mercantile elite was largely Greek speaking while the Slavic peoples formed the majority of the landless peasantry. Even the Vlachs had their economic niche mostly as shepherds or artisans (Brown 2003a: 106-7). When a Vlach shepherd or a Slavic peasant achieved some upward mobility by entering the merchant class the process was largely indistinguishable from an act of “Hellenization” (Danforth 1995: 59). Such ethnic boundary spillovers seem to have been rather commonplace prior to the nascent of ethno-national politics that reified previously loose and fluid categories. The historical data almost suggests a Swat like model of social organization. But once again the model is

complicated when one takes into consideration the structural limitations of class stratification. As Hechter has argued, insofar as the “cultural division of labor” is organized in strict hierarchical form it maximizes the level of stratification between the groups involved (1978: 312). Class and “ethnicity” become inseparable, i.e. ethnicity becomes the “modality through which class is lived” (Hall 1978: 394). As such it has all the consequences of determining the life-chances and modes of struggle and political action that class entails. The fact that the struggle is articulated along ethnic or cultural lines only serves as an ideological misrepresentation of that struggle thus neutralizing the political possibility of representing the interests of the class as a whole since the ethnic category is unable to incorporate class members from other groups (ibid: 395). This might seem contradictory since I have equated class with ethnicity while confirming that not all members of an ethnic group belong to the same class. But it remains true in the sense that members of a dominant class are usually recruited from certain groups while excluding others. For example while the landless peasantry included members from all ethnic and religious groups, the merchant and landowning elites were exclusively Greek-speaking and Ottoman respectively. The ethnic label of an individual within the structure significantly influenced his or her prospects for upward mobility. This had the effect of both splintering the cohesion of the lower classes into a diversity of ethnics

To further illustrate this point let us get back to the work of Karakasidou particularly the case of Yeorgios Kondos. Records show that his grandfather had moved to the village of Guvezna, around 1850. He was granted certain tax exemptions under the Ottomans and was able to accumulate considerable wealth as a merchant in the village. His grandson Yeorgios Kondos, also became rich from wages earned as a miner in a British company in Halkidiki and built a large house in the village *aghora*, large parts of which are still owned by his descendents. Whereas he took a wife from one of the neighboring Slavic villages, both his daughters were married into prominent Greek-speaking merchant families in Guvezna itself. Kondos divided his property equally among his two daughters and his only son, giving the former sizeable dowries in land properties near the *aghora*. Karakasidou goes on to

say that “such dowries were markedly absent from the marital exchanges practiced by Slavic speakers in the area” (1997: 63-4). The endogamous manner in which marriage was arranged suggests that a certain corporate interest existed in the merchant class as a whole, i.e. wealth was shared among and retained by members of the same class (ibid: 69). Furthermore, the landowning and taxation privileges that significantly influenced the life-chances of individuals struggling for upward mobility were inextricable from their social identity. Karakasidou persistently mentions that the linguistic and cultural differences between the wealthy Greek speaking merchant elite and the poor Slavic speaking laborers were of no political significance and not a source of mutual antagonism before the arrival of national ideologies. In fact the frequent intermarriages between Slavic speaking women and wealthy Greek speaking merchants seem to testify to this. Such arrangements inevitably resulted in a multi-lingual domestic setting and some cultural convergence. Similarly accounts suggest that Ottoman landowners had no difficulties in marrying Christian women whether Slavic or Greek speaking (ref needed). Yet at the same time both the merchants and the peasants appear to have gradually formed two very separate interest groups where the reproduction of the former very much depended on the exploitation of the latter. The intergroup marriages only further establish this point. Creating affinal relations with the Slavic peasants only broadened the access to both cheap labor and trading products for the merchant elite (ibid: 72). At the same time it established a complex system of patronage and the semblance of mutual interests that further immobilized the full realization of class antagonism.

By the time of the Balkan Wars and the departure of the Ottoman landowning class, the Greek speaking merchant elite had established itself as a key political factor in the area and used their position to appropriate much of the land left by the Ottomans (Boeschoten 2001: 39). As this situation wore on antagonisms which ultimately relied on class divisions became articulated via ethnic categories. In other words, rather than identifying one’s structural positioning within the relations of production as such, people identified with the ethnic. Rather than perceiving the obstacle to upward mobility in a

corporate class of merchants and landowners it is perceived in identity. Consequently, upward mobility appears as available on two levels: individually by adapting one's ethnic identity in order to be incorporated in the dominant class; or acting as an ethnic corporate group in order to open a political space to become a dominant class. In Greece, where the national ideology of ethnic and linguistic homogenization had largely suppressed public manifestations of ethnic diversity, social mobility for non-Greeks became a question of proving their always already suspicious national loyalty (ibid: 38). As a result of this stigma those who did manage to acquire the 'loyalty certificate' had to prove themselves 'more Catholics than the Pope' in order to do so (ibid). While some succeeded in doing precisely that, the majority of Slav speakers remain economically and institutionally disadvantaged in comparison with their Greek speaking co-nationals. They suffer from low educational levels and are mostly engaged in low wage unskilled work and are underrepresented in administrative positions (ibid: 35). The fact that they officially do not represent an ethnic minority with special statutory rights further incapacitates their capacity for group action. It is thus possible to argue that the ideology of national homogeneity has effectively reified the policies of national equality while ensuring the reproduction of practical inequality.

We saw previously that much of the same took place within the Yugoslav model where the ideology of worker self-management and Socialist equality served to legitimize the unequal ethnic division of labor. The difference appears in that the Yugoslav model created a mechanism of identity politics through which the economic antagonism was channeled, albeit in a distorted form. The contemporary operations of this dynamic can still be seen in the Republic of Macedonia. During her recent fieldwork with Albanian and Macedonian families in the north Macedonian town of Kumanovo, Rozita Dimova (2010) has explored some of the connections between ethnicity and class by analyzing changes in patterns of consumption. She suggests that the rise of ethno-national differences in Macedonia "need to be analyzed by stressing the rearticulation of class [and] ethnicity" within a changing political and economic climate. One of the key sentiments she picked up at the outset

of her research among the Macedonian families was an acute feeling of loss. The primary implication in this discourse was the loss of class privileges. These privileges were accumulated during the Yugoslav communist period when ethnic Macedonians occupied the vast majority of managerial and administrative positions and enjoyed a comfortable state sponsored lifestyle. These material advantages were accompanied by an ideological conviction that it is precisely the ethnic Macedonian element that stood as the vanguard of progress, modernity and civilization. The undesirable Otherness that stood in direct opposition to this value system was (and often still is) projected onto members of other ethnic communities, most notably Albanians. This was reflected not only in occupational differences but also in communist party membership. In spite of all the Yugoslav rhetoric of 'Brotherhood and Unity' communist party circles viewed Albanians with more than a hint of distrust under the assumption that "it is not possible to talk with them and that they can only be persuaded by force" to join the ranks (Crvenkovski K. in Shoup 1963: 76).

However, since the country's independence and the break up of the old system this cultural division of labor has begun to crumble under the pressure of shifting circumstances and the tables are being turned. International pressure to extend and implement constitutional minority rights combined with domestic political efforts by Albanian politicians that culminated with the brief insurrection in 2001 have opened a significant public space for Albanians. Many are now managing to achieve some upward economic and social mobility within the republic itself. This has been particularly facilitated by the easier flow of remittances from large Albanian migrant communities in Western Europe (Dimova 2007: 9). The latter have also contributed to the development of an entrepreneurial culture and business strategies among the Albanian community in Macedonia which has made many Albanians far better prepared for the transition to a neoliberal economic system than their state dependent ethnic Macedonian co-citizens. The demise of the state has left the latter group feeling suddenly dispossessed and the boundaries across which the Other is projected are becoming increasingly blurred.

Interestingly the logic of ethnic exclusion seems to be reproducing itself among the Albanians themselves. For example the court of Justice in Tetovo, a small town in north-western Macedonia with a majority Albanian population, has become ethnically clean. Nationalities other than Albanian have been discouraged from working there and much the same has been occurring in other towns with an Albanian majority (Dimova 2006: 318). Many of the inequalities of the old system are finding a way back into the current organization of society. Rather than achieving a shared public space for all ethnic groups the end result appears to be divided political spheres of dominated and dominant organized along ethnic lines. In each case the lower classes are again splintered in a multitude of ethnicities whereas the dominant ones fill their ranks with members from either Macedonian or Albanian ethnic groups. The old communist unifying rhetoric of self-management and “Brotherhood and Unity” has been replaced with “integration and co-habitation” and vague references to tolerance. In this regard little appears to have changed in the structural dynamics of Macedonian society but a slight change in roles. To thus return to Wallerstein, ethnicity has remained a society’s way of managing hierarchical labor boundaries where there are inevitably some who are the ‘niggers’. Tolerance has become the new trope for the proliferation of structural inequality under the ideology of multicultural diversity. This leaves us with the important question of how ideology reproduces itself and the subjects necessary for the cultural division of labor which we will look at in the following chapter.

The Subject of Ideological Interpellation

In the introduction to the volume *Macedonia: The Politics of Identity and Difference* the question of identity is approached through the structural metaphor of inflection. In other words whatever meaning or direction a signifier possesses cannot be extracted from variations in the isolated acts of its enunciation. Instead we must locate its positioning within the larger spatiotemporal context where inflection is determined by the opposition of signifiers within that context. Establishing the elusive meaning of utterances such as 'Macedonia' or 'Macedonian' would thus depend on locating where one is speaking from (the spatiotemporal trajectory) as well as to whom is the utterance directed. As the structural interplay of signifiers varies so does the context and meaning of seemingly identical utterances thus creating a multiplicity of inflections that are often conflicting and volatile. What the authors aim to achieve by deconstructing such categories is to "unsettle assumptions of fixed, stable ethnic and national categories, and the constituencies defined by them" (Cowan & Brown 2000: 22). This however needs to be complemented by questions of power and an analysis of who benefits (or loses) from the creation and reproduction of such essentialist categories. What are the particular discursive devices that allow their articulation and what are the parameters (and who sets them) that define what can or cannot be articulated (ibid). Similarly for Danforth, the task of the anthropologist is to 'dereify the nation, to deconstruct and expose nationalist myths of the nation waiting, Sleeping Beauty like, to be awakened from its slumber' (1995: 15).

The deconstructive political commitment is more than necessary and valuable, but is it enough? At its heart lies a conviction that the source of ethnic and nationalist antagonism is an inability to reflect on the epistemological contingency of one's own convictions. Are there echoes here of Evans-Pritchard's Azande and his suggestion they were unable to question the

foundations of their own mode of thought (1976: 70)? We see here the same opposition suggested earlier between two distinct modes of being: one where people are completely determined by their culture, unable to question it, and another where the individual is able to make a heuristic effort to de-essentialize the categories that offer meaning. In ethnography this is often embodied in the distance between observer and observed.

The metaphor of inflection demonstrates how ethnicity is located in an endless multiplicity of contexts: leftist, rightist, grass roots, state imposed and then challenged, personal, diasporical and so on. It can hardly be disputed that this is the case. But in order to respond to the need for politically engaged scholarship we must not stop there. As was argued in the previous chapters, the deconstructive effort leaves no centre of power from which the discursive categories of the ethnic and national emanate. They are always already contested as they are created, their hold is only partial and limited and in each and every context we may choose to focus on one of the many different factors that produce the ethnic subject. In the absence of a centre of power the very question of “Who sets the parameters that define what can or cannot be articulated” is effectively neutralized. That obscene ‘Who’ is obliterated into such a multitude of discursive agents that the only promising course of action lies in demonstrating that since everything social is our own constructed illusion we could, with some joint effort, re-construct it into a happier one. The trouble is that in the absence of any pre-discursive reality it becomes politically impossible to determine what the latter might be. Whose illusion is to be trusted? It seems the neoliberal answer is none and all: trust none but tolerate all. This impasse is perhaps the chief reason behind the existential cynical detachment and micro-politics that has come to define the currently dominant political subject. We know that the national ideology is a constructed sense-less fairytale, yet in the absence of other available categories through which I can assert myself as a political subject I nonetheless continue to behave as if this were not the case. We know our politicians are petty fraudsters yet we continue to play the game of electoral promises and votes in the hope that the promise of democracy and free markets is still hiding behind the spectre of impossibility.

Žižek never tires of repeating how the ideological edifice does not depend on its ability to prevent the subject from penetrating its façade in order to reveal its inconsistencies. Totalizing ideologies are by definition sense-less, in terms of their failure to account for the discrepancies of lived experience and therefore rely on their disavowed core. By questioning the discursive formation of ethnic and national categories we are only questioning the explicit ‘text’ of ideology, and missing the Real of antagonism, the core on which ideology is based. Moreover, I share a contention with Graeber that very often people are implicitly aware that the ethno-national categories they use *are* the result of human action and creativity rather than being rooted in the nature of the universe (2001: 247). In fact this is very often implied in the very performance of national rituals. “We are and have always been nationals, except not really” is a contradictory yet common statement that I believe can be usefully analyzed with Žižek’s concept of fetishist disavowal and the fantasy-spectre duo.

Critical powerlessness:

Keith Brown (2003b) offers an interesting account of Macedonian ordinary people’s rueful recognition of petty corruption and self-interest at the level of local and international politics in the aftermath of the NATO bombing campaign of Serbia and just before Macedonia itself had been plunged into armed conflict with Albanian insurgents. People expressed their cynicism in terms of the subservience and complicity of their own politicians with US economic and military interests. The conspiracy theory incorporated a particular chain of events. Immediately after the bombing campaign one of the key figures in the government coalition, Vasil Tupurkovski, locally referred to as Cile, announced the astonishing news that the government of Macedonia has decided to recognize Taiwan’s independence in return for Taiwanese investments in the country worth *one billion* dollars. While this announcement seemed to have startled the incumbent president and prime minister it was met with immediate response by China who claims sovereignty over Taiwan. The

Chinese used their veto powers to block the extension of the UN Preventive Deployment (UNPREDEP) mandate which was seen as essential to the stability of the country in the face of growing inter-ethnic tensions. This vacuum was then quickly filled in with the introduction of NATO forces in order to maintain security.

Besides causing a humiliating diplomatic disaster, Tupurkovski abruptly shifted the discourse away from the promised billion to vague prospects of 'future investment' (which, at the time of writing this, has yet to materialize). The 'billion dollar deal' became over the course of time a shared social resource for evaluating the competence and priorities of local politicians. The entire affair was dismissed as an American orchestrated effort to establish its military presence in Macedonia and complete the encirclement of Kosovo. Tupurkovski, who had prior to his election spent some considerable time in the USA was seen as little more than a pawn in the hands of American capital. This was well captured in the joke of 'Who has the longest and thickest stool in the world?' The answer: 'Cile. He eats in America and shits in Macedonia.' What the joke expresses neatly is the cynical recognition that entire Taiwan affair was little more than a scenario designed to benefit US, Albanian and local elite interests while leaving ordinary citizens to deal with the mess. Such black humor can also be read as an 'cynical' commentary on the 'true' nature of social and political relations whilst acknowledging the powerlessness of the individual to effect change (ibid: 330). But it also transposes the reasons for the failure of the neoliberal dream onto a spectral external Other (Americans, Albanians) who is always already responsible for the failure of the harmonizing enterprise.

This cynical detachment is skillfully captured by Milcho Manchevski in his film *Before The Rain* which traces the story of a Macedonian war photographer based in London whose disillusionment with the hypocrisy of western media prompts his return to the 'honest reality' of his peasant roots. In the scene following the death of the shepherd, Aco, the hero of the story, confronts the village men who are - guns in hand – preparing to take their revenge on the Albanian community while the village doctor watches the

encounter from a neutral perspective. Having failed to persuade them to drop their weapons they dismiss his overtures for legal resolution with the remark “you’re not from around here, just mind your own business”. After seeing them depart he desperately turns to the doctor and asks him with incredulity “Did you see the guns?” The doctor takes out a packet of cigarettes and offers one to Aco saying “have one, go ahead kill yourself”. Aco takes the cigarette in his hand without lighting it. After lighting the cigarette and taking a deep destructive breath the doctor says “You haven’t seen anything yet. This is just the infantry. All we need now are politicians and then we’ll have us a nice war. Sit back and take some photos.” Aco looks at him in disbelief and tells him “You know what? You’re crazy too.” Aco leaves and the doctor, still smoking away, mumbles to himself “That’s true. I’m still stuck here in this madhouse.”

It is hard to resist likening the doctor to Niels Bohr who was once asked by friend at his farmhouse why on earth did he keep a horse hoof stuck on his door. Surely his scientific genius did not believe in such petty superstitions? To this Bohr replied that indeed he does not believe in it but keeps it there because he was told that it works even if you don’t believe in it. The doctor seems to be trapped in a similar quagmire. He does not believe in the madness of ethno-national hatred and violence but they nonetheless remain his reality because they work even if you don’t believe in them. They define the only world he knows and lives in. There are no other modes of political action and expression that can offer meaning within the larger structure. Aco on the other hand is reminded that he is “not from around here”. Not bound by the same laws of social physics. The interesting part is that Aco actually *is* from the same village where he was born and raised before leaving as a young man for England. But it is precisely his ambivalent position that allows him to have recourse to alternative forms of action. He is not over-determined by local social realities. He has options. He can go back to England and continue his career as a Pulitzer Prize winning photographer. The locals cannot. When his cousin dismisses him with the words “you’re not from around here” he dares not look him in the eyes and his entire posture is stricken with shame and grief. As if he too knows that what they are about to do is no good and he has

no liking for it, but he nonetheless goes along with the logic because “this is the way things work around here.”

A similar situation can be seen in Tone Bringa’s ethnographic film *We Are All Neighbours* in which she revisits the war torn villages in Bosnia where only a few years before she had peacefully conducted her research. After a dramatic encounter with her Muslim friends/informants in a nearby town where they were exiled she returns to the mixed Muslim-Croat village where she did most of her fieldwork. To her dismay she finds most of the Muslim houses reduced to rubble by artillery fire and the entire Muslim population gone, whereas the Croat houses and population all remained intact. While driving in a UN armored vehicle through the village she sees one of the Croat women she knew from her fieldwork days, a neighbor and friend of the Muslim family where she was staying. Bringa approaches the woman and with an audible distress in her voice and confronts her with the words “What happened here? What have *you* done?” The woman does her best to avoid any kind of direct eye contact with Bringa and her body language signals some discomfort. She only manages to mumble how doesn’t know what happened and that “they” (the Croat paramilitary) came and drove everyone away. She adds no moral judgment, neither good nor bad, to the set of events that befell her former friends and neighbors. It almost seems that she is also stuck in that same impasse between a grudging recognition that what took place in the village is no good, but is simultaneously compelled to carry out the logic of interethnic animosity that swept away everything in Bosnian society. What remains interesting here is that many of the characters involved are not portrayed as unable to critically reflect on the values that guide their actions. The trouble however is that this critical reflection does not appear to affect their actions. As if at the end of the day it does not matter whether ‘primordial’ links that tie an ethnic group together are truly real, or whether the antagonism between the Muslim and Christian villages has always been there, or whether free market capitalism and elected politicians will really deliver for all. What matters is that it might as well be so, for they are all here to stay.

Does interpellation work?

Is then the entire national ideological commitment a shaky façade that fails to immerse the subject into even the most elementary condition of false consciousness? It is here worth taking a second look on what Althusser has to say about ideological interpellation, or perhaps better said, what Žižek has to add to Althusser's approach. In his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" Althusser lays out his theory of how a person's practice contributes to the internalization of particular cultural stereotype through a process termed interpellation. Though Althusser was mainly concerned with the coercive properties of religion or the state, expressed through such mechanisms as the police, the church or the various bureaucratic manifestations of civil society, it is possible to adopt his approach to our study of ethno-national ideology. The process of interpellation begins with a simple hailing of the "Hey you there" kind:

"Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was 'really' addressed to him (sic), and that 'it was *really him* who was hailed' (and not someone else)" (Althusser 1971: 174-5).

Insofar as ideology has the function of determining individuals as subjects it is itself based on the subject-form which foregoes the concrete individual by means of imposing the former on the latter. One can thus make a distinction between concrete subjects and concrete individuals even though concrete subjects can only exist insofar as they are supported by concrete individuals. Ideology consequently recruits subjects from individuals and transforms them by that very operation of hailing or interpellation. It creates subjects by virtue of recognizing them in the subject categories that precede them. This leads Althusser to state that individuals are *always already subjects* from where it follows that it is individuals that are 'abstract' in relation to the subjects which they always already are. This seemingly paradoxical assertion is in fact rather

common and has been widely discussed by theoreticians of nationalism. Is not Anderson's census a kind of hailing? A calling by the state which recognizes individuals in the categories it offers: "Hey you...Albanian, Macedonian, Muslim, etc." Nationals exist before they were born and after they have passed away. They are born into and die in the subject categories of the national meta-narrative.

In the particular historical context of class struggle Althusser was concerned to demonstrate the operation by which labor power is reproduced not only in terms of its skills but also the "reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression" (Althusser 2001: 132-3). The specific institutions that ensure this reproduction range from state education to, police, workplace, church, army etc.

The ultimate criticism of both Althusser and writers such as Anderson and Gellner, is that they assume a far too monolithic vision of the end product of the ideological operation (see Herzfeld 2005: 6). Ideology recognizes its subjects in the masses (it recognizes them all) and recruits from the masses (it recruits them all). It seems that all ideologies are appendages of the state and the latter assumes a monolithic aura of invincibility. Such models deprive the subject from any capacity for agency. The subject has no power to respond to the call with variation or to even reject it altogether. This critique usually appeals to the implicit pre-existing agency of the subject that foregoes the act of interpellation and renders the subject capable of resisting the overdetermining power of the ideological apparatuses. Indeed Althusser never fully explains how exactly the subject internalizes the ideological interpellation and becomes that thing she really is. Why does the hailing work so well and reach its target unvitiated? This gap between the hailing and the internalization of the call is often exploited by critics of Althusser as the space that opens up the possibility for resistance where one can rebel, elude or ignore the interpellation. The contact between ideology and the agentive subject thus needs to account for this agency whether in the form of a *cultural*

engagement between ‘top’ and ‘bottom’ (Herzfeld, 2005: 3) or a kind of a synthesis between ‘learned history’ and ‘lived history’ (Papadakis, 1993; 141).

But this is where Žižek intervenes by drawing attention to the excessive traumatic kernel, a leftover or residue that by structural necessity cannot be absorbed by the process of internalization but that helps the latter finish of its task of suturing the subject. That gap between the call and the response where the subject mysteriously accepts to be recognized is precisely what allows ideology to patch the chasm between the hailing and the subject (Žižek 1989: 43). Žižek here relies on an idiosyncratic understanding of resistance by the subject. The reason the subject accepts to be interpellated is not because she cannot see through the manipulation or because of ‘false consciousness’ but because there occurs a certain leap of faith in the interpellation process that conflates the subject with the reality she is hailed to respond. The question is not whether the subject can or cannot resist the calling, but that only by giving in and allowing oneself to be articulated in advance by this symbolic realm can one avoid and postpone the terror of a “radically open field of *significatory possibilities*” (Chow 2002: 110). In other words what the subject resists is the obscene terror of complete freedom rather than the ideological, institutional process of interpellation. We need to illustrate this in more detail with some examples.

Does Vereni’s (2000) ethnographic account of the process of subjectivation and national becoming in Greek Macedonia not illustrate this point aptly? Vereni’s analysis focuses on the life story of Leonidas Khristopoulos, a farmer from the district of Florina, with reference to a textual analysis of several autobiographical notebooks by Leonidas. In them Leonidas proactively inscribes his story within the ideological meta-narrative of the nation. In Vereni’s words “by inscribing his story within that of the nation, Leonidas, the author, seeks from the nation a justification of a life whose difficulties otherwise seem insurmountable” (ibid: 48). Does this not capture the fear, the terror of that open field of significatory possibilities; the open ended lack of definite, determinate meaning? Is it possible that this is what Leonidas is resisting in answering the hailing of the national ideological apparatus? One of

the reasons he has chosen to textually immortalize his life story is due to his participation in the Greek educational system which prescribes supremacy to the written word over the spoken one. Vereni likens the ideological imposition of a unified national language, alphabet, a common past and religion to a kind of trade-off. Whether forcefully imposed or voluntarily accepted the trade off remained the same: you will leave behind your impure and culturally heterogeneous heritage, in exchange for an externally created, greater and more fascinating history whose spatio-temporal reach always already presupposes you as a subject⁴.

What is of particular interest here is the fact that the national ideology of a unified homogenous community of nationals is not unquestioningly received by Leonidas as the final truth nor does it immediately interpellate in him a 'false consciousness'. The myth of national homogeneity and unity in both time and space does not correspond to the lived reality of Leonidas. The first obvious discrepancy is that Leonidas' and his family do not speak Greek as their mother tongue. In his words the language they speak is a mixture of dialects including words some of which are "Slav, a few are Vlach, some are Albanian and many are Turkish." More controversially, in the still relatively early days of the national consolidation effort in Greece, Leonidas' family was not recognized as Greek during a very tragic event that took his mother's life. In the heat of the Greek Civil War Leonidas and his family found themselves confronted by both right-wing government militia and the left-wing Greek People's Liberation Army (*ELAS*). During an episode of fierce fighting between the factions the house in which the family was taking refuge came under artillery fire. Whereas Leonidas avoided injury his brothers and especially his mother were badly injured. The hospital however refuses to admit them twice. The authorities dismiss them saying they are "fine where

⁴ There is more than a hint of Pascal's wager here. For example the fragment in *Pensées* where he demonstrates his arguments on why is it rational to bet on God: "Now, what harm will befall you in taking this side? You will be faithful, humble, grateful, generous, a sincere friend, truthful. Certainly you will not have those poisonous pleasures, glory and luxury; but will you not have others? I will tell you that you will thereby gain in this life, and that, at each step you take on this road, you will see so great certainty of gain, so much nothingness in what you risk, that you will at last recognise that you have wagered for something certain and infinite, for which you have given nothing" (Pascal 2004: 214).

they are, stretched out on the ground. Let them die for those are ‘Bulgars’” (ibid: 60). It is not entirely clear why they were rejected and labeled Bulgars by the hospital staff. Language may have played a part as well as the possibility that they were identified as supporters of the anti government *ELAS*. A further discrepancy is the controversial relationship between Leonidas and his father whose mention is largely omitted in the autobiographical notebooks. After insisting for more information Veroni manages to unveil bits of his father’s fate: he had escaped to Serbia, spent some time in Czechoslovakia and even Australia where his other sons had migrated, and ultimately settled in the Federal Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia where he died in the seventies. The fact that he never came back to Greece and his non-Greek national orientation is (supposed to be) a severe blow to Leonidas’ efforts to insert his story within the greater national narrative.

Yet for all these lived discrepancies he shows some remarkable creativity in reconciling them with the ideology of the nation. Whereas on the one hand his autobiography contests the imagined ‘sameness’ of the community it is simultaneously non-antagonistic in that it makes use of the national discursive devices in order to persuade heteroglot members of their Greekness (ibid: 49). The natural principle of national descent notwithstanding, Leonidas represents himself “in time, through history and memory, and in space through the integration of the Greater Macedonia of maps with the lesser Macedonia of daily experience” (ibid: 63). It is here that Veroni insists that we should avoid seeing Leonidas as a “pawn in a nationalist game greater than himself; he *acted* and was the agent of choices” (ibid: 62; emphasis in original). But is this moment of action not precisely that interpellating leap of faith of the Althusserian subject? To reiterate Žižek: “An ideology really succeeds when even the facts which at first sight contradict it start to function as arguments in its favor” (Žižek 1989: 49).

I wish to introduce here one more example once again taken from my own research in the Struga region of the Republic of Macedonia (Dimitrovski 2006). It rests on the biography of Fadil Mustafoski, a currently retired

primary school teacher and self declared Macedonian of Muslim faith from the village of Labunishta in Macedonia. The national identity of Macedonian speaking Muslims has been a highly contested issue in the republic since at least the seventies. Given that ethnic and national categories developed in close correlation with religious affiliation, people of Muslim confession were not entirely made it in the imagined community of Orthodox Macedonians. As a response to this challenge the 'Republican Association of Artistic and Scientific Manifestations of the Macedonian Muslims (RAASMMM)' was formed in 1979 with state sponsorship. Fadil assumed the position of first secretary within the organization whose aim and purpose had been to 'once and for all nationally awaken the Macedonian Muslims.' Besides occupying the position of secretary Fadil held a number of other state related positions as a minor official in his municipality and was an active member of the communist party until the early nineties.

With the demise of communism Fadil's main preoccupation in the new republic became the national question of the Macedonian Muslims. To this end he undertook a lengthy research project that took him over eight years to complete, ultimately resulting in a monograph of his native village of Labunishta. The monograph contains records of family trees, facsimiles of birth records, a brief historical account of Labunishta and detailed descriptions of folk rituals regarding marriage, death, religion, birth, material culture as well as a collection of folk songs and anecdotes. The structure of it aims to locate the village culture within a Macedonian ethnologic continuum by juxtaposing similarities between Muslim and Christian rituals and linguistic properties. Family genealogies aim to construct an image of common descent by tracing the historical cohabitation of Muslim and Christian families in the village, even though the Christian element in the village is currently less than five percent. The motivation for Fadil's effort is in his words his debt to his fatherland, i.e., his responsibility to the nation. Asked about the audience he wishes to address Fadil says: 'It is my aim with this monograph to say that Labunishta is inhabited by Macedonians only, from a Christian and Muslim confession. I want to tell the world, and this book has gone all over, I have

sent copies in Australia and Canada [both contain large Macedonian diasporas] that this is so.’

Much like Vereni’s account of Leonidas, Fadil uses the discursive devices of the state in order to deliver his message. His long participation in the state educational system has led him to confer more authority to the written rather than the spoken word. The monograph’s research and publication were entirely financed by Fadil, a project that left him in heavy financial debt. He appealed to a number of state institutions for financial assistance but received little more than encouraging words for his endeavors. Also, much like Leonidas, he has been engaged in some creative efforts to reconcile his Lesser history with the ideology of the nation. The challenges are many.

Fadil recounted an incident when, during the 2001 conflict between the government forces and Albanian insurgents, a transport of Macedonian soldiers had been ambushed leaving eleven dead. The incident sparked off a number of riots in several Macedonian towns throughout the country directed against Muslims of all nationalities. ‘It is ignorance that makes people identify Fadil from Labunishta with those who were killing in Karpalak. All day they were burning in Prilep and Bitola the shops of the Muslims. Not the Albanian ones, but the Muslim ones! What wrong did they do?’

Moreover, the census conducted in 2004 dealt a further blow to the national ideology. Instead of opting for the category Macedonian, as was the case with the previous two censuses, more than sixty percent of the villagers declared themselves Albanian⁵. Fadil excuses the ‘confusion’ of his fellow villagers by reference to the ‘manipulative political goals of the Albanians’ who are exploiting the ‘petty self interests or low educational level’ of the locals. This rhetoric reflects a wider Macedonian historiography where national historians have had to explain numerous records which suggest that people in the territory of the republic did not always identify themselves as Macedonian. Usually this is done by invoking the spectre of ‘enemy propaganda’

⁵ The reasons for this national reorientation are numerous and complex. For more information on ambiguous Muslim nationalities in Macedonia see Ellis (1995).

(Bulgarian, Serbian, Greek etc.) and the absence of an independent Macedonian state capable of spreading its own. Aside from asserting that the state has not made enough efforts to educate the Slavic speaking Muslims appropriately, one of his common remarks would be that:

‘this country has to realize the need to include these people much more. It is not pleasing if they put a few directors, or one deputy minister. There are at least thirty people in this area with university education that can go to Skopje [the capital] tomorrow. Send fifteen people in Skopje, put the rest here in Struga and then these people will finally see that if they send their children to school they will have work after that. The people need to see that the most loyal part of the Macedonian people ... are the first to stand in defense of the fatherland.’

Like Leonidas it appears inadequate to dismiss Fadil as a pawn in the game of national ideology. He is a conscious agent far too aware of the everyday discrepancies between the principles of unity and common descent preached in the Greater history and the contingency of lived experience to be simply dismissed as an example of ‘false consciousness’. But it is again fascinating how the facts which appear to contradict the national fantasy do very little to disrupt it. Fadil *knows* that Macedonians are reluctant to accept him and his fellow Muslims as equals, sometimes in a very violent manner but also occupationally. Much like the Albanians, during the Yugoslav period the Muslims rarely found themselves in influential government jobs, or in managerial positions in state enterprises. Caught between outright rejection by his fellow Muslim villagers and the wider Macedonian public with only marginal support from the state institutions, Fadil is nonetheless managing to carve out a space for himself in the imagined community.

The terror of freedom:

Veroni suggests that Leonidas is a free agent because he had choices. He could have easily chosen under slightly different circumstances to become a Macedonian or Bulgarian, rather than the Greek Macedonian he insists upon. This does not however testify to the impotence of the hailing. The only real ‘free’ choice one can imagine under the circumstances is not to have to make

the choice (between Greek, Bulgarian, Macedonian or Egyptian) in the first place. It is the virtual non-existence of this possibility that validates the all pervasive presence of ideology and its calling. In Gellner's words a person without a nation nowadays is like a person without a shadow (1983: 6). The absence of that shadow is the open field of signification that the subject resists by allowing oneself to be articulated in terms of the ideological apparatus of national identity and assume a subject-position as an interested agent within symbolic reality. As soon as the subject completes this operation she is by definition in ideology, insofar as she successfully postpones confrontation with the antagonism of the Real which makes every identity a priori impossible. In other words, as soon as Leonidas recognizes himself as a Greek Macedonian he is engaged in fighting with the Spectre of his ideological fantasy: in this case the Slav Macedonians and other Greeks antagonistic to his vision of what constitutes Greekness (Veroni 2000: 54). In the case of Fadil we have the conceptual fantasmatic 'Albanian'. What the spectre does is suture the gap of ideology, the impossibility of achieving a harmonious identity, i.e. the falsity of every totalizing harmonious articulation of society. The ideological illusion lies in the fact that it is precisely the spectral Other which is preventing the subject from achieving full development; that only after the annihilation of the Spectre can a complete mature self be realized (Žižek 2005: 251).

Hegel illustrated this through the dialectic of the Lord and the Bondsman: that the Lord is ultimately a creation of the Bondsman who projects the blockade of his identity onto the external repressive figure of the Lord. The latter serves only to blind the Bondsman to the self-impediment of his identity. The Bondsman can free himself from the Lord only when he realizes that his oppressor embodies his own auto-blockage. This leads to the realization by the Bondsman that he never possessed the very thing the Lord is supposed to have deprived him of. Such a realization that "we *never had* what we were supposed to have lost" is the "experience of pure antagonism where the negation is brought to the point of self-reference" (ibid: 252). The moment of freedom is thus the moment of greatest anxiety.

The dialectic above can also be discerned from the double meaning of the word ‘subject’ which may refer to a person subjected to political rule or a free agent instigating its activity. The paradox is that subjects can become free agents only if they ‘project’ or transpose their freedom into the social symbolic substance that opposes them, i.e., assume an interested subject position. For example in our case, national subjects can only be subjects insofar as they presuppose that the social substance opposed to them (the nation) is in itself already a subject, the big Other to whom they are subjected (Žižek 1989: 229). The big Other however only exists because the subjects must presuppose its existence in order to achieve their subjection. By this reasoning it would seem the only way out of the ideological fantasy is to assume not the existence “but the *nonexistence* of the big Other” which would imply an act wherein the subject also “*annuls himself as subject*” (ibid: 230-1). This position, defined by Lacan as *subjective destitution*, is where we face the Real in its utter meaninglessness and keep open the gap between the Real and its symbolization. The desire to postpone this moment is what ultimately makes interpellation possible. The formal act of conversion by which subjects inscribe themselves into the big Other is simply that gesture that transforms the pre symbolic Real into a meaningful symbolized totality (ibid)⁶.

We can see the logic of this latter point in full operation in Dimova’s recent ethnographic article on inter-ethnic representations in Macedonia. In a context of changing fortunes Dimova describes how the ethnic Albanians who were during the period of socialism described as “backward and poor” by many Macedonians are nowadays suddenly becoming too close, too similar culturally. Their representation as culturally inferior acted as a legitimizing ideology for the ethnic division of labor that ensured the position of Macedonians as the dominant class that occupied the best jobs. In practice though it was this class division that ensured Albanians would stay “backward and poor”, that is, economically and institutionally deprived. After the break

⁶ Kafka perhaps did most to capture this operation via literary metaphor. In *The Trial* we have the Law embodying the big Other before whom K. realizes his subjection. The Law itself is however utterly senseless in its operation and does not ask K. to obey it because it makes sense or because it is true but simply because it is the Law. It is K. who is desperately seeking a trait to identify with. *He* is the agent searching for a secret supposedly hidden in the big Other that will reveal the meaning of the call.

up of socialism and the destabilization of ethnic Macedonians as the dominant class, many Albanians have begun to achieve some form of social and economic mobility. They now consume the same products as Macedonians, go out in the same cafés, wear the same clothes, listen to the same music and in general try to emulate the same western stereotypes of youth culture. The old stereotypes of ‘backward’ and ‘uncivilized’ are no longer as consistent with their phenomenological characteristics. Yet this in no way reduces the potency of the ideological imagination. Dimova illustrates this in a conversation she had with one of her Macedonian friends which occurred after they had left a wedding organized by one of the Albanian families she did her research with. During the wedding her friend had a lengthy conversation with one of the bride’s cousins and appeared to be impressed by his “‘knowledge of philosophy and literature. We were talking about death and the afterlife. Wow, he is so well read. And he dresses so well. You could not tell that he is an Albanian at all ... But don’t get fooled, my dear. Albanians like these are the most dangerous ones -- you cannot recognize them. They are so similar and therefore so much more sneaky. These are the ones we should fear and not be impressed by’” (Dimova 2010).

Such statements of fetishist disavowal (‘I know very well, but nonetheless...’) seem to have been commonly uttered by Dimova’s interlocutors. The discourse on Albanians cannot complete itself without invoking the conceptual ‘Albanian’, that manipulative, scheming figure whose sole aim is to destabilize the country and on account of whose actions decent, hardworking Macedonians have to suffer humiliating deprivation. The spectre of the ‘Albanian’ is there to hide the Real of antagonism, i.e. the self-hindering impediment of the Macedonian national fantasy that always returns to the same place. The Real always threatens to announce itself in this very gap between the total harmonizing ideology and its failure to deliver. As soon as the gap opens it is sutured by the Spectre that finishes the job of interpellation. The task of defying the ideological grip thus belongs to the subject who can identify with this gap and the senselessness of the ideological fantasy and confront the Real of society that returns in all its different symbolic manifestations.

Conclusions

In his *Fear and Trembling* Kerkegaard begins the Epilogue to the book with the following passage:

“One time in Holland when the market was rather dull for spices the merchants had several cargoes dumped into the sea to peg up prices. This was a pardonable, perhaps a necessary device for deluding people. Is it something like that we need now in the world of spirit? Are we so thoroughly convinced that we have attained the highest point that there is nothing left for us but to make ourselves believe piously that we have not got so far – just for the sake of having something left to occupy our time?” (Kierkegaard 2003: 145).

I believe that this captures well the modern predicament of anything that attempts to become politically engaged scholarship. The question is whether we have become so convinced that we have reached the end of all radical political and economic projects that all we can now do is play the post-ideological game of detached criticism just for the sake of “having something left to occupy our time”? Need we ‘dump’ in the sea every now and then the achievements of previous scholarship in order to justify a new shipment of critical theory that will do little to alter the status quo? I hope this dissertation has not achieved any of that. It has been my aim to build on previous scholarship in order to propose a return to a standpoint of universality. Not universality in the sense that deep down we ‘all share the same values’ but the universality of the very inadequacy or impossibility of achieving harmony within any particular identity in contemporary societies. I hope it has become evident by now that I am trying to push through the idea that all of the different conflicts over questions about and related to identity, ethnic or national in Macedonia are but different manifestations of the Real of class antagonism, of the dynamics of global capitalism.

It is almost a commonplace observation that capitalism is no longer ‘rooted’ in any particular culture of society. It is universal in the sense that it is a “truly neutral economic-symbolic machine” that subsumes all particular cultures and traditions in its form, from where they emerge as the effects of an impossibility of stability. The point of solidarity is not to be sought in the integrative motto of ‘let us tolerate our differences’ but in the very struggles that cut across all particular cultures “a pact between what, in each [society] undermines its identity from within, fights against its oppressive kernel” (Žižek 2009: 133).

Is there a binding theme to the examples I have used to present my case? Keith Brown (2010) has suggested that the lives of ordinary Macedonians separated by a century can be analyzed by reference to the global flow of capital and the operations of empire. He juxtaposes two seemingly unconnected events: the death of a migrant from Macedonia on a sinking ship in Baltimore in 1907 and the deaths of two Macedonian contractors in Baghdad in 2004 at the hands of Islamic militants. What links the lives of these men separated by ninety-seven years and thousands of miles is that they all ended up as cheap labor in the service of American capital which was crucial in mediating their life journeys. Why stop there? Can we in some way link the lives of these migrant workers to the exchange programs organized between Yugoslavia and affluent western countries that facilitated the supply of a cheap Albanian labor force for the latter (Dimova 2006: 5)? What are the structural conditions that prompted members from one ethnic group to resort to such measures each at different points in time?

What of the hardships within the Republic itself? Dimova’s writings are replete with stories of economic depravity for Albanians during the discriminatory years of the communist project. We need not look far to juxtapose these with similar struggles plaguing many ethnic Macedonians today. On the 13th of March 2007 the local daily *Utrinski Vesnik* revealed one of the dirtier secrets of the transition: textile workers throughout the country are worked sixteen hours a day for less than a hundred and fifty euros a month

(Stevkovska 2007). A year before the same newspaper published another paradox: Greek investors trying to open up two textile companies could not find eighty willing employees in a region that had a registered unemployed workforce of around 22000 (Karevski 2006). The reporter interviewed an unemployed textile technician who said that she would “rather continue her miserable existence on the social benefits her unemployed husband receives than work in conditions that have been surpassed in the nineteenth century”. She goes on to say that “they pay for eight hours a day but make you work ten ... including on national holidays ... and if you so as mention any union you end up without work the following day. Such conditions are possible only with the Greeks and with some feudal lords in Djibouti”.

The actual work conditions in Djibouti are irrelevant here and it is doubtful whether the interviewee had any intimate knowledge of the country except that its location is in Africa – the epitome of the ‘backward’ other. Exploitation appears to be a question of whether or not one is civilized enough to deserve it. It was the same ideological fantasy that justified the economic subservience of Albanians during much of communism. Their uncivilized ‘backwardness’ earned them their spot at the bottom of the hierarchical division of labor. Another article published in the daily newspaper *Dnevnik* reported that a TV cameraman from Bitola was beaten up and abused by the owners and security staff of a Greek textile company after attempting to film the work conditions in the factory (Zdravkovska 2006). The cameraman apparently managed to phone his lawyer who went to the factory to demand his release. The lawyer later told the reporter that “he was surprised that they were unperturbed by his threats of legal prosecution. What surprised him the most was that the entire event took place in the presence of a police officer who instead of reacting just sat there and drank coffee.” In his entire career this was the first time he witnessed “such brutal behavior ... and disrespect of the Macedonian people by foreign citizens.” It is unclear whether it is the first time he experienced such disrespect from local policemen. It is clear however that he was shocked that the local organs of coercion prefer siding with the foreign capitalists than show solidarity with the nation. Why should this be

surprising? And what is the Spectre that sutures this discrepancy in order to maintain the ideology of the nation?

What happens to a class of underprivileged workers when they relate to each other as ethnics spread over a hierarchy of civilizational achievements? Is the new ideology of multi-ethnic integration and tolerance simply another ideological effect of the same governing mechanism that ensures the reproduction of the ethnic hierarchy of labor? These are speculative questions arising from this tentative survey of some of the social, political and economic themes in Macedonia that will require more serious empirical and other data to be answered. What I have attempted to suggest is that there is both a theoretical and political need to point beyond the preoccupations of identity politics and towards the always returning Real of contemporary society.

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